# An Inconvenienced Youth? Ageism and Its Potential Intergenerational Roots

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Age is the only social category identifying subgroups that everyone may eventually join. Despite this and despite the well-known growth of the older population, age-based prejudice remains an understudied topic in social psychology. This article systematically reviews the literature on ageism, highlighting extant research on its consequences and theoretical perspectives on its causes. We then identify a crucial gap in the literature, potential intergenerational tensions, speculating how a growing-older population—and society's efforts to accommodate it—might stoke intergenerational fires, particularly among the younger generation. Presenting both sides of this incipient issue, we review relevant empirical work that introduces reasons for both optimism and pessimism concerning intergenerational relations within an aging society. We conclude by suggesting future avenues for ageism research, emphasizing the importance of understanding forthcoming intergenerational dynamics for the benefit of the field and broader society.

*Keywords:* ageism, age-based prejudice, intergenerational tension, hostile ageism

Though age, gender, and race are the three primary dimensions of interpersonal categorization (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Kite, Deaux, & Miele, 1991; Kunda, 1999), only age encompasses categories that every living person potentially joins. Despite this universality, surprisingly scant research examines age-based prejudice, compared with racism and sexism (Nelson, 2004, 2005). Indeed, a quick PsycINFO search (February 2012) yielded 8,491 entries with the keyword *racism* and 2,836 for *sexism,* but only 750 for *ageism.* Bugental and Hehman (2007) demonstrated the problem to be even more apparent when restricting the search to two of the premier social psychology journals; in the 20 years prior to their search, only one article on ageism appeared, compared with 50 and 33, respectively, for racism and sexism. Some researchers have attempted to explain this lack of research focus by citing the socially condoned nature of ageism, causing it to be overlooked altogether as a form of prejudice (Nelson, 2005; Palmore, 1999). Whatever the reason, age-based prejudice remains drastically underinvestigated, despite the salience of age in interpersonal judgments.

Notwithstanding an overall lack of research on the subject, evidence does indicate age prejudice to potentially complicate older people's quality of life (Butler, 1969; Nelson, 2004; Ng, 1998). As demonstrated by prejudice research concerning other social groups, stereotypes are not just static beliefs; rather, many have pernicious short- and long-term consequences. In the modern world, older people face reduced social and economic opportunities, damage to self-esteem, and exacerbated physical health problems, to name only a few consequences of ageist treatment. Adding more complexity, some note that along with negative elements of age-based stereotyping, *positive ageism* emerges via stereotypes of wisdom and happiness—in addition to practical benefits such special tax breaks, discounts, and housing programs (Palmore, 1999). Regardless of one's beliefs about the existence or nature of ageism, with average life expectancy increasing and the proportion of people over 65 in the United States estimated to double by the year 2030 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, & the Merck Company Foundation, 2007), improving elder well-being undoubtedly warrants urgent investigation.[1]

This article represents an attempt to bring ageism into the scientific psychology mainstream through a sociostructural, intergenerational lens. We first systematically review the ageism literature, discussing (a) its complex consequences on older people and (b) theoretical perspectives that explain its causes. Although acknowledging the utility of these perspectives, we then identify an important gap in the literature: (c) intergenerational tension-based ageism, which will potentially—though not inevitably—intensify as the older population grows more prevalent and necessitates a redistribution of societal resources. Drawing from empirical literature on ageism, intergenerational perceptions, and other types of prejudice, we present both (d) empirical bases for pessimism and (e) empirical bases for optimism concerning how well generations

[1] It is for this reason that the current article focuses on elders rather than youth, though we acknowledge that ageism goes both ways (and in fact targets people of any age, given the right context). Moreover, much as racism and sexism presuppose certain targets of prejudice, ageism tends to target older people most saliently—rendering them the logical starting point in a discussion on the subject.

might cope with shifting age dynamics. We conclude by suggesting (f) future avenues for research in this area, highlighting areas in which increased understanding of intergenerational perceptions seems particularly vital. Overall, this article elucidates what is known about the complex domain of ageism, suggests ways in which the field can move forward in testing new theoretical (particularly intergenerational) ideas, and ultimately hopes to spur more researchers to investigate this increasingly important phenomenon.

## Consequences of Ageism: Subtle and Complex

What research has been conducted on age-based prejudice and discrimination demonstrates it to be surprisingly pervasive, potentially infecting numerous societal facets. For instance, ageism appears in medicine, where medical schools underemphasize geriatrics (Levenson, 1981) and older people often face less aggressive treatment for common ailments, which are dismissed as a natural part of aging (Bowling, 1999, 2007). In the workplace, despite considerable research indicating that job performance does not decrease with age (e.g., Cleveland & Landy, 1983; Liden, Stilwell, & Ferris, 1996; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989), evidence indicates that older job applicants are rated less positively than younger ones, even when they are similarly qualified (Avolio & Barrett, 1987). Many older people also face discrimination in the form of abuse and neglect in nursing homes (e.g., Griffore et al., 2009; Malmedal, Ingebrigsten, & Saveman, 2009) and even within their own families (e.g., Coyne, Reichman, & Berbig, 1993; Gaugler, Leach, & Anderson, 2005; Pillemer & Wolf, 1986; Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2004). Still more disturbing, this form of ageism is likely underreported, due to caseworkers and doctors being less familiar with elder abuse than other forms of domestic violence (Nelson, 2005). Media representation of older people also tends to reflect age-based biases, as older people are traditionally underrepresented and typecast on television shows (Signorelli, 2001), precluded from lead roles in movies (Bildtgård, 2000), and stereotyped in magazine advertisements (Miller, Miller, McKibbin, & Pettys, 1999). Given the diverse societal facets of ageism, some argue that this form of prejudice is currently more prevalent than racism and sexism (Age Concern England, 2008; Banaji, 1999; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2005).

However, given ageism's noted complexity, this potentially bleak picture warrants some qualification. For instance, the U.S. government does allocate a disproportionate amount of health care dollars toward the over-65 population; more than one third of health care spending goes toward the older populace, despite their forming a mere 12% of the total population (U.S. DHHS, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2011). Also, whereas the family can be a source of abuse and neglect, it is far more often a source of positive elder interaction—to the point of helping foster positive attitudes toward older people in general (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005; Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, Voci, & Kenworthy, 2006). Moreover, although older people may not be commonly represented in mainstream media, evidence indicates that when they are featured, they are done so positively (e.g., happy, active, and strong; Dail, 1998; Roy & Harwood, 1997), are neglected in certain domains only (e.g., car marketing, but not financial service advertisements; Roy & Harwood, 1997), and experience disparate outcomes depending on gender (older men

come across more favorably than women; Vernon, Williams, Phillips, & Wilson, 1991). Complicating things further, despite ageism's apparent prevalence, emotional well-being tends to increase with age (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000). All of this reinforces the multifaceted nature of ageism and its consequences on targets.

