The Family and Communication Dynamics of Group Salience

Jake Harwood
Department of Communication
University of Arizona

Priya Raman
Doctoral Program, Department of Communication
University of Arizona

Miles Hewstone
Department of Experimental Psychology
Oxford University

Group salience is a key variable both in influencing quality of intergroup contact and in moderating the effects of intergroup contact on prejudicial attitudes. Two studies uncovered the communicative dimensions associated with evaluations of age salience in the grandparent–grandchild relationship, and we investigated the extent to which communication dimensions predicted various measures of salience, relational closeness, and attitudes concerning aging. Communication phenomena that were positively correlated with measures of age salience were negatively related to relational closeness. Only 1 communication measure (grandparents talking about the past) moderated the relationship between quality of contact with grandparent and attitudes toward older people. Specific communicative dimensions emerged that warrant further investigation in this and other intergroup contexts.

Communication scholars have been slow to address issues of intergroup relationships, and family communication researchers have been no exception here. Although stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination have become focal topics for social psychologists in recent years, communication research has largely ignored

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Correspondence should be addressed to Jake Harwood, Department of Communication, University of Arizona, PO Box 210025, Tucson, AZ 85721. E-mail: jharwood@u.arizona.edu

these significant social problems (for exceptions see Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1990; Harwood & Giles, 2005; Mastro, 2003). Even scholarship in intercultural communication has often focused on issues of interpersonal understanding and liking, rather than issues of intergroup mistrust and hate. This study examines a key construct in the study of intergroup relationships (group salience) with the goal of understanding more about the communication dynamics of that construct in the family context.

GROUP SALIENCE AND COMMUNICATION

Group salience is an individual's awareness of group memberships and respective group differences in an intergroup encounter (e.g., the salience of race in an interracial conversation). The notion of group salience has received increasing attention in the intergroup relations literature in recent years, particularly in research concerning intergroup contact. Following work by Rothbart and John (1985) and Hewstone and Brown (1986), research has demonstrated that group salience is crucial for affect during contact with a specific outgroup member to generalize to attitudes concerning the outgroup as a whole (Hewstone & Lord, 1998; for a review, see Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Specifically, as salience of the outgroup member's group membership grows, so does generalization from one's attitude toward the outgroup member to outgroup attitudes overall. For instance, Brown, Vivian, and Hewstone (1999) found that the intimacy of respondents' contact with outgroup nationalities predicted the desire to live in other countries only among those who rated their outgroup contact as high in group salience. In situations of positive intergroup contact, such generalization is a desirable outcome—a positive encounter with an outgroup member is more likely to lead to reduced prejudice under conditions of group salience. This finding has emerged from carefully controlled experimental work with artificially constructed groups (e.g., Ensari & Miller, 2002; Maurer, Park, & Rothbart, 1995), as well as from survey research with real groups (e.g., Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Such effects are explained as a function of the interconnectedness between the cognitive representations of the outgroup individual and the outgroup as a whole. Feelings about the outgroup member only apply to the entire outgroup when the outgroup individual is seen as closely connected to their group (rather than, e.g., an exceptional or unusual outgroup member).

However, along with this "positive" effect of group salience on the likelihood of generalization, some studies have demonstrated a negative effect of group salience on the experience of the encounter itself (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). High levels of group salience can be associated with less satisfying and more anxious interactions (Greenland & Brown, 1999). Under some circumstances, at least, high levels of salience may invoke negative outgroup stereotypes that precipitate negative expectations and experiences of in-

tergroup contact (Williams & Giles, 1996). However, reviewing the literature as a whole, Brown and Hewstone (2005) emphasized that there is no a priori reason to expect salience to have universally negative effects. It may be that high group salience with little possibility for developing interpersonal acquaintance might create conditions leading to intergroup anxiety (e.g., Islam & Hewstone, 1993).

Thus, the literature has yielded a paradox: Interactions that yield generalization from a specific outgroup member to a group as a whole may be those most likely to be negative. Therefore, it is crucial that we begin to understand more about the origins and dynamics of group salience to build more sophisticated models of when and how *positive* contact might generalize to outgroup perceptions.

The sociopsychological origins of group salience have received much attention recently, particularly from self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Self-categorization theory has suggested that the salience of a particular social category depends on its *accessibility* (e.g., a chronic readiness to use it) and its *fit* (i.e., the extent to which the category is "useful" in a given context; Blanz, 1999). Thus, self-categorization theory provides information about the cognitive determinants of categorization, as well as acknowledging the dynamic nature of such categorization. However, previous research and theory have paid little attention to the communicative dynamics of intergroup contact, and particularly group salience (cf. Brown, Maras, Masser, Vivian, & Hewstone, 2001; Reid & Giles, 2005). Amidst a large amount of literature concerning a fundamentally communicative event (contact between an ingroup and outgroup member), the event itself has been treated as a black box. The research has focused largely on the outcomes of the encounter, as well as a few of its structural aspects, which have been often manipulated a priori by the investigator (e.g., cooperation, status, task focus; Brewer & Gaertner, 2003). Although the importance of intergroup category salience has been clearly demonstrated, we know very little about how group salience plays out and becomes meaningful within encounters.

