

# Old Age Stereotypes: Reconciling Contradictions

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This study tested the hypothesis that age stereotyping with specific targets would occur when targets were disabled, when information was minimal, when the context was commonplace, and when the measuring instruments were psychometrically sound. In addition, greater compatibility was anticipated between specific and generalized target evaluations when rating scales were anchored to a fixed comparison point. Using between-subject designs, 208 students completed two judgment tasks and reported on the impact that age had on their evaluations. The traditional stereotyping paradigm revealed both positive and negative stereotypes of old age when the target was generalized but not when the target was specific. The qualitative data are used to suggest shortcomings in the use of the traditional stereotyping paradigm with specific targets.

**Key Words:** Age stereotyping, Perceptions of elderly, Stereotyping paradigm, Discriminatory stereotype, Antidiscriminatory response

FOR some time the assumption has been made that elderly people in Western society are stigmatized as a group (e.g., Butler, 1980). Recently, researchers have questioned the validity of such stereotypes (Kogan, 1979; Schonfield, 1982; Tibbits, 1979). Tibbits adopted the view that attitudes about elderly adults are now more positive than they once were. Schonfield and Kogan, however, questioned whether negative age stereotyping has ever been a problem and levelled their criticisms at the paucity of empirical data in support of the phenomenon.

The strongest support for negative stereotyping of elderly people comes from a paradigm that requires respondents to describe the typical old person and/or the typical young person on a set of rating scales (Eisdorfer & Atrocchi, 1961; O'Connell & Rotter, 1979; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969; Weinberger & Millham, 1975). The differences in these evaluations reveal the characteristics that set elderly adults apart. The procedure has been criticized on a number of grounds. First, respondents are forced to think in terms of cultural stereotypes and may respond according to their knowledge of widely held views rather than personal feelings (Bell & Stanfield, 1973; Brigham, 1971). Second, the ecological validity of the paradigm has been challenged on the grounds that the salience of age is unduly enhanced by being the only cue given

to respondents — a problem that is exacerbated when within-subject designs are used (Connor et al., 1978; Feldman & Hilterman, 1975; Kogan, 1979; Wingard et al., 1982).

The plausibility of these criticisms has gained in strength as alternative approaches using specific individuals as targets in between-subject designs have repeatedly failed to show evidence of negative old age stereotyping (Bell & Stanfield, 1973; Connor & Walsh, 1980; Connor et al., 1978; Crockett et al., 1979; Puckett et al., 1983; Weinberger & Millham, 1975). Although these studies raise doubts about the existence of age stereotyping, a number of alternative explanations persist for the absence of significant findings: One relates to the amount of information provided. The categorized social object would more likely be assigned the characteristics of its social category if less information were provided (Ehrlich, 1973).

Another is the atypicalness of the roles portrayed by the targets (e.g., authors, ecological spokespersons, job applicants and widely travelled suburbanites), roles that tend to violate rather than conform to social expectations about elderly adults (Crockett et al., 1979). Such atypicalness means that, psychologically, the target may not be assigned membership in the stigmatized group, a prerequisite for stereotyping to occur (Ehrlich, 1973).

Other explanations involve the measurement techniques adopted. Traditionally, the rating scales used in stereotyping research do not specify a reference point (Wingard et al., 1982). In other words,

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when rating the target on a dimension such as happy-sad, respondents must provide their own answer to the implicit question, "compared with whom?" The ambiguity of the comparison group may be resolved by respondents in different ways depending on whether a specific individual or a group is being rated.

Another measurement problem is the relevance of the evaluative criteria. Available forced-choice instruments are biased toward measuring a few dimensions that have portrayed young generalized targets more favorably than old generalized targets. Little interest has been directed toward broadening the range of characteristics sampled. The bias is particularly obvious when one considers that positive stereotypes have been documented only in studies that have used open-ended questions or sentence completion tasks (Golde & Kogan, 1959; Hickey et al., 1968).

An alternative explanation focuses on the specific behaviors of the elderly target that elicit stereotyping. Old age has been associated with certain negative characteristics such as failing performance, poverty, poor health, and physical unattractiveness, and these may be the qualities that attract prejudice (Banziger & Drevenstedt, 1982; Connor et al., 1978). That social attractiveness influences evaluations is well established (Puckett et al., 1983; Synder et al., 1977). What is not known is whether social attractiveness overrides age to account for stereotypical responding with aged targets or whether social attractiveness interacts with age to define a new and more focused stigmatized elderly target (Brigham, 1971; Crockett et al., 1979). Puckett et al.'s data support the former proposition, though the saliency of age may have been reduced in this study by the atypical role of the target.

