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EFFECTS OF FREQUENCY OF VISITS WITH GRANDPARENTS UPON STEREOTYPING OF THE ELDERLY

HOLT

EFFECTS OF FREQUENCY OF VISITS WITH GRAND-

PARENTS UPON STEREOTYPING OF THE ELDERLY

(TITLE)

BY

Houston L. Holt

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1987
YEAR

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ABSTRACT

Various theories have been proposed as causes of
stereotypes of the elderly. Stereotyping of and myths
about the elderly can be partly explained by lack of
knowledge and too little contact with a variety of
older people.

Ageism is a process of stereotyping old people
just because they are old. It is sometimes used by
society as a means to promote viewpoints about the aged
and, thereby, relieve itself of responsibility toward
old people.

The elderly may sometimes victimize themselves by
acquiescing to negative attitudes displayed against
them. There is a tendency for the elderly to accept
negative definitions of themselves which reinforces the
stereotypes directed against them.

The purpose of this study was to test the
hypothesis that a good relationship between children
and their grandparents will result in the rejection of
negative stereotypes toward the elderly. A revision of
Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz was used to test this
hypothesis.

Results confirmed the null hypothesis that negative
stereotypes of the elderly are not significantly reduced
by frequency of contact between grandparents and grand-
children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A review of the literature suggests there is an increased interest in research regarding American society's attitudes toward older people. Several authors (Butler, 1969; Kalish, 1983; Panek, Stoner & Beystehner, 1983) vividly express that stereotyping of the aged is a definite problem which needs to be addressed.

Negative perceptions of the elderly are known by different names such as prejudice, discrimination and ageism. Ageism is a devalued view based only on age and used as a convenient means for society to promote negative viewpoints against the aged. This means is used by society to relieve itself of responsibility to the elderly. Regardless of the name used to characterize society's attitudes toward the aged, a lack of concern is shown for a large segment of Americans (Kalish, 1983).

Too often the elderly are avoided as individuals. They are discriminated against in jobs, scorned through hostile humor, accused of being responsible for their own plight and considered to deserve what they get (Kalish, 1983).

Brubaker and Powers (1976) caution that limited

research supporting assumptions about the roles of the aged should not be accepted without careful scrutiny. They contend that contact with great-grandparents is considered to be a basis in the rejection of negative stereotypes. Their view, shared by Butler (1983) and Fillmer (1983) among others, is that a better relationship with older people assists youth in forming a more accurate impression of the aged.

Statement of the Problem

There seems to be no doubt as to the prevalence of the negative view in which the older people of society are held (Butler & Lewis, 1982; Panek, et al., 1983; Kalish, 1983). To recognize that stereotyping does exist is the first step toward solution of this problem. However, the solution requires more than mere recognition of the fact that stereotyping of the elderly exists. Discovery of what can be done to change negative perceptions is needed. Discovery of more humane and perceptually accurate approaches to dealing with the elderly is also a vital goal.

This study is designed to contribute in part to an understanding of why negative views and behavior exist. It is to contribute to the search for factors which may reduce such views and behavior. Specifically, the study asks the question: Does more contact with

older people reduce the tendency to regard the aged in a negative fashion?

Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference at the .05 level in negative stereotyping between those with frequent contact with grandparents and those with infrequent contact. The hypothesis is based on the aforementioned contention of Brubaker and Powers (1976). The major purpose of the author's study is to test whether a difference is shown between those who visit their grandparents frequently and those who visit infrequently.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

STEREOTYPING

Although the concept of "stereotype" did not
originate with the study of aging, it has become the
central idea in the explanation of the role of older
individuals in American society (Brubaker & Powers,
1976). Over sixty years ago Lippmann (1922) defined a
stereotype as illogical and rigid reasoning which
produces a factually incorrect perception.

Solomon and Vickers (1978) have defined
stereotyping as "the holding in common by the members of
a group of a standardized mental picture representing an
over-simplified and uncritical judgment by another
group". Therefore, in a sense a person ceases to be an
individual. One's individuality and characteristics
become submerged by any stereotype that has developed.

Stereotyping develops within a multivariate social
context. A goodly number of theories have been proposed
as the basis for the development of stereotypes.

