



# Older Adults' Experiences of Ageism

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# Acknowledgement



## Funder

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- PI: Nancy Morrow-Howell

## WashU Team

### ***Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging, Brown School***

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- Brian Carpenter, PhD
- Natalie Galucia, LMSW
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# Why We Did This Project?



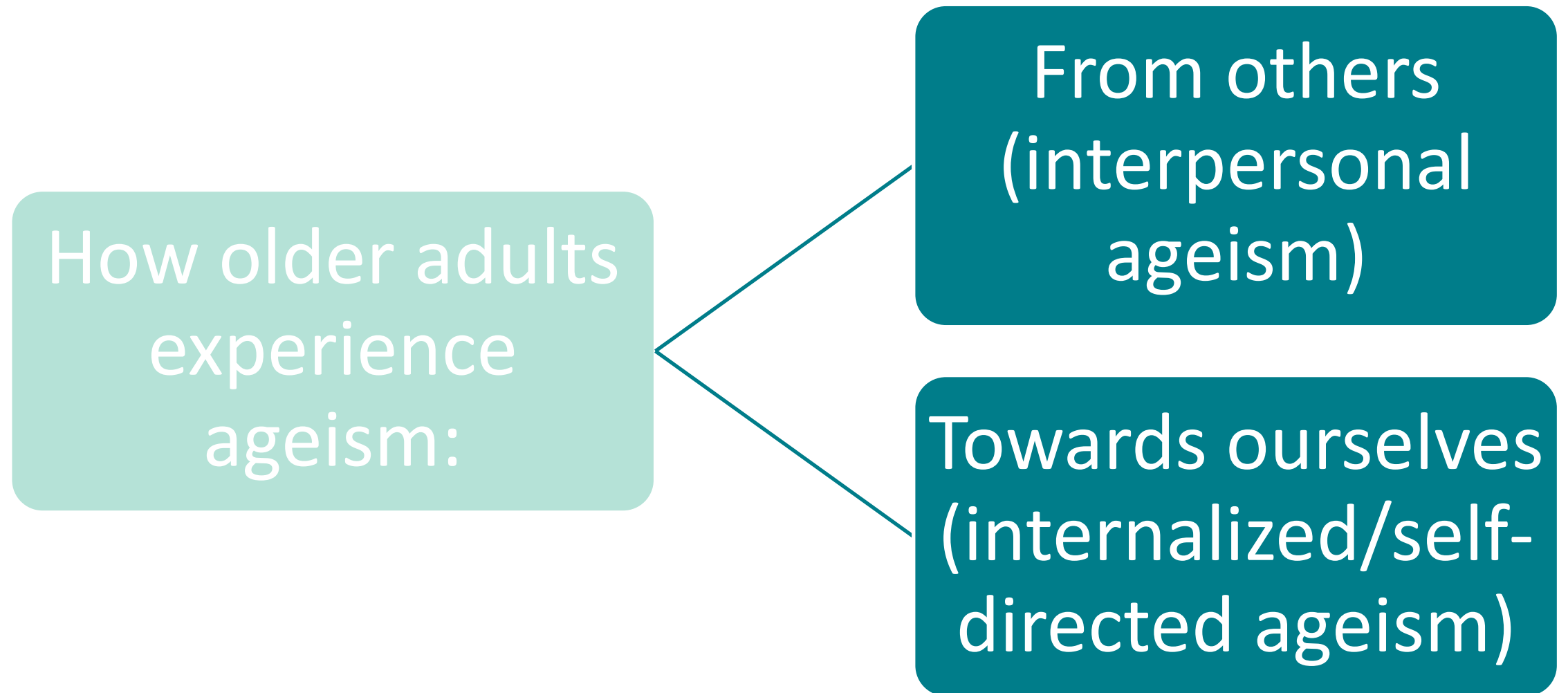
Ageism affects older adults' health, well-being, and inclusion

Most anti-ageism efforts focus on younger people, not older adults

Older adults are often left without tools to deal with ageism

Our goal: help develop practical strategies that empower older adults to respond to ageism

