

Running Head: The Effects of Age and Gender on Stereotyping

The Effects of Age and Gender on Stereotyping

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*Abstract*

This literature review examines the effects of age and gender on participants' perceptions of others. Elderly participants are more lenient in their ratings of both young and elderly targets than are young participants while young participants rate elderly targets more negatively than young targets. The situation in which targets are presented also affects how they are evaluated by others. Both elderly and young adults are evaluated negatively when they are presented in situations that are stereotypically negative. The targets' gender was not found to have a significant influence on participants' perceptions of the target.

### Effects of Age and Gender on Stereotyping

The goal of this literature review is to examine factors that influence participants' perceptions of others. Participants' age (Hummert, 1990), targets' age (Powlishta, 2000), and the targets' gender (Kite, Deauz, and Miele, 1991) have all been found to influence the use of stereotypes. Both young participants (Hummert, 1990) and old participants (Guo, Erber, and Szuchman 1999) have been found to evaluate young and old targets differently. The effects of targets' age have been studied in relation to the target's attractiveness (Perlini, Bertolissi and Lind, 1999) and the target's situational role (Braithwaite, 1986). In comparison with the targets' age (Powlishta, 2000), the targets' gender does not seem to have a significant influence on participants' perceptions of the targets (Jackson and Sullivan, 1987).

#### *Effects of age of participants*

##### *Young participants*

Hummert (1990) wanted to find whether young participants had negative attitudes towards elderly targets. She conducted a study with 81 undergraduate students. Forty-four participants answered questions regarding elderly targets and the other 37 answered questions regarding young targets. The participants were given a description of the target and were asked to form a mental picture of the target and to estimate the targets' age. The age ranges for the young targets were 18-21, 22-25, 26-29, 30-33, and 34-37. The age ranges for the old targets were 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84, and 85 or older. After choosing the age

ranges for each of the target age descriptions, participants were asked to judge how typical the descriptions were of old (or young) targets using a 7-point semantic scale ranging from not typical to typical. The final assessment in this study examined attitudes. Participants were instructed to evaluate the target they had been given using a 25-item, 7-point semantic differential scale that included various attitudes.

In contrast to what Hummert predicted, participants in this study did not view the negative stereotypes as more typical of the elderly targets than the positive stereotypes. However, they did assign negative stereotypes to the elderly targets more often than they were assigned to the young targets. Participants used both positive and negative stereotypes in their evaluations of young and old targets, but attributed more positive stereotypes than negative to the young targets.

#### *Old participant*

Later, Hummert (1993) examined whether elderly participants would be more likely than young participants to rate stereotypes of elderly targets as less typical of their age group than young participants would. She hypothesized that elderly participants would have more complex representations of young and elderly individuals based on greater life experience and would therefore be lenient in their ratings of both age groups.

The participants in this experiment were 43 elderly adult volunteers who ranged in age from 62 to 90 years. Participants were given descriptions of targets

that included various traits associated with elderly stereotypes. The descriptions were presented in statements such as: "Think of an older adult who finds it difficult to change, is set in their ways, and old-fashioned". The participants were instructed to indicate which age group they felt the target being described belonged. Participants were then asked to judge how typical the description was of older adults using a seven-point semantic differential scale ranging from not typical to typical.

The results from this study were compared with the results from young participants in a previous study (Hummert 1990). As predicted, the elderly participants gave significantly lower typicality ratings to the set of stereotypes than did the young participants. Hummert's prediction that the effect of the negative stereotypes would be more pronounced than positive stereotypes was not supported. Hummert found that older participants perceived both positive and negative stereotypes as less typical of the younger targets than the older targets. She also found that both the old and young age groups perceived the set of negative stereotypes as less typical than the positive stereotypes for both the young and old targets.

Inspired by previous research by Hummert (1993), Matheson et al., (2000) attempted to evaluate older adults' stereotypical views of younger adults. They hypothesized that older adults would have multiple stereotypes of younger adults. This was based on older adults' having more life experience and more complex representations of individuals than younger adults. It was also based on the fact

that older adults have already experienced life as a young adult and therefore are aware of the traits characteristic of young adults.

This study comprised three tasks. First, participants were asked to list the traits that they believed were characteristic of individuals in their teens and twenties. The second task required participants to group together traits that they thought would be characteristic of young people. All of the traits generated were classified into groups and finally the participants were asked to judge how typical the traits generated were of a young adult using a 7-point likert scale, ranging from not typical to typical

The participants in this study generated a variety of traits from numerous areas. The majority of these traits were social and personality characteristics such as outgoing and idealistic. Participants rated young adults' attitudes as more positive than negative. The results suggest that the participants did not believe the negative stereotypes were typical of young adults. Overall, Matheson et al., (2000) found that the more positively a stereotype was rated, the more typical it was found to be of young people.

