

ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

Andragogy: Combating Ageism (the 20th/21st-Century Generation as a Reference Model)

La andragogía: un límite al edadismo
(la Generación Siglos 20/21, un modelo de referencia)

Juan Manuel de Faramiñán Gilbert

University of Jaen, Spain
jmfarami@ujaen.es

Received/Recibido: 14/3/2022

Accepted/Aceptado: 12/9/2022



ABSTRACT

Despite having our feet firmly set in the 21st century, degrading stereotypes regarding age still persist, something which has given rise to the neologism “ageism”. Faced with this situation, there is a glaring need for a paradigm shift — starting with the institutions and legal norms — in order to reclaim the rights of and respect for the elderly. Educational programmes for both younger generations and those that are already in adulthood are required to allow experience and age to recover the importance they once held in our society. An andragogical drive is key to highlighting the importance of age, while discourse around the 20th/21st-century generation — those who have bridged the gap between two different centuries — could also prove to be thought-provoking.

KEYWORDS: age discrimination, andragogy, ageism, 20th/21st century generation.

HOW TO QUOTE: Faramiñán Gilbert, J. M. de (2022). Andragogy: combating ageism (the 20th/21st-century generation as a reference model) *Revista Centra de Ciencias Sociales*, 1(2), 79-96. <https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.2>

La versión original en castellano puede consultarse en <https://centracs.es/revista>

RESUMEN

A pesar de encontrarnos en pleno siglo XXI, aún se mantienen los estereotipos vejatorios sobre la edad de los seres humanos que han dado lugar al neologismo «edadismo». Frente a esto se impone la necesidad de un cambio de paradigma, que se apoye en las instituciones y en las normas jurídicas, con el fin de poder reivindicar los derechos y el respeto a los mayores. En este sentido, se hacen necesarios proyectos de formación, tanto en las nuevas generaciones como en las generaciones adultas, con el fin de reivindicar la experiencia y la edad. Para lo cual se hace oportuno un esfuerzo andragógico con el propósito de visualizar la importancia de los años, e incluso nos ha parecido sugerente hablar de la Generación Siglos 20/21, con el propósito de unir a aquellas personas que hayan logrado vivir el puente entre estos dos siglos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: discriminación por edad; andragogía; edadismo; generación Siglos 20/21.

1. The Classical Roots of Respect for the Elderly

One of the main issues affecting the elderly is the lack of a proper education framework to allow them to strengthen the experience and knowledge they have accumulated as a consequence of life's rigours. This insufficiency brings about models of micro-ageism wherein adults are accomplices in their own discrimination, which is then adopted by a society that eventually marginalises them, compounding the problem.

This creates the need to design legal provisions and educational methods that help strengthen the position of the elderly in society as a whole. In this sense, andragogy, and in particular andragogues, are the linchpin, boasting the power to lay the foundations for psychological strengthening which can combat the cognitive deterioration that comes with growing old.

In an outstanding piece of work published by Flavio de Jesús Castillo Silva (2018, p. 65), which analyses the origins of the term andragogy, we learn that Alexander Kapp first uttered the term in 1833 to describe the educational processes he saw in Plato's dialogues.

It is worth highlighting that Plato establishes a new order when talking about old age (Faramiñán, 2020a, p. 447–448). He places the elderly in a hierarchy; they are worthy of our respect and submission, and we should listen to and consult them. They occupy themselves with dialectic reasoning (something not recommended for the young), with their knowledge making them apt philosophers and politicians. Older people have virtues, such as wisdom, equanimity and dignity, which society in general should take advantage of. When quoting the poet Pindar, Plato tells us that: “‘Hope,’ he says, ‘cherishes the soul of him who lives in justice and holiness, and is the nurse of his age and the companion of his journey; —hope which is mightiest to sway the restless soul of man.’” (Plato, *Republic*, Book 1, Section 331a). He refutes the idea that the elderly are like children. The elderly must maintain an attitude that is coherent with the position that they have previously assumed. They are sensible and responsible, and they have more experience (manifested as knowledge and power) than the rest of us. Old age does not take away from them their ability to learn, as we see here, paraphrasing Solon: “I would fain grow old, learning many things,” however, adding “of the good only” (Plat, *Laches*, Section 188b).

In *Euthydemus*, he speaks of convincing his friends to learn to play the harp with him. Learning alongside youngsters is something attractive, and he comments that you must overcome the mockery that may accompany being willing to learn. Socrates applies this to the exercise of virtue, referencing Homer: “Modesty is not good for a needy man” (Plato, *Laches*, 201b). In *Parmenides*, old age constitutes a form of authority, as long as it is complemented by knowledge. Here we see Socrates learning from Zeno and Parmenides, the latter of whom is an old man. Plato often refers to Socrates as being young and impatient, however (Plato, *Parmenides*).

