Conflicting Stereotypes in the Face: Socioeconomic Status and Age-Related Stereotypes

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BACKGROUND

Individuals make rapid social evaluations from faces, in part, derived from cross-cultural **stereotypes**:

→ **High SES** - perceived as *competent*
Older Adults (OA) - perceived as *incompetent*

- OA stereotype is pervasive with psychosocial and behavioral outcomes.
- Perceived competence judgments stem from perceived SES, however **contradictory** for High SES OA (e.g. Warren Buffett).

Emotional traces in OA faces
➢ Frequent emotional dispositions of OA etched on the neutral face and overgeneralized to social traits.
➢ Judgments of social class are based on *positive neutral affect* in YA (wealth = happier life), carries over to old age?

Perceived age → biomarker for aging and mortality
➢ Twin studies: "younger" twins at 70 *look happier* and healthier than "older" twins.
➢ Low social class & high sun exposure → facial changes → higher *perceived age*.
➢ Less wealthy individuals experience more perceived age discrimiantion.

Childhood SES and life outcomes
➢ Early SES disadvantage, independent from adulthood SES → sustained negative effect on health, disabilities & lower levels of social integration in old age.
➢ Developmental disturbances maked by facial asymmetry in OA reflects childhood social status.

Oosterhof & Todorov 2008; Fiske et al. 2002, North & Fiske, 2015; Durante & Fiske 2017; Robertson & Weiss 2017; Adams et al. 2016; Barber et al. 2019; Cuddy et al. 2005; Bjornsdottir & Rule 2017; Christensen et al. 2009; McMaughan et al. 2020; Zebrowitz et al. 2013; Landos et al 2019; Cohen at al. 2010.

METHODS

Stimuli - facial photographs of OA (73-83) from the Lothian Birth Cohorts (1921 & 1936).

- **Actual SES of OA** - retrieve collected *social class* (highest attained job in midlife).
- **Childhood SES at age 11** - parent's *social class* (mother's and father's occupation), crowding (occupants/available rooms), access to indoor toilet.

Participants and Experiment - will be recruited through an online platform, rate OA photos on estimated age and affect & complete a *Face-Rating Task* on social evaluations:

❖ "How *rich, high status, competent* does this person appear?"