Guo, Erber and Szuchman (1999) were influenced by previous studies which claimed that older adults often complain about forgetfulness and, therefore they identify with individuals who forget (Poon, 1985). They predicted that older participants would be more likely to attribute memory failures for young and old targets to lack of effort. This hypothesis was based on the notion that older participants would deem memory failures as controllable. Guo et al. hypothesized

that young participants would attribute memory failures in young targets to unstable internal causes such as lack of effort and lack of attention but memory failures in old targets would be attributed to a lack of ability. They based this hypothesis on the idea that memory failure in old targets would be attributed to stable internal causes such as lack of ability and mental difficulty.

To study these predictions, Geo et al., (1999) randomly assigned both young and old participants to one of three memory information conditions. These conditions were presented to each of the groups in articles describing memory over the life span. In one, memory was described as declining with age, in a second memory was described as remaining constant with age. A third group of participants were not given an article to read.

After reading the articles, the participants read a script describing either a young or old target person. After reading the scripts, participants rated the target's memory on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from very poor memory to very good memory. They then rated lack of ability and lack of effort as two possible causes for the target's memory failure. These causes were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from not at all a cause to very much a cause.

The results suggest that the main effect of participant age was significant. Young participants were more likely to attribute targets' memory failures to lack of ability than the older participants. Older participants were more likely to attribute targets' memory failures to lack of effort than the younger participants. In addition, old participants were less negative and more lenient than the young

participants in rating young and old targets' memory. As predicted, there was an interaction between targets' age and their memory failure. The old target's memory failures were attributed more to lack of ability than were the young targets' (Guo et al., 1999).

Old participants in these studies were found to be more lenient in their evaluations of young and old targets than young participants (Hummert, 1993., Geo et al., 1999). Elderly participants perceived both positive and negative stereotypes as less typical of the younger adults than older adults (Hummert, 1993). Overall, these studies found that young adults were more likely than old adults to be associated with positive stereotypes. (Hummert, 1993., Geo et al., 1999, & Matheson et al., 2000).

#### *Young and old participants*

Jackson and Sullivan (1987) hypothesized that young participants would evaluate old targets more favorably than young targets when the targets were described positively, because they would sympathize with this group. They also predicted that old participants would evaluate both young and old targets more positively than the young participants because they would sympathize with young and old targets. Jackson and Sullivan administered the Person Perception Survey and the Attitudes Toward Old People Scale to 203 old and young participants.

The Person Perception Survey consists of three brief descriptions. The descriptions of the targets included descriptions of social person, a physical person and a person who was a psychologist. These descriptions were all



inconsistent with negative stereotypes about the aged. Gender and age were manipulated in these descriptions. After each target description, the participants assessed the target using 23 bipolar traits. These traits included items such as sociable-unsociable, active-not active, and ambitious-not ambitious. A seven-point rating scale was used to rate the targets.

After completing this task, participants were administered the Attitudes Towards Old People Scale. This scale was used to measure stereotypes about the aged. It contains 17 matched pairs of positive and negative statements. Examples of the statements on this scale are 'Most old people are very relaxing to be with' and 'Most old people make one feel ill at ease' (Jackson and Sullivan, 1987). Participants were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with each of these 17 matched statements.

Jackson and Sullivan (1987) found that the old participants rated the social targets more favourably than the young participants did. In regard to the physical targets, the young participants rated the old targets more positively than the young targets. The old participants rated the old and young physical targets equally favourably. These results suggest that old participants are more favorable in their evaluations than the young participants were. Young participants also rated the old psychological targets more favourably than the young targets. The old participants again rated both the old and young psychological targets equally favourably. The results of this experiment are in accordance with Jackson and Sullivan's prediction that young participants would rate old targets more

favourably than young targets when the targets were described positively. In addition, old participants were equally more favourable in their evaluations of the targets than young participants.

Additional research has been conducted examining the effects of young and old participants' perceptions of age-related stereotypes. Chasteen, Schwarz, and Park (2002) examined the activation of age-related stereotypes in young and old participants. They hypothesized that elderly participants would rate young targets favorably and that they would share young participants' negative views of old targets. Chasteen et al. (2002) were also interested in the participants' perceptions of their own age group in comparison with other age groups.

The participants in this study consisted of 72 young and 59 old individuals. Participants were first asked to complete a lexical decision task in which the primes of young, old, or XXXX were presented on a computer screen followed by a second word. The participants' task was to decide whether the second word was a real word or a nonsense word. Pressing the yes key on the keyboard would indicate the word was real and pressing the no key would indicate the word was not real. In total, 10 practice trials were completed by all the participants.

Following these trials, the participants first completed a demographic questionnaire and then completed two explicit measures of their attitudes towards older targets. One measure used was the five-item Fear of Old People subscale from the Anxiety About Aging scale which contained statements such as, 'I enjoy

being around old people'. Participants responses to these statements could range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The other measure used was a 5-item affective scale that assessed people's liking for older people. It included statements such as, 'I admire old people a great deal', and the responses could range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Chasteen et al. (2002) found that overall, participants responded faster to traits that were descriptive of older targets than to traits that were descriptive of younger targets. The participants also responded faster to the young traits when they were preceded by the young prime. Results suggest that participants responded faster to stereotypically old traits than to stereotypically young traits after the old prime. This suggests that participants associate specific traits with specific age groups. Younger and older participants had similar patterns of reactions times. This study found that older and younger participants share the same stereotypes, especially of elderly targets (Chasteen et al., 2002). The results of this study differ from Jackson and Sullivan's (1987) predictions that aging stereotypes do change with age and that old participants would rate young and old targets more favorably than young participants.