In his *Laws*, he speaks of how “every man, woman, or child ought to consider that the elder has the precedence of the younger in honour, both among the Gods and also among men who would live in security and happiness. Everyone shall reverence his elder in word and deed” (Plato, *Laws*, Book IX, Section 879c). And thus he sets up a kind of “social volunteership” that urges youngsters to look after the elderly. In this regard, in *Republic* he indicates that education must teach “when the young are to be silent before their elders; how they are to show respect to them by standing and making them sit.” Meanwhile, at the beginning of the dialogue, Cephalus says: “For let me tell you, that the more the pleasures of the body fade away, the greater to me is the pleasure and charm of conversation” (Plato, *Republic*, Book 1, Section 328d). Even so, age brings with it physical debilitation and a lack of these so-called pleasures of the body, though these are replaced with other desires, such as conversing with friends, taking us back to the art of dialectic reasoning. “And this is a question which I should like to ask of you who have arrived at that time which the poets call the ‘threshold of old age’: Is life harder towards the end, or what report do you give of it?” (Plato, *Republic*, Book 1, Section 328e). He answers that wealth is not the solution to all the problems posed by old age, and that money, just as with the pleasures of youth, only discovers its true value when seen as a roadmap that can guide us to personal happiness. “Now to this peace of mind the possession of wealth greatly contributes; and therefore I say that, setting one thing against another, of the many advantages which wealth has to give, to a man of sense this is in my opinion the greatest” (Plato, *Republic*, Book I, Section 331a). Furthermore, he suggests that those that have a noble spirit should rule over those who don’t (Plato, *Republic*, 681b and 690a). Meanwhile, in *Menexenus* he tells us that the State is responsible for caring for the elderly parents of the youngsters who have died for the city (Plato, *Menexenus*, pp. 420 et seq.).

This provides the elderly with a ripe opportunity to come to grips with their own inevitable death. In Socrates’ *Apology*, he tells us that: “For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private” (Plato, *Apology*, pp. 201 et seq.).

These reflections which were uttered over 2,500 years ago are proof that the question of age is a recurring issue, one whose key ideas we must revisit and rehash to prevent them from being lost to the annals of time. Here I have deliberately selected a range of warnings issued by Plato regarding old age in order to best summarise the suppositions on which Alexander Kapp supported his ideas, being the first person to pioneer the use of the term andragogy, based upon the idea of adult learning he found in Plato’s dialogues.

Later, Malcolm Shepherd Knowles would refer to andragogy as a “set of core adult learning principles,” a methodology aimed at “all adult learning situations” (Knowles, 2006, p. 3), just as the aim of pedagogy is to educate youngsters. Castillo Silva stresses that in the case of pedagogy, “there is a teaching process and therefore the education is directed, unlike in andragogy” (Castillo Silva, 2018, p. 65), before going on to come up with a series of factors that are fundamental to adult learning, following in the footsteps of Eduard Lindeman¹. In this regard, he points to the fact that adults are motivated to learn and to expand their knowledge when they know that this learning will satisfy certain needs or interests, and that the proposed learning must be focused on questions about life itself in order for the adults to be able to use their life experiences to aid their learning while, above all, it is vital for the teaching to not suppress the students’ need for the learning process to be self-directed.

We mustn’t forget the analyses carried out from a sociological point of view that remind us that human rights are defined as a legal and axiological system that represents the fundamental values of human beings (Villasmil and Chirinos, 2016, 197), which implies that the elderly deserve special consideration and that the rest of the population should treat them with greater respect. On the other hand, Sandra Huenchuan (2009, p. 27) claims that we need to gain a greater understanding of the rights of older people, stating that there is a need for more clarifying legally binding documents, such as has already been achieved with other social groups, in particular women, children and those with disabilities.

All of this indicates that, from a sociological viewpoint, ageing must be understood as a concept that goes far beyond the person as a being with solely psychic or biological features; instead, the opposite should apply: emphasis should be placed on the social collective, where social policies guarantee the rights of the elderly as citizens, allowing them to enjoy their environment and a social organisation that is adapted to their specific needs (Bazo, 2011:23).

In summary, all this serves as proof of the need to ensure the participation of the elderly in society (Alemán et al., 2013) and in the management of the social services system, guaranteeing them the right of free association as users of this system, with the implication and rights that this entails.

2. The Light and Dark of Andragogy

It is worth noting that both the terms pedagogy and andragogy have their fair share of critics, as indicated by Iluminada Sánchez Domenech (2015, pp. 10–11) in her doctoral thesis, building on the work of Mohring (Mohring, 1989, cited in Sanchez Domenech, 2015, p. 11). Here she claims that both terms are etymologically incorrect given that, although pedagogy derives from the Greek ‘*país*’, meaning ‘child,’ since antiquity pedagogy has also been used to refer to education in general, with no particular reference to the students’ age. The author proposes ‘*teleios*’ instead of ‘*áner*’, which is the Greek word from which we derive the English ‘adult’. As such, she argues that andragogy could be replaced with ‘*teleiagogy*’, with this being a term that

encompasses adults of both sexes. Aside from the fact that the terminology is less than harmonious, as can be seen, let's take a moment to consider the common usage of the terms pedagogy and andragogy: the former is used to talk about children and adolescents and the latter about adults and the elderly. This makes it easier for us to understand the concepts and practices of them both, setting aside their etymologies for now.

