

summary

In this episode of Aging For All, hosts Jen Yanez Pryor and Andrea Price welcome Glynis Boyd-Hughes, an intersectional gerontologist. Glynis shares her journey into gerontology, emphasizing the importance of understanding the social drivers of health and the impact of intersectionality on aging. The conversation explores how societal systems shape aging experiences and the need for community engagement and advocacy to create better outcomes for elders. Glynis encourages listeners to view aging as a gift and to take action in their communities to support others.

takeaways

Glynis Boyd-Hughes emphasizes the importance of an intersectional lens in gerontology.

Social drivers of health are crucial for understanding aging outcomes.

Aging should be viewed as a gift rather than a burden.

Community engagement can empower individuals to create change.

Advocacy is essential for improving health equity in aging.

The narrative around aging needs to shift to include diverse experiences.

Investing in others is key to creating a supportive society.

Aging is a lifelong journey that requires attention and care.

We all have a role in shaping the systems that affect aging.

Connection and belonging are vital for a fulfilling life at any age.

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Jen Yanez Pryor (00:01.667)

Hello and welcome to Aging For All. We're your hosts, I'm Jen Yanez-Pryor.

Aging For All (00:06.417)

And I'm Andrea Price. Thank you all so much for joining us today.

Jen Yanez Pryor (00:10.809)

Today we're excited to welcome Glynis Boyd-Hughes. Glynis is an intersectional gerontologist melding her lived academic and professional experience and knowledge to create a holistic approach to increasing awareness of the impact of social drivers of health and trauma on equity in aging. Through recognizing a service gap in gerontology,

created as a result of limited focus on social drivers of health and trauma and equity. She is adamant about the effectiveness of an intersectional lens to improve equity for better later life outcomes. She credits her late daughter, Gabrielle, for serving as her North Star and leading her to her encore career as an elder advocate and researcher.

Aging For All (01:00.211)

Hello and welcome, Glynis. We're so happy to have you.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (01:01.88)

Good morning. Thank you. Thank you. I'm really happy to be here. Good morning, everybody.

Jen Yanez Pryor (01:06.681)

Good morning!

Aging For All (01:08.595)

Yes, you have a great bio, extensive experience. So can you talk a little bit about your path to gerontology and your interest in aging?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (01:19.628)

Yes, I'm happy to do that. So I'm just going to go off what Jen was saying as far as about my late daughter, Gabrielle, who was a CNA. And basically, after she passed, I was looking for full time work. She had three young adult children who are basically kindergartners in the school of life that still needed help. And I found work with the CU Connections, which is a span center now.

I was guardianship manager, public guardianship manager, great job. But being practical, looking for a way of how I could build on what I already had. At the time I got that job, I had a master's in leadership, policy and organizational management and a post-bacc in disability leadership. So I wasn't trying to reinvent the wheel, you know, just seeing how I could build. I went to an online seminar with Dr. Tracy Gendron.

I want to say, Jay might have been there maybe hosting, but it was about assisted living administration. So even though I went looking for other avenues on how to basically build my resume and increase my income, what I actually found very, very much a case of serendipity was a field that I genuinely loved and just learning what gerontology meant.

And as I got into it, also taking my background from my previous masters, which is a program grounded in social justice, it just all came together really well. And here we are a few years later, and we are talking about this intersectional gerontology, which I'm really excited about talking about and getting people to see how it matters when we're talking about doing things for elders and making

helping them have better outcomes.

Jen Yanez Pryor (03:16.345)

Yeah, thank you. I love how every time you talk, Glynis, that your story always begins with Gabrielle. I love it so much because she is the reason you do what you do and it's just very touching. So thank you for sharing that with us and our listeners. So I'd love to get into this intersectional gerontology piece because

You know, we've talked to lots of different guests on this show about all sorts of different aspects of gerontology and in person centered care and all of these things, but you in your studies have really discovered we're not really doing anything very intersectionally, right? So what does that mean to you? What does that look like? What's the gap there?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (04:02.848)

Okay, so I will say in fairness to all gerontologists scholars anyone working. I don't think it's intentional I think it's kind of like Kind of like when you buy a blue sob and you never really pay attention to them until you have a blue sob, right? Once you actually have something happen, then you start to pay attention what I found as I got into my studies and Just like me talking about my bio the lived experiences

bringing that with me is like we talk about, for example, retirement, right? We talk about retirement and what that looks like, but the reality is depending on what happened in earlier years and what you had access to and what have you, your retirement may look very different. I just had a conversation today about someone who's working, who's 67, who wants to retire and do all those things, but they're not financially able to.

