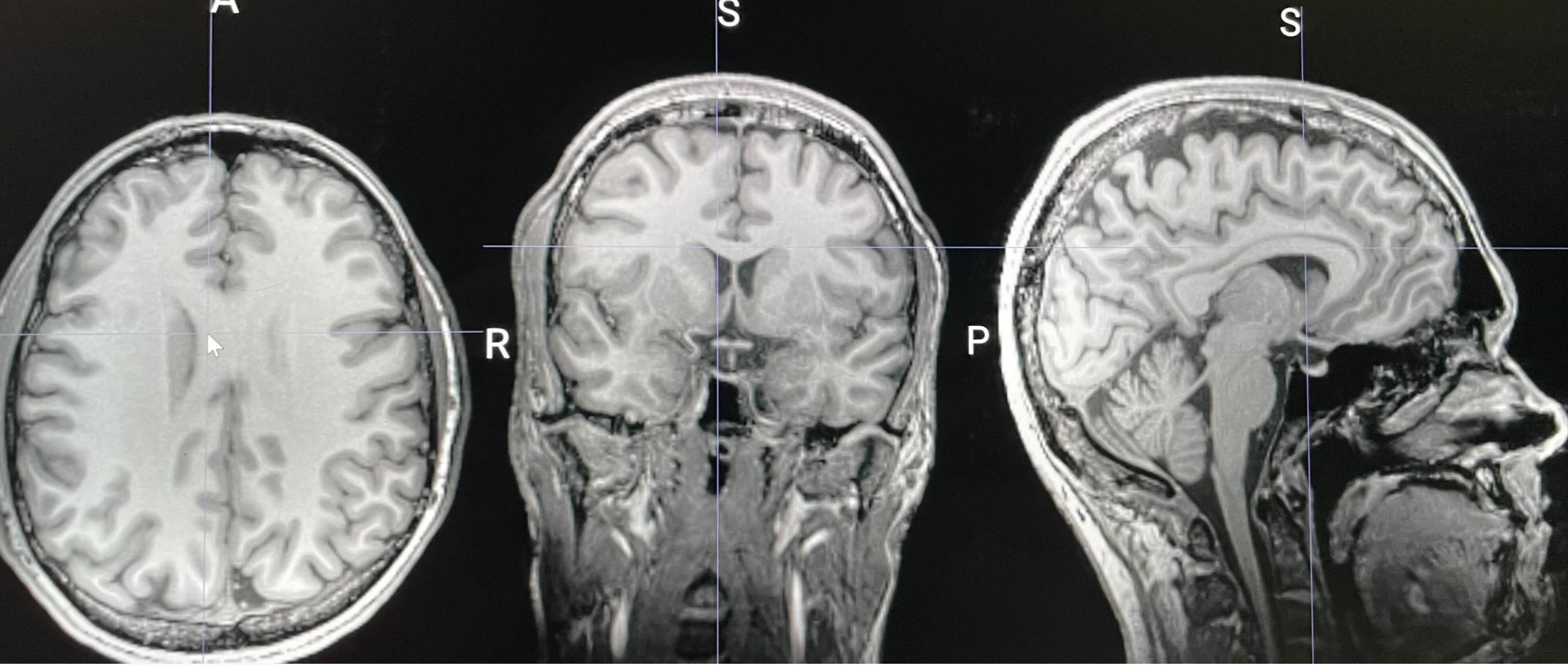


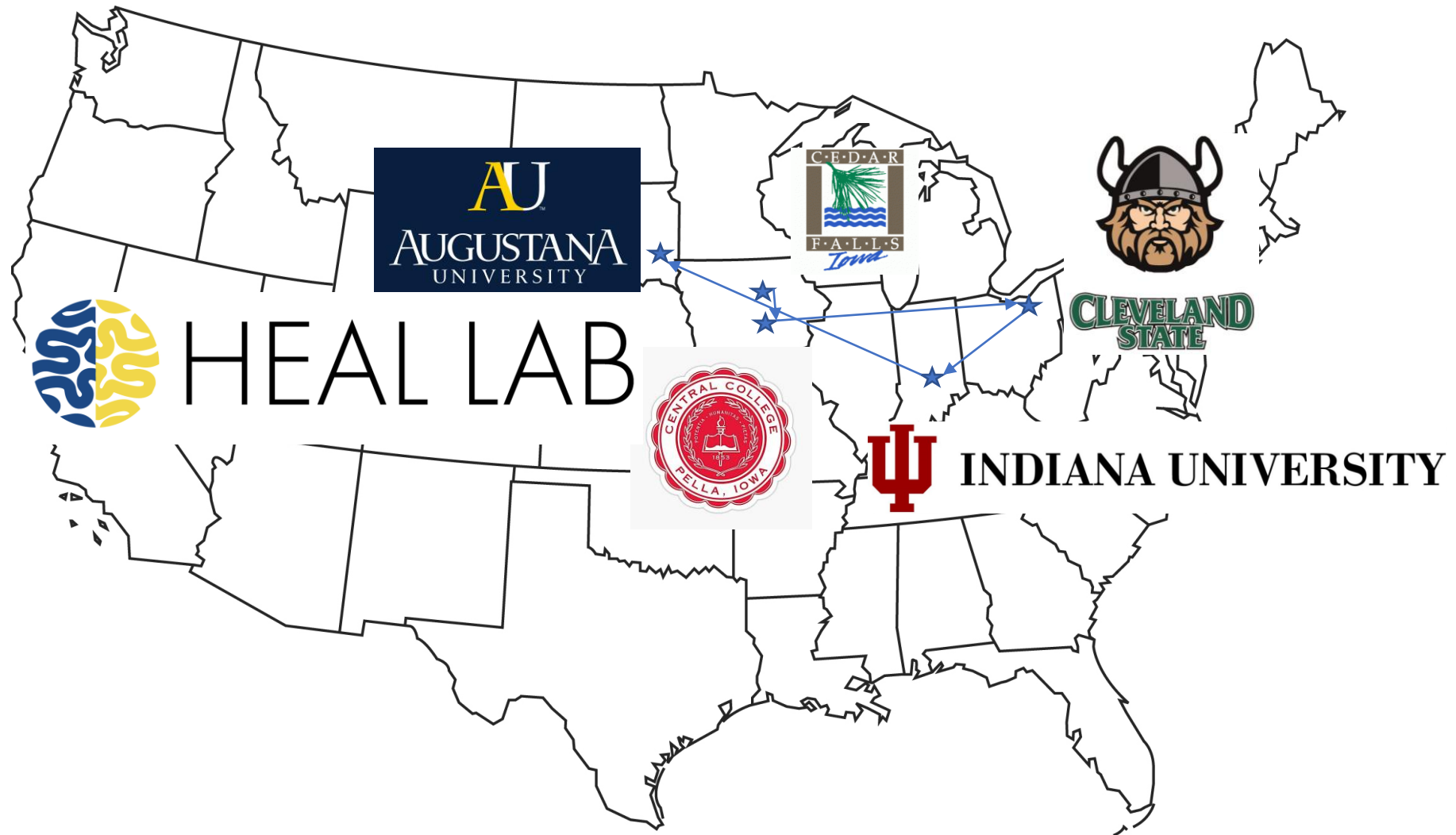


Age is Just a Number:

