

An Empirical Study of Ageism: From Polemics to Scientific Utility

Valerie Braithwaite

Research School of the Social Sciences
The Australian National University

Robert Lynd-Stevenson and Derek Pigram

Psychology Department
The Australian National University

Ageism has been a poorly defined polemical term covering a range of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours directed toward elderly people. Based on data from 195 1st-year psychology students, this study measures four facets of ageism — attitudes to the elderly, attitudes to the ageing process, stereotypes of capability and stereotypes of sociability — and relates scale scores to experimental findings on age discrimination. The study shows interconnectedness among components of ageism, but considerable diversity in how ageist the group was on different dimensions. The major finding was that while both attitudinal and experimental designs were effective in uncovering biases against elderly people, these biases were unrelated to each other. Ageism, defined in terms of verbally expressed prejudice and stereotypes, is to be distinguished from age discrimination, operationalised as a preference for younger over older job applicants.

Butler (1969) coined the term *ageism* to describe "the systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old" (Butler, 1987, p. 22). He has claimed that the phenomenon can be observed at both the institutional and individual level through stereotypes and myths, outright disdain and dislike, avoidance of contact, discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and services, and even humour. Many have endorsed Butler's view and have warned of its consequences (Ciliberto, Levin, & Arluke, 1981; Riley & Riley, 1989; Rodin & Langer, 1980). Proponents argue that ageism impacts negatively on elderly people, not merely through inequitable treatment by society, but through self-fulfilling prophecy. Elderly people come to apply the negative definitions of old age and the expected restrictions of old age to themselves.

In spite of the popularity of the term and its intuitive appeal, data demonstrating the pervasive nature of ageism have not been forthcoming (Brubaker & Powers, 1976; Green, 1981; McTavish, 1971). Indeed, Kalish (1979), Kears, Moore, and Osberg (1982) and Schonfield (1982) responded to the concept with a degree of disdain, arguing that it has been a vehicle for obtaining political support and resources for aged care programs, rather than a scientifically respectable construct. A review of research findings suggests that Butler's (1987) conception of ageism, at the very least, oversimplifies the ways in which elderly people and the ageing process are regarded in our society.

The reviews of Lutsky (1980) and Green (1981) highlight the complexity and divergence in responses to ageing and to elderly people. Positive as well as negative appraisals are evident in the literature (Braithwaite, 1986; Braithwaite, Gibson, & Holman, 1986; Lachman & McArthur, 1986; Luszcz & Fitzgerald, 1986; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). Furthermore, consistency is the exception rather than the rule in studies emerging from the dominant research traditions of attitude measurement (Kogan, 1961; Tuckman & Lorge, 1953), knowledge assessment (Palmore, 1977), evaluations of old and young "generalised targets" (Braithwaite, 1986; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969; Weinberger & Millham, 1975) and "specific targets" (Braithwaite, 1986; Connor & Walsh, 1980; Connor, Walsh, Litzelman, & Alvarez, 1978; Weinberger & Millham, 1975), and attributions relating to old and young on achievement-oriented tasks (Banziger & Drevenstedt, 1982; Lachman & McArthur, 1986). Some have interpreted these inconsistencies as a reflection of the "will o' the wisp" nature of the phenomenon, and have concluded that age is

not an important determinant of the way in which people evaluate and treat others (Lutsky, 1980; Schonfield, 1982). At the same time, widespread support can be found for the thesis that much of the inconsistency in findings can be attributed to methodological weakness and inadequate conceptualisation of key concepts (Kite & Johnson, 1988; Kogan, 1979; Lutsky, 1980).

Although ageism has not been defined explicitly in terms of beliefs, stereotypes, attitudes, expectations, attributions and behaviours, these concepts have provided the basis for inferring ageism. Yet, the measures used have been problematic. The most well-established scale for measuring perceptions of elderly people, that of Tuckman and Lorge (1953), has been widely criticised for not distinguishing between factually based beliefs and negative attitudes toward old age (Brubaker & Powers, 1976; Kogan, 1979). Thus, a high score may indicate dislike for elderly people, or alternatively, knowledge about the restrictions which are more likely to occur with age. Similarly, Palmore's (1977) Facts on Aging Quiz, purported to measure knowledge about the ageing process, has been criticised for having an evaluative component (Klemmack, 1978; Miller & Dodder, 1980).

A related problem involves distinguishing between incorrect beliefs about old age (that may or may not reflect prejudice) and factually substantiated beliefs. To tie age stereotypes to misperceptions is fraught with problems. As Brigham (1971) noted two decades ago in relation to racial stereotyping, there are enormous difficulties in establishing criteria by which the truth or falsity of beliefs can be judged. Today's facts are tomorrow's fiction and vice versa.

