

WELCOME TO THE LAB!

We conduct research examining the developmental and cognitive changes that occur with aging. Our specific research interests include healthy aging and adaptation to age-related changes in everyday life. Other research examines knowledge about cognition and aging, and we have developed a questionnaire to gauge knowledge of both healthy and pathological age-related changes.

The devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill of 2010 have impacted the Louisiana community immensely. An initial hurricane assessment study was carried out to examine the immediate impact of Hurricane Katrina on psychosocial well-being in the oldest-old and younger reference groups. Current research focuses on understanding long term methods of coping with disaster, resilience and recovery, as well as the effects of facing cumulative adversity on psychological well-being.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Examining Practical Memory Concerns in the Oldest-Old

This research seeks to understand memory aging in late adulthood from the perspective of elderly individuals using a qualitative approach.



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ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND AGING LAB

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EXAMINING PRACTICAL MEMORY CONCERNS IN THE OLDEST-OLD

Introduction and Goals

Age-related neurocognitive changes have critical implications for the health and well-being of people in later life. As such, understanding neurocognitive aging is of great significance to members of the research community and the general population alike. While many social scientists and biologists study these changes within the people that they affect using objective, laboratory measures, very few researchers have listened to what older adults have to say about their own aging using subjective assessments, such as verbal reports. Asking older adults to describe their concerns regarding practical memory ability may provide a new and transformational perspective on memory and aging. The purpose of this research is to understand practical memory concerns in very old age from the perspective of nonagenarians who have reached 90 years of age and older. We are especially interested in assessing how age-related memory changes are understood, managed, remediated, and feared in this population.

Practical Memory Concerns

Our focus is concerned with the experience of memory aging in healthy individuals who have reached late adulthood, which is why narrative interview data was collected for this project. Specifically, concerns about the practical usage of memory in everyday life are the subject of this research and what we are seeking to understand within the individuals studied. In particular, we are interested in understanding 4 key types of memory concerns within this sample. They include:

- **Memory Self-Efficacy:** Self-directed judgments regarding how well you are able to use certain types of memory.
- **Memory Management:** Methods developed and utilized in daily life to support memory deficits.
- **Memory Remediation:** Desired areas of improvement for practical memory usage.
- **Memory Fears:** Areas of concern or anxiety regarding age-related memory changes.



NEXT STEPS

Right now, we are planning to start coding a younger reference group, which includes 25 interviews. Eventually, we may also look back and recheck the work we've completed so far with the nonagenarian data and continue coding the last 7 questions for the first set of 40 interviews.

REFERENCES

Marks, L. D. (2015). A pragmatic, step-by-step guide for qualitative methods: Capturing the disaster and long-term recovery stories of Katrina and Rita. *Current Psychology*, 34(3), 494-505.

Data

The data for this project included narrative responses to at-home interviews. Participants included 40 individuals aged at least 90 years old and free of known pathologies such as dementia or stroke. They took part in the Louisiana Healthy Aging Study (LHAS). Data was also collected from a younger reference group. These individuals were asked a total of 9 questions at an in-home interview. Implications for healthy aging and maintaining high quality of life will be considered. This research was supported by a grant from the National Institute on Aging.

Methodology

For this project, we are using an adapted form of grounded theory research (Marks 2015). Traditional grounded theory research was introduced in the sixties by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. This form of research is a systematic approach to analyzing narrative data, and is used in qualitative research by many social scientists. Our current approach involves using open coding: an analytic tool where data is codified and grouped into themes that can be used in later stages of analysis. For this project, we are keeping track of our codes by using an excel spreadsheet, which will be provided to you. The adapted form of this methodology that we are using institutes a team-based approach to open coding that seeks to reduce bias. In our lab, we meet most weeks after open coding a set of interviews to discuss our impressions of the interviews and compare notes.

Open Coding

As stated earlier, open coding is the tool we are currently using to analyze the narrative data collected for this research. To begin, you first need to develop a coding scheme that you can utilize to describe the responses you come across in the narrative data. Luckily, this step is already completed, and the coding scheme that we are currently using will be provided. Next, you will use this coding scheme to start labeling the responses you read in the interviews. This process of labeling can be done in many ways and requires you to find your own best method (whether that is using post-it notes, the comment tool on Microsoft Word, etc.). However, if you get stuck or confused, we are all here for you! So, please feel free to ask questions as they come up.