Deconstructing age-based stereotypes in our modern world

Lucas J. Hamilton, PhD

About me . . .



About me . . .

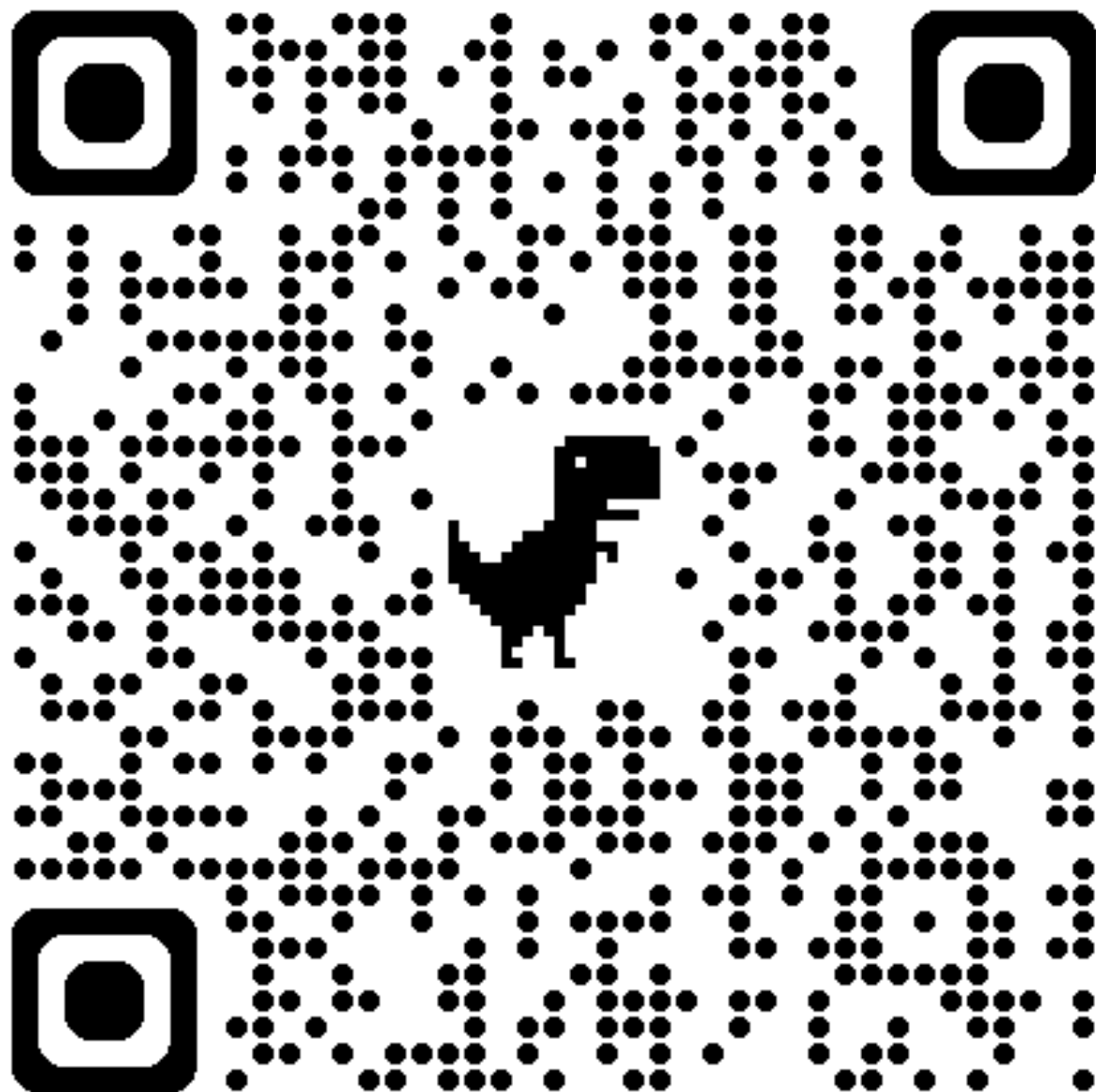
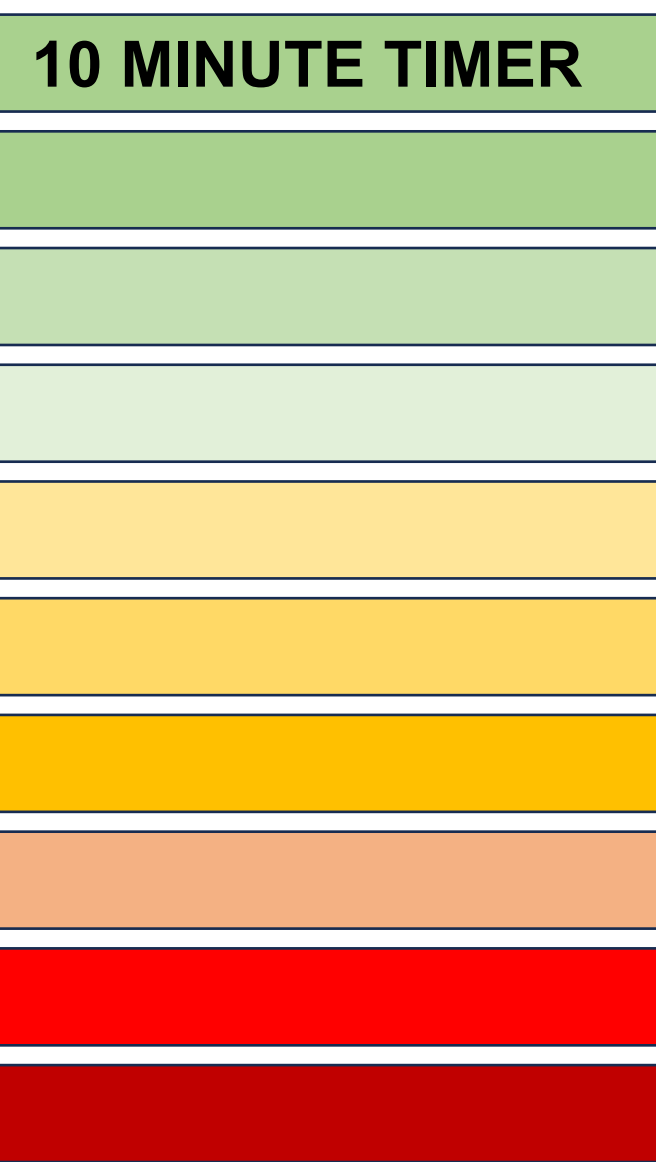


