INTRODUCTION

• Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) proposes that social goals are influenced by an individual’s temporal frameworks, with stage-of-life playing a critical role in the ranking and performance of specific goal-directed behaviors.

• Previous research has found that older individuals, as compared to younger, have a primary goal of emotion regulation, which is achieved by seeking positive emotional responses and avoiding negative responses (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Gross, Carstensen, Passupathi, Tsai, Skorpen, & Hsu, 1997).

• The present study extends this line of research to a social perception task: assessing individuals’ ability to perceive others in relatively complex ways. The Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ; Crocket, 1965) has been used to measure the number of psychological constructs people use to describe a “liked” and a “disliked” other. The RCQ is of interest because it has been shown to be correlated with the ability to communicate in person-centered ways.

HYPOTHESES

Based on previous research regarding SST, the following hypotheses are proposed:
1. An older, time-limited sample of residents from two geriatric care facilities will generate fewer psychological constructs than younger, time-expansive certified nurse aides (CNAs) on the RCQ.
2. Residents will generate as many psychological constructs as CNAs when describing a “liked” person. When describing a “disliked” person, residents will generate fewer psychological constructs.

METHODS

Participants: 23 CNAs and 23 residents were chosen from the 2 geriatric care facilities. Residents were randomly selected from a list of residents whose MSE was at least 22. Residents were recruited and the CNAs who provided regular care were asked to participate. The sample consisted of 23 independent dyads, with 11 dyads at facility 1 and 12 dyads at facility 2.

Sample Size:
Facility 1-11 CNAs (7 females, 4 males), 11 residents (6 females, 5 males)
Facility 2-12 CNAs (10 females, 2 males), 12 residents (10 females, 2 males)

PROCEDURE

CNAs were provided and read instructions in filling out the RCQ and were given 5 minutes to list characteristics, traits, and hobbies about an individual they identified as “liking” and an individual they identified as “disliking.” Geriatric residents were read instructions and were asked to verbally express characteristics, traits, and hobbies about an individual they “liked” and “disliked.” Responses were recorded by research staff.

RESULTS

CNAs | RESIDENTS
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RCQ | Liked | Disliked | RCQ | Liked | Disliked
Facility 1 | 13.55 | 6.64 | 6.91 | 8.27 | 6.1 | 2.18
Facility 2 | 11.75 | 7.08 | 4.67 | 7.25 | 5.91 | 1.33
Total (Average) | 12.65 | 6.86 | 5.79 | 7.76 | 6.05 | 1.75

• A significant difference was found between the total number of RCQ responses for CNAs versus geriatric residents (t (44) = 2.21, p < .05), with CNAs, on average, generating a greater number of RCQ responses compared to residents.

• There was no significant difference between the number of psychological constructs generated by CNAs versus residents in describing a “liked” person (t (44) = .63, p = .53).

• CNAs and residents significantly differed in the number of reported disliked items, with CNAs reporting an increased number of “disliked” responses compared to residents (t (44) = 3.97, p < .001).

REFERENCES


DISCUSSION

• Results from this study confirmed proposed hypotheses and were consistent with previous findings regarding the association of age with the social goal of optimizing positive emotional experiences.

• The geriatric, time-limited resident reported a relatively equal number of “liked” responses as CNAs, but differed significantly in the “disliked” responses. Residents were more likely to: 1) report that they did not know anyone they disliked; and 2) generate fewer psychological constructs for individuals they disliked compared to CNAs. The following examples reflect resident’s tendency to avoid negative emotions when asked to describe a “disliked” other:

“I cannot think of anyone I don’t like”
“I picked a person out of the paper because I am at the point where I like everybody”
“I am 88, that is pretty hard to do”

• In general, the inability of residents to identify “disliked” individuals supports SST, in that time endings tend to bring out the best qualities in people, with kindness becoming a more prominent goal of social exchanges.

• CNAs generated more abstract and concrete constructs to describe a “disliked” individual, with few CNAs being unable to identify a “disliked” social partner.

• The results from this study suggest that as individuals age and endings become more salient, the goal of emotional regulation through seeking positive emotional responses and avoiding negative responses becomes a priority. This study provides further evidence for the applicability of SST.

LIMITATIONS

• Though results are encouraging, the limited sample size may have impacted results and limited generalizability. Replication of this study should include a larger sample size.

• Results may be a reflection of a cohort effect, rather than a true difference between older persons with a more time-limited perspective versus younger persons with a more expansive sense of time remaining in their lives. Future research will want to ascertain the impact of the cohort characteristics on results using a larger sample size.

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