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Personal beliefs and reactions to age and memory threat in everyday materials

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Introduction

✦ Predominantly negative stereotypes about old age pose threat for older persons

- ◆ Self-held age stereotypes longitudinally predict outcomes like well-being and health
- ◆ When primed with negative age stereotypes, old (but not young), perform worse on memory tasks

✦ Impact of stereotype effects limited or magnified by individual and environmental factors

- ◆ Older adults self-beliefs (e.g., subjective age) may moderate negative effects
- ◆ Implicitly threatening situations (e.g., subliminal presentation) may be more influential than explicitly threatening situations (e.g., news article), especially for unconscious and automatic effects
 - Stereotype effects unconscious and automatic
 - Ability to regulate response to obvious or blatant stereotype presentations

✦ "Real-world" stereotype presentations?

Methods, cont.

Stereotype Manipulation: Comics rating, word search, word jumbles; 2 versions for ST and 2 for CTL conditions;



Rated 6 comics (1 age, 1 memory, 1 both, 3 control) for humor, accuracy, and nice vs. mean

Q	W	E	A	K	T	L	T	V	F
W	D	I	A	E	P	E	R	R	C
O	X	E	I	L	E	X	A	J	O
L	Z	X	M	E	N	G	G	U	N
L	E	Y	L	E	I	O	X	M	F
I	L	B	F	L	N	F	L	H	U
P	A	N	E	O	C	T	Q	Z	S
T	O	I	P	A	I	O	I	X	E
Y	A	A	V	E	N	U	E	A	D
R	K	L	A	R	E	T	T	I	B

AVENUE BITTER CONFUSED
DEMENTIA FRAGILE INEPT
PILLOW TABLE WEAK

Instructions: For this puzzle, first solve the jumbled words. Then, use the circled letters from your answers to fill in the surprise answer at the end. The surprise answer is suggested by the cartoon.

TAREF
TROOGF
MMEARH
ISRONE
NEDIELCD

Have you found my father's watch yet? When all I happen to do that I've got work, chores, and too much to do.

HE NEEDED TO LOOK FOR THE MISSING WATCH, BUT HE COULDN'T.

A: THE

Research Aims

Aim 1 Determine impact of everyday age and memory stereotype presentations via comparison of outcomes for stereotype condition (ST) and control condition (CTL).

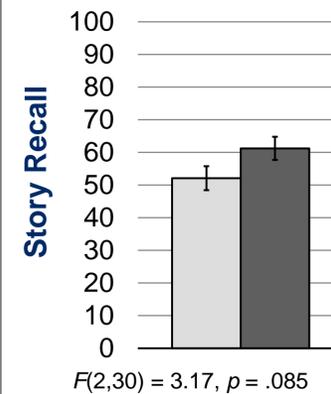
- ◆ Story recall performance. Expect ST < CTL.
- ◆ Proportional subjective age. Expect ST > CTL.
- ◆ General memory evaluation. Expect ST < CTL.
- ◆ Task anxiety during story recall. Expect ST > CTL.

Aim 2 Explore impact on stereotype effects of stereotype awareness. Expect greater susceptibility to stereotype effects for adults who are not aware of the stereotype presentation.

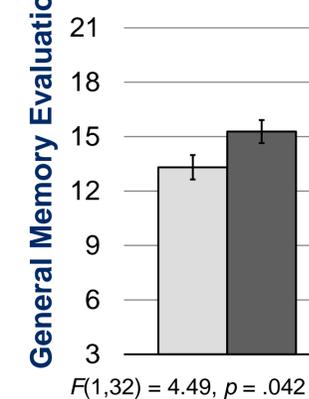
Results

Aim 1 Compared story recall performance, proportional subjective age, general memory evaluation, and memory anxiety between ST and CTL conditions (ANOVAs).

Better story recall for ST (age covaried, trend)



Better memory beliefs for ST



Error bars = SE.

Aim 2 Compared same outcomes for ST participations who were aware (n = 11) and were not aware (n = 7) of the stereotype manipulation (independent sample t-tests).

- ◆ Greater memory beliefs for stereotype aware group (trend), $F(1,16) = 3.09, p = .098$.
- ◆ No other differences ($ps > .10$)

Characteristics related to stereotype awareness:

- ◆ Aware group reported more general memory-related anxiety before stereotype manipulation, $F(1,16) = 5.73, p = .029$
- ◆ Aware group reported higher level of general perceived threat from experimental situation (trend), $F(1,16) = 3.49, p = .080$

Legend CTL ST

Methods

Participants (N = 34): healthy, community-dwelling adults over age 50 (range: 50 – 88 yrs.)

- ◆ **ST:** n = 18, age M = 64 yrs., SD = 10 yrs., 78% female, yrs. of education M = 16, SD = 3
- ◆ **CTL:** n = 16, age M = 61 yrs., SD = 10 yrs., 63% female, yrs. of education M = 17, SD = 3

Measures

- ◆ **Story recall performance:** Verbatim recall of 1-paragraph, 8-sentences story, two structurally equivalent versions; word count
- ◆ **Proportional subjective age:** Percentage of one's life that s/he feels younger/older than their chronological age, using mean of five subjective age responses (e.g., *At this moment, how old do you feel?*); (Subjective Age / Chronological Age) - 1
- ◆ **General memory evaluation:** Global beliefs about memory (e.g., *How do you think your memory compares with most other people your age?*); sum of 3 items on 7-pt. scales (range: 3 – 21); $\alpha = .67$
- ◆ **Task anxiety during story recall:** Subjective rating of anxiety; sum of 8 ratings (e.g., *Confident, Under pressure*) from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much (range: 8 – 56); $\alpha = .68$
- ◆ **Additional measures:** Assessment of perceived threat; a priori perceived mastery (general), general attitudes towards aging, and memory-related anxiety; check of stereotype awareness

Discussion

After exposure, 1) the stereotype group had higher story recall scores, and 2) the "aware" group showed the lowest perceived memory threat and the highest general memory evaluation.

- ◆ Those who noticed the stereotypes counteracted their influence
- ◆ Effects may have operated via pathways outside of anxiety or self-stereotyping, such as self-efficacy
- ◆ Focusing on how to train stereotype awareness and response useful in future research
- ◆ Recommend replications with (1) manipulation of stereotype awareness, (2) larger, more diverse samples, and (3) identification of personal beliefs that moderate stereotype effects but may be modifiable via intervention