

CREATING INTERGENERATIONAL DISTANCE: LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND MIDDLE-AGE

JAKE HARWOOD¹ and HOWARD GILES²

The years of 'middle-age' have received very little attention in the social sciences. We review the two primary strains of research in the area—one concerned with demonstrating the existence of a mid-life crisis, and the other aiming to demonstrate stability in mid-life. Results from a survey are presented which provide initial indications of the importance of linguistic and communicative processes to an understanding of mid-life. In closing, Communication Accommodation Theory is invoked in the development of a model of one particular process within the area of communication and middle-age—the socialization of the middle-aged into elderly roles. This process is described as 'intergenerational distancing'. The importance of language and communication processes in the development of certain crisis situations is outlined.

Introduction

Throughout the social sciences, the period of middle adulthood appears to be a uniformly neglected area in the life-span. These years are virtually invisible in academic research, as individuals 'disappear' into the work force and the family (O'Connor and Wolfe, 1987). We argue herein that the lack of research in this area does a disservice to the notions of 'life-span development' that are espoused within many social-scientific disciplines. In addition, the paucity of research may serve to reinforce perceptions of the middle-aged as a somewhat bland and uninteresting group. This lack of research has been bemoaned by many, including Liebert and Oldham (1989), the Social Science Research Council (1973), and most recently the American Board of Family Practice (ABFP, 1990). Given Boyd and Dowd's (1988) demonstration of the importance of relative age in defining expectations for interaction, a focus on middle-age seems essential. It should be noted that, in contrast with the picture painted above, work on the early and late portions of the life-span is well established in the field of language and communication (see Coupland *et al.* 1991; Durkin, 1988; Dragastin and Elder, 1975; Ryan *et al.* 1986). Despite the fact that middle-aged samples have been included in dialectological and sociolinguistic studies investigating the roles of age and generation in understanding language change in numerous speech communities across the world (e.g. Labov, 1972; Thelander, 1982; Trudgill, 1974), this age group has rarely, if ever, been the unique focus of research attention in the language sciences in and of itself.

The literature is currently lacking an adequate definition of middle-age. Virtually the only consensus to be found is that middle-age is a life-period occurring chronologically somewhere between 35 and 70. Estimates of its chronological extent range

Correspondence should be sent to: Jake Harwood, Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4020, U.S.A.

from Levinson *et al.*'s (1978) notion of 40–45 as the years of 'crisis', to Sherman's (1987) focus on a time period extending from 35–60. The US Census Bureau uses the years 45–64 as the boundaries of 'middle-age' (Bogue, 1959). A considerable amount of this variation is accounted for by whether particular researchers are examining the time of 'middle-age' in general, or the years of the so-called mid-life crisis in particular (for a review of 'definitions' of middle-age, see Borland, 1978). In addition to the confusion in the literature, there is some evidence that the general population displays some variation in its assessments of middle-age. The ABFP (1990) surveyed a national random sample of 1200 adults. They report 11% of 18–35 year olds defining themselves as middle-aged, as well as 30% of their 75+ age-group. Hence, as regards self-categorization, there do not seem to be clear boundaries to middle-age.

That said, the chronological boundaries of middle-age should not be the only focus of a definition of middle-age (see Rubin and Rubin [1982; 1986] for a discussion of the problems surrounding the use of chronological age as a marker). Chronological age may well serve a powerful demarcation function for individuals in shaping perceptions of 'age appropriate' behavior (Neugarten *et al.*, 1968). However, we are particularly interested in the role that social/communicative influences and choices play in self- and other-categorization as 'middle-aged', over and above the role of chronological age.

The first part of this paper is divided into two primary sections. First, we consider research investigating the mid-life crisis. This reflects the predominance of work investigating crisis in the field as a whole. Work investigating the crisis from endogenous and exogenous (social constructionist) perspectives is examined. Second, work disputing the existence of crisis is surveyed. This section reflects the views of many who see middle-age as a time of considerable stability. In the central section of the paper we present exploratory empirical research looking at younger individuals' perceptions of middle age. In conclusion, a model of young–middle-aged interaction is presented. This model will begin to outline a process by which, we argue, middle-aged individuals are socialized into elderly roles within intergenerational talk. Such a process is seen as central to an understanding of the mid-life crisis, reflecting, as it does, the increasing salience of age in the middle-aged individual's life. Hence the somewhat *acomunicative* literature review in the Introduction, and the communicatively-grounded empirical data will be integrated. We see the model as building from, and beginning to integrate, the diverse strains of literature presented through the paper.

Theories and conceptions of crisis

The mid-life crisis is a broadly-accepted phenomenon that has achieved recognition in popular wisdom as well as more academic circles (Coz, 1992; Kearl and Hoag, 1984). The crisis has been identified as consisting of the simultaneous onset of a number of life events, all of which conspire to cause a substantial, and at times traumatic, re-evaluation of self and relationships. The life events include (in no particular order):

(1) Menopause: The climacteric (female menopause) is thought to cause a significant loss of identity in some women (see MacPherson, 1985; Weg, 1988). While traditionally seen as especially significant in a woman's life, the notion of a male menopause has also become popularized recently (Henker, 1981).

(2) 'Empty nest': The loss of one's children is often hypothesized to cause considerable trauma, especially in more 'traditional' family settings where the primary caregiver (generally the mother) may have been engaged in child rearing as a primary task for a considerable length of time (Lowenthal and Chiriboga, 1972; Notman, 1982).

(3) Onset of physical decline: A number of chronic illnesses and a decline in general physical and sensory abilities are seen as symptomatic of middle-age (ABFP, 1990).

(4) Bereavement: Middle-age is often the time when individuals have to deal with personal losses. Parental bereavement is a significant occurrence at this time of life, and the loss of one's peers may also begin to be a factor (Goin and Burgoyne, 1981).

(5) Financial crises: Middle-age is sometimes seen as the time of life when financial obligations spread to the generation below (raising and schooling children), and also to the generation above (caring for elderly relatives: cf. Spitze and Logan, 1990). In addition, financial burdens may be substantial on the middle-aged individuals themselves, with rising health care costs, mortgages, and the like (ABFP, 1990).

(6) Existential factors: A number of more existential factors come into play at this time. For instance, middle-age is a time when we are perceived to be more bound up in issues of our own mortality (Ciernia, 1985; Jacques, 1965; although see ABFP, 1990). In addition, notions of personal achievement and fulfilment are seen as being salient. Individuals are thought to confront their own achievements, and have to come to terms with goals that will not be met. This may be especially true of an individuals' career status, which frequently peaks in middle-age (Born and Nelson, 1984; Buunk and Janseen, 1992; Kakar, 1976).

(7) Sexual bimodality: Jung (1971), Levinson *et al.* (1978), and Neumann (1958) focus on a significant personality change in mid-life. This is the emergence of contra-sexual components of personality—these are characteristics that are traditionally associated with the opposite sex. According to these scholars, middle-aged men develop increasingly 'feminine' characteristics, experiencing more passivity, sensuousness, and dependency (Tamir, 1989), while middle-aged women become more instrumental, assertive, and competitive (Gutmann, 1976; Steiner, Satterberg and Muir, 1978; Wolff, 1956).

Evidence for the mid-life crisis emerges from a number of perspectives, although there is little work which examines the phenomenon from a sociolinguistic/communication standpoint. Rollins (1989) reports that mid-life often constitutes a low point in married life, which characteristically demonstrates a U-shaped pattern of satisfaction (Paris and Luckey, 1966; Pineo, 1961; Spanier, Lewis and Cole, 1975). This pattern is largely seen as a result of the stressors of having children in the home, with satisfaction rising again after the departure of children. The seriousness of this decline in marital satisfaction is reinforced by findings that marriage is the primary determinant

of happiness and mental-health in middle-aged men (although perhaps surprisingly not so much so with women: see Farrell and Rosenberg, 1981; Vaillant, 1977). A review of the crisis literature is not possible here, but good summaries can be found in Cytrynbaum, *et al.*, (1980), Fried (1976), Gould (1978), and Hunter and Sundel (1989a). Those interested in this area should also be directed to the work of Levinson *et al.* (1978) which may constitute the most influential, and the most controversial, example of 'crisis' research (cf. Perun and Bielby, 1979).

