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Friends and Allies

Communication in Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships

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I n the United States in 2000 it was estimated the population of those 65 and older was nearly 35 million, a 12% increase since 1990 (Hetzel & Smith, 2001). With the aging of the baby boomers, it is clear that this growth will continue in the forthcoming decades. One result of this population shift is an increase in intergenerational relationships within the family, the most common of which is the grandparent-grandchild relationship (Mares, 1995). In addition to its increased frequency, this relationship's duration is increasing. Uhlenberg and Kirby (1998) estimate that nearly 70% of individuals are born into families where all grandparents are alive, and this remains the case for approximately 40% at age 10. Estimates suggest that roughly 75% of all grandchildren aged 30 have at least one grandparent alive. Hence, for many, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is the first, most frequent, and most enduring source of intergenerational interaction (Williams & Giles, 1996).

In addition to the aging of the population, three emerging trends in family structure should be considered in a demographic profile of grandparents. First, as of 2000, it is estimated that there are 3.9 million multi-generational households in the United States. Often these households reflect situations in

which the grandparent is serving as primary caregiver for grandchildren under the age of 18. In fact, of the approximately 5.8 million grandparents living with grandchildren, nearly half (42%) are custodial grandparents (Simmons & Dye, 2003). Second, as of 2000, nearly 8% of children are stepchildren or adopted children (Kreider, 2003). This directly increases the number of nonbiological grandparent relationships. Hence, even a basic demographic profile of the grandparent-grandchild relationship suggests diversity and complexity in this relationship. Third, Bengtson, Rosenthal, and Burton (1990) describe the ways in which families have changed, from a relatively small number of generations with many people in each to a larger number of generations populated by fewer people (as a function of increasing longevity and fewer children per family). Consequently, the family context is shifting from one that was substantially *intra*generational, to one that is substantially *inter*generational. All of these trends warrant attention with regard to their influence on family communication.

While the focus on research related to the aging of the population has primarily been on economic and health care issues, increasing consideration is now being paid to the relational aspects of this demographic trend. Recent years have seen the publication of a handbook addressing various issues pertaining to the relationship, such as grandparents as caregivers, grandparenting in different cultures, and grandparents' roles in intergenerational solidarity (Szinovacz, 1998), as well as numerous empirical articles and review chapters. However, various factors justify the inclusion of the grandparent-grandchild relationship in a book on understudied relationships. First, very little of the work on grandparenting has occurred in the communication discipline. In fact, amidst a flourishing literature on communication and aging (Nussbaum & Coupland, 2004) and intergenerational communication (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001), intergenerational *family* relationships, especially for non-adjacent generations, have received surprisingly little attention in the family communication literature (Williams & Harwood, 2004). Second, very few significant research *programs* have emerged on grandparenting. It has been the focus of scattered attention from many researchers, but it lacks the intensive focus and long-term study of a developed research program.

In this chapter, we review the current state of knowledge regarding grandparent-grandchild communication. We first elaborate on the importance and challenges evident in this relationship. Second, numerous variables will be presented as factors that *may* influence the quality or the various types of this relationship. The research findings we describe demonstrate the necessity of including grandparent-grandchild relationships in the mainstream literature on family communication. Then, we turn our attention to research focusing on communicative elements shaped by or shaping the factors introduced in

the previous section. Specifically, we highlight communicative predictors of quality grandparent-grandchild relationships, as well as the communicative "negotiation" of age salience as it relates to relational satisfaction and perceptions of intergenerational communication. Finally, we outline specific areas for future research, theoretical frameworks, and methodological considerations to guide this research. Our goal is to show that this understudied relationship is worthy of more attention than it has been accorded in the past and can be promising as it connects with other lines of research beyond family communication. To begin, we outline possible reasons why the grandparent-grandchild relationship has been understudied.

