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Anne E. Barrett ^a; Laura E. Cantwell ^a

^a Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA

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DRAWING ON STEREOTYPES: USING UNDERGRADUATES' SKETCHES OF ELDERS AS A TEACHING TOOL

**Anne E. Barrett
Laura E. Cantwell**

Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee,
Florida, USA

Using data collected from undergraduates at two large, public universities ($N = 183$), we examined features of student drawings (e.g., facial expressions) as reflections of dominant views of the elderly. Sketches depicted both negative (e.g., frailty) and positive stereotypes (e.g., kindness). They also illustrate gender inequality; for example, men are over-represented in the drawings relative to their proportion in the elderly population. We discuss the use of student drawings as a tool to stimulate discussion on the social construction of "old age," the double standard of aging, and the nature, origin, and consequences of ageism.

Teaching aging courses to undergraduate students of traditional ages can be difficult as a result of the devalued status of the elderly in American society. The negative view of older adults—a pattern documented in numerous attitudinal studies (for reviews, see Kite & Johnson, 1988; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005)—pervades cultural products that we begin consuming at young ages, including birthday cards, advertisements, and films (Ellis & Morrison, 2005; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; McConatha, Schnell, & McKenna, 1999; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2000). While the young may not hold more ageist attitudes than older adults (Kite & Wagner, 2002), they do have less complex views of the elderly, less knowledge about aging,

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Address correspondence to Anne E. Barrett, Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy, 636 W. Call Street, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1121. E-mail: abarrett@fsu.edu

and more anxiety about their own aging (Abramson & Silverstein, 2004; Kite et al., 2005; Lasher & Faulkender, 1993).

Ageist biases and misconceptions among students present a challenge to instructors who not only see many positive aspects of aging but also are aware of the many negative societal and individual-level consequences of ageism. To mention a few, in the health care arena the elderly often receive less aggressive treatment (Bowling, 1999; Guigliano et al., 1998); and, in the workplace they are rated less positively than younger job applicants (Avolio & Barrett, 1987).

Perhaps more insidious than discrimination, internalized ageism—which is widespread among the elderly (Levy, 2001)—is associated with a range of outcomes including hearing decline (Levy, Slade, & Gill, 2006); poorer cardiovascular functioning (Levy, Hausdorff, Hencke, & Wei, 2000); worse functional health (Levy, Slade, & Kasl, 2002); and weaker reports of will-to-live (Levy, Ashman, & Dror, 2000). While ageist assumptions among students present a challenge for instructors, tapping into student views toward the elderly provides opportunities to teach concepts that are central to courses in social gerontology or the sociology of aging. We discuss in this article the use of a teaching exercise that allows students to examine critically their own views of aging and the elderly. In this activity, we asked students on the first day of class to draw a picture of an elderly person. The sketches served as a springboard for a discussion on a range of topics including the social construction of age and “old age,” the influence of cultural and social structural relations on our attitudes toward the elderly, and strategies to combat ageism.

VIEWS OF THE ELDERLY

Among college students and the general population, misconceptions of the elderly and the aging process are widespread (Abramson & Silverstein, 2004; Palmore, 1998; Palmore, 1999). As an illustration, a recent study of 1,200 adults conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons found that the average respondent answered only about half of the 25 questions about aging correctly, with the young scoring lower than older adults (Abramson & Silverstein, 2004). Common misconceptions dealt with the proportion of elders in the population and living in nursing homes—both of which tended to be overestimated. A majority of respondents also incorrectly assumed that most elders are poor, lonely, and easily angered or irritated.

Perhaps stemming from misconceptions about aging, the elderly tend to be viewed less favorably than the young (Kite & Johnson,

1988; Kite et al., 2005). As Palmore (1999) notes, negative images of the elderly include depictions as invalid, impotent, ugly, senile, useless, isolated, and depressed. Other researchers have identified subcategories of elderly stereotypes—each associated with specific physical, behavioral, and personality characteristics. These subtypes include the recluse, the shrew/curmudgeon, the elitist, the vulnerable, and “senior citizen” who is characterized as lonely, powerless, and old-fashioned (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Hummert, 1990; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). Studies, however, also find evidence of positive stereotypes, including the perfect grandparent, “Golden Ager,” adventurer, and elder statesman (Brewer et al., 1981; Hummert, 1990; Hummert et al., 1994; Schmidt & Boland, 1986).

The primary method for assessing student views of the elderly involves surveys, such as Palmore’s Aging Quiz (Palmore, 1998), Children’s Assessment of Old People Scale (Carstensen, Mason, & Caldwell, 1982), and the Aging Semantic Differential Scale (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969). Another strategy that may be useful in the college classroom is suggested by the literature examining sketches of the elderly. Employed for decades as a means of measuring intelligence and personality problems (Di Leo, 1983; Goodenough, 1926; Harris, 1963), the use of sketches in examining attitudes toward the elderly is more recent (Falchikov, 1990; Lichtenstein et al., 2005; Mitchell, Wilson, Revicki, & Parker, 1985; Valeri-Gold, 1996; Weber, Cooper, & Hesser, 1996). We suggest that sketches drawn by college students provide not only a reflection of their views of the elderly and the aging process, but also a novel way of teaching concepts relevant to courses in social gerontology and the sociology of aging.

STUDENT SKETCHES OF THE ELDERLY

The relatively small literature examining sketches of elders focuses primarily on elementary and middle-school students. These studies demonstrate an early socialization to ageist assumptions (Falchikov, 1990; Lichtenstein et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 1985; Valeri-Gold, 1996; Weber et al., 1996). We argue that such assumptions are likely to be well-embedded and taken for granted by the time students enter college. As a result, sketches drawn by college students may tap implicit age stereotypes—defined as “thoughts about the attributes and behaviors of the elderly that exist and operate without conscious awareness, intention, or control” (Levy & Banaji, 2002, p. 51). Compared with responses to survey items, sketches may be less likely

to be filtered through social desirability screens. Drawing on this insight, we developed a teaching tool for use in undergraduate courses on social gerontology or the sociology of aging. Although our exercise was developed for undergraduates, we review studies of sketches employing younger samples because of the lack of research among older students.

Studies vary widely in their methods for examining the images, making comparisons difficult; however, they tend to find evidence of negative as well as positive stereotypes. Perhaps reflecting ambivalent views of the elderly, Lichtenstein et al. (2005) reported in a study noted for its large sample (nearly 2,000 sketches by middle-school students) that approximately 29% of the sketches could be viewed overall as positive, 22% negative, and 50% neutral. Similarly, in a sample of approximately 100 students between 8 and 11 years old, Weber et al. (1996) find that 59% of the sketches depicted the elderly as healthy and active; but, indicators of physical impairment were not uncommon. Of the sketches, 25% included canes, 15% wheelchairs, and 3% walkers. Although depictions of walking aids may reflect the stereotype of elders as physically impaired, the most frequently pictured devices were canes, which indicate less severe impairment, loss of independence, and stigma than wheelchairs or walkers. Revealing similar patterns, Lichtenstein et al. (2005) report that 30% of the drawings include canes or crutches; and, Valeri-Gold (1996) in a sample of 32 young adults finds that 22% included canes and nearly 13% depicted physical deformity. In contrast, signs of impairment are depicted more frequently in a study by Falchikov (1990) involving sketches drawn by 28 students between 10 and 11 years old. Over 80% of the sketches of elderly men and women included walking aids, and 36% of the pictures of old men included hearing aids. Providing further evidence of the marginalized status of the elderly, the Falchikov (1990) study found that sketches of elders are drawn smaller than those of younger people.

Other commonly illustrated features include baldness and wrinkles (Falchikov, 1990; Lichtenstein et al., 2005). Baldness was indicated in 28% of the sketches analyzed by Valeri-Gold (1996) and 31% of those examined in the Lichtenstein study. Wrinkles are depicted even more frequently. For example, Falchikov (1990) finds that most sketches of elders include wrinkles; however, she also notes a gender difference with this sign of aging pictured in 67% of the drawings of old men compared with 82% of the sketches of old women. This pattern may reflect the double standard of aging (Sontag, 1972) which leads physical signs of aging to be more harshly evaluated in women than men (Harris, 1994).

The depiction of facial expressions or emotions provides other indications of students' images of later life. Illustrating a negative view, sketches of the elderly are less likely than those of the young to include smiles (Falchikov, 1990). The stereotype of elders as lonely and depressed also is reflected in the study by Lichtenstein et al. (2005). They find that nearly half of the figures were drawn with smiles and 10% with frowns; however, follow-up questions with students revealed that only about 25% of the figures were viewed by their artists as happy. Reporting similarly mixed results, Valeri-Gold (1996) reports that 25% are drawn with positive facial expressions and nearly 38% with sad facial expressions. Other research reveals a more positive conception of later life. Weber et al. (1996) find that 62% of their students' sketches are depicted as happy, compared with 30% as neutral and only 9% as sad or angry.

Sketches also yield clues about students' views of elders' social participation and physical activity. Perhaps reflecting an image of elders as less socially and physically engaged than the young, relatively few sketches depict activities. For example, Lichtenstein et al. (2005) find that 13% illustrated walking, while even smaller percentages depicted other activities like cooking, driving, playing games, and watching TV. They also find that approximately half of the sketches depicted light activities (e.g., knitting, reading, or watching TV) or no activity at all. However, some of the drawings implied the involvement of elders in social roles and relationships. The most common was grandparenthood with approximately one-fifth of the sketches analyzed by Lichtenstein et al. (2005) indicating this role.

Although not a focus of prior studies, the examination of student sketches reveals patterns related to gender—a social factor strongly influencing the experience of aging. At the most basic level, gender shapes the likelihood of experiencing old age: Twice as many women as men celebrate their 85th birthday (Gist & Hetzel, 2004). This demographic reality of aging suggests that depictions of elderly women in student sketches would be more prevalent than images of older men. Contrary to this prediction, the Lichtenstein study (2005) finds that students tend to sketch a man when instructed to draw “a typical older person.” In an evenlydivided sample of males and females, they find that over 60% of the sketches depicted men. This may reflect the view of men as “subject” and women as the “other” that is defined in reference to men (de Beauvoir, 1953)—an orientation that contributes to a focus on older women’s “problems” and constraints as opposed to their strengths and their agency (Gibson, 1996). Consistent with the double standard of aging, wrinkles are more likely to be included in the sketches of women

(Falchikov, 1990). However, drawings of women also are more likely to depict some positive characteristics such as smiles, grandparenthood, and social activities (Lichtenstein et al., 2005).

While they have tended to be used to explore views of elementary and middle-school students, we argue that sketches also can be used to gauge college students' perceptions of the elderly and the aging process. They may tap implicit age stereotypes that are well-established by the time students reach college. This possibility—combined with the novelty and visual appeal of sketches—makes them an engaging way of teaching a range of concepts relevant to courses in social gerontology and the sociology of aging, including the social construction of age and “old age,” the double standard of aging, and the nature, origin, and consequences of ageism.

DATA

This class exercise has a serendipitous origin. As an ice-breaker on the first day of class, we asked students in our Aging and the Lifecourse undergraduate course in fall 2002 to draw a picture of an elderly person. This was done on the back of an index card on which students provided basic information about themselves (e.g., name, year, and major). A few students asked for further clarification (e.g., whether or not to draw their grandparent(s) or what was meant by an “elderly person”). We explained that they were to draw the first image that came to mind. The sketches unexpectedly yielded rich data on students' perceptions of the elderly. For example, a sizeable number of drawings depicted the elderly as unhappy or having significant physical impairments. Another interesting observation was a tendency to draw figures that were not clearly female or male. These observations led to the development of a tool used throughout the semester as a means of stimulating discussion on ageism and related topics. The exercise was repeated in our aging course in spring 2004 and again in spring 2005. We also supplemented our dataset with sketches drawn by students in two undergraduate aging courses taught by other instructors in spring 2004. We analyzed a total of 183 sketches that were drawn by students enrolled in sociology of aging or social gerontology courses at large, public universities in the South. Our observations regarding student responses to the exercise are drawn from our experiences teaching Aging and the Life Course, an upper-level sociology course enrolling approximately 45 students per semester.

Drawing on prior studies using drawings to measure attitudes (Falchikov, 1990; Lichtenstein et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 1985;

Valeri-Gold, 1996; Weber et al., 1996), we coded the sketches for content that might reflect students' perceptions of the elderly. We created variables indicating the gender of the figure drawn (i.e., female, male, both female and male [a minority of drawings include two or more figures] or indeterminate) and the facial expression depicted (i.e., smile, frown, other/indeterminate). Pictures also were coded for inclusion of various types of walking aids (i.e., none, cane, walker, wheelchair, or multiple aids), glasses, other physical aids (e.g., hearing aids and oxygen tanks), baldness/thinning hair, wrinkles, and the depiction of relationships with other people or pets. Because the inclusion of hands and/or feet might reflect an image of the elderly as active and engaged in their environments, we also coded for these features. Summary statistics for the variables are presented in Table 1.