Recently, there has been some growth in 'crisis-driven' theorizing that considers more social and communicative features. This work moves beyond the communicative sterility of much of the research discussed up to this point. Dannefer (1984), for instance, describes an 'ontogenetic fallacy' which he believes to be widespread in research on the mid-life crisis. The fallacy is apparent in a body of work in the field which sees the mid-life crisis as somehow a 'normal' aspect of development, and hence fails to consider 'socially produced age-related patterns' (p. 101). Dannefer outlines a 'sociogenic' approach to the life-span, and particularly mid-life, that incorporates social-constructionist assumptions, and posits processes such as the self-fulfilling prophecy in both micro-interaction, and larger scale societal processes.

A further contribution to a social constructionist standpoint on mid-life is presented by Kearl and Hoag (1984). Adopting a sociology of knowledge approach, these scholars examine both academic and mass-media articles concerning mid-life over a 20 year period. Their aim is to consider the 'reification' (Berger and Luckman, 1966) of the notion of a mid-life crisis. In other words, they are concerned not with whether or not the mid-life crisis exists, but 'how it has been socially managed as an idea' (Kearl and Hoag, 1984, p. 280). These authors are concerned with the way in which our conception of life-stages and the life-cycle is an inherently *social* accomplishment.

A critical sociological perspective is provided by MacPherson (1985) who describes the way in which osteoporosis has come to be seen as a part of the 'syndrome' of the female menopause. She argues that this is another means by which the patriarchal medical establishment serves to maintain a view of the female menopause as a treatable disorder, rather than a natural part of development. Her discussion sees the use of hormones to treat menopause as a politically-motivated chemical repression of women, with women's experience of mid-life tied to the standing of women in society as a whole (cf. Allan and Cooke, 1985; Rubin, 1979).

Rader (1981) offers a general discussion of the social construction of life-cycle crises focusing upon the role played by such crises in maintaining social control. She suggests that life-cycle crises, such as the mid-life crisis, are a function of society's denial of roles to particular age groups. In particular she focuses upon the denial of sexuality to the 'young' and the denial of play to the middle-aged. These highly restricted roles are seen to result in a lack of fulfilment of important needs. Rader concludes that specialized age roles 'do not maximize life satisfaction or human growth' (p. 135).

Throughout these social constructionist accounts, there is little empirical work

offering communicative data to support the arguments. That said, the arguments are powerful, and suggest a more positive and empowering place for the social/communicative individual in deciding their progress through the life-span. The importance of a communicatively-grounded consideration of the mid-life crisis is presented shortly.

Middle-age without crisis

Notions of the mid-life crisis are fairly well-established in folk-psychology, as well as in mainstream research. Indeed, authors have gone far enough to begin suggesting therapeutic interventions to lessen the effects of the crisis (Anshin, 1985; Davidson, 1979). However, considerable support has also been found for middle-age being a time of considerable stability and happiness (see Collin, 1979). Hunter and Sundel (1989b) argue that 'mid-life for most people is likely to be a relatively calm transition' (p. 20). Similarly, McCrae and Costa (1984) conclude from their longitudinal research that 'over the adult portion of the life course there is little change in the average levels of the commonly-measured personality traits' (p. 125; see also Clausen, 1976; Livson, 1973). Work by a number of authors using a 'Mid-Life Crisis Scale' has reached similar conclusions (Cooper, 1977; Costa and McCrae, 1978; Farrell and Rosenberg, 1981).

These findings are supported by work in a number of separate areas. Weg (1989) discusses issues of sexuality in mid-life, and concludes that it is a time of *increased* sexual opportunities and fulfilment (cf. Butler and Lewis, 1986). Dan and Bernhard (1989) discuss issues surrounding menopause, and again find evidence against the notion of 'crisis'. Menopause, at least in women, is seen as related to a full range of emotional response, from fear and ambivalence to pleasure and relief.

Work also exists on cognitive functioning in mid-life. Labouvie-Vief and Hakim-Larson (1989) point out 'increasing evidence for developmental shifts in adult thought that are progressive and adaptive, and that bring increasing flexibility and openness' (p. 92). Similarly, Schaie and Strother (1968) indicate that certain aspects of intelligence (especially verbal abilities) improve through to late adulthood. In terms of mental health, Chiriboga (1989) presents a uniformly positive assessment. Whereas mental illness is at a peak in the young and the old, the middle-aged appear uniquely equipped to deal with their environment and remain stable. Finally on this theme, ABFP (1990) report a high degree of personal freedom (caused at least in part by the departure of children), and financial security in many of their middle-aged respondents. Again, it is worth noting that language and communication variables have rarely been a focus of any of this research.

Summary

This review has considered work supporting the notion of crisis, and research emphasizing the stability of the mid-life period. It is worth mentioning that, despite the 'competitive' stances of these two positions, both conceptions may (and probably do) hold some validity. First, it is probably true that the experience of crisis varies across individuals, with some experiencing extreme states of crisis in many dimensions

of their lives, and others avoiding crisis altogether. In addition, within individuals there may be elements of crisis and others of stability. A particular individual might be secure and content in his/her marital relationship, but particularly concerned by events in their career setting. The stable element of their life may serve to mediate the effects of the unstable element, or the problems with the career may destabilize the marriage. Hence particular interactions of crisis states and non-crisis states within individuals might be more important to examine than the existence (or not) of such states.

Herein, we suggest a more socially-grounded focus on middle-age as it is bound up within the rest of the life-span. Study of these years within a language and communication framework appears important for the reasons outlined below.

(1) Middle-age may constitute the most complex period in the life-span as regards intergenerational communication. Most individuals in middle-age engage in communication with individuals who are significantly older than them (such as aging parents, superiors in the workplace), as well as significantly younger individuals (primarily their own children). Such variety in communicative contacts might well demand the development of codes broader than those required at other stages.

(2) Mid-life is a time when, at least according to popular wisdom, we pass through a number of crisis points (Cath, 1980; Davitz and Davitz, 1979; Sheehy, 1976). While there is considerable disagreement over the nature (and even the existence) of the 'mid-life crisis', the role of communication in constituting the experience of crisis, and possibly mediating its effects, appears crucial. A communication perspective might well revolutionize theoretical conceptions of the mid-life crisis, shifting the focus from the examination of psychological or life-event factors, to the constitutive influence that talk has on the experience of a mid-life crisis.

(3) Work exists documenting communicative phenomena at other points in the life-span. A comprehensive understanding of the development of communication throughout the life-span demands a focus on middle-age, both to understand the integration of earlier experiences, and the preparation and socialization into roles which will serve for the latter portions of life (see Ng *et al.*, 1991). This paper is particularly directed toward the ways in which communication in mid-life serves to socialize middle-aged individuals into elderly roles.

Empirical research

Given all of these considerations, an exploratory study was carried out of younger individuals' perceptions of middle-aged people, and especially their evaluations of communication with the middle-aged. Three primary issues were addressed by this research. First, we were interested in younger individuals' perceptions/stereotypes of middle age. While some work exists on this topic (see Levin, 1988; Ng *et al.*, 1991), we felt a need for continued exploration, especially given our opportunity to examine links between stereotypes and communicative variables. Second, we were interested in 'labeling' processes. How do younger individuals go about identifying and labeling

the middle-aged, and what cues are most salient to them? Third, we wanted to identify predictors of perceiving communication differences and problems in young–middle-aged encounters. What factors are associated with the perception of such differences? This final question was addressed using a multiple regression analysis.

Method

An exploratory survey was assembled to investigate general perceptions of middle-age in a group of younger respondents. Two-hundred and fifty-three responses to the questionnaire were obtained from 97 men and 156 women. The average age of the respondents was 19.19 years, with very little variation around that mean. All respondents were lower-division communication undergraduates in Southern California who received course credit for their participation. The group was predominantly white (70%) and Asian–American (15%). The questionnaire contained both closed/quantitative items, and the opportunity for more open-ended responses. This section focuses on the quantitative responses, with the open-ended responses being used to inform our later theoretical discussions. The survey is provided in the Appendix, and referred to by question number through the text. The questions on the survey were derived from issues salient in the literature, as well as issues we felt were important in considering communicative features of middle-age. To facilitate information intake, we describe the specific items on the questionnaire as they become pertinent in the analyses.

Results

The respondents were asked to indicate when they thought middle-age began and ended (see question 1, Appendix). Those individuals who responded ($N = 214$) indicated a mean start-point of 37 years old, and an end-point at approximately 53 years old. The average length of middle-age as a part of the life-span was hence seen as approximately 16 years. That said, there was considerable diversity among the sample, with start-points for middle-age listed as early as 20 years old, and end-points as late as 85. The duration of middle-age was perceived as varying from 3 to 30 years. Given the diversity of definitions of middle-age described above, this variation in individual assessments is not surprising, and points to the indistinct nature of the concept of middle-age.

Comparative perceptions of life-stages

A number of ‘comparative’ scales were present in the questionnaire (see question 16, Appendix). These measured relative perceptions of young people, middle-aged people, and elderly people on eight measures—happiness, creativity, satisfaction, dullness, environmental consciousness, political conservatism, radicalness, and settledness (obviously not an exhaustive selection, but based on the literature these were thought to achieve a good spread of ‘important’ evaluative dimensions). The importance of including both older and younger comparison groups is evidenced by Boyd and Dowd (1988) who find distinct patterns for different intergenerational comparisons.

Separate factor analyses were run for the three target age-groups on all eight items³ (see Table 1).

The item concerning environmental awareness was found to show extensive double loading for all target groups in the two factor solutions that emerged, and was dropped. Using varimax rotation, consistent two factor solutions emerged for the three target groups. The items concerning being creative, dull, happy and satisfied loaded together to constitute the first factor. This factor was labeled the 'quality of life' factor. The items concerning political conservatism, being radical and being settled loaded together for the second factor. This was labeled the 'conservatism' factor. In all cases, the two factors accounted for similar amounts of the variance. As a follow-up of the factor analysis, reliabilities were run on the particular scales (see Table 1).⁴

The reliabilities, while not high, were deemed acceptable, given the stability of the factor structure across target age-groups (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). Items on each of the scales were summed, and divided by the number of items on the scale. This procedure was followed in computing all scales, so as to provide scales of similar range (i.e. seven points).

Within-subjects MANOVAs were computed to assess differences on these scales for the different age-groups being rated. The first MANOVA concerned differences in perceived quality of life for the three groups. The overall MANOVA was highly significant ($F_{3,246} = 5308.10$; Wilk's Lambda = 0.01521; $p < 0.001$). Two *post-hoc* comparisons were run to test the differences between perceptions of the middle-aged group and the young and elderly groups respectively. Again, in both cases the differences were highly significant. (Between middle-aged and young, within subjects $t_{248} = 11.43$, $p < 0.0001$; between middle-aged and elderly, within subjects $t_{248} = 4.17$, $p < 0.0001$.)

Table 1. Factor structure and explained variance for intergenerational comparison items

Target age-group	Factor	Variance explained	Total variance explained by 2 factors	KMO/Bartlett ⁴	Cronbach's alpha/Standardized alpha
Young	Quality of life	28.4	46.2	0.651/0.000	0.514/0.546
	Conservatism	17.7			0.418/0.442
Middle-aged	Quality of life	27.3	48.8	0.614/0.000	0.553/0.557
	Conservatism	21.4			0.492/0.502
Elderly	Quality of life	25.5	44.9	0.616/0.000	0.513/0.519
	Conservatism	19.4			0.456/0.452

A similar procedure was followed on the differences between perceptions of the three groups on the conservatism measure. The MANOVA was again significant ($F_{3,249} = 11574.32$; Wilk's lambda = 0.00712; $p < 0.001$). The two pairwise comparisons between middle-aged and young, and middle-aged and old were also significant

(respectively: $t_{251} = 28.45$, $p < 0.0001$; $t_{251} = 18.42$, $p < 0.0001$). The overall pattern can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and direction of differences for within subjects' t -tests on comparative scales

	Young		Middle-aged		Elderly
Quality of life	5.35	>	4.67	>	4.39
Conservatism	2.03	<	4.37	<	5.71

All differences significant, $p < 0.05$.

In general, young individuals are seen as having the highest quality of life in terms of happiness, satisfaction, interest and creativity⁵. Middle-aged individuals are perceived, however, as having a higher quality of life than the elderly. Similar findings can be seen on the measure of conservatism. Young people are seen as the least conservative, then the middle-aged, and finally the elderly are seen as the most conservative. For the purposes of the later regression analyses, difference scores were also calculated between young and middle-aged quality of life and conservatism measures.

Identification of middle-aged individuals

A series of questions investigated how young people identify middle-aged individuals (see question 2, Appendix). Four comparisons were performed to see how much young individuals perceive that they use communication as a 'labeling cue' relative to other possible cues.⁴ All the comparisons were significant, and they reveal a pattern whereby young individuals appear to use physical appearance and the way middle-aged people act as their primary categorization cues. Communication factors are the next most important, followed by clothes, and political and social beliefs. Hence, while communication is not perceived as the primary categorization device, it is ranked above other possible methods (see Table 3).

Table 3. Within subjects t -tests for identification of middle-age items

Physical appearance	Way M-A Act		Communication		Clothes M-A wear	Political beliefs
	5.13	>	4.71	>	4.49	
		$t = -6.83,$ $p < 0.001$		$t = 2.67,$ $p < 0.001$		
5.60		>	4.71	>		4.22
		$t = -9.28, p < 0.001$		$t = 4.97, p < 0.001$		

Factor analyses preliminary to regression

Three factor analyses should be reported due to their contribution to the final regression analysis. First, an analysis was performed on items measuring ratings of

a particular conversation with a middle-aged person (see question 25, Appendix). A three-factor solution emerged from an oblique rotation (see Table 4).

The first factor was labeled the 'relational satisfaction' factor. Eight items gained primary loadings on this factor—being treated like an individual, being understood, being able to express true feelings, having a 'genuine conversation', goal achievement in the conversation, being stimulated by the conversation, being able to 'relate to' the other person, and being confident in the relationship with the other person. The second factor was labeled as an 'intergenerational salience factor'. Primary loadings on this factor were the items concerned with being glad to be young, and not looking forward to middle-age. The third factor was labeled the 'conversational comfort' measure. Loading on this factor were the items concerning feeling relaxed during the conversation, feeling happy during the conversation, and feeling comfortable during the conversation.

Table 4. Factor structure and explained variance for conversation evaluation items

Factor	% Variance by factor	Total % variance	KMO/Bartlett
Relational satisfaction	46.9		
Intergenerational salience	10.0	64.7	0.90267/0.000
Conversational comfort	7.8		

Second, a factor analysis was performed on a series of items concerning young people's perceptions of the middle-aged in general, and their relationships with them (see questions 3–14, Appendix). A varimax rotation revealed three factors (see Table 5). The first factor that emerged from this analysis was concerned with a perceived power differential between young and middle-aged. Three items loaded on this factor—items concerning middle-aged having much power over young people, getting on better with the middle aged if they had less power over the young, and getting on better with the middle-aged if they weren't always telling young people what to do. The second factor again reflected intergenerational concerns. The items concerning preferring to be young than middle-aged, and not looking forward to middle-age received primary loadings on this factor. The third factor was concerned with communication issues. The two primary loadings concerned middle-aged individuals talking about different things than other people, and young people talking about different things with middle-aged people than among themselves (see Table 5).