S. W. Cook (1962) hypothesized that experiences
with the elderly that occur in a negative context lead
to the acceptance of negative stereotypes of old
people. The negative social context need not be
actually negative but be perceived as such by the

individual. Experiences with the elderly in a positive context, however, do not necessarily lead to positive stereotyping. Instead, the individuality of the elderly person is considered as an exception.

Tuckman and Lorge (1958) developed a theory for the development of stereotyping in which they found that the more ill or dependent a subject was, the greater the likelihood of the acceptance of stereotypes of old people. This hypothesis relates stereotyping with the projection of one's physical and/or psychological status and fears onto the elderly.

From the projection theory, one can hypothesize that a younger person may perceive his/her future as being one of illness and dependency. Therefore, the symptoms of the young person may be projected onto the elderly in an attempt to repress these fears.

Another hypothesis relates to the development and acceptance of stereotypes from the labeling theory. Because of various objective indicators of aging, such as grey hair, wrinkles, slower pace, and other characteristics which are considered to be negative, a person is labeled as "old"; he/she is stereotyped.

Those who interact with a person with the label "old" would expect the labeled person to fulfill certain social roles and exhibit specific behavioral patterns. Labeled persons are rewarded when they behave

in a manner, or role, in which society has stereotyped them. However, if the labeled person does not "act his/ her age", rewards are replaced by punishment (Scheff, 1970). This guarantees perpetuation of the label and stereotype.

Most theories relating to stereotypes of the elderly assume that societal stereotypes exist and attempt to explain how society comes to accept them. These theories of stereotypes are limited by very little research data; consequently, there is limited validity. D.G. McTavish (1971) states that methodology in assessing attitudes toward and stereotypes of the elderly is hindered by a lack of valid measures of stereotypes and attitudes.

Measures that have been developed such as the Tuckman- Lorge Questionnaire (Tuckman & Lorge, 1953b) tend to be a mixture of factual statements, anecdotal statements, commonly verbalized beliefs, scientific data and myths. Other methodologies include sentence completion such as the Golde-Kogan Questionnaire (Golde & Kogan, 1959), or structured or unstructured inter- views. Other researchers have analyzed books and television shows. Research utilizing these theoretical approaches to acceptance of stereotypes of the elderly are quite limited and much work needs to be done to further examine various approaches.

The gerontological and geriatric literature contains much discussion regarding the provision and utilization of health care and social services by the elderly. Some publications present simple measures about the quantity of services provided to older clients. However, many service providers indicate that the quality and appropriateness of the services provided for older patients are often not matched to the individual needs of the elderly consumer. Therefore, many of the services rendered are inappropriate as to kind, frequency and orientation (Butler, 1975).

Some of the more urgent problems confronting the elderly because of stereotyping are the need for improved health services and greater employment opportunities. When translated into behavior, stereotyping is considered to lead to the development of inappropriate and irrelevant social services for the elderly (Butler, 1975; Solomon & Vickers, 1978). Solomon (1978a) also holds that stereotyping may be a stimulus for the development of learned helplessness and apathy in the elderly. This, in turn, serves to reinforce stereotypic behavior.

Age discrimination in employment practices dates back to the late 1800"s in the United States ("Development in Aging," 1984). The main reasons employers give for not hiring older workers are:

1. physical decline which lowers productivity
2. difficulty to train
3. employers' penalties due to increased cost of pensions and insurance
4. the older workers' lessened ability to adapt

(Barron, 1971; Drevenstedt, 1981; Sheblak, 1969).

No statistical evidence has been found to support lower performance with increasing age ("Development in Aging," 1984). Another study indicates that older adults are less rigid than younger adults (Panek, et al., 1983).

Stereotypes can be changed by restructuring exploitive societies and creating meaningful roles for the elderly. This requires that societal roles be divorced from modes of material production to allow an old person to engage in meaningful work or other activity regardless of productivity.

There is a need for major reform in American culture's sensibility to the elderly through the media. The media can assist in changing social perception of what older people are really like. The media can also assist older people in gaining a more positive sense of themselves. From the political perspective older people are learning to assert themselves for their own needs and to win self-respect (Butler, 1983).

The importance of the role of grandparents is emphasized in various aspects in the older person's feelings and fulfillment in their association with

their grandchildren. The primary significance is different for different persons. Biological renewal seems to be the primary meaning for some grandparents. This would tend to give a feeling of being young again and a sense of biological continuity. Through the children, one can see life going on into the future.