In summary, research examining both young and old participants found that old participants rate young and old adults more favourably than young participants (Jackson and Sullivan, 1987). Young participants rated old targets more favourably than young targets (Jackson and Sullivan, 1987). Although Jackson and Sullivan's (1987) study suggest that there is a difference in

evaluations by young and old adults, Chasteen et al., (2002) found that young and old adults have similar representations of each other. This may be explained by the use of primes. Participants' exposure to primes before the stereotypes may have resulted in young and old participants having similar responses.

#### *Effects of age of target*

Studies regarding target's attractiveness and situational roles have also been linked to research on target's age. Powlishta (2000) investigated the effects of target age on the generation of stereotypes. Her prediction was that stereotyping should be more extensive when participants are judging child targets than when they are judging adult targets because children are perceived as more rigidly bound by stereotypes than adults. Powlishta also predicted that adult participants would engage in less stereotyping than children based on their cognitive maturity and flexible attitudes.

Participants in this study included 48 children and 28 adults. The children ranged in age from 8 to 11 years old. The age range of the adults was 20 to 42 years. Each participant in this study viewed head shot photographs of 4 men, 4 women, 4 boys, and 4 girls, presented in random order. Each target was rated on the possession of one positive and one negative trait associated with males, one positive and one negative trait associated with females, and one positive and one negative trait that was gender-neutral. The participants rated the targets possession of these traits using a 10-point scale that ranged from not at all to very, very much.

Powlishta found that, in accordance with gender stereotyping, the male targets were rated as more masculine and the female targets were rated as more feminine. The adult targets in this study were rated as more masculine and less feminine than were the child targets. An interaction was found between target sex and target age for masculinity and femininity ratings. Female targets were seen as being more feminine than males by both child and adult targets. In accordance with the first hypothesis, adult participants stereotyped child targets more than adult targets. Unlike Powlishta's second prediction, adult participants engaged in more stereotyping than the child participants did. This was surprising based on previous studies within adults that have shown that amongst adult participants, stereotypes become more flexible with age, as cognitive maturity allows individuals to understand that members of different sexes can possess similar traits (Powlishta). The reasoning for this may be that adult participants' views of other adults may become more flexible with age, but that adult participants' views of children remain rigidly bound by stereotypes.

#### *Attractiveness*

Perlini, Bertolissi, and Lind (1999) studied the effect of women's age on others' perceptions of their physical attractiveness and social desirability. They predicted that attractive, young targets would be evaluated more positively than attractive, older targets. They also predicted that when characteristics that the younger unattractive target would be evaluated more negatively than the older unattractive target.

The old sample in this study consisted of 40 men and 40 women ranging in age from 60 to 85 years old. The young sample consisted of 40 men and 40 women who ranged in age from 18 to 30 years old. All of the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four target photo conditions. The photo conditions included younger and attractive, young and unattractive, older and attractive, and older and unattractive. Participants were asked to rate the target person on 38 bipolar traits. Traits included on this bipolar scale included sociable-unsociable, ambitious-not ambitious, intelligent-not intelligent, and pessimistic-optimistic.

There was an interaction between participant gender and photo attractiveness. Both older male and female participants rated the attractive targets more favorably than unattractive targets. The older participants rated the photos of the older targets as higher in attractiveness than younger participants. The young participants rated the photos of both the younger and older photos as similar in attractiveness. As predicted, older male participants rated the photo of the attractive younger woman as greater in social desirability than the photo of the attractive older women whereas older female participants rated the photos of attractive younger women and older women as equal in attractiveness. The results of this study concurred with the second prediction. The younger, unattractive targets were rated as less socially desirable than the older, unattractive photos by young and old participants.

Perlini, Marcello, Hansen, and Pudney (2001) studied the effects of male target's age on ratings of physical attractiveness and social desirability. Using the same design as in an earlier study conducted by Perlini et al., (1999), they predicted that female participants' ratings of social desirability of male targets would not be affected by age or attractiveness because women look for resourcefulness in a mate and not attractiveness.

Participants in this study included 40 young and 40 elderly women. The participants were randomly assigned to one of four target conditions including young and attractive, young and unattractive, elderly and attractive, and elderly and unattractive. They were then instructed to rate the male targets on the same Social Desirability Index that was used in a previous study by Perlini et al., (1999). An additional five traits were added to represent resourcefulness. These traits included items such as high social status and low social status, good financial prospects and not good financial prospects, and ambitious and not ambitious. Upon completion, participants were asked to estimate the age of the male target.

