Summary
Attitudes toward Older People:
Some Social-Psychological Approaches and Studies

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With the increase in the number of older people, there has been a remarkable demographic change in societies. The birth rate in Turkey has decreased significantly in the last few decades (Tufan, 2014). With rapid increase in life expectancy, effects of older people on societal changes in Turkey will become more evident in the near future as well (Tufan, 2003). The examination of attitudes towards older people is not only critical for health and wellbeing of older people (e. g., Chrisler, Barney & Palatino, 2016) but also for developing public policies and programs on them (Tufan, 2003, 2014).

This paper aims to analyze some approaches and empirical studies in social psychology on attitudes toward older people. In the paper, first, some empirical studies, which define and measure ageism in different ways, are presented. Then, ambivalent ageism and a prescriptive intergenerational-tension ageism (SIC), which offer a theoretical viewpoint for defining and measuring ageism, are discussed. Thirdly, theories and models, namely, social identity theory (SIT), optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT), subjective uncertainty reduction theory (SURT), motivated identity construction model (MICM), terror management theory (TMT), and stereotypes content model (SCM) are presented. In the discussion and conclusion part, the implications of these approaches and studies are presented and some suggestions are made.

Attitudes toward Older People

In social psychology, attitudes toward older people have been defined in terms of positive and negative stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Palmore, 1999). As a sign of negative stereotypes, for example, it has been shown that older people are defined as burdensome, sick, forgetful, and dependent (e.g., Kite, Stockdale, Whitley & Johnson, 2005), and they are defined as helpful, warm, friendly, orderly, and compassionate, as a sign of positive stereotypes (e.g., Patterson, Forbes & Peace, 2009). Although negative and positive attitudes have been distinguished, researchers emphasized the harmful effects of negative attitudes on older people and mostly dealt with these negative attitudes (Ackerman & Chopik, 2021; Butler, 1969, 2009; Nelson, 2004; Ng, 1998).

In a study in Turkey, for example, Kutlu, Küçük and Fındık (2012) measured negative attitudes in terms of stereotypes, avoidance, and discrimination. Vefikuluçay and Terzioglu (2011), on the other hand, using an originally Turkish scale, suggested three dimensions of ageism as positive ageism, negative ageism, and restricting the life of the elderly. Dalcalı and Özyürek (2019) found that the participants scored higher in terms of restricting the life of the elderly compared to positive and negative ageism.

The international studies have also conceptualized and measured the attitudes toward older people in a variety of ways. For example, in a study conducted in Germany, China, and the United States researchers examined how age groups (e.g., adolescent, young) are perceived in terms of competence, hardworking, intelligence, happiness, and selfishness among 18–93-year-olds (Weiss & Zhang, et al. 2020). They found that across cultures participants evaluate older people less positively compared to other age groups. In a study comparing Chinese and American university students, on the other hand, those from China showed more negative attitudes towards older people in terms of antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination. In the study, the Chinese participants reported more contact with elderly family members whereas American participants reported more contact with elderly non-family members (Luo, Zhou, Jin, Newman, & Liang, 2013). As a solution to this complexity in the studies' definition of these attitudes, some social-psychological approaches describe attitudes toward older people, as outlined below, in a more theoretical and integrated way.

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Ambivalent Ageism: Benevolent and Hostile Ageism

Researchers proposed the concept of *ambivalent ageism* to reflect the complex and unclear nature of attitudes toward older people (Cary, Chasteen & Remedios, 2017). This concept was indeed developed based on the SCM (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008), which distinguishes between warmth and competence stereotypes. This model argues that older people, being lower status and not competitive group in a society, are perceived as warmer but less competent. Cuddy et al. (2009) argue that when people evaluate others as better in warmth but worse in competence, it is a pitying or patronizing prejudice that targets older people. Benevolent ageism side of ambivalent ageism was developed to reflect this seemingly positive but patronizing side of ageism. Whereas older people encounter benevolent ageism with "active facilitation", "passive harm", and "unwanted help", they encounter hostile ageism with "active harm" and "passive harm". Notably, hostile and benevolent ageism are interrelated and constitute a significant part of ageist attitudes toward older people (Cary et al., 2017).