Grandparenthood gives an opportunity for success in a new emotional role in which grandparents feel themselves as being better grandparents than they were parents. There is perhaps some proof that grandparents can do some things for their grandchildren which were not done for their own children. This is because child rearing tends to occur at the time in the life cycle when the parents must be much involved in the business of making a living. For others, the importance of association with their grandchildren may be acting as teacher by relating some of the family history. Of course, another aspect in the enjoyment of the grandchildren is the anticipation of the grandchildren becoming successful persons (Neugarten & Wenstein, 1968).

Many believe that children are being given the wrong impression of older people. Stereotyped images depict the elderly as inactive, lonely, nonproductive, "crabby" and physically decrepit. Children today frequently lack sufficient association with the elderly

to form accurate impressions.

In order to determine whether intermediate grade students respond differently to young and old people, 144 boys and girls in grades four, five and six examined pictures of a young man, old man, young woman, and old woman. Students recorded whether they thought these people appeared sick or healthy, ugly or attractive, rich or poor, happy or sad, and friendly or unfriendly. Additionally the students answered five questions designed to assess their willingness to socialize with the two age groups.

Results indicated that children do stereotype the elderly. Old people were rated more favorably in the adjective section of the survey but less well in the affective feeling responses. The results also indicated a need to help children develop more realistic attitudes toward the aged through greater exposure to the aging process and to old people themselves (Fillmer, 1983).

Brubaker and Powers (1976) also believe that one reason for stereotyping by the young is due to lack of contact with older people. They also suggest that a quality relationship between the young and their great-grandparents often results in the rejection of negative stereotypes of old age.

Nancy Klage (1984) reported on results of the Miller-Dodder revision of Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz

administered to an older group and undergraduates. In this report she stated that in some areas the undergraduates gave a more positive view of older people than they gave themselves.

Ageism is sometimes used as a convenient means for society to promote viewpoints about the aged and so relieve itself of responsibility toward the old people. Ageism, as with other prejudices, influences the self-view and behavior of its victims. The elderly have a tendency to accept negative definitions of themselves and, thereby, reinforce the very stereotypes directed against them.

Older people are not always victims. They, too, initiate directions and may exploit their age to get something they want or need (sometimes to their own detriment) by demanding services from others and allowing their own skills to be idle and to deteriorate. Such negative perceptions of the elderly can result in a sense of guilt and pity among the young instead of an appreciation of the talents and energies still available from older people. Such treatment will mean loss of self-esteem for the group with social and economic demand (Butler, 1983).

Of greater importance than the existence of stereotypes of old age is the character of the stereotype. The character of the stereotype of old age is important

because it affects not only the manner in which younger persons perceive and interact with aged individuals but also influences the self definitions and behavior of older people (Brubaker & Powers, 1976).

Atchley (1980) states that some beliefs about older people are accurate, some are inaccurate and some cannot be judged accurate or inaccurate because research has not been done in these areas. Given the complexity of the problem of stereotyping of the elderly, one can see that great effort is required toward a greater acceptance of the aged in our society.

Chapter III

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were students in the College of
Education at Eastern Illinois University. The students
were education majors in required classes of History of
Education and Philosophy of Education. The subjects
included 101 female and 42 male students ages 19 to 60
with a mean age of 22.55 years.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the 24-item
Miller-Dodder Revision of Palmore's Facts on Aging
Quiz (see Appendix). The FAQ has brief true-false
items sensitive to physical, mental and social spheres
in the lives of the elderly. Group score reliability
is high as shown by the consistency with which compar-
able educational groups have similar mean scores. The
reliability of rank ordering of the items in terms of
percentage wrong is also high as shown by the consis-
tency with which the most frequent misconceptions are
identified in several studies (Klage, 1984).

Procedure

Subjects were not chosen by sex but were taken by

groups as they came to three instructors in seven different classes on two consecutive days. They did not identify themselves by name but were requested to indicate their age and sex. Subjects were also asked to give selected information as to the distance they live from their grandparents and the frequency of contact.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The mean score on the Facts on Aging Quiz was
16.273. This is a percentage correct score of 67.8%.
This compares very favorably with the results shown by
the scores of the Klage (1984) report comparing a group
of undergraduate students with an elderly group. The
group of this study also compared favorably on an item
by item basis with those of the Klage report showing
items 16, 18 and 19 as most frequently incorrect by
both groups. The author's study also showed comparable
results on certain items with the undergraduate group
in the Klage report, in that the younger group
indicated a more positive view than was shown by the
older group themselves.