Table 5. Factor structure and explained variance for perception of the middle-aged items

Factor	% variance by factor	Total % variance	KMO/Bartlett
Power differential	32.7		
Intergenerational salience	18.2	67.4	0.63777/0.000
Communication issues	16.5		

The third factor analysis examined young people's responses to situations where middle-aged individuals are seen to try to act like younger people (see question 26, Appendix). An oblique rotation was used here, and again three factors emerged (see Table 6). First, an understanding factor appeared to emerge. Loading on this were items concerning being understood, being treated like an individual, and feeling complimented. The second factor was, again, an intergenerational factor. The items concerning being glad to be young and not looking forward to middle-age were the two primary loadings. Together, these two items seem to constitute a strong intergenerational block. The final factor was concerned with more individual emotional responses to middle-aged people 'acting young'. Primary loadings on this factor were achieved by the items concerned with being angered, and feeling threatened, by the middle-aged person's actions.

Table 6. Factor structure for young individuals' responses to middle-aged acting like young

Factor	% variance by factor	Total % variance	KMO/Bartlett
Interpersonal understanding	33.6	64.9	0.65156/0.000
Intergenerational salience	16.3		
Affective response	15.1		

Predictors of perceived communication differences

The final analysis to be reported is a multiple regression. This was performed in an attempt to find the predictors of perceiving communication differences between young and middle-aged people (see factor 3, Table 5, above). A hierarchical regression was performed, with the variables being entered in three steps. First, a group of control variables were entered—sex, perceived level of contact with middle-aged individuals, and perceived ease of identification of middle-aged individuals. The measure of contact was composed of a measures of general and intimate contact with middle aged individuals (questions 21–22, Appendix), which were highly correlated (Pearson $r = 0.5526$, $p < 0.01$). The identification measure was a scale containing all the identification measures described in the analysis above (standardized item alpha = 0.7691: see Table 3). On the second step, the difference scores calculated from the comparative scales were entered. These were seen to be controlling for individual stereotypes of the elderly. On the third step, the remainder of the factors described in the factor analyses above were entered (see Tables 4–6). Significant predictors of communication problems are listed in Table 7.

Among the controls, a general measure of ease of identification of middle-aged individuals was a strong predictor. This indicates that those young individuals who are more prone to label middle-aged individuals in terms of age categories are also more likely to see communication differences between the two groups. In addition, young individuals who see themselves as having a higher degree of intergenerational contact are more likely to perceive communication differences between the two groups. Next, a measure of distinctiveness between young and old on the 'quality of life' measure

Table 7. Regression analysis for prediction of communication problems for young (Y) with middle-aged (M-A)

Step entered ⁷	Predictor variable	Beta	Partial correlation	Tolerance	T
1	Ease of identification of M-A individuals	0.293973	0.297002	0.984546	4.707***
1	Contact with M-A individuals	0.170227	0.178293	0.996483	2.742**
2	Distinctiveness of Y on quality of life measure	0.221328	0.209788	0.970677	3.233**
3	Perceived power differential between Y and M-A	0.180192	0.185361	0.842929	2.791**
3	Satisfaction when M-A act like young people	0.175521	0.165049	0.699199	2.476*

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

was a significant predictor of perceived communication differences. The more that young individuals perceive their quality of life to be higher than that of middle-aged individuals, the more likely they are to see communication differences between the groups. This may well serve as a preliminary statistical indicator of the mediating role that stereotypes may play in influencing intergroup communication, given the role of distinctiveness in stereotyping (Tajfel and Turner, 1981).

In addition, it seems that power is important to young individuals when they are assessing their relationship with the middle-aged, and especially when they are considering communication differences between themselves and middle-aged individuals. Young people perceiving power differences between the two groups are also likely to perceive communication differences. This may imply that a number of the perceived communication differences relate to issues of young people being controlled by middle-aged authority figures. Finally, a measure of relational satisfaction in situations of middle-aged people acting 'young' was a significant predictor (although not highly so). Again, we feel that this attests to the importance of distinctiveness for the younger group. Those individuals who perceived greater communication differences between the two groups experienced more generally negative affect about the relationship when the middle-aged individual behaved in a way that was seen as intruding on communicative ground belonging to the young.

Discussion

In general our empirical research was aimed at increasing an understanding of younger individuals' perceptions of middle-age, and such individuals' understandings of young-middle-aged communication. In terms of young individuals' perceptions of middle-age, they seem to differentiate themselves from it, while keeping a distance between middle-age and elderly. Middle-age is seen as a time of increasing conservatism, and declining happiness and satisfaction. In our sample, this trend continued,

with the elderly being seen as more conservative and with a lower quality of life than even the middle-aged. As regards the importance of communication in labeling the middle-aged, it emerged as a secondary factor used by young people in their identification of middle age. Clothes and political beliefs (possibly again indicative of the conservatism factor) were seen as of primary importance in deciding whether or not to call someone 'middle-aged'. The final point examined in this analysis was young people's perceptions of communication differences between young and middle-aged. In general the perception of such differences was seen as a function of a tendency to categorize individuals in terms of age, a high level of contact with middle-aged individuals, a perception of power differences between the generations, and a tendency to seek positive distinctiveness for the young. At this stage, explicit recognition should be given to the fact that we have only been considering younger individuals' perceptions of young–middle-aged contact. The perceptions of middle-aged individuals are, naturally, equally important, and might yield complementary, or conflicting, results to those described above.

These findings, of course, only scratch the surface of work that could be accomplished. However, they indicate the importance of studying middle-aged–young interaction, in that they suggest that young people do hold beliefs about the middle-aged as a group, and that those beliefs influence young people's perceptions of their communication with the middle-aged. Hence we aim to emphasize the importance of the relationship between stereotypes and communication in general, as well as highlighting the importance of considering communication as a mediating factor in any attempt to understand middle-age in a life-span context.

Towards a model of young–middle-aged interaction

An understanding of the multifarious roles that language and communication may play in the experience of middle-age will only emerge as a product of a prolonged program of empirical research. The rest of this paper is devoted to the elaboration of one phenomenon that we feel could be productively investigated—the socialization of the middle-aged into elderly roles within intergenerational communication.

It is our belief that Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Coupland *et al.*, 1988; Giles *et al.*, 1991; Giles *et al.*, 1988) provides an extremely useful paradigm within which to examine such intergroup communicative processes. While a complete review is impossible here, CAT is designed to describe and account for variations in individuals' language use from a dynamic 'addressee-centred' perspective. The focus of the theory is on how individuals modify their language use in relation to their hearer(s), and in accord with their socio-psychological orientations to one another.

