



Universität  
Basel

## Research Project

### The influence of negative age stereotypes on social motivation

#### **Project funded by own resources**

**Project title** The influence of negative age stereotypes on social motivation

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**Organisation / Research unit**

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Stereotype threat refers to a state of “self-evaluative threat, whereby anxiety about confirming a negative stereotype in other’s eyes, or one’s own, produces behavior that is consistent with and confirms the stereotype” (Koenig & Eagly, 2005). A majority of the research related to stereotype threat has been focused on the detrimental effects of racial and gender stereotypes on performance in cognitive tasks (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Even relatively subtle situational cues, such as being the token member of a group, have been shown to successfully elicit stereotype threat (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000). More recently, negative effects of age-related stereotypes on cognitive tasks, often those associated with memory, have also been investigated (Lamont, Swift, & Abrams, 2015; Meisner, 2012).

As beliefs, which are not necessarily based on facts, stereotypes are acquired from the social environment at an early age and therefore vary depending on culture (Levy, 2003). In addition, stereotype threat is often characterized as a conflict rooted in perceived group membership (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). Taking this into account, stereotype threat seems like an inherently social phenomenon, yet social outcomes have been widely neglected in research. In order to remedy this oversight, Nikitin and Martiny (2016) conducted a series of studies investigating how social motivation in women is affected by activated stereotypes. When the stereotype that women perform worse than men in math was made salient, women experienced less social approach motivation after completing a math test. This effect was partially mediated by the sense of belonging to the group of students.

In the present project, we investigate the effects of age-related stereotypes on the social motivation of older adults, who are approaching retirement. The aim of the studies is to uncover the mechanisms by which those stereotypes affect social experiences in a workplace context. Further research may focus on finding interventions to counteract the effects of negative age-related stereotypes. Possible interventions may use positive stereotypes, manipulate perceived group membership, or employ techniques such as self-affirmation.

**Keywords** adult social development, social motivation, stereotype threat, negative age stereotypes

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**Add publication**

**Add documents**

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