Now we can reflect on the differences between the methodology used by pedagogues and that used by andragogues, where we see that the former insists more on directed learning during the opening stages of our lives, while the latter is more focused on a participative learning process which should last for our entire lifetime. Remember that in andragogy the adult involved shoulders much more responsibility, with self-evaluation being at the core of the process, given that we are talking about people with a wealth of experience and high intellectual maturity. We could also point out that pedagogy functions vertically between the teacher or pedagogue and the young student, whereas in andragogy there is a horizontal exchange between the andragogue and the adult. The first case centres on authority and direction in order to lay the foundations for a child's life, while in the second case guidance and self-realisation based on the adult's needs are what are important.

If adult education is to last a lifetime, the andragogue must take into account the different stages of one's life, which determine the way in which we deal with the passage of time and the method required for incentivising the adult, particularly once they reach an advanced age.

Adult education is a model that progressively reinforces the image of someone who has reached old age, both in the eyes of society as a whole and according to their own perception, which turns it into an important weapon for combating the age discrimination which has brought about the neologism ageism². However, it is worth asking ourselves to what extent should the andragogical model meet formal and informal criteria? Perhaps a hybrid system would work best, in which the application of a formal or informal plan depends on the adult's own initiative and their willingness to sign up for regulated courses, such as at a centre for lifelong learning, which can be found at most universities, or for informal activities like a book club or volunteer work.

Continuing along this line of thought, Iluminada Sánchez Domenech suggests a "differentiated andragogy, alongside differentiated pedagogy, which would study the significant singularities of adults of different races and cultures, sexual preferences, etc., which in practice would come to fruition as what is known in pedagogy as 'attention to diversity'" (Sanchez Domenech, 2015, pp. 538–539). The author reminds us that the learning systems and principles of andragogy are not the same for a European as they are an African or an indigenous Amazonian, given that Westerners live in close communication with one another and are more affected by global issues that make us increasingly aware, something that could be called "interdependence of fate" (Sanchez Domenech, 2015, p. 539). This discourse is backed up by the work of Lewin and Beck, and it tells us that we are heading towards "task interdependence" in the framework of a global community (Lewin, 1935, and

Beck, 2002). This brings into the spotlight the need for an “empirical investigation into andragogy” (Sanchez Domenech, 2015, pp. 540), especially since andragogy still lacks a working definition. Such an investigation would require the participation of adult volunteers in learning experiences that are capable of creating a type of education that is intrinsically valuable, while ensuring that their satisfactions level can be measured, and without the goal of the adult education being to achieve specific skills, but instead simply being mere curiosity or the pleasure of participating.

As indicated by Ximena Romero Fuentes and Elisa Dulcey-Ruiz (2012), “faced with the silent and inexorable change of the ageing of the global population and with greater human longevity, the question arises: to what extent do these populational and individual changes coincide with the socio-cultural and political ones? It is paradoxical that the increase in life expectancy, which results in greater longevity, particularly in women, as well as the fact that more people are living for longer, is considered a danger, a threat, and not as an achievement and an opportunity.” The authors add that these circumstances are an “achievement and an opportunity to progress towards equity, equality, social justice and substantial improvement in quality of life; to think of how to better organise this life that is growing longer, by taking full advantage of a greater life expectancy, as well as of how to leverage the increase in adult population for the betterment of society as a whole.”

3. The Stigma of Ageism

In stark contrast to the efforts of adult education to improve the quality of life of the elderly, ageism³ rears its ugly head as a factor of age-based discrimination, having become, according to the World Health Organization, the third biggest cause of discrimination in the world after racism and sexism. It is worth remembering that older people are being belittled in increasingly more sectors of society, and what we could call “old-age exclusion” is becoming a scourge which normalises ageist practices. This is something that we have all witnessed and bemoaned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As can be seen, age-based discrimination can be compounded by other circumstances, such as a global pandemic, which has turned our lives upside down and compelled us to reflect upon the need to overhaul our civil ethics models. In fact, as Felipe Morente (2020) warned us with regard to the pandemic, “when faced with such unease, is there any hope of fostering a future that holds any possibility for hope?”, to which he answers, “yes, without a doubt. There is the hope of a world that bases itself on the ethics of civic virtues, [...] the ethics of responsible action, the ethics of duty, the ethics of excellent action and the ethics that can bring about universal happiness.” This is another of the pillars on which andragogy must support itself in order to seek out the common good in a way that does not cut off entire generations of human beings, but instead joins them together in global fellowship.

Therefore, we must be vigilant as age discrimination is exacerbated by other severe forms of inequality — whether due to gender, disability, health conditions, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, poverty or economic crises — that worsen the condition

of being elderly by accompanying it with an array of stigmas. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has pointed out that “the majority of older people are women, who are more likely to enter this period of their lives in poverty and without access to healthcare.” For this reason, he urges that “policies must be targeted at meeting their needs” (Guterres, 2020).

