

Perception of Wisdom: Written vs. Spoken Words

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(1) Introduction

What influences perceptions of older adults?

Cultural Norms for Older Adults

- “Older is wiser”
- “With age comes wisdom”



Negative Stereotypes of Older Adults

- More negative words spontaneously named and ascribed to older adults (Hummert et al., 1995; Kite & Miele, 1991)

Changes in Language of Older Adults

- Declines in lexical retrieval speed and accuracy (Lovelace & Coon, 1991), reduced syntactic complexity (Kynette & Kemper, 1986), and increased tangential speech (Ruscher & Hurley, 2000).



Stereotypes may affect how communication is determined by SLPs.



(2a) Methods

Stimuli

Audio recordings and typed transcripts of speakers' responses to 3 vignettes:



(1) A 14-year-old girl wants to move out of her family's home immediately. What should she do? What else would you want to know and why?

(2) A friend confides to you that he has committed a crime, and makes you promise not to tell anyone. You then discover that an innocent person has been accused of the crime. Although you plead with your friend to give himself up, he refuses. What should you do? What else would you want to know and why?

(3) Describe a turning point in your life, and what you learned from it.

Speakers were categorized into one of three age groups:
Young (30-49), Young Old (50-69), or Old (70-89)

(2b) Methods

Participants



Participants	Listeners	Readers
# of Participants	44	52
Younger (21 – 40)	22	26
Older (60 – 80)	22	26

Procedures

Listeners listened to audio recordings and readers read 6-8 speakers' responses (18-24 total stories) then ranked the following statements:

- (1) This person is knowledgeable.
- (2) This person is perceptive.
- (3) This person considers alternative solutions.
- (4) This person is sensitive to the feelings of others.
- (5) This person communicates well.

Strongly Disagree ----- Neutral ----- Strongly Agree

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5

(3) Hypothesis

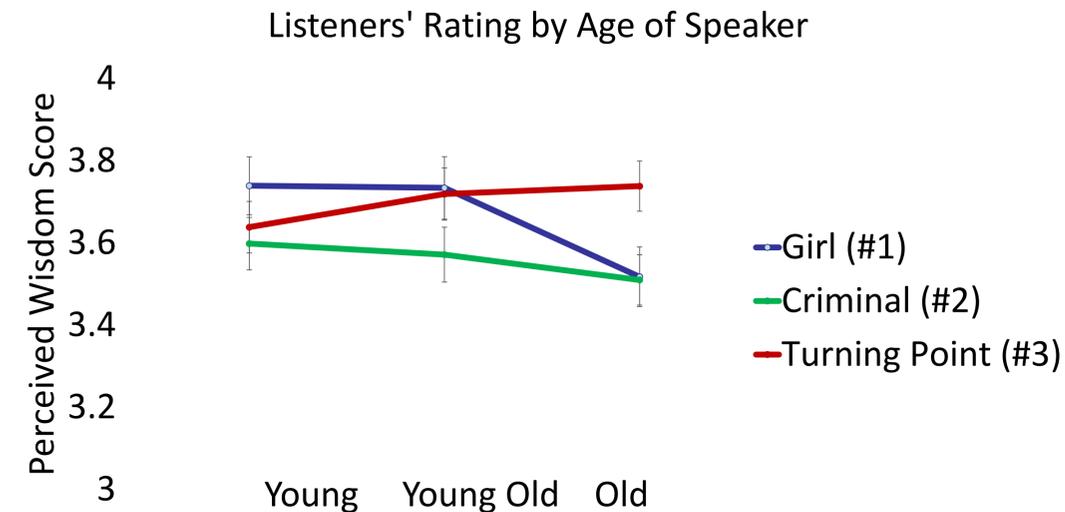
(1a) Listeners and readers will rate older speakers higher than younger speakers.



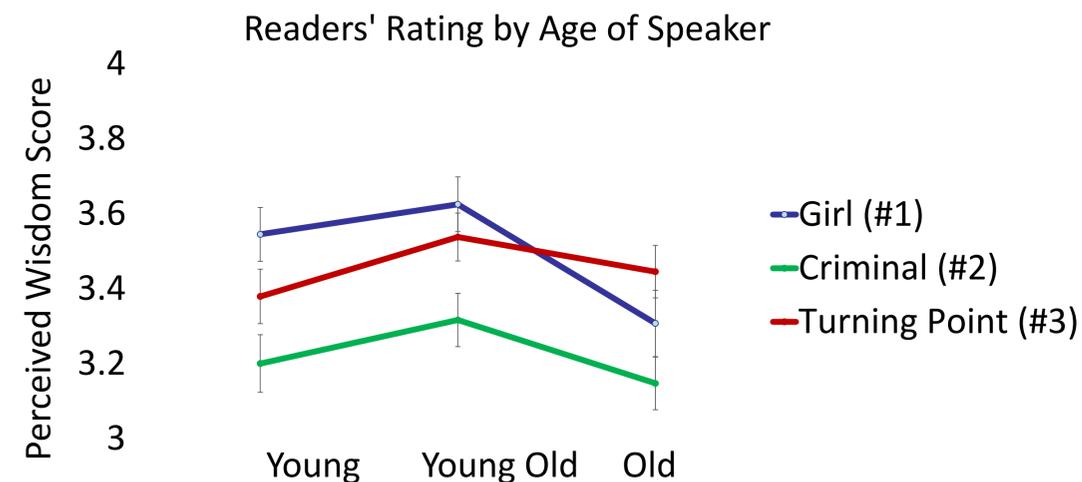
(1b) Listeners and readers will rate older speakers lower than younger speakers.



