



Determinants of ageism in young adults: A cross-cultural investigation

Never Stand Still

Science

Psychology

Yvonne Leung, PhD

CEPAR, UNSW Sydney and Neuroscience Research Australia



Team



**University of
Nottingham**
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

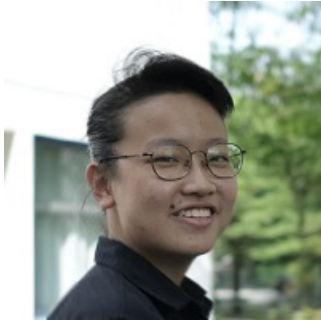


UNSW
SYDNEY



**UNSW Ageing
Futures Institute**

Poster #4



Kimberly Man Min Xi



Dr Polly Chen



Dr Natasha Ginnivan



Dr Brooke Brady



Dr Eun Hee Lee



Remy Blatch-Williams



Scientia Prof Kaarin Anstey

Ageism

- Systematic prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping of one age group against another (Butler, 1969)
- Interpersonal (other-directed ageism) e.g. avoid individuals from certain age groups
- Self-directed (internalised ageism)
- Institutional ageism (ageism perpetuated via policies of an institution) e.g. salary inequity

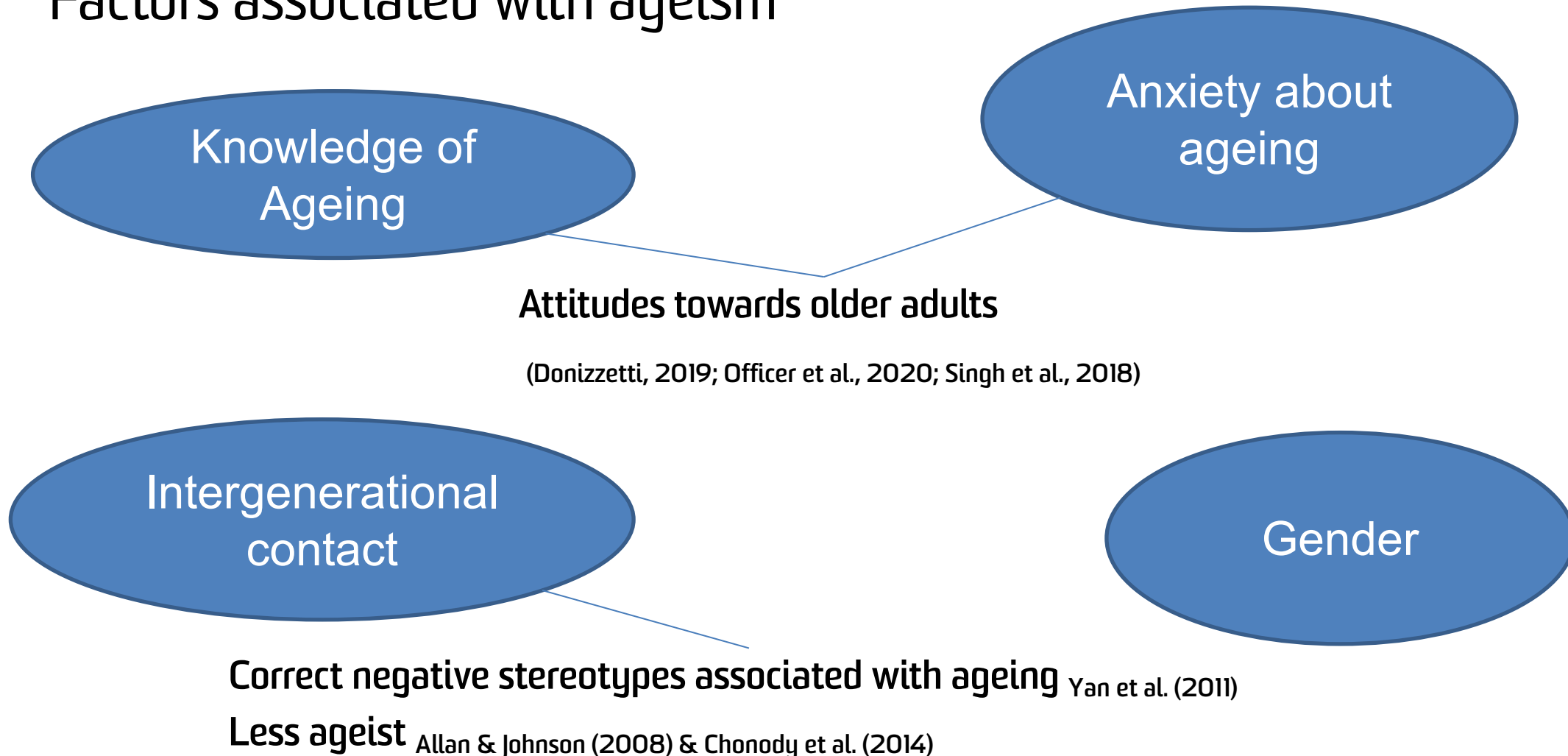
Ageism in young adults

- Young adults tend to be highly susceptible to negative stereotypes of older people as these stereotypes do not apply to them (Levy and Banaji, 2002), or it was an unconscious defensive strategy they embrace to fight against death anxiety (Bodner, 2009)

Ageism in young adults

- Baby talk (exaggeration of intonations, pitch, politeness), and restrict conversational topics to much simplicity
- Consequences of ageism include **increased social isolation** (Mikton et al., 2021), **accelerated cognitive decline** (Levy et al., 2002), and **lower recovery rates** from disability (Levy et al., 2012).
- The proportion of older adults impacted by the consequences of ageism increasing from **51.30% (1970-1978) to 85.30% (2010-2017; $p < .0001$)** (Chang et al., 2020)

Factors associated with ageism



Cultural influence

- Collectivist cultures: emphasise the achievement of group goals and view the self as embedded in the group
- Individualist cultures: view the self as autonomous, prioritise the achievement of personal goals, and have their **social behaviours guided by their own attitudes**
(Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Kashima et al., 1992)
- The value of **filial piety (i.e., respect for elders)** shapes the collectivist culture in East Asia (Sung, 2001)

Previous work on cross-cultural differences

- University students from the UK hold more ageist beliefs than those from Taiwan (Vauclair et al., 2017)