The focus of the present study was the interaction hypothesis — that old age stereotyping will be evident only when the individual exhibits socially unattractive behaviors, in this case poor physical and mental health. Specifically, it was hypothesized that old targets would be evaluated more negatively than young targets when they were portrayed as physically incapacitated or mentally impaired. No differences were anticipated between the young and old targets, however, when they were physically fit or mentally alert.

Several design modifications also were introduced. These included limitations on the amount of information given, avoidance of elitist roles for targets, more extensive sampling of perceptions of personality dispositions, and specification of an

explicit reference point. In addition to evaluations of specific young and elderly targets, data were collected for generalized targets. These data provide an opportunity to compare the specific and generalized target methodologies. Finally, in view of concern about the meaningfulness of attitudes to "sexless" old persons (Walsh & Connor, 1979), stereotypes of generalized targets were assessed separately for men and women.

## METHOD

*Participants.* — High school students ( $n = 222$ ) from seven schools in Canberra, Australia participated in the study. Students were drawn from social science classes and were mainly (83%) female. Ages ranged from 16 to 19 years ( $M = 16.9$ ).

*Task 1: Design and procedure.* — A completely randomized 2 (Age)  $\times$  2 (Ability Level)  $\times$  2 (Ability type) design was used in Task 1. Respondents were presented with one of four vignettes for evaluation; age was manipulated by portraying the central character as either a 71- or 26-year-old woman. The vignettes described women who were either disabled or able, with disability being linked with negative social consequences and ability with social attractiveness. Ability and disability were portrayed in two separate contexts, one where the emphasis was on physical fitness, the other mental alertness.

The active vignette was as follows: Margaret was \_\_\_\_ years of age. She loved walking and took herself almost everywhere on foot. She could walk two or three miles without feeling the least bit tired and was always encouraging others to join her. Everyday, Margaret took herself for one of these walks; usually briskly, but sometimes at a more leisurely pace as she slowed down to chat with neighbours who were walking in the same direction.

The disabled vignette was as follows: Margaret was \_\_\_\_ years of age. Since a recent operation, she had great difficulty walking any distance. She quickly lost her breath and was forced to stop every few minutes for a rest. Consequently, she did not go many places by foot, nor did she welcome company when she did walk. For Margaret, walking and talking at the same time was a physical impossibility.

The alert vignette is described next. Margaret was \_\_\_\_ years of age. She had an amazing ability to remember all sorts of things, particularly names. At meetings, she excelled herself. She never forgot

a member's name, no matter how new or irregular an attender. She was often given the job of welcoming members and their spouses at functions. She needed neither hints nor help when it came to writing out name tags for them. It was often said that she knew more about the members' life histories than they did themselves. This made her an invaluable source of information to all who knew her.

Finally, the impaired vignette took the following form: Margaret was — years of age. She had great difficulty remembering things, particularly names. At meetings she was constantly embarrassed by this. She was often given the job of welcoming members and their spouses at functions and providing them with name tags. She rarely got the names right, even for members she had known for years, and had absolutely no chance of remembering the names of spouses. She was also in the habit of connecting names that she thought she recognized with the wrong pieces of information. Her talents resulted in the most hair raising rumors being circulated.

Table 1. Items Belonging to Three Scales

Items
Concerned for others
Considerate (thoughtful of other people's feelings)
Grateful (appreciative)
Trusting (has faith in others)
Loving (shows genuine affection)
Self-sacrificing (puts others' interests before own)
Happy (feels pleased with life)
Dishonest (lies or cheats)*
Unforgiving (unwilling to pardon others)*
Unfriendly (hostile)*
Irritable (bad-tempered)*
Unhelpful (not prepared to assist others)*
Intolerant (unable to accept those different from oneself)*
Active and sociable
Humorous (entertaining)
Purposeful (strives to achieve goals)
Busy (has lots of interests)
Bright (quick thinking)
Decisive (makes up mind quickly)
Sociable (good company)
Conscientious (hard-working)
Self-reliant (able to do things for oneself)
Responsible
Prompt (on time)
Sensible (thinks things through properly)
Self-disciplined (self-controlled)
Knowledgeable (well-informed)
Unreliable (not dependable)*
Untidy (not neat)*
Disorganized (does things in a disorderly manner)*

\*These items were reverse scored.

