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Month/Year: 1998

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EXPECTATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION WITH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SUBTYPES OF OLDER ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

The study uses a recently-developed scale for eliciting perceptions, expectations, and evaluations of intergenerational communication. As predicted, it is found that younger adults expect to experience more anxiety, receive more complaining, and receive lower levels of attunement from an older adult who is portrayed as "despondent" than one who is portrayed as a "perfect grandparent." In addition, younger adults with more negative attitudes toward older adults expect to experience more negative affect, anxiety, and communication apprehension, to feel more compassion for the older adult, and to receive lower levels of attunement and more complaining from the older adult than those with more positive attitudes. Surprisingly, younger adults with higher levels of young age identification expect to experience lower levels of apprehension, more attunement from the older adult, and to feel more compassion for the older adult than those with lower levels of age identity. These findings are discussed in terms of theoretical models of intergenerational communication, in particular the communication predicament model. In addition, younger people's feelings of having "helped" an older person are discussed in the context of intergroup theory.

In recent years, researchers have uncovered a wide variety of agist stereotypes of older people. Images of elders as being irritable, nagging, grouchy, and cognitively incompetent are just a sample of the negative characterizations that have been uncovered in surveys of public opinion, analyses of TV and literature, and the like (Braithwaite, 1986; Branco & Williamson, 1982; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Palmore, 1990; Woodward,

1991). Some writers argue that negative stereotypes and ageism are close to an epidemic in Western society (Butler, 1989). Overall, negative attitudes toward older people and ageism have been well documented in a number of different social and communication contexts (e.g., caring: Ashburn & Gordon, 1981; medical: Greene, Adelman, Rizzo, & Friedmann, 1991; Kreps, 1990; mediated communication: Bishop & Krause, 1984).

In an attempt to summarize the kinds of communication problems and dilemmas associated with stereotypes in intergenerational encounters, Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, and Henwood (1986) proposed the Communication Predicament of Aging (CPA) model. According to this theoretical statement, certain physical cues (e.g., gray hair, dress style, facial features) may trigger intergroup categorization and associated age stereotypes in an intergenerational encounter (see, for example, Hummert, Garstka, & Shaner, 1997). Such stereotypes evoke certain types of speech behavior from the younger to the older person which are consistent with the stereotype. For instance, a stereotype of older people as cognitively challenged or suffering certain sensory deficits may lead to overaccommodative¹ or patronizing speech, topic restriction, increased volume, and so forth (see Ryan, Hummert, & Boich, 1995, for a review). As a result of such speech patterns in the micro-situation—as well as over time and across contexts—the CPA model suggests detrimental consequences for the older person. Drawing on the work of Rodin and Langer (1980), the CPA model has emphasized the gradual and eventual loss of control for the older person over time as exposure to patronizing speech becomes routine. Ultimately, and in line with the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Snyder, 1981), the model suggests that such losses may result in social, physical, and emotional decline—the stereotypical assumptions that triggered the speech behavior in the first place. Through several revisions, the CPA model has attempted to represent the roles of both young and elderly speakers (Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988), and the potential for certain responses to young patronization to interrupt the cycle (e.g., elder assertion: Harwood & Giles, 1996; Harwood, Giles, Fox, Ryan, & Williams, 1993; Harwood, Ryan, Giles, & Tysoski, 1997). Although the CPA model is a generalized theoretical conceptualization, research using this perspective has focused on patronizing speech (or overaccommodation) directed from young to elderly people and the potential socioemotional consequences of this. In addition, much discussion surrounding the CPA model is grounded in conceptions of elderly stereotypes as unitary and negative.

The existence of a unitary negative image of older people has been questioned recently, and this has implications for the CPA model. For example, Brewer,

¹ Patronizing speech is one example of *overaccommodation*, defined by Coupland, Coupland, Giles, and Henwood (1988) as a miscommunicative process where at least one participant perceives a speaker to “go beyond” a sociolinguistic style judged necessary for attuned talk.

Dull, and Lui (1981) and Schmidt and Boland (1986) have proposed that traits could be grouped to form several different stereotypes of elderly people. Similarly, meta-analytic work has suggested that stereotypes of older people are very heterogeneous, and include positive as well as negative traits (Kite & Johnson, 1988). Other research has also noted variably negative and positive stereotypes or images of elders as portrayed in children's literature (Janelli, 1988), and recent analyses of television portrayals have described a variety of (apparently) positive representations (Dail, 1988; Roy & Harwood, 1997).

Building on these earlier findings, Hummert (1990; 1994; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994) used trait generation and sorting tasks to investigate both positive and negative stereotypes of older people. This research identified four negative and three positive stereotypes of older people held by young, middle aged, and older persons. Negative stereotypes of older adults are: *Severely Impaired* (e.g., slow-thinking, feeble); *Despondent* (e.g., depressed, hopeless); *Shrew/Curmudgeon* (e.g., complaining, inflexible); and *Recluse* (e.g., timid, naive). The three positive stereotypical subcategories of older people have been labeled: *Perfect Grandparent* (e.g., kind, family oriented); *Golden Ager* (e.g., lively, adventurous); and *John Wayne Conservative* (e.g., patriotic, conservative).

