

Stereotypes of Aging

Unit: Human Growth and Development

Problem Area: Older Adult Care Techniques

Lesson: Stereotypes of Aging

■ **Student Learning Objectives.** Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

- 1** Describe the negative perception of aging (ageism).
- 2** Identify the perceptions and stereotypes associated with older adults' physical abilities and health.
- 3** Identify the perceptions and stereotypes associated with older adults' mental abilities and attitudes.
- 4** Explain the demographic words used interchangeably to describe older adults.

■ **Resources.** The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:

E-unit(s) corresponding to this lesson plan. CAERT, Inc. <http://www.mycart.com>.

"Ageism: An Introduction," *Aging and Human Rights*: Webster University.
<http://faculty.webster.edu/woolfilm/ageism.html>.

"Aging," *General Psychology*, Shippensburg University. <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/genpsyaging.html>.

"The Graying of America: America Is Aging," *Independent Lens: Sunset Story*.
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/sunsetstory/graying.html>.

Padgett, Tim. "Unlikely Allies," *Time*, April 17, 2005.



“Positive Attitude Delays Ageing,” BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3642356.stm>.

“Psychology of Aging Module 1: Introduction to Aging,” *Psychology of Aging*. <http://psychologyofaging.blogspot.com/2008/01/psychology-of-aging-module-1.html>.

Schiff, Jaclyn. “The Graying of America,” CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-graying-of-america/>.

“The State of Aging and Health in America: Data Brief Series,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/briefs.htm>.

“The Terry and Hazeldeane Carpenter Intergenerational Center,” Carpenter Center. <https://carpentercenter.net/>.

■ **Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities**

- ✓ Overhead or PowerPoint projector
- ✓ Visual(s) from accompanying master(s)
- ✓ Copies of sample test, lab sheet(s), and/or other items designed for duplication
- ✓ Materials listed on duplicated items
- ✓ Computers with printers and Internet access
- ✓ Classroom resource and reference materials

■ **Key Terms.** The following terms are presented in this lesson (shown in bold italics):

- ageism
- demographic
- intergenerational activities
- racism
- sexism
- stereotypes

■ **Interest Approach.** Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situation. A possible approach is included here.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that by 2030, the number of Americans aged 65 and older will more than double to 71 million. Therefore, 20 percent of the U.S. population—one in five—will be more than 65 years old. Ask the students how this will affect the stereotypical perception of aging. Divide the class into small groups, and have the students create some new products or businesses for an aging population.

Have the students share their ideas. Then discuss intergenerational programming while viewing <https://www.bridgestogether.org/events/igmonth/>. Tell students that Intergenerational Awareness Month is celebrated worldwide in September.

SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1: Describe the negative perception of aging (ageism).

Anticipated Problem: What is ageism?

- I. **Ageism** is discrimination or prejudice targeted toward a particular group, especially older adults. Ageism is considered the third greatest “ism,” following racism and sexism.
 - A. **Intergenerational activities** involve different age groups (e.g., parents and children, grandparents and children, or teens and older adults) working together in areas such as tutoring, mentoring, and volunteering.
 - B. Intergenerational topics include:
 1. Equity
 2. Housing
 3. Justice
 4. Conflict
 5. Mobility
 6. Relations
 - C. **Stereotypes** are beliefs that tend to foster discrimination about a group. An overly simplified image of a group is a stereotype.
 1. **Racism** is prejudice and discrimination targeted toward people belonging to a group with similar physical characteristics. Racism is also characterized by believing that race alone is a primary determinant of traits and abilities.
 2. **Sexism** is prejudice and discrimination based on gender.
 - D. Negative attitudes about ageism are exhibited in language, such as:
 1. Over-the-hill
 2. Old fuddy-duddy
 3. Older than dirt
 - E. Negative attitudes about ageism are exhibited in humor, such as:
 1. Birthday cards for a person over 50
 2. Black “over-the-hill” balloons and party favors
 3. Jokes that start with “You Know You’re Getting Old When...”
 - F. Negative attitudes about ageism are exhibited in the media, such as:
 1. Advertisements and commercials (e.g., the crotchety older person, the hard of hearing older person, and an older person who is not athletic)

2. Radio and television programming (e.g., older people do not like children; older people do not have fun; and older people eat at 3 p.m.)
3. Movies (e.g., *On Golden Pond* and *Driving Miss Daisy*)
4. YouTube (e.g., older adults text messaging)

Teaching Strategy: Use VM-A and VM-B to facilitate a discussion of ageism. Have students complete LS-A.