Ageism is complex from the perpetrator's perspective as well. In fact, much of what would be considered ageist treatment is quite subtle in nature and often has well-intentioned roots. For instance, just as people address small children, well-meaning people unwittingly speak to older people using benevolent yet patronizing baby talk and demeaning, exaggeratedly slow and loud overaccommodation (Giles, Fox, Harwood, & Williams, 1994; Nelson, 2005; A. Williams & Giles, 1998). (This occurs more in certain contexts—such as hospitals—than in others; Hummert, Shaner, Garstka, & Henry, 1998.) Distancing is another common, indirect form of ageist discrimination and includes forms both physical (e.g., placing older people in retirement homes, avoiding places typically frequented by older people) and psychological (e.g., emphasizing differences in attitudes and traits between oneself and older people; Greenberg, Schimel, & Mertens, 2004). Sometimes, the intentions that yield ageist consequences are even more explicitly positive, such as when discourse with antiageist intent (e.g., "youthful old age") backfires by making poor health and frailty seem deviant (Coupland & Coupland, 1993). Similarly, governmental attempts to help the older population have been described as representing double-edged compassionate ageism. In this sense, economically assisting the deserving older population is apparently generous but nevertheless reinforces stereotypes of poverty, frailty, and dependence (Binstock, 2010). As another indication of ageism's often well-intentioned roots, predominant perceptions of older people as worthy of pity foster the typical behavioral combination of well-intentioned active facilitation (desire to help) but deleterious passive harm (neglecting and demeaning; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Ageism's indirectness factors heavily in workplace age discrimination, making it notoriously difficult to prove in court, despite age being a protected category under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Notwithstanding perpetrators' good intentions, stealth ageism and general societal beliefs about aging can take a toll on older people themselves. Negative stereotypes—such as forgetfulness—are disconcertingly difficult to overcome, persistent in the eyes of perceivers even in the face of targets' stereotype-incongruent behavior (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005). Older people may start to talk, think, and move more slowly as a result of receiving overaccommodated speech (Giles et al., 1994). Many internalize negative stereotypes, becoming more forgetful, sickly, and depressed, simply because they anticipate adopting such characteristics in their later life (Whitbourne & Sneed, 2004). Others may suffer lower self-esteem or less control as a result of ageist self-fulfilling prophecies (Rodin & Langer, 1980). With age, people risk internalizing negative age stereotypes; then, via a process of self-stereotyping, these internalizations present a host of deleterious consequences, including failing memory, cognitive confusion, physical frailty, and even cardiovascular responses to stress (Levy & Leifheit-Limson, 2009; Levy, Zonderman, Slade, & Ferrucci, 2009). Old-age stereotypes are powerful enough that in some cases, young people will enact them if primed with elder stereotypes (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996), despite implicitly holding

positive attitudes toward older people (Cesario, Plaks, & Higgins, 2006).

Fortunately, research has begun to focus on ways to combat ageism's negative effects. A particularly encouraging line of research has demonstrated the importance of older people's positive self-perceptions—that is, their attitudes toward their own aging process. Holding positive self-perceptions of aging yields numerous benefits, including increased functional health and longevity, as well as resistance to cardiovascular problems and hearing loss (Levy, Slade, & Gill, 2006; Levy, Slade, & Kasl, 2002; Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002; Levy et al., 2009). In a related vein, the subtle priming of positive aging stereotypes improves performance in related domains, particularly memory tasks (Levy, 1996). Moreover, notwithstanding Bargh et al.'s (1996) seminal finding, in many cases younger adults often do not assimilate to primed age stereotypes; in fact, a contrast effect can emerge if the old-age prime is clearly irrelevant to their age group identity (such as when an elder exemplar spurs younger people to actually walk faster; Dijksterhuis et al., 1998). All of these findings provide hope that older people can combat the effects of negative age stereotypes if they perceive such perceptions as off base. Still, this relatively new line of research needs more investigation.

Another positive development has been the recent rise of research on the benefits of getting older, rather than its handicaps. Numerous researchers have tested the notion that "older is wiser," and a variety of paradigms have demonstrated the veracity of this statement. For instance, older people act more rationally (i.e., stably) than their juniors across various problem-solving tasks (Tentori, Osherson, Hasher, & May, 2001) and more wisely reason about social conflicts (Grossmann et al., 2010). Also, whereas people do face declines in fluid intelligence as they age (i.e., slower in cognitive speed and novel processing; e.g., Bugg, Zook, DeLosh, Davalos, & Davis, 2006), they do not show the same pattern for crystallized knowledge or experience (e.g., Horn & Cattell, 1967). A significantly positive relationship between age and cognitive complexity also emerges in the realm of language use (Pennebaker & Stone, 2003). Moreover, as noted, older people are generally more emotionally healthy, enjoying higher levels of socioemotional regulation, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and duration of positive emotional experience (Blanchard-Fields, 2007; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005; Carstensen et al., 2000; Helson, Kwan, John, & Jones, 2002; L. M. Williams et al., 2006), as well as reduced neuroticism (Loehlin & Martin, 2001). Despite these boons, exaggerated beliefs about sad, frail, lonely elders persist from the interpersonal to the societal level. To understand why this might be the case, we now turn to theoretical explanations that account for ageism.

## Extant Social-Psychological Theories Used to Explain Ageism

Clearly, the overall picture of ageism is complicated. Fortunately, theoretical perspectives on ageism—largely applied from existing, more general social-psychological theories—have provided a significant foundation for understanding the roots of age-based prejudice. Such theories provide a robust understanding, operating at several levels: individual, interpersonal, evolutionary, and sociocultural. We highlight each in turn but focus on the latter level as the most relevant to the current article, given its focus on ageism's potential broad, sociostructural, intergenerational roots.

### Individual-Level Theories

At the individual level, theorists have described age stereotyping as serving an ego-protective function. For instance, one approach conceptualizes ageism in terms of terror management theory (TMT, e.g., Becker, 1973), positing that when confronted with the realization of their own mortality, people push away reminders of eventual death (i.e., older people) and identify more closely with similar others (i.e., younger or middle-aged people; Greenberg et al., 2004; Popham, Kennison, & Bradley, 2011).

Social identity theory (SIT), which highlights the relationship between personal identity and group identity along with the need to feel positive about one's group, may also account for ageism. According to SIT's individual-level predictions, younger individuals should identify more strongly with their ingroup (other younger people) and consequently push away outgroup members (older people) in an effort to promote self-esteem (Kite & Wagner, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). (Older people may also do so, but as noted, we focus here on prejudice against elders, rather than among them.)