A Prescriptive Intergenerational-Tension Ageism: Succession, Identity, and Consumption (SIC)

The SIC (North & Fiske, 2012, 2013a, 2013b) proposes that attitudes toward older people change with increase in older people's proportion in population. Although some cross-cultural studies have produced consistent results regarding the ratio of older people in society (Boudjemadi et al.., 2022; Löckenhoff et al., 2009; North & Fiske, 2015), Ng and Lim-Soh (2021) found that the ratio of older people is not related to the level of ageism across cultures. According to the SIC approach, young people may develop negative or hostile ageism because they may think that older people violate society's expectations of *Succession*, *Identity*, and *Consumption*. In terms of *Succession*, young people believe that older people should give up their work positions so that they can replace them and take their turns and places in society. In terms of *Identity*, young people think that older people should not be involved in activities or be at places, which traditionally symbolize young group identity. In terms of *Consumption*, young people think that older people use the resources shared in society passively and unjustly.

Attitudes toward Older People: Theoretical Approaches

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

The SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) argues that people compare their in-group with the out-group and want to perceive their in-group more positively and distinctively. This theory is applied to explain age group relations

(e.g., Chonody & Teater, 2016). Researchers assert that to achieve a positively distinctive age group identity, young people may express negative attitudes toward older people (Packer & Chasteen, 2006) and attribute negative and positive stereotypes to them (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018).

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT)

The ODT (Brewer, 1991, 1993) argues that individuals want to identify with groups, which provide feelings for belonging and distinctiveness. It was shown that motives for belonging (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino & Sacchi, 2002) and distinctiveness (Jetten, Spears & Postmes, 2004) are related to negative attitudes toward out-groups. Based on age groups, people also encounter feelings of belonging and distinctiveness (Marcus & Fritzsche, 2014). Taşdemir (2020), for instance, showed that among other motives, only feeling of young group belonging is associated with ambivalent ageism expressed among university students in Turkey.

Subjective Uncertainty Reduction Theory (SURT)

The SURT (Hogg, 2007) argues that people are likely to be members of groups, which provides a meaningful social identity. It was shown that under conditions of uncertainty, but not of certainty, people are likely to identify with in-groups and discriminate against out-groups (Hogg, 2007). With memberships in age groups, people may also have a meaningful social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Young group members, for example, may think of themselves in terms of beauty, attractiveness, and health (Bugental & Hehman, 2007). In an implicit way, people tend to associate being young with good things, whereas being old with bad things (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Taşdemir (2020) showed that among other motives, only feeling of young group distinctiveness is associated with negative older people stereotypes expressed among university students in Turkey.

Motivated Identity Construction Model (MICT)

The MICM (Vignoles, 2011) argues that by being members of groups, people can have feelings of efficacy and continuity in addition to self-esteem, distinctiveness, belonging, and meaning. Research has shown that people want to identify with groups in which they can feel connection across time and place (Sani et al., 2007). Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013) showed that people, who perceive a threat to social continuity tend to express negative attitudes toward groups, which they perceive threatening. Weiss and Lang (2012) indicated that shortened future time perspective was likely to be threatening for older people, and identification with age group

was negatively related to perspective for future time in old people but positively so in young people. Researchers have argued that for older people, identifying with a younger group, it is likely to be a defensive strategy aiming to perceive future time not as short (Rappaport, Fossler, Bross, & Gilden, 1993).

In addition, people have a need to believe that they are competent and able to control something in their life (Breakwell, 1996). In an experimental study, the participants, who perceived lower levels of personal control, showed a tendency to define themselves with the in-group and displayed more negative attitudes toward the out-group (Fritsche et al., 2013). It was shown that young people are more likely to be perceived competent compared to older people (Kite et al., 2005). To summarize, people may associate efficacy, continuity, self-esteem, distinctiveness, belonging, and meaning with their age group membership and express relatively negative attitudes toward older group based on these (Schoemann & Branscombe, 2011; Weiss & Lang, 2012).