Given these diverse cognitive representations of older adults, Hummert (1994) proposed a stereotype sensitive model of communication and aging as an extension of the CPA model. The model proposed that when positive stereotypes of older adults are activated for young people in an intergenerational context, normal adult speech ensues. However, when negative stereotypes are activated, patronizing speech (and the ensuing complications described by the CPA model) is more likely. Hummert and Shaner's (1994) young adult respondents provided support for the model. They believed that they would use more overaccommodations with a Severely Impaired target than with a Perfect Grandparent target. Moreover, audiotaped messages to the Severely Impaired elder were shorter, less complex, and more demeaning in emotional tone than were those to the Perfect Grandparent.

Hummert, Garstka, and Shaner (1995) used the Language in Adulthood questionnaire (Ryan, Kwong See, Meneer, & Trovato, 1992) to assess beliefs of young, middle-aged, and elderly participants about their own communication skills and those of four elderly targets. Traits used to characterize the targets corresponded to two positive (Golden Ager, John Wayne Conservative) and two negative (Despondent, Shrew Curmudgeon) stereotypes. Participants of all ages believed that there would be fewer communication problems in hearing and memory for the positive targets than for the negative targets. It should be noted that this was true even though the trait descriptions of the two negative targets gave no indication of memory and hearing difficulties. In addition, perceptions of age-related increases in word recognition and storytelling skills favored the positive targets over the negative ones. Thus, beliefs about the communication

competence of elderly individuals can result from their being categorized as a particular type of elderly person—negative substereotypes are expected to have more communication problems than positive substereotypes. The study described herein presents highly related data, however it is focused on a broader array of measures than the primarily competence-based evaluations used by Hummert et al. (1995).

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHARACTERIZATIONS OF INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Both the CPA model and Hummert's activation model give central importance to stereotypes of older people, or what have been called person schemas (Hastie et al., 1980; Wyer & Srull, 1989). However, in addition to person schemas or stereotypes, people also have stereotypical expectations or understandings for typical *events*, including expected behavior and affect associated with those events. These sets of expectations have been dubbed *event schemas* (Bower, 1981; Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Wyer & Srull, 1989). Neither the CPA model or the activation model detail event schemas for intergenerational interactions—what we expect to happen, how we expect to feel, and the like. These responses would predictably be related to communication behavior, interpersonal attributions, affective responses, desire for further contact, and so forth in actual encounters.

In a recent study, Williams and Giles (1996) have provided a springboard for this broader view of intergenerational interactions. They studied young people's retrospective accounts of their experiences and affective responses to various types of intergenerational communication. Young people's self-reported accounts of satisfying and dissatisfying intergenerational conversations were analyzed in order to explore the kinds of problems as well as the pleasures young people themselves report in association with intergenerational encounters. Using the procedures of Hecht, Ribeau, and Alberts (1989) written accounts of such conversations were content coded and analyzed to extract underlying dimensions or themes of communication satisfaction and dissatisfaction. As well, participants reported emotions and potential improvement strategies for these conversations.

Results indicated that seven themes or dimensions were frequently associated with satisfying conversations: *Socio-emotional support* (older people were perceived to be interested, attentive, encouraging, and complimenting young people); *perceived older accommodation* (older people were considered sensitive to intergenerational boundaries and did not ask for personal or intimate information); *narratives* (older person telling stories and "carrying" the conversation); *mutuality* (where the conversational interactants "came together" and the conversation took on a life of its own); *positive emotional expression* (such as touching and smiling); and, *astereotyping* (older partners perceived to be unlike other older people and "age not mattering" in the conversation).

Six themes or dimensions were associated with dissatisfying conversations: *old underaccommodation* (older partners perceived as inattentive, non-listening, interrupting and "off-target" attention, old fashioned and inflexible); *young reluctant accommodation* (young people reportedly feeling an obligation to be polite, hold their tongue, self-censor, and/or show deference and respect for age), *negative emotional expression* by older people (reports of angry complaints and/or painful self-disclosures); *defensiveness by young* (young people who disclaimed responsibility for intergenerational communication difficulties); *communicative restrictions* (generally associated with perceptions of older partner's speech production and reception difficulties), and *young negatively stereotyped* (young beliefs that older partners see young people as irresponsible, reckless, and/or naive).

When it came to emotions reported by the young in such encounters, satisfying encounters were couched in terms of happiness, relaxation, self-esteem, and so forth, while dissatisfying encounters triggered reports of frustration, anger, desire to leave, and to a lesser extent, powerlessness. However, there were no differences between conversational types when it came to feelings of being loved, other esteem, anxiety, boredom, and sadness. What was particularly interesting was that anxiety was reported in almost 14 percent of satisfying conversations and mixed positive and negative emotions in over a third of satisfying encounters—hence, for young people even those intergenerational encounters which were judged as satisfying were not universally positive. Not surprisingly according to conflict theory (Wilmot, 1987), the blame for dissatisfying encounters was placed primarily on the shoulders of older conversational partners. Moreover, when asked for ways in which the conversation could be improved, young people generally suggested that older adults should be more accommodative to younger adults' needs. Taking an intergroup perspective (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995; Williams, 1996), Williams and Giles (1996) found that dissatisfying conversations were rated as more salient in intergroup terms than satisfying conversations. In this case, intergroup communication was defined as when participants perceived age as salient and themselves and the older person as typical of their respective age groups (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Williams et al. (1997) developed Williams and Giles' (1996) intergenerational communication satisfaction and dissatisfaction dimensions into the "Perceptions of Intergenerational Communication Scale" (PICS). This scale comprised a set of items designed to measure the characteristics of the dimensions described above in a quantitative fashion. Williams and colleagues (1997) recruited college students from nine nations (Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada) to respond to the nineteen items on this scale with regard to conversations with their elders. Responses were factor analyzed for each nation separately and for all nine nations together, and the same general pattern emerged. Four factors

which underlie perceptions of intergenerational conversations were identified. *Elder non-accommodation* was when young participants reported that older people negatively stereotyped the young and did not attend to their communication needs (for example, elders were close-minded, out-of-touch, or complained). On the other hand, *elder accommodation* was when older people were perceived as supportive, attentive, and generally encouraging to young people (e.g., older adults told interesting stories, gave useful advice, did not pry). A third factor *respect obligation*, reflected aspects of reluctant young accommodation, respect, and politeness, but was rather ill-defined and suffered from low reliabilities. A fourth factor *age-irrelevant positivity*, described a situation where young people felt conversations with older people were emotionally positive, satisfying, and where age did not matter.

This study represented a first attempt to measure the full breadth of young individuals' cognitive representations of intergenerational conversations. The PICS measure demonstrated its potential to tap complex and subtle aspects of perceptions of intergenerational communication with a generalized elder target. The study reported in the present article was designed to examine young people's perceptions of, and expectations for, intergenerational communication with different subtypes of older people (see review of Hummert's work, earlier), focusing on a specific conversation with a specific person. It extends previous research by examining a broad range of expectation measures (using the PICS questionnaire), and by incorporating more extensive measures of affective expectations which have received little attention in previous research. It has been noted that anxiety plays a central role in determining negative outcomes in intergroup contexts (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). This has been supported by theoretical and empirical work in the intercultural sphere (Gudykunst, 1995; Gao & Gudykunst, 1990; Stephan & Stephan, 1989). Therefore, we anticipate that anxiety may be an important variable in intergenerational conversations, and that other affective measures may play an important and previously under-attended role.

SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES

If young people are induced to imagine a particular stereotype of an older person, then it is likely that they will have expectations about that person's communication behavior as well as their own responses in that context. Using Hummert's (1994) stereotype sensitive model of intergenerational communication we predicted that young participants would have different communication expectations for different substereotypes of older people. Building on previous research by Williams and Giles (1996), we expected negative stereotypes of older people to be associated with dissatisfying dimensions of communication (e.g., reluctant accommodation, elder underaccommodation) and negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, apprehension). From previous research on patronizing speech we

predicted that young people would expect to modify their own speech, particularly in response to negative stereotypes of older people. Considering these predictions together we formed the following hypothesis.

H1: Participants assigned to converse with a "despondent" older adult will provide more negative evaluations on the Perceptions of Intergenerational Communication Scale than those assigned to converse with a "perfect grandparent."

Again, considering the activation model of intergenerational conversations as well as other research described above, evidence suggests that individual differences may mediate expectations of intergenerational interactions. One clear potential influence is younger adults' generalized attitudes toward older adults. Little work has examined this possibility although researchers have frequently suggested that those with more negative attitudes toward age and aging in general will behave in different ways toward elderly individuals (Braithwaite, 1986; Palmore, 1990; Ryan et al., 1986). In addition, previous research (Williams & Giles, 1996) has indicated that intergroup salience may play a role in young people's evaluations of intergenerational conversations. The extent to which a person perceives an intergenerational interaction as "intergroup" will depend in part on the importance they assign to their age identity (i.e., their level of identification with their own age or generational group: Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Garstka, Branscombe, & Hummert, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, this study aimed to examine the role of general attitudes toward elderly people and young age identity in evaluations of intergenerational communication, resulting in a second hypothesis.

H2: Young adult participants with negative attitudes toward older adults in general and with higher levels of age identity will provide more negative evaluations on the Perceptions of Intergenerational Communication Scale than those with more positive attitudes and lower levels of age identity.

It should be noted that Hypotheses 1 and 2 are independent of one another. They both predict "main effects" for their particular independent variables and it is possible that support will be found for them both. That said, the relative strength of support for the two hypotheses will be interesting to examine. Some research has suggested that people tend to modify their speech as a function of the fact that a target is "elderly," regardless of the functional ability of the older person (e.g., Caporael, 1981; Kemper, 1994). However, other research has shown that under some circumstances young people will modify their behavior and expectations in response to different types of older adult, including differences in the functional capacity of the addressee (e.g., Hummert, 1994; Hummert & Shaner, 1994; Hummert et al., 1995; Hummert, Shaner, Garstka, & Henry, 1996). The relative volume of support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 may provide some indication as to

whether general attitudes or specific target characteristics are more powerful in determining expectations for communication with older adults.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 109 volunteers from an introductory communication class at a large Midwestern university who took part in the study in return for extra credit. The sample was 61.5 percent female and 88 percent Euro-American (4.6% African American, 1.8% Latino-American, 3.7% Asian-American, and 1.9% "other" or missing). The average age of the sample was 19.7 years ($SD = 1.4$), the age range was between eighteen and twenty-five years (a small number of subjects over the age of 25 was excluded for the purpose of maintaining a homogeneous "young" subject population). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two stimulus conditions and completed a questionnaire packet.