A third problem surrounds the use of the term *stereotype* in the field of gerontology. Stereotypes can be held by individuals or subgroups without being shared by the population (Braithwaite, 1986; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). Furthermore, when stereotypes are publicly discussed as unjustifiable social prejudice, compensatory and sympathetic responses to the stigmatised group are aroused (Scheier, Carver, Schulz, Glass, & Katz, 1978). Yet much of the ageing research on stereotyping rests on the assumption that there will be homogeneity within the group; and certainly not conflicting stereotypes which could wash out any experimental effects one might hope to find. Using qualitative data collected in the course of a traditional stereotyping experiment, Braithwaite (1986) concluded that two opposing prejudices were at work — one which could be called a discriminatory

stereotype, and another which could be called an anti-discriminatory response. The discriminatory stereotype exposed the much-talked-about negativism toward ageing and older people and was alive and well amongst one segment of the population. Flourishing just as profusely, however, was a backlash against this stereotype — a concern with viewing the stigmatised group with sympathy, making allowances for failings, and verbalising positive stereotypes. A similar observation of heterogeneity in stereotyping the elderly has been made by Guttman (1988), who described medical students, somewhat humorously, as being either gerophiles or gerophobes. Gerophiles feel warm toward elders in general and are committed to protecting and rescuing their elderly patients from the difficulties that they face. Gerophobes, on the other hand, are apt to deny such difficulties. They are afraid of getting old and can't cope with constant reminders of loss and decay, preferring to think of old age as a time for the emergence of "new executive capacities" (p. 1).

A fourth source of confusion in age stereotyping research involves demand characteristics. Experimental designs which enhance the salience of age as a criterion for evaluation have received the most criticism in this regard (Green, 1981; Kogan, 1979), although the argument can be extended to much of the attitudinal research. Respondents may not be sharing their own beliefs as much as their knowledge of cultural stereotypes (Bell & Stanfield, 1973; Brigham, 1971).

This paper takes a first step along the path of clarifying the ambiguity that surrounds ageism and examining its legitimacy as a scientific concept. The strategy ties ageism explicitly to the concepts of stereotype and attitude. This is not to exclude other concepts, but rather to assign stereotype and attitude the status of core concepts. The basic unit for defining these terms is "belief". Following Rokeach's (1973) usage, beliefs can be descriptive (capable of being true or false), evaluative (the object of belief is judged to be good or bad), or prescriptive (specifying action as desirable or undesirable). Stereotypes are defined as descriptive beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a social group. Operationally, strength of adherence to a stereotype is represented by the individual's beliefs about the probability that a state of being or way of behaving is characteristic of a group. The defining feature, therefore, has nothing to do with how correct or incorrect the belief is or how much consensus surrounds the belief, but rather with how undiscriminating an individual is in applying a characteristic to all members of a social group.

Whereas stereotypes hinge on probabilistic beliefs applied universally, attitudes hinge on feelings about social groups. An attitude is defined as an organisation of beliefs which focus on an object or situation. In theory, the beliefs may be descriptive, evaluative or prescriptive, hanging together in such a way as to produce an overall favourable or unfavourable attitude to an object or situation. In this research context, however, where the descriptive/evaluative distinction is regarded as important, beliefs comprising the attitude measures are required to have an evaluative component, expressing feelings, likes and dislikes on the part of the individual.

In the gerontological literature, semantic differential rating scales and stereotype check lists have enjoyed considerable popularity in gauging perceptions of elderly people. Facets which have emerged with some consistency include evaluation, effectiveness, and social performance (Braithwaite, 1986; Holtzman, Beck, & Kerber, 1979; Luszcz & Fitzgerald, 1986; Naus, 1973; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969; Thomas & Yamamoto, 1975). The dimensions of effectiveness and social performance lend themselves readily to assessment as stereotypes of older people. Evaluation clearly belongs to the attitudinal domain. While most researchers interested in the evaluative dimension have focused on elderly people as a social group, this study included an additional dimension, attitude to the ageing process.

Hickey, Bragg, Rakowski, and Hultsch (1978) have presented both theoretical and empirical arguments for distinguishing between attitudes to old people and attitudes to the ageing process. The distinction was further prompted by Butler's (1987) notion of ageism. In contrast to racism and sexism, ageism

defines a prejudice that ultimately will be directed toward oneself. Membership of the stigmatised group can only be avoided through death. Butler (1987) ascribes a causal role to fear of ageing in his conception of ageism. He has argued that "a deep and profound dread of growing old" (p. 22) leads to greater social distance between young and old. Such social distancing gives rise to stereotypes and negative attitudes, and ultimately, discriminatory behaviour.

The purpose of this research was to examine measures of the core components of ageism and their interrelationships. While we have avoided the issue of discriminatory behaviour in this basic conceptualisation, we have not lost sight of the fact that the importance of stereotypes and attitudes rests on their presumed links with such outcomes. As yet, surprisingly little progress has been made toward establishing such linkages (Kite & Johnson, 1988; Lutsky, 1980). Therefore, more specific, behaviourally relevant measures were also included. Contact with elderly people was one such variable. Respondents were also provided with employment interview transcripts relating to the appointment of a 1st-year psychology tutor. Attraction to older or younger tutors in 1st-year psychology was a second outcome variable investigated. A third was the expectation of whether an older or younger applicant would get the job. In addition to scales to measure individual ageism, we developed a scale to measure perceptions of the prevalence of ageism in our society, a variable regarded as a possible source of confounding in past studies.

Specifically, the issues addressed in this research were the following:

1. Is there coherence in the stereotypes and attitudes individuals hold toward elderly people?
2. Is fear of the ageing process related to a negative attitude to the elderly and negative stereotyping?
3. Is low contact associated with fear of ageing and greater stereotyping?
4. Do the ageism scales predict satisfaction with tutors?
5. Do expectations regarding tutoring appointments reflect personal ageism or perceptions of societal ageism?

METHOD

Subjects

Ninety-seven and 98 1st-year psychology students volunteered for this study over two consecutive years. The study was conducted as part of a 2nd-year psychology project. In 1988, 70% of participants were women, but this dropped to 52% in the following year. Ages ranged from 16 to 62 ($M = 21.57$) in 1988, and from 18 to 49 ($M = 22.84$) in 1989.

Design and Questionnaire

Participants completed two separate tasks. The first involved reading one of four transcripts of an employment interview with an applicant for a tutoring position in psychology. Biographical details were included with the transcripts. Participants subsequently evaluated their candidate by means of a series of scales, including a rating of how much they would like the person as a tutor from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5), and an estimate of the candidate's likely success in getting the job from *less than 25%* (1) to *more than 75%* (4).

Transcripts varied in terms of the age of the applicant and their academic interests. The age was given as either 27 or 59. In one transcript the applicant was enthusiastic about teaching. In the other, the applicant expressed interest in her own research as well as teaching. All applicants were women. Transcripts were assembled and allocated using a 2 x 2 between-subjects design.

The second task required all participants to complete a three-part questionnaire incorporating the ageism scales. The scales were developed and piloted by Pigram (1987) and appear in Appendix I. Each has an equal number of positively and negatively worded items. In Part I, 34 randomly ordered statements tapping attitudes to elderly people, attitudes to the ageing process, or perceptions of discrimination against the aged in society were rated on a 6-point scale from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (6). Part II comprised 18 randomly ordered statements

assessing stereotypes of elderly people being capable/incapable or sociable/antisocial. Responses were made on a 5-point rating scale ranging from *always true* (1) through *depends* (3) to *always false* (5). Part III measured contact with grandparents or elderly friends on a 7-point scale, ranging from *several times a week* (1) to *less than once a year* (7), along with the age and sex of the participant.

RESULTS

Self-Reported Ageism

The descriptive statistics for the ageism scales from each data set (1988 and 1989) are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Alpha reliability coefficients for the scales appear in the diagonal of the matrix of scale intercorrelations in Table 2. A comparison of the 1988 and 1989 statistics shows little variation in the findings across the 2 years. The combined data set was therefore used for subsequent analyses. Basic descriptive statistics for the total sample appear with the scale items in Appendix I.

The positive and negative nature of responses to old age, as well as the variability across individuals, can be appreciated through analysing the frequency distributions on the five scales. Given the balance of positive and negative items, the midpoint of each scale (see Table 1) can be interpreted as indicating a neutral attitude or an unwillingness to generalize about older people in either a positive or negative way. High scores on the scales consistently mean a positive view or endorsement of the concept being measured. A comparison of the scale means and midpoints in Table 1 gives an indication of the group view on each aspect of ageism under study. The frequency distributions provided a more fine-grained analysis. With regard to attitudes to elderly people, 79% scored above the neutral point, showing that most respondents reported being at least somewhat favourably disposed to older people. When the ageing process was the object of evaluation, the proportion responding favourably fell to 55%. The stereotyping scales produced contrasting results. On the capability scale, 70% scored below the midpoint, indicating a tendency to associate old age with losses in competence and effectiveness. In contrast, 63% scored above the midpoint on

sociability, showing that the majority regarded elderly people as tending toward tolerance and friendliness rather than being anti-social.

The variability in scale scores and the infrequent use of the extreme categories in the stereotyping questionnaire (*always true*, *always false*) highlight the variability in opinions amongst this relatively homogeneous group of respondents. Nevertheless, they tended as a group to view society as discriminating against older people. A high 78% scored below the midpoint on the perception-of-ageism scale, leaving a minority holding positive views about the way our society treats elderly people.