The Lack of Attention to Grandparental Relationships

The lack of attention to the grandparent-grandchild relationship is in part due to a simplistic conceptualization of the relationship. Stereotypical notions of grandparents have them as warm, loving, cozy, and generally female people who bake cookies, knit, call their grandchildren "sweetie," and provide candy and generous Christmas gifts (e.g., Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994). Such conceptions are both overly positive and overly homogeneous, suggesting a relationship involving no conflict, little intensity, only tangential involvement, and virtually no diversity. In contrast to this simplistic and fairy-tale conception, the existing literature actually demonstrates dramatic diversity in the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Scholars such as Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) have shown that numerous types of relationships exist, from the very distant to the emotionally close, and to a grandparental style involving extensive contact and influence. Furthermore, much of the literature and research has focused on fairly young grandchildren. Explorations of relationships between grandparents and *adult* grandchildren are almost nonexistent. As with parent-child relationships, the dynamics of the grandparent relationship undoubtedly change as grandchildren move further into adulthood. Older grandchildren have the opportunity to form relationships with their grandparents that are independent of their parents, or they may share a caregiver role with their parents such as driving their grandparents to the clinic periodically. Until scholars take on board the complexity and diversity that this relationship encompasses, it is unlikely that extensive research attention will be devoted here.

Another significant contributor to the lack of research attention to grandparenting is that it is overshadowed by the parent-child relationship. Research into personal and family relationships is often troubled by the

complexity of dealing with more than a single dyad. Since the parent-child relationship already offers considerable complexity (generally two parents, often multiple children), involving additional members of the extended family provides daunting methodological challenges. Add to this a general notion that the grandparent relationship simply cannot be as important as the parent-child relationship, and you have a recipe for neglect.

Finally, we suspect that certain cultural and ideological biases have crept into research in this area. Western culture tends to focus on the nuclear family. Recent trends of mobility (in jobs and retirement living) and increasing age segregation in housing have reinforced the importance of the nuclear family (Chudacoff, 1989). Western culture has also traditionally valued youth and devalued old age—who really wants to study *old* people, anyway? We suspect that researchers' preferences may have been swayed by these preconceived biases, and hence they have paid insufficient attention to grandparenting as an important relational context. In the end, the grandparent-grandchild relationship has not received the same emphasis that other family relationships have received from communication scholars. We now outline the unique opportunities and challenges that this relationship provides to researchers interested in family communication.

Communicative Opportunities and Challenges

As Kornhaber (1985) suggests, there is evidence that the grandparent-grandchild relationship may be second only to the parent-child relationship in terms of its overall impact on child development. Perhaps one of the most common perceptions of grandparents' role in the family is that they are important in transmitting family history and evoking/reinforcing family identity (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1981). Moreover, a number of studies reinforce the notion that grandparents play a symbolic role, including promulgating traditions, values, and beliefs related to family (Brussoni & Boon, 1998), cultural/ethnic identity (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000), and religious traditions and values (King, Elder, & Conger, 2000). However, minimal research has examined the actual communication practices involved in transmitting these traditions, values, and beliefs (although see Nussbaum & Bettini, 1994).

Grandparents also play an important supportive role in the lives of grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). A *supportive role* here references the ways in which grandparents are involved in their grandchildren's family lives during changes in family structure. Early discussions on the role of grandparents emphasized the supportive aspect of the relationship

(e.g., Kornhaber & Woodward, 1981), and recent research has pursued this topic further, suggesting that grandparents provide emotional and financial support (Block, 2002). Emotional support is particularly crucial during family struggles such as parental separation or divorce (Cogswell & Henry, 1995). Furthermore, grandparents also emerge as key figures in assisting the family in raising grandchildren who have physical or mental disabilities (Findler, 2000). Less information is available on how the types of support and supportive interactions vary based on the age of the grandchild or grandparent as well as the physical and mental capacity of the grandparent. Hence, further research is needed to understand how support is enacted (e.g., seeking support, providing support) in this relationship, particularly with teen and adult grandchildren.

A noteworthy trend in grandparents' supportive roles is serving as caregivers (Landry, 1999). Grandparents often become caregivers or custodial parents of their grandchildren in reaction to family problems such as middle-generation substance abuse (Burton, 1992), mental/emotional illness (Jendrek, 1993), incarceration (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994), or divorce (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Although a sense of pride and joy is typically associated with raising the grandchildren, there may be some unfortunate consequences. In addition to financial strains, legal issues (Waldrop & Weber, 2001), and physical exhaustion, grandparent caregivers may experience shifts in their support networks because their friends may no longer share the role of parent (Jendrek, 1994), resulting in a sense of social isolation for many (Landry, 1999).

