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RELATING TO OLDER PEOPLE EVALUATION (ROPE): A MEASURE OF SELF-REPORTED AGEISM

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The Relating to Older People Evaluation (ROPE) is a 20-item questionnaire that measures positive and negative ageist behaviors that people may engage in during everyday life. In this article, we report the first findings from several administrations of the ROPE along with initial psychometric information on the instrument. Respondents were college students, community-dwelling older adults, and persons affiliated with a university community. Results indicate that most people of all ages readily admit to positive ageist behaviors. Younger and older adults appear to participate in similar amounts of ageist behavior. Analyses by gender indicated that women endorsed the positive ageism items more often than did men. Psychometric analyses yielded estimates of adequate test-retest reliability and internal consistency reliability. Implications for current views of ageism as a social phenomenon and strategies for reducing ageist behaviors in everyday life are discussed.

People of all ages are familiar with the term ageism, which refers to any form of prejudice or discrimination based on chronological age.

Butler (1969) was the first to coin this term, bringing the concept of ageism to the forefront in the field of gerontology. Since this time, ample experimental evidence documents the presence of widespread and frequent ageism in our society today (Palmore, 1999, 2001). Ageism impacts both attitudes and personal behavior towards older persons. From a social cognitive perspective, ageism may also influence older persons' implicit beliefs about their own competencies as well as self-stereotypes (Levy, 2001). Most would agree that we live in a youth-oriented society where various forms of ageism are pervasive (Kelchner, 1999; Palmore, Branch, & Harris, 2006). In fact, many behaviors perceived as courtesy or lightheartedness towards older persons can be manifestations of discriminatory, stereotypical attitudes (Palmore, 1999). Despite the interest in ageism as a theoretical construct and a social phenomenon, relatively little research has been directed to measuring how people actually relate to older adults in everyday life.

The purpose of the present research was to develop a measure of people's ageist behaviors as they relate to older adults in daily life. Several measures of ageism can be found in the research literature including the Attitudes Toward Old Persons Scale (Kogan, 1961); the Aging Semantic Differential (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969); and the Fraboni Ageism Scale (Fraboni, Saltstone, & Hughes, 1990). Fraboni et al.'s scale of ageism is based on self-report, but it is primarily a measure of attitudes rather than actual behaviors. Another aspect of ageism concerns people's lack of knowledge about aging. Indeed, Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz has been in existence since 1977 and has been used widely to document misconceptions about aging (Palmore, 1998). Recently, the Ageism Survey was developed to measure older persons' experience of ageism defined as prejudice and discrimination (Palmore, 2001). Older individuals' perceptions of having experienced ageism are important to consider insofar as such incidences speak to the vulnerability of different segments of the older adult population as well as the prevalence of ageism in society in general.

In this article, we introduce the Relating to Old People Evaluation (ROPE), a self-report measure of the frequency and types of ageist behaviors. We chose to use this title, rather than one with the word ageism in it because we wanted to maximize the number of responses—especially honest responses. We suspected that ageism in the title might reduce the number of people willing to respond as well as the number of behaviors admitted. The questionnaire contains 20 types of ageist behaviors: 6 are positive types of ageism and 14 are negative types (see Appendix). Examples of positive types include

Hold doors open for old people because of their age and *Vote for an old person because of their age.* Examples of negative types include *Send birthday cards to old people that joke about their age* and *Vote against an old person because of their age.* The items were developed from the literature on ageism, discussions with colleagues, experiences of older people, and results of the Ageism Survey which is comprised of negative ageism items (Palmore, 2001, 2004).

Ageism includes prejudice (stereotypes and attitudes), personal discrimination (behaviors), and institutional discrimination (policies and practices). However, the ROPE questionnaire is designed to measure only personal discrimination (negative or positive). The inclusion of negative and positive ageist items is a unique feature of the ROPE. This distinction between negative and positive ageism is based on Palmore's (1999) conceptual typology between these forms of ageism. The ROPE questionnaire was designed to answer three basic questions:

- **What is the prevalence of ageist behaviors in this and other societies?**
- **Which types of ageist behaviors are more prevalent?**
- **Which types of people report more ageist behaviors?**

METHOD

Participants

A total of 314 individuals participated in this study. Participants included college students, community-dwelling older adults and various members of a university community. Demographic characteristics of the sample appear in Table 1.

