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ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AGED OF PERSONS UNDER AND OVER THE AGE OF FORTY

EDRO I. SIGNORI
 DORCAS SUSAN BUTT
 JOHN F. KOZAK
University of British Columbia

Abstract

An analysis of attitudes toward persons '65 years or older' yielded five factors: Integrity, Fortitude, Social Appeal, Dependability, and Open-mindedness. When the 716 respondents were divided into those aged 40 and over and those under 40, ratings by the older respondents yielded two additional factors: Competence and Reflectiveness. Analyses by sex showed Integrity accounting for the greatest variance in the ratings by females while Social Appeal accounted for the greatest variance in the ratings by males. An unfavourable stereotype of the older person was manifested in the negative pole of Open-mindedness (Rigidity). Positive attitudes toward the elderly were manifested in the variables comprising the first four factors, but this positive stereotype is rarely reported in the literature.

Résumé

Une analyse factorielle des attitudes vis-à-vis des personnes de 65 ans et plus a permis d'isoler cinq facteurs: Intégrité, Force morale, Attrait social, Fiabilité et Ouverture d'esprit. En divisant les 716 sujets en deux groupes suivant qu'ils avaient moins de 40 ans ou 40 ans et plus, on a observé, chez les plus vieux, deux facteurs additionnels: Compétence et Réflexion. Des analyses selon le genre ont démontré que l'Intégrité expliquait le plus de variance dans les réponses des femmes tandis que l'Attrait social rendait compte de plus de variance dans les réponses des hommes. Un stéréotype défavorable quant aux personnes âgées s'est manifesté au pôle négatif de l'Ouverture d'esprit (Rigidité). Bien que rarement évoquées dans les recherches connues, des attitudes positives vis-à-vis les personnes âgées sont apparues au niveau des variables qui composent les quatre premiers facteurs.

Contributions of data for the study were made by Dr. D. Krebs of Simon Fraser University; Dr. G. Nelson, U.B.C., Faculty of Education; Dr. I. Olson and Dr. J.E. Michael of Vancouver City College; and Sara Pawson of Douglas College. Additional assistance and consultation was received from Dr. Miriam E. Bunt, University of Windsor and Dr. G.W. Russell, University of Lethbridge. This assistance is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

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The literature on attitudes toward older persons has generally reported prejudicial stereotypes (Jabs-Kriegsmann, 1977; Sohnsen & Smith, 1978). Such stereotypes have been reported among men and women (McTavish, 1971; Weinberger & Milham, 1975) and among

Requests for reprints should be sent to Dr. Susan Butt, Department of Psychology, The University of British Columbia, # 154 - 2053 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1Y7.

professional groups (Cicchetti, Fletcher, Lerner & Coleman, 1973; Weinberger & Milham, 1975; Longino & Kitson, 1976). Recent investigators have approached aging as a multi-dimensional process and have suggested that the attitudes expressed toward older persons are also therefore multi-dimensional in structure. Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) and O'Connell and Rotter (1979) have reported the presence of a three-factor structure upon which older persons are perceived more negatively than younger people. These factors are: Instrumental-Ineffective, Autonomous-Dependent and Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability.

In contrast to the negative findings above, other researchers have reported more positive images of the older person held by both the young (Thomas & Yamamoto, 1975; Ivester & King, 1977; Signori, Butt & Kozak, 1977; Note 1) and by older persons themselves (Signori & Kozak, 1979). A recent study by Signori, Butt and Kozak (1980), in which age-matched males and females under 40 rated people "65 years of age and over" on 69 bipolar scales, yielded five factors: Integrity, Fortitude, Social Appeal, Dependability, and Open-mindedness. Of these, the usual negative picture of older persons was concentrated at the conservative pole of the last factor, Open-mindedness. The first four factors pointed to essentially positive impressions of the older person as indicated by the average (α) variable ratings comprising each factor. These findings differ from the three factors presented by Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) who employed a smaller number of rating scales (32). The present study reports an extension of the earlier study by Signori *et al.*, (1980) in that it includes additional data obtained from respondents 40 years and older. These were factor analyzed separately.