Terror Management Theory (TMT)

The TMT tries to explain human behavior in terms of death anxiety (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). This theory argues that people develop cultural worldviews, which allow them to create standards of value for a meaningful life. To enhance their self-esteem and achieve immortality, people try to meet the (valued) standards of their cultural worldview (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). Martens, Goldenberg, and Greenberg (2005) extended the TMT and suggested that older people constitute an existential threat for younger people by reminding them "death is inescapable", "the body is fallible", and "the bases by which we may secure self-esteem (and manage death anxiety) are transitory".

Stereotypes Content Model (SCM)

The SCM proposes that warmth and competence stereotypes are compensatory for each other and legitimizing for the existing system (see Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). They serve to justify unequal inter-group relationships by presenting warmth or affection as if a reward for lower status groups (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Researchers have shown that across cultures people tend to evaluate older people as warmer than competent (Cuddy et al., 2005). In a study among student and nonstudent samples, the older group was identified as less competitive and lower status than many other groups including young people (Fiske et al., 2002). In addition, university students expressed mostly pity as their feeling toward older people. Indeed, pity is indicated as a primary emotion toward older people, which gives them the message

that they are seen as helpless and weak. Accordingly, older people, who internalize such messages, may come to perceive themselves dependent on others (see Fiske et al., 2002). Considering mixed-content stereotypes, older people are exposed to helping and exclusion behaviors together (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; see also Tufan, 2003).

Discussion and Conclusion

This review study attempts to analyze approaches and studies that deal with the attitudes toward older people from the social psychology perspective. First, some studies, which define these attitudes in different ways were considered. Although these studies in general deal with negative ageism, they show important differences in the definition of ageism in terms of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of attitudes toward older people. In this regard, ambivalent ageism and SIC approaches are important, which offer theoretical viewpoints for the definition of these attitudes. In addition, ambivalent ageism reveals the aspect of ageism, which is relatively acceptable in societies, seemingly protective and positive, but has negative effects on the individuality of older people. The SIC approach, on the other hand, provides predictions about how older people will be approached by members of a society in the near future and how the relations between age groups will change.

Secondly, theories and models explaining the attitudes toward older people were discussed. These theories and models are generally used to explain the intergroup relations in social psychology (e.g., Chonody & Teater, 2016). Among these, SIT, ODT, SURT, and MICT may be considered as social identity-based theories. In the context of age group relations, these theories and models are particularly useful in explaining the negative attitudes of young groups towards older groups. Young in-group members, who perceive a threat to their social identity-based self-esteem, distinctiveness, belonging, meaning, continuity, and competence from an older group, are likely to express negative attitudes toward them. In this regard, it may be helpful to diversify the age-related categories in society to include other group aspects of individuals as well (e.g., working old, retired old, unemployed old, advanced old, young university student, working young, unemployed young) instead of categorizing people simply as 'old' and 'young' (e.g., Song & Zuo, 2016).

The TMT has an interest in the concept of death anxiety and proposes that individuals try to increase their self-esteem to cope with this anxiety but feel worthless when they encounter with older people (Martens et al., 2005). One implication of TMT for reducing ageism

would be to support young people's participation in activities (e.g., working with non-governmental organizations), which may enable them to perceive themselves relatively permanent in a culture and help them to increase their self-esteem.

The SCM, on the other hand, argues that perceptions of different groups in society depend on the status differences between groups and the social resources groups have (Fiske et al., 2002). This model is important in that it reveals that stereotypes towards groups function to legitimize status differences between groups. Unlike the SIC approach, the SCM (and ambivalent ageism) predicts that the stereotypes towards older people, who are increasing in number and visibility each day, will change in a positive direction and more competence-related aspects will be attributed to them.

Thus, social-psychological theories and models explain the attitudes toward older people based on different factors and have various implications for a positive change in attitudes. Accordingly, although the negative view of the SIC approach is supported by some studies (e.g, Boudjemadi et al., 2022), more research is needed on how the increase in the elderly population will affect the attitudes. In particular, further research that examines the assumptions of the SIC, SCM, and ambivalent ageism approaches in the context of social identity and intergroup relations may be useful. For example, experimental studies can be conducted in which the minority and majority positions and/or social status of young and old groups are manipulated, and the SIC, SCM and ambivalent ageism are examined accordingly.