The role of individual difference variables in ageism

Linda J. Allan a,⇑, James A. Johnson b, Scott D. Emerson a

a Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7, Canada
b Department of Economics, University of British Columbia, 3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 13 May 2013
Received in revised form 25 October 2013
Accepted 29 October 2013
Available online 16 November 2013

Keywords:
Ageism
Aging anxiety
Personality
Empathy
Gratitude
Individual differences

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the role that personality traits, empathy traits, and gratitude have on ageist attitudes and aging anxiety. Consistent with previous research, participants who exhibited greater aging anxiety were more prone to ageist attitudes. Participants with greater dispositional gratitude exhibited significantly less aging anxiety and less ageist attitudes. All of the Big Five personality traits, with the exception of extraversion, were found to be significant determinants of ageist attitudes, aging anxiety, or both. With the exception of personal distress, none of the empathy dimensions predicted either aging anxiety or ageist attitudes.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Almost four decades ago Butler (1975) introduced the term ageism which refers to "a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old" (p. 12). Despite the intervening time, there remains a paucity of research on ageism compared to other types of prejudice such as sexism and racism (North & Fiske, 2012).

Research indicates that the aging process is widely regarded negatively and suggests that many individuals hold ageist views of elderly adults (see Butler, 2005; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005). Discrimination against older individuals continues to appear in domains such as the workplace (McCann & Giles, 2002; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2006; Stuart-Hamilton & Mahoney, 2003) and in medical settings (Ferrario, Freeman, Nellett, & Scheel, 2008). The proportion of older adults in the United States and Canada is higher than ever before and is projected to rise over the coming decades (Statistics Canada, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2009). As the population becomes increasingly older it becomes more important to understand ageism and to develop strategies to decrease ageist attitudes and behaviours. One approach that may be useful is to explore which individual differences contribute to ageism.

Demographic variables associated with individual differences in ageism have been studied. Males have consistently been found to be more ageist than females (Boswell, 2012; Boudjemad & Gana, 2009; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2005). Research on the influence of the amount of contact with older adults on ageist beliefs yields mixed findings. In the case of university undergraduates, some researchers (Allan & Johnson, 2009; Boswell, 2012; Schwartz & Simmons, 2001) found no relationship between quantity of contact with older adults and ageist attitudes while others (Luo, Zhou, Jin, Newman, & Lie, 2013; Van Dussen & Weaver, 2009) found that more contact with older adults is related to more positive attitudes toward older adults. Sullivan (2008) found no relationship between quantity of contact and ageist attitudes, however, quality of inter-generational contact was predictive of less ageist attitudes.

Lasher and Faulkender (1993) define anxiety about aging as "combined concern and anticipation of losses centered around the aging process" (p. 247). They conceptualize aging anxiety as different from other types of anxiety but related to psychological well-being and attitudes toward aging. Anxiety about (one's own) aging seems to be linked to ageism. Harris and Dollinger (2001) found that university students with high levels of aging anxiety held more negative attitudes toward the average 70-year-old and rated themselves at 70 more negatively than did students who had lower aging anxiety. Several studies have found a significant positive correlation between aging anxiety and ageism among university students (Allan & Johnson, 2009; Boswell, 2012; Harris & Dollinger, 2001).

A unique explanation for the link between aging anxiety and ageism is terror management theory (TMT; see Martens,
2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 392 students (252 females) enrolled in psychology courses at a mid-sized university in Western Canada. They were recruited through the Psychology Department’s experiment management system and received course credit for participating. Most participants were between the ages of 18 to 20 (M = 19.36; SD = 1.52). Most participants reported ethnicity as White (71.7%), Others self-identified as Asian (15.3%), or other (11.8%), while 1.2% did not respond.

After providing consent, each participant completed a series of online questionnaires in a fixed order. The instruments took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographics

The demographic questionnaire included items regarding age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, and current year of study. A question about the participants’ frequency of daily contact with older adults and one regarding whether they had lived with an elderly relative in the last 5 years were also included.

2.2.2. Ageism

The Fraboni Scale on Ageism (FSA) developed by Fraboni, Saltstone, and Hughes (1990) and revised by Rupp et al. (2005) is a measure of ageist beliefs about older adults. The Rupp et al. (2005) version comprises 23 statements which can be divided into 3 factors: Stereotypes (e.g., “Old people complain more than other people do”), Separation (e.g., “I sometimes avoid eye contact with older people when I see them”) and Affective Attitudes (e.g., “Old people should be encouraged to speak out politically”). Participants indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement. Higher scores on the FSA indicate more ageist attitudes. The FSA has high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas of .70 to .79 (Rupp et al., 2005).

2.2.3. Aging anxiety

The Anxiety about Aging Scale (AAS; Lasher & Faulkender, 1993) is a 20-item self-report scale assessing anxiety about aging including fear of older people, psychological concerns about aging, physical concerns about aging, and fear of losses associated with aging. Participants indicate on 5-point Likert items the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements concerning aging. Higher AAS scores indicate greater anxiety about aging. The AAS has good levels of internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of .82 (Lasher & Faulkender, 1993).

2.2.4. Personality

The NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI: Costa & McCrae, 1989) is a 60-item scale designed to assess the constellation of traits defined by the Five Factor Theory of Personality. The NEO-FFI comprises five personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Openness is characterized by originality, curiosity, and ingenuity (e.g., “I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature”). Conscientiousness refers to orderliness, responsibility, and dependability (e.g., “I work hard to accomplish my goals”). Neuroticism is characterized by upset ability and is the polar opposite of emotional stability (e.g., “I often feel inferior to others”). Agreeableness relates to good-naturedness, cooperativeness, and trust (e.g., “I often feel inferior to others”). Extraversion denotes talkativeness, assertiveness, and energy (e.g., “I am a very active person”).
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات