



# ISSUES IN AGING

EDITION 4

MARK NOVAK



Mark Novak's fourth edition of *Issues in Aging* is a comprehensive, up-to-date, readable and relevant examination of contemporary issues in aging. Novak emphasizes the diverse experiences, opportunities and advantages that come with age. His book is down-to-earth, accessible, and balanced. Novak's book is myth-busting and destroys stereotypes and misconceptions about older persons.

—Herbert Northcott, Professor, Sociology,  
University of Alberta, Canada

Novak provides a gripping tour of positive aging ideas. Novak refers to his approach as a glance into successful aging and we can learn from his comprehensive approach. Students in sociology, psychology, health communication, aging studies, and healthcare providers will benefit from this engaging and practical book.

—Diane Ferrero-Paluzzi, Associate Professor and Chair,  
Speech Communication Studies, Iona College, USA





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# ISSUES IN AGING

*Issues in Aging* combines social, psychological, biological, and philosophical perspectives to present a multifaceted picture of aging. Novak illustrates both the problems and the opportunities that accompany older age. This text helps students understand the tremendous variability in aging, and introduces them to careers working with older adults.

This new edition reflects the continued changes in the way we age. The fourth edition has been updated to include emerging issues in aging. These include the prevalence of HIV/AIDs in later life, current research on mental potential in old age, the creation of age-friendly cities, and new options for end-of-life care.

Each chapter begins with a set of learning objectives to guide students in their reading and concludes with a list of main points, questions for discussion or study, suggested readings, and relevant websites to consult. Each chapter also includes up-to-date charts and graphs as well as key terms to help students understand the issues presented. Break out boxes reveal the human side of aging through the stories of individuals in real life and in the media.

**Mark Novak** is Professor of Sociology and Dean of Extended Education and Global Outreach at California State University, Bakersfield. He has taught a course in Aging and Society for over 20 years.





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Mark Novak



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# PREFACE

Some years ago I attended a sociology department meeting to present my first proposal for a course on aging. After some questions from the committee, the committee chair (a professor of comparative culture) leaned forward and squinted at me. “I have no objection to you teaching this course,” he said. “You have an interest in the subject and knowledge of the area. But, tell me, what in the world will you talk about for an entire semester in a course on aging? People get old, then they die. What else is there to say?”

This colleague wouldn’t ask these questions today. Every day, newspaper and magazine articles bring us new knowledge about aging and our aging society. In the United States today, there are more older people in the population than ever before. Studies report findings on diet, exercise, pensions, family life, and housing. Televised reports suggest ways to stay healthy and live a long life. Almost everyone knows something about aging today, and the growth in popular books on this subject suggests that people want to know more.

Issues in aging will grow in importance as more people enter middle and later life. Most university and college students today will face these issues in their careers. For example, the Baby Boom generation has entered old age and will move like a glacier into this stage of life in the next few years. This mass of people will want services from professionals who understand their needs and concerns. Students in gerontology classes, whatever their major or field of study, will need to know about this aging population.

This book presents facts and information about aging today. It covers the issues that older people and their families will face. And it deals with issues that an aging society will raise for all of us. Whether you are older yourself, have older parents, relatives, and friends, or plan to work with older people, the information in this text will help you understand aging today.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

This book has an underlying theme: successful aging. The text presents a full picture of aging—problems and all. But it emphasizes the opportunities and advantages of later life. This theme makes more sense today than ever before.

Longer life and more years of activity and good health have changed the landscape of later life. Late old age still brings physical decline. But better health and nutrition at every stage of life, along with advances in medicine, extend the active years of middle age. The saying “60 is the new 40 and 70 the new 50” may have begun as clever remarks. But they describe the reality of aging today for more and more people. Relatively few older people today (age 65 and over) fit the stereotypical image of the poor and decrepit senior. Better pension plans, better health, and more opportunities for personal expression and social engagement all have transformed later life. This book documents that transformation and the new ecology of aging today.

Some years ago, French gerontologists coined the term the *Third Age* to describe this new stage of life. This concept defines a time of life between adulthood (the Second Age) and late old age (the Fourth Age). It refers to the healthy active years around retirement before the physical decline of old age sets in. Researchers Moen and Spencer (2006, p. 128) define this as a time of transition, a “*midcourse* between the career- and family-building tasks associated with adulthood, but before any debilitating infirmities associated with old age.” This stage may begin in the fifties and go on to age 80 or more.



Two phenomena led to the emergence of the Third Age today. The first is demography. More people than ever before (the Baby Boomers) have entered the Third Age. This group will soon fit the traditional age category of old age (age 65 and over). But Baby Boomers will look and act more like people in middle age than like the stereotypical older person. The second factor is longevity. People, on average, live longer today than ever before. And they will live these added years, sometimes called the “longevity bonus,” in better health than past generations (Moen & Spencer, 2006, p. 128). Add to this changes in technology that allow people to stay productive longer, opportunities to stay engaged through volunteer work, and the practice of lifelong learning. All of these changes mean that Third Agers will remain active and engaged in second careers, leisure, and social service. They will redefine the concept of retirement and of later life.

Moen and Spencer (2006, p. 134) call the traditional view of old age “outdated” and “obsolete.” The old model no longer fits the complexity and emergence of the Third Age. The rapid social change at the start of the 21st century—technological change, a globalized economy, unstable work careers, demographic change, convergence of male and female career opportunities—calls for new models to fit new patterns of social experience.

The existence of the Third Age as a large-scale phenomenon causes some rethinking of assumptions about aging. The Senior Olympics, for example, have existed for a number of years. But, in the past, people who took part in these events seemed like odd specimens. Today, large numbers of people in their fifties and older run marathons, take up surfing, and climb mountains. These Third Agers shatter the stereotype of the older person. They force a new look at what we call old age.

Social institutions such as business and industry need to adapt to this new population of Third Agers. As Baby Boomers retire from the workplace, they may leave behind a labor shortage. The smaller age groups behind them will provide fewer workers to the labor force. This will change the way that business and industry view retirement and the retiree. Some companies will rehire retirees, while others will give people incentives to delay retirement.

On my campus, an interim president came out of retirement for 2 years to manage the campus while we searched for a new leader. The campus then hired our administrative vice president, who delayed retirement to serve as our new president. He then brought back a retired senior administrator to serve as vice president to manage a troublesome unit. These administrators all had many years of successful experience. This pattern will occur more and more often in varied industries and institutions in the years ahead.

Third Agers will engage in activities that express their interests and passions. And they will create institutions to meet these needs. They will form lifelong learning institutes and volunteer programs to expand their knowledge and use their skills.

This fourth edition of *Issues in Aging* links the generations through the life course perspective. The emergence of the Third Age demands this approach. The Third Age blurs the meaning of retirement and old age. It asks for a view of aging that looks at the whole of adult life—the discontinuities (e.g., retirement) and the continuities (e.g., lifelong learning). A life course perspective shows where and how a person’s life has continuity. It also shows how the generations depend on one another. Many Boomers will play the role of caregiver to their aging parents and to their children and grandchildren. They will deal with their own retirement and health issues as they age. And they will affect the younger generations through their use of services, their social contributions, and their ability to improve society as they age.



Finally, as Baby Boomers enter the Third Age, they will put pressure on existing programs and services. The Social Security system, corporate pension programs, and the health care system will have to adapt to this large number of older people. Some of these changes have begun already. For example, the Social Security program raised the age for entitlement to full benefits. In general, these systems and others may shift the cost of a program or service to the individual. This marks a change from the way that programs and services developed during the 20th century. During the past century, government and corporate programs provided greater benefits to older people. The 21st century will ask people to take more responsibility for their own pension planning and health care costs.

Novelli and Workman (2006, p. 12) list five threats to the well-being of the big generation entering the Third Age:

1. Lack of preparation by Boomers for their long period in retirement
2. The shift of pension risk and responsibility to workers by corporations
3. Poor financing and organization of government programs, including health care, Social Security, and social services
4. A health care system that focuses on paying bills but not on health promotion
5. Lack of clear options and opportunities for a well-educated, healthy, and active Boomer population.

Each of these threats puts the Boomer generation at risk. These items point to weaknesses in America's preparation for an aging society.

This book looks at these and other issues related to aging and society today. For example, all older people encounter negative stereotyping, many minority older people face low incomes, and some older workers retire without sound pension plans due to economic change. Rising health care costs threaten to bankrupt individuals and burden society. All of us need to understand these and other issues. This calls for knowledge that sorts the myths from the realities of aging.

I have designed this book for easy use and enjoyable reading. Each chapter presents issues around a single theme—for example, housing, health care, or income security. I present the facts on that theme, the issues related to that theme, and creative responses to these issues.

Each chapter begins with a list of expected learning outcomes. These serve as a summary of the chapter's contents. They also serve as a way for you to check your understanding after reading the chapter.

Chapters also include graphs and tables for the display of complex information. In almost every case, these displays have an accompanying explanation. I have also tried to give the meaning of new concepts in the text. You will also find definitions of key terms throughout the text, so that you can read along without reference to a glossary. However, for your convenience, you will find a glossary of all terms at the back of the book. I have included photos and case studies of older people. Some of these people I have met informally or through my research. Other cases come from insightful articles in the popular press. These additions show the human side of aging. The various boxed features show the diversity of older people and their unique circumstances. Some of these features show the lighter side of aging.

The end of each chapter includes a summary of main points, questions for discussion or study, suggested readings, and relevant websites. These resources will help you explore a topic further and begin independent research.



## ORGANIZATION

*Issues in Aging* first looks at large-scale social issues—social attitudes, the study of aging, and demographic issues. It then explores how these conditions affect individuals and social institutions. The book concludes with a look at political responses to aging and how individuals can create a better old age for themselves and the people they know.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce students to the study of aging. Chapter 1 looks at attitudes toward older people. It corrects many of the myths about aging. It also examines the origins of negative attitudes toward older people and ways to change these attitudes. This edition includes quizzes on ageism and new material on the denial of aging: anti-aging and amortality. Chapter 2 looks at how best to study aging. It reviews the theories and methods gerontologists use in their research. New material in this edition includes an in-depth discussion of the life course perspective and life events. The chapter concludes with a discussion of applied research and evidence-based practice.

Chapter 3, a chapter on demography, places aging in the United States in a world context. The chapter first reviews aging in underdeveloped, developing, and developed societies. It then presents information about aging in the United States. Chapter 3 looks at the increase in the number and proportion of older people in the U.S. population. This is the foundation for the chapters that follow.

Chapters 4 through 6 discuss how individuals age. Chapter 4 covers the issue of personal health and well-being. This edition reports the increased research on exercise, diet, and new ways to cope with physical change in later life. New material focuses on women and health as well as the importance of health literacy.

Chapter 5 discusses psychological and developmental issues related to aging. This chapter reviews changes in memory and intelligence. This edition reports the latest research on mental potential in later life. Terms in the literature such as *reserve capacity*, *plasticity*, and *adaptability* all describe a more positive view of mental ability in old age. New material introduces research findings from studies of brain chemistry and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) research. Researchers have also begun to explore the effects of training, physical exercise, and creative activity on mental ability. This edition highlights this new thinking about mental potential in later life.

Chapter 6 examines race, ethnicity, and culture. The older population in the future will be more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse than ever before. This will lead to different experiences of aging for people with different characteristics. An older white male with a good pension and a poor older Hispanic woman will experience aging differently. They will have had different life experiences and they will bring different resources with them into old age. This diversity will create challenges for professionals and programs that serve older people.

Chapters 7 through 10 explore current issues related to health care, income security, retirement, and housing. These chapters show that all these institutions face challenges related to population aging.

Chapter 7 reports on the 2010 federal government health care reform bill, the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.” This chapter looks at how this legislation affects health care for older people. Controversy over this legislation continues as this edition goes to print. An attempt to repeal and replace this act has begun. The result of this effort and how changes in the law (should they come about) would affect older people remains unclear at this time. Still, the overall system of health care service to older people will remain in place. New material in this chapter looks at the expansion of community care and the development of telehealth through use of the Internet.



Chapter 8 includes a discussion of funding for the Social Security program. It provides up-to-date information on the current and future solvency of Social Security. (Hint: The program will likely survive and be around for future generations.) The chapter also looks at reform proposals such as private retirement accounts and the move to defined contribution pension plans. These approaches to retirement funding shift the investment risk from the government and corporations to the individual. The chapter looks at recent data on pockets of poverty—minority group members, widows—that exist within the older population. The chapter includes a discussion of the recent economic recession and its effect on older people’s incomes.

Chapter 9 reports on the latest trends in workforce participation. Recent data show a reversal in a decades-long trend toward early retirement. A number of social and economic forces, including a drop in stock market values, the recent recession, and longer life expectancy, all encourage people to postpone retirement. The recent recession and corporate closures have also led some older workers to leave the workforce early. The chapter documents the problems older workers have in finding new jobs if they get laid off. The chapter concludes with a discussion of new career options for older workers and retirees.

Chapter 10 looks at some of the latest trends in senior housing. This includes the development of green homes, universal design (to suit people of all ages), and smart homes. This chapter picks up a theme that appears in several earlier chapters—the use of technology to support successful aging. The use of technology in homes includes video monitoring devices, computerized lighting systems, and safety devices like anti-scalding water systems. New trends in housing include cohousing—supportive communities of seniors with similar interests. This chapter reports on the growth of the “Aging Friendly Communities” movement. These communities provide social and health care support to members who otherwise live independently. Technology will also change the way older people drive cars. Auto safety features include video cameras to help people back up and alarms to warn a driver if he or she gets too close to a car in front. Improvements to road signs will make driving safer for older people (and everyone else).

Chapter 11 tracks the growing interest in recreation and education among older people. It also describes the diversity of recreational interests based on racial and ethnic differences. In particular, studies show a growth in the use of computers among older people. This includes participation in online communities, communication with family and friends, and the use of the Internet for education. Future advances in technology will open new educational opportunities for older people. It will especially benefit homebound older people or those who live at a distance from their families. Volunteering and community service also provide outlets for older people to find meaning in retirement and give back to their communities.

Chapters 12 and 13 look at the personal lives of older people—family life and social supports. Each of these topics has its own large literature and deserves its own focus. Chapter 12 looks at intimacy and our relationships with those we love. This chapter presents new information on gay couples, widowhood, couples that live apart, and dating. It describes older singles’ use of Facebook and Twitter to meet new people. A section on HIV/AIDS describes an issue that few people associate with the older generation. This chapter also describes an unusual adaptation to singlehood in later life—polyamory. This refers to people who have intimate relationships with multiple partners. This chapter includes a discussion of grandparenting—an experience common to most older people today. Chapter 13 looks at the differences between male and female caregivers. It also describes the experience of caregiver burden. Many caregivers face this challenge. Eldercare programs in the workplace can help people cope with the stress of caregiving.

Chapter 14 raises questions and issues related to the treatment of older people at the end of life. It explores topics such as physician-assisted suicide and prolonging life through technology.



This edition looks at how different cultural groups in the United States look at death and dying. This discussion returns to the theme of diversity within the older population. It urges sensitivity to cultural differences around end-of-life care. The chapter also describes new ways to communicate end-of-life preferences through advance directives.

Chapter 15 provides information on politics and social policy. It deals with the current political system and how it might address the issues raised in earlier chapters. Topics include voting behavior, political participation, and support for senior programs. The chapter also criticizes the “Merchants of Doom” who predict generational conflict due to population aging. More moderate voices call for intergenerational cooperation and support.

Taken together, these chapters give an overview of aging in American society. This edition expands on changes first noted in earlier editions. These include a more positive view of aging, new responses to an aging society, and the entry of new cohorts of people into later life.

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My son Daniel assisted at points along the way. He's watched me work on this book for several years. Now he has become a scholar himself and plans an academic career. Someday I may help him with one of his books.

I dedicate this book to my mother-in-law, Sylvia Kravis. She passed away during the writing of this book. She is a great-grandmother many times over. She drove her own car into her late eighties and lived independently until near the end of her life. She raised a happy and productive family. A recent photo shows her surrounded by her children and their spouses, her grandchildren and their spouses, and her great-grandchildren. She beams with pride at the camera, her youngest great-grandchild in her lap. She's been a role model of successful aging, and I thank her and remember her for the support she's given all of us through the years.

## **SUPPLEMENTS FOR THE INSTRUCTOR**

Please visit the eResources website at  
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# Aging Today



Patrick Ward/Alamy

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- LO1 Describe the goals of gerontology.
- LO2 Recognize ageism and understand its effect on older people.
- LO3 Recognize the sources of ageism in Western society.
- LO4 Replace myths about aging with factual knowledge.
- LO5 Explain some of the ways that thieves attempt to steal from older people through fraud, and the effects of victimization.
- LO6 Criticize workplace discrimination and its effects on older workers.
- LO7 Explain what gerontologists mean by “the ageless self.”
- LO8 Describe the reason for the emergence of the “Third Age” and “the Fourth Age.”
- LO9 Point to changes that can moderate ageism including educational programs and social policies.



Jessie Taylor called for a cab and headed downtown for her last appointment of the day. She works for the state office on aging. She monitors nursing home standards and teaches staff ways to improve patient care. Jessie is 63 years old. She has a pear-shaped figure, a pixie grin, and a mop of gray hair. As she got out of the cab, the driver got out, too. He grabbed her elbow, ushered her across the street, and deposited her on the sidewalk. “You can’t be too careful crossing the street these days,” he said, then smiled and waved goodbye. Jessie said that when she goes to her local supermarket, the checkout clerk often asks other customers to wait a moment while she checks Jessie’s things through. Then, one of the workers helps her to her car with her groceries.

All of this used to surprise Jessie. After all, she works at a job like everyone else, drives her own car when she travels out of town, and serves as a leader in her profession. Yet sometimes people treat her like a frail old woman. People see her kind face, gray hair, and wrinkles and they want to help her. They imagine that she needs help doing simple things because of her age. I asked Jessie whether she ever tells people that she doesn’t need their help. She said that sometimes she does, but she doesn’t want to discourage these people from helping someone in the future, so often she goes along and grins to herself.

Jessie knows that stereotypes can be useful. They help us get along in a complex world where we know only a fraction of the people we see and meet every day. But stereotypes can lead to problems. Jessie sees **stereotyping** every day in her work. She listens as nursing home aides call patients “dearie” and “sweetie.” She watches as workers use baby talk with their adult patients.

Stereotypes can lead us to misjudge people, to treat them inappropriately, and in the case of older people, to assume that they need help.<sup>1</sup> Stereotyping can also lead to **prejudice**, a negative attitude toward a person, and to **discrimination**, unfair treatment based on prejudice rather than merit. **Gerontology**, the systematic study of aging, attempts to counteract stereotyping and prejudice.

It presents a more balanced view of later life. This chapter looks at (1) the benefits of studying aging, (2) the social basis of age stereotyping, and (3) changes in society that will lead to new images of later life.

## KEY TERMS

**stereotyping** to believe unfairly that all people with a particular characteristic are the same.

**prejudice** a negative attitude toward a person based on their social characteristic such as age, gender, ethnicity, or race.

**discrimination** unfair treatment based on a prejudice rather than merit.

**gerontology** the systematic study of aging.

## WHY STUDY AGING?

Everyone can benefit from the study of aging. First, gerontology can help you understand current social issues. A society with an increasingly older population, for example, will experience changes in **social institutions**. Consider the following changes that will occur in three institutions: the family, the health care system, and recreation programs.

- More people than ever before will live in what some gerontologists call *beanpole families*. These families have three, four, or more generations alive at the same time. Each generation has relatively few members due to smaller numbers of children being born. Older people in these families will live into late old age. Some of them will need caregiving help from their younger family members. Others will live independently or with some formal help in late old age.
- Older people will get more of their health care services in the community. Programs such as visiting nurse services, Meals on Wheels, and foot clinics at senior centers



will help keep seniors in their homes longer.

- Older people will take part in more active recreation programs, including fitness programs, adventure travel, and university courses.

These changes will lead to different social service needs, and this will require a shift in economic resources. Should the government give more money to older people? Will this mean less money for other age groups? Will it lead to tensions between the generations? Answers to these questions will shape public policy in the future. The study of aging allows you to understand and respond sensibly to such issues.

The second reason for studying aging is that you might plan to work in a field that serves older people. Students in nursing, social work, or physiotherapy will almost certainly work with older people. Students in recreation studies, architecture, or family studies will also benefit from understanding aging. Even students in business programs need to know about aging. Companies from banks to restaurants to travel agencies now see older customers as an important part of their clientele. You will work with older people in almost any field you choose. Knowledge of aging will give you a better understanding of your clients and their needs.

Third, most of us live in families with older members. Your parents and grandparents will soon face many of the issues discussed here. You can help them deal with the issues of later life by studying aging.

Jeanne, a student in one of my classes, used her knowledge of aging to help her grandmother stay involved in family life. She noticed that her grandmother had begun to avoid Sunday family dinners. Jeanne discovered that her mother had told her grandmother not to bother making the potato salad for dinners anymore. Jeanne's mother wanted to make life easier for her grandmother, whose arthritis had gotten worse.

The grandmother felt that she had lost an important role in the family. If she couldn't help cook the family dinner, she decided she wouldn't come at all. Jeanne explained the situation to her mother, and they arranged for Jeanne to work with

her grandmother in preparing the potato salad. The grandmother enjoyed teaching Jeanne her recipe, Jeanne got to know her grandmother in a new way, and her grandmother started coming to Sunday dinners again. Greater awareness of aging issues can make you a resource to your community, your family, and yourself.

Most people know something about aging before they study the subject. They know about aging from their personal experiences, from their contact with older people in their families and neighborhoods, and from the media. Still, this gives a limited view of aging, one that sometimes mixes truth with bias and myth. A person who has watched a relative or friend die of Alzheimer's disease, for example, may fear aging. But relatively few people contract this disease. Most older people are healthy into late old age. The Federal Interagency Forum (2012, p. 29) said that between 2008 and 2010, "76 percent of people age 65 and over rated their health as good, very good, or excellent." Even at age 85 and over, 67 percent of people report good or better health.

Older people form a diverse group. Some people have problems, while others report high life satisfaction. "Apart from dementia," Zarit said, "older people have lower rates of mental disorders than other adult age groups and generally report higher emotional well-being. . . . This is a finding supported by virtually every epidemiological survey" (2009, pp. 675–676). Zarit concluded that "older people may, in fact, be somewhat better off—happier, less depressed, and even less lonely than the other adult age-groups" (p. 678).

Jivraj and colleagues (2014) conducted a long-term study of people age 50 and over in England. They found high subjective well-being among their subjects. They also found that, compared to younger cohorts in their study, older cohorts report higher levels of subjective well-being. They found this pattern well into old age when poor health and widowhood led to decline. The researchers said that

Satisfaction with life . . . seems to increase in older cohorts and increase at a faster



rate when controlling for marital and health status. . . . [this] shows that as people age, their health declines and they have less partnership support, they nevertheless become more satisfied with their circumstances, and are happier in their situation than they would have been if they had been younger. (p. 939)

In spite of results like this, Hummert (2011) said that, with respect to aging, “the number of negative stereotypes exceeds that of positive stereotypes” (p. 251). Gerontologists work to replace myths and stereotypes with facts and knowledge. They have conducted many studies that look at current images of aging and attitudes toward old age.

## AGEISM

Some years ago, Robert Butler (1969) coined the term **ageism** to describe these negative attitudes toward aging. The International Longevity Center (2006, p. 21) defined ageism as “Ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices on the part of individuals that are biased against persons or groups based on their older age.” Ageism “reflects a deep-seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged—a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, ‘uselessness,’ and death” (Butler, 1969, p. 243; also Butler, 2005).

Palmore (2001) reported that, in one sample of older people, 77 percent said they had experienced more than one incident of ageism. They most often reported disrespect or the assumption that they had an illness. The World Economic Forum (2012, p. 10) found that ageism “is prevalent worldwide.”

Hess (2006, p. 384) reviewed the psychological literature on aging stereotypes. He found that overall “the literature suggests an underlying negative component to most categories of older adults.” Achenbaum (2015) said that “ageism remains virulent” as much today as in the past. Laboratory studies of attitudes about aging show

a consistent bias against older people. Nosek, Banaji, and Greenwald (2002) compared subjects’ attitudes toward race, gender, and age. They found stronger negative associations with age than with race or gender.

Studies (Hummert, 2011; also Ouchida & Lachs, 2015; Davis & Friedrich, 2010) find that older people themselves hold negative age stereotypes and these lead to “biased behaviour toward older persons, even from members of the older age group” (p. 254). Hummert said that older people who stereotype fellow seniors display the “black sheep effect.” This “occurs when group members derogate in-group members whose characteristics threaten positive perceptions of the group” (p. 253). In an earlier study, Hummert, Garstka, and Shaner (1997) found that, compared to younger people, older people applied more negative stereotypes when shown the faces of very old people. The researchers said that the very old faces threatened the older participants’ positive view of themselves.

Older people may try to distance themselves from being old in everyday life. Graham (2010, p. 4), editor of *AARP—The Magazine*, tells the following story. She and fellow editors attended a Bruce Springsteen concert in New Jersey in October 2009. A woman approached them and asked, “Why would you wear an AARP [formerly the American Association of Retired Persons] T-shirt to a Springsteen concert?” Graham explained that she worked for AARP and that, by the way, Springsteen himself was 60 years old. The woman took this in, then asked, “But why would you want people to know you’re *old*?”

Graham said this response would make sense from a teenage Springsteen fan. But this woman was in her sixties. Graham said a friend of hers calls this attitude “chronological racism.” Ageism makes life unpleasant and in some cases difficult for the older person. Comedian Carole Montgomery, 55, wrote an article for the *Huffington Post*. She titled it “WAIT, I’m Not Dead, I’m Just Over 50” (Montgomery, 2013). She said, “The first time I read Harry Potter I remember thinking *how cool would it be to have*



*an invisibility cloak?* And then I turned 50 and voila, my cloak was me.”

She then asked, “What’s so bad about getting old? Are the young so afraid of aging because that means you’re closer to death? Or is it that we’ve brainwashed our youth to believe that only tight skin and shiny hair are the epitome of perfection?”

A national study of perceptions of aging in the United States found that fewer than half of older people reported “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problems with health, crime, income, and loneliness. But this same group of older people thought that nearly all older people had “very serious” or “somewhat serious” health, safety, income, or relationship problems (Cutler, Whitelaw, & Beattie, 2002). Palmore (2015), in a summary of the literature on ageism, said “even older people continue to believe the negative stereotype that most old people are weak, sick, or senile” (p. 873).

Some older people, for example, refuse to use bus passes that give discounts to seniors. They would rather pay the higher fares than admit their age. A 72-year-old man I met on a bus told me he was going to visit the “old folks” at a local nursing home. He does not see himself as an old person. Most people, it seems, feel that “old” is 5 years older than they are.

Some years ago, Kalish (1979) and Estes (1979) described a **new ageism**. This refers to the desire to help older people who need special treatment due to poor health, poverty, or lack of social supports. Although this positive form of ageism tries to do good, it supports the stereotype of old age as a time of decline and loss. Binstock (1983, 2005a) calls this a **compassionate stereotype** or compassionate ageism. This stereotype attempts to create sympathy for older people, but it doesn’t give a true picture of later life.

Estes found that a federal bureaucracy to care for older people, what she calls the **aging enterprise**, grew out of compassionate stereotyping. Supporters of older people created the stereotype of older people as poor, frail, and dependent.

This image created sympathy for older people and led to programs such as **Medicare**, the **Older Americans Act**, and improved **Social Security**. These programs did improve older people’s lives, but they also set the stage for the current round of **scapegoating**.

Some people now question whether the old deserve such apparently lavish treatment. Some policy analysts and the press declare that older people have plenty of money and political power and they cost too much to care for. Stereotyping, whether negative or compassionate, in the end decreases public support for the older person who really needs help.

## KEY TERMS

**social institution** a stable social organization such as the family, the government, or the education system.

**ageism** “Ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices on the part of individuals that are biased against persons or groups based on their older age” (International Longevity Center (2006, p. 21).

**new ageism** the desire to help older people who need special treatment due to poor health, poverty, or lack of social supports.

**compassionate stereotype** attempts to create sympathy for older people, but it doesn’t give a true picture of later life.

**aging enterprise** the federal bureaucracy that has grown up to care for older people.

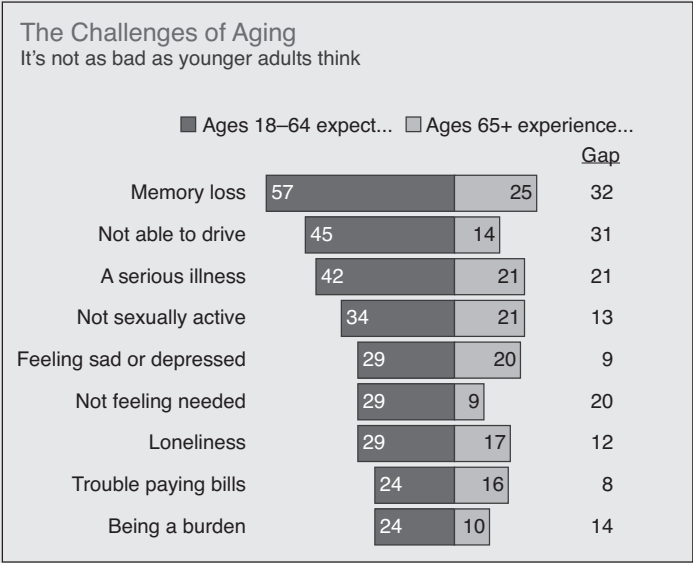
**Medicare** the federal government health care plan to serve older people.

**Older Americans Act** legislation enacted in 1965 that authorizes a range of home and community-based services such as Meals on Wheels, transportation, and legal services.

**Social Security** the federal government income system to support older people.

**scapegoating** singling out a person or group to blame for a situation.





**Figure 1.1** The Challenges of Aging

*Note:* Asked of adults 18–64, *n* = 1,631; and adults 65+, *n* = 1,332.

*Source:* Pew Research Center. (2009). Growing old in America: Expectations vs. Reality. Retrieved April 10, 2016, [www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/06/29/growing-old-in-america-expectations-vs-reality/](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/06/29/growing-old-in-america-expectations-vs-reality/). Reprinted with permission.

The Pew Research Center conducted a study of 2,969 adults to learn about the views of aging held by younger and older people. Figure 1.1 shows the results of a question that asked about the challenges people face in old age.

In every case, compared to seniors, younger people held a more negative view of later life.

The large majority of older people (80 percent) do not report feeling sad or depressed. Only 9 percent of older people report not feeling needed, and only 10 percent said they feel like they are a burden.

TABLE 1.1 The Benefits of Growing Older (Percent Who Feel This Way)	
More time with family	70
Not working	66
More time for hobbies/interests	65
More financial security	64
Less stress	59
More respect	59
Volunteer work	52
More travel	52
Second career	14

*Adapted from:* Pew Research Center. (2009). Growing old in America: Expectations vs. Reality. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from [www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/06/29/growing-old-in-america-expectations-vs-reality/](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/06/29/growing-old-in-america-expectations-vs-reality/)

The Pew Research Center looked at what older people liked about later life. They consulted 1,332 older adults to get their views. The responses to this survey (Table 1.1) show a generally positive view of old age. This, in part, reflects the benefits of retirement from work. Retirement allows seniors to spend more time on hobbies, with family, in volunteer roles, and on travel. In response to an open-ended question, seniors rated time with family, especially grandchildren, as the best thing about old age. About three-quarters of seniors (in response to another question) said they were “pretty happy” or “very happy.” The Pew report concludes that “the phrase “golden years” is something more than a syrupy greeting card sentiment.”



### BOX 1.1 Quiz: Are You Age Aware?

Find out if you are age aware or age averse by taking this simple quiz.

1. When referring to people over the age of 75, what term do you use?
  - Elderly
  - Older woman/older man
  - Seniors or senior citizens
  - Old Age Pensioner
  - Geriatrics
  - Old-timer or golden-ager
2. How would you complete this sentence? Old age means . . .
  - A physically older version of myself
  - Having more time to do the things I love
  - Losing my independence/becoming dependent on others
  - Not being able to stay physically active
  - Being wiser
  - Losing my mental capacity
3. Which statement below most closely matches the type of interactions you have with people over the age of 75, other than your parents or grandparents?
  - I volunteer with older adults because I enjoy their company
  - I have no real exposure to people in their 70s and 80s because I avoid old people whenever possible
  - I connect with relatives/friends who are over 75 occasionally out of obligation
  - I have acquaintances who I enjoy chatting with regularly and assist with simple tasks if they need my help
4. When you think of people over the age of 75, how would you typically describe them?
  - I don't have much exposure to older adults, but when I do encounter them I enjoy their company
  - Boring with not much to say
  - Interesting with great stories to tell
  - Confused and slow-witted
  - Grumpy and generally miserable
  - Happy and content with life
  - It depends on the individual
5. Choose the response that most closely resembles how you would react in the following scenario. *You're chatting with your mother or grandmother on the phone and she mentions that she's feeling under the weather but it's nothing serious, you . . .*
  - Ask her if she wants you to make her an appointment with the doctor
  - Hang up the phone and make a doctor's appointment without consulting her
  - Take her at her word that it's nothing serious, she's a grown woman and knows what's best for herself
  - Tell her that she needs to make an appointment with her doctor, you know what's best for her
  - Ignore her comment completely, older people tend to be hypochondriacs

Source: Revera. (2015). *Age is more*. Retrieved from <http://ageismore.com/ageismore/about/age-aware-quiz.aspx>. Reprinted with permission.

## CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF AGEISM

At a conference a few years ago, a sales representative gave me a page of comments about getting older. The page had his name and phone number in the outside margins. I suppose he thought that people would pass this page along to colleagues. They would share this bit of humor and his name as well. The page said:

You know you're getting old when . . .

- Everything hurts, and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.
- Your pacemaker makes the garage door go up every time a pretty girl walks by.
- Your back goes out more often than you do.
- The last time you helped a little old lady across the street, it was your wife.



I've read these lines to many audiences and classes of students, and people find them funny. But at the risk of ruining the fun, I suggest that all of these jokes foster ageism. For one thing, they all make older people seem physically and psychologically weak. They also make older people seem less able to do things or imply that they cannot control their bodily functions.

The man who gave me this list saw no harm in the humor, and since then I have received copies of this list from other sources. One copy of this list appeared in *Reader's Digest*. Imagine that a similar list had a racial or ethnic bias. Would you pass it along to your customers or show it to your professor? Would it be published in a national magazine? Few people see these jokes as ageist at first. All of us have grown up with the stereotype of older people as run-down and decrepit. Jokes like these and many other sources in our culture support ageist beliefs.

Great writings from the past, for example, present ageist images of older people. Aristotle's image of aging shows many of the biases people express today. Old men, he said,

are sure about nothing and under-do everything. . . . They are small-minded, because they have been humbled by life: their desires are set upon nothing more exalted or unusual than what will help them to keep alive. . . . They live by memory rather than by hope. . . . This, again, is the cause of their loquacity; they are continually talking of the past, because they enjoy remembering it. . . . Their sensual passions have either altogether gone or have lost their vigour.