Perlini et al., (2001) found that the younger males were not rated as more socially desirable than older males. They also found that attractive males were not rated as more socially desirable than unattractive males. These results concur with the predictions that age and attractiveness would not affect the participants' ratings of socially desirability in male targets.

*Situational Roles*

Braithwaite (1986) examined the effect that the target's age would have on participants' perceptions of the targets. Braithwaite hypothesized that old age stereotyping would be evident when the targets exhibited socially unattractive behaviours but not when they were physically fit and mentally alert.

Participants in this study ranged in age from 16 to 19 years of age. Each participant was presented with one of four vignettes for evaluation. The vignettes described women that were either disabled or not. Vignettes describing targets as disabled were linked with negative social consequences and vignettes describing targets as able were linked with social attractiveness. Age was manipulated in each of the vignettes, with the targets being described as being either 71 or 26 year old women. After reading the vignette, participants rated the target on 45 ways of behaving, including being considerate, intolerant, decisive, self-reliant, knowledgeable, and disorganized. The participants rated the behaviours on a 5-point scale ranging from less than most people to more than most people.

Upon completion of this first task, the participants were asked to take part in a second task. This task required the participants to use the same rating scales as used in task 1 to evaluate a generalized target. Unlike task 1, the sex of the target was manipulated in task 2. Participants were asked to describe one of the following: the majority of old women, the majority of old men, the majority of young women, and the majority of old women. Old was defined as 70 years of age, and young was defined as 25 years of age. Braithwaite (1986) informed the



participants that the target in task two was not the same age or sex as the target in task 1.

Of the 222 participants, 93% were able to correctly recall the age of the target in task 1. Only the responses from these participants were used in the analysis of the experiment. Braithwaite (1986) found that there was no interaction between the targets' age and rated ability level. The main effect for ability level was highly significant. Disabled targets were perceived to show less concern for others than the able targets. The mentally impaired targets were rated as being more concerned for others than the physically impaired. The physically impaired were rated as more responsible than the mentally impaired. The majority of participants indicated that the targets' age had more of an influence on their ratings of the elderly targets than it did on their ratings of young targets.

The results of task 2 suggest that age of the targets had a significant effect. Elderly targets in task 2 were rated as being more concerned for others and more responsible. Consistent with previous studies, the elderly were also rated as less active and sociable than young targets. The manipulation of sex did not have an interaction with age on any of the dependent variables in this study. This study showed evidence of both positive and negative age stereotypes. The results of this study failed to show evidence that age had an effect on perceived ability levels. Both disabled elderly and young targets were rated more harshly than able elderly and young targets (Braithwaite, 1986).

Braithwaite, Gibson, and Holoman (1986) conducted further research to study the effect of the target's age on participants' perceptions in relation to situational roles. They examined the influence of age stereotyping when the targets were displaying characteristics linked with old age stereotypes such as irritability, passivity, helplessness, conservatism and general failure in cognitive functioning.

The participants in this study were female and male undergraduate students. Every participant was given a booklet containing four vignettes, each with a different scenario. The first scenario was of an individual who was accepting and passive, an inactive and conservative target was in the second scenario, and an irritable and dependent target was depicted in the third scenario. The fourth scenario described a target that was helpless. Both the age and sex of the targets were manipulated in the stories. After reading each vignette, the participants evaluated the target's character by completing the Aging Semantic Differential scale.

Braithwaite et al., (1986) found that negative stereotypes were found to be evoked by the participants only when there was a significant interaction between age and context. The only scenario in which negative elderly stereotypes were present in this study was in the scenario of the fire, which depicted the target as irritable and dependent. This suggests that the elderly targets were not viewed negatively amongst the majority of the participants. Reasoning for this may be that the age cue of 71 may be synonymous with disabled and the age cue of 26

may be synonymous with able. Therefore, when specific targets are presented the able 26-year-old behaves as expected and is rated accordingly, whereas the able 71-year-old exceeds expectations and ratings are given a boost (Braithwaite, 1986).

Age does have an effect on participants' perceptions of the targets. This effect of age was especially experienced when attractiveness was considered. Younger, unattractive targets were rated less favourably than older, unattractive targets (Perlini et al., 1999). Perlini et al., (1999) also found that older participants found older targets more attractive than the young participants did while young participants rated younger and older targets as similar in attractiveness. According to Braithwaite (1986), older adults are not viewed negatively amongst young and old adults and that negative stereotypes are only evoked under specific situations in which the elderly were being portrayed negatively.

#### *Effects of the gender of targets*

The gender of a target may have an effect on the participant's attribution of age stereotypes. A study previously cited by Jackson and Sullivan (1987) examined the effects of a target's gender on the generation of age-related stereotypes. They found that young participants were more favorable in their evaluations of old female targets than young female targets, but did not evaluate old and young male targets differently. Young participants in this experiment evaluated psychologically competent old women more favourably than psychologically competent young women whereas older participants old and

young targets equally regardless of gender. The results of this study suggest that the targets' gender does influence the participants' evaluations of the targets under some conditions, but that the target age has a greater effect on the participants' perceptions of the targets.

