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How Old We Are & How Old We Feel

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How Old We Are & How Old We Feel

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INTRODUCTION

- Previous research on **Subjective Age** (how old people feel) has produced a number of interesting and relatively inconsistent conclusions.
- Personal variables like race, gender, marital status and income were once thought to play an important role in a subjective age, however previous studies have found no significant relationships between these variables (Henderson et al., 1995).
- In a study by Stephan and colleagues (2012), openness to experience, extraversion, and good perceived health were associated with having a young subjective age in older individuals.
- More recent research has shown that older adults generally report feeling younger than their chronological age (Hughes et al., 2013).
- The purpose of the current study was to empirically assess differences between chronological age and subjective age.
- We hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between subjective age and chronological age, and we also sought to explore potential differences in age-subjective age discrepancies between genders.

METHODS

Participants

- 97 participants (70 females, 27 males) completed the present study with a mean age of 22.39 (SD = 5.97).
- Participants came into the lab after volunteering through the Psychology Department's SONA online research software.

Materials

- 5-item Subjective Age Questionnaire (Galambos, Turner, & Tilton-Weaver, 2005).
 - 7-point Likert scale (1 = a lot younger than my age to 7 = a lot older than my age)
 - e.g., "Compared to most people my age, most of the time I feel...", and "My interests and activities are most like people who are..."
- Self-reported chronological age and subjective age (in years).
 - To measure discrepancies between chronological and subjective ages, chronological age was subtracted from self-reported subjective age, so that negative age discrepancy scores represent individuals feeling younger than their actual age.

Procedure

- This experiment was included as part of a larger study.
- After completion of the primary task for the study, participants were given the Subjective Age Questionnaire.
- Participants were given 45 minutes to complete the study.

RESULTS

- A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between subjective age and chronological age.
- The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation such that as chronological age (M = 22.39, SD = 5.97) increased, subjective age scores (M = 4.40, SD = 1.03) subsequently decreased, $r = -.396, p < .001$ (See Figure 1).
- We also ran an independent samples t-test to compare mean age discrepancy scores between participant genders.
- The analysis revealed a difference between genders that was marginally significant ($t(94) = -1.73, p = .087$, See Figure 2), with males on average reporting a subjective age slightly younger (M = -1.11, SD = 6.82) than their actual age and females reporting an average subjective age slightly older (M = .97, SD = 4.59) than their actual age.