The “More Intergenerationality, Less Ageism” public declaration (Macrosad Report, 2020), drawn up by the Mixed Commission of the Macrosad Chair for Intergenerational Studies at the University of Granada, stresses that “solid investigations have uncovered the international prevalence of ageism, especially against the elderly,” for which reason we must take into consideration that certain rules for behaviour have been established which affect certain age brackets, such as children and the elderly, based on arguments that were considered plausible before the pandemic. These are arguments that are commendable when trying to protect the health of older people, but we must be very careful with this kind of “categorisation,” as they can cause psychological harm and lead to age-based discrimination and stigmatisation that are without a doubt harmful.

The aforementioned public declaration claims that “age discrimination poses a significant risk to the psychological, behavioural and physiological health and well-being of the elderly” and insists that “elderly patients must be treated in the same conditions as the rest of the population.” It backs up this argument with the example that “it would be unacceptable to rule out treating a person sick with COVID-19 simply because they are too old,” something which actually occurred in some Central American countries (Faramiñán, 2020b, pp. 1–21).

Let’s take a look at the scope of ageism, then. The public declaration underlines three determining arguments: “ageism exists and it is very damaging,” given that it entails prejudices and negative stereotypes that account for a great deal of inequality and injustice; “age discrimination is unacceptable,” particularly so given the severe and unethical nature it takes on in the context of a pandemic, as occurred with Coronavirus in 2020 (when taking decisions regarding the application of intensive care, the declaration considers it unacceptable to rule out a COVID-19 patient for treatment simply because they are too old); and finally, “proper intergenerational contact reduces ageism” (Macrosad Report, 2020).

For this reason, it pleads that the time has come for proper education regarding the ageing process, combined with a sustained drive to boost intergenerational relationships both inside and outside of the family sphere, to be definitively introduced to public and private agendas and across all age groups.

As detailed by the HelpAge International España foundation,

“ageism and age-based discrimination are a reality in societies throughout the world. The elderly suffer from discrimination and their human rights are being violated in all settings — in the family, in the community and by institutions. This situation is widely tolerated and in some cases it may even be encouraged through the establishment of upper age limits to the exercise or enjoyment of certain rights. This occurs at a time when we are undergoing unprecedented demographic

ageing, meaning that the number of people in a situation of vulnerability, who are systematically discriminated against, is bound to increase.” It adds that, “despite the fact that international human rights laws apply to people of all ages, it’s very uncommon to see a particular reference to older people. As a result, the rights of the elderly are not being sufficiently protected by the human rights mechanisms, the international community, governments and civil society” (HelpAge International España, 2022).

Together, the State Bureau for the Rights of Older People, GAROP and HelpAge International have been fighting for years on both a national and international level to introduce an international convention on the rights of older people and to establish a global legal framework that will: a) establish a definitive and universal position that age discrimination is morally and legally unacceptable; b) create a legally binding protective framework complete with accountability mechanisms; c) clarify governments’ responsibilities regarding the elderly; d) bring together already recognised laws that are currently provided for in other instruments and documents; e) correct the existing imbalance in the approach to the economic and social rights of older people by bringing together laws in a single, indivisible instrument; f) ensure that age-based discrimination and the rights of older people take their rightful place in the agendas of governments, donors and NGOs; g) boost comprehension and offset the multiple, complex forms of discrimination experienced by elderly men and women; h) establish a reference framework for the design and implementation of policies on demographic ageing that are based on rights, equity and social justice; i) provide a powerful tool for defending and educating older people; and j) enable those represented by these entities to claim their rights and bring about a shift in perception from older people as recipients of provisions and services to older people as holders of rights and responsibilities (HelpAge International España, 2022).

As María Dolores Fernández-Fígares points out in her article entitled ‘Harmful Ageism,’ published in *Ideal de Granada* newspaper, “the solution proposed for this problem has been known for a long time in gerontology scientific circles: intergenerational contact must not be lost. “The normal thing in a healthy society is for different generations to live in harmony and to enrich one another” (Fernández-Fígares, 2020)⁴.

4. Erasing Stereotypes

The WHO, in its Global Report on Ageism published in 2021, estimates that age-based stereotypes and prejudices have resulted in alarming models of discrimination against the elderly, building on a series of pre-determined beliefs that serve to justify ageism, and which have serious consequences for both physical and mental health. In addition, it is worth noting that these discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes don’t affect all people in the same way, given that they can be even more damaging when combined with contempt for someone’s gender, ethnicity, cultural level or lack of economic resources.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that unintentional or involuntary ageism also occurs as a consequence of stagnant models found in the conscience of the international community which directly affect the elderly, such as limitations and physical obstacles — a lack of ramps in steep areas or handrails on stairs — and the digital divide, as not everyone belongs to the digital generation, which puts up barriers preventing people from using social media or accessing their bank or other services via the internet. The biggest mistake is basing our opinions of the elderly on clichés associated with old age, such as dependence, fragility and physical and mental deterioration.