Goals

- Define ageism and identify examples.
- Understand why ageism developed, its effects, and how to avoid it.
- Build knowledge and skills for more effective interactions.

Outline

- Knowledge check on aging
 - Self-assessment
 - Addressing major misconceptions
- Research study I conducted
- Activity (as time allows)



Major misconceptions

Illness is inevitable.

Your brain deteriorates

There's no changing now.

Major misconceptions → Ageism

Illness is inevitable. → Old workers get sick more often.

Your brain deteriorates. → Old people are demented.

There's no changing now. → Old people are outdated.

Experiences with everyday ageism

AMONG ADULTS AGE 50-80

82%

Experienced one or more forms of everyday ageism in their day-to-day lives



65%

Exposure to ageist messages

45%

Ageism in interpersonal interactions

36%

Internalized ageism

*Note: Percentages reflect responses of either often/sometimes or strongly agree/agree to forms of ageism.

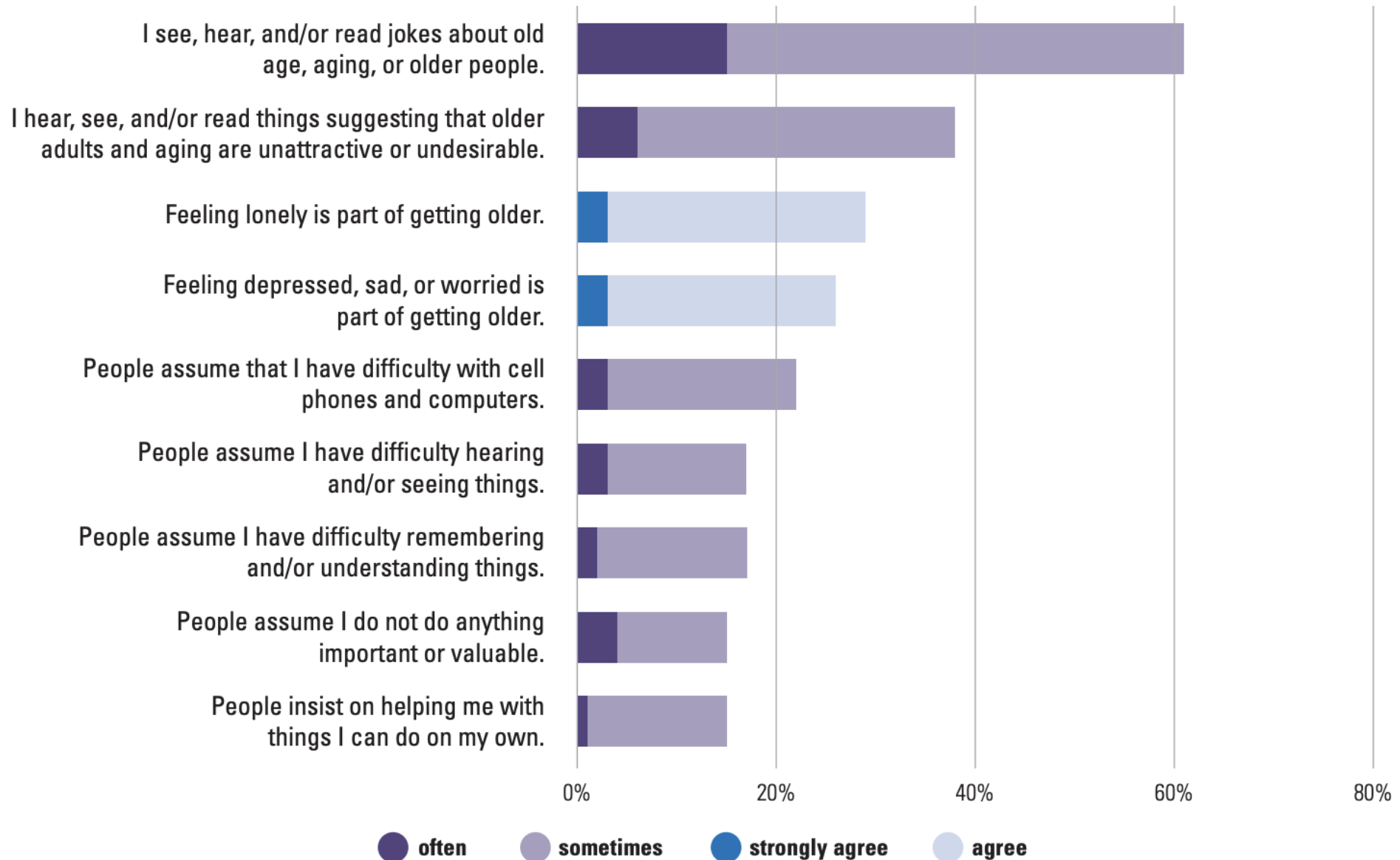


**NATIONAL POLL ON
HEALTHY AGING**
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

What does “everyday ageism” mean to you?

1. I hear, see, and/or read jokes about old age, aging, or older people.
2. I hear, see, and/or read things suggesting that older adults and aging are unattractive.
3. People insist on helping me with things I can do on my own.
4. People assume I have difficulty hearing and/or seeing things.
5. People assume I have difficulty remembering and/or understanding things.
6. People assume that I have difficulty with cell phones and computers.
7. People assume I do not do anything important or valuable.
8. Feeling depressed, sad, or worried is part of getting older.
9. Feeling lonely is part of getting older.
10. Having health problems is part of getting older.

What does “everyday ageism” mean to you?



Positive views on aging

AMONG ADULTS AGE 50–80

88%

Feel more comfortable being themselves

80%

Have a strong sense of purpose

67%

Feel more positive about aging

65%

Think their life is better than they thought it would be



**NATIONAL POLL ON
HEALTHY AGING**
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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100k people
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“A 70-year-old is making policy for a world that does not exist.”

“The average age of C-level execs is 57 because businesses make money, not change diapers.”

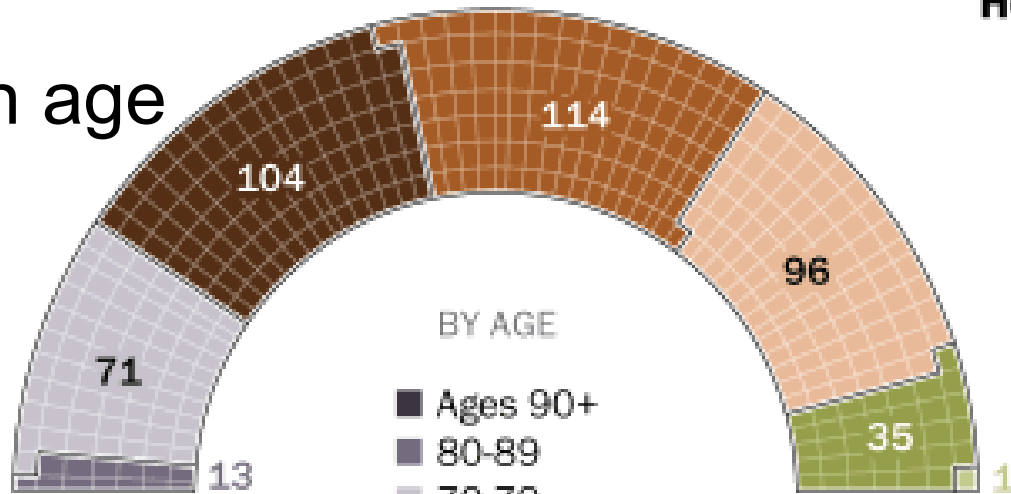
“I want someone who can add 5 + 5.”