The pattern of correlations among the ageism scales tended to be stable across samples (see Table 2) and produced a number of interesting findings. First, awareness of ageism was relatively independent of the other scales and was not linked to personal beliefs about the capacities of older people. Second, attitude to the ageing process was positively related to attitude to the elderly. Third, while the "capable" and "sociable" stereotyping scales correlated significantly with each other, the capability scale, in particular, was strongly linked with attitude to the ageing process. It would appear that beliefs of lost competence in old age are far more threatening to younger generations than expectations of becoming antisocial.

Ageism Scale Scores and Their Correlates

The ageism scales were related to the age and sex of the respondent and the frequency of contact with elderly people (see Table 3). Positive attitudes to elderly people and to the ageing process accompanied more frequent contact. Perception of ageism in society was also stronger when respondents mixed often with elderly friends and grandparents. The stereotyping scales were not associated in a linear fashion with contact. Two alternatives were explored. Little contact could result in either strong negative or strong positive stereotypes so we used scattergrams and *eta* coefficients to test for non-linear relationships. None were found. Another possibility was that frequent contact was associated with greater appreciation of individual differences among the elderly and a greater tendency to use the middle cate-

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations for the Ageism Scales in the 1988 and 1989 Samples

Scale	Number of Scale Items	Midpoint	M(SD) 1988	M(SD) 1989
1. Attitude to elderly	8	28	32.91 (6.20)	32.76 (6.27)
2. Attitude to ageing	16	56	57.58 (11.85)	57.88 (10.68)
3. Capable stereotype	10	30	26.72 (4.59)	27.51 (3.89)
4. Sociable stereotype	8	24	25.50 (3.60)	25.72 (3.60)
5. Perceived ageism	10	35	29.04 (7.34)	27.41 (7.22)

Table 2 Alpha Reliability Coefficients (Diagonal) and Intercorrelations for the Ageism Scales for 1988 and for 1989 in Parenthesis

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attitude to elderly	.80 (.82)				
2. Attitude to ageing	.41*** (.33***)	.88 (.84)			
3. Capable stereotype	.30** (.26**)	.40*** (.30***)	.82 (.78)		
4. Sociable stereotype	.41*** (.18*)	.06 (.14)	.22** (.32***)	.76 (.77)	
5. Perceived ageism	-.24** (-.12)	.02 (-.07)	-.06 (-.08)	.04 (-.02)	.82 (.81)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

gory, "depends", on the rating scale. The standard deviations for the stereotyping scales for low and high contact respondents were therefore compared, but differences were not found. Stereotyping does not appear to be related to frequency of contact.

The age of the respondent was related to the three most interrelated ageism scales. Older respondents were more likely to have a positive view of elderly people and of the ageing process, and were more likely to regard older people as being as effective and competent as younger people. Women were more likely to express a positive attitude toward the elderly than were men.

Experimentally Derived Age Discrimination

A 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance was used to examine the effects of applicant's age (27, 59), interests (research, teaching), and respondents' contact with elderly people (low, high) on the dependent variable, attraction to the applicant as a tutor. Two main effects were significant, the applicant's age, $F(1, 188) = 5.48, p < .05$, and interests, $F(1, 188) = 6.54, p < .01$. Respondents were more attracted to the younger applicant, M (young) = 4.08 compared with M (old) = 3.75, and less attracted to the applicant with strong research interests, M (research) = 3.74 compared with M (teaching) = 4.09. Contact had been included because it was linked to a positive attitude in the earlier analyses. It did not play a significant role in this analysis, however, having neither a main nor interactive effect.

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance in which applicant's age and interests were used to predict expectations of job success produced a significant main effect for age, $F(1, 191) = 10.49, p < .001$. The success expected for older applicants ($M = 2.53$) was significantly lower than that expected for the younger applicants ($M = 2.89$).

The results of the study involving the evaluation of younger and older job applicants suggest that age discrimination is operating among this group of students. Older tutors were regarded as less attractive. Furthermore, they were expected to be less successful, suggesting that this group perceives age as being relevant to success in the job market. If these interpretations are correct one would expect to find that those who were least

Table 3 Correlations Between the Ageism Scales and Contact, Age and Sex of Respondent

Scale	Contact	Age	Sex
Attitude to elderly people	-.37***	.19**	-.23***
Attitude to ageing process	-.21**	.22**	-.03
Stereotype of capable-incapable	-.12	.15*	.00
Stereotype of sociable-antisocial	-.06	-.02	-.07
Perceived ageism	.18**	-.07	.04

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 Multiple Regression Models Predicting Attraction to and Expectation of Job Success for the Older Tutor ($n = 91$)

Predictors	Attraction		Expectation	
	r	β	r	β
Transcript interest	.13	.22*	.07	.12
Respondent's sex	-.16	-.14	-.19	-.16
Respondent's age	-.24*	-.24*	-.18	-.21
Attitude to elderly	-.06	.01	.02	.01
Attitude to ageing	-.18	-.18	.02	.02
Capable stereotype	-.12	-.01	.05	.10
Sociable stereotype	.00	.00	.05	.02
Perceived ageism	.16	.15	.16	.16
R^2		.16		.11

* $p < .05$

attracted to the older tutor would have ageist attitudes and negative stereotypes. Expected success may also be related to these variables, but more importantly, one would anticipate a relationship between expected success and perceptions of ageism in our society.

Linking Ageism and Age Discrimination

To examine the above hypotheses, a series of multiple regression analyses were used with the subsample who had evaluated the older applicant. As can be seen from Table 4, the model involved regressing attraction to the tutor on the eight variables: the applicant's interests, the respondent's age and sex, and the respondent's five ageism scores. Only interests and the respondent's age explained significant variation in how much the older tutor was liked. Students preferred a tutor who was committed to teaching rather than one who also had strong research interests. Surprisingly, older respondents were less favourably disposed to a more mature tutor than younger respondents.

A similar regression model was set up to explain expectations of success (see Table 4). None of the variables emerged as significant predictors and the zero-order correlations provided no support for the hypothesis that perceptions of ageism in society would predict expectations of job success for the older applicant. The variable which emerged as being most strongly related to expectation of success was how much the tutor was liked ($r = .37, n = 96, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The goal of this research has been to conceptualise ageism in terms of distinct and measurable components, to measure these components, examine their interconnectedness, and explore their relevance to other measures which have been used in past research to infer ageist practices. Ageism has been defined in terms of negative attitudes to the elderly and to the ageing process and in terms of negative stereotypes regarding the capabilities and sociability of older adults. The data from this study support the notion that these attitudes and beliefs are interrelated and that some people can be said to hold the ageist outlook described by Butler (1987). Furthermore, the data were consistent with the important role which Butler has assigned to fear of ageing in relation to negative attitudes to elderly people and the holding of negative stereotypes.

Ageism, however, was not rampant among this group of students. While the majority viewed the capacities of elderly people somewhat negatively, they were also likely to view their social outlook positively and to feel positively toward the aged. They were more ambivalent about how they felt about growing old themselves. For the majority, therefore, responses to ageing and the aged were mixed, a conclusion which is consistent with a considerable body of past research (Green, 1981; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Lachman & McArthur, 1986; Luszcz & Fitzgerald, 1986; Lutsky, 1980; Schmidt & Boland, 1986).

As Luszcz and Fitzgerald (1986) found, perceptions were related to the respondents' age, becoming somewhat more positive as the ageing experience crept up on them. More regular contact with elderly people also was associated with more positive attitudes, although no association was found with stereotyping. Research on contact has not produced consistent results (Green, 1981; Lutsky, 1980; McTavish, 1971). Part of the difficulty has been untangling cause and effect. Do attitudes determine regularity of contact or does contact shape attitudes? If the latter is the case, critics have pointed out that frequency of contact is not as relevant as the quality of the contact (Green, 1981). A further problem is the variety of measures used to ascertain how people perceive the elderly (Kite & Johnson, 1988). The findings from the present study demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between stereotypes and attitudes. Measures which contain both are likely to produce a confusing pattern of results.

While ageism was not characteristic of the group when personal attitudes were assessed, other data collected in this study reflect age discrimination. First, the majority of students thought

society did discriminate against elderly people and this opinion was not restricted to "advocates of the aged". Attitudes and stereotypes of elderly people and of ageing were relatively independent of views about how ageist society was. Second, discrimination by this group of students was evident when a between-subjects design was used to manipulate the age of the applicant on the interview transcript. Students showed a preference for a younger applicant for a tutoring position across two transcript conditions and they consistently predicted greater likelihood of success for the younger applicant.

It should be noted that the differences, while statistically significant, were not large. Nevertheless, the finding is worthy of comment because so much previous research employing a between-subjects design with specific targets has failed to find a difference in favour of younger persons. The accepted explanation for the absence of an experimental effect has been that if the age cue is subtle, respondents will not base their judgements on age. Kogan (1979) and Kite and Johnson (1988) have concluded that age effects will be obtained when within-subjects designs rather than between subjects-designs are used, because the former evoke demand characteristics. It has also been argued that context is important and that age only becomes salient when no other information is given, or when the target is a "generalised other" rather than a specific person (Green, 1981; Kite & Johnson, 1988). A third explanation has been that age effects can not be expected to emerge when the target person is behaving in a way which contradicts the traditional stereotype (Crockett, Press, & Osterkamp, 1979; Green, 1981). According to all three propositions, age discrimination should not have occurred in the current research context.