According to this WHO report on ageism, statistically speaking, it is estimated that one in every two people in the world has a discriminatory attitude when it comes to age, and the consequence of this behaviour leads to mental and physical problems in those commonly called old. To help with this issue, the WHO has joined forces with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), who are all committed to combating this affliction that negatively impacts human rights, and to carrying out periodic evaluations in order to eradicate what they have called “an insidious scourge on society” (WHO, *Ageism is a global challenge: UN*, 2021).

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a worrying shift in age discrimination, with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO, indicating that “as countries build back better from the pandemic [...] our driving vision is a world for all ages, one in which age-based stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination do not limit our opportunities, health, well-being and dignity” (Global Report on Ageism, 2021).

It is alarming to see how ageism is silently seeping into institutions and different sectors of society, including public health (“a systematic review in 2020 showed that in 85% of 149 studies, age determined who received certain medical procedures or treatments”) and the media, with devastating consequences for the elderly: discrimination and a feeling of powerlessness, which in turn trigger isolation and loneliness and a worse quality of life. As a result, it is claimed that over six million cases of depression in the world are due to ageism, which, even among the elderly, leads to a higher rate of premature death. As stated by Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, “the pandemic has put into stark relief the vulnerabilities of older people, especially those most marginalized [sic], who often face overlapping discrimination and barriers — because they are poor, live with disabilities, are women living alone, or belong to minority groups” (WHO, *Ageism is a global challenge: UN*, 2021).

However, it is also worth noting that ageism doesn't just affect older people; it goes hand-in-hand with a social dysfunction between different generations. In the words of Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “we need to fight ageism head-on, as a deep-rooted human rights violation,” adding that “ageism harms everyone — old and young. But often, it is so widespread and

accepted — in our attitudes and in policies, laws and institutions — that we do not even recognize its detrimental effect on our dignity and rights” (WHO, *Ageism is a global challenge: UN*, 2021).

In this regard, the 2021 Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, which was submitted to the Human Rights Council, is particularly enlightening. The report stresses the need to increase awareness of age discrimination and analyse its possible causes in order to combat and eradicate it. One of the pitfalls that must be overcome is that the legal instruments currently in place do not comprehensively cover older people in terms of legal capacity, quality of care, long-term care, palliative care, care for the victims of violence and abuse, the different means of recourse, independence and autonomy, and the right to a decent quality of life, particularly with regard to housing.

The report conceptualises the term ageism and reinforces the idea of this type of discrimination as a set of stereotypes that, combined with prejudices and discriminatory actions or practices based solely on a person’s chronological age, segregate the part of the population branded as old. Therefore, as a starting point to clearing up the concept, the term “elderly”, as used in 1995 by the United Nations General Assembly, was replaced with “older persons”, which fits in more coherently with the UN’s aims. Thanks to deeply rooted stereotypes, given that the term old person implies someone who is hobbled by some weakness as a result of their advanced age, the reality, however, is that anyone can suffer in life, regardless of age. In fact, the term ageism, which was coined by Robert Neil Butler, can be defined as the systemic discrimination of people due only to the fact that they are elderly, just as racism and sexism are types of discrimination based on skin colour and gender.

As we have mentioned, ageism has a negative influence in an intergenerational context, and the stereotypes associated with it apply generally to older people, which creates a significant divide between the young and the old, something that must be resolved as soon as possible given that if we fail to react in time, it will soon take root in the legal, medical, educational, political and social systems and directly affect people’s behaviour, prompting “widespread interpersonal ageism [that] perpetuates and legitimizes [sic] structural discrimination” (Mahler, 2021, point 25). This means that interiorised ageism leads to structural ageism as these stereotypes are instilled from an early age, which in turn results in distorted perceptions of older people. In addition, it is important to highlight that despite the growing attention being paid to active ageing policies and the recognition of older people as holders of rights, just like the rest of society, several barriers continue to be in place that prevent them from enjoying these rights, and these barriers were exacerbated, as already mentioned, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Faramiñán, 2020b and 2021c).

5. Institutional and Legislative Strength

Despite the growing importance of the idea of “healthy ageing”, which is no doubt underpinned by certain solid andragogical methods, institutional polices continue to apply and reproduce in the global conscious the untarnished image of the so-called “vital stages” into which life is so neatly divided: the early years, associated with learning; the adult years, associated with work; and old age, associated with retirement and inactivity. This is an inherently negative association given that an older person may well continue to learn (indeed they should) and work (if they so desire), and retirement could simply be seen as a change in activities, just not as a period of life that is synonymous with inactivity. The WHO’s Global Report on Ageism insists on the need to foster good intergenerational relations and to prevent youngsters from scorning the elderly, something which leads to undesired consequences that can be described as “self-directed ageism” (WHO, 2021), which is produced as a result of a lack of self-worth and self-esteem in adults.

