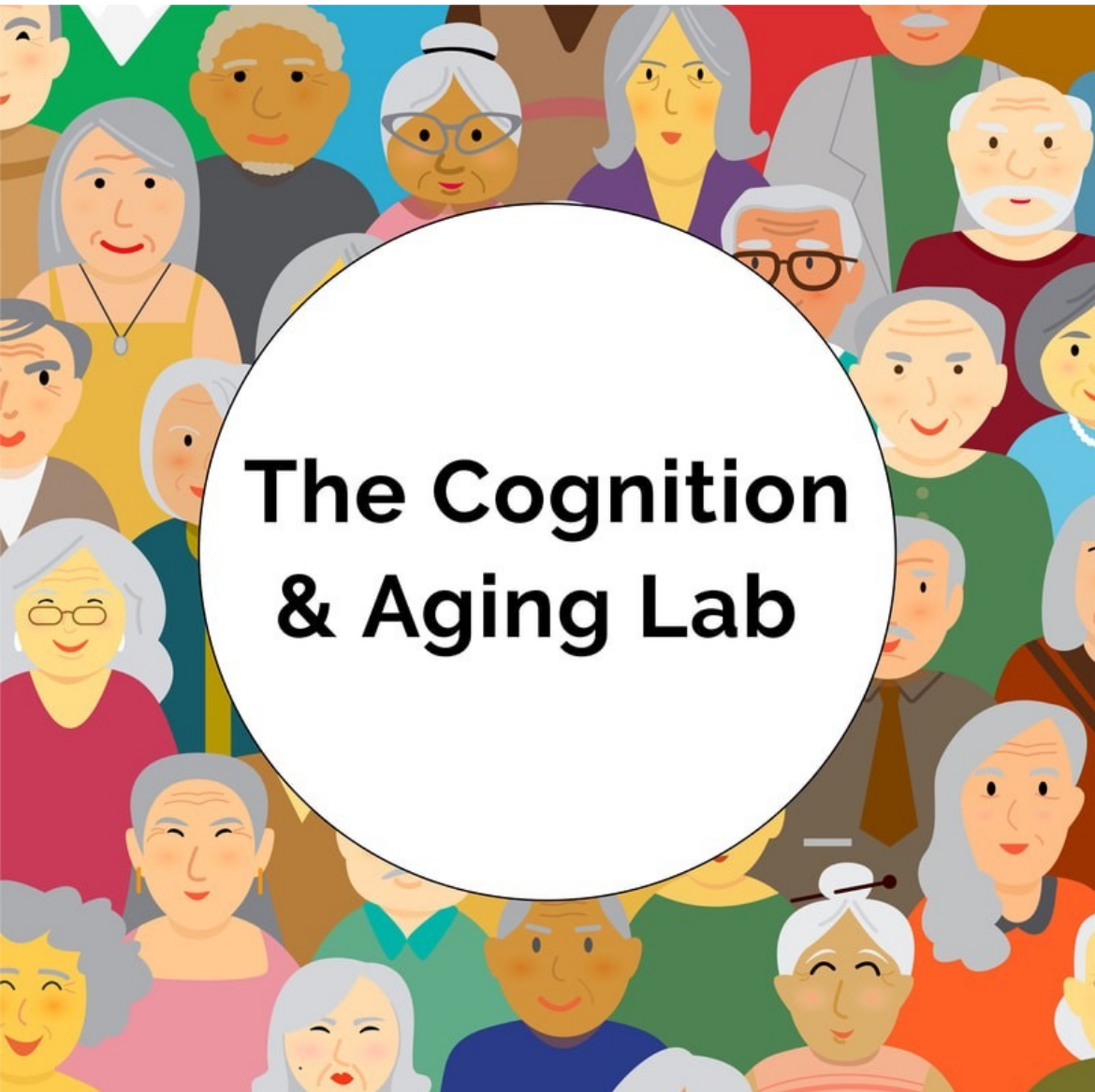




Age, Not Preclinical Alzheimer's Risk, Drives Social Judgments of Memory Errors

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BACKGROUND

- Memory errors are common across the lifespan, but the way they are interpreted is influenced by characteristics of the individual.
- **Age shapes attributions of memory errors.** Identical memory errors are evaluated more negatively in older adults than younger adults and are more often attributed to stable cognitive deficits.
- **Alzheimer's disease (AD) information influences judgments.**
 - A diagnosis of AD leads others to assume the individual already has severe memory impairment and diminished functional capacity (Berry et al., 2015).
 - Simply knowing that a person is AD biomarker positive can trigger stigmatizing assumptions, leading observers to judge identical behaviors more negatively, regardless of the person's actual cognitive status (Stites et al., 2022)
- **Goal: To study how age and AD risk information (APOE genotype) together shape interpretation of memory errors.**

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Participants

191 participants aged 18-35 years
206 participants aged 60-80 years

Participants who reported being aware of their own APOE genotype (N =32) or who failed comprehension checks (N =5) were excluded.