Such caregiver roles often reverse when grandchildren become adults. Studies suggest that caregiving is a growing challenge for *all* in that grandchildren often serve as primary caregivers to their grandparents (Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Bengston, 1996). Married grandchildren caring for their grandparents suffer strain in family relationships with their spouses and children, while single grandchildren report challenges in the development of romantic relationships. However, positive outcomes from caregiving are also found including long-lasting positive memories, generational reciprocity, and maintenance of close family relationships (Dellman-Jenkins, Blankenmeyer, & Pinkard, 2000). The caregiving component of the grandparent-grandchild relationship warrants further inquiry in terms of understanding how caregiving roles emerge and reverse and how grandparent and grandchild communicatively negotiate these changes once these roles are assumed.

In addition to the specifics of caregiving, research has also examined broader issues of relational quality in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, with a focus on the variables that have shown strong links to interpersonal solidarity in and quality of this relationship. Positive parent-grandparent relationships (past and present) are associated with parental

encouragement of grandparent-grandchild contact (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). The grandparent-grandchild relationship is particularly challenged if the parents are divorced, especially before grandchildren reach adulthood (Drew & Smith, 2002). When family feuds or geographic distance are added to the picture, a loss of contact between grandparents and grandchildren is particularly likely. Parental divorce has been shown to decrease the quantity of contact, especially for paternal grandparents (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). However, divorce and remarriage of the parental generation generally does not affect grandparents' perceived obligations to help their grandchildren financially (Ganong & Coleman, 1998). Grandparents who foster a positive relationship with the custodial parent can overcome the challenges of parental divorce by maintaining a relationship with their grandchildren, albeit with modifications to their role. Maintaining communication through telephone, written, and face-to-face interactions may be crucial during this transitional phase (Gladstone, 1988). The marital status of grandparents also influences the level of involvement with their grandchildren (Silverstein & Marenco, 2001). King (2003) concludes that the divorce of grandparents negatively impacts this relationship, and those negative effects are stronger for grandfathers and paternal grandparents. Thus, both the parents' and the grandparents' marital status can serve as both a facilitator and a barrier to quality of grandparent-grandchild relationships.

Geographical proximity of grandparents and grandchildren functions as another key predictor of quantity of contact. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) suggested that geographical distance accounts for 62% of the variance in frequency of contact. However, geographical distance findings are inconsistent. While some research suggests that increased frequency of visiting and closer geographic proximity between the grandparent and grandchildren are positively associated with closeness (Harwood & Lin, 2000), additional findings indicate more satisfaction among grandchildren with long-distance relationships than relationships that are geographically proximal (Harwood, 2000a). One key area for future research might be to examine more *specific* dimensions of emotional closeness and the ways in which they change as a function of geographical distance. We suspect that geographically distant grandparents may be "idealized" to some extent, while the actual relationships remain rather superficial.

Using qualitative techniques, Holladay, Lackovich, and Lee's (1998) turning point study discovered that relationships were generally hurt by increases in distance and helped by decreased geographical proximity. Furthermore, grandparents seem fond of relationships in which the grandchild lives nearby (Falk & Falk, 2002), and the theme of distance is clearly important, as

revealed by its prominence in grandparents' accounts of their relationships with their grandchildren (Harwood, 2004; Harwood & Lin, 2000).

Age is naturally a key variable in grandparent-grandchild relationships, due to both the intergenerational nature of the relationship and the changes that occur as the grandparent and grandchild age. Younger grandchildren seem to have closer relationships and more frequent interaction with their grandparents. However, some older grandchildren may have more intimate and substantial communication with their grandparents—particularly as they seek out such contact independent of parental encouragement or familial obligations (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1981). The age of the grandparent is also important. Very young ("off-time") grandparents often resist their "unexpected" role (Burton & Bengtson, 1985). They may still be working full time and have other obligations that limit their flexibility to contribute to the relationship in the same way as older grandparents. On the other end of the continuum, very old grandparents may be more likely to be suffering from health and mobility issues, and this may hinder their involvement (Barer, 2001). Grandparents who are in the "prototypical" age for grandparenting (early retirement years) tend to be most satisfied with their role, in part because they "fit" society's conceptions of that role (Harwood & Lin, 2000).

