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Intergenerational Intervention to Combat Age-Based Stereotype Threat and Promote Self-Regulation

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Introduction

Age-based stereotype threat (ABST) can impair older adults' memory

- Underperform compared to true ability due to concerns about confirming stereotypes (Rodríguez & Naveh-Benjamin, 2018; Lamont et al., 2015; Nelson, 2012)
- May lead to false positive diagnoses of mild cognitive impairment (Mazerolle et al., 2017)
- Magnified when individuals identify strongly with group and moderated by self-perceptions of aging (Barber & Mather, 2013; Fernández-Ballesteros, Blancho, & Huiz, 2014; Steele, 1992)
- Theorized to operate via increased anxiety and reduced self-efficacy (Chasteen et al., 2008; Hess, 2006)

Participation in intergenerational discussion groups typically focused on aging may promote more positive age attitudes or inoculate against ABST

Chen, Joyce, Harwood, & Xiang, 2017; Gagliardi et al., 2014; Wong & Gallo, 2016

Methods

Study Design: 2 ABST condition (between: High, Null) × 2 intergenerational discussion group participation (between: Yes, No) mixed factorial

Participants (N = 21): 55 to 86 yrs. old (M = 75.43, SD = 7.72 yrs.)
- 90% female, 80% Caucasian, highly educated (M = 17.9 yrs., SD = 3.2 yrs.)
- Healthy (M = 8.2, SD = 1.3, 1 = poor to 10 = excellent) and community-dwelling

ABST Condition: Random assignment to high threat (n = 9) or null threat (n = 12)

- 3 90-min. semi-structured discussion groups with university students (n = 4-5)
- Topics centered on adult development and aging with assigned reading

Intergenerational Discussion Groups: Self-selected to participate (n = 13)

- Memory-occupation association memory: 30 occupation-name pairs, 6 min. encode, 4 min. recall, % names correct at immediate recall

Task-related anxiety: Retrospective self-report level anxiety during memory task, mean of 8 ratings (e.g., tense, jittery), 1 = not at all to 7 = very much

Aging attitudes and beliefs: Multiple survey measures, including self-relevant (e.g., subjective age, attitudes towards own aging) and general attitudes (e.g., implicit ratings of traits of older adults) (Maher & Simons, 2001; Strickland-Hughes et al., 2018; Schwartz, 1986; Wohl & Bigler, 1986)

Memory self-efficacy: General memory evaluation and task-specific (Chasteen et al., 2005; West, DARK-Frostemon, & Bopp, 2009)
- Health and demographics and other beliefs (e.g., future time perspective)

Research Aims

Aim 1: Replication of ABST manipulation (Mazerolle et al., 2015)
- Poorer memory performance for high threat than null threat instruction conditions

Aim 2: Test moderators of ABST
- Greater ABST effect expected for higher task-related anxiety
- Greater ABST effect expected for greater identification with age group
- Reduced ABST effect expected for higher task-specific self-efficacy
- Reduced ABST effect expected for participants in intergenerational discussions

Explore: Correlates of age and memory beliefs and participation in the intergenerational discussion groups

Results

Aim 1: Worse memory for high threat (M = 17%, SD = 19%) than null threat (M = 35%, SD = 24%)

Aim 2: Worse memory performance for discussion (M = 19%, SD = 16%) than no discussion (M = 42%, SD = 27%). No threat × discussion interaction.

ABST not moderated by self-efficacy, task-related anxiety, or aging beliefs.

Explore:
- Memory self-efficacy related to memory, r = .53, p = .01, subjective age, r = .43, p = .01, and future time perspective, p = .47, p = .03
- General aging attitudes related to vision, r = .78, p < .001, hearing, r = .72, p < .001, and health, r = .56, p < .001, but not discussion groups

Discussion

- Replication of ABST effect with associative memory task, no moderation effects
- Worse performance for intergenerational discussion group participants and no benefits to age-related beliefs; possible delayed effect, biased sample, or reactivity

“Successful” aging related to more positive general aging beliefs; possible self

Limitations: Sample selectivity; self-selection to intergenerational discussions; post-test only design; data collection on-going

Next steps: Experimental pre-post design to test moderation of ABST by training

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