

STUDENT PAPER WINNER:***ABSTRACT******AGING AND CATEGORIZATION: USING GENERALIZED EQUIVALENCE CLASSES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS TO COMPARE OLDER AND YOUNGER ADULTS***

Christine M. Engle

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA - WILMINGTON

The present study was an effort to bring together accounts of stimulus equivalence, the transfer of function among stimulus classes, and age-related changes associated with the creation of stimulus classes. This experiment explores these ideas using two participant groups, one consisting of younger adults and one consisting of adult volunteers over the age of 65. Participants were given training using nonsense syllables and eight sets of abstract stimuli. The stimuli differed on a number of features, four of which were class-consistent. Each stimulus contained a combination of one, two, three, or four of the class-consistent features, and the number of class-consistent features was used to identify the typicality of the stimulus within each class. Upon completion of the equivalence training and testing procedure, each participant was told that one of the stimuli from training carried a disease that infects 50% of the animals or plants with which it comes into contact. Participants were then shown a series of stimuli from the testing phase of the equivalence procedure and asked to rate how likely each of these stimuli were to also infect plants or animals. Ratings from this phase determined the transfer of function within the stimulus classes created during the equivalence training procedure. Results showed that older adults required more training trials to master baseline criterion levels than younger adults did, but both groups demonstrated the formation of equivalence classes and typicality effects within those classes. Further, both groups also demonstrated transfer of function within the equivalence classes that was related to the typicality rating of each stimulus within a class.