Kite, Deaux, and Miele (1991) also studied the interrelationship of stereotypes of both gender and age. They hypothesized that older women would be perceived as less feminine than young women whereas the men's masculinity would remain unaffected by age.

A total of 198 participants took part in this study. Of the 198 participants, 98 were college students and 100 were senior citizens. All participants received a booklet that described one of the following four targets: a 35 year old male, a 35 year old female, a 65 year old male, or a 65 year old female. After receiving a target description, participants were given five minutes to list qualities and characteristics of their target person. The next task in this experiment was to rate the actions of a middle-aged individual using a probability scale. Finally participants were asked to rate their original target on a set of 32 attributes including items such as self-confidence, financial stability and gracefulness.

Kite et al. (1991) found that there was only one significant effect for target gender on age-related stereotypes. Women targets were rated more favourably on the Positive Physical factor than were men. This study suggested that participants viewed older women as more likely to be wrinkled and to be active in their communities in comparison with older men. Participants rated younger women

as likely to care about families and to be physically attractive in comparison with younger men. Kite et al. reported that the participants' responses suggest that they were the least certain about how to describe young men. The results of this study concur with a previously cited study by Jackson and Sullivan (1987) in which the target age had a greater impact on participants' responses than the gender of the targets.

### *Conclusion*

Research examining the effects of age and gender on stereotyping suggests that the age of participants has a significant effect on their perceptions of targets. Studies have found that old participants rate young and old targets positively (Jackson and Sullivan, 1987). Moreover, old participants are more lenient in their evaluations of others than young participants. Young and old participants are more likely to respond to stereotypes regarding old targets than they are to stereotypes regarding young targets (Chasteen, Schwarz and Park, 2002). This suggests that young and old adults perceive old adults to share similar traits and to be similar as a group whereas young adults are perceived as being different from one another and possessing different traits. In addition, elderly adults were not found to hold negative stereotypes of young adults (e.g. Hummert, 1993., Matheson, Collins and Kuehne, 2000).

An explanation for the discrepancy between evaluations of young and elderly targets may be that from a young age people are exposed to stereotypes of the elderly that depict this group as failing and no longer progressing in life. This

would explain why young participants rated the older targets negatively in comparison with young targets. This may also explain why the elderly participants rated the older targets negatively. Although the elderly participants are members of the same age group as the older targets, they do not sympathize with this group. From repeated exposure to stereotypes depicting the elderly negatively, their minds may become engraved with the idea that younger individuals have more opportunities and potential and therefore rate young targets more positively than older targets.

Additional studies that examined the effects of targets' age and situational roles on the activation of stereotypes found that elderly and young adults were perceived negatively if they were presented to participants in situations that were stereotypically negative (e.g. Braithwaite, 1986., Braithwaite, Gibson and Holoman, 1986). This finding proposes that the context in which people is presented may have an effect on the way they are perceived.

Future research on the effects of age and gender on participants' perceptions of others may choose to examine this issue with reference to male targets instead of female targets. Although previous research has examined how women are evaluated on measures of social desirability, they have not examined how men are rated. This may provide an interesting complement to earlier studies.

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**The Effects of Participants' Age and Gender on Evaluations of  
Social Desirability and Resourcefulness of Men**

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The present study investigated how men and women rate young and elderly men on measures of social desirability and resourcefulness. This study provided a complement to previous research that examined how man and women rate young and elderly women on measures of social desirability and attractiveness. Introductory university students (n = 40) and senior citizens (n = 40) viewed photographs of a young and an elderly male targets and then rated both targets on measures of social desirability and resourcefulness. In accordance with earlier studies that used female targets, young men were rated higher in social desirability than elderly men. In addition, elderly participants were more lenient in their evaluations and rated targets as higher in social desirability than the young participants did. In regards to resourcefulness, young women, elderly women and young men all saw no differences in the resourcefulness of young and elderly men. However, elderly men rated young men as more resourceful.

Are young and elderly men evaluated differently by young and elderly men and women? According to evolutionary theories of mate selection (Buss, 1994), gender has an impact on participants' ratings of targets. Women rate older men more positively than they rate young men (Buss, 1994). However, whereas women prefer older mates, men do not. Men rate young women more positively than they rate older women (Buss, 1994). Buss proposed that women show a preference for older men because they view this group as having better earning potential and more resources than young men. In addition, male reproductive capacity is not closely related to age and less accurately evaluated from appearance, so therefore age of a mate is of less importance to women than to men (Perlini, Marcello, Hansen and Pudney, 2001). Men however, prefer younger women over older women because they view younger women as more reproductively fit and healthy (Buss, 1994).

When young participants rate descriptions of young and elderly targets, they do not view negative stereotypes as more typical of the elderly targets than the positive stereotypes (Hummert, 1990). However, young participants do assign negative stereotypes to the elderly targets more often than they assigned them to the young targets. An explanation for this finding may be that young participants have difficulty relating to the older targets and therefore attribute more negative stereotypes to that outside group than they would to members of their own age group.