To understand what makes group memberships salient in interaction, we must examine the communicative dynamics of group salience. From an applied perspective, once we understand the specific types of communication that are associated with making group memberships salient, we will be able to develop interventions that enhance such communication and hence facilitate positive intergroup attitude change. Therefore, the primary goal of our research is to assess the communicative dynamics associated with group salience in one specific applied intergroup context.

GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD COMMUNICATION

We examine grandparent–grandchild relationships as an intergroup context, with a particular focus on the effects of grandparent–grandchild contact on prejudice

against older adults. Previous work has shown that attitudes toward older adults tend to be negative (Kite & Johnson, 1988). These negative attitudes are manifest in both explicit and implicit measures (Hummert, Garstka, O'Brien, Greenwald, & Mellott, 2002), although as with other groups, positive stereotypes do exist (Hummert, 1990). Contact with grandparents does influence attitudes toward older people—people with more positive grandparent–grandchild relationships tend to have more positive attitudes about older people (Silverstein & Parrott, 1997; Soliz & Harwood, 2003). Harwood et al. (2005) showed that this association is moderated by group salience, as predicted by the research and theory described earlier (e.g., Hewstone & Brown, 1986). That is, when age is salient, contact with grandparents more readily generalizes to grandchildren's attitudes concerning older people. Thus, the general effects of group salience described previously apply in this context. As with other intergroup contexts, however, we know little about the communicative phenomena that make age salient for grandchildren in their contacts with grandparents.

The grandparent–grandchild context is interesting for two reasons. First, intergroup contact within close relationships may be crucially important in changing attitudes (Mackie & Smith, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002). Close long-term relationships, including those in the family, offer contexts in which the typical anxieties and uncertainties of intergroup contact may be ameliorated, and hence are settings in which group differences and identities can be addressed in a nonthreatening fashion. Although considerable work on intergroup relations has considered contact between strangers, very little work has considered the role of broad social group memberships (except perhaps gender) in family communication. Second, for most young people, their level of intergenerational contact is low, and the grandparent–grandchild context offers a rare source of contact with older adults (Ng, Liu, Weatherall, & Loong, 1997). This relationship also provides contact that is generally rated as more positive than other intergenerational contexts (Ng et al.). If we want to understand more about young people's actual intergenerational encounters, we have to examine intergenerational encounters that occur on a relatively regular basis, and for most young people that means contact with grandparents.

Therefore, in this article, we examine the communicative dynamics associated with age salience in grandparent–grandchild encounters. A pilot study reports a content analysis of open-ended responses concerning communicative predictors of age salience. In this study, our goal was to uncover a range of communicative phenomena that were associated with age salience. Following this, the main questionnaire study aims to understand which communicative phenomena best predict quantitative measures of salience, and to understand how salience-related communicative phenomena are associated with relational closeness and intergenerational attitudes.

PILOT STUDY

Method

Respondents were students at a midwestern university in the United States ($N = 193$, 86% White, 62% women, ages 18–30: $M_{age} = 19.86$, $SD = 1.71$). As part of a larger questionnaire, students wrote responses to the following request: "Please tell us any things that happen in communicating with your grandparents that make you aware of their age, or aware of the age difference between you."

The first two authors read the responses repeatedly. Independently, they developed categories that accounted for the variations in the responses. They discussed the categories and then reexamined the data to refine the categories. After a number of rounds of rereading and discussion, the same two authors finalized a list of 38 communicative phenomena reported as associated with age salience. These were organized into three main groups: topics of conversation, communication style–interaction phenomena, and characteristics of grandparents. Reliability was initially tested by having the first two authors independently code 25 of the responses into the 38 categories. They then met to discuss the system and made minor modifications. The revised system was then tested on a random sample of 44% of the responses. Reliability in this round was sufficient to move ahead with coding the remainder of the responses (including recoding the original 25). These were divided between the first two authors for final coding (see Table 1 for frequencies and reliabilities).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that the majority of categories were explicitly communicative, as would be expected given the prompt. However, noncommunicative ways in which age is made salient were also present (e.g., physical appearance or manifestations of age such as "coughing"). The topics of conversation most frequently reported as triggering age salience included the grandparents' personal history and recollections of past events or eras (e.g., the Depression, World War II). Grandchildren also reported being aware of their grandparents' age when grandparents disclosed chronological age or discussed age differences between grandparent and grandchild. Talk of old-fashioned values was another frequently occurring category. Surprisingly, respondents rarely mentioned grandparents' health as triggering age salience. The stylistic aspects of grandparent communication most commonly associated with age salience were use of unfamiliar lexicon or outdated terms, trouble understanding what grandchildren spoke about, inability to understand slang or phrases in vogue among young people, voicing disapproval with respect to grandchildren's attitudes or behavior (or both), storytelling, and rambling–forgetfulness.