(1941, Bk. II: Chapter 13,  
pp. 1405–1406)

Machiavelli presents the old man in his play *La Clizia* as a lecher. Shakespeare, at the start of *King Lear*, presents the king as a fool. Children's stories throughout history feature ragmen, bogeymen, and wicked witches—all caricatures of old people. Psychologist Becca Levy (2003, cited in Dittmann, 2003; also Calasanti, 2006) reported, "Age stereotypes are often internalized at a young

age—long before they are even relevant to people," and early attitudes tend to be reinforced over their lifetimes.

Psychological learning theory says that early exposure to social information may influence how a child will think about aging and getting older. And this early exposure may carry on into adulthood. Hollis-Sawyer and Cuevas (2013) looked at how children's picture books portray older women. They chose a sample of 90 books. They found that older people appeared in only about one-third of the books. And the books that did include older women generally portrayed them negatively in the text and in images.

The books portrayed older women as witches, or crazy, or alone. The authors concluded that "aging-related and gender stereotypes are pervasive in what is presented to children, from fairytales to cartoons." They went on to say that from a "life course perspective, the earlier we understand aging in a realistic way, the more educated our decisions will be throughout life" (Hollis-Sawyer and Cuevas 2013, p. 909).

Thompson, O'Sullivan, Byers, and Shaughnessy (2014) studied 134 students, ages 18 to 24, to learn about their attitudes toward sexuality in later life. They found that students reported explicit positive attitudes toward sexuality in later life. But on further examination, they found that students held implicit (covert) negative attitudes. Their study also found a moderate implicit general bias against older adults. They conclude that "young adults appear to hold the most negative views of sexuality in older adults compared to children and middle-aged adults" (p. 259).

## The Media as a Source of Ageism

The media provides more examples of ageist treatment. The cartoon show *The Simpsons* depicts Grandpa Simpson as ignorant, forgetful, and timid. In one episode, he and his nursing home friends break out of the home to freedom. They make it to the sidewalk, look around, get scared, and shuffle back inside.



## BOX 1.2 What's in a Name?

Every group has its preferred name for itself. Do we call someone an American Indian, an Aboriginal Person, a Native American? Groups generally adopt and promote a term that presents them in a positive way. However, no acceptable term has evolved to refer to the older population, and anyone who writes about older people or speaks to groups about aging faces a dilemma. What should we call people age 65 and over?

I have not found a term that all the older people I meet will accept. This poses a dilemma for someone who needs to write about older people as a group.

Canadians, for example, feel comfortable with the term *seniors*, as in "senior centre." But in the United States, senior center directors want to

find a new term for their organizations. They feel that the word *senior* turns off new generations of older people. Likewise, terms such as *Gruppies* (Graying Urban Professionals) seem silly. Beck (1990) reports on several other options: "Whoopies (Well-Heeled Older People), OPALs (Older Persons with Active Lifestyles) and Grumpies (Grownup Mature People)." None of these has caught on.

"The real problem," Beck (1990) said, "is that any term associated with *old* is still considered derogatory." And until we tackle and overcome our societal rejection of aging, someone will be offended no matter what term we choose.

Have a chat with some older people and ask them what term they use to describe their age group.

Studies of prime-time television shows, television commercials, and children's shows have generally found that television underrepresents older people. Donlon, Ashman, and Levy (2005) found that less than 2 percent of prime time TV characters were age 65 years or older (though the older population makes up nearly 13 percent of American society). Studies of television commercials also find an underrepresentation of older people in advertisements. When television does portray older people, as in commercials, it often puts them in stereotyped roles. A Dutch study found that the news media in that country tended to portray older characters as incompetent, but with warm personalities (Lepianka, 2015).

In 2003, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) reported that only 27 percent of all women's roles on prime-time television went to women over age 40, and they were typically cast as victims: betrayed, abandoned, and abused. The SAG also reported that more than twice as many roles are available for actors under the age of 40 as for actors older than 40 (International Longevity Center, 2006).

Older people express concern about these negative stereotypes (Robinson, Popovich, Gustafson, & Fraser, 2003). Levitt and Dubner (2005), in their book *Freakonomics*, describe a TV show called *The Weakest Link*. On this show,

contestants vote to eliminate other players. In the early rounds, weak players are eliminated because they lack the information needed to help the others succeed. In the later rounds, players are eliminated if they know too much, because they increase the competition. Levitt and Dubner found that

elderly players [on the show] . . . are victims of taste-based discrimination: in the early rounds *and* late rounds, they are eliminated far out of proportion to their skills. It seems as if the other contestants—this is a show on which the average age is thirty-four—simply don't want the older players around. (2005, p. 79)

A study titled *Ageism in America* reports that the TV show *Murder She Wrote*

starred the legendary stage and film actress Angela Lansbury. Having run successfully for ten years, the show was canceled at the height of its popularity because the audience was deemed too old and therefore the time sold not sufficiently profitable.

(International Longevity Center, 2006, p. 55)



Studies have found signs of ageism in magazine articles (Whitfield, 2001), country music (Aday & Austin, 2000), and jokes (Palmore, 2015). Bowd (2003) reviewed 4,200 jokes and found eight categories of negative stereotypes, including the impotent male, the unattractive female, the sick older person, and the forgetful older person.

Thornton and Light (2006, p. 276) describe the use of **elderspeak** and its effect on older people. Elder-speak refers to “a specialized speech register resembling baby talk in addressing older adults.” This form of speech uses fewer clauses, shorter phrases, more filler phrases (e.g., *like* or *you know*), words with fewer syllables, slower speech, and longer pauses. In other words, elder-speak sounds like baby talk.

## KEY TERM

**elderspeak** a specialized speech used with older people, often by younger people, resembling baby talk.

Elderspeak also includes the use of words such as *dearie*, *cutie*, and *sweetie* (Kennedy, 2012). Institutional workers may use words like these to address residents (for example, “Good morning, dearie, it’s time for breakfast”). Thornton and Light said that stereotyping drives elder-speak. The speaker assumes that the older person has low mental ability or some other impairment.

Elderspeak has a negative effect on the older person. It creates low self-esteem, it reduces a person’s ability to communicate effectively, it decreases the quality of interaction, and it reduces the older person’s sense of control (Ouchida & Lachs, 2015). Ageism even influences retail sales. One student, as part of an assignment to study ageism, entered a women’s clothing store with her mother and grandmother. The store sold moderately priced clothes for women of all ages. The three women walked around the store separately to see whom the sales staff would approach first. The staff approached the student first to offer help and the grandmother last.

Ruth Reichl, former *New York Times* food critic, conducted a similar experiment. She went

to lunch at Tavern on the Green in New York with two older women. One was an acting coach, the other a wealthy older woman dressed in cashmere and fur. Reichl dressed in disguise for the lunch in order to remain anonymous to the restaurant staff. She wore the clothes and took on the personality of a poor old woman.

She reports that the waiters either ignored their table or appeared impatient when serving them. Their table seemed to get slower service than others. Reichl writes,

The service was so slow that after a great deal of small talk and five pots of tea, I felt compelled to apologize. “I always seem to get bad service,” I told Helen [the wealthy woman]. “I don’t know why.” “Well, I do,” she [Helen] snapped. “You look like an old lady. And waiters consider old ladies their natural enemies. They think that they will complain constantly, order the cheapest dishes on the menu, and leave a six percent tip. I have found that it is essential to appear prosperous when going out to eat.”

(Reichl, 2005, pp. 211–212, 215)

Obvious poverty or low income compounds the ageism that an older person faces. In her disguise as an old and poor woman, Reichl became invisible. “As I walked up Riverside Drive,” she said,

not one of the many people walking dogs, wheeling strollers, or carrying briefcases glanced my way. No doorman tipped his hat as I went by. By the time I got to the corner, I felt as insubstantial as the wind; when people looked my way they saw only the buildings at my back. When I waved my hand the taxis hurtled past as if I were not there. I finally resorted to stepping into the middle of the street.

When she finally got a cab, the driver hit the gas so hard it threw her against the back of the seat. When she protested and asked him to slow down, he ignored her. “Perhaps it was how he



## BOX 1.3 Disguised

### The Story of Patricia Moore: A Woman Who Disguised Herself as Old

How does it feel to be an older person? Most of us will have to wait many years to find out, but knowing what it feels like might give us each new insights into aging. Patricia Moore, a 26-year-old industrial designer at the time, decided to turn herself into an 85-year-old woman.

Her journey into old age began with a custom-made latex mask and a white wig. She dressed the part with her mother's purse, canvas shoes, and a cane. She wore bandages on her legs, support stockings, and a cinch to flatten her chest. Old glasses and a pillbox hat completed the disguise.

Pat put her disguise on almost every week for 3 years. She played the role of an old woman in 116 cities in 14 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces. She said that geography made little

difference in how people treated her as an older person. Some people offered her help and treated her kindly. Other people ignored her. Sometimes she faced overt ageism.

Pat gave up her disguise after 3 years, but not before she got mugged, met poor and abused older people, and also met kind strangers who helped her on her way. She counts older people among the kindest strangers she met during her time as an old woman.

Does Pat Moore, the young one with the smooth skin and the pretty eyes, ever miss the "old lady"?

"Oh, I miss her," Pat answers without hesitation. "She was a good friend. We meant a great deal to each other, but for now we've said good-bye.

"It's not a sad parting, though," she adds with a mischievous smile, "I expect to see her again—in the mirror—in about 50 years!"

In Photos 1.1 and 1.2, you can see how Pat looked in and out of her disguise at the time.



**Photo 1.1** Pat Moore in her disguise as an old woman.

Source: Patricia Moore, *DISGUISED—The Story of Patricia Moore: A Woman Who Disguised Herself as Old*. Used with permission.

Bruce Byers Photography



**Photo 1.2** Pat Moore as she looks today.

Source: Patricia Moore, *DISGUISED—The Story of Patricia Moore: A Woman Who Disguised Herself as Old*. Used with permission.

Bruce Byers Photography



always drove,” she said, “but it made me feel like an old boot, a piece of junk that he was desperate to deposit at its destination.”

Reichl experienced a sudden entry into the world of an older person. But many older people experience ageism daily.

One woman, in a study of attitudes toward older people, said, “Salespersons can be impatient if you are choosing something and are not swift enough.” Another woman said, “Salespeople will talk to me rather than to my mother who is 85” (National Advisory Council on Aging, 1993, p. 20). Ageism negatively affects older people’s self-images and lowers their status in society. It makes everyday life less pleasant and in some cases more difficult. Studies find that negative stereotypes of older people lead to lower vitality (Emile, d’Arripe-Longueville, Cheval, Amato, & Chalabaev, 2015), poor health (Vauclair and colleagues, 2015), and even hospitalization (Levy, Slade, Chung, & Gill, 2015).

Writer Malcolm Cowley (1980) describes the effects of ageism on his self-image. “We start by growing old in other people’s eyes,” he said, “then slowly we come to share their judgment.” He recalls the time he backed out of a parking lot and nearly collided with another car. The driver got out, ready to fight. “Why, you’re an old man,” he said after seeing Cowley. Then he got back in his car and drove away. Cowley bristles when he remembers the event.

Some years later, he said,

a young woman rose and offered me her seat in a Madison Avenue bus. That message was kind and also devastating. “Can’t I even stand up?” I thought as I thanked her and declined the seat. But the same thing happened twice the following year, and the second time I gratefully accepted the offer, though with a sense of having diminished myself. “People are right about me,” I thought. . . . All the same it was a relief to sit down and relax.

