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REVERSE MORTGAGES

See
Home Equity Conversion

RIGIDITY

The concept of *psychological rigidity* has been investigated since the early part of this century, occasionally under other labels, such as *proactive inhibition* or *perseveration.* The latter concepts have been defined as the tendency to persist in a behavior that was appropriate in the past when that behavior ceases to be appropriate under new circumstances. The concept of rigidity per se was first investigated systematically by Kounin (1941) taking a Lewinian approach. Kounin speculated that *behavioral rigidity* was a developmental phenomenon that expressed behavioral differentiation from a concrete and rigid pattern in childhood, progressing to increased flexibility as young adulthood was reached, with a return to greater rigidity in advanced age. Chown (1959) examined a variety of definitions of rigidity and termed rigidity to be a rather "flexible" and multidimensional concept. She concluded further that most studies of rigidity showed a high negative *correlation between rigidity and intelligence.* For a recent meta-analysis of studies of rigidity, see Schultz & Searleman (2002).

Factor analytic studies of measures of rigidity have shown that the rigidity construct has at least 3 major dimensions (Schaie & Parham, 1975): (1) pyschomotor speed (rigid persons have difficulty making rapid cognitive responses involving motoric behaviors); (2) motor-cognitive rigidity (rigid persons show greater interference when the conditions for a motor-cognitive response are altered or reversed); and (3) personality-perceptual or attitudinal rigidity (rigid persons express attitudes that reflect difficulties in dealing with ambiguous situations and reluctance to respond flexibly under changing circumstances).

Because of the substantial correlation of rigidity with measures of intelligence, it has sometimes been questioned whether the above dimensions might be no more than alternate measures of established intelligence dimensions. However, when measures of the rigidity dimensions were factored together with measures of 6 major ability dimensions, they retained their distinct status (Schaie, Dutta, & Willis, 1991).

The 3 rigidity dimensions have been investigated both cross-sectionally and longitudinally over the age range from 22 to 88 years (Schaie, 1996). Longitudinal findings suggest that psychomotor speed increases through young adulthood and middle age and peaks at age 60, followed by a sharp decline. Motor-cognitive rigidity declines slightly until age 60, with a moderate increase thereafter. Attitudinal rigidity decreases slightly until early old age and increases thereafter. Substantial positive cohort differences in rigidity have also been noted, with more recent cohorts showing increased psychomotor speed and lower rigidity. However, there has been a modest increase in attitudinal rigidity in the trailing edge baby boomer cohorts. High scores in psychomotor speed and low scores on the rigidity factors in mid-life have been found to predict high levels of intellectual functioning in old age (Schaie, 1996, 2000). Individuals' experience of complex work environments and other stimulating environmental conditions have been found to be predictive of low levels of rigidity (Schooler, Mulatu, & Oates, 1999).

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See also
Personality

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RURAL ELDERS

One in four older adults in the United States lives in a community of fewer than 2,500 residents, and rural areas characteristically have higher proportions of older persons than do urban areas. Yet Youman's (1967) study of *older rural Americans* and the unique characteristics, needs, and concerns of this population went largely unnoticed. By the mid-1990s increasing concern with the circumstances of rural older persons was reflected by the publication of several volumes on the topic (Bull, 1993; Coward & Krout, 1998; Gesler, Rabiner, & DeFriese, 1998; Krout, 1994).

In the past half-century, rural older populations have changed. Older adults who have aged in place are now complemented by aging individuals who were part of an urban exodus—the "back to the land" movement of the 1970s, as well as those lifelong urban residents who decided to retire to the country in search of a Rockwellian image of rural life. Rural America also has changed: less than 4% of rural residents are involved in farming as their primary source of income. *Rural residential mobility* and population turnover is increasing, as more and more rural settlements become "bedroom communities" for urban centers and their populations become more ethnically and socially diverse. New forms of economic activity (prisons, hazardous waste facilities, factory outlet complexes, recreation sites and retirement communities) are assuming increasing prominence in new *rural economies* transformed by telecommuting, the Internet, and the emergence of distance learning and telemedicine. Rural services are increasingly consolidated within fewer settlements, and smaller communities have more limited service outlets within an increasingly dynamic rural landscape.

Socioeconomic Status

Despite increasing diversity in the older rural population, the *income levels of rural older adults* remain lower than those in urban and metropolitan areas, and poverty levels are higher, with the nonmetropolitan-metropolitan poverty gap increasing with age (Rogers, 2002). Reversing a trend that occurred from the 1960s up until the 1990s, in some areas income disparities are actually increasing, particularly for older women (Rowles & Johansson, 1993). Rural older Americans are more likely to be living in substandard housing and to be transportation disadvantaged than their urban counterparts. In spite of such objective disadvantage, rural elderly report comparable levels of subjective well-being to those who reside in urban areas. The explanation for this may lie in *compensating characteristics of rural residence*, including high levels of home ownership, strong place attachment resulting from lengthy residence, and access to rides, practical help, and social support from friends and neighbors.

Sociocultural Characteristics

Stereotypes of rural older persons immersed in supportive family networks have been questioned by research acknowledging the increased geographical dispersion of families and the growing prevalence of care from a distance. While some rural communities are still characterized by strong community-based intergenerational social support of older adults and continuing expectations of such support, with the passing of each generation, changing values are