Materials

Participants were presented with a description of an older adult target and a complementary photograph. In a between subjects design, the older adult was presented in a manner consistent with one of two substereotypes of elderly people revealed by Hummert et al.'s (1994) research. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to a trait description of the "perfect grandparent" subtype. These participants were told "The picture you are looking at is of Jennifer Brown. She is a loving and kind grandparent. Her family often describes her as generous, wise, and intelligent. Jennifer is seventy-one years old and has been retired for eight years." The remaining participants were told "The picture you are looking at is of Jennifer Brown. She is a lonely and somewhat neglected grandparent. Her family often describes her as sad, afraid, and hopeless. Jennifer is seventy-one years old and has been retired for eight years." The name of the condition ("despondent" or "perfect grandparent") was not mentioned. The traits mentioned as part of the description were central traits in Hummert et al.'s (1994) clusters of subtype traits. Each description was accompanied by a stereotype-consistent photograph selected from Hummert et al.'s (1997) stimulus materials. In both conditions, the photograph featured the same older woman in identical dress and physical pose (seated). However, in the perfect grandparent condition the woman was smiling while in the despondent condition she had a neutral expression on her face. Hummert et al. have demonstrated that these facial expressions are associated with positive and negative subtyping, respectively. Participants were asked to keep the photograph visible while they completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed in individual sessions, hence there was no chance of them viewing another photograph and

inferring the nature of the manipulation. Participants were asked to imagine having a conversation with the woman in the photograph, and asked to write a brief open-ended description of the conversation. This was designed to stimulate thought about the conversation before the quantitative evaluation. Following this, participants were asked to respond to two questionnaires, presented in counterbalanced order.

One questionnaire was Hecht's (1978) interpersonal communication satisfaction inventory (Com-Sat). This questionnaire has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1984). In the current context individuals were asked about their perceived satisfaction in the conversation with the older target, and the measure was highly reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

In addition to the Com-Sat questionnaire, participants were asked to assess the imagined interaction with the older target on a modified version of the PICS questionnaire. In the current study, this questionnaire had seventy-seven items, primarily derived from the PICS questionnaire described earlier (Williams et al., 1997). These were supplemented by items from the Communication Anxiety Inventory (Booth-Butterfield & Gould, 1986). As described earlier, anxiety is a construct that is becoming important within the area of intergroup communication, but that has received little attention to date in research concerned with intergenerational communication (see Williams & Giles, 1996). Additional items measuring other dimensions of affective response were also incorporated in the scale—these were derived inductively from previous research into intergenerational communication. The complete set of items was divided into three sections. These measured perceptions of *own behavior* in the interaction (23 items, sample item: "During the conversation with Jennifer I spoke louder"), perceptions of *emotions* experienced in the interaction (34 items, sample item: "During the conversation with Jennifer I felt tense"), and perceptions of *older partner's behavior* in the interaction (20 items, sample item: "During the conversation with Jennifer I found that she told interesting stories"). The extent to which a respondent anticipated or imagined particular behaviors or emotions was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

In addition to the items regarding the specifics of the intergenerational conversation, participants also completed two general measures. The first of these was a thirteen-item age identity scale which measured the extent to which respondents viewed their own age group positively and were personally committed to membership in that group ($\alpha = .96$; Garstka et al., 1997; Sample Item: "I feel an attachment to other members of my age group"). This was completed ostensibly as part of a separate study which was administered prior to the current study. The second more general measure comprised three subscales of Braithwaite, Lynd-Stevenson, and Pigram's (1993) attitudes toward aging questionnaire. The three subscales used in the current study were the "attitudes toward contact" scale which measures perceived enjoyment of contact with older

adults ($\alpha = .84$), the "perceptions of older adults' competence" scale ($\alpha = .82$), and the "attitudes toward older adults' sociability" scale ($\alpha = .64$). This was measured immediately following participants' ratings of the conversation. Respondents were instructed to answer independently of their answers about the specific conversation, and the questions were clearly phrased in terms of older adults in general. The procedure generally took about forty-five minutes and no problems were reported.

To summarize, the study consisted of a simple experimental design: the nature of the older adult target (*perfect grandparent* vs. *despondent*) was manipulated, and various measures were taken of younger adults' perceptions of a conversation with that target. In addition, attitudes toward older adults and age identity were measured.

