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Ageism and Stereotype Threat

Equalit and Human Rights Commission

March 19th 2009
Defeating Ageism: Intergenerational Cohesion and Stereotypes

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This work was conducted with
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Sujata Ray, Andrew Harrop and Leslie Sopp (Age Concern England)
Sibila Marques, Luisa Lima (ISCTE), Genevieve Coudin (Paris V)
• Overview

• Stereotypes and their consequences for older people
• Theory-based way to counteract effects of stereotypes
• Survey and experimental evidence
• Conclusions
• Some Theoretical Anchors

• *Stereotype Content Model* – basic dimensions of stereotypes have detrimental impact in different ways for different groups

• *Intergroup Contact Theory* – friendship-based contact across group boundaries increases trust, mutual disclosure, and positive attitudes to groups *as a whole*

• *Common Ingroup Identity* – improved intergroup relationships when people can find a basis for shared identity across groups

• *Stereotype Threat* – Psychological response to stereotype that undermines self and group
The Consequences of Stereotypes

- Observation
- Inference
- Confirmation
- Stereotype
- Others
- Self

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Example:
A person prangs the car
Is the person 17 or 70?
Apply stereotype >> Infer cause

*Older >> Incompetent >> Doddery Driver*

*Younger >> Impetuous >> Inexperienced Driver*

Apply remedy

Older >>> Remove driving license for ever
Younger >>> Fine, more lessons
Dealing With Consequences of Stereotypes

Observation → Inference → Confirmation → Intervention

Stereotype

Others → Self

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In the past year how often has someone treated you unfairly because of your:
- Gender
- Age
- Religion
- Race or ethnic background
- Any disability
- Sexual orientation

Prevalence of discrimination in Britain (ACE 2004)
2006 data: Younger people would be better at...

- Being Creative
- Learning New Skills
- Taking Enough Exercise
- Using the Internet to Buy Something
- Taking Direction from a Supervisor
- Driving

2006 data: Older people would be better at...

- Understanding Other People’s Viewpoints
- Solving Crossword Puzzles
- Making Financial Decisions
- Being Polite
- Settling Arguments
- Healthy Diet

Typical 25 year olds: [Bars for younger respondents]
Typical 75 year olds: [Bars for older respondents]
### Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Warm</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Young</th>
<th>Old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Older People are

“Doddery (but Dear)”

Differences in ‘warmth’ and ‘competence’ stereotypes between older and younger people
Stuck for something to buy your dad?
Stuck for something to buy your dad? He’d love this, a phone he can actually use.

Keep it simple this Christmas. Vodafone Simply

Make your dad’s Christmas, get him a straightforward, hassle-free Vodafone Simply phone. Available now on prepay from just £50 in Vodafone Stores, or call 0800 068 4882, or visit vodafone.co.uk/simply

Make the most of now.
Tt is for tortoise

Tortoise plods as he creeps down the track.
But then so would you.
Is Intergenerational Contact a Problem?
Intergenerational Contact

Do you:
Have a close friend..
Have a friend...
Know at least one person...
Meet people...
Rarely or never meet people...

Who is over 70/under 30
Stereotype Threat

• Stereotypes create disadvantage

  – the ‘burden of suspicion’ that a negative stereotype about one’s group’s abilities may be confirmed

  • E.g. women worse at maths, Black students worse (than white) at maths, Asian students better at maths, gay men a ‘risk to children’.

  – Older people less competent?
Can Group-Based Stereotype Threat Be Reduced?

- Closer contact between generations may reduce the psychological distance between ‘old’ and ‘young’.

- In turn this may weaken the expected stereotypes and so reduce stereotype threat.
Looking ahead:

Contact with the over 70's and beliefs about their declining competence

% Agreeing Competence Declines with Age

Inter-generational Relationships

Remote

Close

Age of Respondent

16+ 25+ 35+ 45+ 55+ 65+
Looking back: Intergenerational Contact and Self-Stereotypes among the Over 70s

Evidence from the ACE Survey

70+ (n=278)
Cognitive Ability

• Experiment 1: Does intergenerational friendship ward off stereotypes?
  
  (Abrams, Eller, Bryant, *Psychology and Aging*, 2006)

• 97 participants over the age of 59

  – “see whether old people do perform more poorly on intellectual tasks than young people” (*threat*).

  • Vs

  – “see how people differ in their responses on different tasks” (*no threat*).
Effect of Stereotype Threat and Intergenerational Contact on Cognitive Performance

![Bar chart showing the effect of stereotype threat and intergenerational contact on cognitive performance. The x-axis represents Low Threat and High Threat scenarios, while the y-axis represents the performance index ranging from -1 to 1. The chart compares Less Positive Contact (blue) and More Positive Contact (red).]
Anxiety During Performance

- Low Threat: 2
- High Threat: 4

- Less Positive Contact
- More Positive Contact
Intergenerational Contact, Stereotype Threat and Intergenerational Attitudes

Tackling Age Discrimination Beyond the Workplace
For Older People, Positive Intergenerational Contact is Associated with:

- Reduced Negative Self-Stereotypes
- Reduced Negative Intergenerational Bias
- Reduced Threat-related Test Anxiety
- Improved Performance on Cognitive Tests
What Types of Intervention Can Help Prevent Stereotype Threat Effects?

- Focus on most positive personal trait?
- Abandon group membership?
- Increase time/reduce distraction?
- All require separation of person from their group or the testing situation
- **What can the person bring to the situation?**
- What is the role of grandchildren?
- Can we induce effects of contact without actual contact?
Experimental Evidence 2:


- Math performance
- The role of grandchildren
Contact with Grandchildren and Stereotype Threat

Threat x Contact interaction, $\beta = -0.50$, $t(45) = 4.42$, $p < .001$
Experimental Evidence 3:

- **Imagined contact**

- 84 participants over the age of 60 (mean = 72)

Either

- Control (Anxiety, Test – 24 items)
  - or
- Threat + Imagine an outdoor scene
  - or
- Threat + Imagine meeting, and ways of classifying, a young stranger
Imagined Contact, Stereotype Threat and Performance

- Control
- Threat + Scene
- Threat + Contact

Maths Performance
• How Intergenerational Contact Prevents Stereotype Threat Effects

Low Positive Contact → High Anxiety → Under Performance

High Positive Contact → Low Anxiety → True Performance

Threat
How Interventions Might Work

Observation → Inference → Confirmation

Stereotype → Contact → Intervention

Others → Self

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Conclusions

• Using survey evidence of social stereotypes provides a strong baseline for intervention tests

• Tests have to be based on well-justified hypotheses, derived from strong theory and prior evidence

• Tests need to use reliable and interpretable outcomes

• Results do not prescribe policy but show the possible reach and limits of interventions

• Results can stimulate new hypotheses and possible policy avenues