(Cowley, 1980, pp. 5–6)

## Lack of Knowledge as a Source of Ageism

Some of what looks like ageism comes from ignorance. Few people know much about aging today except what they see and hear in the media and popular culture. Gerontologist Erdman Palmore (1977) created a Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ) to explore people’s knowledge about aging. Palmore designed the quiz to test physical, mental, and social knowledge as well as common misconceptions about old age. The FAQ has led to a small explosion of studies as researchers from around the world criticized, validated, and modified the original quiz (Palmore, Branch, & Harris, 2005; Helmes, 2016; Pachana, Helmes, & Gudgeon, 2013).

Palmore himself published part two of the quiz in 1981. He later developed a multiple-choice quiz (Harris, Changas, & Palmore, 1996). Here is a brief FAQ that draws on Palmore’s quizzes.<sup>2</sup> Read the questions and answer them either true or false.

1. All five senses tend to decline in old age.
2. Over 20 percent of the U.S. population is now age 65 or over.
3. The life expectancy of African Americans at age 75 is about the same as that of whites.
4. The majority of older people have incomes below the poverty level (as defined by the federal government).
5. Older workers have fewer accidents than younger workers.
6. People tend to become more religious as they age.
7. Lung capacity tends to decline in old age.
8. At least 10 percent of the aged are living in long-stay institutions (i.e., nursing homes, mental hospitals, homes for the aged).
9. Over three-fourths of older people can carry out their daily activities without help.
10. The aged have higher rates of criminal victimization than persons under age 65.

How did you score? The answers appear on page 15.



Palmore (1998, p. 43) reports a “most disturbing general finding” from the use of the FAQs. “Most people know little about aging and have many misconceptions . . . the average person appears to have almost as many misconceptions about aging as correct conceptions.” He found that people scored better on some questions than on others. The questions most often missed included the proportion of older people in long-stay institutions, the older person’s inability to change, and the proportion of older people below the poverty line.

A study by the AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) and the University of Southern California (2004) found similar results. This national study of almost 1,500 Americans found that people answered about half the items on a 25-point quiz correctly. Sixty-four percent of respondents mistakenly thought that a majority of older people lived in poverty, 73 percent mistakenly thought older people were lonely, and 85 percent mistakenly thought that 10 percent of older people live in nursing homes.

Palmore (1998) found that test takers tended to assume a negative view of older people. He also found that even people with expertise in aging missed many of the FAQ questions. Graduate students and professionals who worked with older people missed about one-third of the true/false questions. Gerontology students and faculty

members missed from 10 percent to 30 percent of the items. These findings (also Davis & Friedrich, 2010) suggest that most people have an uneven knowledge about aging. In general, people seemed to have more knowledge of physical changes that come with age and less knowledge of social facts about aging.

Both the Palmore research and the study by the AARP and University of Southern California show that the most frequent misconceptions about aging come from negative views of old age. Palmore (1998) found that people with more education scored better on the FAQ. People with a high school education scored 52 percent to 60 percent correct, undergraduates scored 55 percent to 69 percent correct, graduate students scored 65 percent to 76 percent correct, and gerontology students and faculty scored 66 percent to 92 percent correct. Finally, specialists in the field of aging scored 90 percent or better.

Hess (2006) reviewed the research on attitudes toward older people. He found that people with more knowledge about aging had a more positive view of later life. They could see things from the perspective of the older person. Also, people who had personal contact with older adults tend to stereotype less. Negative stereotypes come into play most often when we know little about a person or group.

## BOX 1.4 To Dye

### Or Not to Dye: That Is the Question

“I had light streaks put in my dark hair when I was younger,” Genie said. “Now I do the opposite. I have dark streaks put in my gray hair.” She said:

As I got older, I had my hair colored its original black. I had it done every 3 or 4 weeks. It cost a fortune. But I made it part of my budget. Had to have it done. I couldn’t stop. If I stopped, I’d have a line across my head where the gray would grow in and where the black color stopped.

Then I got sick and they shaved my head. That was my opportunity. I stopped coloring my hair. I let it go silver. But one day I looked in the mirror and I thought, “Gosh, she looks old.” So I started again, but this time with dark highlights in the gray.

Genie faced the dilemma that many women (and men) face as they age—to dye or not to dye. In a society that idolizes youth, gray hair marks a person as old and less desirable. Hair dye covers

*(continued)*



**BOX 1.4 (continued)**

one sign of aging and allows a person to appear more youthful.

A Procter & Gamble survey cited in Kreamer, 2007) found that 65 percent of women dyed their hair in 2004—many times the proportion in the 1950s. This, Kreamer (p. 72) said, “is why going gray has become a difficult . . . choice for modern women to make.” A gray-haired older woman now stands out from her age group.

A 2007 *Time* magazine poll asked people whether they thought gray hair is an advantage or disadvantage today. Nearly four-fifths of respondents (79 percent) thought gray hair disadvantaged a person in personal or social life, and 67 percent thought it disadvantaged a person in the workplace.

Nora Ephron (2006, p. 36), in her book *I Feel Bad About My Neck*, said,

There’s a reason why forty, fifty, and sixty don’t look the way they used to, and it’s not because of feminism or better living through exercise. It’s because of hair dye. . . . Hair dye has changed everything, but it almost never gets the credit. It’s the most powerful weapon older women have against the youth culture.

The new role of women in the workplace plays some role in women’s decisions to dye their

hair. The workplace values a youthful look, and women may feel pressured by social attitudes to use hair color. But this poses a dilemma. The independent working woman represents a liberation from the past definitions of femininity.

The women’s liberation movement promised freedom from narrow (male-dominated) views of female beauty. A woman who dyes her hair to appear younger seems to give in to the stereotypical images of youth and beauty that women wanted to escape.

**Questions**

Will new generations of women, the Baby Boomers, continue to dye their hair? Boomers created the “do your own thing” ethic of the 1960s. Will they reject social convention and stop coloring their hair as they enter the third age? Will Boomers let their inner gray show?

What do you think about the tendency of women (and some men) to color their hair? Should people dye their hair as they age in order to look younger? Or should they allow their gray hair to show?

Does hair coloring encourage the continuation of negative attitudes toward getting older? Does hair coloring marginalize the poor older person, who can’t afford professional hair coloring? Does hair coloring give in to societal ageism?

**BOX 1.5 A (Slightly) Humorous Look at Aging**

Nora Ephron (2010), in her seventies, wrote, directed, and produced the film *Julie & Julia*. She reflects (with a touch of humor) on the ambivalence she feels about aging in an essay titled “The O Word.”

I’m old.

I am sixty-nine years old.

I’m not really old, of course.

Really old is eighty.

But if you are young, you would definitely think that I’m old.

No one actually likes to admit that they’re old. The most they will cop to is that they’re older. Or oldish.

In these days of physical fitness, hair dye, and plastic surgery, you can live much of your life without feeling or even looking old.

(pp. 127–128)

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## SOME FACTS ON AGING TODAY

Consider some of the correct answers to questions on the FAQ. You will find more details on these questions and the other questions on the FAQ in later chapters. For now, consider the facts presented here and think about why people might have missed these items.

**True or False?** Over 20 percent of the U.S. population is now age 65 or over.

**False.** The proportion of older people in the United States has grown over the past 100 years. In 1900, about 4 percent of the population was age 65 or over. By 2010, the proportion of older people had more than tripled to 13 percent (West, Cole, Goodkind, & He, 2014). The proportion of older people in the population will continue to grow. By the year 2050, when the last Baby Boomers reach late old age, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that older people will make up 20 percent of the population. This aging of the population will transform American society. It will transform policies and programs for older people, open new opportunities for people of all ages, and change our views of later life.

**True or False?** The majority of older people have incomes below the poverty level (as defined by the federal government).

**False.** In 2013, 12 percent of older women and 7 percent of older men had incomes below the official poverty line (Cubanski, Casillas, & Damico, 2015). This proportion has dropped from the early 1960s, when more than 30 percent of older people had incomes below the poverty line. Older people today get more of their income from work or pensions than in the past.

In addition, a number of government programs provide a stronger economic safety net than ever before. This net consists of improved Social Security benefits, yearly cost-of-living increases in Social Security, and a Supplemental Security Income program. Some groups of older people still suffer from high rates of poverty, as we will see. But, older people today are better off than they were a generation ago.

**True or False?** At least 10 percent of the aged are living in long-stay institutions (i.e., nursing homes, mental hospitals, or homes for the aged).

**False.** On any given day, about 5 percent of people age 65 and over live in an institution. Some will stay for a short time and return to their homes. Most older people today and in the future will live on their own or with family members in the community. Most have reasonably good health and manage to care for themselves.

Those older people who have physical problems and need help often use community care programs that range from Meals on Wheels to visiting nurse services. Older people who need help rely mostly on family and friends. People who live in institutions, in most cases, are very old, have poor health, and have few informal supports to help them stay in the community.

But nursing home residence differs by gender. For example, compared to men, women make up the majority of nursing home residents in the United States. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (2012) found that women made up two-thirds (67.2 percent) of all nursing home residents. The older the age group, the higher the concentration of women.

Women show a high concentration in nursing homes for several reasons. First, women make up a higher proportion of very old people. And in late old age, a person may need nursing home care. Second, in late old age a woman will often be widowed. She may have fewer family and community supports and may need institutional care for this reason. Third, men tend to be married into late old age. They will have a wife who can provide care in their own home. All of these conditions lead to a high concentration of very old women in nursing homes.

**True or False?** The life expectancy of African Americans at age 75 is significantly less than that of whites.

**False.** African Americans, compared to whites, have a lower **life expectancy** at birth. An African American child born in 2013 could expect to live to age 75.5. A white child born in that year could expect to live to age 79.1. These figures



mean a difference of 3.6 fewer years of life expectancy for the African American child.

But this question asks about life expectancy at age 75. In 2013, the life expectancy for African American men and women at age 75 was 86.8 years. The life expectancy for white men and women age 75 in that year was 87.1 years, a difference of only three-tenths of a year—or about the same (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). These figures show the effects of high African American mortality in childhood and young adulthood. Poverty, poor health care, and unhealthy living conditions put many African American infants and children at greater risk than whites. Once African Americans reach age 75, they have survived most of these harsh conditions.

**KEY TERM**

**life expectancy** the number of years a person can expect to live at a particular age (e.g., at birth, at age 65).

**True or False?** Compared to people under age 65, the aged have higher rates of criminal victimization.

**False.** Older people have the lowest rates of criminal victimization across all crime categories (see Table 1.2). Older people, compared with younger people, have a much lower risk of violent crime or property crime. However, older people do have a high risk for certain types of crimes—for example, larceny with personal contact, such as purse snatching and pocket picking. Older people show some of the highest rates for these types of crimes in urban settings.

Doyle (1990) used an opportunity framework to explain patterns of crime against older people. *Opportunity* refers to the attractiveness of a target, the exposure of the target, and the guardianship or protection of the target. Older people have less exposure to criminals. They tend to stay at home at night and to live in relatively safe neighborhoods. Retired people spend more time at home and so protect their property more. At the same time, they do offer an attractive target for purse snatchers and pickpockets on the street.

**TABLE 1.2 Rate of Violent Victimization, by Age, 2014**  
(Victimization rates are per 1,000 persons age 12 or older)

Age	Violent Crime	Serious Violent Crime
12–17	30.1	8.8
18–24	26.8	13.6
25–34	28.5	8.6
35–49	21.6	8.9
50–64	17.9	7.0
65+	3.1	1.3

*Note:* Violent crime includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assaults. Does not include homicide.

*Note:* Serious violent crime includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.

*Adapted from:* Truman, J.L. & Langton, L. (2015). Criminal victimization, 2014. Table 9, p. 9. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved April 14, 2016, from [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv14.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv14.pdf)

This table shows the decrease in violent criminal victimization that takes place from middle age onward. Older people show extremely low rates of violent crime or serious violent crime. The data show only about 34 cases of violent crime per 1,000 older people (one-tenth the rate of the youngest age group), and only a little over 1 case of serious violent crime per 1,000 older people.