Three raters coded the drawings on each variable. Interrater reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha statistics, ranged from 0.74 to 0.99 and averaged 0.92 across the variables, indicating a relatively high degree of agreement among raters. Variables that

Table 1. Description of undergraduate sketches of the elderly

Measure	Percentage
Gender of student:	
Female	73.77
Male	26.23
Gender depicted:	
Woman	36.61
Man	42.08
Both	3.28
Indeterminate	18.03
Facial expression depicted:	
Smile	58.47
Frown	3.83
Other/indeterminate	37.70
Physical features depicted:	
Walking aid(s)	32.79
Glasses	35.52
Bald/thinning hair	34.43
Wrinkles	40.98
Hands	46.45
Feet	44.26
Relationships with humans or pets	6.01
Type of picture:	
Face only	31.15
Body (not in a scene)	59.02
Body in a scene	9.84

Note: $N = 183$.

yielded less consistency across raters included gender of the figure depicted and facial expression. Cases in which all three raters did not agree were adjudicated by assigning the codes reported by two of the three raters. In the four instances in which none of the raters agreed, they discussed the pictures and came to a joint decision about the coding.

Other data examined include the gender of the artist. Because the age range in the original class was narrow, data on student age was not collected. One of the five classes included a few first-year graduate students. Their sketches were included in our sample but were too few to permit separate analysis.

RESULTS

In this section, we discuss the patterns observed in the drawings and their use in illustrating concepts and stimulating class discussion. The findings were discussed extensively early in the semester within the context of several lectures on the social structural bases of ageism and the social construction of age and “old age,” including its gendered nature. Statistical patterns were presented in graphical format on an overhead along with illustrative sketches by anonymous student artists.

Gender and Aging

Consistent with other research (Lichtenstein et al., 2005), there was a tendency to depict men more often than women. Approximately 37% of the sketches included a clearly female figure; the corresponding figure for illustrations of males is 42%. This pattern is striking not only because of the gender composition of the sample (i.e., 74% are female) but also the demographic reality of aging that suggests a more “female picture” of the elderly. In our class discussion, students were encouraged to consider the role of gender inequality in producing this pattern in the sketches. Discussions drew on the feminist insight that men tend to be defined as “subject” and women as “other,” defined only in relation to, and different from, men (de Beauvoir, 1953). We examined with the class the possibility that the instruction to draw “an elderly person” may have led many to picture men, despite their underrepresentation among the elderly. We also discussed ways that gender inequality shapes the experience of aging. For example, although women outnumber men in later life, they are more likely to be widowed (Kreider & Simmons, 2003), live

in poverty (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003), be disabled (McNeil, 2001), and be caregivers themselves (Dwyer & Coward, 1991).

Although students tended to draw men more often than women, we also observe that they were likely to draw a figure of their own gender. Approximately 70% of men included a male figure in their sketch, compared with only 36% of the women artists ($p < .001$). Similarly, 50% of women included a female figure compared with only 13% of men ($p < .001$). In class discussion, we asked students about their thought processes in deciding whether to draw a male, female, both, or neither. Some students indicated in our discussion (as others noted next to their drawings) that they were not artists, so they had simply decided to draw a stick figure—which they viewed as genderless, by definition. Others explained that they thought of their grandparents, most often a same-sex grandparent, which led to a discussion of the gendered nature of our social networks.

The absence of clear depictions of gender in a substantial minority of the sketches (18%) also stimulated discussion of the image of elders as “sexless”—lacking sexual desire, ability, and activity (see Figure 1 for an example). Although not analyzed as systematically as the drawings of elders, we have used a similar exercise in a course on the sociology of families and noted the clarity with which gender is depicted in student sketches of “a family.” In these drawings, a young family with small children is often illustrated. The genders of adults are clearly indicated by dress, hairstyle, relative height, or other physical features. Sharing these observations with students in the aging class led to discussion of the comparative absence of the clear depiction of gender in the sketches of elders. Several of the students’ explanations for this pattern reflected the stereotype



Figure 1. Sketch lacking a clear depiction of gender.

of elders as lacking sexual interest or ability. The discussion provided an opportunity to present information counter to this stereotype. Although the frequency of sex tends to decline with age, research indicates that older adults enjoy relatively high levels of satisfaction with their sex lives (Johannes & Avis, 1997). Students generated possible explanations, including lack of concern about pregnancy and greater comfort with their bodies and partners.