Hummert (1993) later provided a complement to this research by investigating whether elderly participants would be more likely than young participants to associate negative stereotypes with elderly targets. Participants were presented with stereotypical descriptions of elderly individuals and asked to judge how typical the descriptions were of elderly adults. Hummert found that older participants perceived both positive and negative stereotypes as less typical of the younger targets than the older targets. This suggests that older participants have more sympathy for young targets than they do for members of their own age group. This may be because older participants believe that younger individuals have more potential and opportunities in life than older individuals.

Inspired by research by Hummert (1990;1993), Matheson, Collins and Kuehne (2000) evaluated older adults' stereotypical views of younger adults. They proposed that older adults have more life experience and will therefore have more complex representations of individuals than younger adults. Participants were asked to generate a list of traits characteristic to young adults and a list of traits characteristic of older adults. The traits were then assigned to groups and participants were instructed to rate how characteristic each trait was to both young and old adults. In accordance with earlier studies (Hummert 1990; 1993), Matheson et al. found that the more positively a stereotype was rated, the more likely it was to be assigned to a young target instead of an elderly target.

Jackson and Sullivan (1987) presented participants with descriptions of targets and evaluated the participants' assessment of the targets. They found that

older participants were more favorable in their evaluations of the targets than the young participants were. This suggests that older participants are more lenient in their evaluations than young participants are. This may occur as older participants have a greater understanding of others as they have more life experience than a young participant and therefore are able to sympathize with both the young and older targets.

Following the research by Jackson and Sullivan (1987), Guo, Erber and Szuchman (1999) were interested in discovering if there would be a difference in young and old participants' leniency levels in regard to their evaluations of young and elderly targets' memory skills. Similar to findings by Jackson and Sullivan, Guo et al. found that older participants were less negative and more lenient in their evaluations in comparison with the young participants with regards to rating young and old targets memory failures. Older participants were more likely to attribute targets memory loss to unstable internal causes such as lack of effort and lack of attention. Young participants were more likely to attribute targets memory loss to stable internal causes such as lack of ability.

In a recent study, Chasteen, Schwarz and Park (2002) examined the activation of age-related stereotypes in young and elderly participants. This studied differed from earlier research by Jackson and Sullivan (1987) as Chasteen et al. presented participants with an age prime prior to measuring the participants' evaluations of the targets. The targets were evaluated using the Fear of Old People subscale from the Anxiety About Aging Scale. Chasteen et al. found that when

the age prime was used prior to the target evaluation, there were no differences in young and elderly participants' evaluations of the targets. This suggests that the participants' age does not have an effect on their readiness to attribute stereotypes to young and old targets if they are presented with an age cue prior to rating the target.

In addition to age, attractiveness has also been found to have an effect on participants' evaluations of targets. Older male and female participants rate attractive female targets more favorably than unattractive targets (Perlini et al., 1999). In comparison with younger participants, older participants rated photographs of older targets as higher in attractiveness. The young participants rated the photos of the younger and older targets as similar in attractiveness. As previously found by Buss (1994), older male participants rated the attractive younger woman as higher in social desirability than the attractive older woman whereas older female participants rated the attractive younger woman and older woman equally. Younger, unattractive targets were rated as less socially desirable than older, unattractive photos by both younger and older participants (Perlini et al., 1999).

The purpose of this present research is to study how men and women rate male targets on measures of social desirability and resourcefulness by manipulating the age of the targets. Although previous studies have been conducted examining how men and women rate female targets on social desirability and attractiveness, studies have not focused on how men and women

rate male targets on social desirability and resourcefulness. This study differs from previous research as male targets are used instead of female targets and attractiveness is not being manipulated. Expanding on previous research which suggested that women prefer older men based on their accumulated resources and wealth (Buss, 1994), this study includes participants' evaluations of resourcefulness among the young and elderly male targets. The ratings of resourcefulness was included in an attempt to discover if the perceived level of targets' wealth has an impact on participants' evaluations of the target.

The rationale for this study is that if older men are seen to have accumulated more resources than young men, and women value resourcefulness then it is expected that women would rate the older male target higher than the young male target. However, the results should be different for male raters. Young male participants should rate young and old men as competition and would therefore feel threatened by both young and old men. Elderly men will not feel threatened by young men and will therefore favor young men over old men.

According to predictions, women will rate the elderly male target as more socially desirable and resourceful than the young male target. In addition, young men will rate young and old male targets negatively on measures of social desirability and resourcefulness. Old men will rate the elderly male target as less socially desirable and resourceful than the young male target.

## Method

### *Participants and Design*

The young sample consisted of 20 women (18 to 30 years old) and 20 men (18 to 30 years old) recruited from introductory classes at Algoma University College. The older sample consisted of 22 women (60 to 90 years old) and 18 men (60 to 90 years old), in apparent good health, recruited from retirement communities and senior citizen centres in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

A 2 (target age: young or old) X 2 (participant age: young or old) X 2 (participant gender: male or female) factorial design was used.