In all, there were 147 college students with 123 from Louisiana State University (LSU) and 24 from the University of Georgia. There were 120 community-dwelling older adults with 37 responses to an article in *Fifty Plus*, 25 seniors from southern Louisiana, and 58 from northern Virginia. There were 47 persons from a university community which consisted of 16 responses to an article in the Duke Center on Aging newsletter and 31 attendees at a LSU Life Course and Aging Center Community Partners luncheon. In all, there were 100 males and 214 females. The age range was 18 to 98 years. Participants' educational attainment ranged from less than ninth grade to over 20 years of education.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

		Age (years)			Gender	
Group	n	*M*	*SD*	Range	Male	Female
College students	147	22.9	5.6	18–49	38	109
Older adults	120	70.9	10.0	46–98	45	75
University community	47	38.0	16.7	20–87	16	31

Note. The college students were enrolled in undergraduate courses at Louisiana State University and the University of Georgia. Older adults were drawn from three states including Louisiana, North Carolina, and Virginia. The university community sample consisted of persons who responded to an article in the Duke University newsletter and others who attended the LSU Life Course and Aging Center annual community partners luncheon.

RESULTS

Overview of Scoring

For each item, respondents selected one of three response options: Never (scored as 0), Sometimes (scored as 1), or Often (scored as 2). There are two ways to score the questionnaire. Scores may be summed within each dimension and expressed as a proportion of the highest score possible for that dimension; or the number of items in a dimension with a Sometimes or Often response is divided by the number of items in that dimension (6 or 14) to result in the proportion of positive or negative behaviors reported. The first score is based on both the number and frequency of reported behaviors; the second score measures just the number of different reported behaviors. In this paper, we focus on the first scoring method and discuss primarily the number and frequency of behaviors reported.

Prevalence and Frequent Types

The results indicate that ageist ways of relating to old people are widespread and frequent. Virtually all of the respondents admitted one or more ageist behaviors. Furthermore, the positive ways were reported much more often than the negative ways. On average, participants endorsed 0.53 of the positive items, but only 0.23 of the negative items.

We conducted an item analysis to determine the least and most frequently endorsed expressions of ageist behavior that people are willing to admit to. Table 2 presents the outcomes of the item analysis.

Table 2. The least and most frequently endorsed expressions of ageist behavior that people are willing to admit to. Items rank ordered by proportion endorsing the item

No.	Question	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %
5	Hold doors open for old people because of their age.	6	29	65
3	Enjoy conversations with old people because of their age.	7	38	55
1	Compliment old people on how well they look, despite their age.	10	50	40
9	Ask an old person for advice because of their age.	16	53	31
8	When I find out an old person's age, I may say, "You don't look that old."	19	55	26
12	Talk louder or slower to old people because of their age.	31	54	15
19	When a slow driver is in front of me, I may think, "It must be an old person."	32	50	18
7	Offer to help an old person across the street because of their age.	41	44	15
2	Send birthday cards to old people that joke about their age.	51	35	14
4	Tell old people jokes about old age.	56	33	11
18	Avoid old people because they are cranky.	62	37	1
10	When an older person has an ailment, I may say, "That's normal at your age."	63	32	5
13	Use simple words when talking to old people.	64	29	7
11	When an older person can't remember something, I may say "That's what they call a 'Senior Moment.'"	64	26	10
20	Call an old woman, "young lady," or call an old man, "young man."	75	22	3
17	Avoid old people because of their age.	78	21	1
15	Vote for an old person because of their age.	81	16	3
6	Tell an old person, "You're too old for that."	83	14	3
14	Ignore old people because of their age.	87	12	1
16	Vote against an old person because of their age.	89	11	0

For ease in exposition, we combine the two categories Sometimes and Often into one category in the discussion that follows. As can be seen in Table 2, the most frequent type of ageist behavior, reported by 94% of respondents, was *Hold doors open for old people because of their age.* Almost as many reported two other positive types: *Enjoy conversations with old people because of their age* (93%); and *Compliment old people on how well they look despite their age* (90%). A less frequent form of positive ageism was *Vote for an old person because of their age* (20%).

