

## Communication across the life span

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The aim of this study is to investigate intergenerational communication across the life span. Theoretical background: Social identity and inter-group communication theory (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, 1991; Harwood, Giles, and Ryan, 1995), as well communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1991). "Age functions as one such social group" (p. 102) and it can act as a salient group identity in a discourse. People make adjustments in their communications styles in order to match their perceptions about the other or the group membership. Individuals aim to achieve positive identity.

**Participants** from college-aged students to community adults divided into four groups: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59\*. Those groups were explored in terms of their perceptions toward three *target* groups – elders (65-85) and young teenagers (13-16) as well as peers.

*Research Question 1:* What is the pattern of reported frequency of contact with the target groups, and does it change across the life span?

*Research Question 2:* Is reported frequency of contact related to perceptions of communication with the different target groups?

**Procedure** Participants from the four groups were asked to fill in open-ended questions. They were asked to describe their perceptions of the other's behavior while interacting with the target groups as well their own communicative behavior.

### **Stereotypes and ageism toward youth**

Note: authors define the age 18-20 as late adolescence.

Stereotyping perceptions about young people: reckless, irresponsible, tendencies to abuse alcohol. Social and behavioral problems – risk taking, rebelliousness, recklessness and impulsivity; prone to anxiety and depression.

Young people demonstrate extreme sensitivity how others perceive them, especially peer groups. They are aware that middle-aged people stereotype them as feckless and irresponsible. From the other hand, they are also bothered by the patronizing behavior older groups have toward them.

### **Discussion and results**

*Research Question 1:* the 20-29 group reported less frequent contact with elder and teen targets and more contact with peers than the older participants. That suggests those young people are not that involved with family environment or having cross-generational friendships but spend their time with peers in activities like clubbing, dating etc. The group 50-59 reported more frequent interactions with elders than with teens but they also had the most frequent contact with peers.

*Research Question 2:* Adults demonstrate moderate levels of interaction with all age groups. With age the positive evaluation of elders increases with teens being the most negative towards them. Also, 13- to 16-year-olds were seen as more non-communicative and self-promotional and less accommodative and this is especially strongly expressed by 20-29 group. Elders are viewed as more non-accommodative.

- In developmental psychology: 10 years defines an age cohort.

Findings suggest there is an existing social and communicative distance between 20-29 group and elders. The same-age interaction was of great importance for younger groups. The same-age peers decreases with age and the frequency of contact with elders increases.

## REFERENCES

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- In developmental psychology: 10 years defines an age cohort.