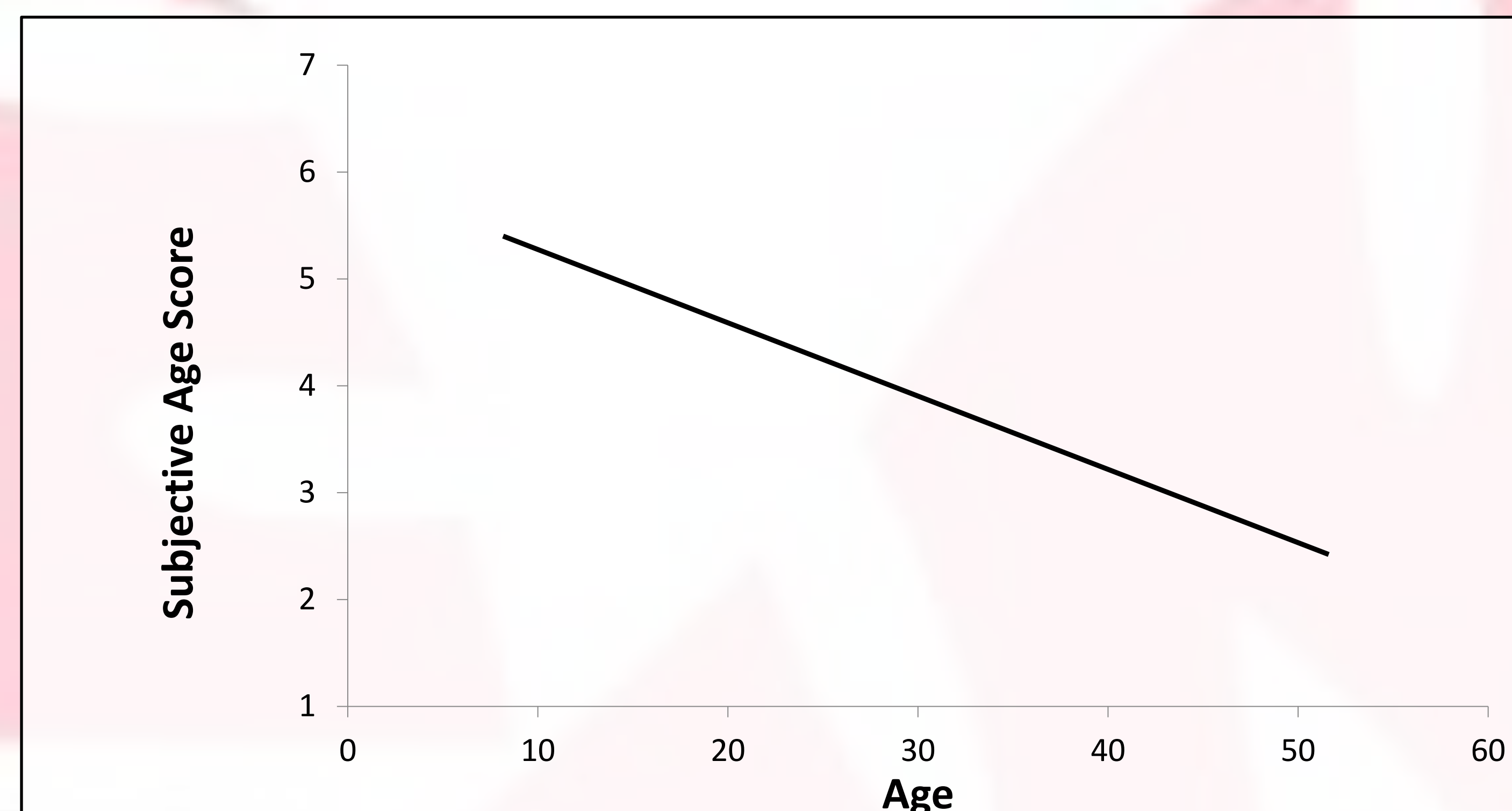


Figure 1. Relationship between chronological age and subjective age scores.