(4a) Results: Impact of Speaker Age

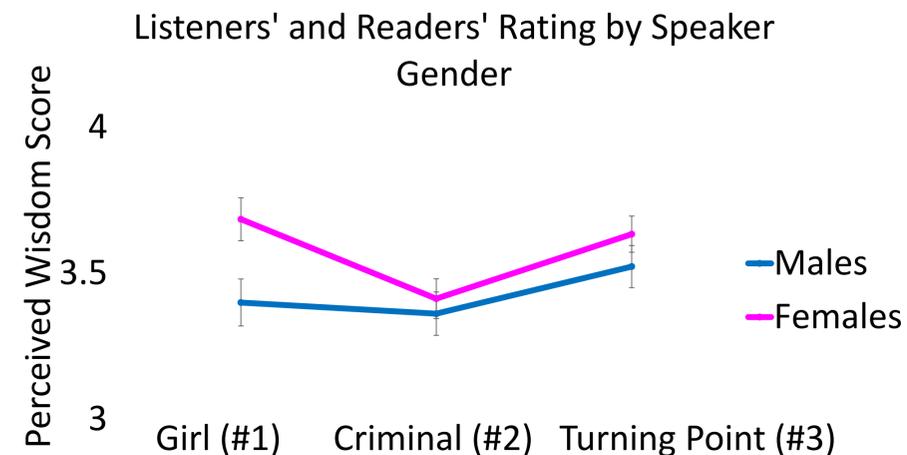


- Listeners and readers ranked older speakers highest on Narrative #3 (Turning Point).



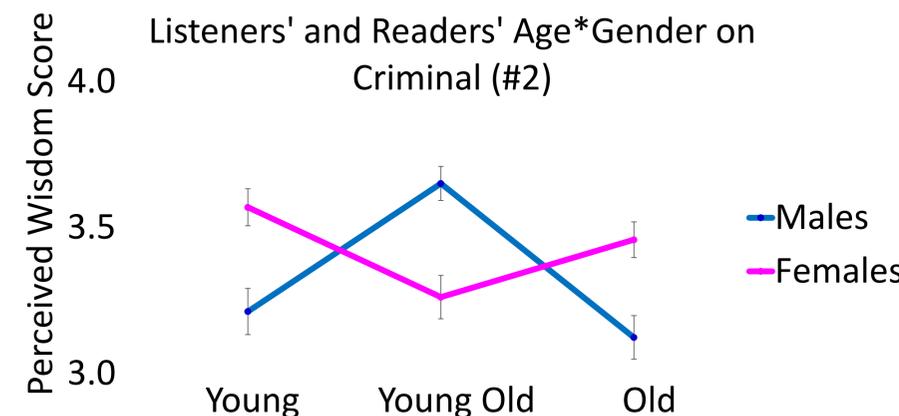
- Older speakers scored significantly lower only for readers on Narrative #1 (Girl). No other significant differences.

(4b) Results: Impact of Gender



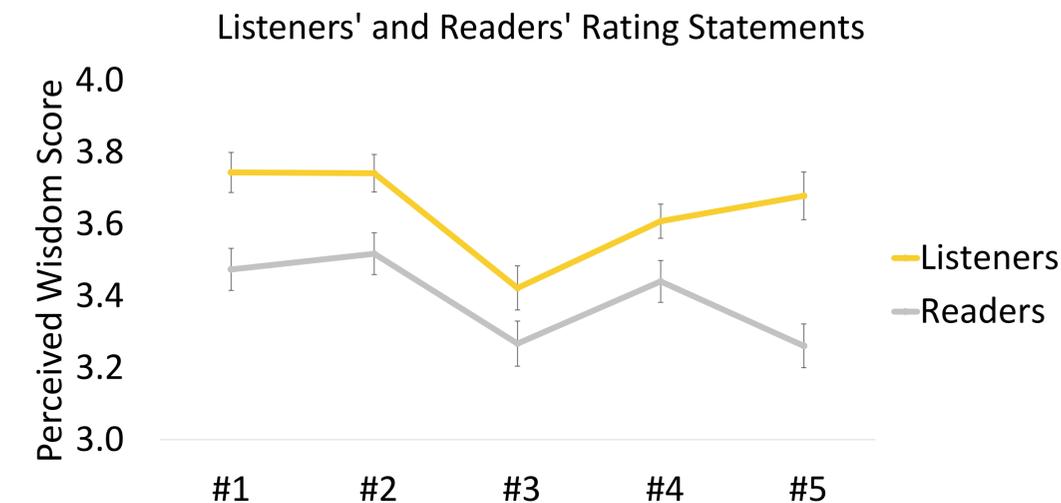
- Same pattern for listeners and readers. Females rated higher than males for both readers and listeners on Narrative #1 (Girl).

(4c) Results: Age*Gender Interaction



- Young and old females rated higher than males, but young old males rated higher than females for both readers and listeners on Narrative #2 (Criminal).

(4d) Results: Rating Statements



- Listeners gave higher scores than readers, particularly on Rating #5 (Communicates Well).

(5) Conclusions

- Impact of age depends on the topic the person is discussing. SLPs should consider using various topics during evaluation and treatment to reduce bias.
- Impact of gender is also topic specific. Even seemingly "neutral" topics may exhibit bias.
- Listeners provided higher scores, especially on #5 (Communicates Well). Voicing cues may have contributed to these results.

Future Directions

- Explore older adult language characteristics: What is contributing to their lower ratings?
- Explore impact of gender: Will results change if identical stimuli is spoken by both genders?

References

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Acknowledgements

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