

Young at Heart: The Age You Feel (*and how you feel about aging...*) Affects Well-being in Later Life

***Third Age Learning Kitchener Waterloo
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WATERLOO
APPLIED HEALTH
SCIENCES

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Schedule

- 1:30 – 2:30 – introductions, talk, early in talk – quick audience survey
- 2:30 – 3:00 – quick break? Q&A

Before we start....

- What are some common ***positive stereotypes*** about older adults?
- What are some common ***negative stereotypes*** about older adults
- What makes you ***feel younger?***
- What makes you ***feel older?***

Outline

- Stereotypes:
 - What they are... function
 - Ageist stereotypes
- Subjective age and negative aging attitudes
 - Meanings and implications
 - Impact on wellbeing
 - Impact on sexuality
- Brief intro....
 - Prof. in Recreation and Leisure Studies at UW
 - Much of my research focuses on adult development and aging, coping and sexual orientation
 - Actually born in Waterloo – live with my husband Richard and much of my leisure time involves Gio....



Stereotypes

- What are they? Why function do they serve?
- Stereotypes
 - Can be thought of as a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a particular group
- They help us make judgments and decisions quickly in everyday life
- We're "cognitive misers" – i.e., it's easier to apply a stereotype and make a decision than take time to consider all the angles...

Stereotypes

- Stereotypes about groups of people
 - Often have positive and negative characteristics
- Stereotypes exist about many groups of people
 - e.g., women, men, various ethnic groups, gay and lesbian people, short or tall people, thin or larger people... etc....
 - And – older adults

Stereotypes

- (*check impromptu survey results.....*)
- What are some typical positive stereotypes about older adults?
 - Wise
 - Mentors
 - Accomplished
 - Experienced
 - Friendly... etc.....

Stereotypes

- What are some typical negative stereotypes about older adults?
 - Dependent
 - Forgetful
 - Incompetent
 - Weak
 - Asexual
 - Declining... etc.....

Aging Stereotypes

- Are...
 - Assimilated or internalized at a very young age (as young as 3)
 - In western cultures (e.g., Canada and US) are largely negative
 - More positive in other cultural groups (e.g., some European and Asian cultures)
 - Unlike many other stereotypes, ***we are likely to become the target*** of the stereotype as we become older adults...

Aging Stereotypes

- So what? Who cares?...
 - Aging stereotypes have consequences for numerous aspects of life
 - e.g., for the way older adults are treated...
 - For the mental functioning, physical functioning, longevity of older adults

Consequences of Aging Stereotypes

For a review, see:

Levy, B. R. (2003). Mind matters: Cognitive and physical effects of aging stereotypes. *Journal of Gerontology*, 58B, P203-P211.

Subconscious
prime – words
flashed on
computer screen

- Becca Levy

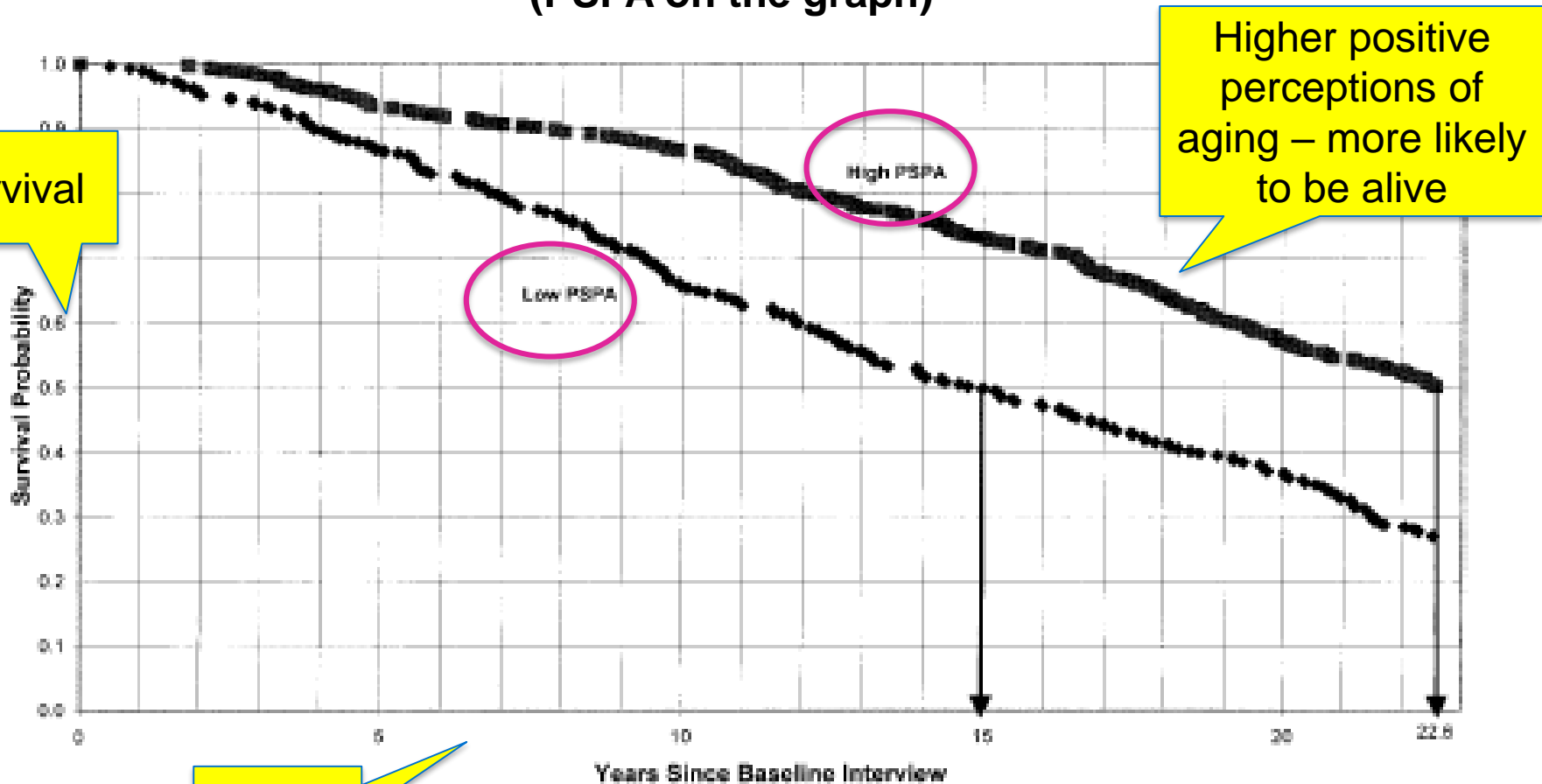
- in numerous studies, **primed** negative or positive aging stereotypes and found an effect on:

- Memory (e.g., better with positive stereotype prime)
 - Walking speed (quicker with positive stereotype prime)
 - Clarity of handwriting
 - Physical stress reaction to challenge (worse for neg. stereotype)
 - Longevity – those with positive aging attitudes, lived on average **7.5 years** longer than negative aging attitudes

Levy's Work on Longevity

- Measured aging attitudes – yes/no to:
 - “Things deep getting worse as I get older”
 - “I have as much pep as I did last year”
 - “As you get older, you are less useful”, etc...
- Age at baseline was 50 to 92 years, over 600 participants, and followed over 23 years
- Statistically controlled for various confounding factors

Survival probability for high vs. low positive self-perceptions of aging (PSPA on the graph)



Survival

Higher positive perceptions of aging – more likely to be alive

High PSPA

Low PSPA

Time

ence of positive self-perceptions of aging (PSPA) on survival. Arrow indicates median survival.

Aging stereotypes and Subjective age

- Shifting gears a bit, Richard Eibach and I have studied the intersection of subjective age and aging stereotypes
- Subjective age – basically, how old you feel!
- How old do YOU feel?....
 - After age 40, people typically feel about 20% younger than they actually are
- Is feeling your age – or even feeling older – necessarily a beneficial thing or detrimental thing?...
- Depends – e.g., For younger people, conveys a sense of maturity...

Aging stereotypes and Subjective age

- For older people – is feeling closer to your actual age (rather than 20% younger) helpful? Or harmful?
- We argued that “it depends”....
- On how negative or positive your attitudes about aging were (e.g., somewhat like aging stereotypes)
- I’m going to begin with a study that shows how/why older subjective age might be felt... and intersections with aging stereotypes...

Aging phenomenology, subjective age, and ageist stereotypes

Eibach, R. P., Mock, S. E., & Courtney, E. A. (2010). Having a “senior moment”: Induced aging phenomenology, subjective age, and susceptibility to ageist stereotypes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*, 643-649.

- With a midlife sample (on a boat...)...
 - Gave an easy to read or hard to read passage
 - Hard to read: italicized, bit smaller, lighter tone...
 - Then said it was a bad print job – or NO explanation...
 - “Scrambled sentence task” – that included positive or negative aging stereotype words
 - Assessed subjective age (how old to you feel)



Aging phenomenology, subjective age, and ageist stereotypes

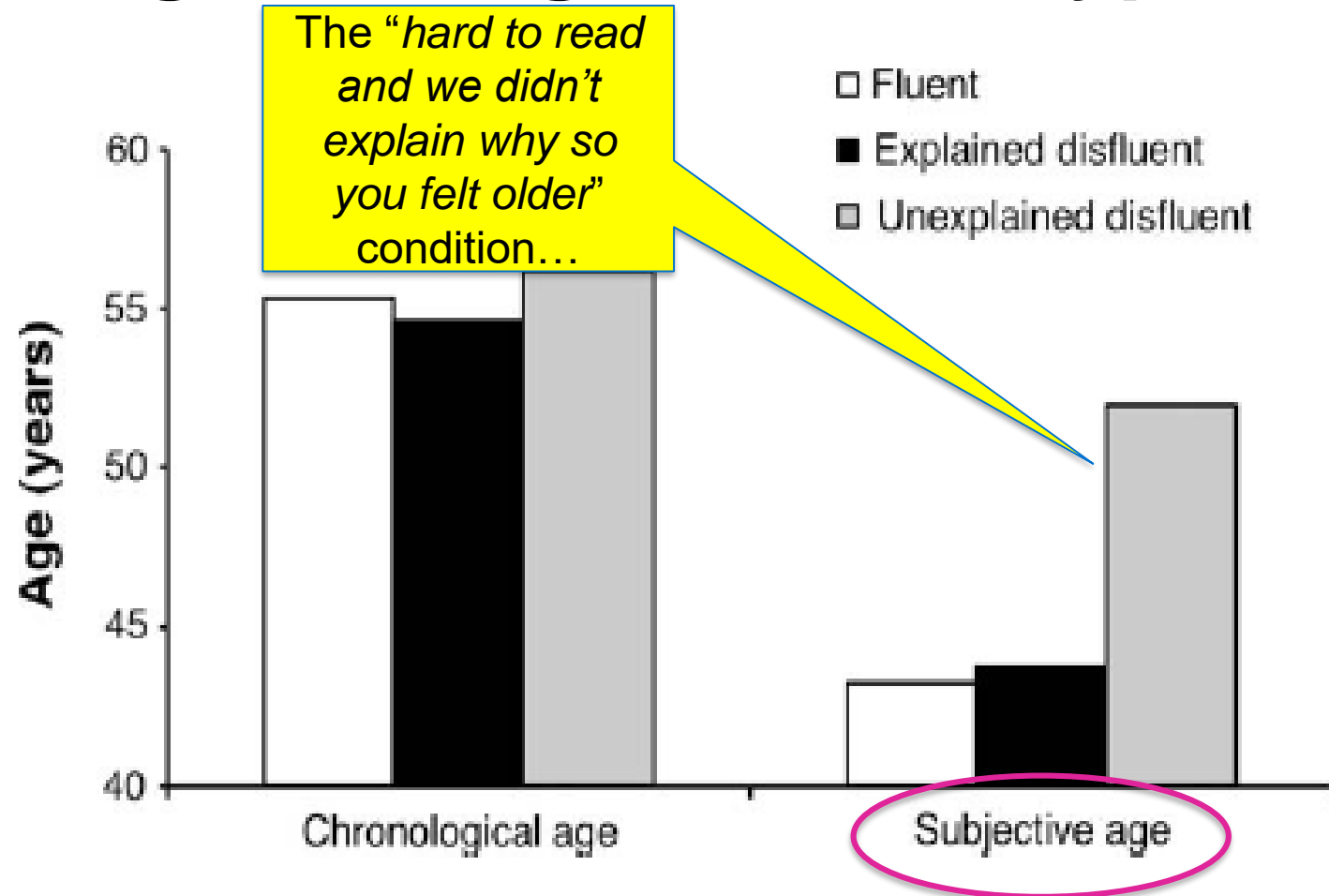
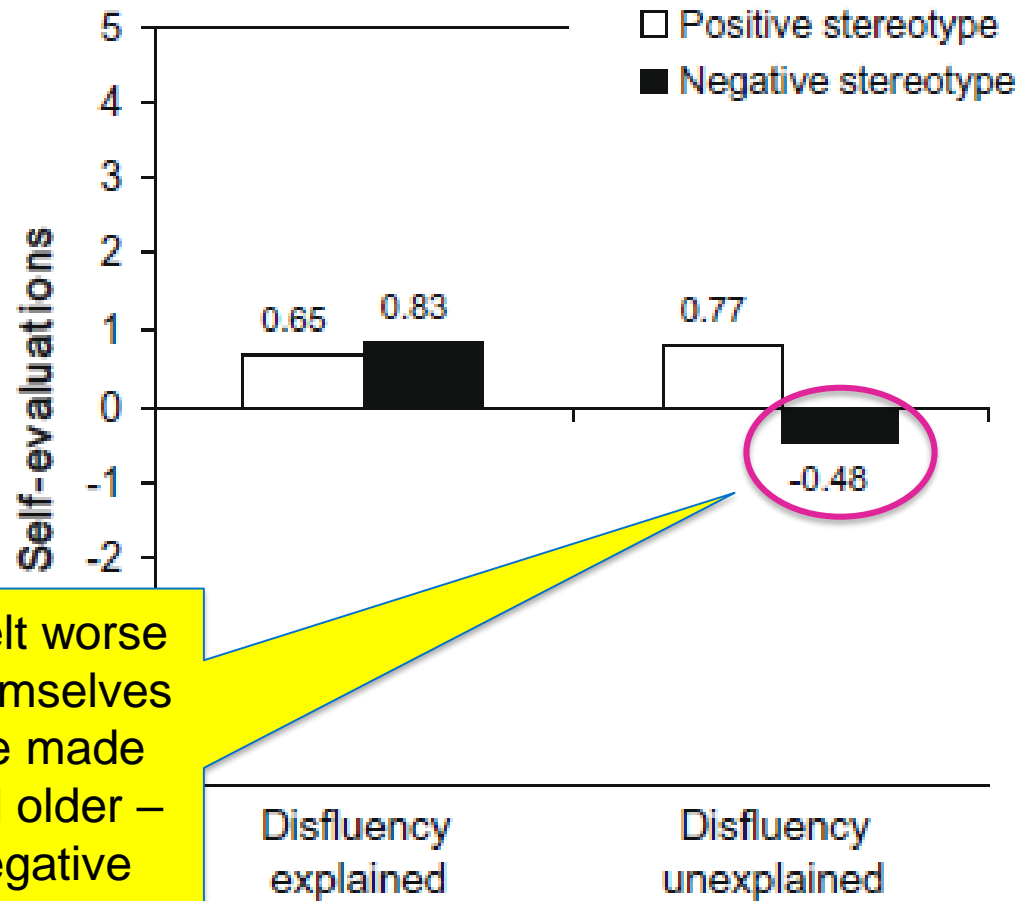


Fig. 1. Actual age and subjective age reports of participants depending on whether the stimuli were visually fluent or disfluent and whether visual disfluency was explained or unexplained (Study 1).

Aging phenomenology, subjective age, and ageist stereotypes



People felt worse about themselves when we made them feel older – AND negative aging stereotypes were primed

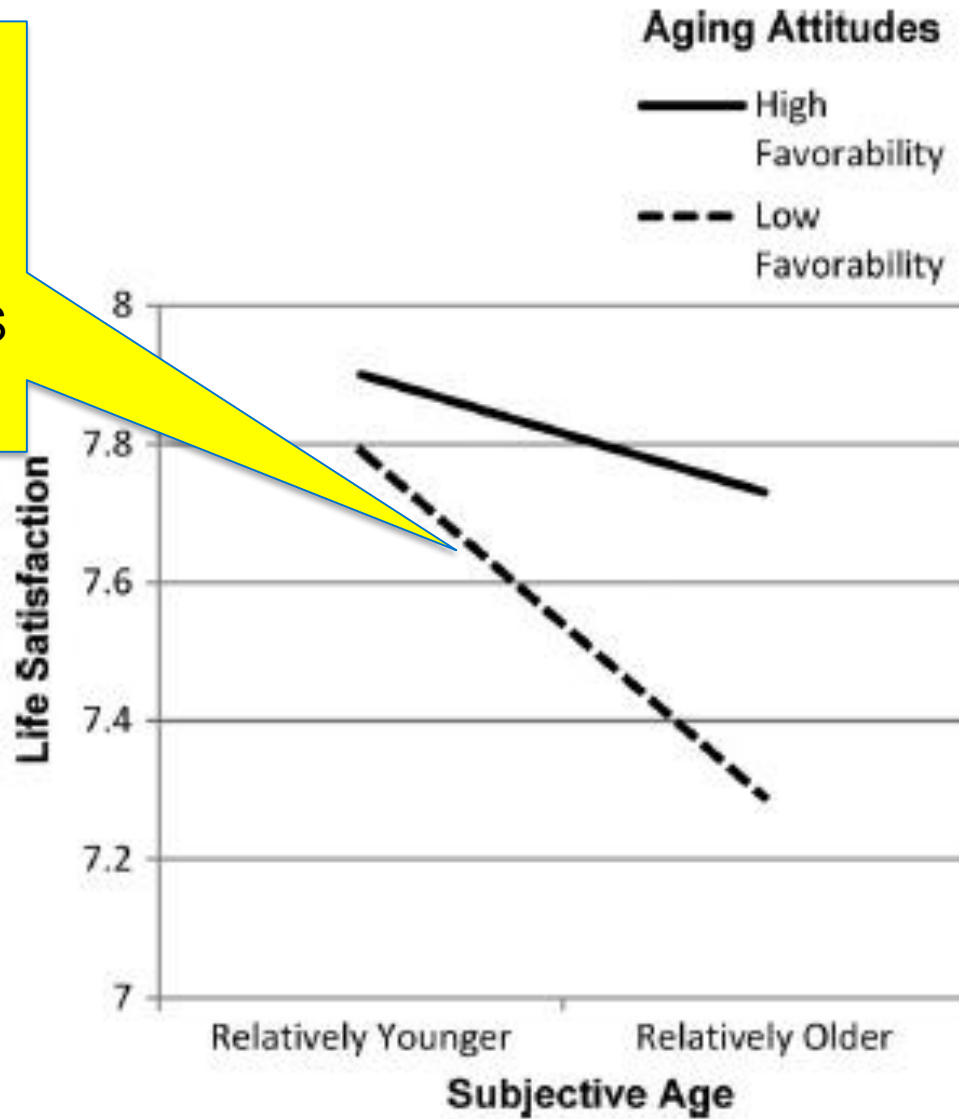
Self-evaluations of participants as a function of whether the visual disfluency of the stimuli was explained or unexplained and whether positive or negative aging stereotypes were primed (Study 2).