In our discussion with the class, we also linked the drawings of figures of ambiguous gender to the weaker relationship between gender and social roles in later life compared with early and middle adulthood. In particular, women's and men's roles in the domains of work and family tend to be more strongly influenced by gender in early stages of adulthood. In later life, at least two forces may reduce the salience of gender. First, women and men tend to occupy similar social roles: Both are likely to lack paid work roles, while the grandparent role may figure prominently. Second, there may be a weaker link between biological sex and gender role orientations in later life, as many women gain independence and self-confidence—characteristics traditionally associated with males. At the same time, many men acquire more female-typed traits such as nurturance and warmth (Gutmann, 1987).

Negative Stereotypes of the Elderly

Another observation that motivated this project focuses on perceptions of the emotional quality of elders' lives. A few sketches reflect the image of later life as an unhappy stage marked by isolation and depression. Although we found that only 4% of the figures were clearly frowning (see Figure 2), approximately 38% were not able to be determined; for example, some artists drew straight lines or wavy lines that curved slightly at the corners of the mouth (see Figure 3). We also found that smiles were less likely to be included in pictures that also contained physical aids (49% versus 63% of sketches without aids; $p < .08$) or baldness (43% versus 67% of sketches that do not picture baldness; $p < .002$). A similar pattern was found for smiles on figures with wrinkles (55%) versus those without (61%); however, the difference is not significant. We note that our use of this exercise in a course on the sociology of families yielded a different pattern. In student sketches of "a family," typically a young family with small children is drawn—all with smiles. This observation is consistent with research indicating that smiles are more likely to be drawn on young than old figures (Falchikov, 1990). The patterns in facial expressions led to discussions on a range of topics. These



Figure 2. Sketch clearly indicating a frown.

included stereotypes of elders as isolated and depressed; positive aspects of aging; and variation in emotional well-being in later life by such factors as gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Students generated numerous sources of negative images, including television, movies, advertisements, birthday cards, and ageist jokes and language. They also were encouraged to think about features of our society that contribute to the social isolation and loneliness experienced by some elders. These included cultural and social features like the high value of independence, the lack of public transportation in many communities, and the emphasis placed on the nuclear family.

The illustration of emotions also relates to gendered expectations regarding aging, as well as emotional expression. Sketches that included women were more likely than those without female figures to include smiles (74% compared with 48%; $p < .005$). Revealing a similar pattern, female students were more likely to draw smiles than were males (64% compared with 42%; $p < .006$). These observations stimulated a discussion of gender differences in images of later life. Students noted that they tended to associate images of older women with the grandmother role, which they assumed was very rewarding. They identified a wider range of stereotypes of older men including not only the (happy) grandfather image but also the shrew/curmudgeon and elder statesman. Our discussion of these observations also covered gender stereotypes defining women as more emotionally expressive than men—an assumption that is not supported by research (Simon & Nath, 2004)—but remains widespread.

The sketches also reflected images of sickness, frailty, and “ugliness” (see Figures 3, 4, and 5). Of all the drawings, 43% included a physical aid (excluding glasses). However, canes were more common (26%) than walkers (3%) or wheelchairs (2%). Of all the drawings, 35% included glasses. Other physical signs of aging were drawn with similar frequencies: 34% of all the drawings (and 62% of the sketches including male figures) illustrated baldness or thinning hair, and 41% included wrinkles. Although falling short of significance, wrinkles were somewhat more common on sketches that contained female figures compared with those depicting only males (45% versus 38%). However, physical aids were depicted significantly less frequently in sketches of women than men (23% versus 40%; $p < .02$). These features of the sketches sparked discussions of the social and psychological origins of the stereotype of elders as frail and dependent. They also resulted in discussions of the cultural meanings attached to signs of aging such as wrinkles and the use of various physical aids. Students generated a range of explanations for their views. Explanations included students’ relatively infrequent contact with elders, negative portrayals of the elderly in various media, and fear of death (which tends in modern societies

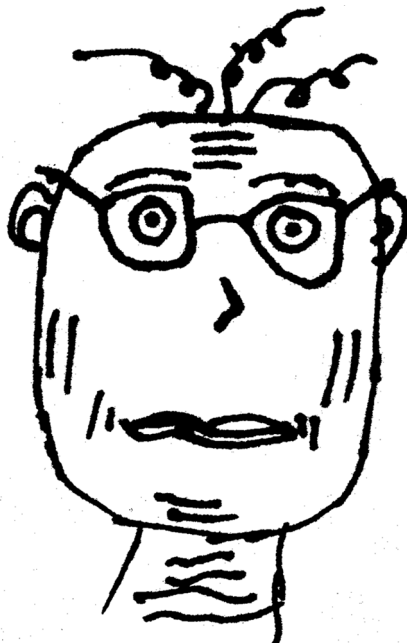


Figure 3. Facial expression not clearly a smile or a frown.



Figure 4. Image of frailty.

to occur among the elderly). The discussion also covered possible means of changing these images, including collective efforts to encourage more cross-generation contact (e.g., day care centers connected with senior centers) as well as individual-level strategies (e.g., avoiding

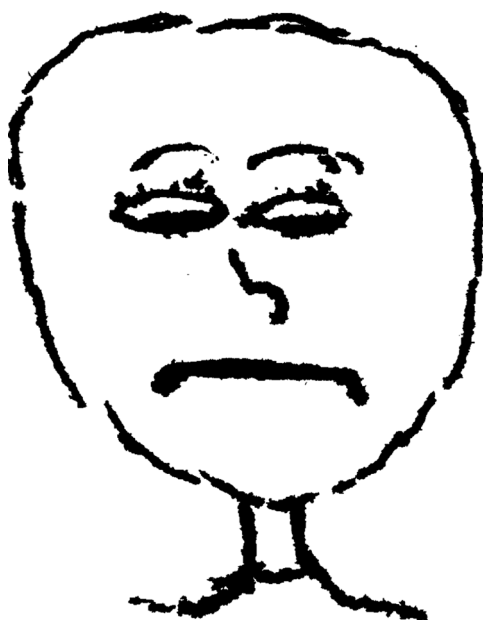


Figure 5. Stereotype of elders as ugly.

ageist language). Our discussion of the stereotype of the elderly as “ugly” included a comparison of American culture’s definition of physical signs of aging as unattractive with, for example, the Japanese view of wrinkles and silver hair as symbols of wisdom (Palmore & Maeda, 1985).

Other stereotypes depicted in the sketches were fodder for class discussion. For example, pictures of elders collecting Social Security checks from their mailboxes or driving slowly or ineptly (see Figure 6). Sketches of stereotypical retirement activities, such as golf and vacationing, were discussed in relation to images of the elderly as useless and mentally inept—as a drain on social resources and participating in self-indulgent activities. These pictures led to a discussion of the characterization of later life as a “roleless role” that offers few expectations and little status (Burgess, 1960). This also provided an opportunity to tie our discussion to readings from their textbook (Quadagno, 2004) on modernization theory. This theory argues that industrial and economic development decreased the status and power of the elderly by increasing their proportion in the population, reducing their value as holders of knowledge to be passed on to younger generations, attenuating intergenerational family ties, and replacing mystical explanations for longevity with scientific ones (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972). As a counterpoint to the depiction of elders as socially inactive, we presented statistics on elders’ family and



Figure 6. Image of the elderly as recipients of government support.

community involvement including the significant number of grandparents caring for their grandchildren (Simmons & Dye, 2003).

Positive Stereotypes of the Elderly

Many images drew on positive stereotypes. Capturing the students' somewhat ambivalent views—as well as the coexistence of divergent stereotypes—one sketch clearly indicated that elders are either “very nice or very mean” (see Figure 7). Several sketches depicted the “kindness” stereotype discussed by Palmore (1999). We find that these images—for example, the depiction of elderly women baking cookies (see Figure 8)—tend to depict grandmotherly figures rather than older men. Approximately 13% of the pictures including female figures, compared with less than 1% of those without women, depicted relationships with other people or pets ($p < .0003$). In

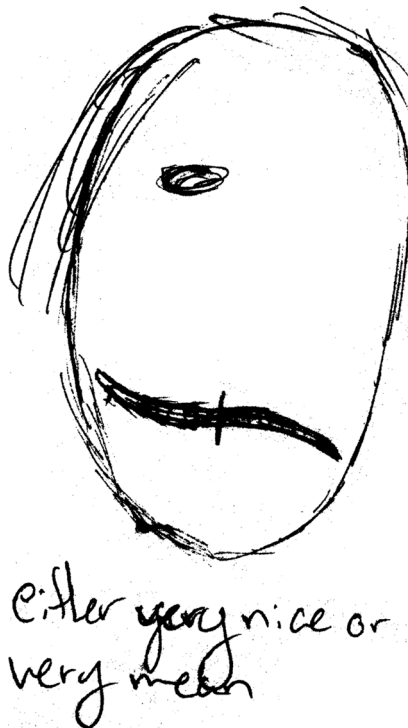


Figure 7. Sketch capturing divergent stereotypes of the elderly.

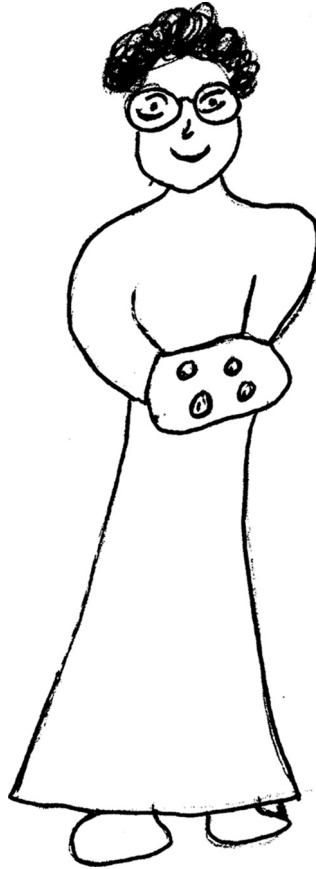


Figure 8. Image depicting the kindness stereotype.

addition, of the approximately 6% that illustrated or implied relationships with others, most were positive images such as depictions of grandmothers. These patterns led to discussions of the roles of elderly women and men in their families. There were also discussions of the social construction of gender which leads women to be viewed as more generous and self-sacrificing than men.

Although too few to warrant statistical analysis, several sketches indicated an image of the young-old as active and physically fit (e.g., jogging and flexing muscles). Drawing on the numerous references to “successful aging” in the gerontology literature, we suggested that these images may be seen as pictures of “super-successful

aging.” Showing these sketches to the class was a useful way to stimulate discussion of our perceptions of the controllability of the aging process. Such were particularly appropriate in light of American culture’s emphasis on individual responsibility as well as the considerable inequality that exists in access to resources facilitating “successful aging.” The sketches also provided an introduction to critiques of the cultural emphasis on “active aging,” which has become nearly a moral imperative in Western societies (Katz, 2000).

Social Construction of Age and “Old Age”

Although primarily used in the context of teaching about ageism, the sketches also were employed as an illustration of the various ways that age can be defined, as discussed in their textbook (Quadagno, 2004). Figure 9 illustrates four ways of defining age in general and “old age” in particular. Functional age, which defines old age by level

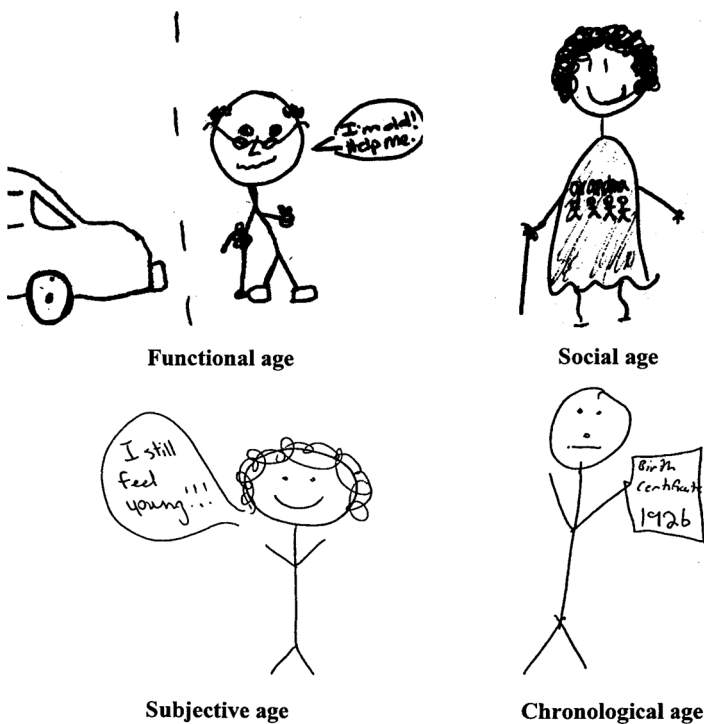


Figure 9. Sketches illustrating four ways of defining age.

of physical ability, was illustrated by many sketches, including those depicting physical or mental impairments. For example, several students drew pictures depicting the elderly as unable to drive well or needing assistance in crossing the road. Age can also be defined in relation to the social roles that one occupies, with old age indicated by an absence of some roles (e.g., paid worker) or the presence of other roles (e.g., grandmother). Another way of defining age involves subjective assessments of one's age, which is illustrated by the drawing of an elder exclaiming, "I still feel young!" Chronological age is illustrated by drawings of elders holding a birth certificate, for example, or wearing a T-shirt indicating one's year of high school graduation.

In addition to their extensive use early in the semester to illustrate concepts relating to ageism and the social construction of age, the drawings were often used in the beginning of class as a way to introduce the day's topic. For example, at the beginning of a discussion on retirement, illustrations of stereotypical retirement activities were shown on an overhead. We discussed the image of retirement as a leisure-filled time of life, which led to a discussion of social factors that influence the likelihood and experience of retirement.

DISCUSSION

We find that sketches of "an elderly person" drawn by college students illustrate many of the stereotypes noted in the literature including impairment, impotence, ugliness, and isolation. Although some images were negative, other depicted positive stereotypes such as the image of elders—particularly women—as kind, grandmotherly, cookie-baking types. The patterns revealed in our sample of undergraduates are generally consistent with prior studies examining sketches drawn by younger students. As illustrations, students are more likely to draw elderly men than women (Lichtenstein et al., 2005); and, approximately a third of the sketches include walking aids (Lichtenstein et al., 2005; Valeri-Gold, 1996). Also consistent with prior work (Lichtenstein et al., 2005; Valeri-Gold, 1996; Weber et al., 1996), our findings regarding facial expressions suggest that, although smiles are frequently drawn, students express ambiguity about the emotional quality of later life. This was revealed in our study by the substantial minority of sketches (38%) with indeterminate facial expressions.

Discussing these patterns with our classes was an effective strategy for teaching various concepts in our social gerontology course, including ageism, the social construction of age and "old age," and

issues at the intersection of ageism and sexism. Several features of our exercise are appealing. Drawing on the literature on implicit ageism (Levy & Banaji, 2002), we suggest that responding to an attitudinal item regarding one's views of the elderly or late life may be more biased by social desirability than a sketch of an elder. Sketches may involve less conscious reflection on particular qualities of elders and may, therefore, provide a more accurate reflection of age-related attitudes and perceptions. In addition, we find this activity to be useful because it stimulates discussion on a range of topics and involves a novel source of data. In our experience, the students seemed to enjoy seeing and discussing their sketches over the semester. For many students, the discussion of their own sketches appeared to mark a realization of their own biased views of the elderly, which connected them to the course materials in a more personal way. Further, learning early in the semester to see any cultural product as a potential source of data may have led the students to bring more unique observations of their own to other class discussions. Students would frequently bring materials to class like magazine advertisements or observations regarding the depiction of elders in films. Such participation may have been stimulated by encouraging students early on to think broadly about the social origins of their assumptions about old age.

We found this teaching tool to be beneficial for engaging students with the course material; however, the exercise should be replicated and its effectiveness empirically evaluated in a variety of classroom settings. For example, student scores on scales measuring knowledge or attitudes about the elderly could be assessed before and after the exercise in order to quantify its impact on student learning. Similarly, although the sketches stimulated considerable discussion and interest among our students, research should more rigorously examine student assessments of the exercise. In addition to conducting further evaluations, more work is needed that assesses sketches as measures of student views. To this end, we are collecting data that will allow us to compare features of the sketches, as coded by raters, with students' written descriptions of their sketches and their responses to surveys measuring attitudes toward the elderly. Such examinations will allow us to further explore the possibility that sketches reflect implicit attitudes (Levy & Banaji, 2002).

This teaching tool could be adopted for use in a variety of courses. We noted that we used a similar activity in a course on the sociology of families. We found it to be a useful way to stimulate discussion on cultural images of families. The sketches typically included a young, happy family with small children (and clearly distinguished genders,

particularly in the adult figures). Sharing these illustrations with the family class sparked discussion on a wide range of topics, including gender roles in families, the centrality of the nuclear family, and romanticization of parenthood in American culture. Related to aging—and ageism—the sketches of young families also provided an opportunity to point out that our increasing life expectancy means that we spend a much longer period of our lives as adult children with living parents (and even grandparents) than as dependent children. Our experience suggests that this sketch activity could be incorporated into other courses, such as the sociology of gender or social psychology. Another alternative would allow students to conduct the analyses themselves, perhaps in small groups, which would provide them with firsthand experience collecting data, conducting content analysis, and formulating and testing hypotheses.

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