aging and emotion regulation

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older adults report positive affective lives

sample empirical findings

positive affect

negative affect

Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998
conceptual framework

socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999):
limited time → prioritization of emotional goals and emotion regulation
older adults feel good because they prioritize emotion regulatory goals

how do older adults interact with the world to produce such positive affective experience?
older adults may use their information processing to help them feel good

socioemotional selectivity and the “positivity effect” (Carstensen et al., 1999; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005)

limited time → prioritization of emotional goals and emotion regulation → processing preference for positively-valenced over negatively-valenced material (in service of emotion regulation)

eye tracking
older adults activate positive gaze preferences when in bad moods


is this true for all older adults?
individual differences matter as well

positive gaze preferences only help some older adults feel better
depends on how well their attentional system is functioning
for example, older adults with good executive control can stave off mood declines by looking more at happy faces

Isaacowitz et al. (2009) under review.

conclusions and future directions

aging may bring with it improved emotion regulation, and the ability to use looking as a tool of regulation, but this is not true for everyone
studying mood change in real-time can provide a window into how regulation takes place, and whether that varies by age