In addition, the increase in life expectancy has put paid to the idea of old age as being a period of inactivity; now the opposite may be true: there is a dearth of opportunities and new options for work, both paid and unpaid. Remember that, from an anthropological point of view, age is a social construct which has varied over the centuries, with old age being considered from a wide range of perspectives depending on the historical context. During the 20th century, a person was considered old once they reached 70, while nowadays, in the 21st century, widespread healthy living is providing us with plenty of examples of older people in full physical and mental health at 90 years of age and even older.

On the other hand, as Mahler reveals in her report, “age as a social construct guides human rights discourse on ageing by underlining the agency, autonomy and independence of older persons instead of viewing them as unquestionably vulnerable and in need of protection” (Mahler, 2021, point 37). From this position we can see the importance of combating age discrimination so that the issue is reflected in the relevant legal framework and, in particular, in international human rights laws, and it is worth pointing out that there is still no out-and-out prohibition of this kind of age-based exclusion.

In the United Nations framework, only two instruments explicitly refer to age: the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which in article 7 obliges States Parties to ensure “the rights provided for in the present Convention without distinction of any kind,” including age; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, whose article 8 states that States Parties must agree to “combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age.”

Going back to Mahler’s report, point 40 tells us that “the lack of a clear prohibition of age discrimination may in part explain why, in international law or national law, differential treatment based on age can be considered as permissible discrimination”

(Mahler, 2021, point 40). This legal loophole in international human rights law must be reviewed by the specialists, with support from jurists and politicians, considering that as it currently stands, there is no clear and comprehensive prohibition of age discrimination.

The concept of discrimination, however, is generally described under international human rights law as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction that has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any field” (Mahler, 2021, point 38). Likewise, and as a way of closing this loophole, the term “in any field” could be understood to extend to age discrimination. In this regard, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ruled that age discrimination can be considered a motive for exclusion and is prohibited by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 1995, Annex IV, point 11; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2010, Section IV, B 31) both in terms of age and sex. It is worrying that people continue to be discriminated against because of their age, people who are often also at the disadvantage of being without work, whether they are looking for work or are retraining or completing a tertiary education course, and that is without also focusing on the inequality that exists in the pension system simply as a result of one’s place of residence. To further compound this issue, we must take into consideration the impact of disability when combined with old age; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reminds us of the need to recognise that people with disabilities “enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others” (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008, Article 12.2).

Returning once again to the Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler (2021), it’s interesting to see the progress made in this regard in regions such as Latin America, Africa and Europe. The Report indicates that, “while age is not explicitly listed as a prohibited ground [...] in the American Convention on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (in the Poblete Vilches and others v. Chile Judgement of 8 March 2018, paras. 125–143) has held that age is covered by the non-discrimination guarantees contained in that treaty” (Mahler, 2021, point 46). Also worthy of mention is the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, article 5 of which provides for the comprehensive protection of the rights of older people, while article 32 assertively manifests against structural ageism by considering it necessary to “adopt measures to achieve dissemination of, and to progressively educate the whole of society, [...] foster a positive attitude to old age [...] and avoid stereotypical images in relation to older persons⁵.” In a similar vein to these regional regulations, article 18 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights states that “the aged [...] shall also have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs,” with article 3 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa proposing that signees “prohibit all forms of discrimination, [...] encourage the elimination of social and cultural stereotypes [and] take corrective measures.”

In Europe, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms fails to explicitly mention age discrimination, and so too does the European Social Charter, even though the latter does refer to elderly people's right to social protection and calls on the Parties to fight against age discrimination and adopt suitable legal frameworks. On the other hand, the European Court of Human Rights has indicated that protecting the rights of the elderly should fall under the "other" category (ECHR Factsheet, *Elderly people and the European Convention on Human Rights*, 2019), backed up by the other treaties we have discussed.

It is worth pointing out the giant leap forward found in article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which, in talking about non-discrimination, states that "any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited." This thought is echoed in the Treaty of Lisbon, with article 19, which refers to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, indicating that "the Council, acting unanimously in accordance with a special legislative procedure and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation."

Claudia Mahler categorically voices her displeasure with these provisions, however, writing that "overall, existing regional instruments have a limited ability to address ageism and age discrimination because of their insufficient ratification and limited regional coverage" (Mahler, 2021, point 50). She adds that, "furthermore, the regional treaties only partially address multiple and intersectional discrimination, and they lack specific obligations for States," which leads us to the need to foster a legislative effort to devise specific regulations to tackle this type of discrimination and overturn existing prejudices.

6. A Recurring Theme: "The 20th/21st-Century Generation", a Visualisation Project

The research published by Argentina's National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI), which analyses age discrimination, proves very poignant and, in its attempt to overcome stereotypes and existing prejudices to reclaim the importance of old age, indicates that "we grow old from the minute we are born. The cycle of life is a constant evolution and old age — with its inherent features — is part of that evolution. We must understand that older people — beyond the perceptions and beliefs of society — have the same opportunity to grow, develop and learn, as well as to experience new things, just like those currently in other stages of life" (INADI, 2022).

