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Socializing more linked with better aging attitudes

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Introduction

Motives and goals that direct activity choices change across adulthood.

- ◆ The Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) suggests that we move from future-related goals to present-related goals as we age (Carstensen, 2006)
- ◆ Generativity increases in aging -- older adults are motivated to “give back” to younger generations and the community (Erikson, 1950)

Intergenerational social engagement may improve aging attitudes.

- ◆ Research shows that intergenerational social engagement may improve aging attitudes in early life, but the benefits to attitudes of older persons is less clear (Gaggioli et al., 2014)

Awareness of age-related changes (AARC) could influence aging attitudes.

- ◆ Older adults report negative attitudes about old age in general and about their own aging (Strickland-Hughes et al., 2016)

Purpose of the Present Research: Test whether actively social lifestyles (e.g., engaging in intergenerational discussions) contribute to being more conscious of gains in aging.

Methods

Study Design

Correlational and quasi-experimental; between-groups comparison (discussion group, no discussion group)

Participants (N = 32)

Participants aged 50+ from San Joaquin County area (56-86 years old, $M=74.75$, $SD=7.56$; 88% white; 88% female)

Procedures

Baseline Survey Packet. Answer questions about background, health, aging attitudes, and activities; online or paper; 30 min.

In-person assessment. Small groups of 1-4 participants; complete surveys and memory test; both paper and computer; 60 min.

Measures

Awareness of Age-Related Change

Awareness of Age-Related Change (AARC): Subjective aging experiences and the extent of awareness of gains and losses related to the health and physical functioning and cognitive domains on a scale from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much* (Diehl and Walt, 2010)

Cognitive gains: *I have more foresight; I have become wiser.*

Cognitive losses: *I am slower in my thinking; I am more forgetful.*

Health & physical items: *I have less energy; My body needs rest more often.*

Lifestyle Activities

Activities Questionnaire: Rating of frequency of participation in private and public social activities, e.g., *I visited relatives, friends, or neighbors and I attend organized social events*, on a scale from 1 = *never* to 9 = *daily*; Sum score of 22 responses (range: 22-198) (Jopp & Hertzog, 2010)

Intergenerational Experiences

Frequency x Quality of Contact with Younger Adults: Rating of frequency and quality of interactions with younger adults on a 5-point scale. Product of the ratings for a frequency score weighted by quality (Strickland-Hughes & West, 2015)

Intergenerational Discussion: Participation in 3 1-hour discussion groups with university students and assigned readings; topics covered issues relevant to adulthood and aging



Research Questions

1. Does intergenerational social engagement relate to aging attitudes?

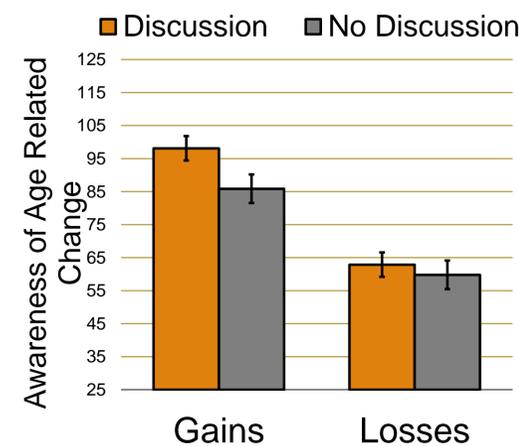
H1: More positive and frequent intergenerational contact will correlate to more positive perceptions of aging.

2. Does participation in intergenerational discussions relate to awareness of age-related gains?

H2: More social interaction will correlate with awareness of more age-related gains.

Results

Intergenerational Contact and AARC



- ◆ Positive correlation between frequency x quality of interaction with younger adults and positive aging attitudes
- ◆ Significant interaction found: more positive and less negative aging attitudes for discussion group participants
- ◆ Positive correlation found between positive aging attitudes and social engagement

Correlations between social engagement and awareness of age-related change

Table 1

	All AARC Gains	All AARC Losses	Cognitive Gains	Cognitive Losses	Health & Physical Gains	Health & Physical Losses
Intergenerational Discussion	.367	.096	.395	.001	.411	.176
Frequent x Quality of Contact	.301	-.008	.296	.109	.152	.065
Public Social Engagement	.243	-.349	.095	-.321	.188	-.345
Private Social Engagement	.108	-.433	.061	-.168	.056	-.291

All values in bold orange print are significant ($P < 0.05$); One-tailed test

- ◆ Strong and positive relationship found for engaging in intergenerational discussions and health & physical gains
- ◆ Positive correlation between intergenerational discussions and cognitive gains
- ◆ Frequency x quality of contact with younger adults positively correlated with cognitive gains

Discussion

- ◆ Our findings suggest that more social interaction, such as intergenerational discussion groups, may lead to an increase of awareness of age-related gains and not bring much awareness to age-related losses.
- ◆ Additionally, more frequent and better quality interactions with younger adults may also increase awareness of age-related gains, specifically in the cognitive domain.
- ◆ Overall, we find support that an actively social lifestyle may have a significant influence on being more conscious of positive age-related changes in the cognitive and health & physical domains.
- ◆ **Limitations:** Self-selection of participants into discussion groups; convenience sampling of lifelong learning members that are relatively high-educated and are primarily white females; findings are correlational, not causal; the present study is ongoing.