

## From Anti-Aging to Anti-Ageist: Changing Attitudes through Social Media

Age discrimination and ageism negatively affect each of us across our lifetimes. Age stereotyping undermines employment, suppresses the promise of living a long healthy life, and corrodes social relationships within and across generations.<sup>1-6</sup> Ageism costs the United States \$850 billion in GDP each year and is linked to \$63 billion in health care costs.<sup>2</sup>

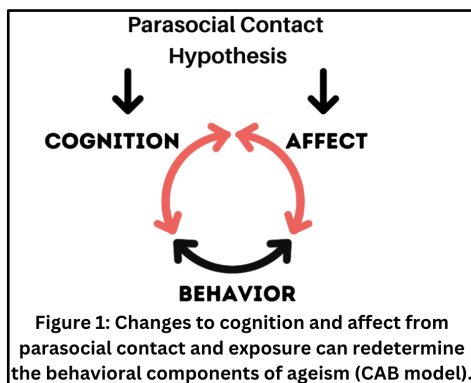
Ageist stereotypes can be changed with intentional contact between older and younger individuals, social policies and laws, *and* social media.<sup>4</sup> In this research brief, we explore how to leverage social media to challenge widely held attitudes on aging and between generations.

### How Beliefs and Attitudes Are Shaped

Ageism has three main components: *cognition* (e.g., stereotyping), *affect* (e.g., negative and positive attitudes), and *behavior* (e.g., avoidance, discrimination, violence), known as the CAB model:

cognitive-affective-behavioral (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> Our cognitive and affective beliefs inform our behavior.<sup>8</sup> The concept of *attitude consistency*

suggests these components mutually influence each other.<sup>7</sup> Changes to cognition and affect from interventions (e.g., social media) can change ageism and age-based discriminatory behavior.<sup>5,6</sup>



### Social Media's Reach: Why It Matters

We are all exposed to more advertisements, television, and social media than in prior years.<sup>9</sup> On average, individuals consume about 34 hours of television weekly and adults over the age of 75 years watch the most at 4.5 hours daily.<sup>10</sup>

Marketing companies are not only targeting youth. Older generations are increasingly engaging with and utilizing electronic media.<sup>11</sup> Adults in their 50's, 60's, and older are adopting social technologies and closing the gap in rates of internet use between older and younger generations.<sup>12</sup> Traditional differences between the digital presence of "young" and "old" are only becoming more outdated. For instance, out of internet users aged 65 and older, 70% use the internet on a typical day.<sup>12</sup>

### Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (PCH) is an extension of Gordon Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis. An example of parasocial contact is with television, social media, advertisements, and other forms of digital content. PCH suggests positive portrayals of minoritized individuals/groups in virtual settings and mass media can reduce prejudice.<sup>13</sup> Parasocial contact has been shown to affect interpersonal relationships.<sup>14</sup> When people form emotional bonds with characters, celebrities, and media representations, their view of the "out group" can shift if characteristics do not align with stereotypes.<sup>13</sup> Increasing the types of media content about aging and older adults can potentially reduce ageism and age-based discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

### Reducing Ageism via Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

Parasocial Contact Hypothesis suggests there's a way to leverage media to positively influence the cognitive and affective components of ageism, and thereby change people's behavior towards another generation. Although parasocial relationships in digital media are based on "indirect" contact, the impacts of parasocial contact extend beyond social media and TV programs into real-world interactions.<sup>16</sup>

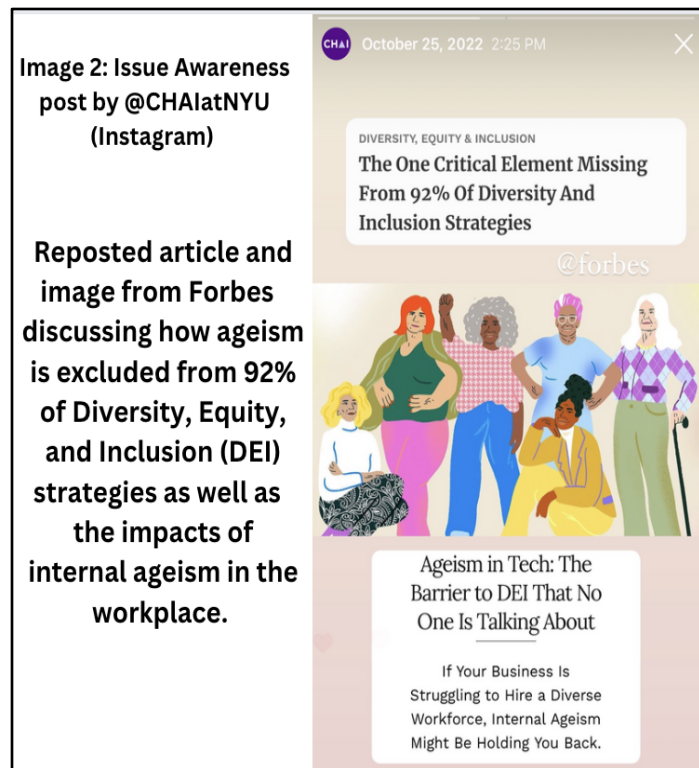
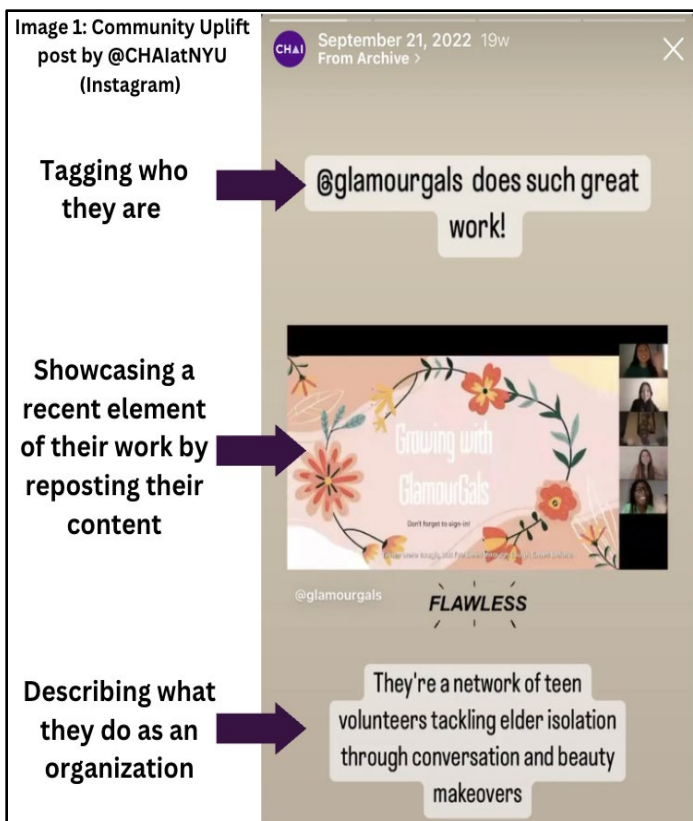
At the core of parasocial contact is the idea that the more visibility a community has that is varied and represents a positive or neutral message (as opposed to negative portrayals), the less stereotyping and discrimination they will encounter.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, over correcting ageist attitudes by producing media that portrays aging as solely a positive experience reinforces aging as "one thing" (either good or bad).

**Parasocial Contact Hypothesis in Action:  
CHAI's Approach to Social Media**

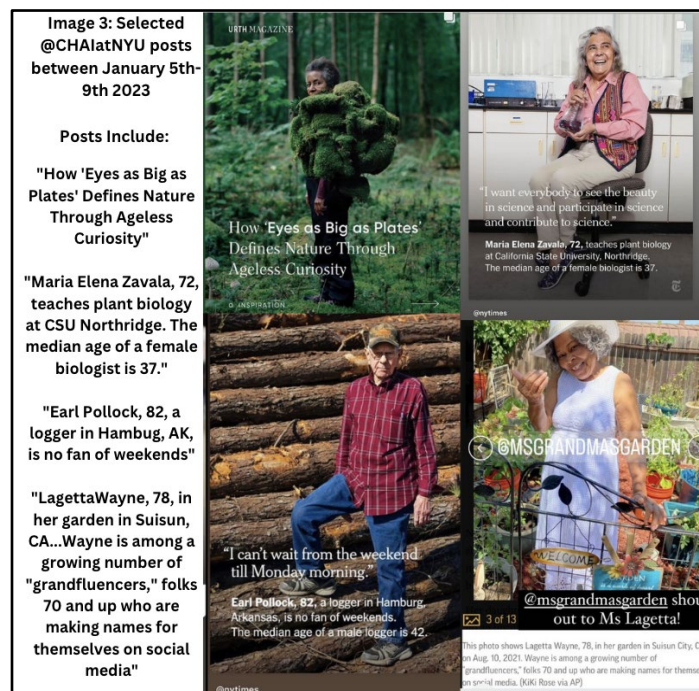
CHAI's approach to social media has three components:

Community Uplift. CHAI's Instagram, Facebook, and home website aims to create virtual contact between intergenerational organizations nationwide. We identify varied content across platforms and repost content from other organizations doing meaningful and interesting intergenerational programming in a weekly "shout out" to lift up their work. These posts include: tagging who they are, briefly describing what they do, and showcasing a recent element of their work from their content (Image 1).

Diversity and Intersectionality. CHAI intentionally posts diverse and intersectional representation across sociodemographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, sexual and gender identification, activity portfolios). Increasing awareness of issues related to intersectional ageism+racism+sexism+isms aligns with our goal of decreasing discrimination at large (Image 2).



Exposure & Contact. By intentionally reposting intersectional and diverse content related to aging, health, and intergenerational cohesion, CHAI provides a new cognitive framework for audiences to imagine, thereby subtly challenging stereotypes and to new possibilities. CHAI aims to reflect the diversity of our society and audience by providing varied and nuanced portrayals of aging and social relations (Image 3).



The posts we reference in this brief are from Instagram where CHAI can be found [@chaiatnyu](#). Additional exemplar social media accounts from other intergenerational organizations include:

- Cogenerate ([@cogenerate](#) )
- Generations United ([@gensunited](#))
- Dorot ([@dorotusa](#))
- VISIONS ([@visionsvcb](#))
- United Neighborhood Houses ([@unhny](#))
- SAGE ([@sageusa](#))
- Glamour Gals ([@glamourgals](#))

### Conclusion

This brief explains CHAI's theoretical approach to social media: it is a mechanism to decrease ageism and other forms of bias informed by the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. Given the vital role of digital media in fostering intergroup relations, CHAI's is laying the groundwork for ending ageism and promoting meaningful intergenerational relationships nationwide and globally through education and by example. We need to evaluate this endeavor to learn of its impact on cultural norms.

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