

Can Ageism be reduced by service learning built in a lecture-based aging course?

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Outline

- Overview of ageism
- Psychological mechanisms behind ageism
- Interventions to reduce ageism
- The current study

Older Adults and the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **“The problem of older adults”** (Zhou et al., 2020; Fraser et al., 2020)
 - Media depicted COVID-19 to only impact older adults
 - Nursing home deaths – high mortality rate seen as normal
- **Social media and #Boomerremover** (Godfrey, 2020)
- **Lives of elderly are seen as unimportant**
- **The pandemic has exposed the preexisting problems**

What is ageism?

- **Like racism or sexism, but with respect to age**
 - Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination based on age (Butler, 1969)
 - Not a popular “ism”
- **Affects all people across cultures** (Lin & Bryant, 2009; Luo et al., 2013)
- **Prevalent among young adults** (Levy, 2009; Levy et al., 2013)

What gives rise to ageism?

The terror management theory (TMT):

- Features of older adults remind of human vulnerability
 - Knowledge that age eventually leads to death (Martens et al., 2004)
 - Death anxiety -> rejection of older people
 - Young adults rated older adults lower if they had similar characteristics (Martens et al., 2004)
 - Characteristics and abilities that contribute to self-esteem diminish with age

Terror Management Theory (TMT; Rosenblatt, Greenberg & Solomon, 1989)

What else explains ageism?

The social identity theory (SIT):

- We gain a sense of self-worth through group membership
 - **Ingroups and outgroups: “Us vs. Them”**
 - **Pervasive idea that older adults are of lower status**
 - **Outgroup bias**

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel and Turner, 1979)

Stereotype Embodiment Theory (SET)

- **Negative stereotypes about aging are internalized in younger years**
- **Ageism leads to self-ageism as we grow older**
- **Associated with negative consequences on health, cognitive functioning, and longevity** (Haslam et al., 2012; Kang and Chasteen, 2009; Levy et al., 2002, 2012; Westerhof et al., 2014; Wurm et al., 2007)
- **Adds to the importance of reducing ageism in young adults**

Stereotype embodiment theory (SET): Levy, 2009.

Interventions shown to Reduce Ageism

- Education about aging (Edward & Aldous, 1996)
- Reciprocal intergenerational interaction (Allan & Johnson, 2009; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)
- Combination may be most effective (Burnes et al., 2019)

Table 2. Student Paired *t* Test Results For Anxiety about Aging and Ageism

Variables	Pretest		Posttest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
AAS Total	48.18	9.66	47.48	9.56	.72	.48
AAS—FOOP	9.84	3.22	9.36	2.60	1.42	.16
AAS—PC	11.08	3.11	10.84	3.13	.63	.53
AAS—PHYS	14.84	3.21	14.40	2.82	1.11	.27
AAS—FOL	14.14	3.33	14.44	3.65	-.66	.51
FSA Total	62.56	11.69	60.20	10.53	2.11	.04
FSA—ANTIL	22.96	5.03	21.48	5.02	2.71	.01
FSA—DISCR	18.76	3.32	18.46	3.04	.82	.42
FSA—AVOID	20.84	4.75	20.26	4.39	1.07	.29

Note. AAS = Anxiety about Aging; FOOP = Fear of old people subscale; PC = Psychological concerns subscale; PHYS = Physical appearance subscale; FOL = Fear of loss subscale; FSA = Fraboni Scale of Ageism; ANTIL = Antilocution subscale; DISCR = Discrimination subscale; AVOID = Avoidance subscale.
N = 50.

Current Study

Participants:

- GVSU students enrolled in Perspectives on Aging (PSY366)
- Perception of age (FSA) was measured at beginning and end of semester
- N=32 participated in both tests

About the course:

- A comprehensive view of aging from the psychological, social-cultural, and evolutionary perspectives
- Six topics covered: 1. Cultural and historical views of aging; 2. Biological aging; 3. The evolving self; 4. Styles of adult thinking; 5. Creative endeavors of the elderly; and 6. The emergence of wisdom.
- Curated research articles and book chapters for in-depth understanding
- Strong focus on empirical research of aging

More about the course: Service-learning Project

- Groups of 3 students visited a local independent living center
- Intergenerational interaction through activities designed by students based on reviewing of previous research
- Samples of activities: Painting, making birdhouses, creating a playlist
- Final paper involving a review of relevant literature, a reflection of their experience, and a critical discussion of issues surrounding intergenerational integration.

Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA)

- To assess ageism using 29 statements
- Rated on a 1-4 scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree
- 3 subscales:
 - **Anticolution:** *“Many old people just live in the past”*
 - **Discrimination:** *“Old people don’t really need to use our community sports facilities”*
 - **Avoidance:** *“I personally would not want to spend much time with an old person”*

Findings

- Overall scores on FSA were significantly lower
- Significant decrease in all 3 subscales

Figure 1. Average Scores on FSA and Subscales

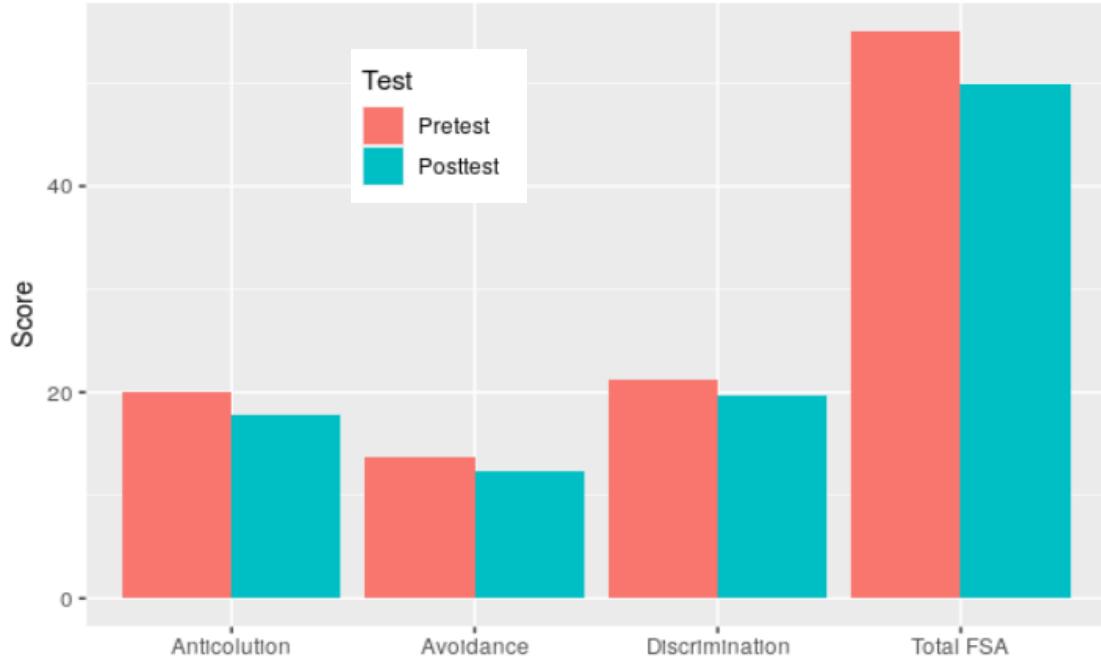


Table 1. Student Paired t-test results for Ageism (N = 50)

Scale	Pretest		Posttest		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Total FSA	55.05	1.39	49.9	1.35	3.88	.001**
Anticolonial	20.10	3.51	17.72	3.94	4.46	.000***
Discrimination	13.79	2.42	12.42	2.45	2.72	.011*
Avoidance	21.16	3.60	19.76	2.96	2.47	.019*

Notes. *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Discussion

- Preliminary evidence that a course on aging with an intergenerational interaction reduces ageism in college students
- Reduced perception of outgroup homogeneity
- Less misconceptions and increased acceptance and understanding of older adults
 - May feel more comfortable around older adults
- Students may have better interactions with elderly in careers
 - Medical and nursing

Limitations and future studies

- No control group
- Limited sample size
- Response bias
- Lack of behavioral measure
- Long-term effectiveness is still unknown
- The significant results of this study serve as a basis for future studies with larger sample sizes, control groups, and improved measurement

Thank You!

“Aging is an extraordinary process where you become the person you should have always been”

- David Bowie