Figure 1 depicts a model, developed from a number of sources within the CAT paradigm, that illustrates the general processes with which we are concerned in this paper (see Coupland *et al.*, 1988; Gallois *et al.*, 1988; Hewstone and Giles, 1986; Ryan *et al.*, 1986, for similar formulations). The central element in the model is the

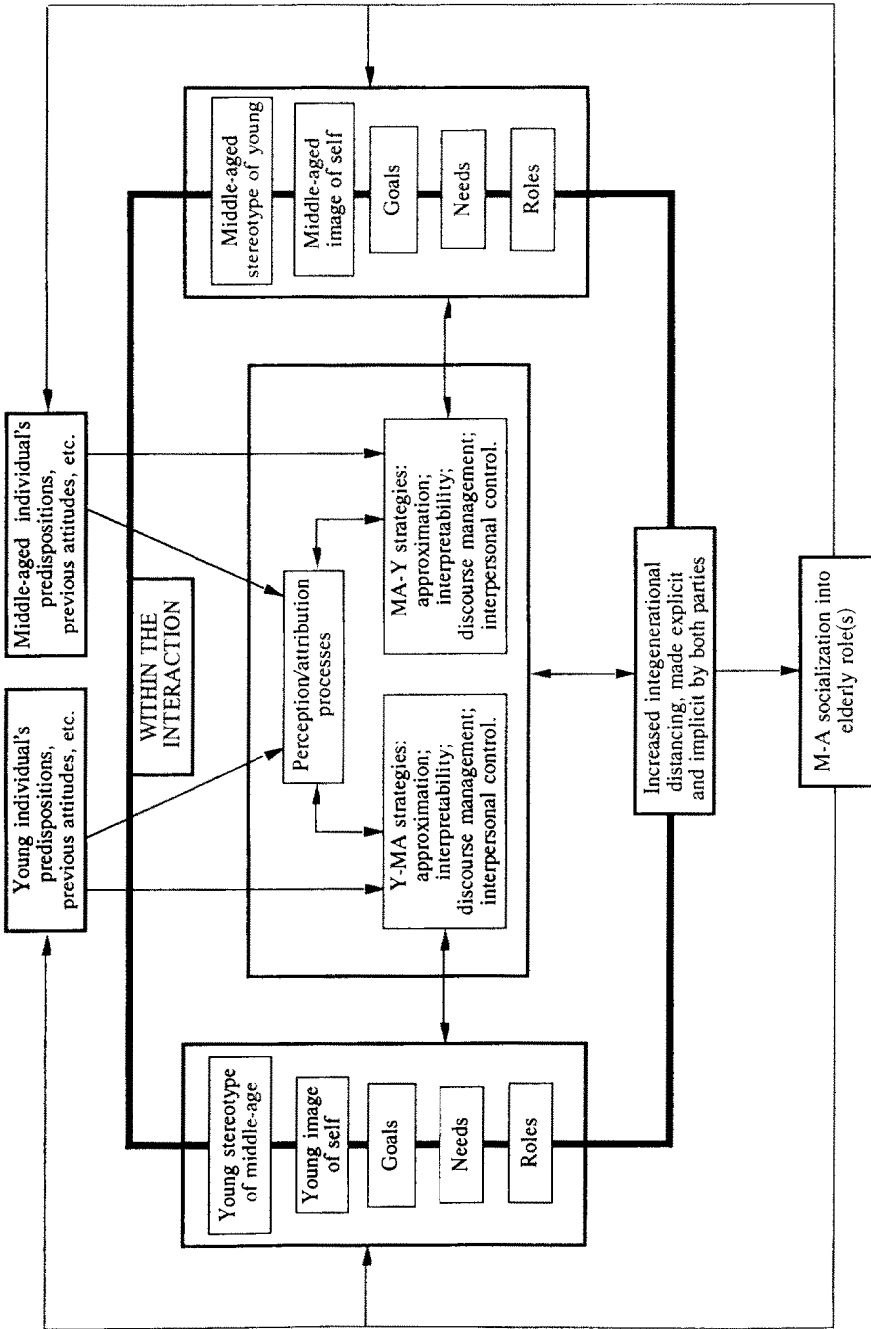


Figure 1: Model of Adult Socialization on Young - Middle-Aged Encounter

intergenerational (young–middle-aged) interaction, in which each party selects particular strategies, and interprets the other's. This process is influenced by predispositions, goals, stereotypes, self-image, roles and conversational needs. These factors are (with the exception of predispositions) revised and reconstituted in the course of the interaction. The argument (to be fleshed out below) is that strategy choices, perceptions, and attributions made by both parties in these interactions will serve a process of 'intergenerational distancing', whereby the two interlocutors come to perceive themselves as increasingly far apart in terms of a number of factors. As shown in the model, this 'distancing' will progressively socialize the middle-aged participant into an 'elderly role', with such socialization feeding back into future interactions, and the middle-aged persons image of themselves as well as middle-age in general.

Coupland *et al.*'s (1988) elaborated model of CAT processes describes four types of sociolinguistic encoding that an individual might employ in a given interaction. The first of these, attention to other's productive performance, focuses on 'approximation' of own speech style to other's speech style, and encompasses the traditional accommodation phenomena of convergence and divergence. The second, attention to other's interpretive competence, involves individuals paying more attention to other individuals' perceived/stereotyped abilities in terms of perception and understanding of linguistic stimuli. Third, the other's conversational needs were seen as a possible focus of attuning. Here, various 'discourse management strategies' could be invoked in order to accommodate interlocutors' perceived/stereotyped conversational needs. Finally, social roles could become the focus of attuning, in which case various 'interpersonal control strategies' might be invoked. The following will briefly describe features of young–middle-aged interaction that could be characterized by these processes⁸. The examples within each category are drawn from open-ended responses to our survey, as well as previous empirical and theoretical work in CAT.

1. *Approximation*

There are few 'dialect' features that are universally characteristic of young individuals as opposed to the middle-aged. Within particular cultures, especially immigrants, children may consciously diverge from adult use of a native language, or even accented use, partly as a divergence from middle-aged community's (and especially their parents') wishes. In most cultures there are some lexical and stylistic features that distinguish a youth 'slang', and again these may be used by the younger individuals to diverge. A complementary process to this may occur if middle-aged individuals attempt to converge by using slang terms. This may be a counter-productive approach for the middle-aged individual, who risks rejection by the young interlocutor, and betrayal attributions by other middle-aged individuals (see Platt and Weber, 1984, for a discussion of inappropriate accommodation strategies). Our regression analysis found that young individuals' satisfaction when middle-aged individuals 'act young' is related to their perception of communication differences between the two groups (see Table 7).

2. *Interpretability*

In addition to its apparently divergent stance, use of 'youth dialects' by the young may be seen as underaccommodative by middle-aged individuals, since M-A are not familiar with the argot of the younger generation. Alternatively, the young person might overaccommodate in terms of explaining the youth dialect to middle-aged person. It may be possible that misunderstanding in middle-aged individual is attributed by the young person in terms of middle-aged 'ignorance', rather than in terms of the 'cultural' differences between the two age groups (see Giles and Coupland, 1991, for a discussion of age differences as cultural differences). Hence, the positive distinctiveness provided to the young person through use of their own dialect may be enhanced through 'manufacturing' low interpretability. Some indication of the importance of linguistic processes in providing distinctiveness for the young individual can be found in the regression analysis described above (see Table 7).

3. *Discourse management*

The category of discourse management falls into three sub-categories: field; tenor; and mode. 'Field' refers to the ideational/referential content of the talk, 'tenor' concerns the management of interpersonal positions, roles and faces, and 'mode' relates to the procedural/textual dimensions that structure talk (Coupland *et al.*, 1988).

(a) *Field*. The middle-aged individual might well engage in talk about 'youth issues' such as pop music, or school. These discussions might well end in the middle-aged individual demonstrating a lack of understanding of these issues, or possibly a denigration of the importance of such topics⁹.

Similarly, the younger individual might overaccommodate in terms of topic choice. Our free response data indicate that this overaccommodation may occur in terms of what younger individuals prefer *not* to talk about with the middle-aged. 'Taboo' topics for the young include a number of 'youth-oriented' activities such as their social life (parties, drugs, sex, relationships), their school life (especially grades), and general issues regarding television, movies, fashions and music. The avoidance of these topics can be construed as the younger individual 'protecting' the concerned middle-aged person from the possibly 'shocking' nature of youth culture (although the middle-aged person may be more than competent to deal with such information!).

What may be particularly interesting are differences in the content of talk, dependent upon who is being talked about. As is elaborated later, the young respondents in our sample saw 'advice-giving' as a primary activity in intergenerational talk. In such activity, the subject matter for the young person is their future, whereas the middle-aged individual is primarily drawing on their past experience. At least in young people's perceptions of their interactions with the middle-aged, the middle-aged have no future, their role being that of helping the young people plan their future. Even outside of the advice-giving mode, young individuals see the middle-aged as talking extensively about their past (cf. Coupland *et al.*, 1991).