A look at the 119th Congress by age and generation

Number of voting members of the 119th Congress in each age group and generation

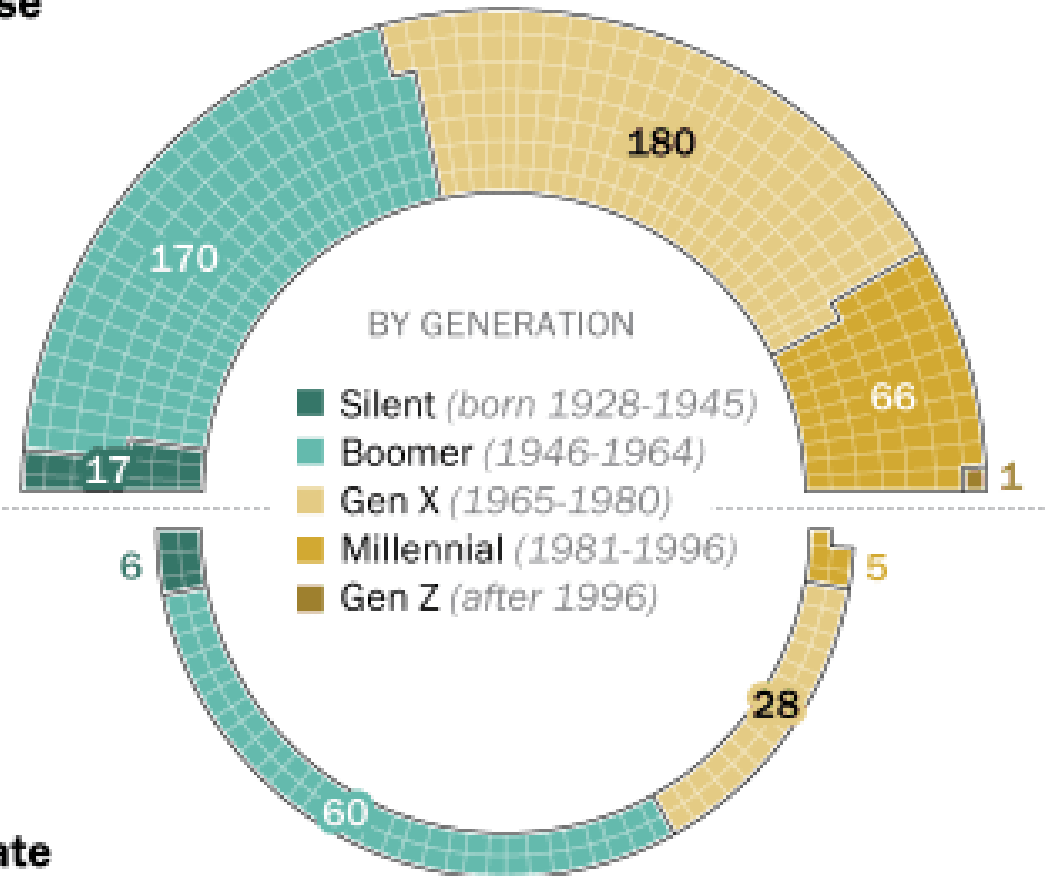
Median age
57.5

House



Median age
64.7

Senate

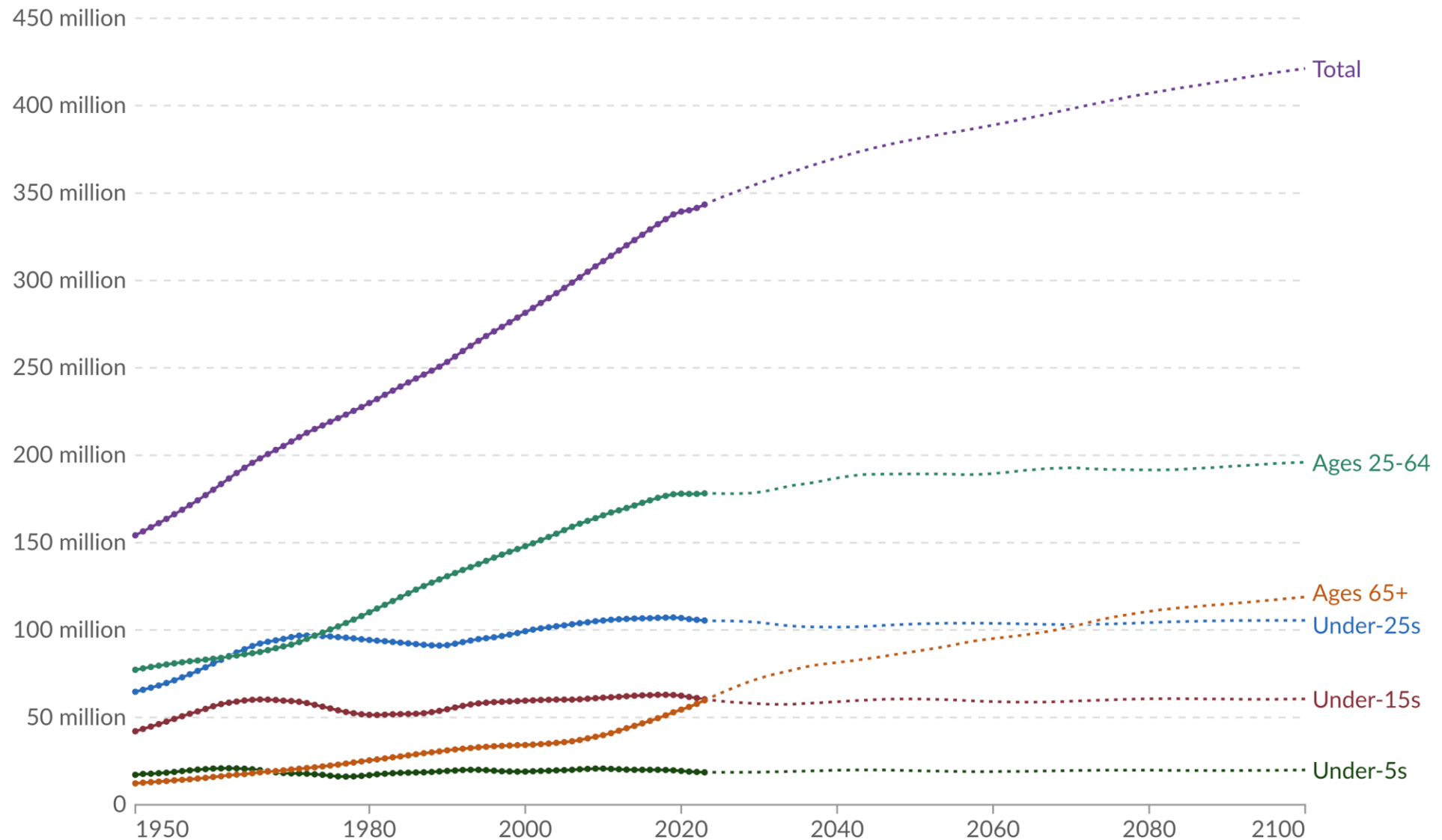


Note: This analysis reflects the makeup and ages of the 533 voting members of the 119th Congress as of Jan. 3, 2025.