After reading a vignette, respondents rated the target on 45 ways of behaving (see Table 1 for examples). Responses were made on a 5-point rating scale labelled *less than most people* (1), *somewhat less than most people* (2), *as much as most people* (3), *somewhat more than most people* (4), and *more than most people* (5).

Respondents were then asked to recall the age of the character they had just evaluated and whether or not age had influenced their evaluations. If the response was yes, they were asked how they thought age influenced their judgments.

*Task 2: Design and procedure.* — After a short break, respondents used the same rating scales to evaluate a generalized target. Although sex of target was not varied in Task 1, it was manipulated along with age in Task 2. Respondents were asked to describe one of the following: the majority of old women — women around 70 years of age; the majority of old men — men around 70 years of age; the majority of young women — women around 25 years of age; the majority of young men — men around 25 years of age. In no case was the target in Task 2 the same age and sex as the target in Task 1. The separateness of Tasks 1 and 2 was impressed on all respondents.

## RESULTS

The 45 ways of behaving were reduced to a set of three scales initially by using principal axes factor analysis followed by a varimax rotation on the ratings of the generalized targets. The three scales comprised items that had comparable loadings across the four populations — old men, old women, young men, and young women (see Table 1). The alpha reliability coefficients for these scales ranged from .69 to .88. Subsequently, the internal consistency of the three scales was examined in each of the eight experimental conditions where participant numbers were too small to factor analyze. Although the coefficients tended not to be as high as in the generalized condition, they were nevertheless satisfactory, ranging from .51 to .89. The three major dimensions consistently found to underlie the 45 ways of behaving were Concerned for Others, Active and Sociable, and Responsible.

Of the 222 respondents, 94% could recall the correct or near correct age of the target in Task 1 when they were asked. The data from these 208 respondents were used for subsequent analyses. Due to missing data, the sample for Task 1 was further reduced to 205 and for Task 2 to 202.

*Task 2.* — Data were analyzed by a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) where age of target (26 years, 71 years), ability level (able, disabled) and ability type (physical, mental) were the independent variables, and Concerned for Others, Active and Sociable, and Responsible were the dependent variables.

The hypothesized Age  $\times$  Ability Level interaction was not obtained,  $F(3, 195) = 0.96, p > .05$ . Indeed, no effect involving age was significant. As shown in Table 2, there was no evidence of age stereotyping, either within or across conditions.

In contrast, the main effect for ability level was highly significant,  $F(3, 195) = 157.3, p < .001$ , as were the univariate analyses for each of the three dependent variables. Disabled targets were perceived as less concerned for others than able targets ( $M = 36.4$  and  $M = 46.7$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 136.9, p < .001$ , less active and sociable ( $M = 20.2$  and  $31.2$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 399.8, p < .001$ , and less responsible ( $M = 20.1$  and  $28.0$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 308.3, p < .001$ .

Not surprisingly, type of disability influenced target evaluations also, producing a significant overall main effect in the MANOVA,  $F(3, 195) = 8.2, p < .001$ , and significant differences on two dimensions: Concerned for Others,  $F(1, 197) = 13.4, p < .001$ ; Active and Sociable,  $F(1, 197) = 9.7, p < .005$ . Targets from the mental ability vignettes were judged more favorably than those from the physical ability vignettes ( $M = 43.0$  and  $40.1$ , respectively, on Concerned for Others and  $M = 26.4$  and  $24.9$ , respectively, on Active and Sociable). This effect, however, was not consistent across level of ability, as evidenced by a significant Ability Level  $\times$  Ability Type interaction in the MANOVA,  $F(3, 195) = 46.5, p < .001$ , and in the three univariate analyses. The mentally impaired were rated more concerned for others than the physically impaired ( $M = 39.7$  and  $33.1$ , respectively), whereas the reverse was true for the physically and mentally able ( $M = 46.6$  and  $48.7$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 16.6, p < .001$ . On the Active and Sociable factor, the able and not the disabled groups varied on ability type; the mentally alert fared better than the physically fit target ( $M = 33.2$  and  $30.6$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 12.6, p < .001$ . Finally, the mentally alert were seen as more responsible than the physically able ( $M = 30.1$  and  $27.2$ , respectively), but the mentally impaired were seen as less so than the physically disabled ( $M = 18.0$  and  $22.3$ , respectively),  $F(1, 197) = 80.7, p < .001$ .