A functional approach to age stereotyping (Snyder & Miene, 1994) likewise explains ageism at the individual level: Ageism may serve an ego-protective function that buffers the self from the threat of getting older (similar to TMT) or a social function that facilitates interaction with the young ingroup (similar to SIT). Buttressing all of these individual-level theories is the finding that negative attitudes toward death significantly predict devaluation of older adults among younger and middle-aged people (Collette-Pratt, 1976; Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2004).

### Interpersonal Theories

Other theories step away from the individual and focus directly on face-to-face interactions. Many of these perspectives emphasize the role of older people's physical appearance in fostering ageism (Palmore, 2003). One such premise is that ageism develops due to *negative halo effects*—that is, because older people are perceived as generally unattractive, they are also seen as having negative traits and abilities (Langlois et al., 2000). Another approach incorporates *overgeneralization effects,* whereby people believe that because older people's appearance implies certain traits (e.g., lonesome, inferred from droopy eyes; sad, inferred from stooped posture), then they must be that way (Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2004). One other appearance-based theory centers on how older people's facades generally lend clues about interaction potential. These clues, dubbed *social affordances,* may cause children, for instance, to learn that the wrinkles or slow gait in an older person signify someone who is not enthusiastic or outgoing (Palmore, 2003). Each of these theories highlights the idea that older people may be devalued simply from having more repellent bodily blemishes than the average person; these uncontrollable, highly visible characteristics undoubtedly devalue older people, paralleling other types of stigma as a marked status (Bugental & Hehman, 2007; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Jones et al., 1984).

## Evolutionary Theories

Some ageism accounts suggest an evolutionary basis for the devaluation of older people. One study found that in hypothetical decisions to help, Darwinian cues for inclusive fitness lead to decisions with ageist implications—specifically, younger, fit people are favored over older, infirm people, and the healthy are favored over the sick (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994). This notion is supported by findings that ageism intensifies when people feel vulnerable to infectious diseases (Duncan & Schaller, 2009). Another suggestion is that people have evolved to perceive changes in older people's appearance and behavior as signs of weakness (Jensen & Oakley, 1980). Though not addressing ageism directly, one evolutionary approach to stigma (Kurzban & Leary, 2001) identifies people who indicate contagion (e.g., frequent illness) and those who lack the promise of ongoing resource-holding as prime targets for social exclusion; predominant perceptions of older people fit the bill on both counts. Others cite sociodevelopmental evidence that people are hardwired to hold ageist beliefs. Illustrating this, children hold prejudicial feelings and stereotypic beliefs about older people as early as age 3 (Seefeldt, Jantz, Gapler, & Serock, 1977), which continue through adolescence (Doka, 1985–1986), apparently rendering inevitable lifelong prejudices (Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2004).

A broader, socioevolutionary, sociofunctional perspective of intragroup relations can also explain ageism (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007). According to this theory, people have evolved to live in effective, interdependent groups to maximize group (and, consequently, individual) success. As a result, when certain group members threaten group returns, corresponding reactions ensue. Older people may be perceived as threats in that they allegedly cannot reciprocate benefits from other group members. This generally leads to paternalistic, prosocial helping behavior toward them as ingroup members, but in some cases, their perceived inadequacy in assisting ingroup success can also foster anger and resentment. Given its broad applicability to different social groups living in a society (particularly older people), we return to the sociofunctional approach in our sociostructural discussion of ageism.

## Sociocultural Theories

Sociohistorical accounts of ageism cite major events that caused society as a whole to evolve in ageist ways. Nelson (2005) emphasized two such occasions: The first, the advent of the printing press, naturally improved record keeping of important events; this in turn replaced the traditional storytelling, wisdom-sharing role of older people. The second turning point was the industrial revolution, which necessitated greater mobility in the family (to relocate for available jobs) and placed increased value on workers who could quickly adapt to and perform difficult manual labor tasks, with less value on experienced employees per se (Butler, 2009; Nelson, 2005). Some theorists have suggested other causes as a result of modernization. For instance, improved education has created a literate majority of young people and thus reduced the role of older people as primary sources of knowledge. Another consequence of modernization is improved medical care, which has created a disproportionately large (and ever-increasing) older population that society has not traditionally accommodated (Cuddy & Fiske, 2004).

In a related vein, a social role perspective on ageism might link perceptions of older people with the societal roles they are seen as playing—a theory used to explain beliefs about other social groups (predominantly women; Eagly, 1987). For instance, because many older adults are retired, they might be correspondingly perceived as less agentic (Kite & Wagner, 2004). These hypotheses may explain why older people are less valued than in the past, and indeed, studies show that an unfortunate but common attitude toward older people is that they are dispensable and useless members of society (Levy & Banaji, 2004).

Other theories focus on modern social structure in fostering prejudice, including ageism. The stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) theorizes that the dimensions of warmth ("How friendly and trustworthy are this person's intentions?") and competence ("How well can this person enact those intentions?") are fundamental in people's perceptions of others. As established by convenience samples of older and younger adults and by a U.S. national random-sample survey, warmth and competence combinations drive perceivers' stereotypes, emotional prejudices, and behavioral reactions toward members of specific groups. From this standpoint, older people by default compose a pitied social group—that is, stereotypically warm but incompetent. This pattern is in contrast to pride-inducing societal reference groups (stereotypically high in both warmth and competence), envied groups (competent but not warm), and contemptible, disgusting groups (low on both).

Reflecting ageism's complexity, mainstream society quite reliably stereotypes older people in a simultaneously positive and negative light—that is, as both warm and incompetent (Cuddy & Fiske, 2004; Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005; Fiske et al., 2002; Glick & Fiske, 2001). The high-warmth, low-competence perception of older people is not only pervasive—spanning Eastern cultures traditionally believed to hold their elders in higher esteem—but also persistent, even in the face of counterstereotypic behavior (Cuddy et al., 2005, 2009). Importantly, warmth and competence stereotypes drive (and derive from) sociostructural perceptions of cooperativeness and status, respectively. Given their high-warmth, low-competence stereotype, in the default case, older people are correspondingly viewed as noncompetitive and low status (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002). Low-competence elder stereotypes resemble the sociofunctional threat of nonreciprocation, as well as social role theory's described lack of agency.

Overall, these theories might seem pessimistic, portraying older people as irrelevant in a modernized society. However, because an ever-growing-older population will inevitably change the social structure of age and because older people will become increasingly difficult to ignore, so too might social structure-based perceptions of older people shift. Yet, resembling ageism's overall complexity, this shift can occur in a potentially positive or negative direction. In light of the sociocultural perspectives, which best capture broad societal perceptions of older people changing for the better or for the worse, we discuss these possibilities in the coming sections.

## An Important Gap: Potential Sociostructural, Intergenerational Tensions

A crux underlying virtually all of the reviewed ageism theories is that older people are largely absent from the mainstream—out of societal sight and mind. Individually, people are motivated to

push them away (e.g., TMT, SIT). They are allegedly unattractive and representative of undesirable traits from which people dissociate themselves (interpersonal). Ostensibly representing illness and contagion, they are to be avoided (evolutionary). Broader sociocultural theories portray older people as peripheral members of society: low in status and competitiveness (SCM), lacking in agency (social role theory), and allegedly nonreciprocating (sociofunctional) and useless in an industrialized, modernized world (sociohistorical). All of these notions jibe with common and all-too-accurate depictions of older people as invisible, existing far away from conventional media, marketing, and culture (Robinson & Skill, 1995; E. H. Thompson, 2007; N. J. Thompson & Thompson, 2009).

Nevertheless, sociostructural age dynamics are quickly changing in the United States. As noted, the older population is expected to double in the next 20 years. By 2050, the number of older people should swell to almost one fourth of the population, outnumbering the number of children for the first time in history (Gale, 2010; United Nations, 2002, 2009). According to experts, growth trends portend half of all children born since 2000 living past their 100th birthday (Tugend, 2011). In other words, the people society now considers older and irrelevant are about to become far more common and visible—perhaps more so than ever in modern society.

A more noticeable older population presents the very real chance of antiquating invisibility-driven stereotypes. Nevertheless, the way in which such a redefinition occurs could yield either positive or negative consequences. That is, the new older population will be bigger and potentially more influential than ever but also potentially more depletive, putting an unprecedented burden of care on younger generations. Either way, prevailing beliefs about older age eventually making way for young may not continue to function as they traditionally have.

Various media outlets have taken note of these possibilities. For instance, *The New York Times* now contains a regular online section on "The New Old Age" (http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com). A plethora of bestselling books have also emerged in this arena, both relatively optimistic (e.g., Ken Dychtwald's, 1999, *Age Wave: How the 21st Century Will Be Ruled by the New Old*) and relatively pessimistic (e.g., Susan Jacoby's, 2011, *Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*). Posturing on budgetary issues concerning Medicare and Social Security, political leaders have also recognized the delicate, hot-button issue of the newly prominent older population and its implications for intergenerational resource distribution. In all cases, there is potential for resentment against the older population as policymakers strive to maintain generational balance.

Unfortunately, psychological research has lagged behind mainstream pundits in pondering the intergenerational consequences of an aging population. In fact, social scientists have seldom cited generational differences as a mechanism in age prejudice at all (for a notable exception, see Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Braithwaite (2004) did note that "stepping back to take a broader view of our institutional structures for dealing with all types of 'isms' may be a necessary first step for making progress on addressing ageism" (p. 332). Despite this and in spite of other social psychologists lamenting social psychology's lack of focus on broad sociostructural forces (Oishi, Kesebir, & Snyder, 2009), intergenerational dynamics are nevertheless largely missing from the ageism literature.

Part of the reason for psychology's lack of intergenerational focus might be that research has been largely uncertain about whether younger people particularly hold ageist attitudes toward their elders (Kite & Wagner, 2004). In identifying ageist perpetrators—at least as measured by general attitudes toward aging and the aged—studies have found equal evidence for younger and older ageists (Bailey, 1991; Chasteen, Schwarz, & Park, 2002; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Some research has even suggested that older people themselves are the greater culprits (Hellbusch, Corbin, Thorson, & Stacy, 1995; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005), corroborated by recent evidence that younger people hold greater positive attitudes toward older people than previously thought (as measured by the Fraboni Scale of Ageism; Fraboni, Saltstone, & Hughes, 1990; Lin, Bryant, & Boldero, 2010). However, other studies have implicated younger people as the greatest endorsers of negative old-age stereotypes (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995; Kalavar, 2001; Rupp et al., 2005; Sanders, Montgomery, Pittman, & Balkwell, 1984). Although clearly inconclusive, this overall body of research suggests that people of all ages are prone to reacting negatively to the concepts of aging and the aged, presumably due to universally associated negative characteristics of both (e.g., reminders of mortality and unattractiveness).

Still, a sociostructural analysis might yield different results, in that different generations might feel differently about generational deservingness. In the modern era, age groups typically take their turn at reaping different levels of societal resources. Younger people start out with very few resources; for instance, many are dependent on caregivers for support, and society curbs various freedoms (e.g., driving and voting restrictions; Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004; Westman, 1991). As people grow into middle age, they reap many more resources—including maximal prestige, influence, income, wealth, employment, mainstream media coverage, and societal leadership positions (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004; Gerbner, 1998; Rodríguez, Díaz-Giménez, Quadrini, & Ríos-Rull, 2002; Szafran, 2002; Todaro, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Eventually, at some point in older age, people begin to tail off, largely stepping down from prominent positions and ceding a degree of resources (and, as discussed, receiving less mainstream exposure). Though this pattern may not hold universally within particular societal sectors (e.g., athletics may favor the younger, and certain political offices may favor the older), broader society tends to follow default age progression—spurring pity for older people but also relegating them to a low-status, irrelevant position.

Yet the rapid growth of the older population, along with the potentially more visible new old age alters the system, adding a layer of ambiguity to the traditional pattern and changing the dynamics of intergenerational interdependence. It is not so clear whether younger generations will appreciate an old-age revolution if they themselves are negatively affected by it (as underscored by Social Security concerns). In other words, in contrast to global, negative attitudes toward aging—which, as noted, potentially implicate people of all ages—sociostructural, resource-based research approaches might yield more age-differentiated results, with people tending to favor their own generation. This is not to say that intergenerational conflict is inevitable, nor that pure harmony is entirely feasible; each potential outcome presents a wealth of empirical and social questions to be investigated. For now, we

can draw upon the empirical literature on ageism, age relations, and general intergroup prejudice to infer reasons for both optimism and pessimism in forthcoming intergenerational relations and perceptions.

## Empirical Bases for Intergenerational Pessimism

Several lines of evidence suggest grounds for pessimism based on intergenerational interdependence: resource threat, benevolent prejudices, prescriptive stereotypes, and age progressions.

### Resource Threat

As noted, age prejudice lacks theory on potential intergenerational competition over resources. Nonetheless, social psychological theories on other forms of intergroup prejudice do often stem from a finite-resource perspective (Allport, 1954)—a concept that dates back to at least the early 20th century (Sumner, 1906). For instance, classic realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1988) states that competition over scarce resources drives prejudice between groups. Other theories, such as the SCM and the sociofunctional approach, also view perceived conflict as a source of prejudice. Given an aging population, scarce resources, and the social structure of age almost certainly changing from the status quo in some form, forthcoming circumstances present risk for intergenerational prejudice and tension—particularly from younger generations who might bear the brunt of taking care of an enlarged older population.