RESULTS

Analysis of Perceptions of the Intergenerational Encounter

Each of the three sections of the PICS questionnaire (older partner's behaviors, own behaviors, own emotions) was separately factor analyzed to reduce the volume of data and access the dimensions underlying each set of questions. Exploratory factor analysis was adopted since this was the first use of this particular version of the questionnaire. Principal components extraction and varimax rotation were used. For each portion of the questionnaire a solution was accepted which was 1) interpretable, 2) parsimonious, 3) where all primary factor loadings were at least .2 higher than all secondary loadings (i.e., .6/.4, or .5/.3 for any given solution), and 4) where the ensuing factor had a reliability of at least .70 (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). When acceptable factors were found, the constituent items were summed to create single subscales. The resulting subscales are presented in Table 1 and described below.

Emotion Measures

Three factors were extracted which accounted for 54.7 percent of the variance in the twenty-six items (8 items were dropped due to small or double loadings, or because they significantly lowered the reliability of the scale). The first factor reflected a general *positive affect* dimension (e.g., annoyed, emotionally negative, bored: $\alpha = .91$). The second factor revealed a combination of items concerning personal self-confidence (self-confident, good about myself) and benevolence (compassionate, helpful). This was termed the *compassion/self-esteem* factor ($\alpha = .86$). Third, an *anxiety* factor emerged (nervous, shy, tense: $\alpha = .84$).

Own Behavior Measures

Two factors emerged from the analysis of the questions concerning younger behaviors which accounted for 44.8 percent of the variance in the eighteen items

Table 1. Summary of Factors Emerging from the PICS

Expected Emotion

Positive affect: defensive (R), guarded (R), emotionally positive, satisfied, age didn't matter, comfortable, emotionally negative (R), happy, frustrated (R), angry (R), interested, annoyed (R), bored (R)

Compassion/self-esteem: compassionate, self-confident, helpful, supportive, kind, generous, good about myself, secure

Anxiety: calm (R); nervous, shy, awkward, tense

Expectation of Own Behavior

Communication apprehension: I felt poised and in control (R), my words became confused and jumbled, fingers and hands trembled, had nothing worthwhile to say, was afraid of making an embarrassing slip of the tongue, could not think clearly when I spoke, heart seemed to beat faster than usual, didn't know what to say, looked for ways to end the conversation, did not act like myself, had to bite my tongue, easy to find the right words to express myself (R)

Young overaccommodation: I spoke slower, avoided certain words, spoke louder, felt obliged to be polite, avoided certain topics, made allowances for age

Expectations of the Older Adult's Behavior

Elder attunement: complimented me, told interesting stories, gave useful advice, negatively stereotyped me as young (R), was attentive, talked down to me (R), was supportive, gave unwanted advice (R), gave welcome advice

Elder complaining: made angry complaints, complained about her life circumstances, complained about her health

Note: (R) indicates items reverse-coded.

(5 items were dropped). The first of these reflected a *communication apprehension* dimension (e.g., I did not know what to say, I did not act like myself: alpha = .87). The second factor reflected *young overaccommodation*. Items here included avoiding certain words, talking louder, and feeling obliged to be polite (alpha = .76).

Expectations of Older Behavior Measures

The two factors that emerged from the questions concerning the older person's behavior accounted for 53.5 percent of the variance in the twelve items (8 items were dropped). The first represented *elder attunement* to the younger person's needs (e.g., gave welcome advice, told interesting stories, was

supportive: $\alpha = .85$). The second represented *elder complaining* (e.g., complained about her life, complained about her health: $\alpha = .77$).

Validation of the Dimensions

A multiple regression analysis was run with Hecht's (1978) Com-Sat as the dependent variable, and the various scales described above as the predictors. The set of predictors significantly predicted the Com-Sat, accounting for a substantial portion of its variance (adjusted $R^2 = .74$, $F(7,100) = 45.37$, $p < .001$). Examination of the individual scales indicated that *communication apprehension* ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$), *elder attunement* ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$), and *positive affect* ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$) all contributed significant unique variance in predicting the Com-Sat. *Elder attunement* was the most powerful predictor, indicating that global communication satisfaction for younger individuals in intergenerational encounters is substantially determined by the extent to which the older person is attuned to their conversational needs. This predictor outperformed the others by large margins.

It should be noted that all of the variables, even those that did not significantly predict the Com-Sat in the regression analysis, were substantially related to the Com-Sat in terms of bivariate correlations. The lowest simple correlation was between the Com-Sat and *young overaccommodation* ($r(108) = .26$, $p < .001$). In addition, the various scales were correlated with one another to a greater or lesser degree (mean pairwise correlation = $.42$, $SD = .23$, minimum = $.02$, maximum = $.81$). The overall pattern of moderate intercorrelations between the scales indicates that as a set they were accessing related constructs. We feel that along with the correlations with the Com-Sat, this provides good indication of the validity of these scales.