Method

Participants

Participants in the entire study (N=716) included the 456 age-matched males and females under the age of 40 from the earlier study (Signori *et al.*, 1980) and 260 male and female adults 40 years of age and over from additional study. The mean ages of the males and females were 23.8 and 23.7 years of age respectively for the younger group and 53.3 and 53.7 years of age for the older group. The overall population of participants ranged in age from 14 to 91 years, with very few participants at either extreme.

Measurements

All participants were asked to rate a reference group described as "people 65 years or older" on 69 bipolar Likert-type scales. The scales, described elsewhere (Signori *et al.*, 1980), were constructed from previous studies on prejudice toward minority groups (Signori, Sampson & Rempel, 1968) and from the traits used by older people to describe themselves (Signori & Kozak, 1976; Note 2). Support for the validity of the scales in socio-cultural research is demonstrated in significant findings from previous studies (Butt & Signori, 1976).

Analyses and Results

A factor analysis (Halm, 1973) with multiple R^2 in the diagonals and varimax rotation on the total sample yielded the same five factors found in the previous study (Signori *et al.*, 1980): Integrity, Fortitude, Social Appeal, Dependability, and Open-mindedness (Table 1). The criterion used to determine the number of factors was that each factor have an eigenvalue greater or equal to one.

Table 1
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for
Total Group (N = 716)

Variable	Factor I: Integrity	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Kind, gentle	.64	5.29
Well-mannered, lovely people	.61	5.17
Truthful, honorable	.61	5.49
Mature, adjusted	.59	5.37
Controlled, disciplined	.57	5.32
Possess dignity, self-respect	.54	4.64
Agreeable, understanding	.54	4.64
Wholesome, harmless	.53	5.28
Sacrificing, giving	.49	5.14
Careful, cautious	.48	5.58
Intelligent, bright	.47	5.00
Sociable, friendly	.46	5.15
Sane, sensible	.46	5.35
Honest, trustworthy	.42	5.51
Modesty, humility	.40	4.73
Frank, forthright	.40	4.91
Cheerful, optimistic	.40	4.51
Organized, coordinated	.38	4.68

Eigenvalue: 18.35; Percentage of variance: 26.59.

Attitudes Toward the Aged

Table 1 (continued)

Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Total Group (N = 716)

Variable	Factor II: Fortitude	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Strong, vigorous	.62	3.93*
Healthy, well	.62	4.11
Determined, ambitious	.60	4.51
Active, energetic	.58	4.20
Assertive, aggressive	.58	4.23
Involved, participating	.54	4.17
Enthusiastic, zestful	.53	4.42
Independent, self-sufficient	.51	4.63
Tough-minded, self-reliant	.49	4.53
Venturesome, uninhibited	.46	4.19
Contented, happy	.45	4.54
Unworried, secure	.44	4.22
Rich, influential	.43	4.04
Trained, skilled	.43	4.70
Competent, professional	.42	4.59
Dominant, overbearing	.40	4.37
Courageous, brave	.37	4.56
Confident, reliant	.36	4.80

Eigenvalue: 3.66; Percentage of variance: 5.30.

Table 1 (continued)

Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Total Group (N = 716)

Variable	Factor III: Social Appeal	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Delightful, exquisite	.64	4.79
Enhances, advances	.60	4.79
Intuitive, insightful	.55	4.56
Sensitive, appreciative	.55	5.20
Talented, gifted	.54	4.74
Clean, well-groomed	.51	5.10
Productive, industrious	.49	4.68
Charming, pleasing	.44	4.56
Humorous, witty	.43	4.89
Idealistic, high-minded	.42	4.23
Creative, imaginative	.38	4.47
Efficient, methodical	.36	4.78

Eigenvalue: 1.91; Percentage of variance: 2.76.

Table 1 (continued)

Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Total Group (N = 716)

Variable	Factor IV: Dependability	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Restrained, temperate	.54	4.83
Reliable, responsible	.51	5.41
Modest, self-deprecating	.47	4.45
Conscientious, scrupulous	.43	5.11
Helpful, cooperative	.41	5.16
Reticent, discreet	.37	4.18
Quiet, placid	.34	4.75
Tolerant, patient	.42	4.60
Flexible, persuasible	.55	3.57*

Eigenvalue: 1.46; Percentage of variance: 2.11.

