



A Mommy for Ageism Awareness!

by

Lynne Berrett

I missed posting on Ageism Awareness Day (this initiative surely deserves more than a day). But that doesn't mean I haven't thought about ageism; I have been an active member of the American Society on Aging for many years.

In my mid-80's I have a somewhat different perspective on ageism that I did in my 60's and 70's. Back then I was still working full-time. I was fortunate, as a psychotherapist and coach, to have been a solopreneur since my 40's. So, a lot was under my control as long as my health held up.

Since I retired from full-time practice I've become active in a whole new arena, developing our nonprofit Ageless Mind Project as well as maintaining an ongoing presence in virtual worlds with our Whole Brain Health programs. I can do this now because I am fortunate in not having to worry anymore about making a living.

But that's not true of many of the "younger" people I know. And some in my own age cohort are also living on the edge financially, especially if they are solo agers.

So I'm very committed to supporting crucial efforts to make sure that job opportunities are truly available to those who want or need to work when they are older.

Of course there are other forms of ageism, and these affect me much more directly. One of the many reasons I enjoy spending time in virtual worlds as an avatar is that nobody knows, or cares, how old you are there. You can choose how you want to be seen and you're taken at face value. You are judged, if at all, by your words and behavior. Take my avatar as an example. Compare her to my "real" picture at the top of this post. What's your reaction?



Looking at her/me through the lens of ageism, questions have come up that I haven't considered seriously before. Is it age-ist to represent myself in this way? Does telling other avatars my physical age make me less ageist? Does opting for grey-ish hair? These aren't questions that keep me up at night, but I do find myself pondering them now....

Ageism awareness isn't always simple or easy. I've had several close encounters recently that have raised even more questions for me.

I live in a village of 10,000 people with a large immigrant population, mostly from Central and South America. Back in the mid-90's, when my mother was in her early 80's and living with us after she developed dementia ([see AMP Origin Story](#)), some of her aides were Latinas. They would brush her hair and fuss over her, often addressing her as "Mommy." She blossomed under their attention, and I appreciated their gentleness with her.

Last week, I was at the checkout at Whole Foods and asked the cashier, probably in her 40's, if I had tapped my credit card correctly. She said, "You did it fine, Mommy."

Did you feel a small twinge in your solar plexis too when you read this? I thought of all the retorts I wanted to make — and didn't, because I knew she did not intend to disrespect me.

To further rub salt in that silent wound, the other night as I was leaving a local restaurant behind people who were chatting, I smiled at a remark one of the men made. He saw my smile and said, "Isn't that so, Mommy?" Again I knew he just meant to be friendly. But once again I felt that little twinge.

And then there's the young woman Josh and I walked by at a bus stop this summer who smiled at us and called out, "You two are so cute!" And the stranger outside the church we were passing another time, who shouted, "You look like movie stars!" (Because we were wearing sunglasses?)

I am sure all these were meant as compliments of some sort. But to me they were unexpected personal comments made by total strangers. It was uncomfortable to be singled out repeatedly in quite this way — just because I am old.

I've thought a lot about this, and here's the bottom line: I don't want to be thought of as a cute old person. I want other people of any age to relate to me as one ageless mind in touch with another, both of us delighted and even transformed by the stimulating conversation.

Is that possible, do you think? I'd like to work toward it. I have some ideas about how I could help it happen.

First, we have to start where we are. I've shared a few real life anecdotes out of many I could tell. What kinds of personal stories do you have about ageism?

(And am I the only person who has felt those sudden unpleasant twinges?)

As always, you can write a comment here or on the AMP Substack or email me at agelessmindproject@gmail.com. - Lynne

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