UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

Activities Adjusting Attitudes: The Relationship between Lifestyle and Aging Attitudes

Lluvia Garnica, Sebastian Getman, Alexis Gutierrez, & Carla Strickland-Hughes, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology

Introduction

Negative attitudes about old age in general are pervasive (Hummert, 2011; Kite & Stockdate, 2005)

◆ In general, negative stereotypes about old age become self-relevant once individuals identify as old (Levy, 2009)

◆ Negative attitudes pose serious risks, e.g., increased rate of heart attack, worse memory performance, reduced longevity (Levy et al., 2002)

Knowledge about social groups and active engagement help break stereotypes promote healthier lives

◆ Increased knowledge and awareness about a social group may reduce reliance on the stereotypes and encourage more realistic beliefs (Hess, 2006)

◆ Engaged lifestyles are cognitively stimulating or physically active may promote healthier aging (Hertzog et al., 2008)

Purpose of the Present Research: **Test whether engaged lifestyles and positive intergenerational contact relate to more positive and less negative aging attitudes (about aging in general and self-perceptions of one's own aging)**

Research Questions

1. Does intergenerational contact improve older adults' aging attitudes?

◆ **H1a:** More positive and frequent intergenerational contact will be related to more positive perceptions of aging

◆ **H1b:** Participants who engage in intergenerational discussion groups focused on topics related to aging will have more positive self-referential and general aging attitudes, than participants who did not engage in the discussion groups.

2. Does greater participation in lifestyle activities relate to more positive aging attitudes?

◆ **H2a:** A more frequent participation lifelong learning classes and activities will be related to more positive general and self-referential attitudes toward aging.

◆ **H2b:** Greater participation in social activities will be related to more positive general and self-referential attitudes towards aging.

Methods

Study Design

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

Participants (*N* = 60)

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members aged 50+ from San Joaquin County area; $15 gift card

Procedures

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

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

Measures

Lifestyle Activities

◆ **Lifelong Learning Participation:** Report of duration of membership, typical time spent weekly on OLLI activities, and checklist of participation in specific activities, e.g., Lectures, Lunch and Learn events.

◆ **Activities Questionnaire Social Score (*Activities Questionnaire*):** Rating of frequency of participation in specific social activities, e.g., *I visit relatives, friends, or neighbors* and *I attend organized social events*, on a scale from 0 = *never* to 8 = *daily*; Sum score of 22 responses (range: 0-176) (Jopp & Hertzog, 2010)
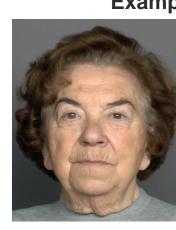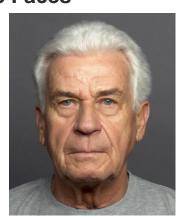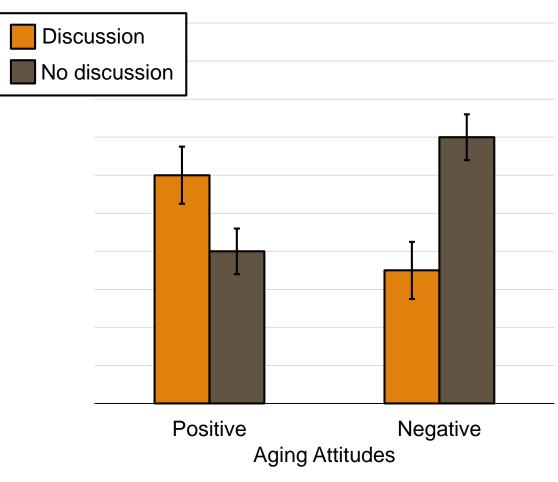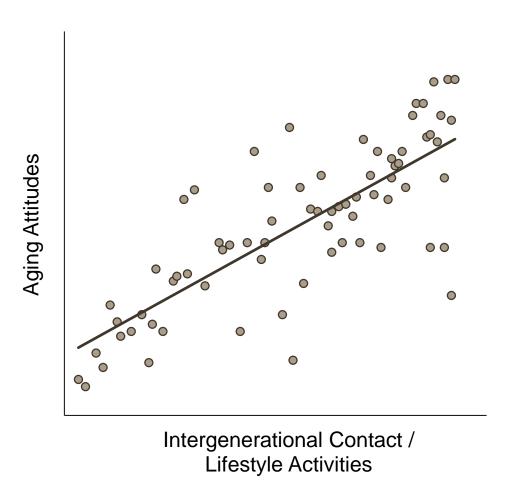