Objective 2: Identify the perceptions and stereotypes associated with older adults' physical abilities and health.

Anticipated Problem: What are the facts about older adults' physical abilities and health?

- II. Updated facts about the physical well-being and health of older adults
 - A. The beauty of older women can be seen in *Dove Pro Age* commercials. The marketing campaign may be viewed on YouTube.
 - B. According to the Surgeon General, trends show a decline in the chronic disabilities of older adults due in part to improved diet, physical fitness, and health care.
 - C. According to the Surgeon General, normal aging decreases sensory, pulmonary, and immune function. However, the decreases do not occur at the level of commonly held negative stereotypes about aging.
 - D. Walking is often considered one of the few vigorous activities appropriate for older adults. Yet the story of 68-year-old Werner Berger, who summated Mount Everest, proves that this assumption is incorrect. The video "Meet Me at the Top" may be viewed on YouTube.
 - E. Research indicates that the older population is healthier and wealthier than they were 100 years ago. People are also living longer. Share the following with the class: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-graying-of-america/>.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM-C to facilitate a discussion of the health and physical well-being of older adults. Have students complete LS-B to review aging stereotypes shown in the popular media.

Objective 3: Identify the perceptions and stereotypes associated with older adults' mental abilities and attitudes.

Anticipated Problem: What are the facts about the mental abilities and attitudes of older adults?

III. Updated facts about the mental ability and attitude of older adults

A. Active older adults

1. Politically active groups working on issues related to retirement and other issues (especially those relating to children) include:
 - a. American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
 - b. Greater Aventura Citizens Association
 - c. Gray Panthers
 - d. Intergenerational Centers
2. Voting: Americans aged 65 to 70 have the highest voting record, followed by those over 75 years of age.

B. Computer use

1. Show the YouTube commercial "idk my bff rose." The AT&T commercial shows a grandmother text messaging.
2. Internet searching increases neural circuits in older adults.

C. Memory

1. Younger people accept that they sometimes forget things.
2. The stereotype about an older adult's memory is that he or she forgets things because of his or her age.

D. Attitude

1. Attitude is the single most important health factor for older adults.
2. The types of stresses people feel change with age.
3. Older adults are more apt to accept what cannot be changed.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM-D to facilitate a discussion of the mental abilities and attitudes of older adults. Have students complete LS-C.

Objective 4: Explain the demographic words used interchangeably to describe older adults.

Anticipated Problem: What words are used to define older adults?

- IV. A **demographic** is a group identified within the human population. For example, teenagers in the Midwest who attend public schools could be one demographic.
- A. The tendency is to lump all seniors into one demographic group using interchangeable words (e.g., elderly, old, senior, and aged).
1. This time frame can span 40 to 50 years.
 2. The time from birth to age 50 is never categorized as one demographic group.
- B. United Nations Resolution 35/129 classifies the older demographics according to shared characteristics and performances. The classifications are:
1. Young-old are from age 65 to 74.
 2. Middle-old are from age 75 to 84.
 3. Old-old are 85 years and older.

Teaching Strategy: Use VM-E and VM-F to facilitate a discussion of the demographics of older adults.

- **Review/Summary.** Use the student learning objectives to summarize the lesson. Have students explain the content associated with each objective. Student responses can be used in determining which objectives need to be reviewed or taught from a different angle.
- **Application.** Use the included visual masters and lab sheets to apply the information presented in the lesson.
- **Evaluation.** Evaluation should focus on student achievement of the objectives for the lesson. Various techniques can be used, such as student performance on the application activities. A sample written test is provided.