Table 1 (continued)

Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Total Group (N = 716)

Variable	Factor V: Open-mindedness	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Universal, broad-minded	.36	2.59*
Liberal, radical	.36	1.51*
Unhabituated, unaddicted	.24	2.50*
Promiscuous, over-sexed	.28	3.39*
Objective, impractical	.32	3.73*
Generous, altruistic	.38	4.63
Trusting, adaptable	.38	4.50

Eigenvalue: 1.31; Percentage of variance: 1.90.

*Ratings below "4" place people 65 and over at the opposites of the labels noted in the table (on a seven-point scale). Those traits on which the elderly are rated below average are: strong, vigorous vs weak, delicate; universal, broadminded vs clannish, narrow-minded; liberal, radical vs conservative, traditional; unhabituated, unaddicted vs habituated, addicted; promiscuous, over-sexed vs frigid, under-sexed; objective, impractical vs subjective, personal and flexible, persuasible vs rigid, stubborn.

A separate factor analysis of the ratings from the older group (n=260) yielded a similar five factor structure along with two additional factors identified as Competence and Reflectiveness (Table 2). Separate factor

analyses of male and female data revealed equivalent five factor solutions with a reordering of the first factor. For males the first factor was Social Appeal while for females it was Integrity.

Table 2
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor I: Integrity	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Kind, gentle	.67	5.33
Truthful, honorable	.65	5.52
Well-mannered, lovely people	.63	5.36
Frank, forthright	.61	5.06
Careful, cautious	.57	5.59
Mature, adjusted	.56	5.49
Harmless, wholesome	.55	5.35
Intelligent, bright	.55	5.20
Possess dignity, self-respect	.53	5.53
Agreeable, understanding	.52	4.83
Sociable, friendly	.51	5.42
Sacrificing, giving	.51	5.25
Controlled, disciplined	.51	5.31
Cheerful, optimistic	.50	4.77
Fragrant, aromatic	.47	4.83
Cooperative, helpful	.47	5.22
Sane, sensible	.43	5.29

Eigenvalue: 20.07; Percentage of variance: 30.53.

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor II: Fortitude	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Determined, ambitious	.69	4.70
Strong, vigorous	.68	4.32
Energetic, active	.62	4.52
Assertive, aggressive	.61	4.34
Zestful, enthusiastic	.58	4.74
Independent, self-sufficient	.56	5.07
Creative, imaginative	.55	4.54
Healthy, well	.53	4.43
Tender-minded, over-protected	.52	4.58
Rich, influential	.52	4.24
Involved, participating	.51	4.49
Brave, courageous	.47	4.86
Objective, impersonal	.46	4.15
Humorous, witty	.44	4.96
Venturesome, uninhibited	.43	4.53
Contented, happy	.43	4.73
Flexible, persuasible	.42	3.91*

Eigenvalue: 3.45; Percentage of variance: 5.00.

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor III: Social Appeal	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Delightful, exquisite	.61	4.90
Enhances, advances	.60	4.82
Intuitive, insightful	.56	4.59
Clean, well-groomed	.54	5.24
Idealistic, high-minded	.52	4.66
Charming, pleasing	.50	4.72
Sensitive, appreciative	.49	5.26
Talented, gifted	.47	4.77
Generous, altruistic	.38	4.75

Eigenvalue: 2.05; Percentage of variance: 2.97.

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor IV: Dependability	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Reliable, responsible	.57	5.61
Restrained, temperate	.53	5.02
Conscientious, scrupulous	.51	5.25
Honest, trustworthy	.50	5.62
Quiet, placid	.48	4.81
Stable, well-balanced	.47	5.18
Productive, industrious	.46	4.83
Competence, professional	.41	4.92
Modest, self-deprecating	.40	4.72
Reliant, confident	.37	5.02

Eigenvalue: 1.57; Percentage of variance: 2.27.

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor V: Competence	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Efficient, methodical	.55	4.94
Educated, learned	.50	4.90
Organized, coordinated	.46	4.97
Endurance, persistence	.45	4.95
Trained, skilled	.43	4.87
Promiscuous, over-sexed	.21	3.72*

Eigenvalue: 1.37; Percentage of variance: 1.99.

Attitudes Toward the Aged

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor VI: Reflectiveness	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Reticent, discreet	.45	4.59
Serene, relaxed	.40	4.74
Patient, tolerant	.39	4.87

Eigenvalue: 1.26; Percentage of variance: 1.83.