From the standpoint of age specifically, it is possible that older people who increasingly delay retirement or receive an increasingly disproportionate amount of government funding will face backlash from a younger generation eager to take their turn at such societal rewards. Though empirical work in this area is sorely lacking, various social scientists have at least speculated about impending age wars between younger and older generations over scarce resources (Binstock, 2005; Dychtwald, 1999; Hamil-Luker, 2001; Kingson, Hirshorn, & Cornman, 1986; Longman, 1986; Minkler, 1991/2006). In fact, some have argued that the very concept of a generation stems from interage conflict over cultural resources (Turner, 1998).

Although work on age-based resource tension is lacking, broader work on prejudice indicates that favorable or mixed views of a stigmatized outgroup can quickly turn into purely antagonistic ones if the outgroup becomes a direct threat (Dear & Gleeson, 1991; Lee, Farrell, & Link, 2004). Likewise, when an outgroup's goals conflict with those of the ingroup, the ingroup ascribes negative traits toward the outgroup (e.g., untrustworthy, ill intentioned) and experiences negative feelings toward it (Fiske & Ruscher, 1993). If the younger generation starts perceiving the older one as inhibiting its own success, these reactions are likely to be particularly strong. Sociofunctionally speaking, "people are most attuned to threats to ingroup success when there are tangible outcomes at stake" (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005, pp. 772–773).

### Benevolent Prejudices

Extant prejudice research also depicts subtle, benevolent forms of prejudice (which ageism is, as delineated) turning overt and hostile due to interdependence-based tensions. For instance, the combination of male dominance in society and male–female interdependence in intimate spheres forms benevolent sexism; this combines paternalistic, benevolent prejudice (e.g., chivalry) toward women if they "know their place" with backlash and resentment if they act in threateningly nontraditional manners (as is the case with activist and agentic women; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Likewise, older forms of race relations spurred Whites to be motivated to view African Americans as benignly subservient—stemming from the combination of White superiority beliefs and the need for Black labor (Baron, 2000)—but risked hostility if Blacks acted in ways that were too assertive or "uppity" (Jackman, 1996). (Such a reaction is also reflected in people's willingness to scapegoat minority groups when they become successful; Glick, 2005.) Naturally, age groups are similarly independent, as they tend to live in the same society (not to mention often in the same family) and draw from the same resource pool. Thus, the risk for generational tension will be particularly ripe if younger generations view older ones as increasingly overstepping their boundaries.

### Prescriptive Stereotypes

Potential beliefs about what older people deserve in relation to the young reflect *should*-based, prescriptive stereotypes, which attempt to maintain a certain social status quo and control what other social groups are to do (in contrast with descriptive, *are*-based stereotypes; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Terborg, 1977). Again, researchers have applied this concept to forms of intergroup prejudice other than age, such as sexism (Rudman & Glick, 2001). However, as noted, forthcoming age trends might signal a broad violation of the traditional progression of age—whereby older people do not transition away from mainstream society as much as they traditionally have, thereby (possibly) infringing upon the traditional territory of younger generations.

### Age Progressions

Despite ageism's apparent similarities with other forms of prejudice, some elements are likely to differentiate it, given the unique, inevitable, universal progression of age. One approach proposes three distinct, age-driven domains within which younger people might be particularly motivated to hold prescriptive stereotypes aimed at curbing elder control of resources: ensuring older people's active succession of enviable resources, minimizing the older population's passive consumption of shared resources, and preventing elder identity infringement on symbolic resources. Though these domains yield various empirical questions to be tested, recent work has already implicated the young as the strongest endorsers of such stereotypes (North & Fiske, 2010, 2011). In their focus on a turn-based queue, these domains conceptualize a natural age-driven progression—thereby differentiating age (and ageism) from other social categories (and prejudices).

For instance, age groups take turns in enjoying prime resources; as noted, at some point, older people are expected to step aside and make way for younger generations. In this vein, *succession* suggests younger people's desire to limit older people's active control of envied resources, such as wealth, seniority, political clout, and, more recently, employment. Some pundits argue that elder per-

ceptions will shift increasingly from pity to envy, based on the predicted upsurge in healthy, pensioned older people with greater disposable incomes than many young workers (Friis, 1991). Others argue that the prevailing stereotype of American elders already constitutes a wealthy and powerful voting bloc (Binstock, 1985; Minkler, 1991/2006). The swelling of the older population might only exacerbate tensions made apparent by the recent recession, which has made all too salient the limited number of available jobs. A poor economy sparks debates about mandatory retirement within diverse professional fields, ranging from neurosurgery and gastroenterology to aviation and the judiciary and even to academia (Day, 2009; La Corte, 2009; Scarrow, Linskey, Asher, Anderson, & Selden, 2009; Thomson, Bernstein, & Leddin, 2008; Wilber, 2007). As real-world evidence for the delicacy of succession issues, older-worker layoffs and age discrimination claims have already reached record numbers (Elmer, 2009). From the standpoint of the younger generation, the outcry for older people to just retire already has intensified in recent years (e.g., Quindlen, 2009) and may only increase as the population's age imbalance grows.

Additionally, age groups take turns at reaping shared resources, such as when younger and middle-aged people pay into Social Security with the promise of enjoying the benefits in later life. Thus, in contrast to succession's active withholding of desirable resources and positions, a second potential area of intergenerational tension revolves around passive *consumption*, or depletion of shared, allotted resources. From the standpoint of the younger generation, a swollen older population might necessitate a redistribution of resources that will favor the old. Already, despite the fact that there are twice as many children as older people, governmental spending ratios range from four to one to three to one in favor of the older population (Howard, 2008). Additionally, despite currently representing less than a quarter of the total population, older people consume 51% percent of government expenditures for social services (Minkler, 1991/2006). The predicted increase of the older population intensifies fears that older people will bankrupt the economy and pillage natural resources by their sheer existence (Schulz & Binstock, 2006). With real concerns over Medicare and Social Security running out of funds (e.g., Wolf, 2011), younger people might resent elder depletion of social programs that the former may never enjoy. Complicating the issue, empirical experiments utilizing trolley-problem paradigms (where participants must choose to sacrifice one person to save a number of others or vice versa) indicate that people generally sacrifice older and other low-status people to spare other types of people (Cikara, Farnsworth, Harris, & Fiske, 2010). This finding suggests that policies catered toward the older population might face significant backlash.

Age groups take turns enjoying symbolic resources as well; for instance, what is considered "cool" among younger people tends to differ drastically from what is valued by other age groups. From this, a third, more figurative domain of intergenerational tension, *identity*, revolves around activities and roles usually reserved for the young. This dimension offers caution to those who envision a smooth reinvention of older age, with older people increasingly venturing into traditionally young territory. For example, research indicates that older people who attempt to cross ingroup boundaries, such as those who try to look younger, are no longer pitied but often resisted (at least as measured by vignettes about targets

in their 50s; Schoemann & Branscombe, 2011; Walz, 2002). In light of extant group identity-based theories, younger people might have particular motivation to maintain generational boundaries for two main reasons. The first centers around maintaining self- and group-level esteem; for instance, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would predict that younger people push away and demean older outgroup members as a means of protecting group-level self-worth, as does a functional approach to ageist stereotyping (Snyder & Miene, 1994). Likewise, the creation of a strong, exclusive youth culture may be a way of asserting autonomy and esteem among younger people (Bytheway, 1995; Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Sardiello, 1998), satisfying higher order needs for power and identity (Carroll, Howard, Vetere, Peck, & Murphy, 2002). Research supports these identity-based theoretical applications, in that younger people are more likely to mimic and look more favorably upon ingroup members who express stereotypic statements toward old-agers, rather than stereotype-inconsistent ones (Castelli, Pavan, Ferrari, & Kashima, 2009).

A second potential purpose of maintaining generational identity boundaries is the ego-protective maneuver of precluding identity threat. As noted, because older people are reminders of eventual mortality, younger people might emphasize a difference in attitudes and personality traits to maintain psychological distance (Greenberg et al., 2004). Snyder and Miene's (1994) functional approach also encompasses such motivations, explaining how barring older people from the young ingroup buffers the self from its future negative aspects, such as declines in daily functioning and physical appearance. From a scarce-resource (pessimistic) perspective, diminishing the identity of older people causes them to be viewed as repellent and societally useless; younger people may use this to create social inequalities, mirroring other forms of stigma-based prejudice (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).

Though more empirical investigation is warranted, from a theoretical standpoint, these domains (succession, consumption, identity) build upon the sociostructural theories of prejudice already described, in that each represents a potential elder departure from default perceptions of pity. In SCM terms, older people's succession-based denial of desired resources might be associated with envy—that is, a forfeiture of traditional high-warmth attributions but perhaps a (begrudging) gain of increased competence. By contrast, the consumption-based portrayal of older people as passive societal freeloaders might comprise the contemptuous combination of low warmth (i.e., selfishness) along with default low competence (i.e., dependency)—similar to that of other perceived parasitic social groups, such as homeless people. Additionally, identity motivations reinforce the ingroup pride cluster, in the sense that youth-based, ingroup boundaries exclude people (particularly older people) who are not "us." A sociofunctional perspective would corroborate all of these notions: Succession violations might arouse anger or envy among younger people and a consequent attempt to obtain desired resources (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005), overconsumption represents a threat to ingroup economic resources, property, and reciprocity relations—which arouses anger and disgust—and crossing identity boundaries might be a "contamination by an unpalatable object or idea" that yields active avoidance or rejection (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005, p. 772). Even social role theory would depict a newly obstructive older population as deviating from its traditional position of nonagency. In all cases, the growing-older population and related violations of

these intergenerational dimensions potentially give rise to novel, more hostile elder subtypes in the eyes of the young, as discussed later in this article.

## Empirical Bases for Intergenerational Optimism

Several lines of evidence suggest a more optimistic outlook: age-specific interests, improved elder images, increased contact, less cognitive impairment, and elder altruism.

### Age-Specific Interests

In spite of the potentially distressing picture depicted in the prior section, intergenerational tensions are not inevitable. Some question the inherent structural conflict between younger and older age groups. For instance, in contrast to Turner's (1998) noted views on generational conflict, Irwin (1996, 1998) countered that little empirical evidence supports different age groups' sharing homogeneous interests; by extension, there is therefore little motivation to pit their interests against those of other generations, as doomsayers claim. Similarly, Higgs and Gilleard (2010) argued that the situation is more complex than mere generational tensions over resources. In particular, they argued that social policies (such as Social Security) do not have nearly the impact on generational relative well-being that more powerful, volatile market forces do. A similar argument avers that the aging of the population is a fairly minor factor in the rising cost of health care, as compared to the alternative explanation of health-related costs simply outpacing the general rate of inflation (Binstock, 2010; Reinhardt, 2003).

### Improved Elder Images

Moreover, though a larger, older population possibly enhances perceptions of intergenerational competition over resources, such a development can also improve long-held perceptions of older people. Research has already demonstrated that younger people, when given the opportunity, can subtype older people in meaningful and often positive ways. For example, Brewer, Dull, and Lui (1981) first showed that younger people reliably differentiate the nurturing "grandmother" and distinguished "elder statesman" from the lonely "senior citizen." Follow-up work by Schmidt and Boland (1986)—and later Hummert (1990)—suggested that younger people's favorable representations of older people can get even more specific, including the "John Wayne conservative," "perfect grandparent," and "sage." A greater, more diverse pool of older people might mean even more opportunities for positive elder subtypes to emerge in the eyes of the young, particularly if the predicted redefinition of older age occurs.

### Increased Contact

Additionally, shifting age dynamics will likely necessitate greater intergenerational interaction. Fortunately, a wealth of social psychological research suggests that intergroup contact can effectively reduce prejudice, under the right circumstances (Amir, 1969; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Specific to intergenerational interaction, high levels of contact with older people predict low levels of ageist stereotypes, regardless of perceiver age (Hale, 1998). Existing evidence already indicates that high-quality intergenera-tional interaction can be a successful buffer for elder stereotype threat, allowing older targets to overcome beliefs about cognitive impairment (Abrams, Eller, & Bryant, 2006). Other research suggests that arenas in which generations already tend to interact homogeneously–such as religious communities—are effectively free of ageist sentiment (Evans, 2011; Grefe, 2011). These findings indicate that more frequent intergenerational contact might yield significantly positive social outcomes.

### Less Cognitive Impairment

When contact between members of different age groups has not worked, it has often been because older people confirm prior stereotypes of cognitive impairment (Griff, Lambert, Dellmann-Jenkins, & Fruit, 1996; Seefeldt, 1987). Yet, in line with the idea of older age's reinvention, increasingly more research is starting to show that age-related cognitive decline is largely overblown (Verhaeghen, 2011). For example, the link between age-based neuro-anatomical changes and age-related cognitive decline is less clear than traditionally believed (Salthouse, 2011). Naturally, this is a contentious issue and one that has already become a prime research topic, in large part due to the continual fight against Alzheimer's disease. Nevertheless, much as increased contact might beget positive intergenerational perceptions, so too should increased awareness of the exaggerations of age-related cognitive decline.

### Elder Altruism

More directly related to intergenerational competition, empirical evidence suggests that older people who are demonstrably altruistic can escape perceptions of stinginess and self-interest. For example, research indicates that many older people would be willing to give up their place in line for cardiac services and believe that this is the right thing to do (Mariotto et al., 1999). Likewise, despite stereotypes that they merely care about their own self-interests and unanimously endorse taxing the young for their own benefit, research shows that older people are actually much more altruistic and support generational equity much more often than most believe (Logan & Spitze, 1995). Thus, much as greater elder exposure should help disconfirm stereotypes of universal senility, increased public view of older people should also help alleviate exaggerations of self-interest.

That older people can garner favorable views by assisting younger ambitions also fits with the noted sociocultural theories of ageism. From an SCM point of view, being perceived as appropriately assisting younger generations may suggest a degree of competence to go along with the traditional high-warmth stereotype of older people. In this more generous context, older people are likely to be perceived as trustworthy allies to younger success; as a result, reactions involving admiration (high warmth and high competence) might ensue. Similarly, from a sociofunctional perspective, the ability of older people to share (or give up) resources to benefit the young entails cooperative ultrasociality, which enhances perceptions of trustworthiness. Because these traits are considered extremely important among interdependent groups, they are likely to predict increased prosocial and affiliatory behaviors (Cottrell et al., 2007). Social role theory once again might conceptualize these newly active older people as atypical of their

traditional unagentic role, but in a more positive light. Still, how perceptions of a more visible, consuming older population develop comprises numerous empirical questions—largely dependent on how the new old age ultimately defines its societal place. We suggest particularly important directions for future research in the following section.

## Future Research Avenues for Intergenerational Investigation

Proverbial wisdom suggests that it behooves younger people to be sympathetic toward their elders. Unfortunately, the anticipated graying of the population and a recessional societal resource pool may only increase generational competition, fostering resentment instead of respect. Nevertheless, the optimist might counter that a larger old population will increase opportunities for intergenerational contact and understanding, which have the potential to improve relations, increase understanding, and debunk intergroup misconceptions. Stronger, consistent relationships between old and young may form mutually respectful relationships that enhance the portrayal of older people as helpful societal allies. With this aim in mind, we suggest various future research directions.

### Framing of the Graying Problem: Can Perceptions of Intergenerational Competition Be Changed?

There is a certain inconvenient truth inherent in shifting age dynamics; a greater number of older people does inevitably increase societal influence and resource consumption, and a healthier older population might increasingly participate in traditionally young activities. Nevertheless, journalists, pundits, and other media merchants of doom may exaggerate competition between generations and unflatteringly depict older people as wealthy yet costly burdens (Schulz & Binstock, 2006). Likewise, implicating Social Security and Medicare for society's economic woes inflames canes-versus-kids battles, which may deflect attention from more central potential causes of economic crisis (e.g., income inequality; Minkler, 1991/2006; Pollack, 1986). Interage hostility is likely to result from proclamations of a zero-sum intergenerational game.

Increased awareness of realities (rather than exaggerations) underlying these issues will become all the more important as the older population grows. Researchers should test interventions that deemphasize the notion of older people as responsible for societal age inequalities or problems and see if this increases how favorably younger people perceive them. Taking a cue from Binstock (2010), reframing old-age entitlements as part of a broader social contract that benefits all generations might go a long way to maintaining positive images of older people in an aging society.

### Ensuring Successful Intergenerational Contact: What Works and What Doesn't?

Another key research track should focus on the impact of intergenerational programs in undermining perceptions of intergenerational exploitation. Some research does evaluate such programs, which attempt to foster contact, cooperation, and understanding between generations (e.g., Newman et al., 1997). Encouragingly, the benefits of intergenerational contact have already been demonstrated within the family: Frequent contact with grandparents predicts changing attitudes toward older people (Harwood et al., 2005), and higher levels of self-disclosure with grandparents leads to more positive explicit attitudes toward older people in general (Tam et al., 2006). As noted, many religious communities have demonstrated that contact is an effective mechanism for reducing ageism under certain circumstances.

However, to date, it remains to be seen whether beneficial intergenerational contact extends beyond a few select domains. Indeed, the overall evidence of intergenerational programs consistently altering younger attitudes toward older people appears mixed at best (Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2004). Extending the benefits of intergenerational contact outside the family is not out of the realm of possibility, but a major obstacle is pervasive, socialized age segregation (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). This may be a primary reason that people generally hold ageist attitudes toward older people in general, despite holding mostly positive views toward specific older people that they know intimately (Kite & Johnson, 1988). As the burden of caring for an enlarged older population falls more heavily on the young, it is imperative that research continue to establish what works and what does not in intergenerational contact.

### Established Elder Subtypes: Reintroducing the Young-Old Versus Old-Old Distinction

Despite lay beliefs that older people are relatively uniform in appearance, attitudes, and health, the older population is actually one of the most diverse. A particularly critical distinction lies between the "young-old"—the age group roughly 65 to 75, who are relatively healthy, active, and socially involved—and the less active "old-old" (McGinnis & Zelinsky, 2003; Neugarten, 1974; Yasuda et al., 1997). In terms of research on allocation of resources between generations, this division is crucial. For instance, policymakers may have an easier time making a case for health care resources being spent on more-active young-old versus the old-old. By contrast, debates about mandatory retirement might disproportionately target the young-old (who are more often still employed and thus more at risk for accusations of delaying retirement). Again, these are empirical questions, but research findings concerning these potential differences will have important policy implications. In certain contexts, society's traditional over-65 definition of *senior* may be more usefully broken down into these more meaningful subcategories (North & Fiske, in press). Notably, aging researchers have further revised these original subtypes to encompass an additional "oldest-old" category (e.g., Suzman, Willis, & Manton, 1992), suggesting that many are beginning to realize the importance of subtyping what has vaguely been conceptualized as a generalized older age.

### Emergent Elder Subtypes: Hostile Ageism and Elder Admiration

Backlash from the young against older people who violate their alleged societal place represents a hostile form of ageism rarely considered in the ageism literature. In fact, a search for *hostile ageism* on PsycINFO currently yields exactly zero results. (Bugental & Hehman, 2007, did speculate briefly that a hostile form of ageism might occur if older people appear to seek resources at the

expense of the young, as the current article has argued.) To date, research has indicated that, when ageism is expressed in a basically negative manner, it occurs more often via implicit measures than explicit ones (Bugental & Hehman, 2007; Cesario et al., 2006). However, younger people might have little reason to hide their resentment if they feel that their natural path to social resources is blocked by the older generation. This is especially so given that explicit expressions of common old-age stereotypes are rewarded by greater affiliation with young ingroup members (Castelli et al., 2009).

On the other hand, as noted in the optimistic section, older people can potentially break away from their predominant low-status perception in a positive way. One of the running themes of Ken Dychtwald's (1999) *Age Power: How the 21st Century Will Be Ruled by the New Old* is that the next older generation will be unlike any other: larger, healthier, more active, and, with hope, more societally productive than merely consuming. This latter aspect may be the most important in changing mainstream perceptions of decrepitness or, from a sociostructural perspective, of older people who refuse to stay in a low-status, unobtrusive place. New, societally friendly social policies—such as the creation of an elder corps—could go a long way in not only accommodating an enlarged older population but changing these negative perceptions. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on the potential impact of such policies is lacking, and thus, this is a direction ripe for future research.

## Cross-Cultural Explorations

Cross-cultural research has been a major crux of social psychology for the past 30+ years, but surprisingly little research has examined directly whether ageist beliefs differ between cultures. Prevailing wisdom is that ageist beliefs may not be as prevalent in Eastern cultures, which traditionally hold their elders in higher esteem (e.g. Nelson, 2009). One important factor in this belief is the historical Eastern tradition of filial piety, or *xiao*—the Confucian ideal that places responsibility on younger people to respect, obey, and care for their elders (Ng, 1998, 2002). A more general line of support for this hypothesis is that Eastern cultures tend to be more interdependent and holistic. Thus, people within them should allegedly more often seek to maximize collectivist, relational success—in contrast to more independent, individual agency-focused Western cultures (Nisbett, 2003). Given greater cultural focus on the relational, as well as a tradition of filial piety, Easterners theoretically should place greater importance on maintaining effective relationships with and taking care of elders.

However, empirical evidence that such beliefs result in a cultural reduction in ageism is surprisingly sparse. One notable exception is Levy and Langer's (1994) study with older Chinese and American participants. They found that (a) views toward aging and memory performance were positively correlated and (b) the Chinese elders exceeded the older Americans on a memory task. From this, they concluded that cultural beliefs about aging shape older people's degree of memory loss, which implied that Chinese cultural beliefs about aging were more positive. However, even this particular instance provides only indirect support, not aiming to directly demonstrate ageism being less common in Chinese culture.

Even more rare are comparisons based on intergenerational resource perspectives. Speculatively, beliefs about age-based allocation of societal resources may not be so different across cultures that are historically distinct but similarly industrialized in the modern world. As previously indicated, one plausible explanation for why older people may have come to be less valued than in the past is that they do not offer as much value in modernized societies. From this standpoint, even traditionally interdependent-focused cultures may come to perceive their elders as consuming but not contributing. As recent evidence, Eastern elders face many of the same forms of discrimination as Western ones do, such as outright abandonment in Japan (Fackler, 2010). Moreover, the warm-but-incompetent older-age stereotype pervades Eastern societies as well as Western ones (Cuddy et al., 2009) and even includes rural Eastern cultures (Chen, n.d.). More research is needed to make definitive cross-cultural conclusions, but a similarly aging population in the East implies that the risk for intergenerational ageist sentiment may prevail across borders.

## Gender and Race Explorations

As the default conception of older people—like other social groups—likely comprises White, male targets, this presents an obvious bias in itself against women and minorities (admittedly, we ourselves have not speculated about demographic differences in this article). Yet little empirical investigation has focused on the compounding factors of gender and race in prejudice toward older people. Concerning the former, some research indicates that older women—compared with older men—may be viewed more positively by younger people (Narayan, 2008), but other work suggests that older women might suffer the double-whammy of sexism in addition to ageism. For instance, attributions of dependency, ineffectiveness, and passivity might render their situation more dire than that of older men (Block, Davidson, & Grambs, 1981; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Nuessel, 1982).

Concerning racial and ethnic differences, surprisingly little research has investigated attitudes among African American or Latino populations toward older people. Preliminary findings might suggest that minority groups hold lower levels of ageism. For instance, African Americans report respect for older African Americans (Fiske, Bergsieker, Russell, & Williams, 2009). It is also possible that the Hispanic emphasis on *familism*—loyalty and solidarity among family members, including the extended family (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987)— and a higher incidence of co-residence with older family members (Burr & Mutchler, 1999) may indicate lower levels of ageism among younger Latinos. In any case, these potential demographic differences are another domain that promises importance, considering that half of the older population is female and that the current older population is fast becoming more ethnically diverse than any in U.S. history (U.S. DHHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).

## Ageism Against the Young

Though its focus usually connotes prejudice toward older people, the word *ageism* naturally includes people discriminated against at any age. As underresearched as ageism generally is, even more scant is the subfield of ageism against the young.

Indeed, if intergenerational contentions exist, then they might exist in both directions. For instance, an older generation may view younger people as uncultured and immature (as evidenced by Mark Bauerlein's 2008 book, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*). While the current article has outlined how younger people might prescriptively stereotype older people to stay out of the way, it remains to be seen whether older people hold corresponding resentments toward a younger generation that might be forced to support them. Such a development is not likely to transpire harmoniously if perceptions of inadequate, illiterate, and intransigent youngsters continue to stew.

Though research in this area is scarce, a small empirical foundation does suggest younger people's being the target of prejudice from adults (if not older ones specifically). The workplace is a prime arena, as large-scale surveys have found at least 25% of younger workers indicate the experience of some form of age discrimination (Loretto, Duncan, & White, 2000). Specifically, younger workers often feel persecuted in the form of negative (demeaning) attitudes, denial of promotions, and disproportionately lower pay (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). This latter belief is corroborated by statistical evidence that the relative wages and employment rates of young workers have fallen in recent decades (Blanchflower & Freeman, 1996). Moreover, outside the workplace, younger people face comparable forms of prejudice to their elders (as noted), such as patronizing speech (Giles & Williams, 1994) and restricted freedoms (Westman, 1991). As psychological research moves further into age-related territory, it behooves researchers to simultaneously consider ways in which all age groups endure age-based bias.

## Conclusion: As the Field Moves Forward

A recurring theme throughout this article has been that an ever-growing-older population might stoke issues of generational injustice. From this standpoint, despite society's treatment of age-bias as a mere second-class civil rights issue (Cohen, 2009), ageism should become a prime research topic across multiple social sciences. Organizations such as the National Institute on Aging and the Alliance on Aging Research have been instrumental in nudging the social sciences into this important territory. Still, the need for more work—and broader, forward-thinking structural approaches—is evident, given changing age dynamics.

Fortunately, social psychologists already have the tools to increase understanding of this stealth phenomenon. By characterizing younger and older people as distinct social groups, social psychology can draw upon one of its strengths—a wealth of literature on intergroup and interpersonal biases—to shed light on intergenerational ageist resentments. Moreover, structural, intergenerational approaches present the advantage of taking into account both traditional psychological foundations of prejudice at the interpersonal level and the broader sociological contexts in which they occur. Such a multilevel perspective exemplifies what psychologists have recommended more generally (Oishi et al., 2009). Ageism research should certainly be no exception, especially within an increasingly complex, rapidly aging society.

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