### *Materials*

Photographs were chosen to represent the young and older male target. Three photographs of younger men and three photographs of older men were selected. The photographs were in colour and were cropped at the shoulders in an attempt to minimize any confounding effects that could be caused by showing more of the targets in the photographs. Only photographs that displayed targets of average attractiveness were chosen as attractiveness was not being manipulated in this study.

A panel of 12 judges, consisting of both male and female judges, independently evaluated the three younger and three older target photographs. Each judge was responsible for rating each set of photographs and the photograph that was rated as most average in attractiveness among the sets of young and old photographs was selected to be included in the experiment. One photograph of



average attractiveness was chosen to represent the younger target and one photograph of average attractiveness was chosen to represent the older target.

The Social Desirability Index which is based on 38 bipolar traits on scales ranging from 1 to 7, was used to measure the social desirability levels of the targets. The positive pole was on the right for half of items and on the left for the other half of these items. These 38 bipolar traits were drawn from a study by Perlini, Bertolissi, & Lind (1999). Five additional traits were included that measured resourcefulness (Perlini, Marcello, Hansen & Pudney, 2001). Even though the photographs of the targets were rated as average in attractiveness, attractiveness is included as a trait as some participants may still deem a target to be attractive and this may have an effect on the participants' responses. The Social Desirability Index included the following items: poised-awkward, modest-vain, boring-interesting, submissive-assertive, sociable-unsociable, independent-dependent, exciting-dull, productive-unproductive, uncertain-certain, organized-disorganized, friendly-unfriendly, selfish-generous, tolerant-intolerant, outgoing-withdrawn, kind-cruel, insensitive-sensitive, ambitious-not ambitious, happy-sad, dishonest-honest, unforgiving-forgiving, late-prompt, reliable-unreliable, hospitable-inhospitable, adventurous-not adventurous, popular-unpopular, wealthy-poor, creative-not creative, uptight-easygoing, not healthy-healthy, humourous-not humourous, intelligent-unintelligent, emotionally stable-emotionally unstable, loving-unloving, materialistic-not materialistic, romantic-not romantic, not satisfied-satisfied, pessimistic-optimistic, and forgetful-not

forgetful. The five additional traits corresponding to resourcefulness were high social status-low social status, good financial prospects-not good financial prospects, good job prospects-not good job prospects, industrious-not industrious and ambitious-not ambitious.

### *Procedure*

Each participant was presented with a photograph of the young target. They were then instructed to complete a questionnaire that measured their ratings of social desirability and resourcefulness of the target. After evaluating the young target, participants were presented with a photograph of the old target. They were again instructed to complete the same questionnaire as earlier for the old target. Half of the participants viewed the photograph of the young target first while the other half of the participants viewed the photograph of the older target first. This was done in an attempt to control for any effects the order of the photographs might have on the participant. Upon evaluating the young and old targets, participants completed a self-rating of the Social Desirability and Resourcefulness Index.

After completing the three ratings of social desirability and resourcefulness, participants were asked to include their age and gender on the questionnaire. This was in an attempt to examine whether a relation existed between the participants' age and gender and their ratings of the targets. All participants were questioned as to how confident they were that their evaluations accurately described the target in each of the photographs. Participants were also

instructed to estimate the age of the young and old targets. Finally, participants were asked to what extent they felt they stereotyped others on the basis of age.

## Results

### *Social Desirability Index and Resourcefulness*

A composite score was used to measure both social desirability and resourcefulness. Thirty-eight traits pertaining to social desirability were combined to reflect participants' evaluations of the targets' social desirability. Five traits pertaining to resourcefulness were combined to reflect participants' evaluations of the targets' resourcefulness.

### *Social Desirability Index*

A 2 (target age: young or old) X 2 (participant age: young or old) X 2 (participant gender: male or female) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on participants' evaluations on the Social Desirability Index. A main effect was found for participant age  $F(1, 72) = 9.91, p < .05$ , and target age  $F(1, 72) = 38.87, p < .05$ . Old participants rated the targets as higher in social desirability,  $M = 191.48, SD = 32.59$ , than the young participants did,  $M = 178.23, SD = 26.49$ . The young targets were rated as more socially desirable,  $M = 198.03, SD = 24.91$ , than the old targets,  $M = 171.98, SD = 29.67$ .

