Awareness of Age-Related Change, Future Time Perspective, and Implications for Goal Adjustment in Older Adulthood

Bethany Wilton-Harding¹ & Associate Professor Tim Windsor¹

¹College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University, South Australia

Background

- How people adjust their goals is central to adaptation across the lifespan (Baltes, 1987; Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990), yet little is known about individual difference characteristics that predict how and why people use different goal adjustment strategies.
- In older adulthood, people often adapt to changing life circumstances (e.g. loss of social partners or declines in physical and cognitive health) by disengaging from certain goals. Re-engagement with achievable goals is also an important component in adaptation. We propose that flexibility in goal adjustment (endorsement of both goal disengagement and re-engagement strategies) is an important dynamic process involving effectively adapting goal-related behaviour in response to contextual demands and available resources.

0.40*** (0.52***) 0.004 (-0.04) Goal Disengagement -0.04* Future Time Perspective 0.10*** Goal Re-Engagement 0.01 Goal Flexibility

Figure 3. Unstandardized path coefficients for mediation models with AARC-gains as the predictor. Covariates include AARC-losses, age, gender, education, and physical functioning. Significant pathways are indicated by a solid line. *p < .05, ***p < .001

-0.09 (-0.23***) 0.003 (0.05) Goal Disengagement -0.04* Goal Re-Engagement -0.01 Goal Flexibility

Figure 4. Unstandardized path coefficients for mediation models with AARC-losses as the predictor. Covariates include AARC-gains, age, gender, education, and physical functioning. Significant pathways are indicated by a solid line. *p < .05, ***p < .001

The Present Study

This study extended on recent work by Dutt et al. (2018), by focusing on associations of awareness of age-related **gains** and age-related **losses**, and their interaction as predictors of goal adjustment in older adulthood. Furthermore, we examined whether perceptions of time remaining in life mediated relationships between awareness of age-related change (AARC) and goal adjustment capacities.

Method

408 adults aged 60-88 (M = 67.07, SD = 4.57)

- Online survey (via Turkprime)
- measures included questionnaires assessing AARC, goal disengagement and reengagement (a goal flexibility index was also calculated), and future time perspective.

Figure 1. Interaction of AARC-losses and AARC-gains in the prediction of goal flexibility. Higher AARC-losses was associated with less flexible adjustment of goals. However, this association was less evident among those reporting higher AARC-gains.

Results

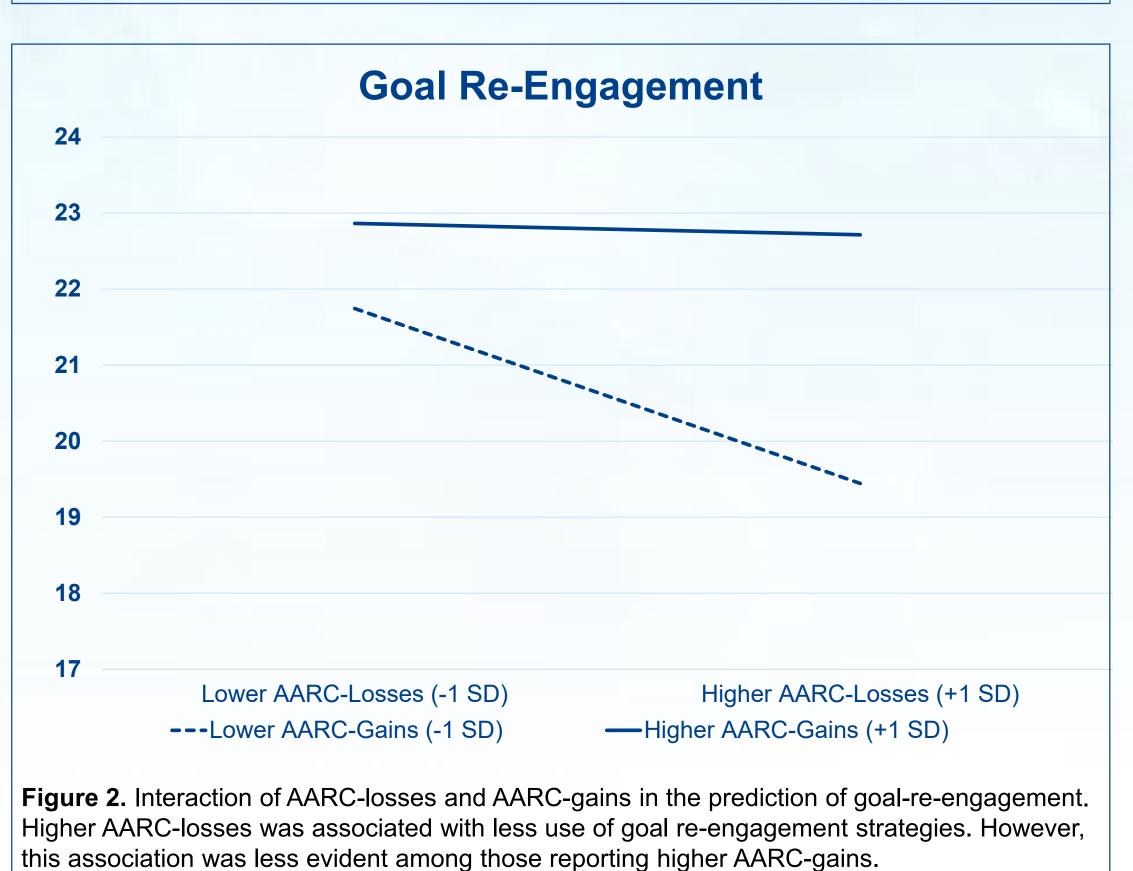
Regression analyses showed that AARC-gains moderated the relationship between AARC-losses and goal adjustment. While AARC-losses was associated with *lower* reported goal flexibility and goal re-engagement, this association was *weaker* for those who also reported high AARC-gains (see Figures 1 & 2).

Mediation analyses showed that future time perspective (FTP) mediated relationships between AARC and goal adjustment. Higher AARC-gains was associated with a more expansive FTP, which was associated with *lower goal disengagement*, and *higher goal re-engagement*. Conversely, higher AARC-losses was associated with a more restricted FTP, which was associated with *higher goal disengagement*, and *lower goal re-engagement* (see Figures 3 & 4).

Conclusions

Awareness of age-related losses may not inherently undermine self-regulatory behaviour, if this awareness is accompanied by an appreciation of developmental gains and enduring strengths.

Those with higher AARC-gains may be more aware of future opportunities due to a recognition of their resources (Hobfoll, 2002) and performance capacity (Ryan & Deci, 2000), therefore remaining committed to goals for longer and more readily engaging in new goals. For others, awareness of age-related losses may result in a reduced focus on future opportunities, and in turn more willingness to disengage when goals are blocked.





INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT