

Re: Could the increase in human life-span account for these results?

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Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.stat.math/2009-05/msg00131.html>

- *From:* Rich Ulrich <rich.ulrich@xxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Thu, 14 May 2009 22:40:34 -0400
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On Thu, 14 May 2009 14:16:13 -0700 (PDT), Gary <LanceGary@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On May 14, 9:49 pm, Rich Ulrich <rich.ulr...@xxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Thu, 14 May 2009 16:59:31 +0100, "Lurker"
<spamk...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
wrote:

[snip, posts before my reply]

I agree with Lurker, that this result could easily be artifact. He specifies some reasons, and I will add to it.

The proper data to examine would include the plots of age/ inferred age, for separate decades. I expect that the ranges differ, which is one thing that Lurker suggests.

Apparent age? I know a number of women today in their 60s whose appearance – and photos – looks more like 40 or so, if you judged by the standards of the 1960s.

And I'm not sure that it is a sign of "ageism" if you show a photo of someone whose earlier image would be the recognized one.

A direct approach to one "answer" might be to ask the oldtimes at the newspaper if their own instructions to the families had changed, for instance, from "Give us the most recent photo that you have" to "Give us a picture that you like".

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Interesting – you think the photos may look younger because of the success of things like plastic surgery and cosmetic procedures?

Doesn't "cosmetic procedures" refer to surgery, too?

Actually, the acquaintances whom I was thinking of aren't likely to have plastic surgery. They probably use skin lotion and have kept out of the sun, and they might work out to keep fit. And they dye their hair and style it in a modern way, and don't dress like dowagers.

It is a decade earlier when the movie *Sunset Boulevard* features an 'aging actress' who is played by an aging actress — one who is in her early 50s but who gives the impression of someone 10 years older. To my modern eyes.

How would you investigate this topic based on the sort of archival data available?

In order to be convincing, I think that the article would *need* to present the actual photos for a number of "typical" cases.

A better study would also do something more extensive about multiple raters of the age perceived in the photos. Raters should be blind to the actual age, and rate all photos, old and new. That would give some measure of inaccuracies, say, especially when the estimated age is rather older than the age at death. Raters also would be compared to each other, testing for bias and consistency.

Unless there are special circumstances about a small community, it would seem to be in bad taste to find friends or neighbors to interview them to place ages on the photos.

About the hypothesis:

I would definitely talk to people in the news obituary business to find out if *they* agree with the hypothesis, or if they know of any obvious explanation. I suggested one, about a change in the instructions from the newspaper to the families. — It seems to me that I do vaguely recall some mention of that kind of change happening, years ago. Ask some old people if obituaries used to *insist* on having the oldest–age photos.

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Rich Ulrich

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