

Uncertainty Reduction in Initial Relationships

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Introduction

The current project focuses on the strategies people are most likely to employ when they are working to reduce uncertainty in face-to-face interactions, with attention to the way demographics (e.g., race or gender) might impact the choice of strategies an individual is most inclined to select. While there has been some research relating to the way demographics might impact uncertainty reduction, specific strategies of uncertainty reduction are relatively unexplored from a demographic perspective. Participants were asked about which uncertainty reduction strategies they use during initial interactions. Consistent with the research hypotheses, there were differences in the strategies different racial and age groups used. Counter to prediction, there were no differences found in the way participants from different genders used strategies, specifically self-disclosure.

Hypothesis

- Due to reflections on in-person interactions, participants will report higher levels of interactive strategies than both passive or extractive strategies.
- Strategies (i.e., interactive vs. passive or extractive) used most often will be similar to other participants from the same racial identities as them.
- Participants age 18-30 will be more likely to use both passive or extractive strategies than participants age 30 and older.
 - Participants age 30 and older will be more likely to use both interactive strategies than participants age 18-30
- Women are more likely to use self-disclosure as a strategy to reduce uncertainty than men.

Methods

- An online survey was conducted using the Qualtrics platform
- In total 190 participants completed the survey
- The survey began with five questions relating to demographic identities of the participants, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and regional location in the United States
- The survey asked participants about uncertainty reduction experiences, strategies including self disclosure, and perceived closeness of the subsequent relationship

Results

- Participants reported higher levels of interactive strategies ($m = 3.54$, $sd = 0.85$) than passive or extractive strategies ($m = 2.80$, $sd = 0.81$) using a paired samples t-test ($t = 10.28$, $p = .000$)
- There were significant differences by self-identified race in participants' uses of both active strategies ($F = 2.42$, $p = .028$) and passive/extractive strategies ($F = 4.26$, $p = .000$)
- Younger participants were more likely to use those passive or extractive strategies ($m = 3.15$, $sd = 0.91$) than were older participants ($m = 2.71$, $sd = 0.77$), using a one-way analysis of variance ($F = 9.68$, $p = .002$)
- There was no difference between those 30 and older ($m = 3.51$, $sd = 0.84$) compared to those age 18-30 ($m = 3.76$, $sd = 0.89$) in their use of interactive strategies ($F = 2.91$, $p = .090$)
- Counter to prediction, women were not more likely to share personal information with someone if they were sharing information with them ($F = 1.69$, $p = .196$)

Discussion

- The results from this study were able to provide insight into how demographic groups used certain strategies to reduce their uncertainty about someone they just met. Through examining relational closeness, this study was also able to consider how effective the participant thought the strategies were
- The study was not limited to a certain population and provided a variety of demographic identities to be represented in the results. The representation of different populations not only allowed the analysis of those groups but also the comparison of certain groups to one another. In some cases, multiple groups were analyzed together in comparison of a group with many participants
- Moving forward, research can consider intersectionality of identities among the participants as well as the type of relationship participants were considering while taking the survey