

Prejudice and Discrimination

Lecture Eight

Ageism

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- Ageism

- Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination based purely on age Butler (1969)

- But not 'old-ageism'

- Juvenile ageism (Montessori, 1974)

- Society is largely positive about youth

- Stereotypes about old-age are easily accessible and usually negative, whereas stereotypes about youth are more limited and fairly positive (Chasteen et al., 2002)

Ageism Is A Strange Prejudice To Have...

- Many of the groups we have discussed (race/gender/sexual orientation) have discrete boundaries
 - We are either a member of that group or we are not
- Ageism is different
 - Prejudice against a group that we will (hopefully) one day be a member of
 - We may be very positive towards certain members of the group (parents, grandparents)
 - Hold positive and negative views about old people
 - But twice as many negative as positive views (Hummert, 1990; Schmidt & Boland, 1986)

- Crockett and Hummert (1987)
 - Subcategorisation of ageism
 - We seem to view the *concept* of old age negatively, but specific older people more negatively
- Brewer et al. (1981)
 - Negative superordinate category of old people
 - But more positive subcategories of old people
 - It is the subcategories that are we used when we meet specific older people, not the superordinate category

The Elderly As An Outgroup

- If the young see the elderly as an outgroup, they will be more negative towards them than their own group
 - Classical ingroup protection/outgroup derogation seen in most group studies
- Activate negative stereotypes about the outgroup
 - Greenberg et al. (2004)
 - Photos of older people (outgroup) activate more accessibility to death-related concepts in younger (ingroup) members
 - Dijksterhuis et al. (2002)
 - Participants primed with stereotypes of the elderly walk more slowly afterwards

Butler (1980)

- Benign ageism
 - Subtle prejudice borne more out of fear and anxiety of getting old
 - Belief that old age will lead to a loss of capacity
- Malignant ageism
 - A more classical form of stereotyping, as seen with the other forms covered earlier
 - Seeing older people as 'worthless', lesser people (a bit like an SDO person would see someone of another race)

Institutional Ageism

- Western society has many acceptable negative terms for older people, far more than positive terms (Nuessel, 1982)
 - Derogation of someone due to race, religion, etc., are frowned upon, or even legislated against
 - Not the case with derogation of someone because of their age
- Many jobs operate a compulsory retirement age of 65/70 years old
 - Whether a person is still capable of doing the job or not

- Social condonement (Falk & Falk, 1997)
 - Stereotypes of old people on TV
 - The greeting card industry
- Arguments for improvements over time
 - More positive stereotypes in the media (Bell, 1992)
 - Seen as more affluent (Palmore, 1999)
 - But is this the case? Ignores the hidden poor

- Positive discrimination

- Does it help older people or reinforce stereotypes of them?
- Free bus passes for all etc.
 - Suggests a need for help – but this isn't always the case (and some younger people could do with a free bus pass as well)

The Ways Older People Are Treated

- Overaccommodation
 - People may be overly polite, speak louder and slower
- Baby talk
 - Use simple sentences, adopt pitch and tone similar to how one talks to a baby
 - Giles et al. (1994)
- Kemper (1994): Caregivers in a nursing home spoke to patients slowly and simply – treatment based on age, not cognitive ability
- Caporeal et al. (1983): Older people with low cognitive abilities prefer baby talk, as it has soothing features
 - But not all old people have low cognitive abilities

The Ways Older People Are Treated

- How would you feel if someone offered to help you across the road?
 - Can influence self-esteem (Nadler & Fisher, 1986)
 - Implies that help is required, even if it isn't
- Issues such as this can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy
 - Could lead to people accepting and believing that they need help, should not be doing things that they are 'too old for', should not be independent (Arluke & Levin, 1984)
- Levy et al. (2003): Older people with positive self-perceptions live 7.5 years longer than those with negative self-perceptions

The Ways Older People Are Treated

- Older people living independently score twice as high on self-esteem scores as high-school students (Cottrell & Atchley, 1969)
 - More stable self-concept
 - More control over social roles
 - A 'time of maintenance' (Atchley, 1982)

The Ways Older People Are Treated

- Medical treatment of older people
 - Doctors and medical students show negative attitudes towards older people (Levinson, 1981)
 - Older people less likely to be offered life-saving or reconstructive surgery than younger people (Madan et al., 2001)
- Therapists less likely to refer older patients for psychiatric assessment (Bouman & Arcelus, 2001)
 - Ageism or misconception of the ageing process? (Kane, 2002)

So Why Are We Ageist?

- Gerontophobia (Levin & Levin, 1980): Fear of older people is a fear of our own impending end
 - Fits in with Terror Management Theory
- Age Grading
 - Society sets out ages into distinct groups
 - School; Work; Retirement; ...Death!
- A burden on society
 - If we are what we do, what are we when we do nothing?
 - We define ourselves by what we do – particularly our jobs (Deaux, 1996)

■ Modernisation

- Society moves forwards very quickly. Not keeping up technologically can make one lose touch with society

■ Idealism

- The idea of personal liberty over respect (Branco & Williamson, 1982)

■ Both utilitarian in their explanations

■ We believe things will be different for us

- Markus and Nurius (1986): Possible selves. Enables us to be negative about the outgroup (older people) and think that we will not be like them

Age Discrimination

- Managers have a more negative view of older workers (age 60) compared to younger workers (age 30; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976)
 - Less capable, less adaptable, slower physically and mentally
- Younger people rated younger workers (<30 years old) more favourably than older workers
 - Older people showed no bias against any age group (Finkelstein et al., 1995)
- Older workers less likely to be interviewed for a job than younger workers (Finkelstein, 1997)

Juvenile Ageism

- Bytheway (1995)
 - 'Denial of personhood of children'
- Young people perceive that elderly people speak to them in a patronising way (Giles & Williams, 1994)
 - Outgroup derogation?
 - Anger at no longer being part of that group?
- Little research into juvenile ageism
 - Why? Largely because the stereotypes are so entrenched in our society
 - Even teenagers accept the stereotypes created about them (moody, irresponsible, rebellious; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2000)

Are We 'As Old As We Feel'? Or Should We 'Grow Old Gracefully'?

- Younger people report cognitive ages that are older than their chronological age
- Older people report cognitive ages that are younger than their chronological age (Goldsmith & Heiens, 1992)
 - But larger discrepancies for older respondents showed stronger fear of ageing
 - Older respondents with least discrepancy showed greatest life satisfaction
- Does getting older allow us to do the things we want to but can't when we are younger?
 - For financial, time reasons, etc.?

Summary Of Ageism

- We have mixed views of older people
 - Superordinate negative views
 - But positive views when we can be bothered to subcategorise or encounter an individual
- Much of the prejudice towards the elderly appears to be benign
 - Societal influence; anti-discrimination laws; self-fulfilling prophecies
- Juvenile ageism is an issue but is ill-defined and largely unexplored