Two explanations for the present findings can be found in the literature. Discrimination against the older job applicant may be related to context variables or to the age of the older target. The older target was 59, not a sufficiently advanced age to give rise to such sympathetic and compensatory responses as "she is great for her age" or "exceptional" (Crockett et al., 1979). It is unlikely that students consciously categorised this applicant as old. The applicant, more likely, was regarded as being different from them.

"Being different" may be an important consideration in selecting a tutor. Green (1981) has proposed an interesting explanation for much of the inconsistency in experimental research involving judgements of specific targets. She has suggested that intimacy is an important variable. Older people are responded to more positively in situations where there is low intimacy rather than high intimacy. For 1st-year psychology students, tutors are people with whom they have frequent contact, who act as their advocates and help them through their difficulties. The experimental context of selecting a tutor involves personal contact and greater intimacy than other job selection contexts typically used in the literature.

Complicating the picture further is the finding that those who were least happy with the older tutor were not those who held negative stereotypes and attitudes toward the aged nor were they those who were more aware of a cultural negative stereotype about older people. This result in itself does not conflict with previous research. Kogan (1979) argued that one should not expect generalised scales to predict specific behavioural criteria on the grounds that one needs consistency between independent and dependent measures: either a diversity of behavioural indices or specific attitudinal measures of the attitude object and the social context (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Sears (1983) demonstrated that group stereotypes are often compartmentalised from attitudes to individual group members. He interpreted his data in terms of a positivity bias, whereby individuals are evaluated positively even though a negative stereotype is held about the group to which they belong. Connor et al. (1978) and Weinberger and Millham (1975) have published data demonstrating poor correspondence between evaluations of the elderly as a group and evaluations of an elderly individual from that group.

In the above studies, the effect was present in the generalised condition, but disappeared when specific individuals were evalu-

ated, leading the researchers to conclude that age was not relevant to the evaluation process. In contrast, in the present study, age was relevant when individuals were evaluated, leading us to infer age discrimination. Yet this discrimination could not be linked with negative attitudes or negative stereotypes. Thus, our data show two traditionally accepted bases for inferring ageism as being unrelated: low scores on attitude and stereotype measures have nothing to do with lower satisfaction with an older tutor. The unspoken assumption that lowered satisfaction is due to conscious beliefs and attitudes cannot be justified from these data. A distinction needs to be drawn between ageism as a coherent set of beliefs and stereotypes on the one hand, and discrimination as choice or preference based on age on the other.

Separating ageism from discrimination contradicts current usage. The distinction, however, has been drawn previously, though not in these terms. In a study of reactions to physical handicap, Langer, Fiske, Taylor, and Chanowitz (1976) concluded that non-verbal indices of "negativity" toward physical abnormality may simply reflect discomfort and conflict rather than derogation. In cases of age discrimination, respondents also may be choosing on the basis of spontaneous feelings of comfort and attraction. Ageist ideology may be quite irrelevant to their responses. As Puckett, Petty, Cacioppo, and Fischer (1983) suggested almost a decade ago, social attractiveness, not age, may be the key to understanding the process of selection of one person over another. Preferences among individuals may be based on a sense that the person will fit in, that one can relate to the person and feel comfortable with that person. In this domain, stereotypes and attitudes may not guide behaviour, but simply be the means by which we rationalise our reactions or criticise choices. This is not to trivialise ageism nor marginalise its scientific utility. In other domains at both the macro (e.g., policy development) and micro (e.g., self-concept) levels, ageism may have a substantial impact on well-being. Interpersonally, however, ageism as consciously held beliefs and attitudes appears to offer little by the way of prediction or explanation.

APPENDIX I

Attitude to the elderly ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 32.83$, $SD = 6.22$)

1. I really enjoy talking to older people. (REVERSE SCORE)
2. I can mix with elderly people without feeling out of place or ill at ease. (REVERSE SCORE)
3. I think that the friendships I have with young people are more satisfying than those I have, or might have, with old people.
4. Being friends with an older person is just as rewarding as being friends with a young person. (REVERSE SCORE)
5. I find old people far more interesting than young people. (REVERSE SCORE)
6. Older people really don't say or do much that is of interest to me.
7. I feel uncomfortable when I have to talk to an old person.
8. I would probably avoid going out somewhere if I knew the majority of people there would be old.