TABLE 1
Intercoder Reliability and Category Frequency (Pilot Study)

Categories	κ	n	%
Topic of conversation (grandparent)			
Personal history	0.79	32	16.6
Specific past events (not personal, e.g., a political assassination)	0.89	22	11.4
Past eras (e.g., the 1950s)	0.79	12	6.2
Grandparent's age or grandparent–grandchild age difference	0.74	11	5.7
Old-fashioned values	0.79	9	4.7
Family history	0.79	7	3.6
Health	0.88	5	2.6
Personal hardships	1.00	4	2.1
Death or dead people	1.00	3	1.6
Current events	1.00	3	1.6
Regrets about past behavior	1.00	1	0.5
Communication style or interaction phenomena (grandparent)			
Uses unfamiliar lexicon	1.00	23	11.9
Has problems in understanding	1.00	15	7.8
Disapproval/complaint	0.84	15	7.8
Storytelling	1.00	10	5.2
Rambling/forgetfulness	1.00	9	4.7
Repetition	1.00	4	2.1
Negative stereotypes of young people as ignorant (etc.); discounting grandchildren's opinions or not taking them seriously	0.66	4	2.1
Giving unwanted advice	0.66	3	1.6
Communication style or interaction phenomena (grandchild)			
Has to speak up or repeat	0.88	7	3.6
Has to explain things	0.65	5	2.6
Uses modern lexicon or slang	1.00	5	2.6
Talking too fast	1.00	1	0.5
Unable to be completely open	1.00	1	0.5
Grandparent characteristics			
Conservative moral/ideological outlook	0.96	37	19.2
Deafness or hearing impairment	0.82	21	10.9
Health/physical impairment	0.82	21	10.9
Grandparent uninformed on current events or grandchild's activities	0.75	13	6.7
Not tech-savvy	1.00	10	5.2
Wisdom/knowledge/wit/confidence	1.00	5	2.6
Racism/prejudice	0.74	5	2.6
Music/media preferences	0.66	4	2.1
Clothing/appearance	0.85	4	2.1
Mental/cognitive impairment	1.00	4	2.1
Falling asleep	1.00	2	1
Thrift/stinginess	1.00	2	1
Institutional advantages/concessions (e.g., senior citizen discounts)	1.00	1	0.5
Driving/mobility	1.00	1	0.5

The grandchildren also reported that they were aware of age differences when they themselves felt the need to speak up or repeat things in conversations with their grandparents, and when they sensed that their grandparents did not understand their use of slang. Finally, the most common grandparent characteristic reported was having a conservative moral or ideological outlook (or both), with deafness or hearing impairment, poor health, and low knowledge of technology and current events also having high frequencies.

This study uncovered students' perceptions of the communicative phenomena associated with age salience. However, it is likely that a number of triggers of age salience are either too subtle for our respondents to be directly aware of, or too obvious for them to mention in open-ended responses. Therefore, we aimed to develop a more complete list of age salience triggers based on both the results from the pilot study and a thorough review of relevant research. Our goal was to use this list to understand which communicative phenomena are more predictive of age salience assessments, and to understand some of the theoretical issues underlying relationships between salience and intergenerational attitudes. As noted at the outset, salience has typically been associated with negative affect in intergroup encounters. Hence, we were interested in examining whether any of our salience-related communicative phenomena had positive relational consequences.

Several areas from the intergenerational communication literature were tapped to develop a fairly comprehensive list of potential age salience-related communication behaviors. First, J. Coupland, N. Coupland, Giles, and Henwood (1991) discussed ways in which older adults "mark" age identity in discourse. Their work described categorization processes (e.g., disclosure of age-associated personal circumstances, such as widowhood) and temporal framing processes (e.g., describing how a particular locality has changed historically). In related work, N. Coupland, J. Coupland, and Giles (1989) showed that actual disclosure of chronological age is something that occurs more frequently among older adults, and that marks age rather explicitly. Neither of these studies explicitly discussed the relevance of age salience for the intergroup contact literature. However, the various categories of age reference uncovered are likely triggers of age salience, and they were drawn on in developing items for the questionnaire study.

Second, Ryan, Kwong See, Meneer, and Trovato (1994) developed a Language in Adulthood questionnaire, which includes items concerning communicative phenomena associated (either in reality or stereotypically) with old age (e.g., having trouble hearing). Ryan et al.'s work did not directly reference age salience as an issue, and the Language in Adulthood questionnaire was not intended as a measure of age salience. However, certain items are clearly relevant and they are used in modified form in this study.