For these reasons, I think it's time we start thinking of age and experience as an endorsement of knowledge and wisdom, which must be backed up by the deeds performed throughout the life of older people, and that once and for all we should reinvent the confusing and unjust criteria that cause ageism. My proposal is a new formula called "The 20th/21st-century generation" (Faramiñán, 2021d) involving people who have lived in the two centuries — and as such they have banked a great deal of experience — who wish to continue proving useful to society by actively and effectively connecting with the younger generations, who in turn can use this experience to help them when facing their own century, the 21st.

This aim of this intergenerational project, with the help of andragogues, is to: a) gather the testimonies of a large group of people who witnessed the changing of era, a temporal shift or, as we prefer to call it, a bridge between two centuries; b) harness the wealth of experience provided by a life of contrasts, a chiaroscuro that saw them overcome wars, economic crises and environmental disasters, that allowed them to build a family, raise children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren; in sum, a life lived to the fullest; c) recruit those who, once they have brought their professional life to a close and reached retirement age, wish to keep active, in most cases by doing volunteer or unpaid work, with the satisfaction of helping younger generations being payment enough; d) find those who are willing to put all their effort into creating intergenerational ties in order to collaborate with younger generations and share with them their best asset: their experience; and e) share the sweet taste of knowledge, that tiny morsel they treasure in their heart and in their brain which stores the secret to their successes and failures.

All of these aspects make up a vital model, with its foundations set in two different centuries, in which enriching experiences and wisdom intertwine to the aid of youngsters, those who were unable to witness the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, and to help them see and understand the structural and paradigm shifts that this once-in-a-generation changing of the century brought about.

As the participants become increasingly aware of the importance of this project, which I call "the 20th/21st-century generation", it has the chance to become a difference-maker, a promoter of respect to which we can turn for knowledge, reflection and vital wisdom. Remember that such a generational event won't be repeated until the next change of century, meaning that this 20th/21st-century generation holds a uniqueness that we must promote and cherish.

Human beings grow old in pain and fearful of death, and as such they are generally not filled with joy. And as our society has become mobilised by wide-spread infection, fear has become a shadow that provokes unrest.

This is an opportunity not just for social and legislative progress, but also progress in terms of our thoughts. A particularly philosophical line of thought which takes on all of this knowledge and wisdom, something which is not just a great opportunity

for us, but also for the future generations who will reap the benefits of this exchange. At the end, the most important thing is finding out how we know what we know: we know because we learned from our life experiences, which provided us with the wisdom and ability to make our way through life's maze in one piece.

Now that we both know and understand, we have an even greater responsibility, and this vital process invigorates and strengthens us, as long as we are aware of it. If not, we will be letting this fundamental opportunity to evolve and to serve our society slip through our hands.

7. Notes

1 On page 65, Castillo Silva states that Lindeman “devises concepts of adult education and develops the idea of informal learning.” He was the first American to employ the term andragogy, using it in two of his works. On page 12, he also adds that “there are those who believe that the term ‘pedagogy’ should disappear and be replaced with Education Science.”

2 The neologism ageism was put forward in 1998 by Robert Neil Butler, a psychiatrist and gerontologist, to highlight the stigmatisation of elderly people. *See* Butler, 1998.

3 Ageism is a specific type of age discrimination which is provoked by any attitude, behaviour or institutional structure that harms or impedes a person or group of people from enjoying their rights, and whose determining factor is old age.

4 Also, in another article by the author in the same newspaper (January 26, 2022), entitled “Penuria digital”, she attacks the insensitivity of the banks that generate clear discrimination against those who are not digital natives, and praises the Eighty-year-old surgeon, Carlos San Juan, who, with his slogan “I’m older but not an idiot,” has managed to mobilize public opinion and the attention of the banks, for which the journalist adds: “in this scenario, we are going to need reaffirm our best human values, before we become heartless automatons.”

5 The Report suggests that it is necessary to determine the definition of old age, a very changeable criterion that can vary depending on the context or living conditions — in some cultures or places it may refer to people over 60 years of age, for example, though this is obviously not applicable to all societies.

8. References

- Alemán, C., Alonso, J. A. and Fernández, P. (2013). *Dependencia y Servicios Sociales*. 2ª edición. Pamplona: Aranzadi.
- Bazo, M. T. (2011). Teorías sobre vejez. In R. Gómez (Dir.), *Salud, Demografía en la población anciana* (p. 23). Madrid: Alianza.
- Beck, U. (2002). *La sociedad de riesgo global*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
- Butler, R. N. (1998). *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial and Biomedical Approaches* (con Myrna I. Lewis y Trey Sunderland).