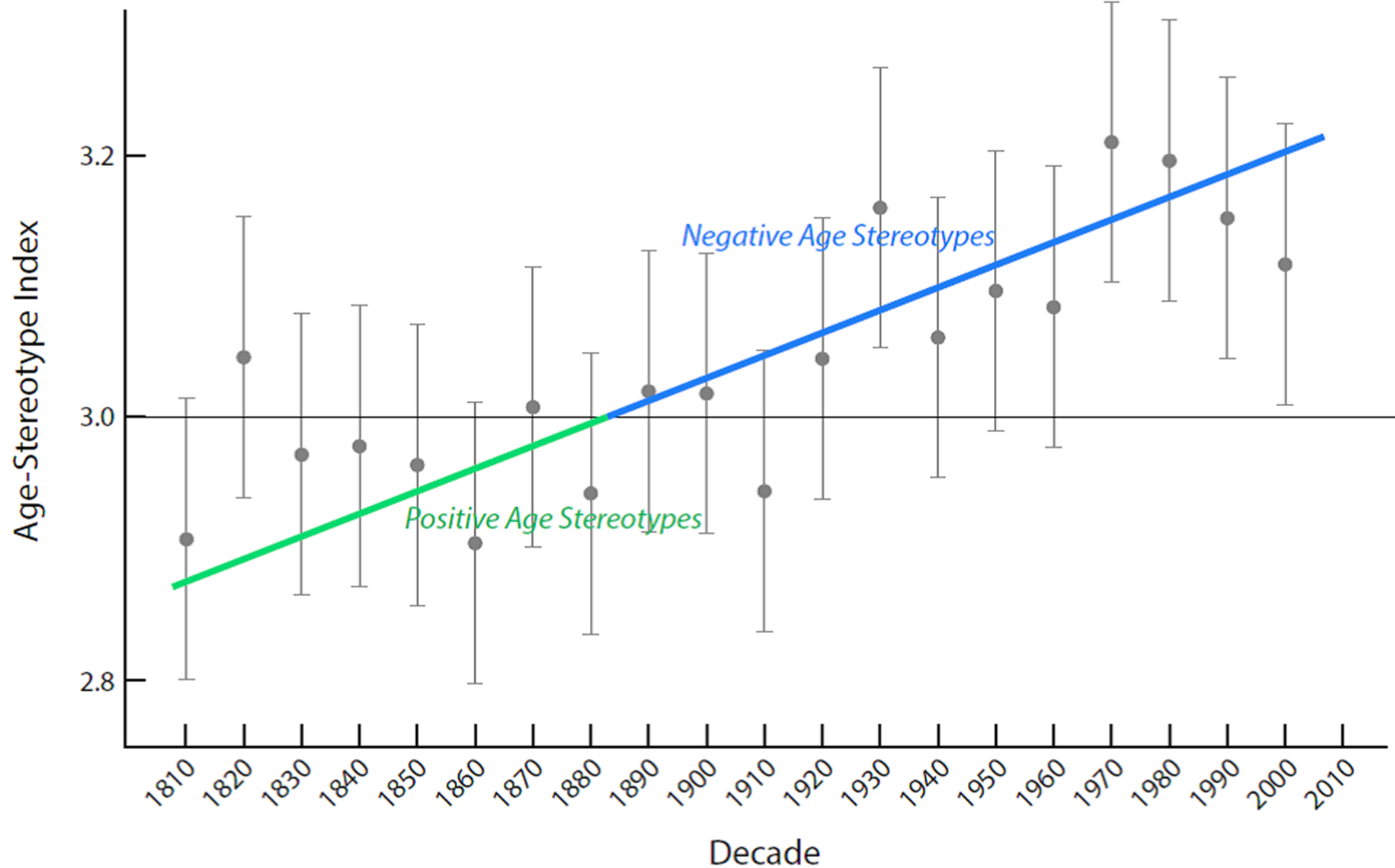
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of birthdate data from the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress and other published sources.

Population by age group, United States

Historic estimates from 1950 to 2023, and projected to 2100 based on the UN medium scenario¹.



