Are you threatening me? Responses to age-based stereotype threat

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Are You Threatening Me? Responses to Age-Based Stereotype Threat

Sebastian Getman & Dr. Carla Strickland-Hughes
Department of Psychology

INTRODUCTION

- Commonly-held stereotypes about memory and aging are pervasive to older adults (Munson, 2011; Kit, et al., 2005).

- E.g., beliefs that aging equates to cognitive decline and that older adults are forgetful or demented.

- Negative attitudes pose serious risks, e.g., increased rate of heart attack, worse memory performance, reduced longevity (Kirst, et al., 2005).

- Age-based stereotype threat (ABST) can impair older adults’ memory performance.

- Concerns about confirming stereotype can lead to underperformance from true ability (Larson et al., 2013).

- Can lead to false positive diagnoses of mild cognitive impairment or dementia (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

- Theorized to be due to increased anxiety and level of confidence (self-efficacy) (Chauvin et al., 2005; Hez, 2006).

- Informing older adults about younger participants decreased older adult’s memory performance (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

METHODS

Study Design

- Experimental, between groups: 2 threat groups: High Threat (n=14), Null Threat (n=15)

Participants

- n = 29: 56-86 years old, M=74.69, SD=7.55, 90% female, 86% white, 49% completed Bachelor’s degree

- Community-dwelling adults from San Joaquin County area

Measures

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

Anxiety: Task-Related Anxiety (Shiviano, 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

Subjective Age: How old a person feels in years (Kastenbaum et al., 1972; Strickland-Hughes, 2018)
- Mean score from 5 items expressed as a proportion of one’s chronological age
- (Subjective Age – Chronological Age) x 100

Task-Specific Self-Efficacy: Confidence in ability to do the name-occupation memory task (Chauvin et al., 2005)
- 5 items; e.g., I can handle this task; I am unsure if I have the ability to do well on this task
- Sum of 5 ratings using a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (range: 5-25)
- Higher score indicates greater confidence

Memory Evaluation: Assess global beliefs about memory (Strickland-Hughes et al., 2016)
- Evaluation of recent memory performance, comparison of one’s memory to same-aged peers, and overall satisfaction with recent memory performance
- Sum of 4 questions on 7-point Likert scale (e.g., 1= very unsatisfied to 7= very satisfied)
- Higher scores: greater perceived general memory ability

Perceived Stereotype Threat: (Chauvin et al., 2005)
- Measures participants levels of perceived stereotype threat & is used as a manipulation check
- 5 statements on 5-point Likert scale

RESULTS

Aim 1: ABST Replication

As expected, memory performance was worse for participants randomly assigned to high threat (M=19%, SD=18%) than participants randomly assigned to null threat (M=32%, SD=22%), t(27)=1.81, p=0.041.

Aim 2: Mechanisms

- Found no relationship between being in the high threat condition & feeling more threatened, having less anxiety, more negative evaluations of memory, nor less memory self-efficacy

- Higher perceived threat related to less task anxiety, feeling older, and lower self-efficacy

High vs. Null Stereotype Threat Condition Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Null</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory Performance</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Age</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Anxiety</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Stereotype Threat</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High vs. Low Perceived Stereotype Threat Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory Performance</td>
<td>1.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective Age</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
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</table>

DISCUSSION

- Replicated ABST manipulation (memory)

- Higher perceived threat related to lower anxiety and lower memory self-efficacy

- Threat effects may be due to participant characteristics (i.e. less prone to anxiety, more positive attitudes)

- Trend towards feeling older under higher stereotype threat (both experimentally-assign and perceived)

- Small sample size, but data collection on-going

- Selective sample (e.g., majority white female; members of lifelong learning; high level education); recommend replication with diverse samples

- Long-term goal: Reliably produce ABST, and identify key mechanisms, in order to design and test interventions to promote ABST resilience

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