Subjective age and well-being: Harmful only with negative aging attitudes

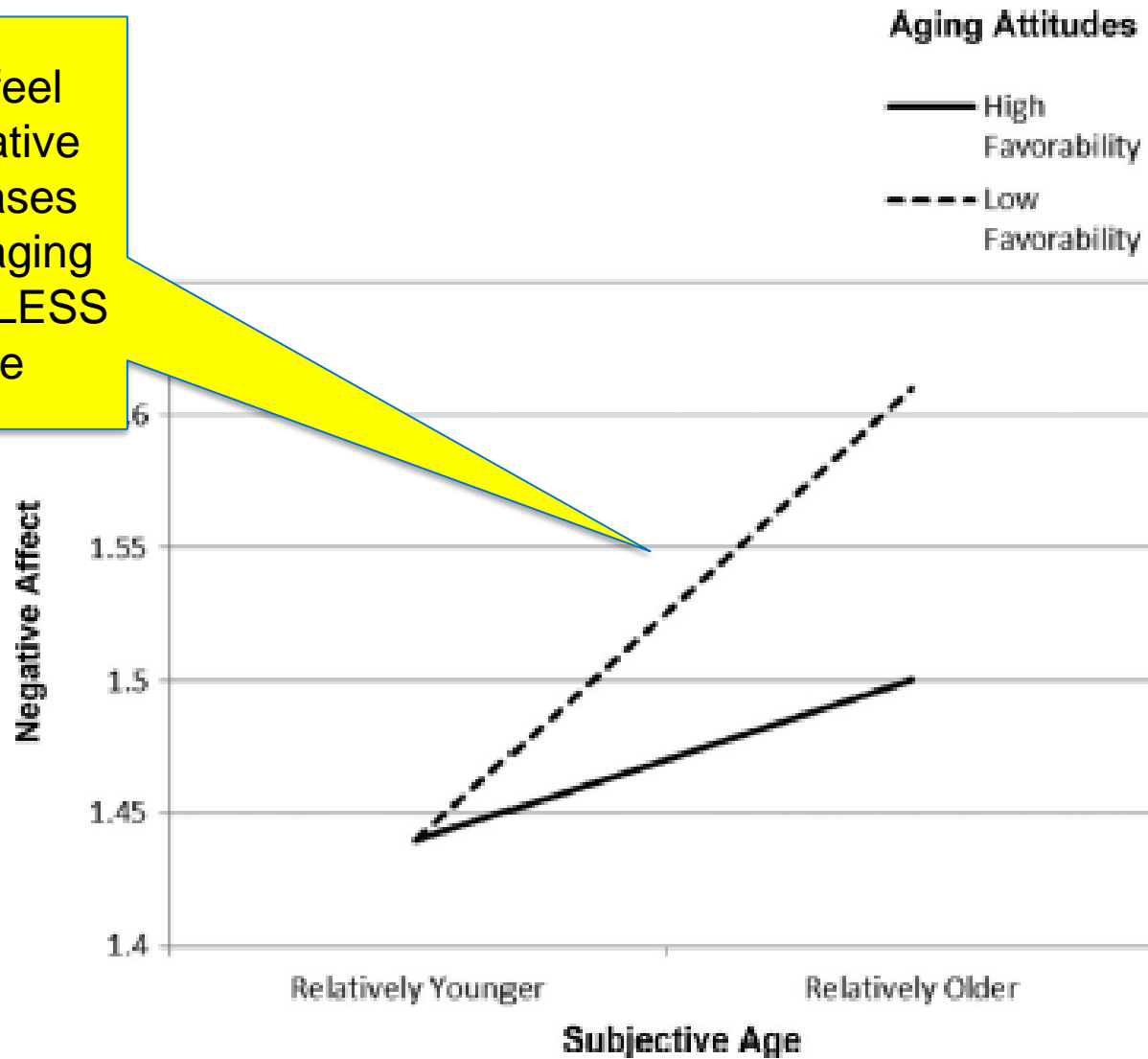
Mock, S. E. & Eibach, R. P., (2011). Aging attitudes moderate the effect of subjective age on psychological well-being: Evidence from a 10-year longitudinal study. *Psychology and Aging, 26*, 979-986.