■ **Answers to Sample Test:**

Part One: Matching

1. a
2. d
3. b
4. c
5. e

Part Two: Short Answer

1. The United Nations Resolution 35/129 classifies the older adult demographics according to shared characteristics and performances as:
 - a. Young-old are aged 65 to 74.
 - b. Middle-old are aged 75 to 84.
 - c. Old-old are aged 85 and older.
2. Answers will vary but should include three of the following facts about older adults' physical and mental abilities (or others as discussed in class):
 - a. Trends show a decline in the chronic disabilities of older adults due in part to improved diet, physical fitness, and health care.
 - b. Normal aging decreases sensory, pulmonary, and immune function. However, these decreases are not to the level of commonly held negative stereotypes about aging.
 - c. Walking is often considered one of the few vigorous activities appropriate for older adults, but 68-year-old Werner Berger summated Mount Everest and proved this stereotype to be incorrect.
 - d. Research indicates that the older population is healthier and wealthier than they were 100 years ago. They also live longer.
 - e. Older adults are politically active, and those aged 65 to 70 have the highest voting record.
 - f. Computer use by older adults is common. Internet searching increases neural circuits in older adults.
 - g. The stereotype about an older adult's memory is that he or she forgets things because of age.
 - h. Attitude is the single most important health factor for older adults.
 - i. The types of stresses people feel change with age.
 - j. Older adults are more apt to accept what cannot be changed.

Part Three: True/False

1. T
2. T
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. F

Stereotypes of Aging

► Part One: Matching

Instructions: Match the term with the correct definition.

- a. ageism
- b. demographic
- c. racism
- d. sexism
- e. stereotypes

- _____ 1. Discrimination or prejudice against older adults
- _____ 2. Discrimination based on gender
- _____ 3. A group within the human population
- _____ 4. Prejudice against a group with similar physical features
- _____ 5. Beliefs that tend to foster discrimination

► Part Two: Short Answer

Instructions: Answer the following.

1. List the United Nations Resolution demographic categories and ages describing older adults.



2. List and describe three facts about older adults' physical and mental abilities.

► Part Three: True/False

Instructions: Write *T* for true or *F* for false.

- _____ 1. Attitude is the single most important health factor for older adults.
- _____ 2. We tend to lump all older adults together when we use words like elderly, senior, and old.
- _____ 3. Research indicates that the older population is healthier and wealthier than they used to be.
- _____ 4. Ageism can be displayed in our humor.
- _____ 5. According to the Surgeon General, trends show an increase in the chronic disabilities of older adults.
- _____ 6. The older adult political groups only work for issues related to retirement.

AGEISM



Ageism—
prejudice or
discrimination
toward older adults

Language

Humor

Media

PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

Add to this list of perceptions and misconceptions about aging.

- ◆ Older adults become senile.
- ◆ All five senses decline in old age.
- ◆ Older adults cannot adapt to change.
- ◆ Retirement is the happiest time of life.
- ◆ Retirement is detrimental to an individual's health.
- ◆ A majority of older adults end up in a nursing home.
- ◆ A majority of older adults are lonely.
- ◆ Old age is a second childhood.
- ◆ With age comes wisdom.
- ◆ "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."



PHYSICAL STEREOTYPES OF OLDER ADULTS

Myths About Physical Health	Facts About Physical Health
Older adults cannot be models. The older adult body is not beautiful.	Beauty in older women can be seen in the <i>Dove Pro Age</i> commercial. The campaign can be seen on YouTube.
Older adults have a large number of chronic disabilities.	The Surgeon General indicates a decline in the chronic disabilities of older adults due to improved diet, physical fitness, and health care.
Older adults have decreased sensory, pulmonary, and immune functions.	The Surgeon General indicates that normal aging decreases sensory, pulmonary, and immune function, but not to the extent of commonly held beliefs.
Older adults have no stamina and cannot exercise.	Werner Berger summated Mount Everest at age 68. The video “Meet Me at the Top” can be seen on YouTube.