Third, Giles, Williams, and colleagues' work on intergenerational accommodation revealed behaviors that are common and that might invoke awareness of age and age differences. For example, Williams and Giles (1996) discussed the ways in

which older adults at times express disapproval of younger people. These authors noted that such evaluations are associated with high levels of age salience. Similarly, Williams et al. (1997) tested a measure of intergenerational accommodation strategies, some of which have the potential to raise salience. Also from an accommodation perspective, N. Coupland, J. Coupland, Giles, Henwood, and Wiemann's (1988) work on elderly painful self-disclosure is relevant. Their work indicated that disclosure of painful events or conditions (e.g., illness or financial strain) is associated with age in important ways, both in actual behavior and in the minds of young recipients (see also, Henwood, Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1993). Hence, the questionnaire study included a number of items derived from the rich tradition of work on intergenerational accommodation.

Finally, work has discussed skills and traits associated with aging. For instance, Kemper, Rash, Kynette, and Norman (1990) reported a positive association between aging and storytelling ability, and hence, items concerning storytelling are included in the questionnaire study. Likewise, work on age stereotypes has demonstrated that certain communication traits (e.g., sincerity and complaining) are associated with age and warrant inclusion (Harris, 1975; Harwood et al., 1996; Hummert, 1990).

We designed a questionnaire to assess the frequency with which potentially salience-related communication behaviors occurred in communication with a grandparent. Respondents also completed measures of age salience, relational closeness, and attitudes about aging. Our study examines which communication factors best predict global salience measures, which factors also predict relational closeness, and which factors moderate the relation between contact and attitudes.

QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY

Method

Undergraduate students ($N = 198$) at a large southwestern university in the United States completed a questionnaire in exchange for course credit (M age = 19.85 years, $SD = 1.75$). They were largely White (74%) or Latino (9%) and were predominantly women (64%). The questionnaire included two sections presented in counterbalanced orders (complete questionnaire available from the first author).

Section 1: Perceptions of Older Adults as a Group

Respondents reported their feelings about older adults ("People over 65, not including your grandparents") on six semantic differential items (negative–positive, warm–cold, trusting–suspicious, friendly–hostile, contempt–respect, admiration–disgust; $\alpha = .81$).

Section 2: Relationship with Grandparent

Previous work has demonstrated that contact effects tend to be more powerful in relationships that feature more frequent contact (Harwood et al., 2005). Therefore, participants were asked to report on the grandparent relationship in which they had the most contact in the past year or, failing that, the most contact in their lives. They supplied the initials of the grandparent and the nature of the relationship (e.g., maternal grandfather). Those with no grandparent contact were excused.

Quality of the relationship with the grandparent.   This was assessed in two ways. The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale was used (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). This scale has demonstrated remarkable reliability and validity as a single-item measure of relational closeness (Aron et al.). Seven Venn-diagram-like pictures of overlapping circles labeled "self" and "grandparent" were shown. The circles varied from an initial diagram featuring no overlap, to a final diagram featuring almost complete overlap. Respondents marked the picture that best represented their relationship with their grandparent. Respondents also completed a three-item measure of relational satisfaction with the grandparent derived from previous work (Harwood, 2000). Items were: "Overall, how well would you say you get along with this grandparent?" (1 = *very poorly,* 5 = *very well*), "How emotionally *close* would you say you are to this grandparent?" (1 = *very distant,* 5 = *very close*), and "How would you rate the *quality of your relationship* with this grandparent?" (1 = *very poor,* 5 = *very good*; α = .86.) These three items were combined into a single score that was then standardized. The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale scores were also standardized and the two measures were combined in a single composite measure of closeness (α = .77).

Group salience.   Theoretical statements in this area have referred to *group salience* and *group typicality* in largely interchangeable terms. These constructs may have similar effects in intergroup contact, but they are not isomorphic—group membership may be salient as a result of *a*typicality (e.g., 83-year-old skydivers). Past operationalizations of the salience construct have often included items assessing group salience, group awareness, and group typicality (Brown et al., 2001; Harwood et al., 2005), albeit that such measures generally yield satisfactory reliability. In this study, we included seven items from Anderson, Harwood, and Hummert (2005) that were designed to tap two dimensions of group salience: awareness and typicality. Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*). Three items assessed group awareness: "How aware are you of the age difference between you and this grandparent?", "How much do you think about this grandparent's age?", and "How much does the age difference between you and this grandparent matter?" (α = .69). Four items assessed group typicality: "How similar is this grandparent to other older adults?", "To what extent is

this grandparent typical of older people?", "To what extent is this grandparent like other older adults?", and "Is this grandparent representative of her or his age group?" (α = .82). An exploratory factor analysis (principal components extraction and varimax rotation) demonstrated that the typicality and awareness items loaded clearly on separate factors, and were only moderately correlated (r = .18, p = .01).