Finally, the role of grandparent sex and lineage has been noted repeatedly in the literature. While not uniformly consistent, the broad pattern of results appears to indicate that maternal grandparents and grandmothers tend to have closer relationships with their grandchildren (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). Women appear to focus more on the emotional components of the grandparent role, whereas grandfathers often appear more focused on instrumental features (e.g., advising about finances or careers: Downs, 1989).

The discussion above illustrates that we know a fair amount about certain concepts central to grandparenting as well as structural variables that influence the quality of the relationship. Much of this research has not had a direct focus on communicative components of the relationship. Hence, the next section focuses on the findings related to grandparent-grandchild *communication*.

What Do We Know About Grandparent-Grandchild Communication?

Researchers have primarily examined two communicative features of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. First, research has examined the communicative factors that differentiate between high and low quality grandparenting relationships. Second, work has examined communicative aspects

of age salience and the consequences of this relationship for younger people's attitudes about older adults and aging. We examine these two in turn.

Quality

Closer grandparent-grandchild relational partners are more likely to enjoy their interaction, to discuss a wide range of topics, and to interact more frequently in face-to-face settings than less close relational partners (Harwood, 2000a). In closer relationships, grandchildren were more likely to positively stereotype their grandparents (Pecchioni & Croghan, 2002). Furthermore, Anderson, Harwood, and Hummert (in press) concluded that age stereotyping, relational closeness, and reciprocal self-disclosure influence age-adapted communication behaviors (e.g., patronizing communication, under- and overaccommodation: Kemper & Harden, 1999) of young adult grandchildren with their grandparents and older adult acquaintances.

A prominent communicative act associated with older adults is storytelling (Ryan, Kwong See, Meneer, & Trovato, 1994). Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) showed that grandfathers and grandmothers have rather different storytelling styles. Grandfathers tended to discuss historical issues (e.g., the war) and health issues. Grandmothers, on the other hand, talked more about relationships and family history. However, grandchildren rarely tell stories to their grandparents. They had a difficult time doing so, perhaps revealing the broader issue of who has "license" to tell stories (those with experience) and also stereotypes of communication style (old people are good storytellers: Kemper, Kynette, Rash, O'Brien, & Sprott, 1989). More broadly, this storytelling role is probably indicative of a function that grandparents play in terms of mentoring (King & Elder, 1997) and transmitting family and cultural identity (Langellier, 2002).

Taking a communication accommodation theory perspective to examine adaptive communication behavior, Harwood (2000b) and Lin and Harwood (2003) have demonstrated that a variety of accommodative behaviors are associated with solidarity in the relationship. For instance, underaccommodation (i.e., paying insufficient attention to the other's conversational needs) and overaccommodation (i.e., overcompensating based on perceived stereotypes of aging, patronizing) are associated with lower levels of relational solidarity. Accommodating the other and feeling accommodated are both positive predictors of solidarity.

Types of communication media used in the relationship were found to affect quality of grandparent-grandchild relationship (Harwood, 2000a). Frequency of telephone communication appeared to be associated with more satisfying relationships (more so than face-to-face or written communication). Recent work by Holladay and Seipke (2003) shows that communication using

e-mail is also relatively frequent in the grandparent-grandchild relationship
and that it also predicts overall satisfaction and closeness in the relationship.

Age Salience

Age-related adaptive communication behavior may be a function of
age salience. Age salience refers to the extent to which age-based distinc-
tions (i.e., younger vs. older adult) pervade the interactions between the
grandparent and grandchild—it is the degree to which the participants are
mutually aware of, and acting in terms of, their respective age group mem-
berships. Preliminary findings have shown that grandparent-grandchild
relationships in which age is salient tend to be less positive than ones in
which age is not important (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005).
That is, when one or both parties are conscious of the age difference dur-
ing their interactions, the interaction experience is less likely to be consid-
ered positive. Given that age salience has negative consequences, it is worth
understanding its predictors.