- Chinese college students hold more negative attitudes towards ageing and older adults than their American peers (Luo et al., 2013)
- Greater knowledge of and more positive attitudes towards ageing were found in Western countries (Huang, 2013)
- No difference (Zhan et al., 2021)

The current study

- Factors that contribute to ageism towards older adults
- How culture may play a role by comparing young adults from high (Malaysia) and low (Australia) collectivist cultures

Man, KMX, Chen, PL, et al (submitted)

Participants

- Undergraduates from Australia ($n = 108$, 73% females, $M_{age} = 19.51$, $SD_{age} = 2.09$) and Malaysia ($n = 103$, 65% females, $M_{age} = 20.59$, $SD_{age} = 1.18$)
- Malaysians or Australians of Chinese (66%)/British origin
- Majority had no gerontology training (~3% study medicine/neuroscience)

Man, KMX, Chen, PL, et al (submitted)

Measurements

- Ageism (Fraboni Scale of Ageism)
- Predictors:
 - Gender
 - Quality/Frequency of Intergenerational Contact
 - Perceived grandparents' health/ageing
 - Facts of Ageing
 - Anxiety about Ageing

Fraboni Scale of Ageism

- Most old people should not be trusted to take care of infants
- Older people complain more than other people do
- I sometimes avoid eye contact with old people when I see them
- Complex and interesting conversations cannot be expected from most old people
- Most old people are interesting, individualistic people

Facts of Ageing

The senses that tend to weaken in old age are:

- Sight and hearing
- Taste and smell
- Sight, hearing and touch
- All five senses

As for old people learning new things:

- Most are unable to learn at any speed
- Most are able to learn, but at a lower speed
- Most are able to learn as fast as younger people
- Learning speed is unrelated to age

Lung vital capacity in old age:

- Tends to decline
- Stays about the same among non-smokers
- Tends to increase among healthy old people
- Is unrelated to age

Anxiety about Ageing

- It doesn't bother me at all to imagine myself as being old
- I have never dreaded the day I would look in the mirror and see grey hairs
- When I look in the mirror, it bothers me to see how my looks have changed with age
- I fear that when I am old, all my friends will be gone
- I expect to feel good about life when I am old