Fortunately, she still has great health, which is wonderful, but she does not have the income and the support system where she can have a retirement where she's I don't know working in the garden or whatever people do when they retire so Intersectionality is a term that was officially coined by activist lawyer Kimberly Crenshaw in late 1989, I believe

And basically she introduced the term to describe multiple forms of discrimination like racism and sexism, specifically talking about black women, but actually expanding it and basically

stating that these unique disadvantages can't be separated or understood individually. And even though she did the official terminology, if you will, it was already being talked about back

with the Sojourner Truth when she did her A.I. woman speech in Seneca Falls because when you have, we all have different identities and things that we call our own and it does influence what our lives look like even with the best intentions. So when we talk about aging and we talk about housing, we talk about food, well,

Glynis Boyd Hughes (06:25.42)

We have to look at social drivers of health, which I talked about in my comps presentation, which is the terminology moving away from social determinants of health with the idea that a driver is something where there can be more intentionality on behalf of the person and also the systems that we're living in. So there is flexibility and fluidity there where things can change. I believe I shared.

If not in cops, have shared my story of having a hospitalization and they did the thing they do when you're leaving to make sure you have everything you need, you know, to go home and be good. And I read my paperwork later and basically ended with I had no negative social drivers of health impacted me in a way where I couldn't go home. And that was very meaningful for me as a black woman from a low wealth background with disabilities.

to read something at this point in my life. No, you have the things that you need to be okay. So if I use myself as an example, knowing where I started, I think about so many other people, what could be done differently, not just helping elders where they are now, but what can we do at the front end? There's a lot of investment in young people as there should be, because we want them to have good lives and good starts, but

It seems that once we become adults, the idea is that we are solely responsible for our outcomes. Of course, we all need a level of accountability, no doubt, but we cannot overlook the impact of systems and processes, laws and guidelines, things that influence the choices that we're able to make and not make. And those are reasons that can lead to someone being 67.

and still having to work even though they've done everything that we're told you're supposed to do to get the outcomes that you want.

Aging For All (08:29.415)

Thank you, Glenice. And I really apply your ability to make connections and that it was not in your bio, but I think that's what you've been able to do very well based on this description to take your real wisdom, lived experiences combined with this academic work that you've done and see there is a gap when we talk about aging, particularly when it comes to intersectionality. And many people maybe in their twenties aren't thinking about retirement. That was one of the first examples you used. So how do we help others?

start making these connections. The aging is not in isolation. We're whole people with lives and experiences and we hope to grow to be elders. So how do we prepare to face this world in an intersection of many different things, maybe successfully?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (09:04.066)

Mm-hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (09:10.242)

Mm-hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (09:20.364)

Well, thank you for that. really appreciate it. And I will tell you one of my first professors when I went back to VCU at 50, that was when I resumed my undergrad studies. She told me that I was an associative learner, which I understand now you're basically taking different pieces of maybe academic or whatever, and you're applying it to your real life experiences. So when you talk about how can we do that, I'm going to use something that my husband taught me, because, you know, I also got it.

Shout out Gary. So Gary was a football player and he played semi pro ball. And he told me that, I mean, some of his best friends he made were white men from different socioeconomic classes and things like that. And for a lot of them, they were engaging with people that under other circumstances, they would have never, but somehow the football field, no pun intended, became like an even playing field.

where they were able to engage in something that they all had an interest in and in the process learn about each other as people, as humans. Not black, white, poor, rich, whatever, but just people. So when we say about the aging and people think about retirement in their 20s, if we don't have access to opportunities and information, it becomes almost magical like, well, will you become old? This happens.

when you're young, this happens. But when you actually have that engagement in different areas, then it changes, it shifts the narrative. So I'm back in school, as I mentioned, going back to VCU, I'm 50 years old in school with students who are my grandkids age. And so what we did for each other, I learned from them and they learned from me. And as you're able to do that,

It takes the scarier way, right? We don't over inflate any part of life being 20 is not necessarily the best part of life being 80 is not the best part. It's the part that you're in at the time. What you want, if I could say is a reasonable portion of health, something to do that you care about and people you want your people. Those things are things that you need at every part of your life. does not matter how old.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (11:44.462)

what your identities are or what have you. And as you lose the fear, we're just talking about aging, as you lose the fear of aging, then you can kind of look at it from the perspective of,

know, as my grandma would say, if you keep on living, you're going to get old. So what does Glen is today want to do? So Glen is tomorrow has a better shot at the kind of life she wants. It does not mean it's a guarantee.

