



Care Watch

AGEISM EXISTS: NAME IT! RESIST IT!

PASSING

"I anticipate that ageism is going to happen so I change my behaviour: I don't tell my children when I forget appointments; I never let others know my real age—when I make a mistake I don't want people to think it's due to 'old age'." (Care Watch Member)

Has someone mistaken you for being younger than you are? Were you secretly flattered? Have you laughed with others at ageist jokes? Do you monitor your speech, dress, and behaviour so that you do not appear old? The above quote and questions depict the dynamics of passing.

WHAT IS PASSING?

Passing refers to a situation where we assume an identity that is false in order to gain social acceptance. We might do it deliberately, or we might passively allow a case of mistaken identity to continue.

WHY DO PEOPLE DO IT?

● People 'pass' to try to avoid social discrimination.

WHY DO WE CONDONE PASSING?

Passing occurs in a variety of contexts. We see it happen in places or situations where a stigmatized identity is exchanged for one that the larger society regards more positively. For instance, in an ageist society, to be mistaken for being younger than we are is valued—so why protest? It is often easier to go along with the false assumption than to challenge it, and in some social contexts, passing is a survival strategy.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF PASSING?

● Passing practices promote ageism because they are fashioned from the same social expectations that determine which positive identities we should assume in society and which negative identities we should reject. So, while passing for younger might appear to help us mitigate the difficulties of possessing the stigmatized identity of old age in Canada, it does not challenge the legitimacy of power and privilege that imposes the stigma in the first place.

THE CHALLENGES FACING US

Is being a senior citizen or retired person a stigmatized status? If so, why is being employed or being young a privileged status?

Do we try to pass for being younger? Under what circumstances do we consent to be so mis-categorized? When do we dispute it?

When we participate in passing practices, what inequities are we perpetrating? Who wins? Who loses?

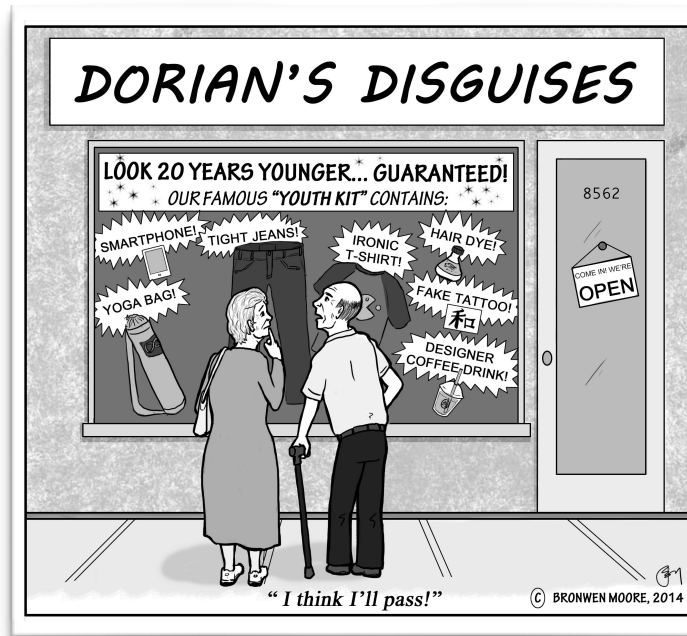


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