❖ "How old do you think this individual is?" → *perceived age*

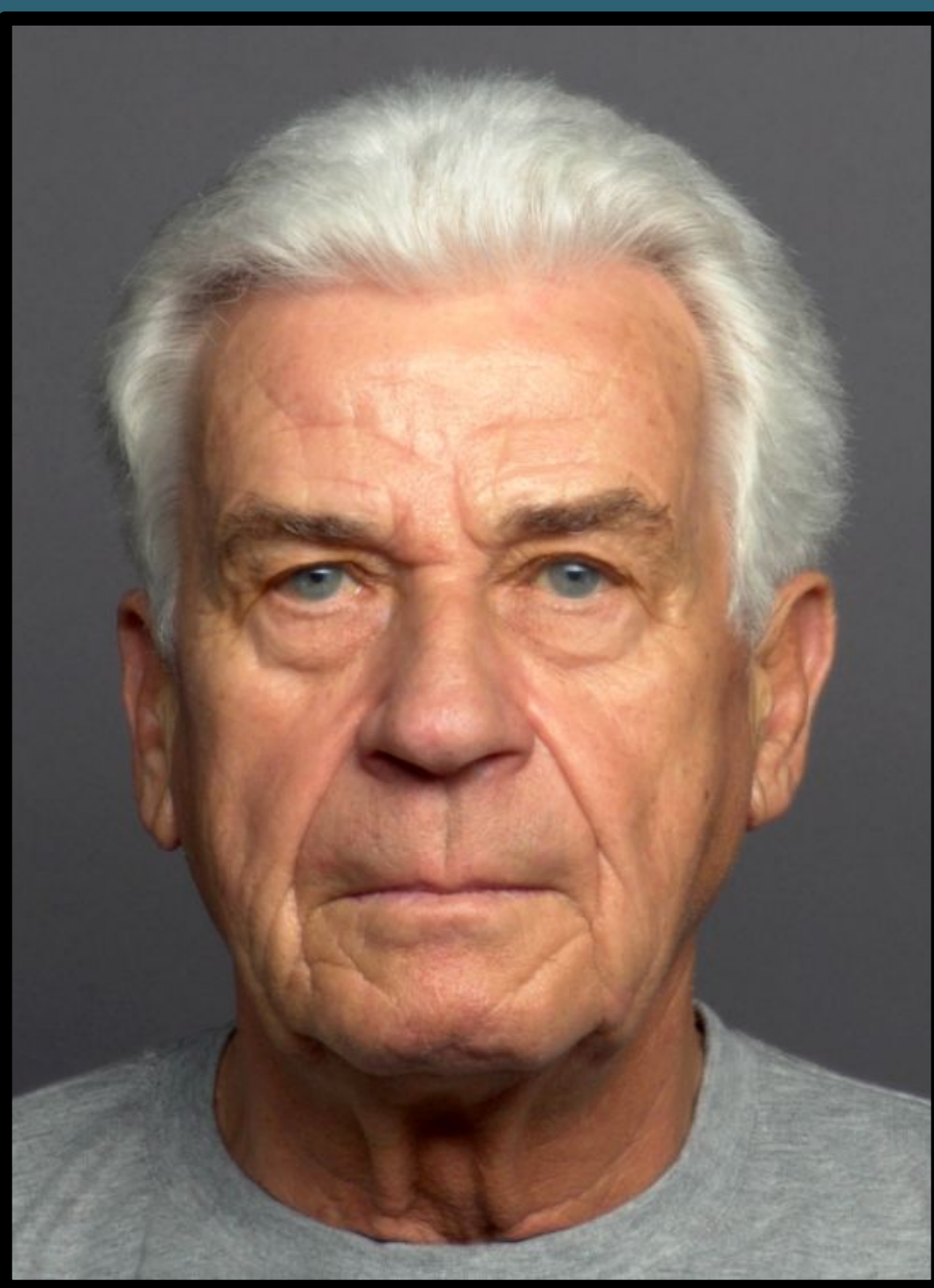❖ "How does this person feel?" → *perceived affect*

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Determine how **SES** is evaluated in the **faces** of **older adults** & how it interacts with **age-related** variables.

RQs:

1. Can perceivers accurately detect SES from OA faces?

2. Does *perceived competency, perceived age, actual age, and positive neutral affect* relate to actual and perceived SES?