Other studies support this framework. Many minority older people live in high-crime neighborhoods and have more exposure to criminals. African American men, for example, show high rates of assault and intimidation against them. Older men in these neighborhoods may look like easy targets to criminals.

**Victimization by Fraud**

Older people seem more susceptible to certain types of crime than others. Con artists and swindlers, for example, tend to target this population.



Older people have savings that make them attractive targets. They may also have fewer social supports to help them steer clear of bogus deals such as home repair and medical and insurance scams.

Applied Research & Consulting LLC (2013, p. 3) asked a representative sample of 2,364 Americans about their susceptibility to fraud. The study found that

Americans age 65 and older are more likely to be targeted by fraudsters and more likely to lose money once targeted. Upon being solicited for fraud, older respondents were 34% more likely to lose money than respondents in their forties.

Setzand and Watson (2015) found that, compared to younger people, older people face a greater risk of fraud. Cons and swindles take many forms. Con artists often use the “bank examiner” swindle on older people. In that case, a con artist calls an older person—often a woman who lives alone—and says that someone is embezzling money from her bank. The caller asks if she will help catch the thief. The caller tells her to withdraw money from her account and give the money to a bank messenger who will arrive at her door. The caller explains that the messenger will take the money back to the bank. The bank will then check the serial numbers and catch the crooked teller. The messenger, of course, works for the con artist and gets away with the money. “‘Once you hand over your money, there is no recovery,’ said Melvin L. Jeter, southern regional security director for NationsBank. ‘There’s no way any money’s going to get back’” (McLeod, 1995, p. 14).

Home repair con artists also target older people. They look for homes that need repairs—loose shingles or a broken gutter. The swindler then knocks on the older person’s door and offers to estimate the cost of repairs. He or she gives a low estimate and says that the older person will have to pay for the work right away to get this deal. The con artist usually asks for cash payment before any work gets done. Some crooks even drive the older person to the bank to withdraw the money. Once the swindler has the money, the work

may never get done, or it is done poorly with cheap materials. Con artists of this type may come back again and again to do more repairs. They may even try to borrow money from the older person once they have a relationship.

Fraud risk differs by gender. For example, older women (age 50 and over) face the greatest risk of loss through confidence fraud/romance scams. Over 2,100 women in this age group report losses of over \$51 million in 2014—an average of \$24,000 per person. Only 729 men in this age group reported a romance scam for a total loss of \$10 million—one-fifth the total loss reported by women for this type of fraud. What accounts for the difference between the sexes? Widowhood, loneliness, isolation due to disability, and the need for companionship (even if only virtual) make older women attractive targets to romance scams.

Scammers use poetry, flowers, and other gifts to reel in victims while declaring undying love. These criminals also use stories of severe life circumstances, tragedies, family deaths, personal injuries, or other hardships to keep their victims concerned and involved in their schemes. They also ask victims to send money to help overcome alleged financial hardships.

Not surprisingly, the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3, 2014) reports that, compared to women age 50 and over, men in that age group more than two and a half times as often fall for auto-fraud scams (at least to judge by the rate of complaints). And older men, compared to older women, lose more than two and a half times as much money to these fraudsters. Gender stereotypes seem to hold true even when it comes to being fleeced. And the crooks probably know this. It seems fair to say, when it comes to fraud, women are romantics and men love their cars.

The Internet has provided scam artists with a new medium for fleecing older people. Internet scams include auto-fraud scams (where the crook attempts to sell a vehicle they don’t own), work-from-home scams (criminals use the older person’s accounts to steal and launder money), and romance scams (where the crooks begin an online relationship and then ask for money to help with personal financial problems). The IC3 (2014), in



its *2014 Internet Crime Report*, said that people age 50 and over filed 44,640 reports of Internet crime (16.6 percent of the total).

These and other electronic schemes use technology to play on a person's ignorance, weakness, or greed. Older people who have little experience with electronic media serve as easy targets for thieves. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) estimates that Internet scams account for about two-fifths of fraud complaints.

Of course, many people never report their involvement in these scams, so the total number of people affected and the total dollars lost remain unknown. Almost certainly the losses come to many times the amounts reported to the IC3. The FTC (2016) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2016) provide fraud prevention information on their websites.

## Effects of Victimization

Barbara Barer, an anthropologist at the University of California, San Francisco, found that fraud can lower an older person's self-image. She reports the case of a 96-year-old woman cheated out of money for an emergency alert system. The woman felt so embarrassed about losing the money that she never reported the crime. She felt that if her friends or family knew, they might question her competence.

Barer said that older people also feel that if they report crimes, they may face further victimization. One man arranged for car repairs with a neighbor. The neighbor never did the repairs. The man feared that the neighbor's children would smash his car windows and slash his tires if he reported the crime.

Barer said that crimes like these against older people can lead to feelings of inferiority and loss of self-esteem. Crimes against very old people can lead to a loss of independence and possibly institutionalization. Barer said that with most crimes, society sees the criminal at fault, but "when a crime is committed against an elderly individual, the victim is implicated for being at fault for allowing it to happen. The mistake is unforgivable. Thus it is preferable to conceal the shame" (Unreported Crime, 1994, p. 4).

In an earlier study, the AARP (1999) found that older people, compared with younger people, had less knowledge of consumer rights. Younger people, compared with older people, tended to take a less trusting attitude toward businesses. These differences between older and younger consumers make older people more susceptible to con artists. Police often have special pamphlets prepared to alert older people to schemes directed at them. Twenty states share information to foil fraud schemes. Other states sponsor consumer hotlines for older people, train police, and scan junk mail for current scams.

## Fear of Crime

A national study in 2000 by the National Council on Aging (Cutler et al., 2002) found that 36 percent of older people felt that fear of crime was a "very" or "somewhat" serious problem for them. This figure dropped from 50 percent in 1974. But it still means that more than one older person in three considers crime a serious problem. Also, specific groups may fear crime more than others. Acierno and colleagues (2004) asked 106 adults age 55 and over about their fear of crime. The researchers found that women, visible minority group members, people who felt depressed, and socially isolated people reported the most fear of crime.

Some fear of crime may have a sound basis. Older people who live in urban areas with high crime rates, for example, report a greater fear of crime than those in rural areas. They do in fact face a greater risk of victimization than suburban older people. Likewise, older people may fear crime because a purse snatching can lead to personal injury (National Institute on Aging, 2015b). Older people who live on fixed incomes may fear the effects of petty theft on their ability to pay their bills. The topic of fear of crime and ways to reduce this fear need more careful study.

## Ageism and the Workplace

The U.S. Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) prohibits mandatory retirement at any age (except in cases where age influences ability).



Congress (29 U.S.C. sec. 621(b) (1967), cited in McCann and Ventrell-Monses (2010) enacted the ADEA “to promote the employment of older persons based on their ability rather than age; [and] to prohibit arbitrary age discrimination in employment.” The act attempts to reduce discrimination against older workers.

But researchers have a hard time judging the success of this legislation or the extent of discrimination. Employers who discriminate on the basis of age cannot admit it for fear of legal action. Raposo and Carstensen (2015, p. 79) said “this legislation has been relatively ineffective.” Schulz and Binstock (2006, p. 158) said that the law has driven most discrimination “underground.” McCann and Ventrell-Monses (2010, p. 356) said that “more than 40 years after the ADEA’s enactment, age discrimination continues to impede the achievement of equal treatment for older persons in the workplace.”

Chou (2012, p. 27) surveyed the literature on workplace discrimination. She said employers often think of older workers as

less flexible or creative, less alert, more prone to accidents, in poorer health, unfamiliar with new technologies, more resistant to innovation and technical change, harder to train, lacking in physical strength, less ambitious, less productive, and less financially beneficial.

Chou and Choi (2010) studied micro-aggressive behavior against older workers. They found that about 80 per cent of the people in their study reported at least one instance of the following experiences in the past year: “being unfairly given undesirable tasks; being watched more closely at job than others; receiving ethnic, racial, and sexual slurs from boss or coworkers; and being ignored or not taken seriously by boss” (Chou, 2012, p. 28). Barrington (2015, p. 36) reports that ADEA filings of discrimination that cite “workplace ‘relations’ (e.g., harassment, discrimination, intimidation) have grown from 10 percent of charges in 1993 to almost 30 percent in 2010.”

The number of formal complaints lodged by workers gives a glimpse of the problem. Older workers filed 15,785 discrimination complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1997. The number of complaints grew to a peak of 24,582 in 2008. The economic recession and layoffs in 2008 in part accounts for this spike in complaints (Levitz & Shishkin, 2009). In 2016 older workers filed 20,857 complaints—22.8 percent of all complaints.

One worker told the Conference Board (Parkinson, 2002, pp. 17, 33), “After about (age) 45, the company does not continue to recognize one’s contribution, and further advancement is denied if one is not already at the VP level.” Another worker said, “All meaningful assignments or other opportunities are given to employees who are the same age as, or younger than, the boss—who is most often in his or her 40s.”

“I do not expect to retire for approximately 6 years,” one worker said. But his supervisor denied him opportunities for advancement due to his age. Haralson and Parker (2003) found that 63 percent of job seekers said they would leave dates off their resumes to hide their age.

An AARP (2008) study found that 60 percent of workers age 45–74 said they believe age discrimination exists in the workplace. Of those who believed age discrimination exists at work, nearly all (90 percent) consider it very common or somewhat common. Most of them felt that age discrimination begins at age 50. Thirteen percent of workers in this study said they experienced some form of age discrimination during the past 5 years. This included not getting hired, being passed over for promotion, being denied access to training, or being passed up for a raise.

Another survey by the AARP (2007b, p. 59) found that, compared to younger workers, workers age 50 and over had much less confidence in their ability to find a job. “Age discrimination,” the report said, “is viewed as the single largest barrier to finding jobs for workers over age 50.” A number of experimental studies document age discrimination in the workplace.

Lahey (2008), for example, sent out resumes for equally experienced older and younger



workers. The resumes went to 4,000 companies in Florida and Massachusetts. She found that the people presented as younger applicants in their resumes had a 40 percent greater chance of getting called for an interview.

A case in California shows that age discrimination can occur in the public sector. The city of Milpitas agreed to pay \$140,000 to settle an age discrimination brought by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The city

failed to hire qualified applicants over age 50 who scored higher than the person selected in a three-person panel review of the candidates. Instead, the city hired a younger applicant, age 39, for the position of executive secretary to the city manager.

(EEOC, 2016)

The district director for the EEOC, William Tamayo said, “Older workers continue to face bias due to negative stereotypes.”

In the Milpitas age discrimination case, the court ruled that the city

will distribute revised age discrimination policies to all employees; implement a comprehensive procedure for reporting complaints; provide annual anti-discrimination training to all employees, managers and supervisors; and report any age discrimination complaints to EEOC for two years.

(EEOC, 2016)

But, Rix (2008, p. 202) said that “age discrimination is all but impossible to document.” Malinen and Johnston (2013), for example, found that explicit attitudes toward older workers showed no age bias. But a further study of implicit (less conscious) attitudes showed negative attitudes toward older workers. She said that this “research demonstrates the unconscious nature of bias against older workers” (p. 446).

What sorts of things do employers believe about older workers? And what are the facts about older workers?

Cooke (2006) said that employers view older workers as more expensive and less effective than younger workers. They believe this “despite anti-discrimination laws and evidence that older workers are indeed capable of learning new tasks and tend to have higher loyalty and less absenteeism” (p. 396). Firms that want to retire older workers will do so through “voluntary buy-outs” even where states make mandatory retirement illegal.

The AARP (2007a, p. 59) sponsored a study of seven developed nations. The study found that “age discrimination in hiring practices continues to be a serious concern around the world.” People age 50 and over, compared to younger workers, said they felt less confident about their ability to find a new job. They also felt that age discrimination posed the single greatest barrier to finding a job. In this AARP study, 28 percent of people age 50 and over said that they had experienced age discrimination. Sixty percent of these people said that they experienced age discrimination when looking for a job. More than 35 percent reported age discrimination in promotion decisions.