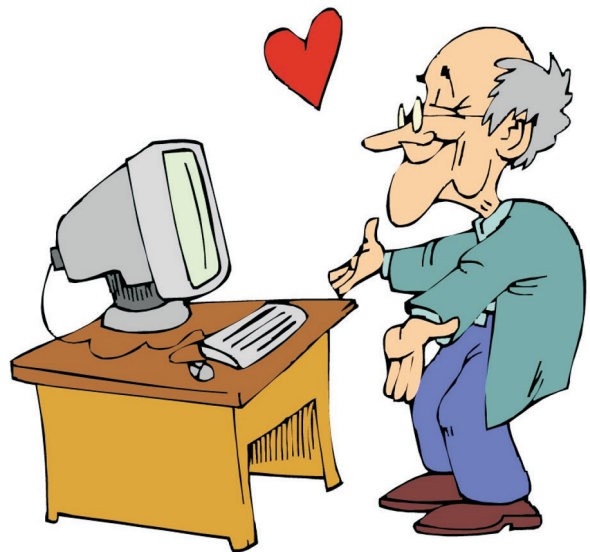
What other myths and facts about the health and physical well-being of older adults have you heard?



MENTAL STEREOTYPES OF OLDER ADULTS

Myths About Mental Health and Attitudes	Facts About Mental Health and Attitudes
Older adults do not care about politics.	Older adults have several politically active groups. Americans aged 65 to 70 years have the highest voting record followed by those over 75 years.
Older adults cannot figure out how to use the Internet.	Older adults have their own Web sites. (e.g., AARP.org and Senior.Net. Also, an AT&T commercial can be seen on YouTube “idk my bff rose” of a grandmother text messaging.
Older adults are always forgetting things.	Younger people accept it when they forget things while older adults blame it on aging.
Older adults are always stressed.	Seniors are more apt to accept what cannot be changed.

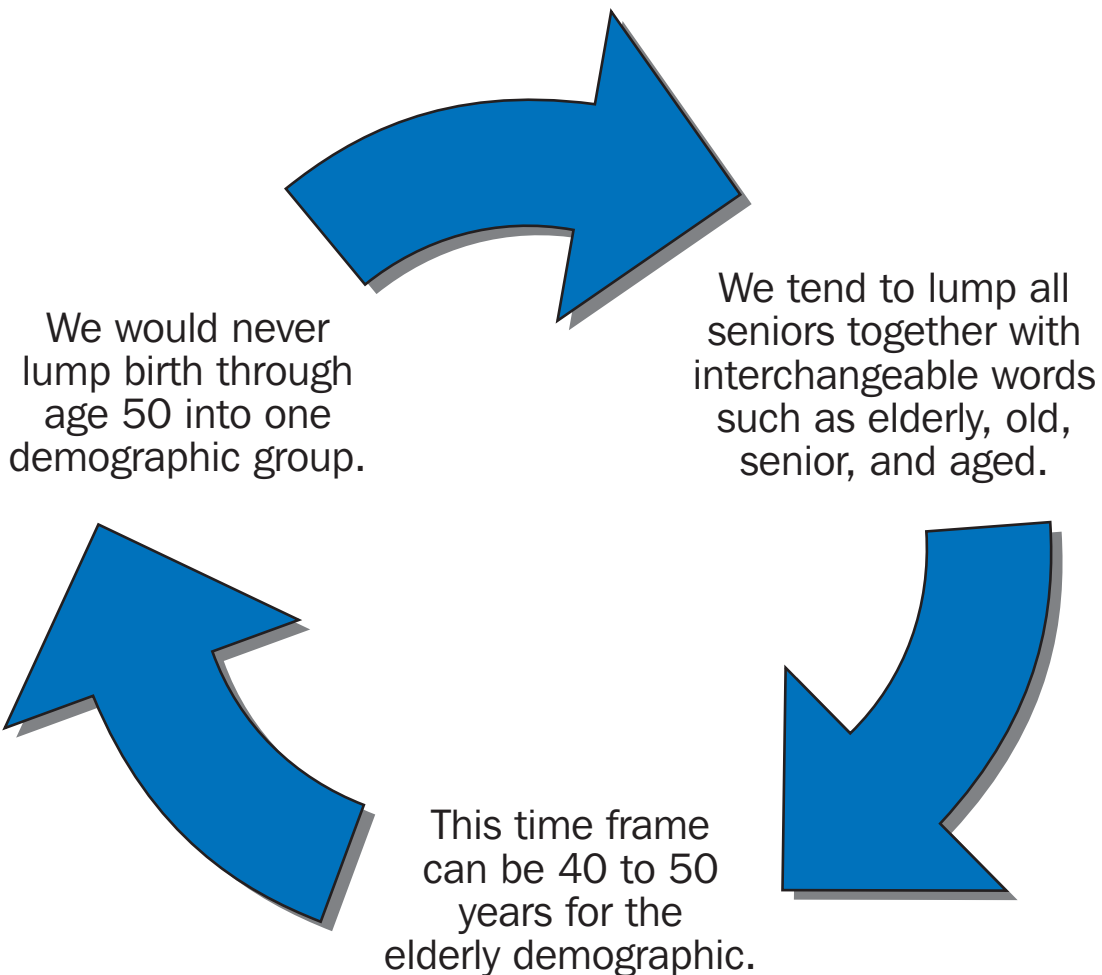
What other myths and facts about the mental health and attitudes of older adults have you heard?