Getting education taking care of your health things like that. It's not a guarantee that you're gonna have this perfect later life But you know, I'm not a gambling person but I'm gonna bet on doing those things every time because it's gonna give me a better chance at Outcomes at the kind of outcomes I want the thing is when you look at people who don't have access to opportunities or

getting to have conversations with people different from themselves. When you don't have that kind of engagement, we end up being in little bubbles. And we have this idea of what being 50 looks like, what being 80 looks like, what being 19 looks like. I read an article yesterday with just the headline. It said, for the first time in history, midlife is not, now it's just one article and one researcher, Jen. So, you know, we're going to take it for what it's worth. But it was interesting because it said for the first time in history,

The unhappiest or most crucial time is no longer midlife. 22 year olds are dealing with more anxiety, depression, things like that. And when you think about it that way, it's like, well, is being 22, why do we put that in a place where this is what you want, but somehow being 60, you want to turn away from. So I'm thinking about when we look at folks in nursing homes, how people are treated, we create that world.

And so we all have an investment in uncreating it and doing something different. I'm currently, I'm an AIT over at Morningside in the West End. And you know, you're seeing people who are there and it's like, how do we help people living now in this congregate setting? Because for whatever reasons, they're no longer in their own individual homes. How do we help this way of living?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (14:08.258)

become not a lesser way, it's just another way. And I think aging, that could be summed up that way, it's another level of living. It's not necessarily worse or better. And all of that is contingent on the things that, the work that we've done beforehand. I will tell you, cause I'm a storyteller as Jen knows, I spent a summer working in advancement at Cornell. And the first week was really difficult. I was really,

Aging For All (14:18.067)

Hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (14:37.998)

pretty depressed actually, because you're sitting in meetings where people are talking about millions of dollars like we're talking about going to get Starbucks. I mean, it was advancement, but it made me realize from where I came from that there was a different world that a lot of

people that I knew and know they don't have access to, but was it the world or the knowledge? So taking that knowledge and being able to bring it back and actually help people use it

to do things in a way that benefit others because it's not enough just to benefit for yourself. It's great that you your health is good and your money's good and you get people but it's not great that other people don't have those things or don't have access to it.

Jen Yanez Pryor (15:26.691)

Clintus, I wanna like package a couple of sound bites from that because I think what's really, and I'm sure our listeners are picking up on this, is really kind of empowering inspirational from all of this is the statements like we can shift the narrative that we created systems and we can uncreate them that just even moving from social determinants of health to social drivers of health, right?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (15:55.405)

Right.

Jen Yanez Pryor (15:55.957)

It's giving us the space to actually put our hands on something and do something about it. It never occurred to me before talking with you about this, that social determinants of health is just like, this is what's gonna happen to you and that's just life, right? That's kind of the message it has. Whereas social drivers is like, okay, I actually have some autonomy here to do something. If I find that...

Glynis Boyd Hughes (16:03.064)

Mm-hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (16:13.356)

Right. Right.

Jen Yanez Pryor (16:25.825)

My living situation is poor. What is within my scope that I can do something about that? Right. And, and I think, you know, going back to the, the access to opportunities, engaging with people who are different from you, like a lot of that is, is what's missing in these conversations about, how do I live better? Like, what can I do for me? And it's not just in isolation, right? I mean, that's

Glynis Boyd Hughes (16:53.837)

Right.

Jen Yanez Pryor (16:55.053)

That's kind of the big picture here is that there's, there's a lot of things that are in place that we people put there and we people can change.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (17:06.592)

We can't and you know, I think we've all heard someone say what life isn't fair And so when I hear someone say that my comeback is well, what is life? people we're life we're Organizations we're policies we're all of that is us right and there is a quote from I believe Angela Davis Where she says something effect of if they come for me in the morning and you do nothing They'll come for you in the evening

Jen Yanez Pryor (17:11.619)
Yeah.