It will be recalled that, on completing Task 1, all respondents were asked if they thought age influenced their judgments and, if so, in what way. As shown in Table 3, it is clear that the age cue tended to be used by the majority of respondents judging elderly targets but by a minority evaluating young targets. This difference was statistically significant in three of the four conditions using chi-square tests of independence. The exception was the mentally alert vignette.

Of those reporting an influence, data were examined describing the nature of this influence. These responses were coded according to whether they were positive, negative, or neutral. Negative responses for the elderly targets linked old age with being useless; old fashioned; senile or nutty; a nosey, old bag; an old maid; and cranky. Positive comments referred to the aged as mature, experienced, and considerate. Equally common in the positive group, however, were responses where allowances were being made for frailty in old age.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Each Cell in the  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  MANOVA for Specific Targets

Independent variables	Dependent variables			n
	Concerned for others <i>M(SD)</i>	Active and sociable <i>M(SD)</i>	Responsible <i>M(SD)</i>	
Type (physical)				
Young able	45.8 (5.3)	29.2 (3.5)	25.6 (3.1)	28
Old able	48.0 (5.5)	29.8 (3.0)	26.8 (2.9)	26
Young disabled	30.8 (5.9)	20.6 (4.2)	21.4 (3.3)	24
Old disabled	35.0 (7.0)	19.9 (5.1)	23.1 (3.3)	28
Type (mental)				
Young able	47.5 (8.2)	34.1 (4.4)	30.7 (3.2)	23
Old able	45.8 (6.0)	32.4 (3.7)	29.6 (3.0)	25
Young disabled	38.6 (6.1)	19.6 (4.0)	17.8 (3.6)	26
Old disabled	40.9 (6.1)	20.7 (3.2)	18.1 (3.6)	27

Table 3. Percentages of Respondents in Each Condition who Reported that Age Influenced Their Judgments

Vignette	Age of target		$\chi^2$
	Young	Old	
Active	25	81	14.59**
Disabled	33	79	9.08*
Alert	52	68	.69
Impaired	38	89	12.50**

\*The degrees of freedom for each chi-square test of independence was 1.

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

suggesting that low expectations of the aged were underlying the evaluation.

The use of the age cue with young targets followed a different pattern. Negative responses mainly took the form of criticism that targets did not live up to the high expectations one has of a 26-year-old. For someone of that age, the target was seen as not accepting enough, not stable, rude, immature, inefficient, and lacking in initiative. Positive responses tended to refer to the image of a 26-year-old as a person who was mature, responsible, independent, and at his or her peak.

The percentages of negative responses for each condition are presented in Table 4. With respect to these data, three observations are particularly noteworthy. First, where age is taken into account in the evaluations, its influence is generally positive or neutral. Second, when it is negative, the victims appear to be more often old than young, though the number of cases in each vignette is too small to test for statistical significance. The major exception to these observations is the high proportion of negative judgments for the young, cognitively impaired target. In this situation, the age cue most negatively affected the young target evaluations. Third, the positive or negative evaluation should be distinguished from what could be termed an underlying age expectation. Some respondents verbalized these age-related expectations that tended to be high for the young, at times resulting in relatively harsh evaluations, and low for the old, sometimes making for a more sympathetic approach.

*Task 2.* — The ratings of generalized targets revealed a different pattern of results. Age had a significant main effect in the MANOVA,  $F(3, 196) = 57.08, p < .001$ . As shown in Table 5, elderly people were seen as more concerned for others ( $M = 41.6$  and  $39.5$ , respectively),  $F(1, 198) = 4.5, p < .05$ , and more responsible ( $M = 23.0$  and  $21.2$ , respectively),  $F(1, 198) = 12.1, p < .001$ , instances of positive stereotyping. Consistent with previous work, however, they were seen as less active and sociable than young targets ( $M = 22.5$  and  $29.3$ , respectively),  $F(1, 198) = 101.8, p < .001$ .

The second variable manipulated, sex, did not interact with age on any of the dimensions in this study. There was, however, a significant main effect overall for the sex variable,  $F(3, 196) = 7.3, p < .001$ , involving two of the three dependent variables. From the univariate  $F$  tests, men were seen as less concerned for others than women ( $M = 39.3$  and  $41.6$ , respectively),  $F(1, 198) = 6.6, p$

$< .05$ , and less responsible ( $M = 21.2$  and  $23.0$ , respectively),  $F(1, 198) = 13.1, p < .001$ .

Finally, the Task 2 rating data were analyzed in order to determine whether condition on Task 1 differentially affected Task 2. For each of the four conditions in Task 2, respondents were grouped according to their Task 1 target. The groups' Task 2 ratings were compared by means of one-way analyses of variance; no significant differences emerged.

