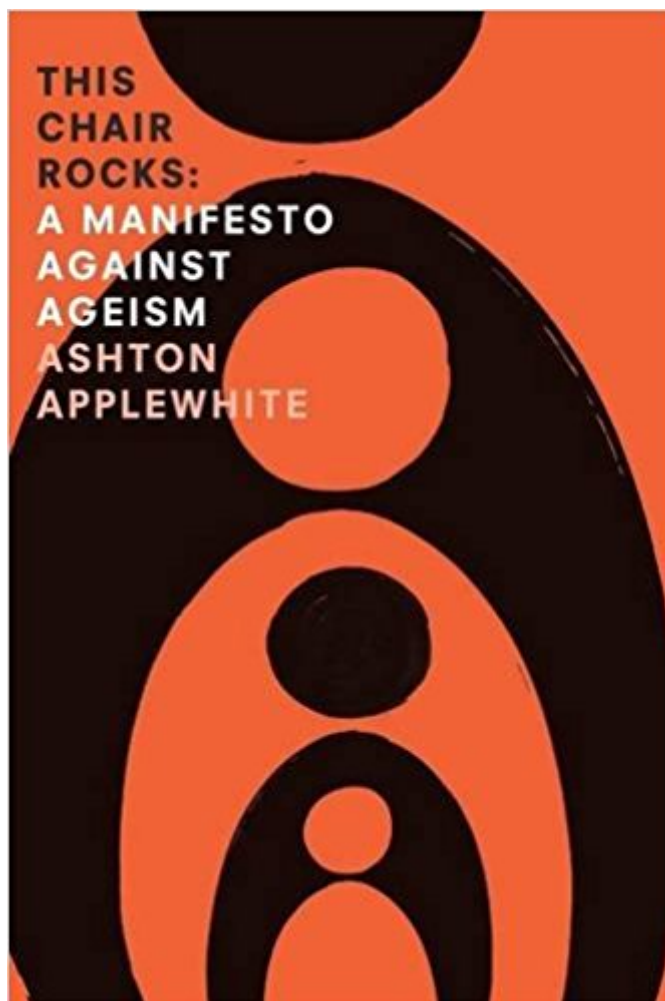


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# This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism



## Synopsis

From childhood on, we're barraged by messages that it's sad to be old. That wrinkles are embarrassing, and old people useless. Author and activist Ashton Applewhite believed them too until she realized where this prejudice comes from and the damage it does. Lively, funny, and deeply researched, *This Chair Rocks* traces Applewhite's journey from apprehensive boomer to pro-aging radical, and in the process debunks myth after myth about late life. The book explains the roots of ageism in history and in our own age denial and how it divides and debases, examines how ageist myths and stereotypes cripple the way our brains and bodies function, looks at ageism in the workplace and the bedroom, exposes the cost of the all-American myth of independence, critiques the portrayal of elders as burdens to society, describes what an all-age-friendly world would look like, and concludes with a rousing call to action. It's time to create a world of age equality by making discrimination on the basis of age as unacceptable as any other kind. Whether you're older or hoping to get there, this book will shake you by the shoulders, cheer you up, make you mad, and change the way you see the rest of your life. Age pride!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Margaret Gullette, Los Angeles Review of Books (8 June 2016) Along comes Ashton Applewhite with a book we have been waiting for. Anti-ageism now boasts a popular champion, activist, and epigrammatist in the lineage of Martial and Dorothy Parker. Until *This Chair Rocks* we haven't had a single compact book that blows up myths seven to a page like fireworks. The book's very cover • red and black and abstract, not palely representational

and grayly passive she proclaims its contemporary energy. Even Applewhite's bleached-white curls stand up energetically they are visible in a dynamic 1:29 minute interview and in person (although we met once, it was before her age-solidarity dye job). Applewhite has a succinct story about how she personally overcame her own ageism and how charmed she is to be happier about getting older. Relief breathes through *This Chair Rocks*, which begins by describing her transformation brilliantly through the tale of "Not-Ray." Ray was a conservative white-haired man in her office, whom she discovered with panic to be her own age. She wanted to hide this from her co-workers: "They'll think I'm old too." That was Stage One, as she thought to herself: "I'm not Ray." Then she started interviewing 80- and 90-year-olds, and got a "first jolt of fresh old air" about what later life was really like. "Specific concerns replaced nameless dread." Still it was a move forward in her thinking: "I graduated to what I came to call I'm Not Ray." Stage Two: trumpet the fact that Ray and I are the same age, because see how much younger I look! With more knowledge came Stage Three: "I'm not Ray. Ray's going to be happy as a clam in Florida: it's the old age he wants. I'm making my way to the old age I want, and it won't look like his." Rightly, for this book, age "denial" is her first target. Far from shaming people who have internalized ageism, she shows even the cosmetically "done" how to undo it. Little shots of self-help are required in a manifesto against an unfamiliar -ism. Almost everything she thought she knew was negative and wrong, and realizing this leads her to compile the pithy, accurate information she has mastered. Many of the personal stories in *This Chair Rocks* come from Applewhite's own research, a total of 50 interviews. The book is divided into small nourishing sections, like a box of oatmeal cookies. The four-page chapter detailing how happiness becomes more common after 80, for instance, which models her method. It's a pro-aging message, and while these often seem phony, Applewhite's changes in register, her tart commentary, and her well-chosen stories pique our curiosity, offering us first the unexpected and then the explicable. Applewhite weighs the data and presents what she finds trustworthy. "Fear does subside," she writes. "Imagine how much more manageable the fear [of aging] would be if we become old people in training when we're young." The territory the book traverses looks familiar the brain, the body, sex, work but I, as a co-worker in the field, still came upon material that was new, and many quotable summations. Applewhite has read canonical gerontologists and a lot of other experts. In two paragraphs she proves "the assumption that older people are inevitable money pits for