Attitude to the ageing process ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 57.73$, $SD = 11.26$)

1. In my old age I will be as enthusiastic about life as I am now. (REVERSE SCORE)
2. I don't feel that there is very much to be scared of when I think of myself as an old person. (REVERSE SCORE)
3. Once you get to a certain age, life inevitably goes downhill.
4. I really don't feel worried when I think about the difficulties I might experience in later life. (REVERSE SCORE)
5. Old age for me will be the most enjoyable time of life. (REVERSE SCORE)
6. I worry that I may not be able to avoid many of the difficulties that come with growing old.
7. I'm afraid that old age could present problems that could make life unbearable.
8. Old age brings satisfactions that are just not available to the young. (REVERSE SCORE)
9. After middle age it is difficult to lead an active and successful life.

10. I feel I will be more than able to cope with any of the problems that may accompany growing old. (REVERSE SCORE)
11. When you are young you have everything going for you.
12. I really don't like the thought of growing old.
13. It worries me that in growing old I won't be able to enjoy life nearly as much as I do now.
14. Life can get better and better once you pass middle age. (REVERSE SCORE)
15. There is a lot to look forward to when you are old. (REVERSE SCORE)
16. Life is definitely at its best when you are young and enthusiastic.

Stereotype of capable-incapable ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 27.12$, $SD = 4.26$)

1. Elderly people are as capable as ever of concentrating on any given task. (REVERSE SCORE)
2. Older people lose the ability to pay attention to detail.
3. An older person tends to become tired and fatigued very easily.
4. With old age, people are inclined to become forgetful.
5. Older people can pay great attention to detail in many tasks. (REVERSE SCORE)
6. As we grow older, we become slower in getting things done.
7. Older people are not able to concentrate as well as they could in their youth.
8. Older people are quite capable of performing tasks that require effort and stamina. (REVERSE SCORE)
9. Elderly people have no difficulty in getting things done quickly. (REVERSE SCORE)
10. A person's memory is not adversely affected by increasing age. (REVERSE SCORE)

Stereotype of sociable-antisocial ($\alpha = .76$, $M = 25.61$, $SD = 3.60$)

1. Older people are the most friendly toward strangers. (REVERSE SCORE)
2. Elderly people are more understanding of the shortcomings of those around them. (REVERSE SCORE)
3. In growing old, we become less friendly towards people we do not know well.
4. Elderly people are less tolerant of the faults and failings of others.
5. Older people are easy going in their expectations about the behaviour of others. (REVERSE SCORE)
6. Older people are less understanding of other people's problems.
7. As we grow old we are more likely to let our personal feelings affect our judgement of others.
8. Elderly people are more sympathetic in their dealings with other people. (REVERSE SCORE)

Awareness of ageism ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 28.24$, $SD = 7.31$)

1. This is a youth oriented society (REVERSE SCORE)
2. There is discrimination and prejudice against old people in this society (REVERSE SCORE)
3. Older people in Australia have the same opportunities and choices as young people.
4. In our society the elderly are neglected and misunderstood. (REVERSE SCORE)
5. This society does not discriminate against people on the basis of old age.
6. We recognize and respect the contribution that older people can make to life in this country.
7. Old people in this country are treated with sympathy and understanding.
8. In this country old people are considered to be just as important as young people.
9. In this society older people are not given credit for the contribution they can make. (REVERSE SCORE)
10. Older people are denied a lot of opportunities in comparison to young people in Australia. (REVERSE SCORE)

REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1977). Attitude-behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 84, 888-918.
- Banziger, G., & Drevenstedt, J. (1982). Achievement attributions by young and old judges as a function of perceived age of stimulus person. *Journal of Gerontology*, 37, 468-474.
- Bell, B.D., & Stanfield, G.G. (1973). Chronological age in relation to attitudinal judgments: An experimental analysis. *Journal of Gerontology*, 28, 491-496.
- Braithwaite, V. (1986). Old age stereotypes: Reconciling contradictions. *Journal of Gerontology*, 41, 353-360.
- Braithwaite, V., Gibson, D., & Holman, J. (1986). Age stereotyping: Are we oversimplifying the phenomenon? *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 22, 315-325.
- Brigham, J.C. (1971). Ethnic stereotypes. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76, 15-38.
- Brubaker, T.H., & Powers, E.A. (1976). The stereotype of "old": A review and alternative approach. *Journal of Gerontology*, 31, 441-447.
- Butler, R.N. (1969). Age-ism: Another form of bigotry. *Gerontologist*, 9, 243-246.
- Butler, R.N. (1987). Ageism. In G.L. Maddox (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of aging*. New York: Springer.
- Ciliberto, D.J., Levin, J., & Arluke, A. (1981). Nurses' diagnostic stereotyping of the elderly. *Research on Aging*, 3, 299-310.
- Connor, C.L., & Walsh, R.P. (1980). Attitudes toward the older job applicant: Just as competent, but more likely to fail. *Journal of Gerontology*, 35, 920-927.
- Connor, C.L., Walsh, R.P., Litzelman, D.K., & Alvarez, M.G. (1978). Evaluation of job applicants: The effects of age versus success. *Journal of Gerontology*, 33, 246-252.
- Crockett, W.H., Press, A.N., & Osterkamp, M. (1979). The effect of deviations from stereotyped expectations upon attitudes toward older persons. *Journal of Gerontology*, 34, 368-374.
- Green, S.K. (1981). Attitudes and perceptions about the elderly: Current and future perspectives. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 13, 99-119.
- Guttman, D.L. (1988). The two faces of gerontology. *Center on Aging*, 4(1), 1-2.
- Hickey, T., Bragg, S.M., Rakowski, W., & Hultsch, D.F. (1978). Attitude instrument analysis: An examination of factor consistency across two samples. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 9, 359-375.
- Holtzman, J.M., Beck, J.D., & Kerber, P.E. (1979). Dimensional aspects of attitudes toward the aged. *Gerontologist*, 19(5, Pt. 2), 91.
- Kalish, R.A. (1979). The new ageism and the failure models: A polemic. *Gerontologist*, 19, 398-402.
- Kearl, M.C., Moore, K., & Osberg, J.S. (1982). Political implications of the new "ageism". *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 15, 167-183.
- Kite, M.E., & Johnson, B.T. (1988). Attitudes toward older and younger adults: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Aging*, 3, 233-244.
- Klemmack, D.L. (1978). Comment: An examination of Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz. *Gerontologist*, 18, 403-405.
- Kogan, N. (1961). Attitudes toward old people: The development of a scale and an examination of correlates. *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, 62, 44-54.
- Kogan, N. (1979). Beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes about old people. *Research on Aging*, 1, 11-36.
- Lachman, M.E., & McArthur, L.Z. (1986). Adulthood age differences in causal attributions for cognitive, physical, and social performance. *Psychology and Aging*, 1, 127-132.
- Langer, E.J., Fiske, S., Taylor, S.E., & Chanowitz, B. (1976). Stigma, staring, and discomfort: A novel-stimulus hypothesis. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 12, 451-463.
- Luszcz, M.A., & Fitzgerald, K.M. (1986). Understanding cohort differences in cross-generational, self, and peer perceptions. *Journal of Gerontology*, 41, 234-240.
- Lutsky, N.S. (1980). Attitudes toward old age and elderly persons. In C. Eisdorfer (Ed.), *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics* (pp. 287-336). New York: Springer.
- McTavish, D.G. (1971). Perceptions of old people: A review of research methodologies and findings. *Gerontologist*, 11, 90-101.
- Miller, R.B., & Dodder, R.A. (1980). A revision of Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz. *Gerontologist*, 20, 673-679.
- Naus, P.J. (1973). Some correlates of attitudes towards old people. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 4, 229-243.
- Palmore, E. (1977). Facts on aging: A short quiz. *Gerontologist*, 17, 315-320.

- Pigram, D. (1987) *A clarification of the constructs of ageism and age stereotypes in non-experimental and experimental paradigms*. Unpublished honours thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.
- Puckett, J.M., Petty, R.E., Cacioppo, J.T., & Fischer, D.L. (1983). The relative impact of age and attractiveness stereotypes on persuasion. *Journal of Gerontology*, 38, 340-343.
- Riley, M.W., & Riley, J.W., Jr. (1989). The lives of older people and changing social roles. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 503, 14-28.
- Rodin, J., & Langer, E.J. (1980). Aging labels: The decline of control and the fall of self-esteem. *Journal of Social Issues*, 36, 12-29.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: The Free Press.
- Rosencranz, H.A., & McNevin, T.E. (1969). A factor analysis of attitudes toward the aged. *Gerontologist*, 9, 55-59.
- Scheier, M.F., Carver, C.S., Schulz, R., Glass, D.C., & Katz, I. (1978). Sympathy, self-consciousness, and reactions to the stigmatized. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 8, 270-282.
- Schmidt, D.F., & Boland, S.M. (1986). Structure of perceptions of older adults: Evidence for multiple stereotypes. *Psychology and Aging*, 1, 255-260.
- Schonfield, D. (1982). Who is stereotyping whom and why? *Gerontologist*, 22, 267-272.
- Sears, D.O. (1983). The person-positivity bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 233-250.
- Thomas, E.C., & Yamamoto, K. (1975). Attitudes toward age: An exploration in school-aged children. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 6, 117-129.
- Tuckman, J., & Lorge, I. (1953). Attitudes toward old people. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 37, 249-260.
- Weinberger, L.E., & Millham, J. (1975). A multi-dimensional, multiple method analysis of attitudes toward the elderly. *Journal of Gerontology*, 30, 343-348.