Socializing more linked with better aging attitudes

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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 (DiGiosia et al., 2016).
- 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.

**Introduction**

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.

**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 (56-88 years old, M=74.75, SD=7.56; 88% white; 88% female).

**Procedures**

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

**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 (Baird and Walt, 2010).

**Twelve domains:**
- Physical and mental health
- Physical functioning
- Cognitive gains
- Cognitive losses
- Health-related gains
- Health-related losses
- Social and emotional gains
- Social and emotional losses
- Health and physical items
- Health and physical functioning
- Cognitive gains
- Cognitive losses

**Correlations between social engagement and awareness of age-related change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All AARC Gains</th>
<th>All AARC Losses</th>
<th>Cognitive Gains</th>
<th>Cognitive Losses</th>
<th>Health &amp; Physical Gains</th>
<th>Health &amp; Physical Losses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intergenerational Discussion</strong></td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.395</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequent x Quality of Contact</strong></td>
<td>.301</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Social Engagement</strong></td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>-.349</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>-.321</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Social Engagement</strong></td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>-.433</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>-.168</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Results**

- 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.

**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.

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