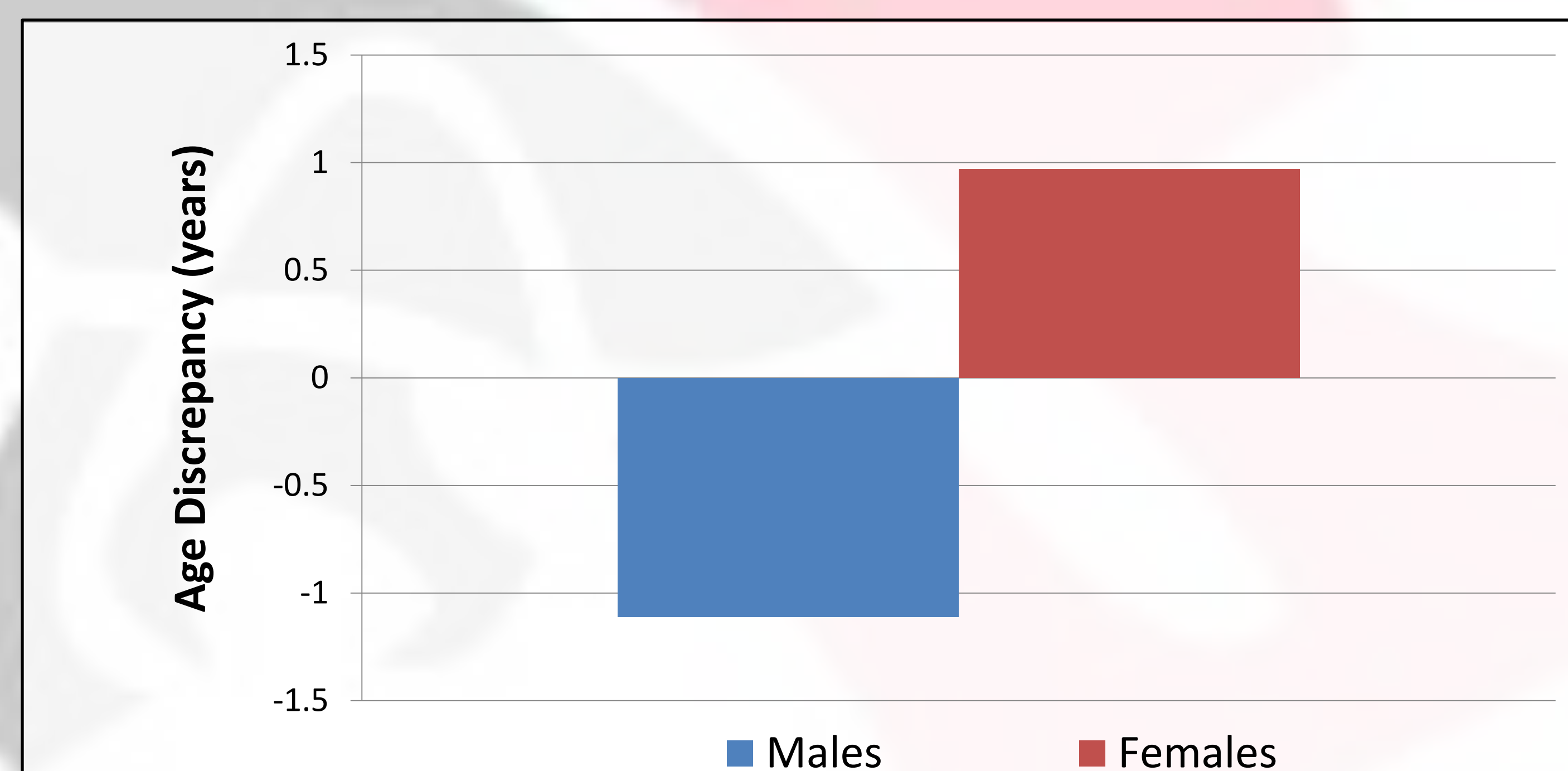


Figure 2. Differences between genders on age discrepancy scores.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our study confirms that a distinct difference exists between the age people are and the age that people feel.
- A significant negative correlation emerged between chronological age and subjective age as measured by the subjective age questionnaire. These findings coincide with previous research (Galambos, Turner, & Tilton-Weaver, 2005; Larsen & Kaliterna, 2002) which demonstrated a negative relationship between subjective and chronological age.
- We also found marginally significant differences between males and females on age discrepancy scores, with males reporting feeling younger than their actual age and females reporting feeling older than their actual age. Interestingly, these between gender results contradict previous finding by Larsen and Kaliterna (2002) such that men and women in our sample differed significantly in terms of their subjective age perception.
- One explanation for the observed gender difference is that men and women share dissimilar views on what it means to be an adult and how they are being perceived by their surrounding peers. Perhaps females tend to distinguish the college environment as more adult oriented feeling as if they need to be older to be part of the in crowd, whereas males view the college environment as a transition into adulthood therefore perceiving the majority of college students as being younger.
- Limitations of the present study include a sample which was limited to college students and comprised relatively few male participants. It is possible that the non-college population experiences no difference, or greater discrepancies, in chronological age versus subjective age.
- Subjective age due to its nature may vary with emotional states or current life situations thereby producing a younger or older relative feeling of age. One suggestion for future research could be to measure how emotional states play a role in individuals' subjective age perceptions.

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