Table 2 (continued)
Factors, Loadings, and Mean Trait Ratings for Raters
Aged 40 and over (N = 260)

Variable	Factor VII: Open-mindedness	
	Loading	Mean Trait Rating
Unhabituated, unaddicted	.44	2.68*
Universal, broadminded	.43	2.68*
Liberal, radical	.31	1.63*

Eigenvalue: 1.08; Percentage of variance: 1.56

*Ratings below "4" place people 65 and over at the opposites of the labels noted in the table (on a seven-point scale). Those traits on which the elderly are rated below average are: flexible, persuasible vs rigid, stubborn; promiscuous, over-sexed vs frigid, under-sexed; unhabituated, unaddicted vs habituated, addicted; universal, broadminded vs clannish, narrow-minded; liberal, radical vs conservative, traditional.

Hotelling T^2 comparisons by sex on mean factor scores revealed no significant differences whereas highly significant differences were found at different age levels, including cross-sexed comparisons (Table 3).

Table 3
Hotellings T^2 on Overall Mean Factor Scores Between
Eight Comparison Samples (N = 716)

Comparison Samples	Mean Factor Scores	
	F	p
All Females (N = 370) vs all Males (N = 346)	1.10	.3585
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Males 40 and over (N = 124)	.24	.9465
Females under 40 (N = 234) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	1.75	.1209
All subjects 40 and over (N = 260) vs all subjects under 40 (N = 456)	16.25	.0000
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Females under 40 (N = 234)	10.93	.0000
Males 40 and over (N = 124) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	6.03	.0000
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	8.20	.0000
Males 40 and over (N = 124) vs Females under 40 (N = 234)	8.54	.0000

Student t-tests on the mean factor scores (Table 4) showed that younger adults (under 40) differed from older adults (40 and over) in the attributions made to old people on the factors of Fortitude, Dependableness, and Open-mindedness. Again, sex of rater by age group was not a significant variable.

Table 4
Factor Score Differences (t tests) between Eight Comparison Samples

Comparison Samples	Integrity	Fortitude	Social Appeal	Dependability	Open-mindedness
All Females (N = 370) vs all Males (N = 346)	-.2267	-1.2502	-1.5807	.3013	1.0815
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Males 40 and over (N = 124)	.3056	.8565	-.5281	.2792	-.1812
Females under 40 (N = 234) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	-.0416	-.8873	-2.3850*	.6659	1.4965
All subjects 40 and over (N = 260) vs all subjects under 40 (N = 456)	.0793	5.0098***	-.3685	4.5037***	5.6342***
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Females under 40 (N = 234)	.2133	3.6969**	-1.6116	3.8677**	4.4523***
Males 40 and over (N = 124) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	-.1165	3.3638**	1.0435	2.6563*	3.1136*
Females 40 and over (N = 136) vs Males under 40 (N = 222)	.2427	4.4810***	.4804	2.9469*	3.3439*
Males 40 and over (N = 124) vs Females under 40 (N = 234)	-.1529	2.6126*	-.9831	3.5226**	4.5955***

*. < .01; **. < .001; ***. < .0001.

Discussion and Conclusion

The major finding of the present study parallels a previous finding reported by the authors (Signori et al., 1980). The five factors of Integrity, Fortitude, Social Appeal, Dependability, and Open-mindedness are apparently used by both young and older groups to describe the social image of the older person. The factor structure from our previous analysis of the young group alone and the present one, which includes the older group, yielded the same five factors with eigenvalues over one. However, the analysis of the older sample, by itself, yields two additional factors with eigenvalues over one: Competence and Reflectiveness. This suggests that the longer experience and maturity of the older raters allows them to make more refined differentiations of the qualities in older people which are reflected in greater statistical variance. Thus, their attitudinal structure is reasonably different from that of less experienced younger persons under the age of 40.