(b) *Tenor*. Also worthy of mention are some young evaluations of middle-aged

attitude. Specifically, our open-ended responses contained a few references concerning the fact that middle-aged individuals treat the young as if they know very little about important issues. In addition, young–middle-aged interactions are seen as particularly negative when discussion concerns certain topics (bad grades, media choices: cf. Kubey and Larson's (1990) discussion of adolescents' uses of media with their parents).

(c) *Mode*. A particularly common strain in the open-ended responses was that of asking advice. A considerable volume of young–middle-aged contact (at least from our responses) is taken up with young people asking for advice from the middle-age, and with the middle-aged offering such advice (even if unsolicited). Such advice is particularly requested and offered on the topics of jobs and families, these being topics about which the middle-aged may be presumed to have experience.

4. *Interpersonal control*

The middle-aged individual might well 'overaccommodate' in terms of lexical simplicity, verbal clarity, and the like in an attempt to place the younger individual in a 'child role'. A history of such 'controlling' behaviors between the two generations might well lead to situations in which middle-aged behavior is perceived as attempting to control in this fashion by the young person, even if such intent was not present. In this context, it is worth reiterating our finding that issues of control are significant predictors of perceived intergenerational communication differences (Table 7 above).

At present, the examples under these headings constitute only informed guesses about important feature of young–middle-aged interaction. However, we feel that these examples provide at least limited support for certain ways in which the middle-aged may be being socialized into a more 'elderly' role within intergenerational encounters. It is argued that all the processes described above have in common one particular factor. The middle-aged individual is being systematically distanced from the world of the young. Whether in terms of not understanding, or disapproving of, the 'latest trend', adopting a parental role, or receiving an unfamiliar 'dialect', the middle-aged person is being separated from the generation below, and hence being aged. Not only do such processes confirm the middle-aged person's 'middle-agedness', but, we argue, they conspire in moving the person towards an elderly identity of disenfranchisement and a perceived incomprehension of the 'way things are'.

In terms of the model presented, one fascinating conclusion is that the conversations may not be problematic in the conventional sense of the term (see Coupland *et al.*, 1991). Both parties may enjoy, and benefit from the interactions. (For example, in the case of advice-giving and receiving, the young person receives (hopefully) valuable information, and the middle-aged individual obtains the rewards associated with mentoring and nurturing.) However, the process (which of course may start even earlier than middle-age) is one where the future of the younger individual takes precedence over the future of the older individual, to the degree that the latter may become invisible to *all* concerned, including the middle-aged individual, him/herself.

At least five primary strains of research seem to be suggested by the findings

reported herein. First, some justification has been presented for a more detailed examination of 'advice-giving' processes between young and middle-aged. It seems necessary to establish whether advice-giving is as common in such encounters as the young individuals perceived it to be. Such research would, needless to say, benefit from examining such advice-giving episodes in naturalistic intergenerational discourse. Related to this, it might be interesting to view estimates of subjective age among the middle-aged before and after engaging in such talk. Second, work should be encouraged that looks at other facets of young-middle-aged talk that might 'age' the middle-aged person. Third, turning to a topic that has received less attention in the second half of this paper, the notion of crisis remains a guiding one in the field. Therefore, some more explicit attempts to uncover communicative origins and mediators of crisis are encouraged. The aging of the middle-aged described in the model might well constitute one element of such a process. A number of other interactional features might well play a part in constructing and refining individual crisis experiences. Fourth, a greater focus upon factors of gender and ethnic identity seems essential in the study of middle age. Some of the work reviewed indicates that the mid-life experience may be qualitatively different for men and women. We would advocate further investigation of these differences, as well as inter-ethnic differences. Fifth, work should be directed in some way toward a life-span conception of communication processes. We see our model as a modest step toward such an end, incorporating as it does a process by which people are shifted through generations within interaction. Such a life-span model was an impetus for opening up the area of communication and middle-age, and should remain a goal for the area as a whole.

Acknowledgements—The authors gratefully acknowledge support for this research provided by a University of California, Santa Barbara Senate academic grant awarded to Howard Giles.

NOTES

¹ Jake Harwood is a Ph.D student in the Department of Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His interests lie primarily in communication phenomena across the life-span, and the role that intergroup processes may play in mediating such communication.

² Howard Giles is Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara. His research interests are in speech accommodation, ethnic language attitudes, bilingualism, and intergenerational communication.

³ A number of factor analyses were run on different sets of questions in the questionnaire. Across all of the analyses, an acceptable primary loading was set at 0.5, with a secondary loading criterion set at 0.4. While these are fairly close together, this was thought to be acceptable given the exploratory nature of the analysis (see Potter, 1986). For a factor to be accepted it had to have an eigenvalue greater than 1.0, and have at least two items with primary loadings. The decision whether to use an oblique or an orthogonal (varimax) rotation was made depending upon the degree of intercorrelation between the factors.

⁴ Noted in the table are two test statistics from the factor analysis. The first of these is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. In each case this is above 0.6, a range described as 'mediocre' but acceptable by Kaiser (1974). This indicates that there were no dangerously large partial correlation coefficients in the anti-image correlation matrix. The second number indicates the significance

of the Bartlett test of sphericity. In all cases, Bartlett's test was highly significant, indicating that there is sufficient intercorrelation among items to pursue a factor analysis.

⁵ It should be noted that more 'materialist' measures of quality of life were not measured in this analysis, and might have yielded quite different results.

⁶ Of course, the distinction between communication cues, and such factors as 'the way middle-aged people act' may be less clear than our questions suggest.

⁷ Step 1: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.109$; $F_{3,229} = 10.460$, $p < 0.0001$. Step 2: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.153$; R^2 change = 0.051; F change = 6.961, $p < 0.01$; $F_{5,227} = 9.388$, $p < 0.0001$. Step 3: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.185$; R^2 change = 0.059; F change = 2.116, $p < 0.05$; $F_{13,219} = 5.055$, $p < 0.0001$.

⁸ The young sample that responded to our quantitative questions were also asked what they talked about with middle-aged individuals, what middle aged individuals talked about with them, and what they avoid talking about with middle aged individuals (see questions 19–22, Appendix 1). Some of the examples in this section emerged from their responses, others are a result of our own theoretically grounded speculations.

⁹ Alternatively, the middle-aged individual might demonstrate some competence in the area, thus risking the 'oldest-swing-in-town' attribution. A number of negative attributions could be made for such unexpected competencies.

REFERENCES

- ALLAN, C. A. and COOKE, D. J. 1985 Stressful life events and alcohol misuse in women: a critical review. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* **46**, 147–157.
- AMERICAN BOARD OF FAMILY PRACTICE. 1991 *Perspectives on Middle-age: The Vintage Years*. American Board of Family Practice, Lexington.
- ANSHIN, R. N. 1985 Omnipotence and self-fulfilment: Key issues in analytically-oriented psychotherapy with older persons. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* **13**, 247–258.
- BERGER, P. L. and LUCKMAN, T. 1966 *The Social Construction of Reality*. Doubleday, Garden City.
- BOGUE, D. J. 1959 *The Population of the United States*. The Free Press, New York.
- BORLAND, D. C. 1978 Research on middle age: An assessment. *The Gerontologist* **18**, 379–386.
- BORN, D. O. and NELSON, B. J. 1984 Male dentists at midlife: An exploration of the one life/one career imperative. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* **18**, 219–235.
- BOYD, J. W. and DOWD, J. J. 1988 The diffuseness of age. *Social Behaviour* **3**, 85–103.
- BUTLER, R. N. and LEWIS, M. I. 1986 *Love and Sex After 40*. Harper and Row, New York.
- BUUNK, B. P. and JANSEEN, P. P. M. 1992 Relative deprivation, career issues, and mental health among men in midlife. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* **40**, 338–350.
- CARMINES, E. G. and ZELLER, R. A. 1979 *Reliability and Validity Assessment*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- CATH, S. 1980 Suicide in the middle years: Some reflections on the annihilation of self. In Norman, W. H. and Scaramella, T. J. (Eds), *Mid-Life: Developmental and Clinical Issues*. Brunner/Mazel, New York.
- CHIRIBOGA, D. A. 1989 Mental health at the midpoint: Crisis, challenge, or relief. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- CIERNIA, J. R. 1985 Death concern and businessmen's mid-life crisis. *Psychological Reports* **56**, 83–87.
- CLAUSEN, J. A. 1976 Glimpses into the social world of middle-age. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* **7**, 99–106.
- COLLIN, A. 1979 'Mid-life crisis' and its implications in counselling. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* **7**, 144–152.
- COOPER, M. W. 1977 An empirical investigation of the male midlife period: A descriptive cohort study. Unpublished undergraduate honors thesis, University of Massachusetts, Boston.