The most frequent type of negative behavior (81%) was *When I find out an old person's age, I may say, "You don't look that old."* This statement may sound positive, but is actually negative because it

implies that looking old is bad and invites the older person to deny their age. The second most frequent negative item (68%) was *When a slow driver is in front of me, I may think, It must be an old person*. This statement is negative because it assumes all old people are poor drivers. The three least frequent negative types were *Vote against an old person because of their age* (12%); *Ignore old people because of their age* (13%); and *Tell an old person, "You're too old for that"* (17%).

Age and Gender Differences in Item Endorsement

We analyzed differences by age and gender in the frequency of negative and positive items reported. We had expected that older people would report more positive behaviors and less negative behaviors compared to younger people. To gain insight into possible age differences in item endorsement, we partitioned the sample for whom precise chronological age was reported to form three age groups: younger adults (18–39 years, $n = 162$), middle age adults (40–57 years, $n = 33$) and older adults (60+ years, $n = 115$). Means appear in Table 3.

To our surprise, we found little or no significant differences between age groups in either the positive or negative dimensions. An ANOVA confirmed a nonsignificant main effect of age group ($p = 0.62$). Apparently these ways of relating to old people are so

Table 3.   Mean scores by age group, gender, and type of item

	Positive	Negative
Younger adults		
M	0.54	0.24
SD	0.16	0.11
Middle age adults		
M	0.51	0.15
SD	0.17	0.08
Older adults		
M	0.54	0.26
SD	0.21	0.13
Total sample		
M	0.53	0.23
SD	0.18	0.12
Gender males		
M	0.49	0.23
SD	0.19	0.13
Females		
M	0.55	0.24
SD	0.17	0.12

engrained in our culture that they do not change as one grows older. The dimension effect was significant, favoring positive ageism items, $F(1, 308) = 213.05$, p < 0.001.

With respect to potential gender differences, we had anticipated that men's and women's responses on the ROPE would be largely similar. This reasoning was based on the observation that men and women did not differ in their perceptions of having experienced ageist acts on the Ageism Survey (Palmore, 2001). Contrary to our expectation, analyses of proportion endorsed by gender yielded a significant gender effect favoring females, $F(1, 311) = 6.73$, $p = .01$. The dimension effect was also significant $F(1, 311) = 685.92$, $p < .001$, confirming that participants were more likely to endorse positive than negative ageist items, with means of 0.53 and 0.23, respectively. Interpretation of these effects was qualified by a significant Gender $\times$ Dimension interaction effect, $F(1, 311) = 5.41$, $p = .02$. As can be seen in Table 3, females endorsed positive ageism items more often than did males, but the two genders did not differ in their endorsement of negative ageism items.

Reliability and Validity

Within the college student sample, test-retest data were available for 90 respondents across the three undergraduate psychology courses where the ROPE was administered on two separate occasions in each class. Results of the first and second administration of the ROPE by class appear in Table 4.

As can be seen in Table 4, the proportion of positive and negative items endorsed was comparable across classes and test administrations with mean endorsement favoring the positive ageist items.

Table 4. Mean proportion endorsed across multiple administrations of the ROPE

| | First administration | | | | Second administration | | | |
| | Positive | | Negative | | Positive | | Negative | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Two-week delay of testing								
Psy 2076	0.50	0.14	0.25	0.12	0.50	0.18	0.26	0.12
Psy 2070	0.60	0.21	0.24	0.13	0.56	0.16	0.26	0.15
Eight-week delay of testing								
Psy 4072	0.55	0.16	0.29	0.12	0.56	0.15	0.25	0.12