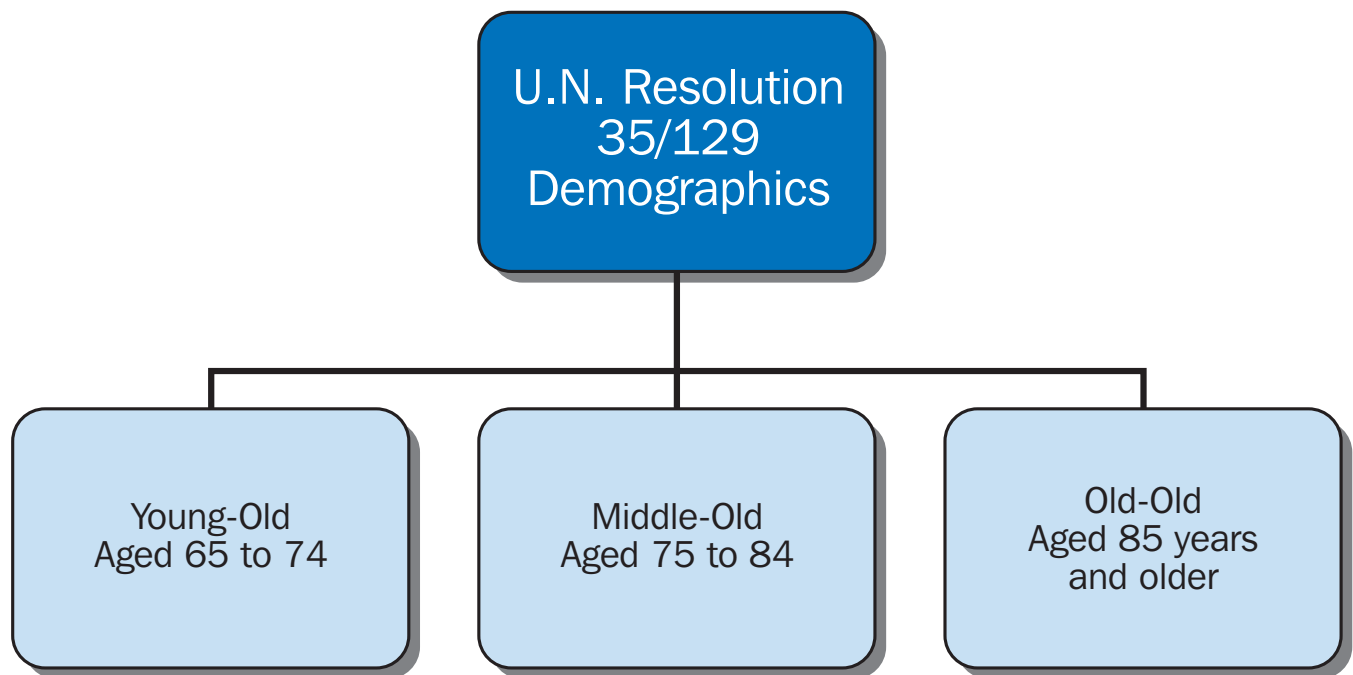
DEMOGRAPHICS OF AGING



**A demographic
is a group within the
human population.**



U.N. RESOLUTION 35/129 ON DEMOGRAPHICS



Identify Stereotypical Ageism in Advertisements

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to review advertisements that show positive and negative aspects of aging.

Objectives

1. Classify advertisements of older adults as positive or negative.
2. Identify messages about aging in advertising.

Materials

- ◆ magazines
- ◆ chalk or whiteboard markers
- ◆ timer
- ◆ board

Procedure

1. In the time allowed by your instructor, find two images portraying an older adult (advertisements or pictures) in a magazine. Find one image with a positive message about aging and one with a negative message.
2. Describe the composition of each image on the board.
3. Identify each image as a positive or negative message about older adults.
4. Identify the stereotype(s) each image presents about aging.
5. Present your two pictures, message, and stereotype descriptions to the class.
6. Add your information to a class graph that categorizes the composition, message, and stereotype findings from the two images you selected.



Identify Stereotypical Ageism in Advertisements

Sample Class Graph of Stereotype Messages from Advertisement Images

Name of Magazine	Composition of Picture	Positive or Negative Message	Stereotype about Aging
AARP	Man and woman smiling	Positive	Seniors are often lonely.
Senior Living	Women with plaque build-up in arteries	Negative	Seniors often have health problems.

The Graying of America

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to research the *The Graying of America* information on the CBS News Internet Web site.

Objective

Identify the reasons older adults are healthier and wealthier as well as why they are living longer.

Materials

- ◆ writing utensil
- ◆ computer with Internet access

Procedure

1. Watch the March 9, 2006 CBS News story video, *The Graying of America*, at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-graying-of-america/>.