- Castillo Silva, F. (2018). Andragogía, andragogos y sus aportaciones. *Voces de la Educación*, 3(6), 64-76.
- Convención sobre los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad (2008). <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/documents/tccconvs.pdf>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2010). General Recommendation no. 28. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/cedaw-c-2010-47-gc2.pdf>
- Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (2018). Judgment Poblete Vilches et al. c. Chile (Merits, Reparations and Costs), judgment dated March 8, 2018, paras. 125 to 143 (age discrimination in the provision of health services).
- European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) (2019). Elderly people and the European Convention on Human Rights. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/fs_elderly_eng.pdf
- Faramiñán Gilbert, J.M. de (2021a). Reflessioni sull'invecchiamento e la discriminazione per età. *Ordine Internazionale e diritti umani*, 447-448.
- Faramiñán Gilbert, J. M. de (2021b). La protección de la salud pública y el respeto a las libertades individuales ante la Covid-19. *Freedom, Security & Justice: European Legal Studies. Rivista quadrimestrale on line sullo Spazio europeo de libertà, sicurezza e giustizia*, 2, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.25267/Paix_secur_int.2021.i9.1705
- Faramiñán Gilbert, J. M. de (2021c). The post-Covid-19 Universe and the recovery of Individual freedoms. *Peace and Security-Paix et Sécurité Internationales*, 9. https://doi.org/10.25267/Paix_secur_int.2021.i9.1706
- Faramiñán Gilbert, J. M. de (2020d). Edadismo o generación 20/21. *En Jáen donde resisto*. <https://www.enjaendonderesisto.es/firmas-invitas/edadismo-o-generacion-20-21/>
- Fernández-Fígares, M. D. (2020). El dañino edadismo. *Ideal de Granada*, columna semanal Puerta Real (6 de mayo). <https://www.ideal.es/hemeroteca?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>
- Guterres, A. (2020). *Las personas mayores tienen el mismo derecho a la vida que los demás durante y después del coronavirus*. United Nations. <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/05/1473762>
- HelpAge International España (2022). HelpAge España. <https://www.helpage.es/convencion-internacional/>
- Huenchuan, S. (2009). *Envejecimiento, derechos humanos y políticas públicas*. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.
- INADI (2020). Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo de la República Argentina. <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/guiajuridicagratis/instituto-nacional-contra-la-discriminacion-la-xenofobia-y-el-racismo-inadi>

- Informe Macrosad sobre Lucha contra el edadismo (2020). University of Granada, April 15, 2020. <https://catedras.ugr.es/macrosad/informacion/noticias/mas-intergeneracionalidad-menos-edadismo>
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1995). Annex IV. General Comment no. 6. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CESCR_GEC_6429_E.pdf
- Knowles, M. (2006). *Andragogía*. México: Oxford.
- Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*. New York: Ed. McGraw-Hill.
- Mahler, C. (2021). Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Human Rights Council, 48th period of sessions, September 13 to October 1, 2021. Agenda Item 3, Promotion and protection of all human, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. United Nations General Assembly, A/HRC/48/53, August 4, 2021. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/215/63/PDF/G2121563.pdf?OpenElement>
- Mohring, P. M. (1989). *Andragogy and Pedagogy: A comment on their erroneous usage*. Training and Development Research Center Project, 20 ERIC, quoted by Sanchez Domenech in Doctoral Thesis, p. 11.
- Morente, F. (2020). ¿Las crisis nos hacen mejores ciudadanos? Entre la fe en el progreso y el temor al colapso global. *Diario Jaén*, April 5, 2020. <https://www.diariojaen.es>
- Platón (1974). *Apología*. In *Defensa de Sócrates, Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *Laqués*, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *Menéxeno*, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *La República*. 331^a, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *La República*. 328 d, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *La República*. 238^a, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *La República*. 331^a, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *La República*. III, 681 b and 690^a, *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Platón (1974). *Parménides*, *Obras completas*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Romero Fuentes, X. and Dulcey-Ruiz, E. (2012). Reflexiones sobre envejecimiento, vejez y género. In Red Latinoamericana de Gerontología. <https://gerontologia.org/portal/archivosUpload/uploadManual/RLG-Reflexiones-sobre-envejecimiento-vejez-y-genero.pdf>.
- Sánchez Domenech, I. (2015). *La andragogía de Malcom Knowles: teoría y tecnología de la educación de adultos*. Universidad Cardenal Herrera. CEU de Elche. Departamento de Ciencias Políticas, Ética y Sociología. https://repositorioinstitucional.ceu.es/bitstream/10637/7599/1/La%20andragog%C3%ADa%20de%20Malcom%20Knowles__teor%C3%ADa%20y%20tecnolog%C3%ADa%20

[de%20la%20educaci%C3%B3n%20de%20adultos_Tesis_Iluminada%20S%C3%A1nchez%20Domenech.pdf](#)

Villasmil, J. and Chirinos, L. M. (2016). Reflexiones sobre Derechos Humanos, multiculturalidad y diálogo intercultural. *Opción*, 79, 197–216.

WHO (2015). *World report on ageing and health*. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/186463>

WHO (18 de marzo de 2021). *Ageism is a global challenge: UN*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un>

WHO (2021). *Global Report Ageism*. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/340208>