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How different indicators predict general attitudes toward aging and self-perceived aging

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How Different Indicators Predict General Perceptions of Aging and Self-Perceived Aging

Carla M. Strickland-Hughes & Dana Kotter-Grühn

Theoretical Background

Positive attitudes toward aging and optimistic self-perceptions of aging can help individuals adapt to age-related changes throughout the life span and add to longevity and quality of life (e.g., Kotter-Grühn et al., 2009; Levy et al., 2002).

- **General perceptions of aging (GPA)** refers to individuals’ beliefs, attitudes and feelings about age and ageing, which are predominantly negative (e.g., Kite et al., 2005).
- **Self-perceptions of aging (SPA)** describes individuals’ attitudes toward and how they perceive their own age and aging (Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn et al., 2008; Levy, 2003). Middle-aged and older individuals often report more positive perceptions of aging about themselves than their same-age peers (Hess, 2006).
- **General attitudes toward age(ing) held earlier in life** predict self-perceptions of age(ing) in later life, when attitudes and stereotypes become personally relevant (Levy, 2003).
- **Known predictors of GPA include age, knowledge about age(ing), frequency of exposure and interaction with older adults, and culture** (Hess, 2006; Levy & Langer, 1994). Known predictors of SPA are health status, chronological age, and possibly socio-economic status and gender (e.g., Montepare, 2009; Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn et al., 2008).

Research Questions

1) Are individuals’ general perceptions of aging and self-perceptions of aging predicted by different indicators (i.e., age anxiety, future-orientation, life satisfaction)?

2) Does the predictive pattern differ as a function of age group?

Methods

- **Participants**
  - N = 183 (54% women; years of education M=14.95, SD=2.54)
  - M_age = 48.72, SD = 23.16 (3 age groups: 18 – 35, 36 – 60, and 61 – 92 years)

- **Variables of Interest**
  - **Predictors**
    - Future orientation: Future Time Perspective Scale (Carstensen & Lang 1996)
    - Age anxiety: seven items from the Anxiety about Aging Scale (cf. Lynch 2003)
    - Life satisfaction: Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985)
  - **Criteria**
    - General perceptions of aging: Attitudes to Ageing Scale (Laidlaw et al. 2007)
    - Self-perceptions of aging: 5-item subscale of the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale (Lawton 1975)

Results

**Research Question 1**

*Figure 1. Structural Equation Model with Standardized Regression Weights for Three Age Groups (Young, Middle-aged, and Older Adults)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>SPA</th>
<th>Future Orientation</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<td><img src="image.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at $p \leq .010$.

**Research Question 2**

Multiple-group comparisons indicated that a model in which the regression weights were set equal for the 3 age groups fit the data as well as a model where these regression weights were unconstrained ($\Delta \chi^2 = 10.5$, $\Delta df = 12$, $p = .57$). That is, age anxiety, future orientation and life satisfaction predicted general perceptions of aging and self-perceptions of aging equally in all age groups.

Discussion

- Lower levels of age anxiety and higher levels of life satisfaction and future-orientation were related to more positive perceptions of aging.
- When individual predictors were set to be equal for the entire sample, we found that age anxiety predicted general- and self-perceptions of aging equally well. Life satisfaction and future-orientation were better predictors of self-perceptions of aging than general perceptions of aging.
- Contrary to expectations, age group differences in the predictive patterns were not significant.
- Our limited sample size (N = 183) may not capture age group differences in the prediction pattern. The high education level for our sample may have positively influenced our results.
- Future studies may further investigate the time-dynamic relationship between general perceptions of aging and self-perceptions of aging as well as additional psychosocial predictor variables after accounting for objective factors.

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