- COSTA, P. T. and McCRAE, R. R. 1978 Objective personality assessment. In Storandt, M., Siegler, I. C., and Elias, M. F. (Eds), *The Clinical Psychology of Aging*. Plenum Press, New York.
- COUPLAND, N., COUPLAND, J. and GILES, H. 1991 *Language, Society and the Elderly: Discourse, Identity and Ageing*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- COUPLAND, N., COUPLAND, J., GILES, H. and HENWOOD, K. 1988 Accommodating the elderly: Invoking and extending a theory. *Language in Society* 17, 1–41.
- COUPLAND, N., WIEMANN, J. M. and GILES, H. 1991 Talk as "problem" and communication as "miscommunication": An integrative analysis. In Coupland, N., Giles, H., and Wiemann, J. M. (Eds), *"Miscommunication" and Problematic Talk*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- COZ, S. 1992 Cher: I'm having a mid-life crisis. *National Enquirer* June 2, pp. 46–47.
- CYTRYNBAUM, S., BLUM, L., PATRICK, R., STEIN, J., WADNER, D. and WILK, C. 1980 Midlife development: A personality and social systems perspective. In Poon, L. W. (Ed.), *Aging in the 1980s: Psychological Issues*. American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.
- DAN, A. J. and BERNHARD, L. A. 1989 Menopause and other health issues for midlife women. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- DANNEFER, D. 1984 Adult development and social theory: A paradigmatic reappraisal. *American Sociological Review* 49, 100–116.
- DAVIDSON, L. 1979 Preventive attitudes toward midlife crisis. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39, 165–173.
- DAVITZ, J. and DAVITZ, L. 1979 *Making It: 40 and Beyond*. Winston, Minneapolis.
- DRAGASTIN, S. E. and ELDER, G. H. 1975 *Adolescence in the Life Cycle: Psychological Change and Social Context*. Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, Washington, D.C.
- DURKIN, K. 1988 The social nature of social development. In Hewstone, M., Stroebe, W., Codol, J.-P., and Stephenson, G. (Eds), *Introduction to Social Psychology: A European Perspective*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- FARRELL, M. P. and ROSENBERG, S. D. 1981 *Men at Midlife*. Auburn House, Dover.
- FRIED, B. R. 1976 *The Middle-Age Crisis*. Harper and Row, New York.
- GALLOIS, C., FRANKLYN-STOKES, A., GILES, H. and COUPLAND, N. 1988 Communication accommodation in intercultural encounters. In Kim, Y. Y. and Gudykunst, W. B. (Eds), *Theories in Intercultural Communication*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- GILES, H. and COUPLAND, N. 1991 Language attitudes: Discursive, contextual, and gerontological considerations. In Reynolds, A. G. (Ed.), *Bilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Second Language Learning: The McGill Conference in Honour of Wallace E. Lambert*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale.
- GILES, H., COUPLAND, J. and COUPLAND, N. (Eds), 1991 *Contexts of Accommodation: Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- GILES, H., MULAC, A., BRADAC, J. J. and JOHNSON, P. 1987 Speech accommodation theory: The first decade and beyond. In McLaughlin, M. (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 10*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- GOIN, M. K. and BURGOYNE, R. W. 1981 Psychology of the widow and widower. In Howells, J. G. (Ed.), *Modern Perspectives in the Psychiatry of Middle Age*. Brunner/Mazel, New York.
- GOULD, R. L. 1978 *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*. Simon and Schuster, New York.
- GUTMANN, D. 1976 Individual adaptation in the middle years: Developmental issues in the masculine midlife crisis. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 9, 41–59.
- HENKER, F. O. 1981 Male climacteric. In Howells, J. G. (Ed.), *Modern Perspectives in the Psychiatry of Middle Age*. Brunner/Mazel, New York.
- HEWSTONE, M. and GILES, H. 1986 Social groups and social stereotypes in intergroup communication: a review and model of intergroup communication breakdown. In Gudykunst, W. B. (Ed.), *Intergroup Communication*. Edward Arnold, London.
- HUNTER, S. and SUNDEL, M. (Eds), 1989a *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.

- HUNTER, S. and SUNDEL, M. 1989b Introduction: An examination of key issues concerning midlife. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- JACQUES, E. 1965 Death and the mid-life crisis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **46**, 502–514.
- JUNG, C. G. 1971 The stages of life. In Campbell, J. (Ed.), *The Portable Jung*. Viking, New York.
- KAKAR, S. 1976 Middle-age and organizational role. *Vikalpa* **1**, 31–37.
- KEARL, M. C. and HOAG, J. 1984 The social construction of the mid-life crisis: A case study in the temporalities of identity. *Sociological Inquiry* **54**, 279–350.
- KUBEY, R. and LARSON, R. 1990 The use and experience of the new video media among children and young adolescents. *Communication Research* **17**, 107–130.
- LABOUIE-VIEF, G. and HAKIM-LARSON, J. 1989 Developmental shifts in adult thought. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- LABOV, W. 1972. *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Edward Arnold, London.
- LEVIN, W. C. 1988 Age stereotyping: College student evaluations. *Research on Aging* **10**, 134–148.
- LEVINSON, D. J., DARROW, C. N., KLEIN, E. B., LEVINSON, M. H. and MCKEE, B. 1978 *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.
- LIEBERT, R. S. and OLDHAM, J. M. 1989 Introduction: New psychoanalytic perspectives. In Oldham, J. M. and Liebert, R. S. (Eds), *The Middle Years: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- LIVSON, N. 1973 Developmental dimensions of personality: A life-span formulation. In Baltes, P. B. and Schaie, K. W. (Eds), *Life-Span Developmental Psychology: Personality and Socialization*. Academic Press, New York.
- LOWENTHAL, M. F. and CHIRIBOGA, D. 1972 Transition to the empty nest: Crisis, challenge, or relief. *Archives of General Psychiatry* **26**, 8–14.
- MACPHERSON, K. I. 1985 Osteoporosis and menopause: A feminist analysis of the social construction of a syndrome. *Advances in Nursing Science* **7**, 11–22.
- MCCRAE, R. R. and COSTA, P. T. 1984 *Emerging Lives, Enduring Dispositions: Personality in Adulthood*. Little, Brown and Co., Boston.
- NEUGARTEN, B. L., MOORE, J.W. and LOWE, J. C. 1968 Age norms, age constraints and adult socialization. In Neugarten, B. L. (Ed.), *Middle-Age and Aging*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- NEUMANN, E. 1958 *Psychological Stages of Feminine Development*. Spring Publications, New York.
- NG, S. H., GILES, H. and MOODY, J. 1991 Information seeking triggered by age. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* **33**, 269–277.
- NOTMAN, M. T. 1982 The displaced homemaker: A crisis of later life—the midlife years and after. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* **15**, 173–186.
- O'CONNOR, D. J. and WOLFE, D. M. 1987 On managing midlife transitions in career and family. *Human Relations* **40**, 799–816.
- PARIS, B. L. and LUCKEY, E. B. 1966 A longitudinal study of marital satisfaction. *Sociology and Social Research* **50**, 212–223.
- PERUN, P. J. and BIELBY, D. 1979 Midlife: A discussion of competing models. *Research on Aging* **1**, 275–300.
- PINEO, P. O. 1961 Disenchantments in the later years of marriage. *Marriage and Family Living* **23**, 3–11.
- PLATT, J. and WEBER, H. 1984 Speech convergence miscarried: An investigation into inappropriate accommodation strategies. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* **46**, 131–146.
- POTTER, J. W. 1986 Perceived reality and the cultivation hypothesis. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* **30**, 159–174.
- RADER, V. 1981 The social construction of life cycle crises. *Humanity and Society* **5**, 120–139.
- ROLLINS, B. C. 1989 Marital quality at midlife. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.