Soliz (2004) found that over- and underaccommodative communication
styles are both structurally linked to age salience. Under- and overaccom-
modative communication styles have emerged elsewhere as "intergroup"
communication strategies. Hence, it is theoretically sensible that they emerge
as predicting the salience of groups in a relational setting—in this case,
age-group differences. Harwood, Raman, and Hewstone (2004) have taken
a more exploratory approach to uncovering the communicative phenomena
triggering age salience. These behaviors include talking about the past and
storytelling, expressing lack of understanding of the world today, patroniz-
ing the grandchild, and dispensing wisdom. Many of these phenomena are
also associated with negative evaluations of the relationship (see also Garrett
& Williams, 2004), and the positive behaviors (e.g., storytelling, demon-
strating wisdom) actually displayed very inconsistent relationships to age
salience in Harwood et al.'s findings.

The issue of age salience takes on additional importance when consid-
ered in the context of ageism. Considerable research has examined associ-
ations between grandchildren's contact with their grandparents and ageist
attitudes. As noted by Williams and Nussbaum (2001), "many of our
general conceptions of growing old and of what it may be like to be old
are formed with reference to our relationships with our grandparents"
(p. 168). Grandparent-grandchild contact often satisfies various "facilitat-
ing conditions" that have been described in the literature on intergroup
contact (e.g., contact in a long-term relationship, institutionally supported,
noncompetitive: Allport, 1954). Hence, it is not surprising that some studies
find positive attitudes toward aging resulting from positive grandparent

contact (e.g., Soliz & Harwood, 2003). In explicitly communication-related work in this area, Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, and Voci (2004) demonstrated that self-disclosure in the grandparent-grandchild relationship may be particularly important in influencing attitudes concerning aging—grandchildren who experienced more reciprocal self-disclosure in conversations with their grandparents also tended to have more positive attitudes about aging. Negativity or unfamiliarity with the outgroup may be reduced through such experiences. However, not all research demonstrates clear associations between grandparent contact and attitudes toward aging.

Recent work suggests that age salience may moderate the association between grandparent contact and ageist attitudes. Harwood et al. (2005) and Soliz (2004) demonstrate that for grandchildren who score high on a measure of age salience in interactions with their grandparents, there is a strong association between their feelings for their grandparent and their attitudes about older adults. In contrast, for grandchildren who see age as less central to the grandparent relationship, there is very little association between feelings in the relationship and feelings about older people. In other words, the grandparent-grandchild relationship only influences attitudes concerning aging when there is a clear cognitive connection made between the grandparent and the category "older people." Interestingly, this leads to the conclusion that age salience is beneficial, whereas the research mentioned above indicated that it could be harmful. The paradoxical effects of age salience as beneficial to attitude generalization, but harmful to intimacy and satisfaction, deserve more attention. On one hand, age salience is associated with negative evaluation of the grandparent-grandchild relationship; on the other hand, age salience is a prerequisite for a connection between grandparent contact and attitudes toward aging. These findings illustrate one way in which the study of grandparenting illuminates more general theoretical concerns. The paradoxical effects of group salience have been shown in other intergroup research but never in the context of a personal relationship.

In the previous sections, we have aimed to summarize the research on grandparent-grandchild relationships with a particular emphasis on communication in this relationship. The following discussion will address additional directions for research central to broadening our understanding of this family relationship.

What's Left to Learn About the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship?

There are three broad thematic thrusts that we see as crucial to the future development of this area: culture, technology, and identity. Given space

limitations, we will briefly discuss each in the context of key theoretical frameworks and important methodological considerations. We hope to spark students' and researchers' interests in exploring these areas further.