2. If time allows, watch the other two video segments.
3. Read the census article (on the Web site) about older adults.
4. Based on the video and article, complete the following chart.

Census Categories	Reasons for Increases	My Family Statistics (Agree or Disagree)	My Feelings about the Census Category
Healthier			
Wealthier			
Living longer			



The Emotional Effect of Words

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to interview three older adults (more than 60 years of age) and to develop statistics from the class data.

Objectives

1. Improve interviewing skills.
2. Increase awareness of the older adult perspective and situation.
3. Become familiar with statistics.



Materials

- ◆ list of questions
- ◆ writing utensil
- ◆ interview chart

Procedure

1. Select three adults (who are more than 60 years old) to interview. Assign an identification number to each. Do not include first or last names of the interviewees.
2. Conduct the interviews, and record their one-word emotional responses to the eight words listed in the provided chart (below).
3. Record your interview responses on a class results data table.
4. Total the number of similar responses to each word.
5. Discuss the results with classmates.



6. Answer the three “Debrief Questions,” and give these to your instructor.
7. Read the study using the emotionally charged words on performance in older and younger people. The study, “Positive Attitude Delays Ageing,” can be found on the BBC News Web site: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3642356.stm>.

Interview Responses to Eight Emotionally Charged Words

Directions: “Please tell me the first word that comes to mind when each of the following words are used to describe an older adult.”

Word	# ____ Answer	# ____ Answer	# ____ Answer
Confused			
Cranky			
Feeble			
Senile			
Accomplished			
Active			
Dignified			
Distinguished			

Debrief Questions:

1. What did you learn about interviewing an older adult?
2. What were your expectations about conducting the interviews?
3. In what ways did the interviewees conform to stereotypes about aging?