3. Are these associations similar or different based on childhood and attained SES?
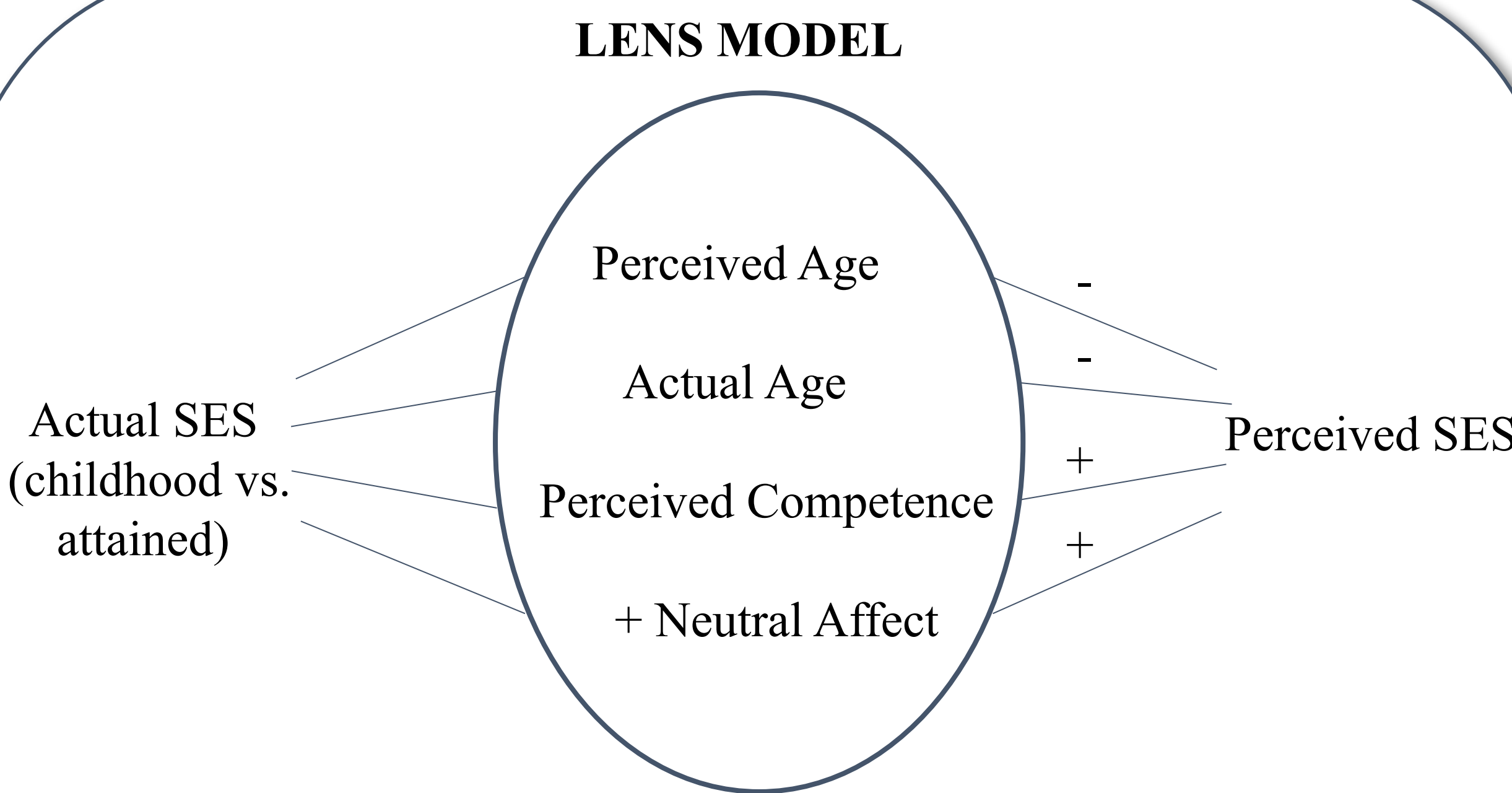
How **rich** does this person appear? (0-9)

How **competent** does this person appear? (0-9)

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EXPECTED RESULTS

LENS MODEL

Actual SES (childhood vs. attained)

Perceived Age -
Actual Age -
Perceived Competence +
+ Neutral Affect +

Perceived SES

1. Conflicting evidence for SES evaluation:
   H1: Yes, observers use emotional cues in the face to derive SES.
   H2: No, observers use stereotype-driven impressions of OA.

2. Correlations within the lens model:
   - ↑perceived age & actual age = ↓perceived SES
   - ↑perceived competence & + neutral affect = ↑perceived SES

3. Differences in actual SES:
   - Literature suggests: OA that grew up in a low SES home (independent from attained midlife SES) → predisposed to health problems throughout life. What changes happen to the face based on childhood and attained SES?

RELEVANCE

★ If SES can be accurately detected: we show a **"hidden" social attribute,** such as + neutral affect**,** that individuals use to form judgments of OA, independent from perceived competency judgments.
   ○ If perceived competency and perceived age are related to perceived SES, but not actual SES: more evidence for the pervasiveness of negative stereotyping of OA.

★ Track how lifetime changes in SES influence perceived age and social evaluations.

★ Expand research on ageism and OA → understudied population, patronized, misunderstood & excluded due to negative stereotyping.

FUTURE WORK

❑ Use ML models to extract amount of wrinkles, lip height and hair greying in relation to perceived age & SES in a mixed-effects model.

❑ Include all of the negative aging stereotypes and test if observer's beliefs (e.g., essentialism, just world) and own SES/SSS influence judgments of OA.