health dollars is incorrect. [Applewhite] People over eighty actually cost less to care for at the end of life than people in their sixties and seventies. You, too, will marvel at the traps we, and media pundits, fall into. People in the age biz and “on the front line of aging policy” go wrong too. “All aging is successful,” not just the sporty version otherwise you’re dead. Age critics usually take a much longer way around to critique “successful aging” for its disregard of class and disability and for raising the bar too high or to argue against the term “the Fourth Age” as if those who were sick or frail had less humanity than us sporty Third Agers. Her whole snarky passage about why “Western imperialism is in decline” bears reading aloud: with apologies to Alexander Pope (and all the well-meaning among us, myself included, knocking ourselves out to educate the public) it is what oft was thought, but never so well expressed. The bright bulb can give serious light. Advice is cannily dropped into the text, like chocolate drops in a cookie. In “Break a Sweat,” Applewhite explains why “frequent partner dancing” is the best exercise. “Reject age as a first-order signifier,” she writes, which for her is an unusual dollop of theory language, but it’s high-quality chocolate. We don’t, in fact, need our age to be the first fun fact about us. After disability activists answered her Facebook interchange, testifying that those who help them are actually grateful, she wrote a page about the pleasures of learning to accept help (say, carrying heavy bags). One big lick of advice, about keeping cognition going, ends “so if you knit, don’t stop at scarves; if you’re visiting a foreign country, try memorizing the phrasebook; and if you need a purpose, help me end ageism.” “Age pride” and “radical aging” “old people in training” are new memes to both hold onto and pass around. Kazuki Yamada, HelpAge International (May 27, 2016) In *This Chair Rocks*, Applewhite unravels the consequences of leaving ageist preconceptions unchallenged. Her sharp wit, accessible writing and strong empirical research disentangle assumptions about the aging process from the facts. At a time when misinformation and ignorance dominate, opening up this discussion is vital. The relationship between the brain, the body and aging is one of the most feared in this arena. However, Applewhite analyses the dense academic research on dementia, cognition and bodily illness with clarity. She unflinchingly concludes that “serious mental decline is not a normal or inevitable part of aging”. On the prospects of a sure descent into senility, she asserts that such ideas are “not even close” to the truth. Obsessing over health isn’t healthy, she also points out. Healthy aging and chronic disease “can and do coexist” in many older people. Sex is also tackled without blushing. She acknowledges

that "nowhere is ageism more sexist, and vicious, than in the domain of sexuality", resisting the notion of the "sexless senior" with well-supported arguments. "The right to intimacy is life-long," Applewhite writes, pointing out the increasing prevalence of STDs among older populations as a consequence of denying the existence of their sexual intimacy. Issues of work and retirement are similarly scrutinized. Applewhite points out the unfortunate difficulties older people face in finding and continuing to work, despite their valuable experiences and perspectives. However, she stresses that older people should not be in a position where they have no choice but to work until the day they die. Applewhite also examines end of life, sharing that very different thoughts occupy you when looking at death straight in the eye rather than from a distance. "Glossing over the very real challenges of late life does no one any favors, but neither does the assumption that even highly circumscribed lives are not worth living," she rightly remarks. Who are we to pity bed-ridden older people when we "grossly underestimate the quality of life that the old enjoy"? The experience of dying is very different on the inside. She challenges us to consider what older people actually want. Why do we often decide matters for them, even when it comes to how they spend the last chapters of their lives? This Chair Rocks speaks with a force that has the capacity to change the reality of all who read it. You are never underestimated as a reader. While acknowledging the societal forces that limit individual potential, it nonetheless provides empowering suggestions through which each person can resist age discrimination. Applewhite constantly challenges the reader: what can you do, and what can we do together? Applewhite's book is an excellent work that speaks with powerful personal experience and a wealth of evidence. It cuts through the ignorance on age, and provides the tools with which to rebuild afterwards. Most importantly, it acknowledges that every person's voice matters - collaboration is necessary given how ingrained ageism has become. Applewhite's manifesto comes at a time of accelerating global ageing, and - despite its largely North American setting - is a much needed jolt to move people all over the world to join the revolution against ageism. Jeanette Leardi, Changing Aging (April 4, 2016) No revolution springs to life overnight. It requires gestation, during which a gradual confluence of ideas and thwarted actions builds up, until the right moment when society is finally ready to encounter its full force. Such is the case with the movement to transform aging. And now we've reached a clear tipping point with Ashton Applewhite's impressive and engaging work, This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism. It's a book whose time has definitely come. Dedicated to Applewhite's mentor, the pioneering pro-aging activist Dr. Robert Butler, this work sets aging's realities against its ubiquitous myths that allow ageism to influence (infect, really) every aspect of modern life. A manifesto, This Chair Rocks declares the need to end age-based discrimination, which

hinders the potential of all generations. Writing in a crisp, vivid, and witty style, Applewhite shows us how and why our culture's preoccupation with youth and deification of youth has resulted in society-wide fear and dread of life's later years, which are actually filled with potential and opportunity for growth, if only we would be more mindful and empathetic of others, and get out of our own internally ageist way. "This punishing old/young binary old/no-longer-young, actually consigns two-thirds of us to second-class status," she writes, "a meekly self-imposed exile to the wrong side of the velvet rope." To help us understand our own journeys dealing with ageism, Applewhite shares the gradual raising of her own consciousness, a process she freely admits is ongoing, as it should be for all of us. She proudly embraces the role of "Old Person in Training," stating that the process to become one "acknowledges the inevitability of oldness while relegating it to the future, albeit at an ever-smaller remove. It swaps purpose and intent for dread and denial. It connects us empathically with our future selves. Never preachy, always conversational, in nine engrossing chapters, Applewhite explores ageism's many impacts on life, including on health care, sex and intimacy, the workplace, community and housing, and at the end of life. Each argument is so thoroughly researched and clearly presented that the book should be required reading for medical students and established health-care professionals, businesspeople, aging-services providers, policy makers and anyone who is getting older. Throughout the book, Applewhite cheers us on as she helps us arrive at fresher, more life-affirming understandings of what being and getting older are really about. Wrestling with our society's insistence on the "age-as-problem" approach can feel daunting, she admits, but it's not as intimidating and difficult as the greater challenges all of us will face if we don't apply ourselves as soon as possible to the task of defeating ageism. As she states, "It's clear that upending discrimination on the basis of age will require fundamental changes in the way society is structured. We have to come up with fairer and broader ways to assess productivity, devise more ways for older people to continue to contribute, support them in these endeavors, and decouple the value of a human being from success along any of these metrics. This social change demands that we join the struggle against racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia as well. Likewise, activists for other social justice causes would do well to consider how ageism hampers their efforts, and to raise awareness and work against it." Abolishing ageism is a revolutionary cause whose time has come. This Chair Rocks, is its inspiring manifesto. Let's all read the book and get to work.

"Wow. This book totally rocks. It arrived on a day when I was in deep confusion and sadness about my age--62. Everything about it, from my invisibility to my neck. Within four or five wise, passionate pages, I had found insight, illumination and inspiration. I never use the word empower, but this book has empowered me." — Anne Lamott, New York Times best-selling author "Vibrant, energetic, fact-filled and funny, This Chair Rocks is a call to arms not just for older people but for our whole society." — Katha Pollitt, poet, essayist and Nation columnist "Sometimes a writer does us all a great favor and switches on a light. Snap! The darkness vanishes and, in its place we find an electric vision of new ways of living. I want to live in a world where ageism is just a memory, and This Chair Rocks illuminates the path." — Dr. Bill Thomas, founder of Changing Aging "This Chair Rocks is radical, exuberant and full of all sorts of facts that erase many of the myths and beliefs about late life. As Applewhite defines and describes ageism, new ways of seeing and being in the world emerge, empowering everyone to see things as they really are." — Laurie Anderson, artist "An eloquent and well-researched exposé of the prejudice that feeds age bias, and a passionate argument to mobilize against it. This must-read book is also a fun-read for every age." — Stephanie Coontz, author, The Way We Never Were: American families and the Nostalgia Trap. "A knowledgeable, straight-talking, and witty book that briskly explains to anyone how-wrong-we-are-about-aging. There's radical news here to enlighten the most "done" starlet, and tart turns of phrase to captivate the most expert age critic: 'All aging is "successful"--not just the sporty version--otherwise you're dead.' This pithy primer ought ideally to be given to every American adolescent--to inoculate them against the lies and stereotypes that can spoil the long life course they will all want." — Margaret Morganroth Gullette, author of Aged by Culture and the prize-winning Agewise and Declining to Decline "Ashton Applewhite is a visionary whose time has come, tackling one of the most persistent biases of our day with originality, verve, and humor. Her magic formula of naming and shaming may just shake all of us out of complacency and it into action. Whether you relate through being older now or recognize that aging is in your future, this is one of the most important books you'll ever read." — Marc Freedman, CEO of Encore and author of The Big Shift: Navigating the New Life Stage Before Midlife "A smart and stirring call to add ageism to the list of 'isms' that divide us, and to mobilize against it. Applewhite shows how ageism distorts our view of old age, and urges us to challenge age-based prejudices in ourselves and in society. An important wake-up call for any baby boomer who's apprehensive about growing old." — Pepper Schwartz, Professor of Sociology, University of Washington and AARP Ambassador