Procedure

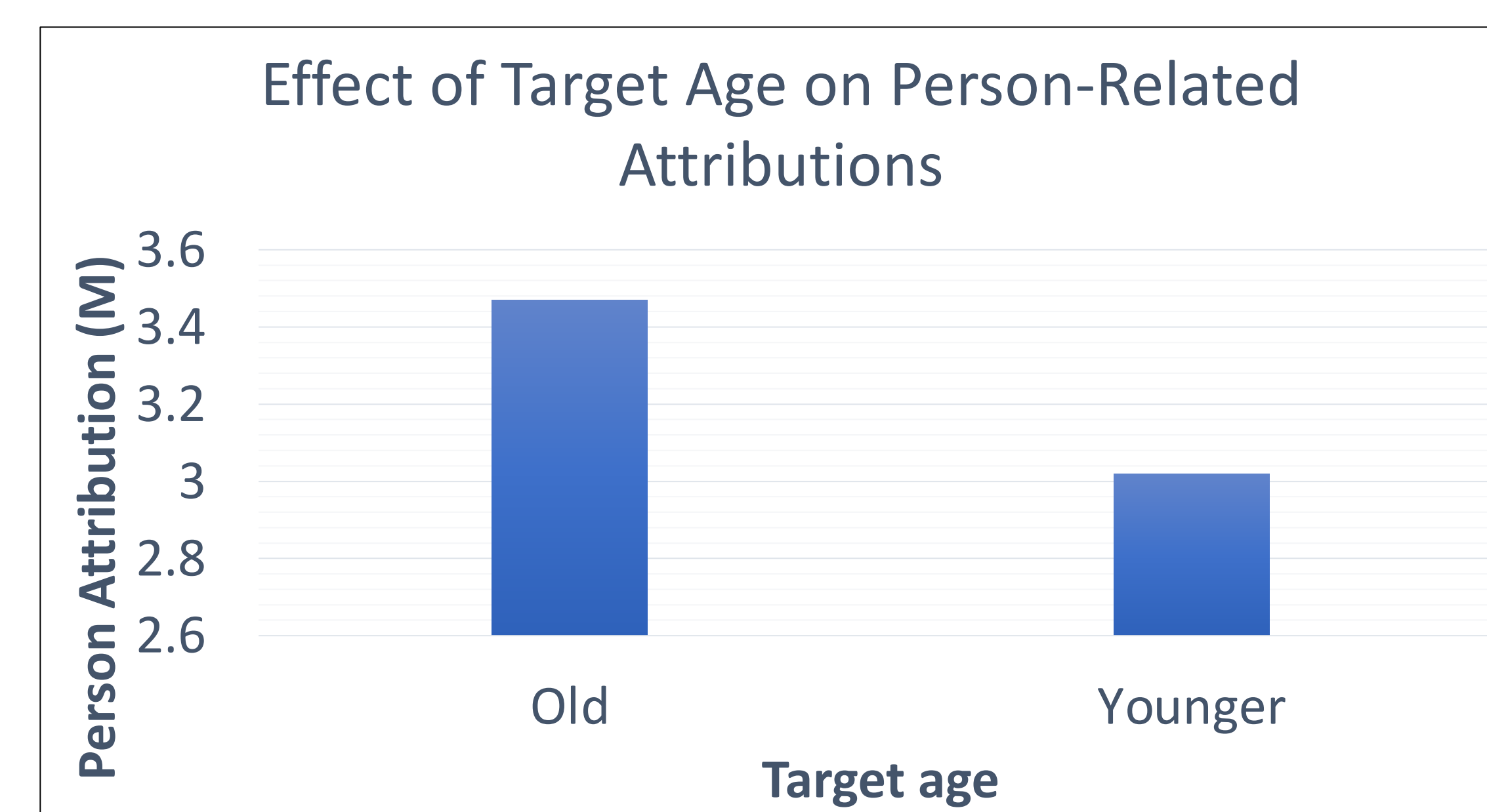
1. Participants read a vignette describing a target person who committed an everyday memory error (forgetting a recently introduced name) with the target's age and APOE genotype-indicated AD risk experimentally manipulated between subjects.
2. Participants rated the extent to which the memory error was attributable to stable person-related factors (poor memory ability) and to modifiable situation-related factors (distraction or inattention).

Example vignette: "Alex is a 72-year-old adult. Yesterday, Alex attended a community gathering at the clubhouse in their apartment complex. While standing near the refreshment table, a new resident came over and introduced themselves. A moment later, Alex's next-door neighbor joined them and asked to be introduced. Alex realized they could not remember the new resident's name."