AGE-BASED STEREOTYPES



Knowledge about normal aging is low or inaccurate.

62% of healthcare providers and 2/3 laypersons think that dementia is normal.

(Alzheimer's Disease International, 2021)

About **25% of laypersons have accurate understandings of ADRD**

(Kim et al., 2023)

People report **fear of ADRD** or **avoid an official diagnosis**

(Rosato et al., 2019; Vickrey et al., 2007; Werner & Kim, 2021)

Knowledge about aging is low or inaccurate.



**AGING
GROWS
EXPERIENCE,
NOT MEMORY
LOSS.**

Some things come with age.
Some others don't.

Learn the warning
signs of Alzheimer's at
... 10signs.org

ad
COUNCIL



TOO OLD
TO RUN AN
ULTRAMARATHON

TOO YOUNG
to run an
online
business

TOO OLD
to run an
online
business

TOO YOUNG
to RUN
FOR OFFICE

TOO OLD
to get
a tattoo



Outline

- ~~Knowledge check on aging~~
 - ~~Self-assessment~~
 - ~~Addressing major misconceptions~~
- Research study I conducted
- Activity (as time allows)

Vignettes were used to elicit beliefs about aging.

NORMAL COGNITIVE AGING

[John/Mary] is a 75-year-old [man/woman]. In the last year or two, [John/Mary] has noticed occasional difficulty remembering events from a week or two ago, finding the right words in conversations, and following [his/her] medication schedule. [He/she] will periodically forget ingredients while cooking and get frustrated with unexpected hassles.

MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

[John/Mary] is a 75-year-old [man/woman]. In the last year or two, [John/Mary] has noticed consistent difficulty remembering events from earlier in the day, following conversations with friends, and paying bills on time. [He/she] will sometimes forget where things are located in [his/her] favorite grocery store, and will become irritable more easily.

DEMENTIA

[John/Mary] is a 75-year-old [man/woman]. In the last year or two, family and friends have noticed that [John/Mary] has significant difficulty remembering the names of close friends, labeling common objects like a watch, and managing finances independently. [He/she] will often get lost while driving and has unexplained emotional outbursts.

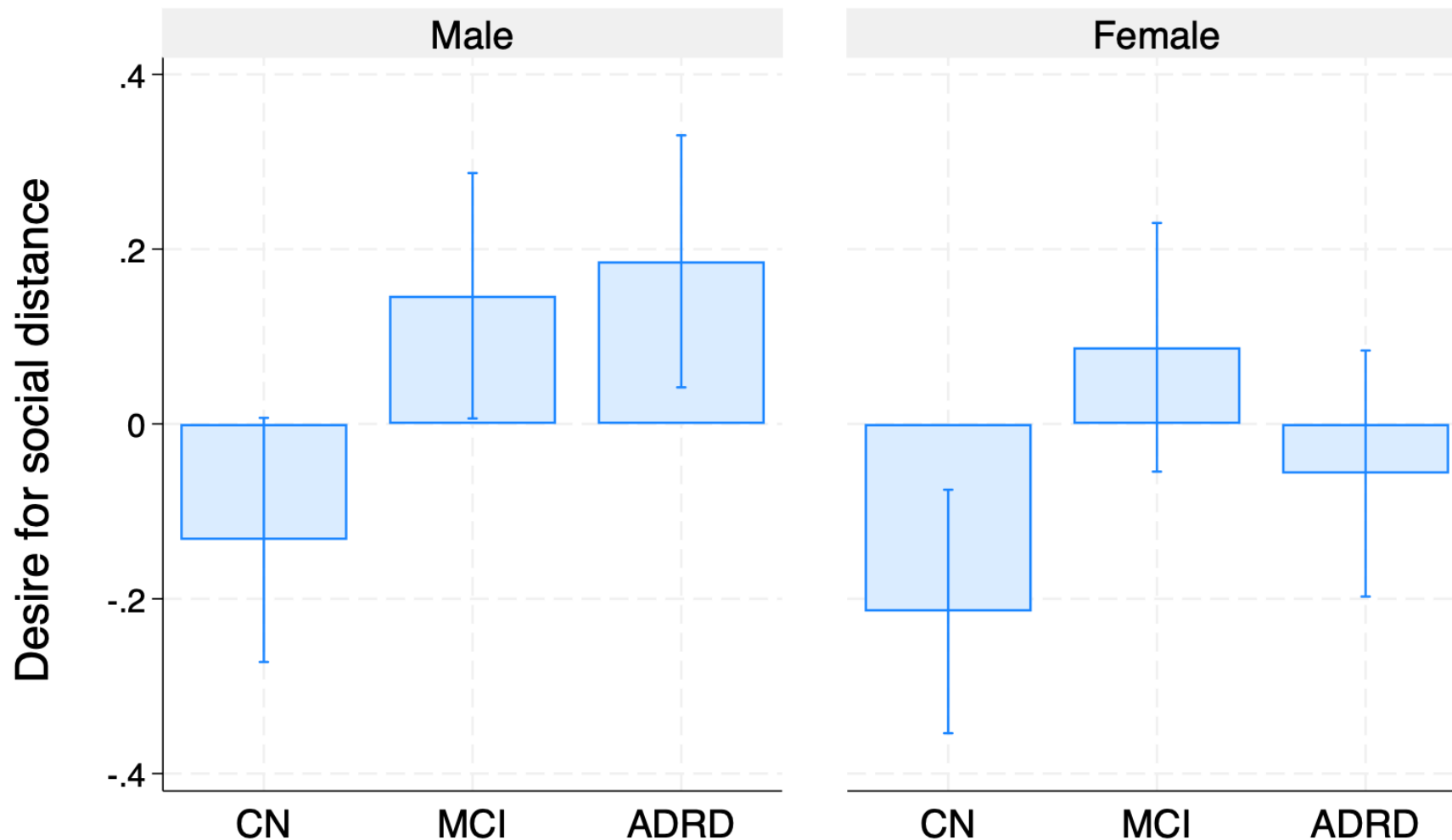
Stratified quota sample to represent US adults