Intergenerational Experiences

◆ **Inclusion of Self in Community Scale:** Pictorial rating of closeness / connectedness between themselves and "younger adults (aged 18 to 30)" (range 1-7). (Mashek, 2007)

◆ **Contact With Younger Adults Form:** 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 Group:** Participation in 3 1-hour discussion groups with university students and assigned readings; topics covered issues relevant to adulthood and aging

General Aging Attitudes

◆ **Implicit Age Attitudes (*Traits of Older Adults*):** *What percentage of older adults do you think age __?* (Grühn, et al., 2011)
  ▪ 15 positive traits, e.g., generous, healthy, wise
  ▪ 15 negative traits, e.g., lonely, poor, senile

Example Faces

Self-Perceptions of Aging

◆ **Subjective age:** How old a person feels (in years). Mean score from 5 items expressed as a proportion of one's chronological age (Kastenbaum et al., 1972; Strickland-Hughes et al., 2016)

$$\frac{(\text{Subjective Age} - \text{Chronological Age})}{\text{Chronologicla Age}} \times 100$$

◆ **Aging Satisfaction (*Attitudes Towards Own Aging*):** Individuals' satisfaction with their own age. Sum of responses to 5 items on a 5-point scale (range: 5-25). Higher Score indicates greater satisfaction (Lawton, 1975)
  ▪ E.g., *Things keep getting worse as I get older.*

◆ **Awareness of Age-Related Change (AARC):** Subjective aging experiences and extent aware of *gains* and *losses* related to different domains (e.g., health and physical functioning); 50 items rated on a 5 point scale (Diehl& Wahl, 2010)

◆ **Ratings of Older Faces:** 8 neutrally-expressive older faces (4 male, 4 female), 7-point Likert-type scale (Ebner, Riediger, & Lindenberger, 2010; Strickland-Hughes & West, 2015)
  ▪ Warm, competent, likeable, physical health, memory ability
  ▪ 15 negative traits, e.g., lonely, poor, senile

Expected Results

RQ1: Intergenerational Contact and Attitudes

◆ Positive correlation expected between quality × frequency interaction with younger adults and positive aging attitudes

◆ Significant interaction expected: more positive and less negative aging attitudes for discussion group participants

◆ Similar pattern expected for self-perceptions and general attitudes

RQ2: Activities and Attitudes

◆ Positive correlation expected between positive aging attitudes and
  ▪ Engagement in social activities and positive aging attitudes
  ▪ Duration and frequency of participation in OLLI activities

◆ Similar pattern expected for self-perceptions and general attitudes

Discussion

◆ *Current status:* IRB approval received April 23, 2018; on-going recruitment of participants

◆ "Old age" special group because everyone transitions into the group; attitudes from early life become relevant for the self

◆ Importance of increased positive and decreased negative aging attitudes: bi-directional relationship between attitudes and behavior
  ▪ Negative self-beliefs and self-limiting behaviors
  ▪ Late life consequences of negative attitudes, e.g., increased rate of heart disease and stroke; poorer memory; reduced longevity

◆ Implications for interventions and programming design for senior centers and lifelong learning groups

◆ *Limitations:* Self-selection of participants into discussion group (possible confounds); convenience sample of OLLI members relatively healthy and educated (external validity); correlational, not causal, relationships

◆ *Future directions:* Design and test social intergenerational intervention to enhance aging attitudes held by younger and older adults

CONTACT: Lluvia Garnica, l_garnica@u.pacific.edu; Dr. Strickland-Hughes, cstricklandhughes@pacific.edu