The truth about Ageism within the LGBTQ+ Community (Hint: it’s not pretty)

NOTES TO SELF

* WRITE IN TONE OF VOICE LIKE HOW YOU WOULD SPEAK IN REAL LIFE TO OFFSET LAURENS ARTICLE ON AGEISM.
* BLOG POST AESTHETIC.
* DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD WITH LAURENS? SPEAK TO LAUREN TO CONFIRM AND IZZY/HANNAH ABOUT LAYOUT.

Ok queers, listen up, before we get started let me tell you one harsh truth about aging- ITS. HAPPENING. TO. ALL. OF. US.

Like it or not, we’re all getting older. It’s not ideal but that’s just the way it is- one day you’re booty popping in G-A-Y and stumbling in at 5am on a Sunday morning, the next you’re in bed by 8.30pm on a Friday with repeats of the Bake Off.

But, while I’m on a tangent, let me tell you something else as a gay man who is about to enter his 30’s (in two years, don’t get ahead of yourself yet), its honestly not as scary as we all think at 21. What IS scary is that the older you get as a queer individual the more you realise and witness that your own community is shunning you to the side in favour of a newer model. That’s right, the older you get the more you start to feel like some kind of used car or out of date phone.

Whilst that may sound funny the truth is that ageism within our community is a massive issue and what’s more it’s having a serious effect on LGBTQ+ peoples mental health. A study by The Social Science and Medicine Journal found that there was a ‘positive and statistically significant’ relationship between “Internalised Gay Ageism” (IGA), in other words the prejudices of one LGBTQ+ generation towards another, and depressive symptoms in the gay men who took part in the study (Lowder, 2015).

Mainly directed at the older generation this internalised ageism is shown in many different ways. Most notably on ‘dating’ apps such as Grindr and Scruff terms such as ‘No old men’ or ‘I already have a dad I don’t need another one’ are rife amongst younger guys profiles. LGBTQ+ writers such as Jeremy Helligar (2017) theorise that this prejudice is a simple, black and white case of ‘older equals not hot’ and suggests this ‘Mean Girls’ attitude is just a new way for gay men to further divide ourselves from within whilst complaining that heterosexual society is bad for doing the same thing.

As well as these more trivial examples, IGA is shown to affect older gay men in many other ways. Speaking to The Inquirer in 2017 LGBTQ+ researcher Prof Jesus Ramirez-Valles stated that during his studies into the effects of aging amongst queer-identifying individuals many of the older generations (50+ for this particular study) felt that despite the marriage equality movement, feelings of loneliness and desire for a partner were more prevalent amongst those who were single at a certain age. These mass feelings of being isolated could be, Valles suggested, remnants of feelings from a generation that lived through the worst of the AIDS epidemic a time at which it was risky to take part in even casual sex, let alone try to find love and thus now feel like ‘that boat has sailed’ (Burling, 2017).

So, what can we do as a community and as individuals to combat this? Now I’m not telling you to go out and hug the nearest older man you see (because that’s weird and how you get a criminal record) but one suggestion I do have is fairly simple- just stop being a bit of a pr\*ck to older people. Fair play if older men aren’t your thing sexually but if one happens to message you on a dating app rather than a blunt “NO” or something ruder why not just a “Hi, thanks for your message, I’m not really into older guys but I appreciate the compliment”? It’s just basic manners and for all you know could put a stop to a depressive episode.

As a community as a whole, researchers suggest that an increased awareness of ageism is a start. Knowing that there is problem is the first step to fixing it. The aforementioned study in The Social science and Medicine Journal also suggested that a feeling of “Mattering” was important to help combat the ageism problem, put simply older generations need to feel a sense of belonging, unity and relevance from within the LGBTQ+ community and this can be done through looking to them for queer history lessons, for working with various LGBTQ+ organisations and for advice on how to handle ourselves at a time when it seems as if the political world is against us again (Kennedy, 2015)

In short, we have to remember that the Stonewall generation gave so much and fought so hard for gay rights, liberation and legal protection. They matter and it’s because of them we are able to be who we are today.

<http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/12/11/gay_aging_study_says_internalized_gay_ageism_affects_gay_men_as_they_get.html> (Lowder, 2015)

<http://www.philly.com/philly/health/menshealth/Gay-and-gray-grappling-with-ageism-loneliness-and-the-long-shadow-of-AIDS-lgbtq.html> (Burling 2017)

<http://www.newnownext.com/internalized-ageism-and-homophobia-a-toxic-mixture-for-older-gay-men/12/2015/> (Kennedy, 2015)

<https://www.queerty.com/ageist-contradiction-youre-not-looking-oldie-grindr-20170219> (Helligar, 2017)