As the following table indicates, there was a
slight difference between groups with different fre-
quencies of visits with grandparents. However, there
was no significant difference on the .05 level on test
scores when compared by means of analysis of variance.
The variant factors of distance subjects lived from and
the frequency of visits with their grandparents were
insignificant. This study did not confirm the notion
that younger people stereotyped the elderly. Neither
did the instrument show that stereotyping is reduced

by more frequent contact between youth and their grand-parents.

The table summarizes the scores and group averages of the author's study:

Subjects	Frequency of visits	Score range	Mean score
32	weekly	11 to 20	16.3
47	monthly	11 to 22	16.1
40	other	10 to 19	15.9
24	Reported no grandparents or for other reasons no visitation		
143			

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Research with availability sampling presents limi-
tations. Such studies do not always suggest negative
stereotyping of the elderly. Thorson, Whatley & Hancock
(1974) indicated that the younger and better educated
held positive attitudes toward old age. Therefore, by
limiting the author's study to college students it is
conceivable that it does not portray an accurate evalua-
tion of the general population.

Students attitudes regarding stereotyping may be
affected by the college atmosphere. Therefore, it is
possible that a more liberal attitude is shown than one
displayed when away from college.

Whether one is from a rural or urban background
may be a factor in stereotyping. This factor, however,
was not one of the variables considered in this study.

One aspect which has been mostly ignored in family
research is the role played by parents in conditioning
the nature of relationship between grandparents and
grandchildren. However, knowledge of how, and to what
degree, children are influenced by parents in that
relationship is not known (Benstson, Olander & Haddad,
1976).

Lopata's study (1973) shows that some widows were

prevented by their own children from getting close to the grandchildren. The speculation is that tension in relations with the middle generation may often prevent a satisfactory relationship from developing between grandparents and grandchildren.

Some believe that social class affects the extent of negative attitudes toward the aged. Muir and Weinstein (1962) found that lower-class subjects felt a stronger sense of loyalty, than did middle-class subjects, to their elders.

Young people without burden of caring for family members of great age, and in poor health, may not have developed negative stereotypes. With different experiences negative views may develop as one reaches middle age.

Views expressed by grandparents show love and enjoyment in their relationship with grandchildren. There is an understanding on the part of grandparents that their role does not interfere with the lives and upbringing of their grandchildren. One grandmother cautioned against getting too close to grandchildren, believing it not good for either in the grandparent-grandchildren relationship (Bengston, et al., 1976).

Quality of time spent in the grandparent-grandchild relationship is more important that quantity in determining young peoples stereotypes toward old age (Gubrium,

1973). Quantity of time is simple to measure. However,
quality, an abstract value, cannot be measured by mathe-
matical means. Quality is an individual's perception
based on true communication of values, ideas and demon-
stration of affection.

Consideration of whether negative views toward
older people are held should not be limited to inter-
viewing observers on views toward family members only.
Family members are seen as individuals and stereotyping
is kept to a minimum.

Aforementioned studies indicate that better educa-
tion creates positive attitudes toward the elderly. In
America's mobile society, frequent contact between
grandchildren and grandparents is often prevented. Con-
sequently, education of the population regarding old age
may need to be obtained outside the family structure.
Mass media can fill this role by creating awareness of
attributes of old age which will instill in the American
culture a sensitivity to the elderly.

Perchance there is the possibility that in mass
media's technological environment individuals form
views of age group and others on the basis of television
and other public media rather than direct contact with
persons. Perhaps one's social life in such environment
is often a matter of reacting to mass media rather than
interacting with people.

New research has stripped away many of the negative myths and stereotypes and has shown aging and the aged to be less frightening than past information indicated. Indeed, on a casual level we occasionally witness denial that stereotyping of older people is any longer a social problem on the part of younger persons. During the past decade knowledge about aging has undergone many revisions. This is due in part to faulty gerontological knowledge in the past. Social changes occuring during this time period affected and changed the aged. However, there are still many myths and stereotypes about the elderly in contemporary American society.