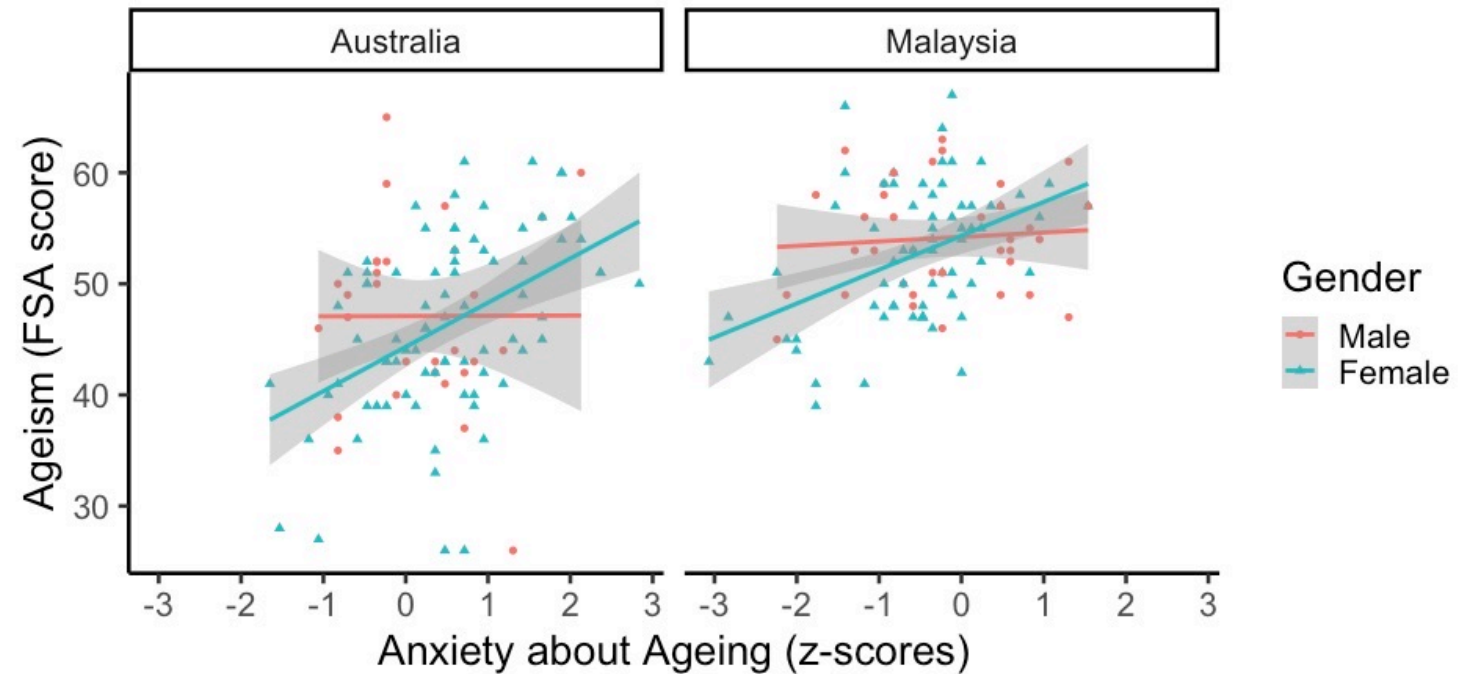
Malaysian vs Australian students

Intergenerational contact (frequency / quality)	No difference	Frequent / Better than average
Grandparents' health	Malaysians > Australians	
Grandparents' ageing	No difference	Better than average
Facts of Ageing	Australians > Malaysians	
Anxiety about Ageing	Australians > Malaysians	

- Compared with Malaysian students,

Australian students showed:

- Lower level of ageism
- Lower ageism in women than men (no gender difference in MYs)
- Stronger association between anxiety about ageing and ageism among women than men



Man, KMX, Chen, PL, et al (submitted)

In both samples

- Increased frequency of intergenerational contact -> higher level of ageism
- Better quality of intergenerational contact -> lower ageism
- Better grandparents' ageing and knowledge about ageing -> lower ageism
- Higher level of anxiety -> higher ageism