Culture

More attention should be given to the cultural values that dictate how a person relates to his or her family members. Three areas associated with culture should be addressed in future research. First, greater attention needs to be paid to minority grandparents in the United States (Kamo, 1998). The majority of grandparent research either ignores cultural variations in grandparenting or problematically emphasizes social and family *problems* related to these variations (Szinovacz, 1998). More attention needs to be paid to how grandparenting among minorities may differ from mainstream conceptions, while at the same time accounting for variations *within* ethnic groups.

Second, we see a need for research on the influence of acculturation on the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Families of immigrants may encounter barriers as younger generations become acculturated to the mainstream culture. However, grandparents may also serve as a connection to the grandchild's cultural heritage (Pettys & Balgopal, 1998). An important communication factor related to acculturation is language and the extent to which grandparents and grandchildren are fluent in the same language. Research on Mexican American families (Silverstein & Chen, 1999) and Chinese families in New Zealand (Ng & He, 2004) suggest that language barriers can negatively influence the quality of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. In this sense, the grandparent-grandchild relationship may be especially prone to cultural gaps, which can have a negative influence on the quality of the relationship (Silverstein & Chen, 1999). Language proficiency plays a unique role in this relationship, and further research should address the ways in which family members overcome this barrier.

Finally, research should continue to examine grandparent-grandchild relationships in countries other than the United States. For instance, reciprocal responsibility and connection within families are emphasized more in collectivistic cultures than individualistic cultures (e.g., Kim, 1994). Collectivists follow different social rules and norms when interacting with family and non-family members (Gao, 1996). Xuan and Rice (2000) showed that Vietnamese grandparents expressed distinct differences regarding grandparents' roles and authority in traditional Vietnamese culture and Australian culture. In addition, in non-U.S. cultures, grandparents and grandchildren may enact different functions depending on familial lineage (e.g., Sangree, 1992). For instance, paternal grandparents may be considered as a more appropriate substitute for child caregiving than maternal

grandparents as a result of strong patrilineal family structure (Chen, Short, & Entwisle, 2000). Hence, cultural variation within and outside of the United States is a notable factor to consider in further investigation of this family relationship.

Technology

Another relatively unexplored area for research is the influence of new technology on communication patterns and relationship building between grandparents and grandchildren. The Internet has shown potential for connecting friends and family by providing an opportunity for people to engage in communication across geographical boundaries and time zones (Pew, 2000). In the U.S., adults over 65 are one of the fastest-growing groups of Internet users, showing a 43% increase in usage since 1994 (Adler, 2001; Wright, 2000). Older adults' use of the Internet has begun to receive attention with regard to social relationships, well-being, and social support (Lin, Hummert, & Harwood, 2004). As well-educated and computer-literate baby boomers enter older adulthood, we anticipate a growth in older adults' use of computers to sustain relationships with their geographically distant children and grandchildren (Harwood, 2004). Furthermore, this use of technology may provide opportunities for in-depth disclosure and affection, as well as change perceptions of older people (e.g., as more "up-to-date"). Further work should examine such effects.

Identity

Social identity theorizing suggests that self-perception is, in part, a reflection of the social groups one identifies with and the evaluative and affective dimensions associated with this identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Brewer (2000) points out that individuals may operate on various levels of group inclusion and exclusion, and we feel this notion is especially apt for understanding grandparenting in that there are various levels of identity for grandparents. Grandparents may identify with an older adult age group or be categorized by others as an older adult. Since ageist attitudes are present in society, there are some negative implications associated with this age group categorization, including diminished quality of relationship with younger adults (Kite & Johnson, 1988). However, unlike non-family older adults, grandparents may possess a shared family identity with grandchildren, which may ameliorate some of the negative effects of age salience, given the overall positive social representations of grandparents and grandparenting. The identity complexities here, though, are drawn out by Harwood (2004), who notes

the distinctions between identifying as a grandparent in terms of role identity (a position in the family) versus social identity (a shared group membership with other grandparents). The complexities associated with communicating such varied identities, intersections of different meanings of "grandparent," and the varied evaluative and affective dimension of grandparent identities are significant areas for further research.