## DISCUSSION

The data from ratings of the generalized targets clearly showed evidence of both positive and negative age stereotyping by this sample. The elderly male and female targets were perceived as more concerned for others and more responsible than their younger counterparts. This positive view of old age has not been reported in studies that have used forced-choice response formats but has been documented elsewhere in the literature. When analyzing a sentence completion task, Golde and Kogan (1959) found elderly people were rated more positively than most people on several social characteristics. In particular, they were seen to put an emphasis on deep and meaningful friendships, to value companionship, and to exude serenity. Chil-

Table 4. Percentage of Respondents in Each Condition Linking the Age Cue to a Negative Evaluation

Vignette	Age of target	
	Young	Old
Active	0%(9)	15%(20)
Disabled	22%(9)	56%(23)
Alert	12%(16)	28%(17)
Impaired	64%(11)	21%(24)

Note. Numbers in brackets represent the number of respondents giving positive, neutral, or negative evaluations.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) on the Three Factors for Each Cell for Young and Old, Male and Female Generalized Targets

Targets	Concerned for Others	Active and sociable		Responsible	n
		Active and sociable	Responsible		
Women					
Young	40.2(5.8)	28.9(4.7)	22.4(3.7)		56
Old	43.2(7.6)	22.3(5.1)	23.6(3.7)		56
Men					
Young	38.7(5.7)	29.9(3.9)	19.7(4.2)		44
Old	39.9(6.8)	22.8(4.8)	22.4(3.9)		51

dren too have been found overwhelmingly to describe elderly adults as kind and friendly, while acknowledging their physical frailty (Hickey et al., 1968). More consistent with traditional views of age stereotyping was the finding that older male and female targets were judged less active and sociable than younger targets. This finding supports the well-documented old age stereotype that evokes concepts of frailty, slowness, irritability, dependency, withdrawal, vagueness, and stagnation.

Age stereotypes were not sex-related. This finding, together with those of Eisdorfer and Altrocchi (1961) and O'Connell and Rotter (1979), suggest that the Walsh and Connor (1979) interaction was context specific. This is not to suggest that a target's sex will not be important in other situations, but it does indicate limitations to the generalizability of Walsh and Connor's conclusions.

Given the possible confounding effect of sex, the individual targets rated in this study were all women who differed in age, ability level, and ability type. No evidence emerged to suggest that age influenced evaluations either individually or in interaction with other variables. Thus, the specific and generalized target methodologies remained irreconcilable, and the interaction hypothesis was not confirmed. From these data, there is no basis for arguing for a stereotype tied to biological rather than chronological age, that is, a stereotype that is triggered by combining age information with deterioration.

In marked contrast to age in its effect was the variable, ability level. These data clearly confirm the powerfulness of cues that come under the social attractiveness umbrella. It seems that disabled elderly adults certainly are judged more harshly than able elderly adults, but no more so than their young counterparts. In accordance with Puckett et al. (1983) and Connor et al.'s (1978) interpretations, these data lead to the conclusion that disability is a potent cue, age is not.

Are we then to conclude that there is no such thing as an old age stereotype, that it is merely a social construction, an artifact of social science research? In answering this question, the issue of why age stereotyping is elicited with generalized targets but not with specific targets must be resolved.

One immediate interpretation that comes to mind is that the cue "71 years of age" is synonymous with disabled and "26 years of age" is synonymous with able. Thus, 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. In the case of the disabled targets the reverse applies. The disabled 71-year-old conforms to expectations and will be so rated. In contrast, the disabled 26-year-old does not live up to expectations and is likely to be given depressed ratings. These patterns of response are consistent with the absence of differences between 26- and 71-year-olds and the substantial gap between the able and the disabled on the active and social dimension. This line of reasoning, however, does not explain why elderly adults were seen as more concerned for others and responsible in the generalized task (Task 2) and no different from young adults in the specific task (Task 1).

A second explanation for why age did not emerge as an influential factor in evaluating specific targets is that the anchor point for comparisons, *most people*, may not have been used either systematically or effectively. From the qualitative data, there is clear evidence of age group comparisons dominating judgments of individual targets, a practice that could be difficult to overturn when responding to Task 1. The magnitude of this problem cannot be ascertained from these data nor can its effects. Nevertheless, this is an undesirable source of error in that it entails the use of different rating scales for young and old people, thereby rendering a comparison of these ratings meaningless.

