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Defeating Ageism: Intergenerational Cohesion and Stereotypes

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This work was conducted with
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Jacqui Bryant, Emily Fagg, Dmitri Provias, Lauren Bedford, Richard Crisp, Katerina Tasiopoulou, Tendayi Viki, (U of Kent)
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
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
Prevalence of discrimination in Britain (ACE 2004)

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

Experience of Prejudice in the Last Year on the Basis of Different Categories
25 year olds would be better at

- Driving
- Using the internet to buy something
- Taking direction from a supervisor
- Taking enough exercise
- Learning new skills
- Being creative

75 year olds would be better at

- Understanding other people's viewpoints
- Settling arguments
- Being polite
- Making financial decisions
- Solving crossword puzzles
- Healthy diet

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

% of respondents

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

% of respondents
## Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Warm</th>
<th>Cold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences in ‘warmth’ and ‘competence’ stereotypes between older and younger people

“Doddery (but Dear)”

Ageism and Stereotype Threat

Equality and Human Rights Commission

March 19th 2009
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Respondent</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16+</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

![Chart showing the effect of stereotype threat and intergenerational contact on cognitive performance. The chart compares performance index across low and high threat conditions with and without positive contact. The bar chart indicates that less positive contact leads to higher performance under low threat, while more positive contact leads to lower performance under high threat.](chart.png)
Anxiety During Performance

![Bar chart showing anxiety levels during performance. The chart compares low and high threat levels with less positive contact and more positive contact. The y-axis represents anxiety level, ranging from 1 to 5. The x-axis represents threat level (Low Threat and High Threat). The chart indicates higher anxiety levels during high threat with less positive contact.](chart.png)
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

- **Control**
- **Threat + Scene**
- **Threat + Contact**

Maths Performance

- Control: 16
- Threat + Scene: 10
- Threat + Contact: 13
• How Intergenerational Contact Prevents Stereotype Threat Effects

Low Positive Contact → High Anxiety → Under Performance

High Positive Contact

Threat

Low Positive Contact → High Anxiety → True Performance
How Interventions Might Work

- Observation
- Inference
- Confirmation
- Contact
- Intervention
- Self

Others

Stereotype

Centre for the Study of Group Processes

Ageism and Stereotype Threat

Equality and Human Rights Commission

March 19th 2009
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