Rosencranz and McNevin (1969) reported only three factors in their study from the factor analysis of 32 variables. These dimensions were described as: Instrumental-Ineffective, Autonomous-Dependent, and Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability. An examination of the variable identifications contained in the paper shows some overlap with the three major factors of the present study. However, several of the trait allocations yielded in the

Rosencranz and McNevin study might be better placed among the fourth and fifth factors of the present study. This discrepancy suggests that their 32 variables do not provide sufficient scope for measuring or accommodating the larger factor content existing in this area of attitude research. A further insight is found in a recent study by Holtzman, Beck and Kerber (1979; Note 3) who reported that the three factors found by Rosencranz and McNevin were psychometrically forced, with a four factor structure being more amenable to the ratings of the 32 scales. This fourth factor was tentatively labelled as Integrity-Despair after Erikson's (1963) last stage of life and seems congruent with the first factor of the present study.

Contrary to Petty's (1977) finding that older adults were significantly more negative than younger adults toward older people, the present study found attitudes to be largely positive or neutral, but more so by the older than younger participants. Of the 69 bipolar scales studied, the younger participants (in the 1980 study) rated older adults as: rigid, frigid, habituated, clannish, poor, conservative, weak, unhealthy, gossipy and subjective. The older participants in the present study described the elderly as: rigid, frigid, habituated, clannish and conservative. For them the traditional negative stereotype was therefore of narrower scope than traditionally cast. Overall the ratings have favourable mean scores with the older raters rating more favourably than the young raters. Older observers may become more tolerant and accepting of deficits in others as those deficits become probabilities in themselves. The acknowledgment of biological decline in older persons by younger persons was even more impressively demonstrated in written reports by children on how they viewed the older person (Lister, Signori & Kozak, 1979; Note 4). Differences in the ratings assigned to older persons by age of raters is clearly evident from Table 3, and age rather than sex is the crucial variable accounting for the differences reported. In terms of mean factor scores these age differences are found on the three factors labelled: Fortitude, Dependability, and Open-mindedness (Table 4). Thus the differences in the perceptions of younger and older observers occur on the qualities of persistence, consistency and degree of flexibility. Persons 40 and over perceive the elderly more positively on all.

The difference in first factor priority

between males and females suggests that females may be more partial to evaluating older persons in terms of moral and ethical values whereas males may perceive more in terms of glamour or physical attractiveness.

In conclusion, what must be emphasized is the positive image that all age groups have of the older person. Despite the differences in emphasis shown between the perceptions of older and younger adults on three of the major factors they both perceive the older person very positively. The elderly are described for example, as: kind, well-mannered, truthful, mature, controlled, wholesome, sacrificing, careful, intelligent, sociable, sane sensitive and clean. Such traits are certainly not those of an undesirable person but instead present a picture of a caring, sensitive individual who, though probably affected physically by the aging process, nevertheless is highly capable, in terms of his or her ability, to transcend the biological limitations and restrictions imposed as a consequence of aging. To focus mainly upon the negative physical side of aging is to overemphasize the perception of biological differences between individuals. Though most people are observant of such physical truths, there are at the same time social-psychological qualities perceived which older persons are known to possess. The more advanced maturity of the older observer is required to both recognize and appreciate these qualities. Only by drawing attention to such positive qualities will the general misconceptions recorded in our literature about the older person be dispelled.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The late Dr. Edro I. Signori was a graduate of the University of Toronto and served with the R.C.A.F. Directorate of Personnel Selection and Research during the war. A professor at U.B.C. since 1949 he participated in projects concerned with drug addiction, alcoholism, spouse personality and marriage, public education, community health, and attitudes toward disadvantaged persons. In more recent years he developed procedures for the assessment of attitudes toward older people and their needs. He interviewed and counselled individuals for educational and industrial vocations as well as persons with personal problems including ex-service personnel, students, workers and older persons.

Dorcas Susan Butt, associate professor in Psychology, University of British Columbia, received her Ph.D. degree in clinical and research psychology from the University of Chicago. Formerly a clinical consultant in psychology at Riverview Hospital, Vancouver; she has done counselling and psychotherapy at the Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Center at the University of Chicago and at the Mental Health Center in Burnaby, B.C. Author of publications in the areas of personality and attitudinal measurement, delinquency, village structure, and socialization; she also wrote the book, *Psychology of Sport: the Behavior, Motivation, Personality and Performance of Athletes* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1976) which has been translated into Japanese.

John F. Kozak is presently a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia. He has worked in the areas of attitudes toward the elderly and on the social implications and problems of aging. In addition, his research interests lie in the areas of personality, psychometrics, and psychophysics.