Theoretical Explanations

When focusing on any family relationship, it is important to consider theoretical perspectives that may guide research on the relationship *within* the family context. Obviously, any of the theoretical approaches to family communication could guide research on the grandparent-grandchild relationship. However, one unique characteristic of the grandparent-grandchild relationship is the significant age difference between the two family members in a society where old age is not highly praised. As previously discussed, this age difference may serve as a barrier to intimate and satisfying grandparent-grandchild relationships. Although age may be the most notable group distinction between the grandparent and grandchild, other group differences (e.g., cultural, religious) may influence communication in this relationship. The following discussion highlights two theoretical perspectives, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT: Shepard, Giles, & Le Poire, 2001) and the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) that are particularly well-suited to examining relationships that cross social group lines.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, preliminary examination of grandparent-grandchild relationships from a CAT perspective has revealed some positive and negative associations between specific communicative behaviors and grandparent-grandchild relational solidarity (Harwood, 2000b). Three issues can be considered for future research grounded in this approach. First, a CAT perspective draws attention to the dynamics of communication. Future work should consider not just static evaluations of communication in the relationship but also the ongoing interactive dynamics. For instance, discovering shifts in accommodative behavior associated with topics (e.g., grandchild under accommodation when issues of school achievement are raised) would provide considerably more sophisticated understanding of grandparent-grandchild communication than we currently have.

Second, examining connections between grandparents' and grandchildren's motives for various accommodation behaviors and actual behavior is important. As noted earlier, multiple identities may be salient in this relationship (age, family, role, etc.), and behaviors may be tailored to emphasize one

more than another in particular contexts to achieve specific relationship goals. CAT provides a framework with which to examine fluctuations in such identities and the communicative manifestations of such changes. Third, a CAT perspective links communication to other important structural, relational, or cultural variables. For instance, the grandparenting styles identified by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) might well be associated with specific communication accommodation behaviors. Finally, particular CAT strategies in different cultural contexts may be evaluated differently and may be perceived as more useful or detrimental in establishing close and intimate relationships (Lin & Harwood, 2003).

Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) highlights the manner in which *intergroup* interactions, typically associated with negative characteristics, can be (re)conceptualized as *intra*group by focusing on a shared identity, which often yields more positive effects in the interaction. In one sense, the grandparent and grandchild are members of separate social groups (i.e., young and older adults). However, as discussed earlier, grandparent and grandchild also share a common ingroup identity (i.e., family). Hence, the CIIM provides a framework for understanding how ingroup and outgroup distinctions may operate within this relationship. Research should investigate what communicative behaviors are associated with marking intra- versus intergroup boundaries in this relationship (and the work described earlier on age salience fulfills a part of this mandate). Although much of the research utilizing the CIIM has investigated non-family interaction, recent work has illustrated its usefulness for examining family dynamics (Soliz, 2004).

Ways of Study

When discussing this family relationship, it is important to remember that a grandchild will most likely have multiple grandparent relationships. Including stepgrandparents and great-grandparents, our recent research indicates that adults aged 18–25 have an average of 3–4 grandparents still living, and many have more. Hence, research examining only one relationship does not capture the full experience of being a grandchild. We would advocate more work examining multiple grandparent relationships simultaneously (e.g., Soliz & Harwood, 2003). In a complementary fashion, we would also encourage work that considers the entire family, not just the grandparent-grandchild dyad (e.g., Ng & He, 2004). Grandparent and grandchild roles may be modified dramatically depending upon the presence of other parties (siblings, other grandparents, the middle generation) in the conversation.

Conclusion

In close grandparent-grandchild relationships, grandparents are more likely to be socially involved, have good mental health, and to have a sense of pride in their grandchildren (Lin & Harwood, 2003). Grandchildren in such relationships are more likely to engage in activities with their grandparents, see benefits to spending time with their grandparents, be influenced by their grandparents' values and beliefs, and have positive attitudes toward their own aging. Therefore, it is important for communication scholars to understand how the challenges of intergenerational communication between grandparents and grandchildren can be overcome and positive grandparent-grandchild relationships, which are mutually beneficial to young and older adults, can be established. The relationship also offers intriguing theoretical challenges to family communication scholars and others in the field.