- With a midlife and older sample (not on a boat....)...
 - Assessed subjective age and aging attitudes at Time 1 then 10 years later (Time 2)
 - Drew on MIDUS study, funded by MacArthur Foundation
 - Approx. 1,170 participants
 - Outcomes: life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect

As people feel older – life satisfaction drops more when aging attitudes are LESS favourable



As people feel older – negative affect increases more when aging attitudes are LESS favourable



Subjective age and well-being: Predicts aspects of sexuality

Estill, A., Mock, S. E., Schryer, E., & Eibach, R. P. (2018). The effects of subjective age and aging attitudes on mid-to late-life sexuality. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(2), 146-151.

Again with the MIDUS data...

- Assessed subjective age and aging attitudes at Time 1 then 10 years later (Time 2)
- Drew on MIDUS study, funded by MacArthur Foundation
- Approx. 1,170 participants
- Outcomes: frequency of sex, quality of sex, interest in sex

Subjective age and well-being: Predicts aspects of sexuality

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Worked with SPHHS masters student...

- Sexuality in later life both function of and predictor of health, well-being, aging attitudes
- Negative stereotypes relating to older adult sexuality
→ asexual or even deviant, e.g., “*dirty old man*”
- Undermines role of sexuality in relationship satisfaction, quality of life, and attitudes toward aging (for older adults)

Table 2 *Standardized Coefficients for Regression Analyses Predicting Frequency, Interest, and Quality of Sex From Demographic Covariates, Subjective Age, Beliefs About Aging, and their Interaction (MIDUS Survey: T1 = 1995 to 1996, T2 = 2004 to 2006)*

	Frequency of Sex	Quality of Sex	Interest in Sex
	Beta	Beta	Beta
	-0.18**	-0.09**	-0.17**
	-0.07**	-0.04	-0.15**
	0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	-0.05	-0.01	-0.02
	0.01	0.05	0.09**
	0.00*	0.00	0.00
Model 2			
Subjective age T1	-0.01	0.04	0.01
Subjective age T2	-0.03	-0.10**	-0.09**
Aging attitudes T1	0.01	0.07*	0.04
R ²	0.38	0.26	0.30

Quality of sex ratings **lowered** as people felt older – but **increased** if ageing attitudes improved

In conclusion...

- What do you think? Reflections? Opinions?....
- Stereotypes, though sometimes useful.... (e.g, quick information processing)... negative stereotypes can impair mental functioning, physical functioning... decrease life satisfaction
- Subjective age – may or may not have a negative impact – depends on attitudes about aging
- Feeling older predicts declines in sexuality ratings but having positive aging attitudes predicts enhanced sexuality ratings...

Thanks!

- Some links to popular press articles:
 - Psychology Today – [negative ageing stereotypes](#)
 - Psychology Today – [subjective age and brain health](#)
 - Psychology Today – [subjective age and general health](#)