McMullin and Berger (2006, pp. 211–218) conducted in-depth interviews with 30 unemployed women and men ages 45–65. All of these people actively tried to find work—and they all reported overt and covert ageism in their job search. “No one will tell you; no one will admit it,” one 60-year-old woman told the researchers.

But I have a friend who owns his own company and he said, “If I interview three people, even though you have the experience, if I think I can get more years out of another one, I would hire another person.” And you know, they don’t have to say that, that’s just the way it’s done.

In answer to a question about age discrimination, one 45-year-old woman made reference to the role that gender plays in age discrimination. “Well definitely because I am a woman and because of my age. They want young, attractive women, not women who are forty-five, fifty or older.” Men in this study also experienced rejection based on their age. One 62-year-old man



said, “I went to two interviews there. They finally rejected me. . . . I, as they put it, was ‘overqualified.’ . . . But I couldn’t get anyone to hire me.”

McMullin and Berger (also Raposo & Carstensen, 2015) found throughout their research that employers often used euphemisms in order to reject older workers. Some companies said that they felt the work is too fast-paced for an older worker, instead of saying the person is too old for the job. The authors said that these phrases and excuses try “to avoid charges of ageism and age-based discrimination.” Employers “seem to disguise their ageist hiring practices by rejecting older applicants with the use of more age neutral terms.”

Employers use years of experience to identify a person’s age. Workers find that their strong resumes may work against them. They signify the age of the worker and that alone may eliminate them from consideration. One worker, a woman of 60, said:

They don’t say anything, but you know when there is absolutely no reason why you shouldn’t be considered—to just look at my resume, they know how many years I’ve been in the business and they can sort of deduct that I’m not thirty-five or forty.

These workers report the effects of ageism and (in the case of the women) sexism in later life. Ageism in these cases affects more than a person’s self-image. It can lead to low wages when a person does find a job. This can keep a person from living a decent life (FrameWorks Institute, 2015).

McCann and Ventrell-Monses (2010) trace the presence of discrimination to weak legislation. These authors said that, compared to legislation that prohibits racial or gender-based discrimination, the law takes a weak stand against age discrimination. For example, a person discriminated against based on race or gender can sue for compensatory or punitive damages due to discrimination. The law does not give the older worker this same right. “Congress’s failure to provide for such damages in an age case implies that the older victim does not deserve a remedy” (McCann & Ventrell-Monses, 2010, p. 360).

The courts have taken a similar stand and “have been consistently unsympathetic to constitutionally based claims of age discrimination.” For example, the courts do not support claims based on ageist comments. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit considered ageist statements irrelevant when presented as evidence of discrimination. One court ruling said, “Ageism is not a vice, or at least not enough of an evil to warrant judicial intervention” (Eglit, 1986, cited in McCann & Ventrell-Monses, 2010, p. 362).

The legal system views age discrimination as less harmful than other forms of discrimination. But the effects of ageism equal those of racial or gender discrimination. Discrimination against an older worker leads to loss of a job, loss of income, and personal humiliation. It has the same damaging effects as other forms of discrimination. But for the older worker, fair treatment often depends on corporate policy and practice rather than legal support.

Some companies do a better job than others at reducing age discrimination. Deutsche Bank, for example, developed a task force on age diversity led by senior managers. The National Health Service in the United Kingdom conducted training on the value of older workers and promotes intergenerational mentoring. Danny Green, human resources director of Merck Frost in Quebec, said, “Frankly, it’s good business for government and employers to make it easier for over-50 employees to continue working. It’s a win-win all around—it adds to the GDP of the country” (AARP, 2007a). These companies and others recognize the experience and dedication that many older workers bring to their jobs. They also recognize that a company must take a proactive stance to overcome age discrimination in the workplace.

### **The Ageless Self: Another Form of Ageism**

Aging celebrities such as George Clooney and Cher serve as role models for Baby Boomers. They make aging look glamorous, and they challenge negative stereotypes. But they may create a new stereotype of the sophisticated, successful,



beautiful senior. These new images of aging may lead to a new form of ageism: the ageless self.

Gravagne (2013 cited in Outcalt, 2015, p. 113) reviewed current films and found a double message. Films often present a stereotype of the older person (e.g., the grumpy old man) that reinforces ageism. But some films present “counter-stories”: films about romance and sexual relationships. These films show that views of aging have begun to change. But the media often substitute one stereotype (the aged toothless crone) for another (the ultra-fit, sexually active senior).

Our consumer society pressures older people to use drugs and products to remain sexually and physically youthful. This promotes an impossible ideal, one that ignores other ways to age. Many of the new images of aging marginalize the very old, older people with disabilities, and older people with a different view of aging.

Some authors see the current interest in longevity, the increases in surgery to alter the effects of aging, and the desire to act young into old age as a rejection of aging. Calasanti and Slevin (2006, p. 3) said that successful aging, when it promotes the image of eternal youth, “means not aging not being ‘old,’ or, at the very least, not looking old.”

Women may feel especially vulnerable as they age. Throughout life, women get social approval for their looks. The ideal older woman, according to the ageist stereotype, Calasanti and Slevin (2006) said, is “healthy, slim, discreetly sexy and independent.”

Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha (2009) interviewed 36 women ages 71–93 about their clothing choices. These women used clothing to mask changes in their bodies that signaled aging. They opted for traditional styles and clothing that masked flabby underarm skin (referred to as “bat wings”), wrinkles, pear-shaped bodies, and loose skin at their necks. One woman said she wears turtlenecks because

Most women as they get older, they get the turkey wattle here you know . . . the fat

sinks from here, goes to under your chin and you’ll find that older women have a bunch of fat hanging down here. . . . I like things with a turtleneck because they hide that ugly part. (Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha 2009, p. 718)

Their comments hint at the underlying anxiety that affects most older people as they age in American society.

Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2011; also Mitchell & Bruns, 2011) argued that “anti-aging” images in the media form part of a broader system of age discrimination and gender and age inequalities. Calasanti (2007) examined Internet advertisements for anti-aging products. She found that these ads reinforce the message that “old people are worthwhile only to the extent that they look and act like those who are middle aged or younger” (p. 335). The media promote an image of old age that values youthfulness, strength, and sexual vigor. For older men, this means maintaining or recapturing their youthful sexual ability; for older women, this means maintaining or recapturing their youthful female beauty.

Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2011) found that older women often have conflicting feelings about the images of women they see in magazines. Women believe the “magazine women” are “unnatural”—through airbrushing or other digital enhancements. At the same time, they feel pressured by these images and advertisements “to consume beauty interventions and to work to discipline and alter their bodies so as to appear more desirable” (p. 113).

The medical profession, along with questionable marketers, joins in the attack on the aging body. This has created a new industry in *cosmeceuticals*. This refers to the combination of cosmetics and pharmaceutical products. Together these substances promise to fight the effects of aging on the skin and in the body. Botox and plastic surgery promise solutions to wrinkles and sagging skin.

Older people today can feel caught in a bind. Society expects people to act young as they age.



### BOX 1.6 The Booming Boomer Market

Boomers take a unique view of later life. Market researchers have begun to track the habits and preference of this big generation. Here are some of their findings:

- Boomers represent the largest consumer market. Nielsen and BoomAgers (2012, p. 4) said, “The Boomers were born into a post-war culture of affluence and optimism. These were formative years, and the values that were forged then have stayed with them throughout their lives.” The Boomers “make money and they spend money.” They spend \$4.6 trillion each year on goods and services.
- Boomers look forward to the future. They plan to begin some big new experiences. Many Boomers plan to start new businesses after they retire. Others want to give back to their communities through volunteer work. They want to find meaning in their post-retirement years.
- Boomers feel concerned with their physical well-being, and they plan to do something about it. Rich Kelleher, age 60, jogs daily. He had an operation on his knee recently that sidelined him for a while. But now he plays tennis daily with the retirees in his condo complex. He and his wife bicycle along the boardwalk near their home in Florida. Rich also owns a kayak that he uses for trips into the mangrove swamps near his home. He’s training to run a half-marathon. Rich lives a more active lifestyle now than when he was in college. Like many Boomers, Rich wants to stay in good health as long as he can. He’s begun to take care of his body through diet, weight control, and exercise.
- Boomers represent a relatively young and wealthy market. They go out for dinner to fast-food and fine restaurants, they enjoy luxury cars, and they spend money on grandchildren. Some even buy new homes that reflect their new lifestyle in retirement (Olenski, 2015). Studies show that Boomers also like to travel. They take vacations,

and they include vacation expenses in their financial plans. Novelli and Workman (2006) reported that the 50-and-over age group accounts for 70 percent of cruise passengers and accounts for 72 percent of all trips in a recreational vehicle.

- Myers and Nielson (2003, pp. 55, 57) said that “Boomers want unique life experiences.” They reported that 40 percent of travelers age 50 and over hold passports (compared to only 17 percent of all Americans). Also,

Among all travelers, people aged 50 and over use 80 percent of all luxury travel—e.g., vacations that cost at least \$350 per day, they average 3 trips per year (more than the young), they stay places almost 1.5 times longer when they go somewhere, [and] they spend 75 percent more money at a vacation site than people aged 18–48.

- Boomers have embraced computer technology. They used technology at work, and they continue to use it in their private lives. Boomers use computers for email, trip planning, medical advice, shopping, and financial management. Nielsen and BoomAgers (2012) reports that people ages 54 to 64 spend an average of 29 hours each month online. They spend this time researching purchases, reading the news, and connecting with family and friends. Boomers make up about one-third of online and social media users.

Baby Boomers enter later life today with a new mind-set and a different history than people now in their eighties and older. The smart marketer will learn how to speak to seniors in this generation and meet their needs.

Can you detect any other trends in the media that show the influence of the Baby Boom generation? Consider advertising, consumer products, and changes in attitudes toward aging.



But an older person might prefer to let the signs of aging show.

Stich (2014), in an online column on later life, admits to using a turtleneck and scarf to hide drooping skin at her neck. But she said,

I no longer obsess over those last five pounds—the hardest to lose—because it’s simply not worth the deprivation. I even squeeze into Spanx for special occasions. At this age, disguise is a quick and welcome antidote to reality.

The **anti-aging industry** cashes in on this denial of aging. A BCC Research report (2013) put the worldwide market for anti-aging products and services at \$249.3 billion in 2012. The report projects an increase to \$345.8 billion by 2018. This amounts to a compound annual growth rate of 5.7 percent between 2012 and 2018. Products in this market include moisturizers, anti-wrinkle creams, anti-aging injections, skin tightening devices, hair growth and hair coloring products, and many more products including drugs to overcome sexual dysfunction. Services include liposuction, facelifts, dermabrasion, hair removal, and many other services including breast augmentation. The major drug and cosmetics companies (Merck, Novartis, Revlon, Shiseido) all serve this large and growing market.

## KEY TERM

**anti-aging industry** provides products that deny aging by covering the signs of aging such as wrinkles and gray hair.

Men do not escape the effects of aging on social definitions of masculinity. Masculinity “may be defined at its core by certain physical features and an inner sense of being male” (Canham, 2009, p. 90). Ideal characteristics of masculinity include physical strength, independence, restricted emotions, power and control, sexual vigor, aggressiveness, and being

non-female. Few men possess all of these idealized traits. But these traits define maleness in Western society.

A retired older man may no longer feel the power and control associated with a job. He may feel a decline in sexual vigor. And if he faces an illness, he may feel a loss of independence. All of these changes threaten an aging man’s masculine identity. American culture lacks guidelines for what it means to be “both a ‘true’ man and an aging person” (Spector-Mersel, 2006, p. 68).

Few studies have looked at the effect of aging on a man’s self-image in later life. Spector-Mersel (2006), for example, said that no masculine equivalent of the *Journal on Women and Aging* exists. This journal includes gender and aging research on women. And yet studies of older men could benefit from more research. Men also struggle with the effects of aging on their self-image (Aléx, Hammarström, Norberg, & Lundman, 2008; Canham, 2009; Tannenbaum & Frank, 2011). The growing market for drugs to overcome erectile dysfunction, for example, points to the male quest for youthful performance. And the high suicide rate among older men points to serious psychological challenges that men face as they age.

Baker and Gringart (2009, p. 989) found that, like older women, older men also expressed dissatisfaction with their physical appearance as they aged. The researchers found that men tended to engage in physical fitness activity to stay in shape. The researchers propose that men (particularly those under age 70) “engage in physical activity . . . to maintain a certain body-shape ideal.” Men at older ages lose their interest in fitness as they age, possibly because they can no longer maintain the ideal of a youthful body. This study found that men become “progressively dissatisfied with their physical appearance” as they age. The researchers conclude that “cultural pressures to conform to youthful ideals are experienced by both genders” (p. 990).

Clarke, Bennett, and Liu (2014, p. 27) summarized studies of media portrayals of older men. They found that advertisements



portrayed men in competitive, youthful roles. “Older men are seen consuming products and services aimed at sustaining or rejuvenating their virility and sexual engagement, thereby enabling them to age successfully.” Still, their research found relatively few images of older men in men’s magazines (e.g., *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Maxim*).

Nearly all of these magazines portrayed men positively, with economic, political, and social power. The researchers call this the “dominant cultural messages about masculinity and optimal aging” (Clarke, Bennett, & Liu 2014, p. 32). The researchers conclude that while these magazines contained many positive portrayals of older men, most men will find these ideals unattainable. For the majority of older readers, they said, “the Fourth Age was increasingly a looming reality” (p. 32).

These magazines, they conclude, “contribute to and reflect broader societal narratives about the devaluation and fear of agedness” (p. 33). Baker and Gringart (2009, p. 990) said that, “cultural pressures to conform to youthful ideals are experienced by both genders.” Wada, Clarke, and Rozanova (2015, p. 47) said that the media reflect “the predominant heteronormative and youth-based culture that persists in America and is constantly reinforced by the selected media.”

Catherine Mayer (2009) coined the term **amortality** to describe the ageless self. Amortals, she said, obey no age norms. “The defining characteristic of amortality,” she writes, “is to live the same way, at the same pitch, doing and consuming much the same things, from late teens right up until death.” Amortals deny aging. In their most extreme pronouncements they deny death itself, hoping for a scientific breakthrough before they meet the reaper.

## KEY TERM

**amortality** the ageless self, a denial of aging by attempting to live in later life at the same pace and with the same interests as in youth.

This image of the ageless self ignores the diversity among older people and the fact that the body declines with age. Holstein (2005, p. 28) cautioned that the ideal of “successful aging” “can also serve to threaten the self-esteem of people who cannot or choose not to live up to those new norms.” Cruikshank (2003, p. 168) proposed that older people and American society show “frankness about decline and loss of capacity.” She argues against the “false cheerfulness” of the ageless self.

This critique of popular images of aging points to the diverse experiences of aging in the 21st century. It also shows the need for older people to confront ageist stereotypes. Clarke (2002), for example, studied the attitudes of older women toward beauty in later life. The women in this study felt pressure from the fashion industry to stay thin. But they rejected the current ideal of extreme thinness. They preferred a more rounded body shape for themselves. Montemurro and Gillen (2013) found similar results in a study of women ages 20 to 68. They found that, compared to other age groups, women in their fifties and sixties accepted their bodies and felt less social pressure.

These women emphasized the importance of inner beauty. They found beauty in a person’s personality, a person’s relationships with others, and a person’s inner happiness. Clarke (2002, p. 440; also Clarke et al., 2009) concludes that social ideals shape an older woman’s view of herself and that “ageist norms . . . denigrate older women and older women’s bodies.” But, she said, older women can and do challenge these norms. “Many of the women in my study,” she said, “provide an important example of how oppressive social values can be resisted and how individuals may . . . offer alternatives to ageist interpretations of later life” (Clarke, 2002, p. 440).

We need to allow for many ways to grow old. Some people want to engage in energetic activities that we associate with youth. Other older people define later life as a time to use their wisdom, share their memories, and offer community leadership. Some people live vibrant, healthy lives into late old age. Others live with



### BOX 1.7 Advanced Style: Another Look at Beauty in Old Age

Ari Seth Cohen (2014) photographs beautifully and sometimes outrageously dressed older women in New York City. Cohen produces a blog that features and celebrates these women. He said of himself, “I’m an old lady expert, creator of *Advanced Style*, lover of all things vintage, and all round good guy!”

The women he photographs have each developed a unique look. His book *Advanced Style* (2012) presents many of his photos. It also includes interviews, stories, and advice from his subjects. The women in his collection often created their wardrobes from recycled items or thrift store purchases. The jewelry worn in the photos sparkles with color. The women wear large coral-colored necklaces, outsized plastic or stone rings, tinted eyeglasses with bright frames, and hats of fur and sequins.

Cohen’s work has appeared in major magazines such as *Vogue Japan* and *Vogue Australia*. The women in these photos create a new image of fashion for the older woman, one based on their personal taste and flair for design. They open the door for other women to follow and create sexy, attractive, colorful designs that suit their personality. (See Cohen’s work at: <http://advancedstyle.blogspot.com/>). This work forces a viewer to rethink stereotypes of older women as disabled, ill, or poor. The women attract attention by their energy and creativity. They force a viewer to think of new possibilities in old age.

Ruth Flowers aka DJ Mamy Rock, 69, performs on the European club circuit. She’s toured Europe as a DJ since her early sixties. She DJs almost every night and sometimes works for months without a break. She said, “Becoming a DJ is the best thing I’ve ever done” (Hyslop, 2010). In an interview with reporter Leah Hyslop she said, “I don’t know why they make such a fuss of me, but it’s like *adoration*.” “It’s all photograph, photograph, kissy kissy. They try to hug me, they tell me they want me to be their grandma, they even throw roses at me—which let me tell you, is quite amazing for a woman of my age!”

“I expect I’ve got friends who think I’m quite insane but they can do what they wish, and I’ll do what I wish. If you can’t do what you want to at my age, when can you?” (Visit Mamy Rock’s official website [www.mamyrock.com/home.htm](http://www.mamyrock.com/home.htm) or go to [www.mamyrock.com/69.html](http://www.mamyrock.com/69.html) to see her at work).

Women such as Mamy Rock and the fashionistas in Cohen’s photos express their passion for clothing, design, and music. They serve as role models for another version of aging, and they give older women permission to explore creative expression in later life.



**Photo 1.3** Ruth Flowers—DJ Mamy Rock



chronic illnesses. Some seem youthful to us; others look old. No single right way to grow old exists. And none of these ways should meet with social rejection.

### Ageism and the Third Age

An important distinction helps explain why people in their sixties, seventies, and even eighties say they do not feel “old.” Some people in later life live active, engaged lifestyles. At the same time, other people in these age groups look and feel “old,” either by lifestyle choice (e.g., reclusiveness), poverty, or a decline in health. This reflects what writers describe as “the ‘destandardization’ or ‘pluralisation’ of the life course.” The confusion of terms that exist around later life—senior, Boomer, senior citizen, retiree, pensioner—point to the uncertain meaning of later life today (Gilleard & Higgs, 2011, p. 135).

Historian Peter Laslett (1996) identified and named two stages of later life: the “Third Age” and the “Fourth Age.” During the Third Age, a person lives in relative affluence, free of work and child-rearing duties, in generally good health, and engaged in fulfilling, socially satisfying activity (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, 2010). Higgs and McGowan (2013, p. 22) call the Third Age “an aging youth culture.” People can be chronologically old, but not act or feel “old.”

The category of old age (which a past generation would have applied to a 65-year-old) now fits the Fourth Age. In this last stage of life, a person loses their autonomy, their physical health, and their ability to care for themselves. This stage now often comes past the age of 85. The young-old person today may accept the drift into the Fourth Age, attempt to hold on to the relative youthfulness of the Third Age, or waffle between these two options.

The onset of chronic physical disability or dementia often pushes the person from the Third to the Fourth Age of life. Until this occurs, the older person adapts to a shifting social status and mixed messages from society. The media sometimes portrays *all* older people as if they lived in the Fourth Age. Sometimes it promotes successful aging that

encourages older people to hold on to their Third Age abilities (e.g., sexual performance).

Longer life for nearly everyone has led to a redefinition of old age. The discussion of ageism and of age discrimination hinges in part on the error of mistaking one age category (the Third Age) for another (the Fourth Age). Baby Boomers in the Third Age object to being categorized as Fourth Agers. The presentation of rock stars as vigorous and youthful, newspaper stories that describe paragliding 90-year-olds, and gyms full of exercising retirees on weekday mornings, provide examples of the Third Age as people live it today.

### RESPONSES TO AGEISM

A study by Cutler et al. (2002) found that 45 percent of older people believed that their later years were “the best years of my life.” Sixty-one percent of the people in this survey said they would feel “very happy” if they knew they could live another 10 years. People in this survey said that the key to a meaningful old age lies in having close family and friendships, good health, and a rich spiritual life. Middle-aged people in this sample agreed that these three items held the keys to a good old age. In this same survey, 68 percent of the older people said that as they grew older, “things seem better than I thought they would be.” And 89 percent of the older people said that as they looked back on their lives, they felt “fairly well satisfied.”

People with good incomes, married couples, people with a secure pension, and healthy people report some of the greatest life satisfaction in later life (Holden & Hatcher, 2006). But as this survey shows, nearly all older people feel satisfied with life in general and they look forward to the years ahead. George (2006) reviewed the literature on life satisfaction. She said that in both short-term and long-term studies, life satisfaction in old age remains high. The National Council on Aging (2015) asked people age 60 and over about life satisfaction. Over 95 percent of respondents reported satisfaction with their mental well-being,



their relations with family and friends, and their housing. Eighty-six percent reported satisfaction with their physical health and 84 percent reported satisfaction with their finances. This view from old age contradicts many of the stereotypes of aging.

Research shows that stereotypes exist because of ignorance about later life and the fear

of aging. Even positive stereotypes can lead to prejudice and discrimination against older people. Authors suggest a number of ways to produce a more balanced view of aging. These include the use of the media, education programs, intergenerational programs, and legislation that prohibits discrimination based on age.

BOX 1.8 The Life Experiences of Today's Centenarians Viewed Through Historical Events		
Year	Age in That Year	Event
1918	1	World War I ends
1929	12	Stock market crashes; Great Depression begins
1931	14	Penicillin is discovered
1935	18	Social Security Act passes
1937	20	U.S. Housing Act passes; establishes public housing
1941	24	Pearl Harbor; United States enters World War II
1945	28	Yalta conference; Cold War begins
1946	29	Baby Boom begins
1950	33	United States enters Korean War
1955	38	Nationwide polio vaccination program begins
1964	47	United States enters Vietnam War; Baby Boom ends
1969	52	First man on the moon
1980	63	First AIDS case is reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1980	63	Era of the personal computer begins
1989	72	Berlin Wall falls
1990	73	United States enters Persian Gulf War
2000	83	Dot-com stock market bubble bursts
2001	84	September 11 attack on the World Trade Center; terrorist threat worldwide increases
2003	86	United States enters Iraq War
2006	89	Broadband Internet, the World Wide Web, and mobile communications create a global community; concern about global warming takes hold
2008	91	First Baby Boomers turn 62, eligible for Social Security retired worker benefits
2008	91	Housing market bubble bursts; economy declines
2017	100	Economy rebounds, but technology replaces many middle class, middle income jobs

(continued)