Salience-related communication.   A total of 65 items inquired about the frequency with which various communication behaviors occurred in the respondents' conversations with the same grandparent (never, rarely, occasionally, often, or very often). These items were derived from the pilot study and the literature review. Because many of the items emerged from previous theoretically driven research, we entered the research with some a priori notions of underlying factors. However, we also examined the emergent factor structure of the items. Due to the relatively low subjects-to-items ratio (3:1), we conducted both an exploratory factor analysis of the items (principal components and varimax rotation) and a cluster analysis (Ward's method: cluster analysis is less sensitive to low subjects–items ratios). We compared the groupings emerging from the two statistical techniques with the a priori categorizations and decided on a final set of categories. Reliability analysis was then performed to identify any items that should be discarded (8 items were dropped). This process resulted in 12 groups of items (see Table 2).

Results and Discussion

Communicative Predictors of Age Salience and Closeness

We aimed to discover communicative behaviors that are associated with age salience, as well as those that predict closeness. Table 3 shows various patterns in the correlations of the communication measures with the two group salience measures and the measure of relational closeness. The most common pattern is of a positive correlation with one or both salience measures, and a negative correlation with closeness (painful self-disclosure, talk about age, talk about health, cognitive deficit, patronize grandchild, and hearing). This pattern resembles typical findings from the previous literature in that high levels of group salience are associated with low quality of contact. Three communication dimensions were significantly associated with one salience measure, but not associated with closeness (talk about the past, not understanding the world today, and moral disapproval). These measures are potentially interesting in that, although they do not positively predict relational closeness, they at least are not negatively associated with it. From an applied perspective, then, these items show the potential to raise group salience without harming relational closeness. One dimension failed to correlate with any of the global measures of salience and just correlated with relational closeness (talk about the grandchild's parents). Finally, two items are associated positively with relational

TABLE 2
Communication Measures
(Including Individual Items; Questionnaire Study)

Dimension: Items	M	SD	α
Painful self-disclosure: Grandparent talks about painful events in his or her life; things that make him/her unhappy; unpleasant aspects of his or her life; regrets about his or her life (e.g., things he or she wishes she had done or not done); his or her financial concerns; complains about things.	2.24	.67	.75
Talk about the past: Talks about specific historical events (e.g., wars, former presidents); how much things have changed compared to the past; periods of time in the past (e.g., the 1950s); hardships people lived with in the past; differences between the world today and the world in the past; compares things happening now to things that happened a long time ago.	2.75	.68	.83
Talk about age: Talks about the age difference between the two of you; his or her age; "getting older"; reminds you how old he or she is; tells you that you are young.	2.16	.67	.73
Talk about health: Talks about his or her health problems; his or her medical conditions in great detail; his or her health (good or bad).	2.50	1.02	.91
Talk about grandchild's parents: Talks about one of your parents when that parent was a kid; when your parents were young.	3.37	.84	.82
Don't understand the world today: Doesn't understand words you use because of the age difference (e.g., slang); says things that sound prejudiced (e.g., racist); not understanding "the world today"; how expensive things are these days; not understanding new technology.	2.40	.84	.73
Cognitive deficit: Has trouble thinking of a word (it's on the "tip of his or her tongue"); has trouble recalling specific facts in a story; loses track of the conversation; has a hard time saying something quickly; forgets people's names; loses track of the topic of conversations; talks in ways that aren't coherent; rambles on about disconnected things; asks you to slow down when you are talking to him/her; asks you to repeat what you just said; complains that you speak too fast; repeats him/herself; tells you the same stories over and over again.	2.08	.69	.91
Grandparent patronizing grandchild: Is sincere when talking to you (Reverse Scored); talks in ways that make you feel stupid; "lectures" you about life; implies that you don't know much because you are young; gives you advice that you don't want or need.	1.91	.68	.76
Deafness: Gets frustrated because he or she can't hear you; has trouble hearing you.	2.23	1.06	.86
Moral disapproval: Disapproves of things people do these days (e.g., living together before marriage); expresses disapproval of today's society (e.g., morals).	2.57	.94	.82
Story-telling: Tells stories about your family; tells you good stories; tells entertaining or funny stories.	3.62	.81	.77
Wisdom: Talks about things in ways that seem really wise; helps you make important decisions; tells you things that you learn a lot from; shares his or her wisdom with you; provides you with good advice.	3.19	.81	.84

TABLE 3
Correlations of Communication Measures with Global Salience Measures
and Relational Closeness (Questionnaire Study)