At this point, it is worth noting that attention is being focused on the inadequacies of the methodology for evaluating specific targets, rather than the shortcomings of the data gathering procedure for generalized targets. In particular, doubts about the ecological validity of the generalized paradigm with undue salience being ascribed to age are not being given adequate recognition. Yet, the bias is justified to some degree because the introspective and qualitative data raise doubts about the legitimacy of drawing inferences about age stereotyping from Task 1 (specific target) and, moreover, fit more comfortably with the findings of Task 2 (generalized target).

When the introspective and qualitative data are examined, evidence of negative age stereotyping becomes apparent. First, respondents saw age as a more relevant piece of information in judging an elderly target than a young target. In other words, regardless of the favorability of the outcome, old and young people are not evaluated on the same criteria. According to introspective reports, the elderly person's age is seen to be important, and the process of conscious evaluation therefore differs.

This finding is consistent with the results that have emerged from age attribution research. Elderly targets' failure to perform tasks is attributed to their age. No such attribution accompanies failure in young targets (Banziger & Drevenstedt, 1982).

Furthermore, the qualitative data demonstrated that, at least for a segment of the population, the expectations held about elderly people are lower and more negative than those held about young adults. The pejorativeness of comments directed at young targets did not approach those describing elderly targets as "useless," "nosey old bags" and, on a questionably positive note, "better than expected." These statements are spontaneous expressions of the age stereotypes that have caused so much debate in recent years.

The qualitative data offer a new interpretation of why stereotyping of specific targets is difficult to demonstrate using the traditional paradigm. These data suggest that in the evaluation of individual targets, two conflicting forces may be at work, both stemming from a culture's expectations of a stigmatized group — one that could be called a discriminatory stereotype, another that could be called an antidiscriminating response. The discriminatory stereotype exposes the much-talked-about negative stereotype of old age and, from the qualitative data, appears to be alive and well among one segment of society. Flourishing just as profusely, if not more so, is what could be termed a backlash against the stereotype — a concern with antidiscrimination, with viewing the stigmatized group with sympathy, making allowances for expected failings, or even verbalizing a positive stereotype.

When specific individuals are targeted for evaluation, these two counteracting points of view may define two subgroups within the sample. Those who have a predominantly positive set about elderly people may converge on a consistently sympathetic view of an elderly individual. By the same token, the more negatively disposed may see a particular aged person in a consistently negative light. In other words, a general target may be seen as concerned, responsible, and yet not necessarily active and sociable by one person; a specific individual, however, must be seen more consistently. The operation of such a halo effect when specific individuals are being evaluated would explain the loss of significant differences when moving from the generalized to the specific tasks. Positive and negative forces would cancel each other out, resulting in a mean score reflecting the view largely of the uncommitted.

The circumstances under which an antidis-

crimination attitude gains momentum in response to stereotyping of a group remains unclear. One obvious limitation of the current study is the sample used. Although providing a good cross-section of older teenagers, this age group may differ from other age groups by having a more open and multifaceted view of the aged. The same phenomenon may not characterize adult perceptions of elderly people.

A further consideration is whether this phenomenon is specific to the issue of ageism. As Kogan (1961) pointed out, being elderly is not a question of circumstances of birth as race, religion, and sex generally are, but rather is a question of maturation. This fact differentiates prejudice toward elderly people from most other forms of prejudice and may account for greater sympathy being directed to this group than to others.

On the other hand, the relevance of these observations may be much broader. The rise of an anti-discrimination response may be a function of the existence of any stereotype reaching public consciousness. Once the stereotype is exposed and deemed unacceptable in the public arena, there may be a marshalling of ideological forces within the society committed to compensating for past injustices and prejudices.

The notion of both positive and negative attitudes arising out of culturally defined age stereotypes has important implications for the paradigm used in research such as this. The current research paradigm seeks to reflect a social stereotype, the underlying assumption being that there is a consistent trend within the population toward endorsement of the stereotype. The methodology allows individuals to differ in the degree to which they subscribe to the group view but does not allow for a situation where attitudes within the group conflict. When the paradigm is used in such a case, effects would be lost as the positive and negative responses of the group are averaged. This problem has not been given serious consideration in the literature. Stereotypes have been conceptualized as cultural phenomena, serving the purpose of distinguishing one group from another. Given this perspective, consensus surrounding the nature of the stereotype is a realistic expectation. It is an expectation, however, that appears to warrant more critical examination.

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