### *Resourcefulness*

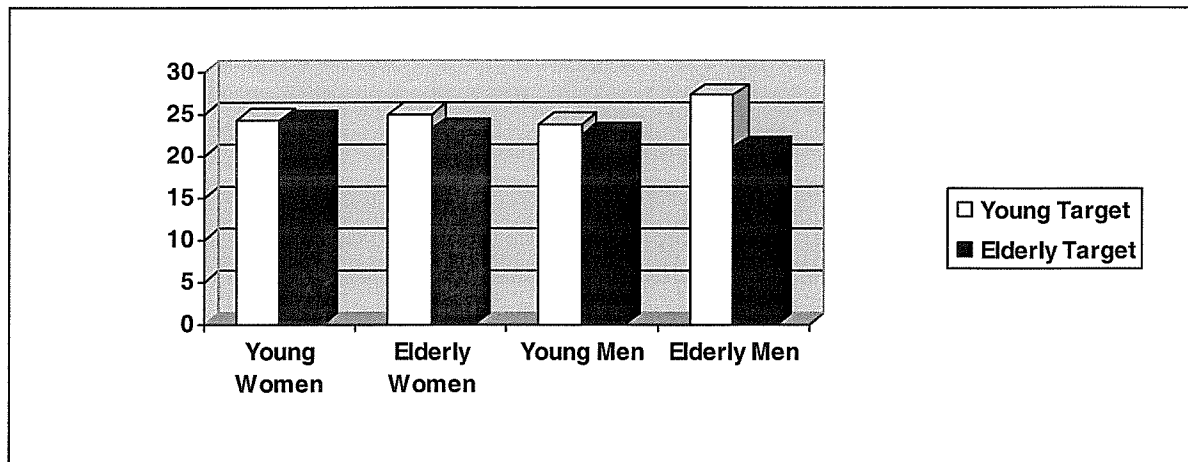
A 2 (target age: young or old) X 2 (participant age: young or old) X 2 (participant gender: male or female) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on participants' evaluations on resourcefulness. A main effect was

found for target age  $F(1, 72) = 9.57, p < 0.05$ . Young men were rated as more resourceful,  $M = 24.98, SD = 4.25$ , than the old targets,  $M = 22.79, SD = 5.37$ . A two-way interaction was found for participant age and target age  $F(1, 72) = 73.31, p < 0.05$ .

#### *Participant Age X Target Age*

Simple effects analyses at each level of participant age and target age indicated that for young women,  $M = 19.35, SD = 3.43, F(1, 36) = 0.075, p > 0.05$ , and elderly women,  $M = 19.26, SD = 4.99, F(1, 36) = 0.498, p > 0.05$ , there is no perceived difference in the resourcefulness of young and old men. For young men,  $F(1, 36) = 0.53, p > 0.05$ , both younger men,  $M = 18.85, SD = 4.17$ , and older men,  $M = 17.85, SD = 4.49$ , were perceived to be equally resourceful. Older men,  $F(1, 36) = 14.36, p < 0.05$ , rate young men,  $M = 21.47, SD = 3.52$ , as more resourceful than elderly men,  $M = 16.35, SD = 4.31$ . In conclusion, young women, elderly women and young men all rated young and old men as equally resourceful. However, elderly men rated young men as more resourceful than older men.

Figure 1. Mean resourcefulness of young and elderly targets as evaluated by young and older men and women.



### Discussion

These findings demonstrate that in accordance with earlier studies that used female targets (Perlini et al., 1999), young men were rated higher in social desirability than elderly men. In addition, elderly participants were more lenient in their evaluations and rated targets as higher in social desirability than the young participants did. These findings confirmed those of Jackson and Sullivan (1987) who also found evidence that elderly participants are more favorable in their evaluations towards others than young participants. With respect to our perceptions of others, we tend to rate elderly men as less socially desirable than young men. Moreover, when elderly individuals rate others, they tend to ascribe many more socially desirable traits to young men than others do.

In regards to resourcefulness, young women, elderly women and young men all rated the resourcefulness of young men as equal to the resourcefulness of

older men. However, elderly men rated young men as more resourceful than older men. Although previous findings suggested that women would rate elderly men as more resourceful than young men (Buss, 1994) this did not occur in the present study. This suggests that women consider all men as being equally capable of obtaining and securing resources. Young men may also see no differences in the resourcefulness of young and elderly men because they themselves are in the process of accumulating resources. Therefore, they compare other young men to themselves and ascribe similar ratings of resourcefulness to other young men. Young men may rate elderly men as resourceful because although elderly men are no longer in the process of accumulating resources, they have already obtained the peak resourcefulness.

Elderly men were the only group that evaluated the resourcefulness levels of young and elderly men differently. Elderly men perceived younger men as more resourceful than other elderly men. A possible explanation for this may be that elderly men are comparing themselves to younger men, who seem to have additional opportunities to acquire resources whereas the elderly men are moving into the retirement stage of life and are no longer accumulating resources.

A possible consideration when examining the results of this study would be to conduct further research employing a larger sample. Perhaps if a larger group would have been used, additional interactions may have been found. Another important consideration regarding future research would be to use the same individual to represent the young

target and the elderly target as it is possible that differences in facial structure may have skewed the results of the study.

In conclusion, age does affect how others evaluate individuals. Young men were perceived as being more socially desirable than elderly men. As evaluators, elderly men and elderly women are more favorable in their assessments than young evaluators. In regards to resourcefulness, all groups rate young and elderly men as equally resourceful except for elderly men. Elderly men perceive younger men as being more resourceful than other elderly men.

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