Dimension	Salience–Awareness	Salience–Typicality	Closeness
Painful self-disclosure	.37	—	−.21
Talk about the past	.17	—	—
Talk about age	.40	.19[a]	−.19
Talk about health	.27[a]	—	−.17
Talk about grandchild's parents	—	—	.17
Does not understand world today	.26	—	—
Cognitive deficit	.46	.25	−.32
Grandparent patronizing grandchild	.38	.14[a]	−.38
Hearing problems	.46	.31	−.29
Moral disapproval	—	.24	—
Storytelling	−.26	−.14[a]	.33
Wisdom	−.29	−.21	.45

Note.   All correlations are significant (two-tailed, $p < .05$). For ease of reading, nonsignificant correlations have been deleted.
[a]When relationships involving the salience measures were re-examined controlling for grandparent's chronological age and perceptions of grandparent's physical health, these correlations became nonsignificant. All other correlations remained significant.

closeness (wisdom and storytelling). Ironically, these two items are negatively associated with both salience measures. This is surprising given that prior research and the pilot study suggested that these phenomena are indicative of age. However, the result is again consistent with previous work that has shown that age salience tends to be negatively correlated with closeness.

Due to the potential covariance between some of the salience items and the grandparents' age and health status, regression analyses were performed examining the relations in Table 3 with grandparent chronological age and health as control variables (both were assessed by the grandchild with single questionnaire items). The majority of the associations remained significant. However, talk about health became nonsignificant as a predictor of age awareness, suggesting that it shares large amounts of variance with actual health status. Likewise, three of the variables (see Table 3) were rendered nonsignificant in their prediction of age typicality. Two of these were very small associations even in the zero-order correlation (patronizing and storytelling). The remaining variable (talk about age) shares considerable variance with actual age. These results appear to suggest a pattern whereby communication variables are more closely related to age awareness than age typicality. This is further supported by regressions involving all communication variables predicting either awareness or typicality, while controlling for health and age. The communication variables accounted for almost twice as much variance in awareness, $\Delta R^2 = .24$, $\Delta F(12, 178) = 5.85, p < .001$, as in typicality, $\Delta R^2 = .13, \Delta F(12, 176) = 2.34, p < .01$.

Group Salience as a Moderator of Attitudes

As noted earlier, group salience is predicted to moderate the relation between contact and attitudes, such that intergroup contact only affects attitudes about the outgroup as a whole when group memberships are salient in the specific context. This relation was examined using regression. In each analysis, attitude toward older adults was the criterion measure; predictors were relational closeness, 1 of the 14 salience measures (awareness, typicality, or 1 of the 12 communicative measure), and the product of these 2. Fourteen analyses were conducted; 1 for each salience measure. Predictors were zero-centered before computing the interaction term (Aiken & West, 1991).

The results of these 14 analyses are lengthy; hence they are summarized here. The relational closeness measure predicted attitudes across all analyses (βs = .26 to .33, $p < .01$, and squared partial correlations (r_p^2) = .06 to .11). As with previous research, close relationships with outgroup members are associated with more positive attitudes, independent of moderating effects (Pettigrew, 1998). The 2 global measures of salience differed in their effects on attitudes. Awareness was significantly and negatively associated with attitudes ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .01$, $r_p^2 = .10$). A general awareness of age is associated with more negative attitudes. Perceptions of typicality were not associated with attitudes. Of the communicative measures, 5 were direct negative predictors of attitudes (talk about age, hearing problems, patronizing the grandchild, cognitive deficit, and not understanding the world: βs = −.14 to −.24, $p < .05$, $r_p^2 = .02$ to .05) and 2 were positive predictors (wisdom and storytelling: βs = .17/.16; $p = .03/.04$; $r_p^2 = .02/.02$, respectively).

The predicted moderator effect was significant in only one of the analyses (awareness: $\beta = -.14$, $p = .04$, $r_p^2 = .02$) and approached significance in two others (talk about the past: $\beta = .12$, $p = .07$, $r_p^2 = .02$; typicality: $\beta = .13$, $p = .07$, $r_p^2 = .02$). In all three cases, the salience measure was split at the median, and correlations between relational closeness and attitudes were computed in both the high- and low-salience conditions. As can be seen in Table 4, typicality and talk about the past reveal the pattern consistent with the theory: Correlations between closeness and attitudes were stronger in the high-salience than the low-salience condition (differences between the correlations were significant in one-tailed tests, $p < .05$, and approached significance in two-tailed tests, $p < .10$). Awareness did not reveal the predicted pattern.

Unfortunately, given that only one communication variable yielded a near-significant moderator effect, these results do not provide tremendous insight on which communicative variables might be good moderators of the contact–attitudes relation. However, further examination of older adults talking about the past seems warranted, given that this variable approached significance and moderated the effect in the predicted fashion. It was also one of the few communicative indicators of group salience that was *not* negatively correlated with relational closeness—at

TABLE 4
Correlations Between Relational Closeness and Attitudes
Toward Older People Under Conditions of High and Low Group Salience
(Questionnaire Study)

Salience Measure	Low[a]	High[a]	z[b]
Talk about the past	.22*	.46*	1.79†
Awareness	.30*	.32*	0.19
Typicality	.19†	.44*	1.87†

[a]"Low" and "High" refer to levels of group salience based on median split of the three measures in the first column. For instance, the first row indicates that the correlation between closeness and attitudes is smaller among those scoring low on "talk about the past" than among those who score high on that measure.

