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Future perspective and healthy lifestyle choices in adulthood

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Introduction

- ✦ **Making healthy lifestyle choices is important, regardless of age!** Finucane et al., 2005; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004; Mather, 2006; Mather, 2006; Mustafic & Freund, 2012; Nyberg et al., 2012
- ✦ Consequences of healthy choices may be more long-term for younger, but more immediate for older
- ✦ Healthy lifestyles not always adopted by either age group Hwang, 2010; Paulus, 2005
- ✦ **Future thinking is multidimensional and may vary according to one's place in the lifespan.**
- ✦ Older compared to younger adults perceive less time left in life, expect a less healthy future, but may see their health as more important Carstensen 2000, 2003; Comblain et al., 2005; Mustafic & Freund, 2012; Staudinger et al., 2003
- ✦ **How does one's sense of the future help or hinder healthy lifestyle choices?**
- ✦ One's place in the lifespan—and associated view of the future—should affect lifestyle choices Demiray & Bluck, 2013; Ebner et al., 2006
- ✦ Future perspective may constitute an age-differentiated influence on healthy choices

Research Aims

- Aim 1** Determine age group differences in current healthy lifestyle choices. Older compared to younger adults will make healthier choices.
- Aim 2** Identify age group differences in three types of future perspective. Older compared to younger adults will have less open global future time perspective [2A], less positive future health perspective [2B], and greater perceived importance of future health events [2C].
- Aim 3** Determine effects of three types of future perspective on healthy lifestyle choices and whether such effects are moderated by age. Healthy choices will be explained by more open global future time perspective (older only) [3A], more positive future health perspective (older only) [3B], and greater perceived future importance (younger and older) [3C].

Methods

Participants

- ✦ **Young:** $n = 78$, $M = 19.9$ yrs., $SD = 2.6$ yrs., range: 18 – 34 yrs., 53% female
- ✦ **Old:** $n = 49$, $M = 73.2$ yrs., $SD = 9.1$ yrs., range: 60 – 93 yrs., 54% female

Measures

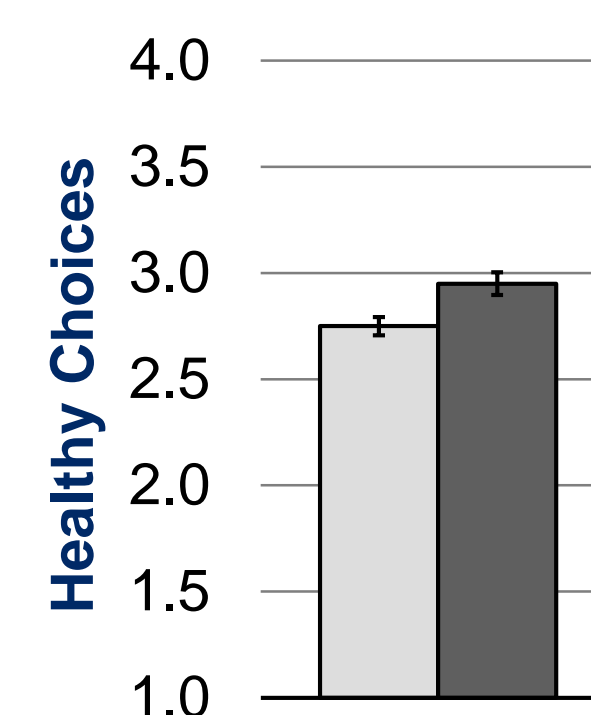
- ✦ **Healthy lifestyle choices***: Choice to engage in specific healthy lifestyle activities in next two weeks, assuming busy time period; mean of 16 choices, scale 1 = *not at all likely* to 4 = *very likely*
 - **Example activities for choices:** Visit with friends, eat fried food, stay active, rush through day
- ✦ **Global future time perspective (FTP)**: 10-item FTP; how open-ended and full of opportunity one perceives one's overall future; e.g., *Many opportunities still lie ahead of me.*; $\alpha = .93$ Carstensen & Lang, 1996
- ✦ **Future health perspective**: 3-items from MIDUS; perceived overall physical health, emotional health, and fitness level five years in the future; $\alpha = .80$ MacArthur & MacArthur, 1998; Staudinger et al., 2003
- ✦ **Perceived future importance***: Importance ratings, 16 specific future health-related events, $\alpha = .72$

* From *Healthy Lifestyle Choices Task*: mental time travel for specific lifestyle items before ratings

Results

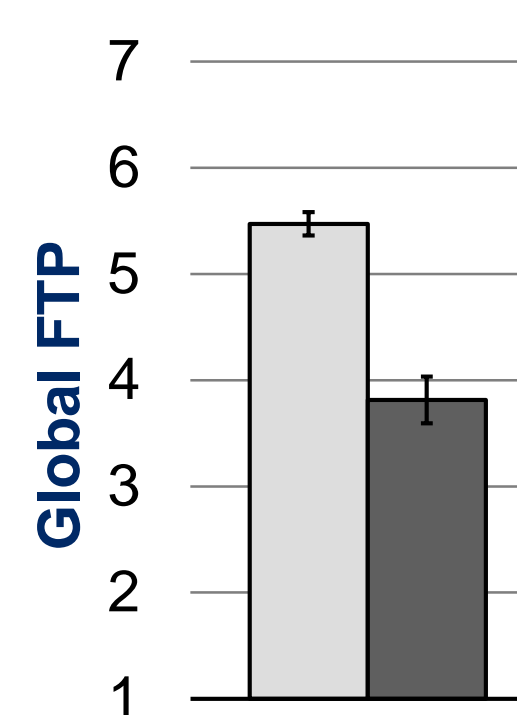
Aim 1

Old made healthier choices

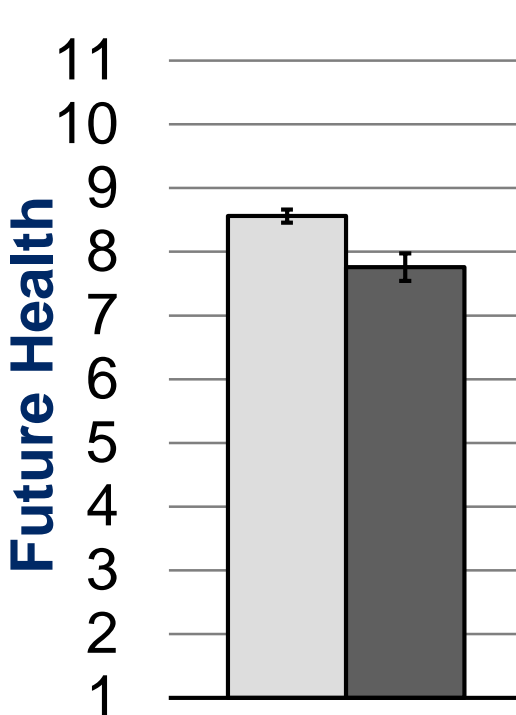


Aim 2

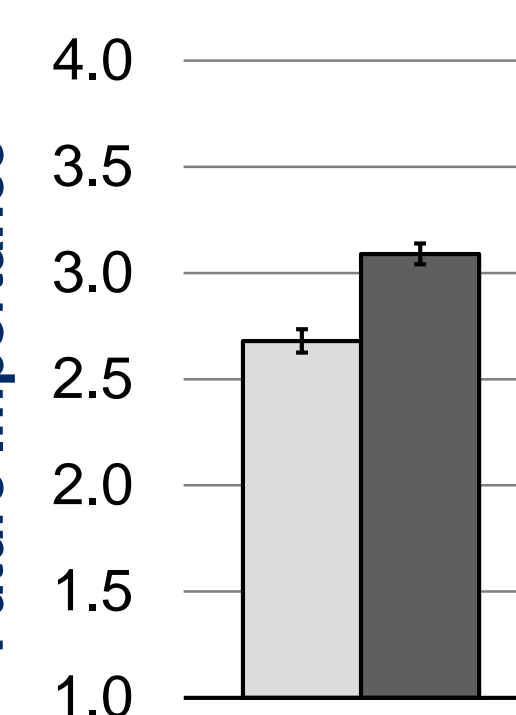
2A. Old reported less positive, open future



2B. Old expected worse future health



2C. Old rated future more important



Legend
 Young (light grey), Old (dark grey)
 All age differences significant, $p_s < .01$
 Error bars = SE.
 Y axis depicts possible range.

Aim 3

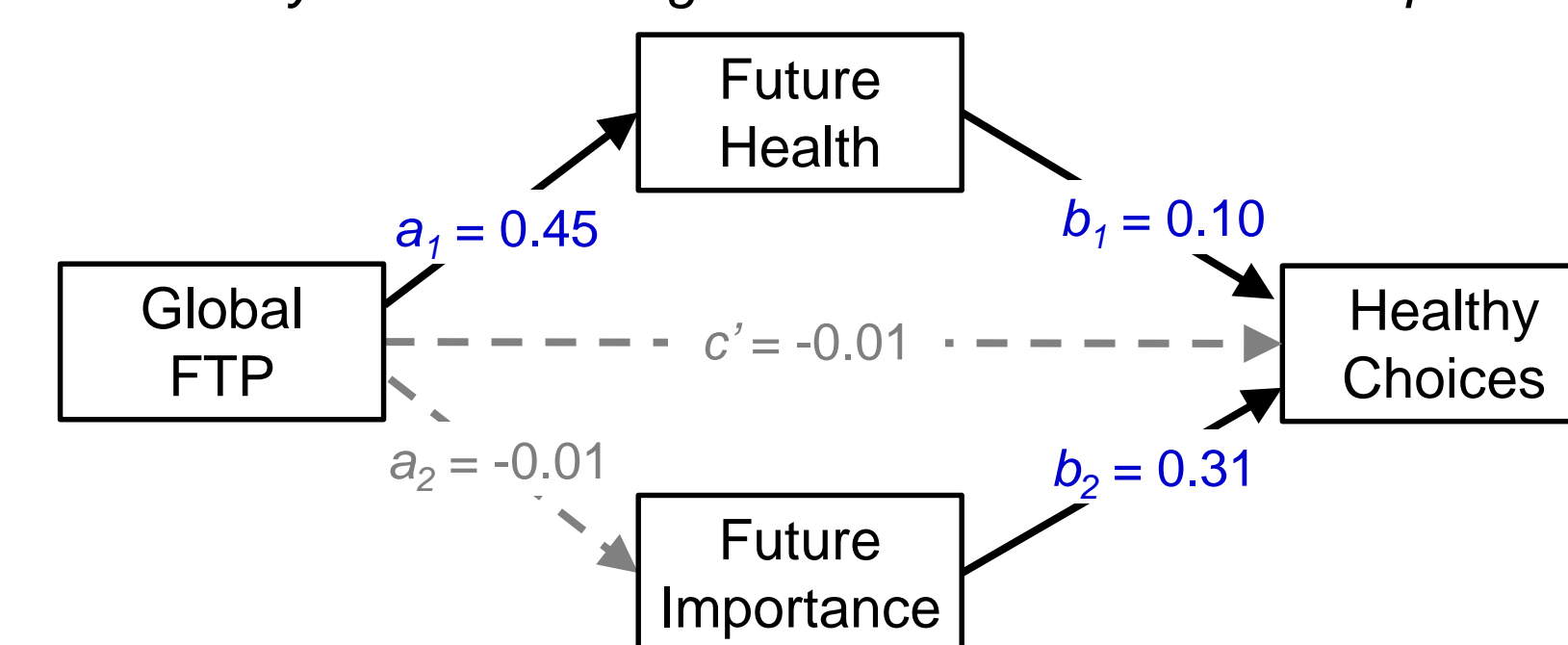
Multiple linear hierarchical regression predicting healthy choices

	B	SE B	β
(Constant)	1.01	.26	
Age	.28	.09	.35**
Global FTP	.05	.03	.16
Future Health	.12	.03	.36***
Future Importance	.18	.07	.23*
Age x Global FTP	.03	.06	.04
Age x Future Health	-.06	.06	-.08
Age x Future Importance	-.26	.18	-.12

$R^2 = .34$. Age = Age group (0 = young, 1 = old). Orthogonal residual centered interaction terms computed. Little et al., 2006
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

- 3A.** Direct effect of global FTP on healthy choices n.s. for both ages; but indirectly affected choices via future health
 - ✦ More positive global FTP → better future health → more healthy choices
- 3B.** More positive future health perspective related to greater tendency to make healthy choices for old and young
- 3C.** Greater perceived future importance related to greater tendency to make healthy choices for old and young

Multiple mediation model testing indirect effects of global FTP on healthy choices through future health and future importance



Unstandardized coefficients reported. Grey, dashed lines n.s. paths, $p_s > .05$; all other paths $p_s < .001$.

Discussion

Young and old differed in healthy lifestyle choices and multidimensional future perspective: Old make healthier choices, perceive a less expansive future, and anticipate worse health, but view future as more important.

Future perspective was linked to everyday healthy lifestyle choices in adulthood: Important beliefs for self-regulation of healthy choices are *I can do this—I expect positive health!* and *This is important!*

Age-differential intervention approaches recommended: Younger adults' healthy choices may benefit from their positive perception of future health, but they need to see future as more important. Older adults' healthy choices may benefit from the great importance they place on specific future events, but need more positive expectations.