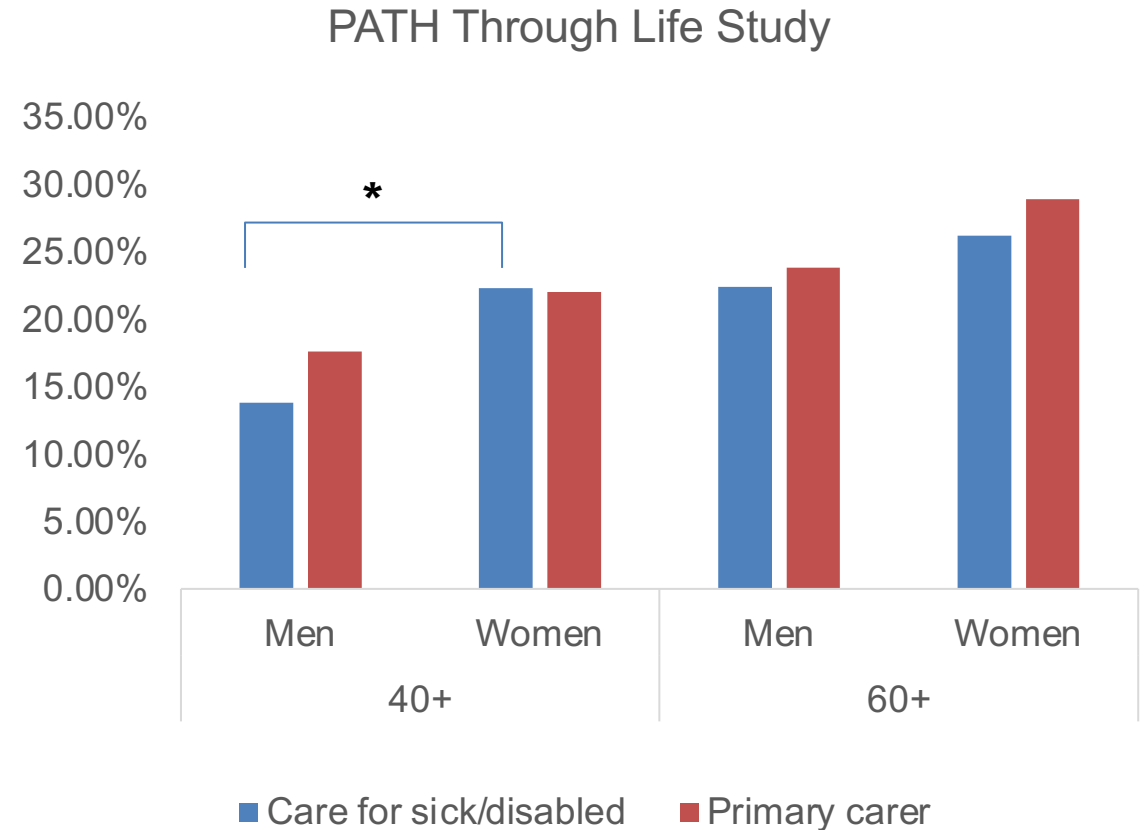
- Factors associated with ageism are generalizable cross-culturally
- Australian students held less ageist beliefs than Malaysians
- Increasing evidence of countries in the East showing higher level of ageism than the West (e.g. Huang, 2013; Luo et al., 2013; Bergman & Bodner, 2015)
 - Urbanisation, economic advancement, consumerism
 - Influence of other cultures
 - Regional differences within collectivistic and individualistic countries (North & Fiske, 2015)

Gender differences in ageism

- Women takes the caregiving responsibility and witnesses the decline of health and losses due to ageing more often than men from providing care (Bergman et al., 2013)
- In Malaysia, more than 60% of informal caregivers were women. Among those who spent 20 or more hours per week on providing care to household members with long-term illness, disability, or elderly, 36% of them were young/middle-aged adults aged between 18 to 34 (Jawahir et al., 2021)

Gender differences in ageism

- Australian women spent almost double the number of unpaid hours than men to care for children and disabled or elderly relatives (Australian Government, 2009)
- PATH Through Life Study
 - More women than men in their late 40s being a carer for the sick/disabled
- Caregiving expectation might explain the gender differences in ageism more strongly than culture



Interventions

- The **Old School Clearinghouse**: An organisation that curates, creates, commissions and disseminates free resources educating people about ageism
- **The Centre for Ageing Better** revealed a lack of representation of older persons in films and other media and have compiled libraries of non-stereotypical versions of ageing and other resources that relate to age-friendliness
- Information-based resources may not effectively reduce the age stereotypes that permeates everyday communications including through social media (Officer & de la Fuente-Núñez, 2018)

- Yvonne.leung@unsw.edu.au