

# Older People Less Able to Hide Bigotry, Study Shows

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People do not get any more racially prejudiced as they age — but they do become less able to hide it, suggests a new study by researchers at UC Davis, the University of Freiburg and the University of Sydney.

The study, which assesses [biases](#) among whites toward blacks, appears in this month's issue of the [Journal of Experimental Social Psychology](#).

During the four-year study, the American, German and Australian researchers asked more than 15,000 whites between the ages of 11 and 94 to take a test that involved associating black and white faces with the words “pleasant” and “unpleasant” as rapidly as possible.

"We found that it's easier for younger people to pair pictures of black faces with positive words than it is for [older people](#)," said Jeffrey Sherman, professor of psychology at UC Davis and an author of the new study. "One possible explanation for this is that older people, because they grew up in less tolerant times, have more [negative associations](#) with black faces than do younger people. Another is that negative associations are present across the age spectrum, but older people are less able to overcome them when pairing faces with words.

"By analyzing the errors people made on this face-word test, we were able to separate these potential explanations — and determine that older people indeed do not have more negative associations, but are, in fact, less able to overcome them."

The association persisted even when the researchers corrected for such factors as education, gender and [motivation](#) to complete the task.

"Our study points to an important social challenge," Sherman said. "As the population ages, biased behavior may become an increasingly common social problem."

Provided by UC Davis

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