First, the stars. I only give 5 stars to things I consider all-time literary masterpieces, so 4 stars is pretty much my top rating for anything in this genre. In other words, I thought this book was great. Reading *This Chair Rocks* (love the title), I was surprised at how much internalized ageism I uncovered. I hadn't ever really thought about ageism as a thing, except in terms of job discrimination, which is fairly obvious. By the time you are halfway into this book you will not doubt that it is a thing. A very big thing, that takes a toll on our health and happiness throughout our lives, whether we are experiencing ageist attitudes from others or imposing them upon ourselves. The book is well-written, funny, and thought-provoking, and I had quite a few aha! moments where Applewhite made an observation or analysis that resonated with me but that I'd never consciously considered before. I'm seeing the world in a new way since reading this book, and I plan to give copies to friends and family, because the more people who begin to think differently about the process of aging, the better for all of us. Highly recommended.

*This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism* by Ashton Applewhite is the book we older Americans have been waiting for. Finally a treatise on aging that validates us, knocking down the prevailing negative stereotypes of aging! Searching for a positive way to age, Applewhite deconstructs the prevailing images of old as a disease! She interviewed older adults, many in their 80s and 90s and did her homework, investigating the current literature on ageism. Applewhite comes to the conclusion that older Americans desperately need a new aging narrative, one that comes from having our consciousness raised, similar to the way second wave feminists analyzed and rejected their cultural upbringing to discover personal empowerment. She encourages the reader to examine the cultural stereotypes around aging that she or he has internalized and to replace them with positive views of aging. Applewhite offers numerous examples of how aging can be a new opportunity for growth, citing conversations with older adults who continue to find meaning in life post retirement and who state greater contentment than at a younger age. She concludes her book with guidelines for elder activists who want to engage in changing social thinking and social policies directed at older adults. I felt newly empowered after reading *This Chair Rocks*. It belongs in the library of not just every older adult but younger adults as well. Applewhite's road map for aging with dignity can't come soon enough in your life!

Ashton Applewhite presents a compelling way to view aging-along with descriptions (sometimes



surprising, at least to me) of what ageism is. The book gives comfort to those of us dealing actively with leaving middle age (whatever that is, exactly) behind and entering new ground. Applewhite deals realistically with the challenges of aging while pointing out the many ways in which we can continue to evolve and contribute to ourselves and the world. One point that particularly struck home was the fact that we are all, always, aging and that in rejecting older people, younger people are in fact rejecting their future selves. Our society has created an unrealistic box in which we place "the old" and everyone looks for ways to avoid being in this artificial box (while, of course, continuing to stay alive). Applewhite dispels many of the frightening myths about aging (for example, the idea of most people ending up as a burden only applies to a small percentage) and explores its many gifts. My only complaint about this book came from the Kindle edition I bought. In several places it was missing pages that made it hard to follow the book's progress. This is a sad fault that mars the reading experience of an excellent work.

I don't generally think of a manifesto as a "page turner", but Ashton Applewhite has managed to do just that! Not only is the book important and engaging, it's also a wonderful read!!! Full of actual information and insights, Applewhite is blowing the lid off of aging & ageism, the final taboo in our youth obsessed culture. She's the Betty Friedan of the baby boomer generation- Thank goodness someone with brains and wit has graced us with her abilities as a writer. THIS CHAIR ROCKS does just that, it totally rocks!!!

Ashton Applewhite's book is a masterpiece into which the author has obviously poured her heart, soul, and considerable intelligence. This book is an eye-opener AND a call to action AND a must read for anyone who is growing older (hint: we all are!) There are so many myths, distortions, deceptions, and prejudices against the whole reality of aging that it is truly frightening. Bottom line is we will all be impacted by the choices that are being made and the policies instituted based on all this misinformation. Applewhite's manifesto is not only painstakingly researched and impressively organized, it is also a "good read" by a good writer. Educate yourself. Educate your friends and family. This is an important conversation for all of us to be having now. The quality of our lives as well as our longevity may well depend on it.

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