Testing Experimental Hypotheses

In order to evaluate Hypotheses 1 and 2, the data were analyzed with a series of regression analyses. In each analysis, one of the seven evaluative dimensions of the PICS (from Table 1) was treated as the dependent variable. The independent variables were the nature of the elderly subtype, the age identity score, and the three subscale scores from Braithwaite et al.'s (1993) measure of attitudes toward older adults. These five independent measures were entered together. Hence for each regression, five predictor variables were used to predict one evaluative dimension of the conversation that the respondent was imagining. The results are summarized in Table 2 which shows the total amount of variance accounted for by all predictors (R^2) and associated significance, the size of contribution of individual significant predictors (β) and the percentage of unique variance accounted for by individual significant predictors (squared semi-partial correlation coefficients— sr^2). For purposes of comparison, the same analysis is also reported with Hecht's (1978) Com-Sat as the dependent variable.

Table 2. Significant Predictors of Perceptions of Intergenerational Interaction

Dependent Variable (see Table 1)	Adj. F^2/F^a	Significant Predictor(s)	Beta	sr^2
Positive affect	.43/16.98***	Attitudes toward contact***	.59	.21
Compassion/self-esteem	.07/2.69*	Attitudes toward contact*	.30	.05
		Age identity*	.19	.04
Anxiety	.15/4.80***	Elderly target*	.18	.03
		Attitudes toward contact***	-.44	.12
Communication apprehension	.35/12.64***	Attitudes toward contact***	-.64	.25
		Age identity*	-.18	.03
Young overaccommodation	.10/3.39**	Attitudes toward contact ^x	-.21	.03
Elder attunement	.45/18.62***	Elderly target**	-.22	.05
		Attitudes toward contact***	.48	.14
		Attitudes toward sociability**	.24	.04
		Age identity**	.21	.04
Elder complaining	.36/13.18***	Elderly target***	.48	.23
		Attitudes toward competence*	-.21	.03
Hecht's Com-Sat	.45/18.38***	Elderly target**	-.21	.04
		Attitudes toward contact***	.60	.22
		Age identity**	.21	.04

^aAll F statistics have 5,102 degrees of freedom.

^x $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

As can be seen from Table 2, the nature of the older target played a role in determining three of the seven dimensions of evaluation. Participants who were presented with the despondent subtype described themselves as more anxious, and described the older adult as less attuned and more likely to complain, as compared to those participants presented with the more positive subtype. Hence, as predicted by Hypothesis 1, the nature of the elderly target (positive or negative subtype) did affect evaluations. However, this only occurs along certain evaluative dimensions.

Considering Hypothesis 2, Braithwaite et al.'s (1993) *attitudes toward contact* dimension was a significant predictor of five dimensions of conversational expectations: compassion/self-esteem, anxiety, communication apprehension, elder attunement, and positive affect. In addition, it was a borderline predictor of young overaccommodation. Across all measures, more positive attitudes toward contact with older adults were related to more positive expectations for this specific interaction. As can be seen from Table 2, this measure was not only the most *frequent* significant predictor, but also the *strongest* predictor in most

instances (i.e., the highest beta, highest squared semi-partial correlation). Braithwaite et al.'s other two attitudinal dimensions predicted only one of the outcome variables each: perceived *competence of older adults* was negatively associated with the level of complaining to be expected in the experimental interaction, and perceptions of *older adults' sociability* predicted level of elder attunement. Hence, support is found for Hypothesis 2, which had predicted that more general attitudes regarding aging would be associated with expectations for this particular conversation.

Age identity also significantly predicted three out of the seven dependent measures. Individuals scoring higher on the age identity measures scored higher on *compassion/self-esteem* and *elder attunement*, but lower on *communication apprehension*. However, as will be discussed further below, these results were in the opposite direction to that predicted in Hypothesis 2. In general, individuals with stronger levels of age identity also expected more *positive* experiences in the intergenerational conversation.

DISCUSSION

A number of findings from the current data have import for future research on intergenerational communication. First, we have continued investigating the dimensions which are central to younger individuals' evaluations of, and expectations for, intergenerational communication. The dimensions emerging here complement those found previously (see Table 1). The *elder attunement* dimension included elements of a dimension uncovered in two previous studies. Williams and Giles (1996) and Williams et al. (1997) both describe an "elder accommodation" factor (i.e., elder support, advice, and narratives). Similarly, the *elder complaining* dimension in the current analysis reflects one aspect of Williams and Giles' (1996) factor of "elder underaccommodation." The two factors underlying young people's perceptions of their own behavior (*communication apprehension* and *young overaccommodation*) are closely related to the previously reported dimensions of "communication restrictions" and "reluctant young accommodation," respectively (William & Giles, 1996). That said, certain of the elements of *young overaccommodation* in this analysis were not frequently reported in the Williams and Giles (1996) self-report data (i.e., talking louder, slower). Overall, it appears that intergenerational communication, for young people, is a variable mixture of young overaccommodation, elder underaccommodation (including complaining), elder attunement (e.g., support, encouragement, advice), communication constraint and restraint (perhaps as a function of apprehension and anxiety), affective valence (from very positive to very negative), and compassion (which in two studies has been linked to self-esteem). Clearly, questionnaire development should continue to sharpen these factors and further confirm their reliability and validity. In addition, further exploratory work should be encouraged to consider additional dimensions. The

fact that the scales in the current study predicted a large amount of variance in communication satisfaction provides support for the construct validity of the current scale. In addition, the reliability of the subscales in the current study was good.

Turning to the hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed in that scores on some dimensions were predicted by the type of target older person. All significant relationships were in the predicted direction—more negative expectations for conversations with a “despondent” target. This demonstrates that younger individuals’ expectations for conversations with different types of older adults vary quite substantially, and that they vary along markedly different dimensions. For instance, expectations of complaining behavior from the older adult differed dramatically between the two target types, while expectations for one’s own overaccommodations to the older adult differ very little. In addition, evaluations which varied dramatically across older targets were not necessarily those which predicted global satisfaction. Complaining by the older adult dominated in terms of distinguishing targets, whereas elder attunement to young’s conversational needs was the dominant predictor of global satisfaction.

It should be noted that the nature of the target did not influence evaluations along all dimensions. In particular, our younger adult participants described little variation in their own behavior (e.g., overaccommodation) across the two older target types. Perhaps the extreme overaccommodations described in this questionnaire are only seen as appropriate with very negative subtypes. In Hummert and Shaner’s (1994) study (in which modifications did occur), the older target was presented as “severely impaired” rather than merely “despondent.” Alternatively, it may be that consciously adjusting one’s own communication was seen as “fake” by our participants, and hence they were hesitant to self-report such accommodations (e.g., talking louder, slower). The fact that these accommodations actually occur in interactions with older adults in spite of these self-reports is not surprising, since this accommodative behavior probably occurs largely below consciousness.

While the nature of the older target was important in determining expectations for the interaction, our analysis suggests that general attitudinal and identity issues also play a substantial role in determining such ratings, hence providing support for Hypothesis 2. For instance, despite the specific information that was given about the older target, evaluations on a number of dimensions were determined more strongly by global attitudes. Only on one dimension (*elderly complaining*) was the specific character of the older person the most powerful predictor of conversational expectations. Thus, expectations of older adults in general may be as important as the specific nature of the target. The current results indicate that it is possible for general attitudes and specific target characteristics to play a role simultaneously in determining expectations.

Interesting findings regarding age identity also emerged. Our younger participants who scored *higher* on the age identity measure also tended to score

higher on compassion/self-esteem and perceptions of elder attunement, and to score lower on communication apprehension. These results are somewhat contrary to our expectations, however they are interpretable. For instance, high levels of age identity may give the younger person the security to give positive evaluations of the older adult, while young individuals who are less secure in their identity may be more prone to discriminate (see Garrett, Giles, & Coupland, 1989, for suggestive parallels in the ethnic sphere). Likewise, a high level of identity may be associated with enhanced confidence, and hence lessened apprehension. Clearly, further research is warranted examining the nature of age identity, and the role it plays in determining perceptions and evaluations of intergenerational encounters. The following section expands on the association between age identity and the compassion/self-esteem dimension, together with the emergence of the compassion/self-esteem dimension in the factor analysis.

Social Identity, Helping, and Power

The compassionate/self-esteem dimension that emerged from the factor analysis deserves discussion. The fact that items concerned with nurturing an older adult (compassion, support, kindness) should load so consistently with items concerned with self-esteem (feeling good about myself, self-confident) is theoretically interesting. This implies that feeling good about yourself, or getting self-esteem from an intergenerational encounter, is strongly associated with a caring/nurturing orientation to the older adult. Qualitative self-report data support this relationship. For example, in her study of intergenerational communication satisfaction, Williams (1994) notes that for young participants the provision of support to older partners was often combined with comments about positive feelings about themselves. For example: "I made her feel better about herself, I felt good about myself," "it makes me feel good to make others feel good," and "mostly I felt good that I had taken the time to talk to her" (pp. 87-88). Similarly, in the open-ended data collected as part of the current study participants frequently reported feeling that they were helping their older partner, and that this made them feel good (see Harwood, 1998). For example, one respondent noted "I would feel good about forcing myself to talk to her. I know she would appreciate it," while another noted "I would feel better . . . after I talked with her knowing that I might have done something to cheer her up."

A positive spin on this would be that young people feel good about themselves for helping the other person. In the social support literature, Stoller and Pugliesi (1989) note that communicating support can be beneficial for the provider as well as the recipient, particularly when providers believe that they have been agents of redefinition and change (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). Such a definition would suggest a selfless, other-oriented approach to the encounter.

However, it is possible to understand this phenomenon in a less rosy context. In particular, we are tempted to view it as indicating that young people feel good

about themselves when they place older individuals in powerless positions. Social Identity Theory suggests that by making positive comparisons of ingroup with outgroup, individuals help to maintain their social identities and gain self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this framework, it can be suggested that by placing older adults into a relatively powerless position by claiming the ability to care for them, younger adults adopt for themselves a relatively powerful position (i.e., caretaker and benefactor). The fact that age identity significantly predicted the compassion/self-esteem dimension of our questionnaire, while the nature of the elderly target did not, may be further evidence for this. If younger individuals who feel more strongly about their "youngness" are also more likely to "help" older adults, this is a strong indication that a social identity explanation may be most appropriate for these data (see also Bytheway, 1995; Kalish, 1979). This finding is particularly troublesome given the convincing evidence in the literature that dependency inducing "helping" is common in certain settings. Baltes and Wahl (1996) present convincing evidence that older adults in nursing homes are often reinforced for dependent behavior and not reinforced for independent behavior. The current discussion would suggest an age-identity/self-esteem explanation for this phenomenon. Carers receive social identity benefits from positively differentiating themselves from dependent older adults, and hence may seek to care for and help even those who do not need such caring. Naturally, within the nursing home setting there may also be more immediate benefits for staff in inducing dependency (i.e., creating easily managed residents), however we do not rule out identity functions as playing a complementary role. Clearly, considerably more research would be required to confirm this suspicion and other interpretations are possible.