RESULTS

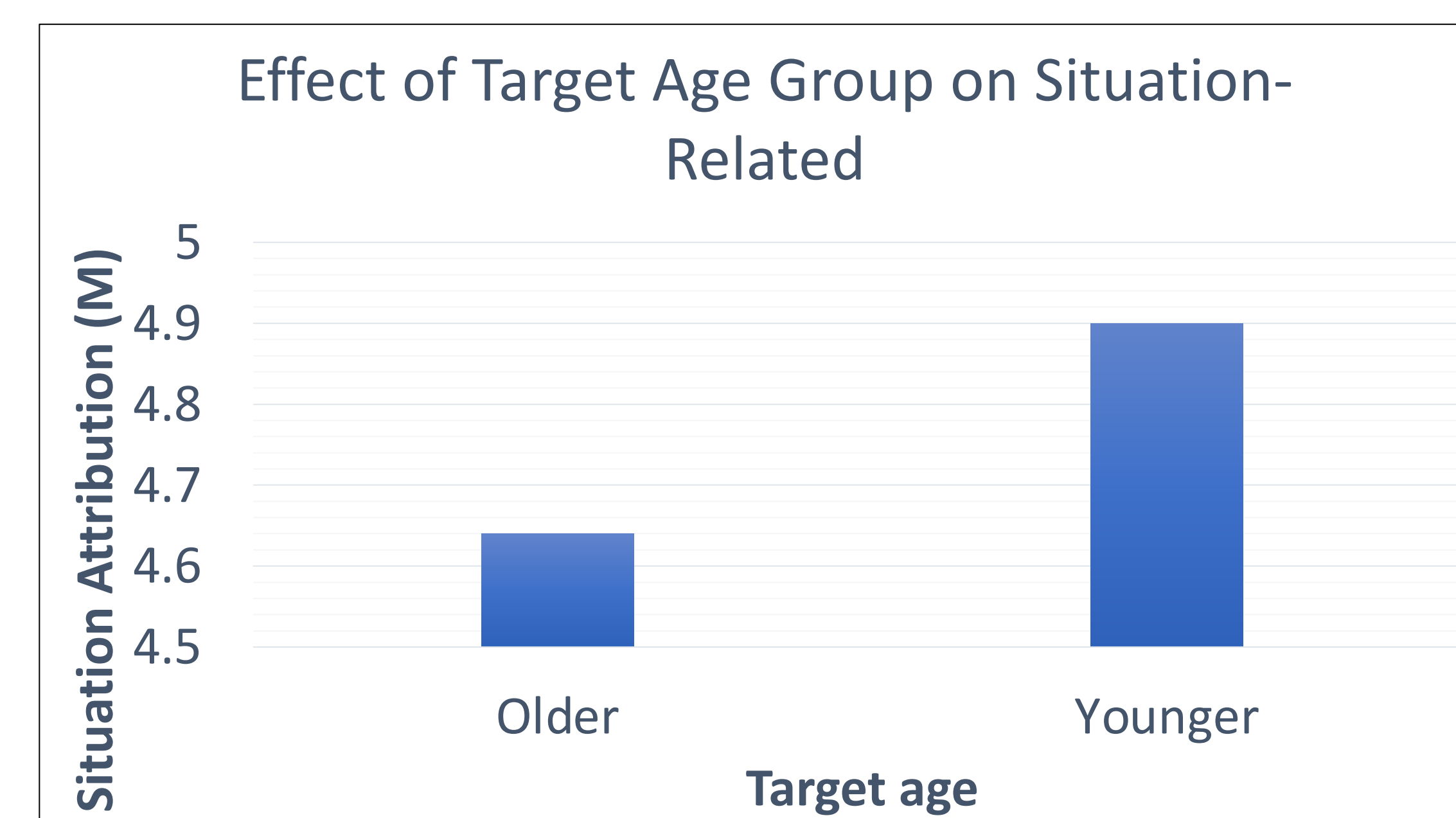
1. Attributions varied based upon target's age

Participants were more likely to attribute memory errors to the person (e.g., "they have a bad memory") and less likely to the situation (e.g., "they were distracted") when the target was an older adult rather than a younger adult.



2. No effect of target's AD risk on attributions

The target's AD risk (based on APOE genotype) did not significantly affect either person-related or situation-related attributions for memory errors.



3. Attributions varied based upon participant's age

Older participants were less likely to make person-related attributions and more likely to make situation-related attributions for memory errors, regardless of the target's age or AD risk.

CONCLUSION

- Observers' interpretations of memory errors were driven by the target's age rather than information about the target's AD risk.
- An age-based double standard emerged: identical memory errors were more likely to be attributed to person-related factors when the target was older and to situational factors when the target was younger.
- Participant age also influenced attributions: older participants were less likely to make person-related attributions and more likely to make situation-related attributions, regardless of the target's age or AD risk.
- Together, these findings suggest that age-based stereotypes may outweigh preclinical AD risk information in shaping social perceptions of memory.