Forgetful? Demented? Maybe you’re just stereotyped.

Introduction

- Commonly-held stereotypes about memory and aging endanger older adults, (Hummert, 2011; Kie et al., 2005)
- E.g., beliefs that aging equates to memory decline and that older adults are forgetful or demented.
- Ageism: prejudiced thinking and biased towards a person just because of their age (Nelson, 2012)
- Age-based stereotype threat (ABST) can impair older adults’ memory performance
  - Underperform compared to true ability due to concerns about confirming stereotypes (Lamont et al., 2015)
  - May lead to false positive diagnoses of mild cognitive impairment or dementia (Mazerolle et al., 2017)
  - ABST magnified when individuals identify strongly with their group and highly value the skill (Hess, 2006)
- Theorized to operate via increased anxiety and level of confidence (self-efficacy) (Chasteen et al., 2005; Hess, 2006)

Research Aims

Aim 1: Test the impact of an age-based stereotype threat manipulation (replication of Mazerolle et al., 2016)
- We hypothesize that ABST (high vs. null threat instruction conditions) will (a) decrease memory performance, (b) increase anxiety, (c) decrease confidence in older adults.

Aim 2: Evaluate whether intergenerational contact “protects” older adults from ABST.
- We hypothesize that participation in an intergenerational discussion group will moderate the effects of the ABST manipulation: older adults who participate in the discussion groups will not demonstrate the same ABST impairments expected for older adults who do not participate in the discussion groups.

Methods

Study Design

- Experimental, between groups; 2 threat (high, null) x 2 discussion groups (with, without)

Participants

- N = 60: Male and female Osher Lifelong Learning members, 50 + years old
- Community-dwelling adults from the San Joaquin County area
- Intergenerational Discussions Exploring Aging (IDEA) - intergenerational discussion groups where university students and lifelong learning members discuss topics about adulthood and aging.

Threat condition: High vs. null instructions
(Mazerolle et al., 2017)

HIGH THREAT INSTRUCTIONS
Both younger adults and older adults are taking part in this study. The first activity is a memory test – you will study pairs of names and occupations. You must perform as well as each other on this test. Please indicate your date of birth on your instructions sheet.

NULL THREAT INSTRUCTIONS
Both younger adults and older adults are taking part in this study. This task is age-different. That means there is typically no difference in how well younger and older adults do. Please indicate your date of birth on your instructions sheet.

Discussion groups condition:
- Lifelong learning members met with undergraduate students for 3 1-hour meetings
- Discussed issues about adulthood and aging
- Completed related magazine readings

Anxiety: Task-Related Anxiety
(Abrams et al., 2004)
- Self-report of level of anxiety felt during the memory task using scale from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much
- 8 ratings, e.g., tense, jittery, calm

Measures

Memory (Name-Occupation Task): Strickland-Hughes, 2017
- Encode (6 min.) and recall (4 min.) 30 pairs of occupations and names on cards
- Percent correctly recalled (0 – 100%)

Expected Threat x Discussion Interaction for Memory Performance & Memory Self Efficacy

Discussion

- Current stage: IRB approval received April 23, 2018
- Importance of awareness of age-based stereotype threats considering prevalence and impact on cognition
- Age-based stereotype threats can decrease not only memory performance but confidence as well and aid in the increase of anxiety.
- Limitations: Self-selection into discussion groups (possible confounds); convenience sample of lifelong learning members who are generally highly educated and healthy (external validity)
- Future Research: Test mediation of ABST effect on memory through anxiety and beliefs; develop and test interventions to counter-act stereotype effects.

Presented for PURCC Spring 2018

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