Limitations and Conclusion

First, it should be noted that the older subtype variable in this study is a dichotomous, nominal-level variable, which is competing to account for variance with reliable and highly variable interval-level measures. Hence, this study should not be treated as indicating the relative strength of target-type and attitudinal variables in determining behavioral expectations. That said, the manipulation of target type was a strong one, featuring very clear descriptions of the target, and a picture of the target that was clearly either positive or negative. Hence, we are not concerned that the manipulation was too subtle for the participants, or that we have overstated the impact of the more general measures. The study should be seen as a demonstration that *both* general and specific factors can explain substantial variance in expectations for intergenerational conversations.

Second, a possible concern with the results is that the general attitudinal measures were taken *following* participants' evaluations of the specific target. In other words, the specific nature of the target may have influenced participants'

ratings of "older adults in general." Two factors, however, guard against that interpretation. First, comparisons of general attitude scale means across the two target groups reveal nonsignificant results (all t s < 2, all p s > .10). This implies that there was no effect of the manipulation on measures of general attitudes. Equally important, the nature of the subtype was entered into the regression analyses at the same time as the general attitude measures. Hence, variance that was shared between the experimental manipulation and participants' general attitudes was removed from the relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. The results report variance that the general attitudinal measures accounted for over and above that accounted for by the manipulation. Naturally, it is not possible to rule out the influence of the evaluations process itself on judgments of general attitudes. Further research should counterbalance these measures to test the stability of the current findings. However, direct contamination of the general attitudes by the manipulation is statistically controlled. It should be noted that the age identity measure was taken before the manipulation, and was presented as part of a separate study, hence it is not possible that the manipulation influenced this measure.

Finally, it is clear that the findings uncovered in the current study require confirmation and elaboration in the context of real interactions. The current study elicits expectations and feelings regarding imaginary conversations, rather than measures of actual interaction. Future research will need to examine the ways in which these expectations influence actual conversations.

The results emerging from this study reflect important aspects of younger adults' expectations for intergenerational encounters. We believe that the applied consequences of the findings are important. Routine, seemingly mundane interactions between older and younger people are an almost daily occurrence. It is through these interactions that intergenerational (mis)understandings and stereotypes are created, sustained, enacted, and reinforced. Moreover, it is through these seemingly unremarkable intergenerational interactions that older and younger people alike negotiate their everyday domestic and lifestyle needs as consumers of products and services (e.g., from servers in shops and offices, and professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and bank managers). In these contexts, people infer traits and expectations for their encounters from physical cues and other, generally limited information. The effects of these inferences in interactions can seriously interfere with older people's physical, psychological, and social functioning in community contexts. The current research suggests that a younger individual approaching a conversation with an older adult that they have categorized as "despondent" will have a series of expectations concerning that conversation. Such expectations might have consequences in terms of the younger individuals' desire to initiate communication, their intention to avoid communication, their anxiety entering the encounter, or a host of other relevant variables. In many contexts these consequences might be serious for *both* parties,

but particularly the older adult who might experience repeated instances of dissatisfying communication and reduced social contact.

To this extent, our argument mirrors that of Hummert (1994) that the activation of cognitive representations will influence the nature of the intergenerational encounter. However, we would argue that these expectations need not be consequences of the stereotyping process as it is presented by Hummert. We would argue, in line with Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz (1982), that expectations for the conversation may be elicited parallel with the stereotype. In other words, we argue against the notion that trait information has some kind of primacy in an interpersonal setting. Cognitive representations that are activated in an intergenerational setting probably include trait information, but also conversational expectations, relationship expectations and plans, strategizing for continuing or terminating the conversation, affective expectations, and the like (see Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986). We advocate continued research to uncover the multiple sets of expectations that younger and older adults have for intergenerational interactions. Such sets will influence the ways in which they approach particular types of interactions, and the ways in which the interactions themselves progress. In terms of the Communication Predicament of Aging (CPA) model outlined in the introduction, these sets of expectations can be understood as "stereotyped expectations" but with the term used more broadly to indicate a full range of expectations about the encounter. We hope that this study has demonstrated that the range of expectations can be considerably broader than merely trait based, and that considering the full range of such expectations will broaden our understanding of the ways in which cognitive representations influence intergenerational communication across contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express our thanks to Mary Lee Hummert for her assistance with the materials used in the current project. We also appreciate the suggestions of Robert Kastenbaum and two anonymous reviewers.

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