Jen Yanez Pryor (17:18.029)
Mm-hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (17:36.012)

So my twist on that is that if I look at aging and being an elder, old, whatever you want to call it, as something that happens to other people, I'm going to continue to live and I'm going to be there at some point. And the things that I did not do will impact me. I don't have any children in school right now at this point. However, education and schools are very important to me because these are folks

who are gonna be taking care of things, doing things, all of that. So that intersectionality, we like to separate ourselves many times and say, well, no, that's because she didn't do that or he didn't do that. When the reality is many of the things that we see are not from lack of effort. We talked about Gabrielle, one of the hardest working people I ever knew and felt very strongly that

Her success was solely on her even though she did everything she could do She couldn't work enough hours in a day. So it's like because of how this system is set up She was able to work. She did great work, but she could not earn the income to keep up with the things are going You know, it's a it's cycle. So if you want the cycle to be different Even if you're not in it per se there has to be a commitment

to others because our time here is not just for us. We're supposed to do something useful with ourselves and I can't think of anything more useful than investing so people can have a shot at creating the lives they want rather than just maintaining lives they inherited.

Aging For All (19:23.417)

Absolutely. And this morning, my husband and I went to breakfast, for instance. And there was a lady there that sat beside us and everyone that came through that door as an employee greeted her, welcomed her, hugged her. And I told my husband, she's a regular. What if everyone was treated like a regular when we went into spaces? What a difference the world would be if we're all just the regulars.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (19:28.17)
Nice.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (19:40.153)
mm-hmm

Glynis Boyd Hughes (19:46.338)
How about that?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (19:52.716)
Right. I love that. That's a lovely thought. And I think that when you talk about the B-N-D-E-I-B, I think that's the difference between inclusion and belonging. I think belonging is what you're talking about. Like when, you know, I had a friend that when I would go to her house, she knew I liked to drink out of this goblet because it looked like the Holy Grail goblet or something. And she would always give me my drinks in that. And I didn't have to ask. So it's like almost like we are already

Jen Yanez Pryor (20:13.369)
You

Glynis Boyd Hughes (20:21.294)
We have a place for you here. We don't have to make a place so that sense of belonging that yeah, I'm 31 years old, but I want my 80 year olds, my 50, my 19 years. I want people to have what they need. So we talk about it as an, we're talking about aging and it's an aging podcast, but aging really is just life. I mean, we have a, we have a lifespan approach in gerontology. We talked about looking at the whole person.

over the span of their life and different theories and what have you and my take is that the better you get with the earlier in life I know I'm making progress because my granddaughter used to talk about 30 did it she doesn't do that anymore because what she understands that's not what it's about it's about taking care of yourself doing things what have you my aunt is 76 and just taught herself how to take care of her yard

because her husband passed. So somebody had to cut the grass. She out there riding the lawnmower, doing the hedges, and it's fine with it. So it's not as much as the age as using what we have and the people that we have to have a life that we feel good about. Everybody deserves that.

Jen Yanez Pryor (21:40.793)
I love that, yeah. So this whole conversation makes me think about, I mean, this is really advocacy, right? It's self-advocacy, it's advocacy at maybe state, federal level, whatever that looks like. What advice do you have for people who are like, I feel like I wanna do something, but I don't know where to start.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (22:04.942)
So one of the best things you can do, particularly when you don't know where to start, is to find somebody, because somebody is already doing it, find an organization that's doing good work or

they align with what your values are. Like one of the resources I shared was Virginia Assistant Living Association. works on behalf of the assistant living industry in Virginia, but they also connect with other organizations across the country.

and they do a lot of good advocacy, speaking up, for example, the auxiliary grant, which are funds that people, if they meet criteria, they can get to help them pay for assisted living. That's something that they work for every year, which is very important. Finding something, you want to do something smaller. Look in your own community and see, do a SWAT. You like that, Jen? Do a SWAT.

Jen Yanez Pryor (23:02.966)
Right.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (23:03.582)
Look at your community and see okay. What do we have this a strength here? What are we missing? What's an opportunity? What's a threat and once you do that? Maybe you can reach out to your local council person or any local organization and say look I can do this you got a skill Look for someone who needs it because there are plenty of organizations That you don't even have to be the best of anything just willing hands and an open heart

And it may sound cliched, but I'm going to tell you, just having that can do so much good. Mother Teresa said we cannot all do great things, but we can do all things with great love. And I think that's at the heart of what we're talking about, that we care and we don't have to know who people are or where they come from. It's just this investment in humanity. And we're talking about elders because to me,

I can't speak for anyone else. I feel like I'm getting better as I get older. My glasses look better. My hair look better. My attitude. It's like I'm coming to know who I really am. But there's no nothing bad about who I've been in the past. It's just I enjoy myself as I'm going along. I want everyone to have that experience. I don't want age to be something that we grieve and mourn. But something is like, you know what?