[b]Test of difference between correlation coefficients.

†$p < .10$, *$p < .05$.

least it does not *detract* from closeness—and it was a frequently reported communicative feature in the pilot study. The relative absence of moderator effects in this study is in contrast to the consistent pattern of effects described by Brown and Hewstone (2005). The sample size for our study is smaller than some of the previous research, and it is possible that statistical power was low in our case.

It is notable that the communicative variables explain significant variance in age salience, even when actual age and health are controlled. Clearly, consciousness of the relational partner's age during interaction is not simply a function of their physical status or actual age. In a sense, this vindicates the goals of the study. Age salience appears to be a dynamic and communicatively influenced variable, and hence more examination of salience-related behaviors in interaction is warranted. The idea that we should attend to the intricacies of communication is further bolstered by the variability in the associations between different communication variables and measures of group salience. Particularly interesting here are the variables that negatively predicted age salience, despite substantial prior work that indicated they should positively predict it (storytelling and wisdom). Also notable are three variables (moral disapproval, not understanding the world today, and talking about the past) that are positively associated with salience but do not harm closeness. All of these variables deserve additional attention to further explain these unusual patterns (see next).

Our findings also have interesting implications for the conceptualization of age salience. There is substantial variability in the patterns of prediction for awareness versus typicality. Painful self-disclosure, for instance, was strongly associated with awareness, but uncorrelated with typicality (an older person talking about negative life events is not viewed as "typical" of their group, but does make their partner aware of age). Expressing moral disapproval, on the other hand, is associated with typicality but not awareness (an older person disapproving of premarital

sex is seen as typical of older people, but age is not at the forefront of their interlocutor's mind during conversation). These findings could be accounted for by considering the meaning of "low scores" for each communication variable. A grandparent who explicitly *approves* of or is accepting of premarital sex might be rated as strongly *a*typical of older people in general, resulting in a strong relation between moral disapproval and typicality. In contrast, awareness of generational and age differences is likely to be raised by any discussion of premarital sex (given the more general association of the topic with age-based norms). Hence, correlations between moral disapproval and awareness might be suppressed by situations in which grandparents behave in an astereotypical fashion. For painful self-disclosure, not disclosing, or disclosing positive information, is not particularly age-marked, and hence there might be less scope for correlations with typicality due to somewhat restricted variance on the atypicality end of the continuum. Similar patterns of smaller or nonsignificant results for typicality rather than salience are observed for talk about age and talk about health—both of which have a similar structure: The absence of these variables is not highly atypical. Thus, more generally, findings indicate that communication variables for which the absence or opposite of the behavior is atypical of older people would be more strongly associated with typicality than awareness. Future research should consider in more detail the possibility of the absence or opposite of particular age-related behaviors, and the consequences of that for typicality–awareness perceptions.

The two measures of salience also differ in the power of the communication variables to predict them. Controlling for grandparent age and health, bivariate and multivariate analyses both indicate that communicative variables predicted age awareness more strongly than age typicality. Research has noted that age stereotyping is driven by contextual cues (e.g., being in a nursing home) and physiognomic appearance (Anderson et al., 2005; Hummert, Garstka, Ryan, & Bonnesen, 2004). Assessments of typicality may rely more on such cues, given the close logical link between typicality and stereotypicality. In contrast, awareness may be more contextually negotiable, and hence driven more by interaction dynamics. These findings suggest that communication interventions premised on raising awareness may be more successful than those attempting to raise perceived typicality.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Relatively little work has examined how broad social group memberships manifest themselves in family communication (Banker & Gaertner, 1998; Harwood, Soliz, & Lin, 2006). However, as families grow more multicultural, interfaith, and international, intergroup issues are going to appear as more prominent concerns (Killian, 2001). Moreover, intergroup scholars have begun to recognize that communication within relational units, such as the family, offers unique possibilities

for their own work—particularly in terms of exploiting some of the inherent identity connections within the family for the benefit of changing intergroup attitudes (Anderson et al., 2005). Our work illustrates the useful cross-fertilization that can occur between intergroup and family communication scholars.

