Defeating Ageism: Intergenerational Cohesion and Stereotypes

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• 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

Self

Others
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
- Stereotype
- Intervention
- Others
- Self
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)
25 year olds would be better at

- BEING CREATIVE
- LEARNING NEW SKILLS
- TAKING ENOUGH EXERCISE
- TAKING DIRECTION FROM A SUPERVISOR
- USING THE INTERNET TO BUY SOMETHING

75 year olds would be better at

- HEALTHY DIET
- SOLVING CROSSWORD PUZZLES
- MAKING FINANCIAL DECISIONS
- BEING POLITE
- SETTLING ARGUMENTS
- UNDERSTANDING OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWPOINTS

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

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

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

Ageism and Stereotype Threat

Equality and Human Rights Commission

March 19th 2009
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.
T 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

Remote
Close

Age of Respondent

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

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Age of Respondent
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

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

![Graph showing anxiety levels during performance with low and high threat conditions. The graph compares anxiety levels in less positive contact and more positive contact scenarios.](image-url)
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, $\beta = -.50$, $t (45) = 4.42$, $p < .001$
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Maths Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Scene</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Contact</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• How Intergenerational Contact Prevents Stereotype Threat Effects

Low Positive Contact → High Anxiety → Under Performance

High Positive Contact → Low Anxiety → True Performance

Threat

Under Performance → Low Positive Contact

High Positive Contact → High Anxiety → Under Performance
How Interventions Might Work

- Observation
- Inference
- Confirmation
- Contact
- Intervention
- Stereotype
- Self
- Others

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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