- ROLLINS, B. C. 1989 Marital quality at midlife. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- RUBIN, A. M. and RUBIN, R. B. 1982 Contextual age and television use. *Human Communication Research* 8, 228–244.
- RUBIN, A. M. and RUBIN, R. B. 1986 Contextual age as a life position index. *International Journal of Ageing and Human Development* 23, 27–45.
- RUBIN, L. B. 1979 *Women of a Certain Age: The Mid-Life Search for Self*. Harper and Row, New York.
- RYAN, E. B., GILES, H., BARTOLUCCI, G. and HENWOOD, K. 1986 Psycholinguistic and social psychological components of communication by and with the elderly. *Language and Communication* 6, 1–24.
- SSRC COMMITTEE ON WORK AND PERSONALITY IN THE MIDDLE YEARS. 1973 *Description of Proposed Activities*. Social Science Research Council, New York.
- SCHAE, K. W. and STROTHER, C. R. 1968 A cross-sequential study of age changes in cognitive behavior. *Psychological Bulletin* 70, 671–680.
- SHEEHY, G. 1976 *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*. Dutton, New York.
- SHERMAN, E. 1987 *Meaning in Mid-Life Transitions*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- SPANIER, G. B., LEWIS, R. R. and COLE, C. L. 1975 Marital adjustment over the family life cycle: The issue of curvilinearity. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37, 262–276.
- SPITZE, G. and LOGAN, J. 1990 More evidence on women (and men) in the middle. *Research on Aging* 12, 182–198.
- STEINER, B. W., SATTERBERG, J. A. and MUIR, C. F. 1978 Flight into femininity: The male menopause? *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* 23 405–410.
- TAJFEL, H. and TURNER, J. C. 1979 An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In Austin, W. C. and Worchel, S. (Eds), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Brooks/Cole, Monterey.
- TAMIR, L. M. 1989 Modern myths about men at midlife: An assessment. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- THELANDER, M. 1982. A qualitative approach to the quantitative data of speech variation. In Romaine, S. (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic Variation in Speech Communities*. Edward Arnold, London.
- TRUDGILL, P. 1974 *The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge University Press, London.
- VAILLANT, G. E. 1977 *Adaptation to Life*. Little, Brown and Co, Boston.
- WEG, R. B. 1989 Sensuality/Sexuality of the middle years. In Hunter, S. and Sundel, M. (Eds), *Midlife Myths: Issues, Findings and Practice Implications*. Sage, Newbury Park.
- WOLFF, T. 1956 *Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche*. C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich.

Appendix

- (1) Approximately what ages do you think count as 'middle-aged'? _____
- (2) In general it is easy to tell if a person is middle-aged from . . .
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| . . . their clothes. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |
| . . . the way they talk. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |
| . . . the way they act. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |
| . . . the things they say. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |
| . . . their physical appearance. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |
| . . . their political or social beliefs. | Strongly agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strongly disagree |

- (3) Younger people have problems in talking with middle-aged individuals.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (4) Younger people have problems in talking with elderly individuals.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (5) Middle-aged individuals tend to talk about different things than individuals of other age groups.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (6) When talking with middle-aged individuals, I tend to talk about different things than I do with people of other age groups.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (7) I sometimes feel patronized by middle-aged individuals when they are talking with me.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (8) I am looking forward to middle age.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (9) I would get on better with middle-aged people if they weren't always telling me what to do.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (10) Middle-aged people tend to be less healthy than younger people.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (11) I would rather be middle-aged than a younger age.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (12) I would rather be middle-aged than an older age.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (13) Middle-aged people frequently have a lot of power over me.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (14) If middle-aged people had less power over me, I would probably get along with them better.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (15) Middle-aged individuals sometimes try to act or talk like younger people.
Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree
- (16) The following questions concern the characteristics of people of different ages in general. For each item we are asking for your ratings of middle-aged, younger, and older people.
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------------|
| Young | Happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unhappy |
| Middle-aged | Happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unhappy |
| Older | Happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unhappy |
| Young | Satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfied |
| Middle-aged | Satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfied |
| Older | Satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfied |
| Young | Dull | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| Middle-aged | Dull | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| Older | Dull | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| Young | Environmentally aware | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Environmentally unaware |
| Middle-aged | Environmentally aware | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Environmentally unaware |
| Older | Environmentally aware | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Environmentally unaware |
| Young | Radical | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Conformist |
| Middle-aged | Radical | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Conformist |
| Older | Radical | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Conformist |
| Young | Creative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Uncreative |
| Middle-aged | Creative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Uncreative |
| Older | Creative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Uncreative |
| Young | Settled | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Mobile |
| Middle-aged | Settled | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Mobile |
| Older | Settled | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Mobile |
| Young | Politically Conservative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Politically liberal |
| Middle-aged | Politically Conservative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Politically liberal |
| Older | Politically Conservative | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Politically liberal |

- (17) What do you think (or what have you overheard) middle-aged people tend to talk about amongst themselves? _____
- (18) What things do middle-aged individuals talk about to *you*? _____
- (19) What things do you talk about with middle-aged people? _____
- (20) What sorts of things might you *not* talk about with middle-aged people that you might talk about with other people? _____
- (21) How much contact do you have with middle-aged people in general?
Very little 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 A great deal
- (22) How much contact do you have with middle-aged people who you would describe yourself as 'close' to?
Very little 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 A great deal
- (23) Now, please think of one *particular* person you believe to be middle-aged. Please tell us that person's age: _____ Sex: _____ Relationship to you (Family, work, etc.): _____
- (24) Now think of a *particular* conversation that you have had with that person. Where did that conversation occur, and what was the conversation about? _____
- (25) How did you feel **during** the conversation?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unhappy |
| Bored | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not Bored |
| Stimulated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not stimulated |
| Uncomfortable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Comfortable |
| Treated like an individual | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Treated like a 'young person' |
| Out of control | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | In control |
| Understood | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Misunderstood |
| Able to "relate" to the other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not able to "relate" to the other |
| Tense | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Relaxed |
| Powerful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Powerless |
- ...how did you feel **after** the conversation?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfied |
| Glad to be young | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not glad to be young |
| Looking forward to middle-age | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not looking forward to middle-age |
| Like it had been a "fake" conversation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Like it had been a "genuine" conversation |
| Confident of your relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not confident of your relationship |
| Like you had achieved what you wanted to | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Like you had not achieved what you wanted to |
| Like you had been able to express your true feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Like you had not been able to express your true feelings |
- (26) If you think that middle-aged individuals sometimes try to act like younger people, please indicate some of the things that they do or say to act that way. _____
- ...how does that make you feel?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Angry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not angry |
| Threatened | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not threatened |
| Complimented | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Insulted |
| Glad to be young | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not glad to be young |
| Looking forward to middle-age | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not looking forward to middle-age |
| Uncomfortable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Comfortable |
| Treated like an individual | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Treated like a "young person" |
| In control | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Out of control |
| Understood | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Misunderstood |