These data are restricted in important ways. They are culturally limited. Phenomena such as *Laodao* in China (a repeating style used by older people; Zhang & Hummert, 2001) would be associated with age salience in that context. However, no equivalent exists in the West. Similarly, the importance of age as a variable varies cross-culturally—it is more fundamental to the social hierarchy in East Asia, and hence is likely to be more chronically salient in those contexts (Chang, 1997; Ho, 1994). Communicative factors might be less influential in determining age salience in those places due to a ceiling effect in salience. The work is also limited by its reliance on self-reports of intergenerational behavior. Observational work on actual family communication patterns (e.g., Ng, He, & Loong, 2004) would yield additional insights into the specific dynamics of *intergenerational* salience in this context. The particular items and categories discussed here are also restricted to the intergenerational intergroup context. For instance, talking about health is not likely to raise the salience of *cultural* group memberships in a conversation between a Euro-American person and an Asian-American person (unless perhaps acupuncture emerged as a topic). Hence, to understand such phenomena in other intergroup contexts it will be necessary to engage the relevant literatures and ask people about their experiences in those contexts. Finally, the limited age range of the participants and the cross-sectional nature of our data must be acknowledged—more attention to issues of causality is warranted in the future.

There are implications of this work for intergroup contexts beyond the intergenerational. First, it is clear from the questionnaire study that group salience is a more complex construct than acknowledged by some previous work. The measures of awareness and typicality are correlated but not isomorphic, and they exhibit inconsistent relations with the communicative measures. The differences between measures of group typicality and group awareness deserve further theoretical and empirical attention and offer interesting pathways for extending this work to other intergroup contexts, particularly in the context of stereotype violations. The intergroup social psychology literature has focused extensively on group *a*typicality, and the ways in which that might reduce the likelihood of attitude change resulting from an individual encounter (Richards & Hewstone, 2001; Weber & Crocker, 1983). Atypical outgroup members tend to be separated (subtyped) from the cognitive representation of the group due to their difference from the stereotype, and thus they do not influence attitudes concerning the group. Our data suggest the possibility that *awareness* (as a somewhat orthogonal construct) might be manipulated independently of *typicality*. This would permit examination of whether subtyping of an astereotypical outgroup member might be rendered more difficult in contexts of high group awareness. For instance, a highly

intellectual African American target might be presented in ways that enhanced group awareness, so as to "inoculate" against the subtyping process.

Second, *talk about the past* was the only communicative variable that moderated the contact–attitudes relation (it approached significance). For older people, talking about the past conveys group-specific knowledge that younger people do not possess. Other intergroup contexts undoubtedly offer similar opportunities. Sojourners can discuss life in their home nation in ways that are impossible for their hosts to replicate, and blind people can describe experiences to which the sighted do not have access (Ryan, Bajorek, Beaman, & Anas, 2005). Hence, although our data are only suggestive, more attention to the communication of unique group-specific knowledge may be warranted. Group-specific knowledge has the capacity to put an outgroup member in a position of some expertise, thus reducing status differences, and is a route through which group memberships might be made salient in a nonthreatening fashion.

Third, of 12 specific communicative indicators of salience, *none* was positively associated with a global measure of salience *and* relational closeness. The "holy grail" of a measure that enhances group salience and quality of contact did not emerge. This finding has pessimistic implications for intergroup contact, suggesting that communication that enhances group salience while also yielding positive relational outcomes is rare. Support for this pessimism comes from two perspectives. First, a significant body of work indicates that negative stereotypes are more accessible and prevalent than positive stereotypes (Hummert et al., 2002; Kite & Johnson, 1988). Thus, group salience may automatically invoke negative implicit cognitions that render positive relational consequences unlikely. Second (and related), group salience may be a valenced post hoc evaluation of an encounter, rather than an affect-neutral outcome of particular behaviors. That is, affect may intervene between specific behaviors and the evaluation of group salience, with negative affect being the proximal predictor of salience. Negative communication behaviors will thus elicit negative affect, which will subsequently lead to higher group salience. If this process occurs, then negative encounters will be experienced (and attributed) in terms of group differences, whereas positive encounters will be experienced as "interpersonal" and independent of group concerns (hence the negative correlations between wisdom and storytelling, and salience in our data). This could, of course, be investigated in experimental work that manipulates intergroup behaviors and subsequently assesses salience. Both interpretations make it unlikely that we will uncover communicative phenomena that simultaneously cause group salience and positive relational outcomes.

Communication is fundamental to understanding group salience. Communicative processes represent one's own group identity (J. Coupland et al., 1991), and also invoke social categories for all involved in an interaction. Although other factors also play a role (e.g., physical appearance, contextual cues; Hummert et al., 2004), social interaction invokes and activates group categories in ways that are

more dynamic, and hence perhaps more easily subject to interventions that might ease intergroup prejudice. In this article we illustrate the diversity in communication behaviors that may trigger group salience in a specific family relationship, as well as demonstrate some empirically and theoretically important distinctions between measures of group salience. From an applied perspective, we demonstrate some ways in which specific communicative behaviors in a particular family context are linked to processes related to intergroup prejudice.

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