Palmore (1977) developed a quiz on facts on aging to determine the amount of factual information about aging held by different segments of society. In administering the quiz to students in an introductory sociology class, he found that the average score was 65 percent correct (Crandall, 1980). This author used the Miller-Dodder revision (1980) of Palmore's FAQ and found similar results.

Palmore (1977) cited the strength of his scale as being short with 25 true-false items. The Miller-Dodder revision (1980) may have slightly contributed to the results of the author's study: but this is not to say that the revised FAQ was not considerably improved over Palmore's original quiz (1977).

The original FAQ had the advantage of a short scale of 25 true-false items of factual statements. The instrument has been empirically documented. The revised version clears language ambiguity in several items along with overstated items that tended to force responses.

Chapter VI

SUMMARY

There is much evidence that the older segment of society is negatively stereotyped. The question of why negative stereotypes of the elderly exist is not easy to determine.

Perhaps an instrument of a more specific nature to measure attitudes and misconceptions toward the aged needs to be perfected. A questionnaire that would indicate the quality of contact between the young and the elderly should prove helpful. Such instrument could consider variables such as health status of the older person, whether he/she lives alone and whether the economic standard of the individual permits independence. Another variable that might lend understanding would be the educational level of the people viewing the elderly. The older person's self-concept in earlier life is a factor that should also be considered.

It is necessary to keep in mind that both the young and the older generations share in the responsibility for the existence of stereotypes. Each generation has a fear of losing something by reason of the other generation's behavior. The older generation has a sense of the end of life and fear that their own

significance may be lost (Bengtson, et al., 1976).
They, therefore, wish that their own values be carried
on through their offspring, and are inclined to deny
evidence of intergenerational differences. The younger
generation, by contrast, fear the loss of their own
identities in the projections of the older generation.
They desire to create values for themselves and tend to
see their parents' attempts to perpetuate old values as
oppressive.

Future research in studying the association of
different generations in regard to stereotypes of the
aged should emphasize quality of contact between the
young and the old. There is also speculation that
higher education may overshadow age norm in the
rejection of stereotypes of the elderly. The quality
factor of education should be an important aspect in
the determination of the rejection of negative
stereotypes toward the aged.

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APPENDIX

MILLER--DODDER REVISION OF PALMORE'S FACTS ON AGING QUIZ

Student's age_____,   Sex_____

Distance between student's home and home of grandparents_____.

Frequency of visits with grandparents: Mark the item which most nearly fits your visiting pattern.

    1. Weekly, or more frequently_____.

    2. Monthly_____.

    3. Annually_____.

    4. If other, how often?_____.

Show your response to the following statements by marking "X".

		TRUE	FALSE
1.	The majority of people over 65 are senile.	___	___
2.	All five senses tend to decline with old age.	___	___
3.	The majority of older people have no capacity for sexual relations.	___	___
4.	Lung capacity tends to decline with old age.	___	___
5.	The majority of older people say they are happy most of the time.	___	___
6.	At least one in ten of older people are in long stay institutions.	___	___
7.	Physical strength tends to decline in old age.	___	___
8.	Drivers over 65 have more accidents than under 65.	___	___
9.	Older people can't work as efficiently as young workers.	___	___

10. About 80% of older people say their health is sufficient to carry out normal activities. _____ _____

11. Majority of older people are unable to adapt to change. _____ _____

12. Older people tend to take longer to learn something new. _____ _____

13. Reaction time of older people tends to be slower than reaction time of young people. _____ _____

14. In general, older people tend to be pretty much alike. _____ _____

15. Majority of older people say they are usually bored. _____ _____

16. Majority of older people are lonely. _____ _____

17. Older workers have more accidents than young workers. _____ _____

18. Over 15% of United States population are now 65 or over. _____ _____

19. The majority of medical practitioners give low priority to older people. _____ _____

20. The majority of older people have incomes below the poverty level--$3025 for a person or $3650 for couples. _____ _____

21. The majority of older people say they would like to have some kind of work to do. _____ _____

22. Older people tend to become more religious as they age. _____ _____

23. The majority of older people say they are usually irritated or angry. _____ _____

24. The health and socioeconomic status of older people, compared with young people, in the year 2000 will probably about the same as now. _____ _____