I'm about to hit those double nickels or whatever you want to call it and you feel good about it. And so what can we do as a society to make sure that's the message that's sent, that people feel good about who they are in their skin and whatever part of life they're

Aging For All (24:50.003)
Well, I think you're doing a good job of making sure society knows. And it starts with these conversations. It starts with this honesty. It starts with this realization that you've been able to share with our listeners today. This is aging for all. And so you've shared great insight, great information, great examples with our listeners today. How has your view on aging changed as you've aged?

Glynis Boyd Hughes (25:16.118)

Mmm So my grandma made she continue to rest in peace she was a huge influence on me and I think Most people would agree you don't know who's been the influence until much later in life, right and I remember, you know being ten years old my grandma would say things I'm like, what is she talking about? But now as I'm looking at 60 I can think back on those things and be like she was the smartest woman I know

I think what I've learned about aging is that

being as she said if you continue to as you continue to live you're going to age taking care of your health to the best of your abilities which is why health equity for example is so important as a topic of advocacy we cannot take care of health if we do not have access to resources our practitioners that are sensitive to the differences that people are dealing with taking care of your health

opportunities to engage in things that maybe you typically wouldn't do and doing these things sooner in life. There is a mention I talk about trauma and the impact of trauma on equity and aging and that comes from my work working with elders who are some have been had dementia but yet still showing evidence and verbalizing past trauma they've had. I mean from early years not necessarily something happening as an older person.

but from earlier life. having trauma informed environments so people can at least be sensitive to it and know what they can do to be supportive of others. I think that for me, my views on aging is that it's like, I think when you're younger, you think, I'm good. You know how when you, you're younger, you're like, oh, I'm almost 14. I'm almost 16. And you even say a half, but you get older. You like to stop doing that.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (27:21.036)

Well, I actually get excited about what I call my daughter will call the landmark birthdays So my next landmark birthday is 60 and I am excited about that because it's like wow i'm gonna be 60 santa do what is that? And and that is an it's a journey and one that You know aging is not something we're all gifted to see and that's the other part Looking at it really as a gift living

Jen Yanez Pryor (27:36.089)

Hmm.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (27:50.83)

Having a life for the peer you have it is a gift and on a practical side What do we need to do to make sure people can feel like it's a gift and not a burden? Because it's nice what we're talking about. But the reality is we have countless elders who are struggling Just to be and not necessarily just with food and housing but even people having connection people caring those kinds of things so

My last little story I used to rent back in the day back in my 20s. I rented from a woman Bless her heart Julia Tucker. This Tucker was in her I'm not kidding y'all. She was in her late 60s She

would go and take seniors to go grocery shopping. She's taking people in their 80s To go get groceries and she was very big on doing in the community very active and she was like that all her life until she passed and like

I don't know, late 80s, early 90s. And you need to be useful. That's the other thing I find you and not just doing something you need to be useful. You need to do something for someone that you the only thing you get out of it is that you've done something for someone. And what you will find by probably by accident, you probably get a lot more out of it than you expected because there's nothing better than helping somebody live their best quality of life. And that's my humble.

Jen Yanez Pryor (29:22.153)

I love that. You know, we've talked about a lot of really, I think, energizing things today. And, you know, I just, I want to, I want to recognize and you know, it's, it's hard work changing all of this. It's not, we make it sound like it's, it's easy. It's not easy. It requires all of us. We got to do something and it's, it's not quick, right? It's not quick. That we, we all know that, but

Glynis Boyd Hughes (29:39.906)
now.

Jen Yanez Pryor (29:48.791)

I think if we can chip away a little at a time, we can create this better world, this better community, this better system, whatever it is that you collectively want to work on, just your little piece of the puzzle. And I love that whole perspective that you've brought here today, Glenis. So thank you so much for coming on.

Glynis Boyd Hughes (30:13.23)

Well, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to share that. And I think to what you're saying about it being a hard work, I mean, I know I'm not going to live a thousand years and that's okay because I'm invested for the long game. And that means I'm going to do my part as long as I can and know that there are going to be others who will continue, which is what really what this thing is all about.

Aging For All (30:39.443)

Absolutely. Yes, Glynis, thank you so much for coming on. You have been a delight, a joy, encouraging, inspiring, a scholar. I will be above. So thank you, thank you, thank you. This has been an amazing conversation with you today. And if you've enjoyed our conversation, please share this with others. There are so many people who need this information. Just click share. And this is as simple as that.

Jen Yanez Pryor (30:48.185)
you

Glynis Boyd Hughes (30:53.175)
Thank you.

Aging For All (31:07.036)

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