To confirm these impressions statistically, we conducted a 3×2 mixed ANOVA on the proportion scores with class as a between group factor and test administration (first, second) and dimension (positive, negative) as repeated measures factors. Analyses confirmed nonsignificant effects of class and test administration (p's > 0.21). The main effect of dimension was significant, favoring positive ageism items, $F(1, 87) = 241.44$, $p < 0.001$. Given the nonsignificant class effect, we collapsed across this variable and conducted Pearson's product moment correlations to examine test-retest reliability. Results yielded significant correlations between the first and second administration for positive ageism items ($r = 0.57$) and also the first and second administration for negative items ($r = 0.72$). We also calculated Cronbach's alpha to examine internal consistency reliability. The internal consistency reliability estimate was adequate (0.70), although somewhat lower than standard conventions (0.80; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The items appear to have high face validity. All respondents appeared to understand the items without further explanation. There were relatively few omitted responses (those few were coded as ".").

DISCUSSION

Most older people report they have suffered from various forms of ageism (Palmore, 2001, 2004). Until recently, however, there has been little attempt to measure the frequency and types of ageist behaviors in our society based on self-report. The purpose of the present investigation was to develop a measure of the prevalence of ageist behaviors generally and various types of ageist behaviors in particular. The present results have shown that people of all ages readily admit to positive ageist behaviors. We also found that younger and older adults endorsed similar numbers of ageist behaviors. Finally, analyses by gender indicated that women endorsed positive ageism items more often than did men. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Positive and Negative Ageism

Our first finding of interest in this study concerned the greater endorsement of positive compared to negative ageist items. Item analyses revealed that the four most frequently endorsed items were all positive items. Perhaps participants perceive these items as courteous or thoughtful behaviors and not ageism per se. For instance, the top three most frequently endorsed items included the

following: *Hold doors open for old people because of their age* (94%), *Enjoy conversations with old people because of their age* (93%), and *Compliment old people on how well they look despite their age* (90%).

However, we suggest that these behaviors are fundamentally ageist in that they reflect underlying assumptions based on a restricted and stereotypic view of later adulthood. For instance, consider a hypo-thetical *modal older adult* who has difficulty opening doors due to age-related declines in physical strength, frailty, and/or limitations related to arthritis. This modal person is a pleasure to talk to, having lived a rich life full of interesting and historic experiences that he/she readily shares with others. Furthermore, this modal older person remains appealing and attractive despite their graying hair and facial wrinkles that are tell tale signs of aging. From this vantage point, one can readily see that behaviors that may appear lighthearted or cour-teous at one level actually tap into ageist assumptions on a deeper level of analysis. Because ageist behaviors of any sort have the poten-tial to undermine the status and treatment of older persons in society, people of all ages need to be aware of the variety of ways ageism can be manifested in our day to day interactions with older adults. The ROPE questionnaire serves as a starting point to inform students, educators, and practitioners that such ageist behaviors exist and to teach students about the potential harm that lies in perpetuating such behaviors. To this end, we found that the ROPE appears to be a reliable and face valid instrument for measuring ageist behaviors in a wide range of participants.

Age and Gender Effects

The second interesting finding in this study was that younger and older adults were quite similar in the frequency and types of ageist behaviors endorsed. This result was a bit surprising as we had expected to observe greater frequency of ageism in younger compared to older adults. Other evidence has shown that college students' age was negatively correlated with total scores on the Fraboni Scale of Ageism, suggesting that ageist attitudes decline with age and increased life experience (Kalavar, 2001; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2005). Our findings suggest that ageist behaviors that people are willing to admit to may persist in frequency across adulthood, although further research is necessary.

The third finding of interest was the analyses by gender, which revealed that women endorsed positive ageism items more often than did men. We suggest that endorsement of positive ageist items may

reflect underlying assumptions of courteous or deferential behavior toward older adults, which may be more common among women than men. Also, deferential behavior directed toward older adults may be an indication of limited knowledge of aging and understanding of the cognitive and physical capabilities of older adults. Consistent with this view, Stuart-Hamilton and Mahoney (2003) found that scores on an ageism measure (Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA)) were negatively correlated with Palmore's Facts on Aging Questionnaire (1977) prior to a training workshop on age awareness. This implies that those with greater knowledge of aging may hold less ageist attitudes. Future research where knowledge of aging is assessed along with the ROPE would be desirable to permit firm conclusions on the role of aging knowledge in relating to older adults.