		Male			Female		
		CN	MCI	ADRD	CN	MCI	ADRD
		(N = 191)	(N = 185)	(N = 179)	(N = 191)	(N = 182)	(N = 187)
Age		47.28 (15.92)	45.75 (15.99)	45.64 (16.74)	45.14 (15.92)	43.73 (14.82)	47.82 (15.95)
Gender							
	<i>Male</i>	90	98	92	96	87	89
	<i>Female</i>	101	87	87	95	95	98
Race							
	<i>White</i>	130	121	119	131	115	124
	<i>Nonwhite</i>	61	64	60	60	67	63
Political Group							
	<i>Republican</i>	52	56	45	56	51	54
	<i>Democrat</i>	67	62	66	59	60	66
	<i>Independent</i>	72	65	68	76	71	66
ADRD Contact		102	107	93	130	112	114
ADRD Knowledge		12.46 (5.16)	12.39 (5.47)	12.12 (5.23)	12.31 (5.10)	12.47 (5.37)	12.87 (4.60)
ADRD Prevalence		11.69 (1.46)	11.63 (1.45)	11.58 (1.37)	11.59 (1.29)	11.50 (1.23)	11.78 (1.46)

Hypothesis 1 – Vignette Effects

Cognitive status ($F_{(2,1109)} = 8.62, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .015$)

Gender ($F(1,1109) = 4.62, p = .030, \eta_p^2 = .004$)



Exploring Labeling Accuracy

	CN	MCI	ADRD
Labeled as CN	137	87	36
Labeled as MCI	107	96	62
Labeled as ADRD	138	184	268

Only 1/3 accurately label normal aging
Roughly 2/3 label normal aging as impairment

MCI often (50%) mistaken as ADRD
ADRD is well-recognized, but still not 100%

Labeling accuracy does not alter or explain away vignette effects.

Hypothesis 2 – Respondent Effects

	Desire for Social Distance	Social Unacceptability	Dehumanization
Gender	-.271***	-.216***	-.0561
Age	-.007***	-.001	-.003
Race (binary)	.148*	.174**	.206**
Political Affiliation			
<i>Republican</i>	.092	.220**	.289***
<i>Democrat</i>	-.003	-.078	-.069
ADRD Contact	-.014	-.069	-.122
ADRD Knowledge	-.016**	-.016**	-.003
ADRD Prevalence	.029	.059**	.051*
<i>F</i>	8.21	6.58	5.64
<i>p</i>	< .001	< .001	< .001
<i>R</i> ²	.08	.06	.05

Interpretation of Results

Vignette effects were limited to desire for social distance.

May reflect a distinct stigmatization that ADRD elicits

→ willing to interact with a person

vs.

→ believing a person is less than human or outcast

Also reflect general ageism, especially towards older men

Interpretation of Results

Respondent effects mirrored international findings

(Herrman et al., 2018; Nguyen & Li, 2020)

The notable exception is the null effect of personal contact which may be driven by negative contact with symptoms of ADRD.

(e.g., Grove et al., 2017; Weisman de Mamani et al., 2018)

The role of local ADRD prevalence and political beliefs suggest that ADRD stigma is multifaceted and not purely solvable by psychoeducation interventions.

Public Health Implications

Develop effective and targeted interventions

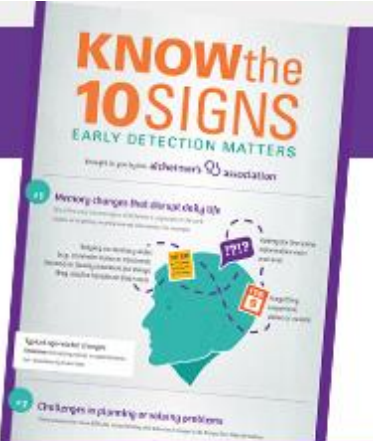


“A person with dementia is still a person.”

“Marilyn’s story” from Alzheimer Society of Canada

alzheimer's  association®

Know the 10 Signs of Alzheimer's Disease
Early detection matters!
Download the free infographic.



The infographic is titled "KNOW the 10 SIGNS EARLY DETECTION MATTERS" and is brought to you by the Alzheimer's Association. It features a central graphic of a brain with 10 numbered signs around it. The signs are: 1. Memory changes that affect daily life, 2. Challenges in planning or solving problems, 3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks, 4. Confusion about time or place, 5. Trouble understanding visual images and objects, 6. Decreased or increased alertness, 7. Changes in personality or mood, 8. Withdrawal from social activities, 9. Loss of initiative, and 10. Repeating the same questions or statements over and over.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

ACTIVITY!

- Reflect on 5 recent interactions with an older adult
 - Who, what, where, when, and
 - Why = Context! (length, reason, outcome)
- Did **you** enjoy the interaction? Did they?
- What do you think went well / wrong?

Goals

- Define ageism and identify examples.
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- Build knowledge and skills for more effective interactions.