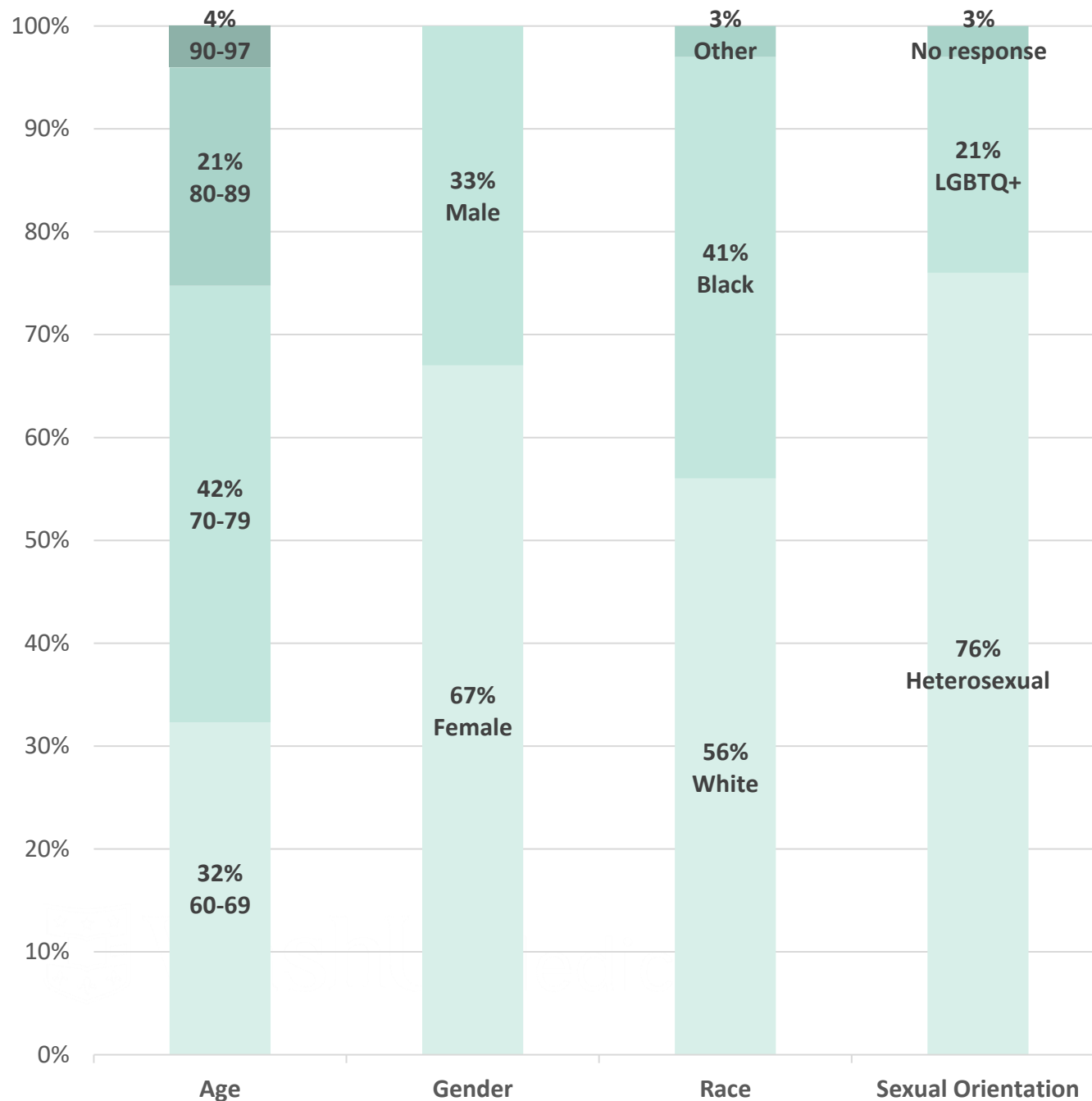
# What We Wanted to Know



# How We Did It?



- Held **12** focus groups in **9** community settings
- Engaged **75** people aged **60 and over**
- Listened to their stories, challenges, and suggestions
- Used their insights to shape practical strategies that empower older adults



# Participants Demographics

From July 29, 2024  
To August 26, 2025  
On Going



# What We Heard in Focus Groups

## 1) Older Adults Face Ageism in Healthcare Settings:

- Being ignored or spoken over during appointments
- Being judged or stereotyped just because of age
- Doctors making healthcare decisions based only on age

"I used to take my mother to the doctor, and they would only talk to me. Like my mother wasn't there."

"If you were younger," my provider said, "I would treat you differently."

"My provider said, You're getting older. And you can just come to expect that once you get to be a certain age you don't need certain tests."

# What We Heard in Focus Groups



## 2) Older Adults Face Ageism in Workplaces:

- Overlooked or treated unfairly because of age
- Rude or dismissive coworkers

• “They didn't even respect me enough to say,  
• ‘Oh, sorry we chose somebody else.’ I never heard back from them, and I found out later they just promoted somebody in house who was younger.”

“An employer said, You’re getting really too old for this.”





# What We Heard in Focus Groups

## 3) Ageism from Family and Loved Ones:

- Family members make decisions for older adults
- Loss of autonomy and control over personal choices
- Loved ones being overly protective—even when not needed

“When I go to the doctor, and I say what's bothering me, they [family members] want to jump in and say, “well, she does this, and she does that.””

“It's sort of a role reversal ... [my daughter says] Just leave that issue alone. I'll take care of it when I get there. Don't worry about that.”

“She's [daughter] always holding on to me, you know, won't let me do anything.”

# What We Heard in Focus Groups



## 4) Self-directed ageism (what Older Adults say to themselves):







- Doubting ourselves
- Blaming age for challenges that may not be age-related

"We start to think of ourselves as old. We see ourselves as old, we compare ourselves to younger people in what we can and cannot do."








"It was all dreary and dark. You are now 40. You will never have fun again."

# How Older Adults React to Ageism

## Different Ways People Respond:

- ✓ Let it go or ignore it 
- ✓ Avoid the situation or remove themselves 
- ✓ Respond with humor or a lighthearted comment 
- ✓ Educate others to raise awareness 
- ✓ Confront the person directly 
- ✓ Take formal action — report it or write a letter 

# Toolkit: How to Combat Ageism

-  Use Education & Humor
-  Be Your Own Advocate
-  Resist Age Stereotypes
-  Create Safe Spaces
-  Adapt with Intention
-  Promote Intergenerational Inclusion
-  Practice Self-Kindness

# Appreciation



- Thanks to all the **older adults** who actively participated in and contributed to this project, helping us learn and better understand their perspectives on ageism and internalized ageism.
- Thanks to **MA4** for providing us with the opportunity and platform to share our progress and learning with more Missourians.

# Questions & Feedback

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