The results of this study underscore the importance of providing educational information on aging in an undergraduate curriculum as well as in continuing education workshops for professionals who work with elderly clientele. In a recent study, we found that people of varying educational backgrounds and occupational experience in social services readily admit to positive ageist behaviors (Allen, Cherry, & Palmore, in press). Thus, educational programs and workshops that focus on improving knowledge of aging are imperative for service providers and others who are likely to come into contact with the older adult population, given the national demographic trends of increasing numbers of older adults in today's society and in the future (Jackson, Cherry, Smitherman, & Hawley, 2008). With the growing number of older people in society today, favorable reactions toward older persons will hopefully become more common. Academic preparation that includes coverage of age-related cognitive and physical changes for students who aspire to work in helping professions is an equally important consideration. Aging education has been regarded as important since the first White House Conference on Aging (1961), and educators as well as government agencies have identified the need for better training for those working with the aging population (Rosen, Zlotnik, & Singer, 2002; Peterson & Wendt, 1990a; Peterson & Wendt, 1990b).

On a broader note, the results of the present study have several implications for current views of ageism as a theoretical construct and social phenomenon. With respect to theoretical implications, our results imply that positive ageism may be a multifaceted construct that includes deferential behaviors (e.g., *Hold doors open for old people because of their age*) as well as humorous approaches to coping with the changes that occur with age (e.g., *Send birthday cards to old people that joke about their age*). The complexities of ageism as

a theoretical construct are noted in the gerontological literature (e. g., Cohen, 2001; Levy, 2001). Future research to develop these and other possible underlying dimensions of ageism seems warranted. Regarding practical implications, academic preparation that includes coverage of the multidimensional nature of ageism for college students is a critical consideration. Educational materials and programs in college and university settings where accurate information about ageism is disseminated could serve to counteract stereotypes, that may result in negative interpersonal interactions between younger and older adults such as patronizing talk.

Two methodological limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, people may deny or minimize the frequency of their behavior if they perceive it to be wrong or socially undesirable. Alternatively, they may exaggerate the frequency of such behavior if they perceive it to be socially desirable, which would tend to inflate the frequency of the positive items. Future research that includes observational studies of actual behaviors or a measure of social desirability together with administration of the ROPE would be desirable before firm conclusions would be warranted. Second, we relied on convenience samples in this study rather than purposive sampling designed to be representative of known populations. The present results should be interpreted with these limitations in mind. Future research in which a stratified sampling approach is used and larger sample sizes are employed would be desirable before firm conclusions would be warranted.

In closing, the ROPE is a valid and reliable measure of ageist behaviors that we hope will increase awareness of the many forms of ageism that exist in our society today. Increasing peoples' awareness of ageist behaviors is a necessary first step toward reducing ageism as a pervasive social phenomenon. The ROPE may provide the basis for more effective educational programs to reduce ageism, because researchers and social activists could better understand which types of ageism are more prevalent, and which groups engage in more ageist behaviors. This instrument (along with the Ageism Survey) could be used to develop an epidemiology of ageism as a first step toward its reduction.

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APPENDIX

Relating to Old People Evaluation (ROPE)

1. Compliment old people on how well they look, despite their age.
2. Send birthday cards to old people that joke about their age.
3. Enjoy conversations with old people because of their age.
4. Tell old people jokes about old age.
5. Hold doors open for old people because of their age.
6. Tell an old person, "You're too old for that."
7. Offer to help an old person across the street because of their age.
8. When I find out an old person's age, I may say, "You don't look that old."
9. Ask an old person for advice because of their age.
10. When an old person has an ailment, I may say, "That's normal at your age."
11. When an old person can't remember something, I may say, "That's what they call a 'Senior Moment'."
12. Talk louder or slower to old people because of their age.
13. Use simple words when talking to old people.
14. Ignore old people because of their age.
15. Vote for an old person because of their age.
16. Vote against an old person because of their age.
17. Avoid old people because of their age.
18. Avoid old people because they are cranky.
19. When a slow driver is in front of me, I may think, "It must be an old person."
20. Call an old woman, "young lady," or call an old man, "young man."