COMMUNICATION AND AGING: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF
COHORT-CENTRISM AND PERCEIVED DECODING
ABILITY ON COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE
AND COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

by

JOYCE LANKFORD ALLMAN, B.S.W.

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At the end of the movie, Camelot, King Arthur is on the battlefield at dawn as a young boy approaches wanting to fight in the battle as one of the Knights of the Round Table. Rather than permitting the lad to join the battle, King Arthur charges him to return home and keep alive the stories of Camelot. He knights the boy "Sir Thomas of Warwick" and spurs him homeward, yelling after young Sir Thomas, "RUN, BOY, RUN!" How often have I heard my own cheering section yelling some version of that exhortation. Although I had my share of stumbles and falls, it is because of their help and encouragement that I kept running and have reached the finish line.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	v
TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	1
II. RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTION	15
III. METHODOLOGY	19
IV. RESULTS	26
V. DISCUSSION.....	33
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIX	47

ABSTRACT

From a sample of 190 (120 "young," 70 "old"), this study sought to determine if there were differences in Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction as a function of the main and joint effects of Cohort-centrism and Perceived Decoding Ability. Analysis of the multivariate model provided only weak support for the joint effects. However, it was found that older persons considered their conversational partners, whether young or old, to be more competent than did younger persons. Also, on the whole, older persons were more satisfied conversing with young persons, while younger persons were less satisfied, regardless of the age of the conversational partner. Those who perceived themselves as high decoders rated their partners as more competent than did those who perceived themselves as low decoders, and high decoders were also more satisfied with the interaction than low decoders. Cohort-centrism was supported only in the case of low-decoding older persons.

LIST OF TABLES

1. Demographics of the Sample	20
2. Frequencies of Participants	21
3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Perceived Decoding Ability, Communication Competence, and Communication Satisfaction.	26
4. Communication Satisfaction Means as a Function of Perceived Decoding Ability and Cohort Pairing	29

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

If it weren't for the mirrors and memories, I would still be 16.

--Lady Jane Digby

According to Lady Digby the perception of aging is a matter of the mind. If we could neither see ourselves aging nor remember the past, we might remain youthful years longer. Nonetheless, aging is a fact of life, yet there is very little research in the communication discipline pertaining to gerontological issues. Biologists tell us what happens physically to the body, and psychologists and gerontologists tell us what happens psychologically, cognitively, and socially. From their information we can make assumptions about the communication process and aging, but little empirical work has been accomplished in this area. Due to the paucity of research in gerontological communication, the field is ripe for investigating whether the elderly have different communication perceptions and needs than other age groups.

Research has shown that as the body ages vision and hearing are two of the senses that reflect the aging process first (Carmichael, 1988). Due to the decreased ability to see and/or hear as well, the question arises as to whether this decrease impacts on communication outcomes and consequences for the elderly. Do these deficits have any bearing on an older person's perceived competence as a communicator? Have the elderly noticed any changes in their communication skills as they have aged; for instance, have their abilities to decode their conversational partner's nonverbal cues changed? One could reason that decoding skills would likely decrease as vision and

hearing decline. However, perhaps the experience that has come with the years enhances decoding abilities. As they have grown older, do they find that they prefer to interact with those in their cohort age group because communication abilities are similar? Do their communication skills or preference for the age of their conversational partner have any bearing on how they perceive others' communication competence or their own satisfaction with the communication outcome?

A review of the literature uncovered little evidence of the elderly evaluating their communication skills, preference for conversational partners, communication competence, or communication satisfaction. The "Baby Boom" generation is aging and it behooves us to identify the outcomes and consequences of communication among and between age groups in an effort to understand how to meet the needs of the upcoming elderly Baby Boomers, while at the same time enhancing the quality of life of our existing elderly. From the perspective of cohort centrism theory, the following literature review provides evidence for studying the elderly's perceived communication decoding skills, conversational partner preferences, communication competence, and communication satisfaction.

Review of Literature

Growth of the Elderly Population

According to Cetron and Davies (1989), the number of Americans over sixty-five will have increased more than 50% by the year 2000. At the present rate of mortality, there will be a projected 34 million people over age 65 in 2000, and if mortality continues to decline at the present rate, this figure will climb to 38 million (Heath, 1986). The fastest-growing segment of the United States population is the 85-and-older group. Whereas they now comprise 1.2% of the population, that percentage

will increase to 1.8% or 4.9 million by 2000 (Cetron & Davies, 1989), and by 2050, the number will be 16 million ("The Coming Crisis," 1990). Even with the aging Baby Boomers being healthier, the fact that they will live longer means that ultimately they will have to have some help with routines of daily life. "In 1985, 90% of the elderly cared for themselves; by 2001 this will decrease to 80%. . .because the composition of the elderly will change to include more 'old-old' people" (Cetron & Davies, 1989, p. 35).

Perceived Decoding Ability

As the United States population shifts toward an increase in the elderly population, the scarcity of research in the communication field regarding aging and nonverbal communication is disturbing. Our population is aging, but we have little understanding of the elderly's nonverbal communication. Of particular importance is decoding ability, since one must be able to decode another's messages in order for interaction to proceed to a successful conclusion.

Visual and auditory channels obviously play an important role in decoding. But for the elderly, diminished channels can affect decoding skills and the perception of communication competence and resulting communication satisfaction. Specifically, if they cannot see to decode kinesic behavior and facial expressions, or hear to interpret paralinguistic cues, they may perceive their conversational partner as being an incompetent communicator and subsequently register dissatisfaction with the interaction. Yet, they may not recognize the source of dissatisfaction as resulting from a decreased ability to see or hear--deficits in the decoding channels. Since research on communication and aging is limited, we must look primarily to the fields of

gerontology and psychology to help explain the visual and auditory channel deficits and draw implications for perceived decoding ability.

Vision, kinesics, and facial expressions. Specific studies of aging and vision overwhelmingly conclude that vision impairment is one of the most noticeable sensory losses for the elderly (Carmichael, 1988; Kalymun, 1989). Direct evidence that vision could affect communication processes comes from McGee and Barker (1982) who suggest that the inability to read nuances of interaction (e.g., facial expressions) due to visual decline may impede the elderly's ability to communicate in an effective manner. It stands to reason that a reduction in visual discrimination skills will diminish the ability to process incoming nonverbal cues. For instance, facial expressions and eye behavior which are elements of nonverbal communication but which are not as easily decoded visually as other behaviors, may not be accurately decoded due to the deficit in the visual channel.

Parham, Feldman, Oster, and Popoola (1981) found that nonverbal decoding differences existed between young and old subjects during deception detection tests. Ferris, Crook, Clark, McCarthy, and Rae (1980) discovered that facial recall was poorer for older subjects, and sensory input rates are slower for the elderly (Hayslip & Panek, 1989). Although we do not know the implications these studies hold for communication interactions across age groups, Parham et al. (1981) suggest the ability to read emotional cues from the face may be enhanced when people interact with cohorts.

Auditory and paralinguistics. It is widely accepted that impaired hearing among the elderly is common. Although hearing loss may be so gradual that it is virtually undetected by those affected, it nonetheless decreases over one's life, and by advanced age, most individuals have some form of hearing disorder (Carmichael, 1988; Olsho,

Harkins, & Lenhardt, 1985). Because even a slight hearing impairment requires a louder and slower conversational style (Eisdorfer & Wilkie, 1972), decoding may be more difficult for those with a hearing deficit, and paralinguistic cues might bypass them. Wingfield, Lahar, and Stine (1989) found that elderly adults, if able to hear and use paralinguistic cues, were much better at comprehending and recalling messages. Although the studies suggest that paralinguistic cues play an important role in the elderly's ability to decode messages, the ability to do so is limited by the aging auditory system.

Summary. As an individual ages, sensory changes occur primarily in vision and hearing. According to Kalymun (1989), sensory deficits seem to develop in stages beginning as early as age 40, with no significant effect on behavior until after age 60. These sensory changes occur as a natural consequence of aging, but the changes in some individuals are greater than those in others. However, for those who experience greater changes, the resulting deficits may affect their perceived decoding abilities, as poor vision hinders decoding kinesic behaviors and facial expressions, and diminished hearing obstructs paralinguistic cues. A question for investigation is whether cohorts decode each other's nonverbal cues more easily because they have more in common as fields of experience overlap.

Although we know the importance that vision and hearing play in decoding nonverbal cues, little research has been undertaken as to how deficits in these channels may impact an older person's perception of his/her own decoding ability. Furthermore, do these deficits affect how the older person perceives the communication competence of his/her conversational partner? How do the perceived decoding ability and perception of the partner's competence affect the resulting communication satisfaction, especially across age groups? We do not know if decoding is easier among cohorts,

which could result in higher perceived competence and satisfaction, or if competence and satisfaction are higher across age groups because the younger accommodate the older. Perhaps the younger do not accommodate the older, and this lack of accommodation makes decoding more difficult for the elderly, and they are less satisfied with communication across age groups. It is to these issues of communication competence and satisfaction that we now turn.

Communication Competence

Success in life often depends on how well a person communicates. This same competence which determines success in earlier years may very well determine how successful a person is in having his/her needs met in their elderly years.

Phillips (1984) states that competence is not a "thing," but rather an evaluation. To evaluate general communicative competence, Wiemann (1977) identified five interdependent components: empathy, affiliation/support, social relaxation, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management. He says that the competent communicator seeks to accomplish his/her own goals while maintaining an other-orientation by being empathic, supportive, and relaxed. Ability to adapt to each new encounter as well as to situations within an encounter shows the competent communicator's behavioral flexibility. And finally, the communicator's competence is based somewhat on the conversational partner's perception of how the interaction is managed. How another's competence is perceived may change, however, over time or situationally. Initial perceptions may change as interactants get to know one another, or perceptions based on first-person participation may be different than those based on third-party observation.

Backlund (1983) also maintains that competence is situational, but regardless of the situation, communication competence and effectiveness are not synonymous. "It is clear that it is possible for a person to be incompetent and ineffective at the same time, competent while being ineffective, incompetent while being effective, and competent while being effective" (Backlund, 1983, p. 7). According to Cupach and Spitzberg (1983) and Spitzberg (1988), how the conversational partner perceives the appropriateness and effectiveness of the communication are the criteria by which competence is measured: appropriate communication avoids violation of interpersonal rules, and effective communication achieves the goal of the communicator without violating contextual rules of appropriate conduct. Ultimately, it is the overt behavior of the communicator that determines whether that person is judged as being competent or incompetent (Spitzberg, 1988). Deficits in vision and hearing may cause an older person to be perceived by others as an incompetent communicator, as his/her overt behavior proclaims the inability to decode others' behaviors and messages. Also, contextual rules of conduct may be violated (such as an older person requiring a louder speaking volume or closer proximity), and these contextual violations may be the cause of their goals not being met--ineffective communication.

Downs, Smith, Chatham, and Boyle (1986) questioned 295 people 65 years old and over as to how they conceptualize communication competence. The answers were categorized according to Wiemann's (1977) general competence categories. "The largest percentage of descriptive statements were associated with general competence, supporting the conclusion that individuals demonstrating high levels of any one characteristic of competence, consequently demonstrated a unitary set of behaviors described as general competence" (Downs et al., 1986, p. 123). The study did not indicate whether the elderly perceive their own cohorts as being more competent than

those of a younger generation. Is it possible that older cohorts perceive each other as competent communicators due to their similarities in deficits and resulting decoding abilities, whereas those of the younger generation may perceive the elderly's overt behaviors as a sign of incompetent communication?

Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction is a holistic positive emotion felt after successful communication interaction, for which behaviors of the interaction were selected based upon expectations (Hecht, Sereno, and Spitzberg, 1984; Hecht and Marston, 1987). It is one of the outcomes commonly associated with competent communication (Hecht, 1978).

As mentioned earlier, there is a paucity of research in the field relating to elderly communication, and one is left to wonder if their communication expectations and satisfaction differ from those of the college-age population where much research is conducted. Drawing from the gerontological literature, research has shown that friendships in older adults affect life satisfaction (Goudy & Goudeau, 1982), loneliness (Schmitt and Kurdek, 1985), and expectations of support (Mancini and Simon, 1984). However, that research does not address whether those friendships are same-age or cross-age friendships, nor how communication affects those friendships. Do similarities or differences in decoding abilities affect satisfaction? Do the elderly find greater satisfaction communicating with cohorts who have similar levels of competence due to comparable deficits and skills?

We are not sure how decoding skills affect perceived communication competence and satisfaction in the elderly. Nor does the literature review reveal whether competence and satisfaction have any relationship to the age of the

communicative partner. From the gerontological theories, perhaps Cohort-centrism Theory may help us understand not only the the elderly's communication preferences but also the how it affects communication competence and communication satisfaction.

Cohort-centrism Theory

Gerontologists study the effects of aging and how elderly individuals deal with life. Munson (1984) states there are over 130 theories of human behavior. From the gerontological literature, O'Hair, Allman, and Gibson (1991) identified five theories relevant to aging and nonverbal communication: Disengagement Theory, Activity Theory, Exchange Theory, Continuity Theory, and Cohort-centrism Theory. Nussbaum (1983) examined conversational content of elderly interactions in light of Disengagement Theory and Activity Theory. This study proposes to study elderly communication from the perspective of Cohort-centrism Theory. From a life satisfaction perspective, Nussbaum (1985) states, "Specifically, a positive, optimistic outlook toward life, enthusiasm with life, and feelings of having accomplished desired goals in life are causally related to feelings of closeness with friends" (p. 266). From a communicative standpoint, cohort-centrism may help explain communication preferences in the elderly, which ultimately will benefit the knowledge of those on whom the elderly rely, such as family, caregivers, or service providers.

Life-course development. Cohort-centrism emanates from life developmental psychology, which according to Baltes, Reese, and Lipsitt (1980), is not a theory but rather an orientation toward describing and explaining developmental processes in human life from birth to death. Neugarten and Neugarten (1986) point out that childhood, adulthood, and old age are defined life periods in even the simplest societies. However, as a society becomes more complex, the life periods become more

numerous. In decades past, American society regarded "old" as the time following retirement in which an individual experienced a decline in physical health, accompanied by social disengagement and desolation. Today's more complex society has subdivided the "old" category into the "young-old" and "old-old," with the distinction based on health and social characteristics rather than chronological age (Neugarten & Neugarten, 1986; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976). "The demographer commonly uses a fixed age such as 60 or 65 as a boundary point because it facilitates standardized analyses and is grounded in legal and conventional practice" (Myers, 1990, p. 21). Schaie (1989) delineated middle-age with a median (mdn) age of 57, young-old mdn = 71, and old-old mdn = 85.

Riley (1971) says that chronological age is important to us as an indication of personal experience which carries probabilities of behavior and attitudes. However, aging is not only an individual phenomenon but also a collective process whereby the structure of an overall population is altered. Thus, "aging individuals" and "aging population" can refer to the aging of cohorts (Myers, 1990). Macroevents, historical experiences that influence development of individuals (Martin & Smyer, 1990), influence cohorts as a population, and these historical experiences affect attitudes and behaviors among the individuals who experience the event. For instance, Martin and Smyer (1990) investigated how individuals perceived the effects of major life events on their lives. They found no between-cohort differences though there were within-cohort differences. Nonetheless, might an historical period (the Jazz age, the Great Depression, the Hippie movement, etc.) affect communication patterns among those cohorts? The disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and the biological sciences have used the life-span/development approach (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980). The communication field could also benefit from this approach, using

cohort-sequential research which Nesselroade and Baltes (1979) say "is important in the study of behavioral development for the purpose of examining the quantitative boundaries of 'basic' developmental findings" (p. 79).

Historical perspective and definition. Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, is credited with bringing the term "cohort" into the sociological field in 1927 (Ryder, 1965; Bengtson, 1989). Mannheim (1952/1927) said that people who are cohorts exhibit certain behaviors and thoughts because they experience the same events by being in the same historical location. The demographic facts combined with sociopolitical events of birth-cohorts, resulted in what Mannheim termed historical consciousness, a sense of ". . .group identity and purpose coming from an awareness of participation in history" (Bengtson & Cutler, 1976, p. 135).

Matilda White Riley (1971) introduced the term "cohort-centric" in 1971. She says that although people may be born at different times, they live through intervals of history and encounter the same historical events, which makes them cohort-centric. Concern is not with specific dates but rather eras of history which affect cohorts through the sociocultural events, conditions, and changes which individuals are exposed to.

A cohort is thus defined as the aggregate of individuals born during a given period who are approximately the same chronological age. This aggregate ages with others of the same period, and includes classes of people who are exposed to given cultural or historical events of a period, such as war, economic depression, fashion, and political upheavals, and these events distinguish one cohort group from another. The impact of these experiences is carried with them and may similarly affect them, resulting in comparable interpretations of and orientations toward life (Bengtson, 1973; Bengtson, 1989; Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Cutler, 1976; Foner, 1984;

Keith & Kertzer, 1984; Myers, 1990; Rosow, 1978; Ryder, 1965). Foner (1984) says that in studying the old, it is important to know which specific historical cohort group is being considered so that the unique characteristics of the group can be considered. For instance, what do cohorts share historically that produces distinctive communication effects?

Homophily. Neugarten and Hagestad (1976) say that bonds of friendship as a rule develop between persons whose interests and experiences are similar, and as such, age often becomes a factor in friendship formation.

[T]he principle of homophily suggests that most people turn to others like them to meet major social needs. To suggest that older people are likely to find friends, to create viable groups, and to define norms when they have access to age-mates is only to say that they are likely to act like other people, and for the same reasons. (Keith, 1982, p. 44-45)

Ishii-Kuntz (1990) studied psychological well-being across stages of adulthood and found that interaction with friends was more important for the older age groups. However, an admitted drawback to the study was that it ". . . did not take into account the possible differences of persons' values for close relationships which may have been derived from different historical experiences" (p. 31-32). According to Hooyman and Kiyak (1988), several social and demographic trends increase the opportunities for the elderly to identify with each other, such as the increasing numbers of older people and the greater numbers of older people moving to retirement communities. Continued interaction with others in the same age group helps the aged maintain a sense of value, belonging, and meaning to life (Aiken, 1982).

Intergenerational socialization. The elderly may prefer each other's company, but cohorts die and those remaining must replace them, either from within their cohort group or by turning to the succeeding generation for social contacts. Some old people feel that young people despise them and that the old have no place in American society

(Clark and Anderson,1967). Bengtson and Cutler (1976) say these perceptions could be due to stereotyping across generations due to sociocultural disparities or to biological and psychological factors.

Sociocultural disparities occur because each generation is born into a different historical period and shaped by the events of the era. For example, the elderly living in the 1990s experienced the Great Depression and World War II, and for the most part, hold more conservative monetary and military values. Cohorts who grew up during the 1960s and the Vietnam era will most likely be influenced by those events and hold more similar values than cohorts succeeding them.

Also, social institutions change, giving different meanings to members of successive generations. For example, the family institution has changed from a traditional, nuclear family of the 1950s where mother was the homemaker and father was the breadwinner, to a more contemporary family where both mother and father share household duties as well as working outside the home. Furthermore, the nuclear family has given way to stepfamilies. Thus, the meaning of "family" may be different to successive generations as the social institution of the family has changed.

Biological and psychological factors can also influence cohort communication. From the review of the nonverbal literature, one can understand that physiological changes in the senses affect perceptions, cognition, and sensation, which in turn can affect the psychological well-being of the individual. Single changes or the additive effects of multiple changes can impact on communication outcomes, resulting in negative stereotypes of the elderly, which in turn may affect future interactions.

Theoretical limitations. There are some objections to cohort centrism as a means of understanding elderly behavior. With any theory of aging, physiological, social, and psychological factors must be considered when defining the behavior of age

groups (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1988). Significant life experiences in these age groups will not be cohort specific, but will impact on each person individually. Those who have experienced chronic illness will have different attitudes than those who have been healthy. Other life experiences which this theory ignores include the influence of family, socioeconomic status, religious differences, and political affiliates (Atchley & Seltzer, 1976; Minkler & Estes, 1984).

Cohort-centrism theory, in spite of its limitations, may hold importance for the study of communication in several ways. First, age-specific knowledge of norms, values, and behaviors are likely to affect the attitudinal predispositions of elderly adults, potentially affecting their behavior. Second, the ability to decode nonverbal behaviors may be something that is learned in association with cohort groups, causing predictable patterns within a particular age-stratification range. Third, the ability to maintain a sense of identity which is coupled with the past may be dependent upon sensitivity to, and identification with, members of one's cohort group.

CHAPTER II

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Butler (1989) states that despite the emergence of gerontology as a field of study and the establishment of the National Institute on Aging in 1975, the study of aging still remains "the poor stepchild" of research support and scientific interest. More specific to the field of communication, Carmichael (1976), Watson and Williams (1988), and O'Hair, Allman, and Gibson (1991) all state that research in the area of gerontological communication is sorely lacking.

From a nonverbal standpoint, Hall (1978) summarizes 75 studies bearing on the issue of gender differences in the ability to decode nonverbal cues of emotion. Studies have examined percentage contributions of specific channels to nonverbal communication (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian & Weiner, 1967; Hegstrom, 1979), social interpretation of verbal and nonverbal cues (Argyle, Alkema, & Gilmour, 1971; Archer & Akert, 1977), attitudes (Argyle, Salter, Nicholson, Williams, & Burgess, 1970), affect (Krauss, Apple, Morency, Wenzel, & Winston, 1981), and deception (Cody & O'Hair, 1983), just to name a few. None of these nonverbal studies has concentrated specifically on the elderly population. The elderly's physiological components are in a declining state, and though these changes vary from individual to individual, O'Hair, Allman, and Gibson (1991) postulate that degeneration affects the decoding abilities of the aged. For instance, poor eyesight and hearing impact on the elderly's ability to decode facial expression, kinesic behavior, and paralinguistic cues. However, among elderly cohorts, the ability to read emotional cues from the face may be enhanced when people interact with cohorts (Parham et al., 1981). As fields of experience overlap, cohorts have more in common and perhaps it is

easier for them to decode each other's nonverbal cues more easily as speaking, vision, and hearing decline. Emblems, illustrators, regulators, and adaptors may be more common among cohorts. Since research demonstrates that visual acuity declines with age, it is likely that decoding facial expressions, eye behavior, kinesics, and proxemics will be adversely affected. Cohort centrism research might reveal that elderly individuals are better able to discern the communicative functions (e.g., relational, expressive, impression formation, etc.) of people in their age group with similar visual limitations. Since the aging process is gradual for most people, the elderly may be unaware that their communication patterns may have changed over the years. While reduced hearing and vision may impact on their communication abilities, another line of reasoning argues that the elderly may in fact be better communicators due to their years of practice.

From a cohort-centrism perspective, those in the second half of life bring their own historical and sociological perspective to the communicative interaction. Keith and Kertzer (1984) ask to what extent behavior reflects age solidarity when people see themselves as sharing a common identity with others of approximately the same age. Pinder (cited in Mannheim, 1952, p. 283) says, "Everyone lives with people of the same and of different ages, with a variety of possibilities of experience facing them all alike. But for each the 'same time' is a different time--that is, it represents a different period of his self which he can only share with people of his own age."

Intergenerationally, Kalish (1969) posits that the young and the old would make a good alliance, as both are segregated at opposite ends of the continuum, yet both are adjacent to the "gerontocracy," the middle-age group that controls the nation. Both the young and the old are seeking self-identity as their roles are redefined. Interviews conducted by Allman and O'Hair (1990) revealed that grandparents and grandchildren

have relatively open communication with each other because the grandparents do not have a direct vested interest in the grandchild, thus allowing the grandchild the freedom to explore his/her identity without fear of negative judgement. Is it possible that "closeness" or "distance" one feels for the cohort affects the communication outcome (Bengtson & Cutler, 1976)?

One of the few studies conducted in gerontological communication tested communication attitudes and aging across six age spans and found that those in their 20s and 60s had more negative attitudes about self and others when rating certain communication events (Watson & Williams, 1988). One of the implications drawn from this study was that subjects' communication attitudes may affect results of professional treatment. Knowing the preferences for conversational partners may help those who provide services to the elderly establish more effective communication with their clients, resulting in greater satisfaction on the part of the client with his/her service provider. The client's satisfaction ultimately culminates in the client following through with the recommended treatment.

"Communication is interaction through messages. . .[which] plays its most distinctive part in building human life and communities" (Gerbner, 1986, p. 252). The elderly, comprised of individuals and themselves a community, are worthy of being studied from a communicative perspective. With the aging of the baby boom generation, studying communication processes in the second half of the life span is timely.

The group of citizens over 65 is the fastest-growing segment in American society, yet there has been little empirical research done in the area of gerontological communication. Specifically, a review of the literature did not uncover any studies examining the perceived decoding skills of the elderly nor studies of communication as

it relates to cohort-centrism. Bengtson and Cutler (1976) state, "The principal goal in generational analysis is to apply a comparative framework to the problem of age groups. . . comparing one age group with others in contemporary society. . . ." (p. 132). The purpose of this study was to apply Bengtson and Cutler's recommended goal to the examination of cohort centrism and communication by testing the effects of decoding ability and same-cohort/non-cohort pairings on communication competence and communication satisfaction.

RQ: Are there differences in Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction as a function of the main and joint effects of Cohort Centrism and Perceived Decoding Ability?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Elements and Sampling Method

A nonprobability convenience sample comprised the 190 subjects for this project. Volunteers were solicited from communication classes at Texas Tech University. In addition, students in communication classes at Texas Tech were offered extra credit for securing subjects within the necessary age groups for this research. To fill any vacancies in the 65-and-over age group, the social service director was contacted at Carillon retirement community in Lubbock, Texas, and asked to recruit independent, healthy volunteers to participate in this research project. Subjects were asked to commit to a 45-minute appointment by signing up on a schedule. The male-to-female ratio was counter-balanced. See Table 1 for demographics of the sample.

Design

This cross-sectional experimental design was conducted in a laboratory environment, with data being collected unobtrusively by a nonparticipant researcher and analyzed quantitatively.

Based on the study of nonverbal disclosure of deception between the young and old (Parham et al., 1981), the study used young adult and old age as boundaries, thus producing three possible cohort pairing combinations for same-cohort and non-cohort investigation (i.e., Young-Old, Old-Old, Young-Young). For analysis purposes, the Young-Old non-cohort pair was further broken down into Young-Old and Old-Young, with the first individual in the pair used as the unit of analysis. Table 2 illustrates the participants according to cohort pairings.

Table 1

Demographics of the Sample (N = 190)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Sex		
Males	87	46
Females	103	54
Age		
18-25	118	62
65-86	69	36
Other (28, 57, 60)	3	2
Marital Status		
Single	114	60
Married	50	26
Divorced/Widowed	26	14
Race		
Caucasian	166	88
Afro-American	11	6
Other	12	6
Native Language		
English	188	99
Other	2	1
Educational Level		
High School graduate	24	13
1-4 yrs. college	125	66
College graduate	21	11
Graduate degree	9	4
Other (<12, Vocational)	11	6
Correctional devices		
Glasses/Contacts	106	56
Hearing Aid	10	5

Table 2
Frequencies of Participants

<u>Cohort Pairing</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Young-Old	28	14.74
Old-Young	28	14.74
Old-Old	42	22.10
Young-Young	92	48.42
Total	190	100.00

Variable Specification and Measurement

The variables were examined with Cohort Pairing and Perceived Decoding Ability as the independent variables and Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction as the dependent variables.

Cohort pairing was operationalized according to year of birth: "Young" were those 18-25 years of age, and "old" were those age 65 and over.

Perceived Decoding Ability was measured from the self perspective, according to the Perceived Decoding Ability scale, short form number two (Zuckerman & Larrance, 1979). The scale was constructed for use in examining the relationship between perceived and actual nonverbal skills, to replace performance measures of nonverbal ability with a paper-and-pencil measure for ease of administration, and to examine the correlations between behavior and attitude regarding people's ideas about their nonverbal skills. The PDA was specifically tested for correlation to the PONS test, a measure of actual decoding ability (Rosenthal, Hall, Archer, DiMatteo, Rogers,

1979) which requires the subjects to react to filmed auditory and visual segments of posed expressions of a single sender. The correlation between the PDA and Brief Exposure PONS was low and positive (0.28, $p < .001$), but it was noted that the six-month lapse between the PONS and PDA measurements may have reduced the size of the correlations. The PDA has been shown to have an internal consistency of .73, and a retest reliability of .82 (Zuckerman & Larrance, 1979). Zuckerman and Larrance suggest that the utility of the PDA is not just in its ability to predict actual decoding: "It appears . . . that the course of future research is not simply to test the relationship between measures of actual and of perceived nonverbal skills, but to examine their utility in predicting other variables of social consequence" (p. 191). As described in the literature review, Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction were those "other variables of social consequence" in this study.

Communication Competence was operationalized through the Conversational Skills Rating Scale (CSRS), an episode-specific measure designed to rate self, conversational partner, or third party (Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987). Because a person's decoding ability may influence his/her perception of the conversational partner's competence, and since research has indicated a relationship between other-competence/satisfaction (Spitzberg, 1988; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984), the CSRS scale was used to measure the single variable of Communication Competence from the perspective of other-competence. The reliability of the CSRS in the Spitzberg and Hurt (1987) study was .89.

Communication Satisfaction was measured using the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (COMSAT) developed by Hecht (1978). "This measure is the only satisfaction measure constructed for use in interpersonal settings and exhibits much higher reliability than a measure of organizational communication

satisfaction" (p. 262). Reliability has been measured from .72 to .93 in four studies (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984; Hecht & Marston, 1987; Hecht, Sereno, & Spitzberg, 1984; Zakahi, 1985). According to Hecht (1978), the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory is appropriate to the measurement of interpersonal communication with actual conversations with a friend, acquaintance, or stranger.

All forms and scales were printed in large (18-point) type on yellow paper for ease in reading. See Appendix for examination of all forms and questionnaires.

Procedure

Permission was granted from the Human Subjects Committee to conduct this research, which took place in the Mass Communications building on the Texas Tech University campus. Participants were paired with zero-history partners, and were processed in same-cohort and non-cohort pairs on a 45-minute schedule.

Individual pairs were given an orientation by the researcher prior to their interaction in order to familiarize them with the project. They were told the purpose was to collect data across age groups regarding communication between younger and older subjects and that their conversation would be videotaped. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality through the use of subject numbers. They were given the option of discontinuing the project at any time during the project without penalty. Participants were then asked to read and sign a Consent Form.

Participants then filled out an Information Form and the Perceived Decoding Ability scale. The researcher then gave participants instructions for the conversation to be videotaped. "A Case Study of American Values" (Norton & Miller, 1975; Miller, 1977) was used as the basis of the conversation (see Appendix). According to Miller

(1977), the scenario maximizes opportunity for spontaneity, has been successful in producing lively discussions, and it does not focus on any particular topic or issue.

Two ceiling-mounted video cameras in opposite corners of the experiment room videotaped both participants, with each camera focusing on one participant and recording both participants simultaneously on one videotape in a split-screen image. The purpose of the video tapes was to provide a permanent record of the interaction for future research.

When the 10-minute conversation time elapsed, each participant was escorted to a private room and asked to complete the CSRS and COMSAT scales. There was no time constraint on answering these questionnaires. When finished, the participants were thanked for their participation and dismissed.

The total time spent with each cohort pair was approximately 45 minutes, with 20 minutes allowed for orientation and filling out forms and questionnaires, 10 minutes to videotape the interaction, and 15 minutes to fill out final questionnaires.

The only compensation for participation was extra credit to those students either participating in the research or recruiting subjects.

Analysis

The research question was addressed by use of a 4 x 2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with 4 cohort pairings and 2 levels of Perceived Decoding Ability (high vs. low) as the independent variables and Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction as the dependent variables. Using the first person in the cohort pairing as the unit of analysis, cohort pairings were Young-Old (YO), Old-Young (OY), Old-Old (OO), and Young-Young (YY). The 2 levels of perceived decoding ability (PDA) were derived by splitting the distribution of scores on the PDA

measure at the median (mdn = 85) with scores above the median classified as high PDA and those below the median designated as low PDA.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Reliability

Reliability estimates were computed for all interval-level measures. Cronbach alpha coefficients for Communication Competence were .94, for Communication Satisfaction, .93, and for Perceived Decoding Ability, .75. These reliability estimates correspond with the reliability estimates referenced previously. The means, standard deviations, and ranges are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Range for
Perceived Decoding Ability, Communication Competence,
and Communication Satisfaction

<u>Variable</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>sd</u>	<u>range</u>
Perceived Decoding Ability	85.40	10.30	60
Communication Competence	97.58	15.81	80
Communication Satisfaction	90.46	16.93	87

Research Findings

This study sought to determine if there were differences in Communication Competence and Communication Satisfaction as a function of the main and joint effects of Cohort-centrism and Perceived Decoding Ability. Results of the MANOVA were only marginally significant (Wilks Lambda = .940, $F(6, 358) = 1.86$, $p = .087$).

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it was decided to lessen the restrictions and utilize the .10 alpha level in order to examine the suggested trend toward differences in the univariate case. Significant Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results were then probed by looking at mean differences among Cohort Pairings and levels of Perceived Decoding Ability¹.

Communication Competence

For Communication Competence, the univariate model was significant ($F [7, 187] = 3.22, p < .01, R^2 = .11$). Two main effects were significant. Differences among some cohort groups were found (Cohort Pairing $F [3, 187] = 4.84, p < .01$), and were manifested in the following ways: (1) Old persons paired with younger found their counterparts more competent ($M = 105.29$) than did young persons paired with old ($M = 96.07, p < .05$); (2) old persons paired with young partners found their counterparts more competent ($M = 105.29$) than young persons paired with young ($M = 93.93, p = .001$); and (3) old persons found each other more competent ($M = 101.11$) than did young persons paired with each other ($M = 93.93, p = .01$).

The second main effect demonstrated differences in Perceived Decoding Ability on Communication Competence (PDA $F [1, 187] = 4.28, p < .05$). High decoders ($M = 102.09$) rated others as being more competent than did low decoders ($M = 96.10, p < .02$).

The interaction effect was nonsignificant ($F [3, 187] = 1.25, p = .29$). For large effects power for the interaction term, with $\alpha = .95$ and 187 degrees of freedom, is greater than .99.

Communication Satisfaction

For Communication Satisfaction, the univariate model was significant ($F [7, 187] = 3.46, p < .01, R^2 = .12$). Both main effects were significant. Differences among some cohort groups were found (Cohort Pairing $F [3, 187] = 3.13, p < .03$), with differences manifested in the following ways: (1) Old persons paired with young were more satisfied with the interaction ($M = 98.36$) than were young persons paired with old ($M = 88.69, p < .05$); and (2) old persons paired with young were more satisfied with the interaction ($M = 98.36$) than were young persons paired with each other ($M = 88.07, p < .01$).

The second main effect demonstrated differences in Perceived Decoding Ability on Communication Satisfaction ($F [1, 187] = 5.27, p < .03$). High decoders ($M = 94.90$) were more satisfied with the interaction than were low decoders ($M = 88.54, p < .02$).

The PDA-Cohort interaction effect was also significant ($F [3, 187] = 3.19, p < .03$). Table 4 displays means and *t*-test results for this model.

Examining individual cases, only one same-cohort pairing comparison (OO/YY) revealed significant results: A **low** decoding **old** person interacting with another old person is more satisfied with the conversation than a **low** decoding **young** person interacting with another young person ($L\ OO > L\ YY$). Non-cohort pairings (YO or OY) compared to each other showed that the high decoder in the pairing was always more satisfied with the conversation than the low decoder: $H\ YO > L\ YO$; $H\ OY > L\ OY$; and $H\ OY > L\ YO$. Non-cohort pairings (YO or OY) compared with same-cohort pairings (YY or OO) showed that when both decoders were high, the older (high) person in the non-cohort group was more satisfied with the conversation than those in same-cohort pairings: $H\ OY > H\ OO$; $H\ OY > H\ YY$. However, when both decoders

were low, the older person in the same-cohort pair was more satisfied than the younger person in the non-cohort pair: L OO > L YO. In the High-Low comparison, the high decoders were more satisfied than the low decoders: H YO > L YY, and H OY > L YY. Figure 1 displays the interaction effect for Cohort Pairing and Perceived Decoding Ability on Communication Satisfaction.

Table 4

Communication Satisfaction Means
as a Function of Perceived Decoding Ability and Cohort Pairing

Perceived Decoding Ability	Cohort Pairing			
	YO	OY	OO	YY
Low	82.25abc	91.50e	95.14ci	85.28dfgi
High	95.13ad	105.21befgh	88.42f	90.86h

Note : Means with the same subscript are significantly different, p < .05

Supplementary Analysis

Because the scale means (SM) for Perceived Decoding Ability (SM = 56), Communication Competence (SM = 62.5), and Communication Satisfaction (SM = 56) were considerably lower than the means obtained in this study, it was decided to examine each of the variables in light of age group to determine if there was a significant difference between the young and old. T-tests showed a significant

Figure 1

Interaction Effect for Cohort Pairing and Perceived Decoding Ability
on Communication Satisfaction

difference in the young and old relative to Communication Competence ($F = .02$, d.f. = 114, $p = .001$), with the old registering a higher mean ($M = 102.82$) than the young ($M = 94.61$). There was marginal significance between young and old relative to Communication Satisfaction ($F = .008$, d.f. = 115.5, $p = .06$), with the old registering somewhat greater satisfaction ($M = 93.7$) than the young ($M = 88.6$). There was no significance between the age groups with regards to Perceived Decoding Ability ($F = .005$, d.f. = 111.9, $p = .15$).

With both groups ranking higher than the scale means, the statistical difference might suggest a Hawthorne effect whereby the subjects, aware that they were being studied, may have behaved differently than otherwise. Furthermore, since the older participants registered the higher means, a "halo effect" may have been operating among that population. The older subjects may have been affected by the special attention and opportunity for activity.

Notes

¹These contrasts were obtained by invoking the LSMEANS Statement in the GLM Procedure of SAS (SAS Institute, 1990). Least-squares means (LSMs) are estimates of the marginal means for each classification variable that would be expected for a balanced design. Each estimate is computed as a linear function of the parameters involving the classification variable, such that the sum of the values within any classification effect is 1. The result is an "adjusted" mean. Additionally, the SAS statement provides probability values, based on t-tests, for the null hypothesis that $LSM(i) = LSM(j)$. All paired-comparisons reported hereafter were derived from this procedure.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The general purpose of this study was to examine whether people prefer to converse with those within their own cohort group (same-cohort) or outside their cohort group (non-cohort), and whether their perceived decoding ability has any bearing on how they perceive their partner's competence and ultimately their own satisfaction with the conversation. Review of cohort-centrism in the gerontological literature would suggest that because of generational similarities, people of similar ages would prefer to converse with each other. However, this study was unable to confirm cohort centrism from a communication perspective. The analysis of the overall model did not overwhelmingly indicate that Communication Satisfaction and Communication Competence are a function of the joint effects of Cohort-centrism and Perceived Decoding Ability, but a trend was suggested toward differences in the univariate case. This study showed that older persons found their conversational partners, whether young or old, to be more competent than did younger persons. Further, on the whole, older persons were more satisfied conversing with young persons, while younger persons were less satisfied, regardless of the age of the conversational partner.

Communication Competence

With regards to the main effect of Cohort Pairing on Communication Competence, significant differences were discovered in the cohort pairings of OY/YO, OY/YY, and OO/YY. Specifically, old persons paired with young perceived the young person as more competent than did young persons who were paired with old (OY > YO) or young persons paired with each other (OY > YY). Old persons paired with

each other perceived their older partner as being more competent than did those young persons paired with young (OO > YY). The main effect of Perceived Decoding Ability on Communication Competence showed that those who perceived themselves as high decoders rated their partners as being more competent than did those who perceived themselves as low decoders.

Perhaps the older participants perceived their partners as being more competent than did the younger participants because the older persons' years of experience have made them more tolerant as communicators. If one were to apply Spitzberg's (1988) criteria of not violating interpersonal or contextual rules of appropriate conduct for judging another's competence, perhaps the older are more forgiving of communication transgressions committed by their partners.

With regards to perceived high decoders rating their partners as more competent than did perceived low decoders, high decoders are possibly more involved in the conversation, and their own conversational ability may enhance or compensate for their partner's abilities. Thus, the high decoder may actually raise the perceived competence level of the conversational partner.

Communication Satisfaction

The main effects of Cohort Pairing on Communication Satisfaction showed that old persons paired with young were more satisfied than young persons who were paired with old (OY > YO) or young persons paired with one another (OY > YY). The main effect of Perceived Decoding Ability and Communication Satisfaction showed that those who perceived themselves as high decoders were more satisfied than those who perceived themselves as low decoders.

When the old and young interact with each other, older persons may be more satisfied with the conversation than younger persons due to societal conditioning. Children are taught to respect their elders, and often with that "respect" comes deference and congeniality toward the elders. Consequently, the young may accommodate the old by letting him/her control the conversation, and the older person may accept control of the conversation. This imbalance in turn-taking might be the reason for the older being more satisfied and the younger less satisfied.

Young persons interacting with each other may be the least satisfied because society does not mandate deference or congeniality to peers. Young persons interacting with each other may not be as congenial to each other as they would be to an elder.

Those who perceive themselves as high decoders may be more satisfied with the conversation than are perceived low decoders for similar reasons high decoders rated their partners as more competent. Being more involved in the conversation than low decoders, the high decoders may compensate for the low decoder's abilities. High decoders may pick up on nonverbal cues more quickly and adjust the conversation accordingly, thus rendering the conversation more satisfying for themselves.

When examining the interaction effects of Cohort Pairing and Perceived Decoding Ability on Communication Satisfaction, five of the nine significant cases revealed high decoders in the cohort pair as being more satisfied than low decoders, with the high decoding old being more satisfied than the high decoding young by a ratio of 3:2 (H OY > L YO, L OY, and L YY; H YO > L YO and L YY). Two of the nine significant cases revealed that low old decoders were more satisfied than low young decoders (L OO > L YO and L YY). The two final significant cases showed that the old high decoders were more satisfied talking with non-cohorts than those high decoders talking with their same-cohorts (H OY > H OO and H YY).

The key to the reason why high old decoders were more satisfied than high young decoders, and low old decoders were more satisfied than low young decoders, seems to lie not in the decoding ability, but rather in the age difference. As in the main effect of Cohort Pairing on Communication Satisfaction, it is possible that the young defer to the old, thus yielding greater satisfaction on the part of the old. Further, high older decoders may be more satisfied talking with non-cohorts than with cohorts for two reasons: First, because society does not mandate deference or congeniality to peers, older persons may enjoy the deference they receive from their younger partners that they may not receive from their own peers. Second, older persons may find younger persons more interesting and more stimulating; conversing with someone their own age may not offer the same challenge or stimulation as conversing with someone younger.

Examining satisfaction specifically from the cohort-centrism perspective, of the nine significant cases, one case showed that low decoding same-cohorts are more satisfied than low decoding non-cohorts ($L\ OO > L\ YO$), and one case showed that old low decoding cohorts are more satisfied than young low decoding cohorts ($L\ OO > L\ YY$). In five cases same-cohort pairs registered the least satisfaction, with four of those five cases being in the YY category (three low decoders, one high decoder) and one case being in the OO category (high decoder).

There were no significant interactions which showed low decoding old cohorts as being less satisfied with the conversation. This lends some credence to Parham et al.'s study (1981) that the ability to read emotional cues from the face may be enhanced when people interact with cohorts. Although perceived decoding ability was low, their satisfaction level was still high, and in fact, of the nine significant interactions, the $L\ OO$ interaction had the second-highest overall mean. If there were visual or auditory

deficits, they were not acknowledged. However, when examined in light of its significant differences, it is found that the greater satisfaction of the L OO is measured against both L YO and L YY. It is very likely that the young's deference to the old has an effect in this interaction, as well as the general dissatisfaction that the YY exhibited in the previous discussion. This line of reasoning, in addition to the five cases of less satisfied same-cohorts, provides little support to Cohort-centrism Theory from a communication perspective.

Conclusion

The limitations of this study are several. The most obvious is that a single, 10-minute, set-up conversation with a stranger may not be indicative of daily conversation preferences. As Wiemann (1977) notes, the criteria of what constitutes competence may change over time, and what was perceived as competent or satisfying in an initial interaction may not be perceived in the same way later. Nonetheless, an actual conversation is more indicative of a real situation than is a hypothetical scenario on paper. Also, the findings of the conversations of a mostly-Caucasian, educated sample cannot be over-generalized.

With the convenience of the university students, the numbers were weighted heavily on the YY cohort pairing; possibly the numbers were in their favor for registering their dissatisfaction. At any rate, the high percentage of YY pairings certainly did not support cohort-centrism.

Fatigue may have influenced some of the results in the "older" population, as the time frame may have become lengthy for some of the participants. In anticipation of this, the competence and satisfaction questionnaires (filled out after the 10-minute interaction) were randomized.

Another limitation may have been the videotaping. Although the cameras were ceiling-mounted and unobtrusive, some participants may have been self-conscious about being filmed and nonverbally registered discomfort. This might have affected how the conversational partner rated their competence. Also, their discomfort may have decreased their own satisfaction with the conversation. The resulting scores would consequently be confounded.

Finally, participants' motivation likely influenced the outcome. Younger persons may have been more dissatisfied because they were participating in the research project for extra credit and actually felt they had better things to be doing with their time. Consequently, they may have been more cynical in their answers. Older persons, on the other hand, had no tangible reward for participation, and could have been participating "as a favor." Consequently, they may have been more altruistic in their answers. Or perhaps a "halo effect" was operating. Participation in the research project may have offered the older subjects specialized attention and an opportunity for activity, both of which may have been appreciated. Older participants exhibited much more patience when waiting for their designated appointments. Also, comments were often heard afterwards from these older participants about how delighted they were to have been asked to participate in the project and how much they enjoyed the conversations.

Heuristically, this study could be expanded by examining the effects of gender as an added independent variable. Were there instances of females deferring to males, and if so, were there differences in the age groups? For instance, did the younger females defer to older males more often than they did to younger males? Did males or females register greater satisfaction with the interaction? Was there a difference in the perceived decoding ability between males and females? Did males or females rate their

conversational partner as more competent? Also, since the interactions were videotaped, it could prove profitable to examine the interactions in light of accommodation theory. Do the younger indeed defer to the older? Does turn-taking differ between same-cohort and non-cohort pairs or between high decoders and low decoders?

Future Directions

There is still much to be learned in the area of gerontological communication, and interest in the field is growing. While gerontological theories help illuminate the aging process, validating communication theories within this population would offer practical utility which could enrich the knowledge of those who work with the elderly population. Ultimately, it is the elderly population itself that benefits from the research, as their quality of life is enhanced.

Future study in gerontological communication could utilize accommodation theory, as this study raised questions as to differences across age groups relative to one group accommodating the other. Are there differences in age-group accommodation as well as gender accommodation? Next, differences in communicator style could prove beneficial. If differences in style were identified which could be generalized to each population (older/younger), it could enhance communication between generations, particularly between younger caregivers and their older charges. Finally, whereas this study examined the differences between zero-history pairs, future research might examine communication differences of known-history pairs. Does relational history have any bearing on communicator preferences? Is relational history more important than the age of the communication partner?

With the aging of our population, our knowledge base of gerontological communication needs to be expanded to enhance the quality of life of our existing elderly as well as to meet the needs of the upcoming elderly Baby Boomers. As a person ages, death of family and friends as well as restricted mobility shrinks a person's support network, and interaction with non-cohorts becomes necessary.

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APPENDIX: FORMS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Orientation and Instructions to Subjects

We are conducting a research project at Texas Tech which seeks to understand communication behaviors of people in various age groups. Research shows that communication behaviors may change as we interact with those either in our own age group or other age groups. It is important to everyone to have a better understanding of communication styles so we know how to improve our communication strategies. Your participation in this project will provide us with information that will help others know how to interact with those across age spans.

This is how we will proceed. First, we will ask you to sign a permission form. Second, we will ask you to fill out a form giving some general information about yourself such as age, education, etc. Third, I will give you a fictitious scenario for the two of you to resolve. During your discussion, I will videotape you with a camera (tell of locations). I would like for you to feel as natural and comfortable as possible. Just be yourself. At the conclusion of the interaction, you will be shown to a small room and asked to fill out a questionnaire about how you felt about the interaction. The entire process should take no longer than 45 minutes.

All of the information you provide, including the videotape, will be held in the strictest confidence and the only people who will ever see this information will be members of the research team. There are no anticipated physical, mental, or emotional risks associated with this project. In fact, I think you may even enjoy the experience. We are selecting for study those people who are at least 18 years of age and who have normal speaking and hearing abilities. All of the study will be conducted in this room and a smaller room around the corner. Does this sound alright? Do you have any

questions? If you prefer not to participate in the project, you may leave at any time.

We understand and wish you the best.

We appreciate your participation in this very important research project. You are going to be helping a lot of people better understand communication among various age groups.

The program director will be happy to respond to any questions, comments, or inquiries related to the project. The Program Director is Joyce Allman, Department of Communication Studies, Texas Tech University (742-3911). In addition, you may also contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects by writing them in care of the Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or by calling 742-3884.

Consent Form

I hereby give my consent for my participation in the project entitled, "Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Among Various Age Groups Research Project: Study 2." I understand that the person responsible for this project is Joyce Allman of the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University, 742-3911. The person conducting the research has explained that this study is a part of a project that has the following objectives: (a) understand communication similarities and differences among various age groups, and (b) determine how communication skills might change as we age. She or her authorized representative has (1) explained that I will be participating in a dyadic communication exchange and that I will be videotaped during this exchange, (2) assured me that there are no anticipated physical, mental, or emotional risks associated with the project, (3) explained how this research will benefit others in understanding communication better, and (4) offered to excuse me from this project if I choose not to participate.

It has further been explained to me that the total duration of my participation will be forty-five (45) minutes; that only members of this research project will have access to the records and/or data collected for this study; and that data associated with this study will remain strictly confidential.

Joyce Allman has agreed to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the procedures and has informed that I may also contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects by writing them in care of the Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or by calling 742-3884.

If this research project causes any physical injuries to participants in this project, treatment is not necessarily available at Texas Tech University or the Student Health Center, nor is there necessarily any insurance carried by the University or its personnel applicable to cover any such injury. Financial compensation for any such injury must be provided through the participant's own insurance program. Further information about these matters may be obtained from Dr. Robert M. Sweazy, Vice Provost for Research, 742-3884, Room 203 Holden Hall, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409-1035.

I understand that I may not derive therapeutic treatment from participation in this study. I understand that I may discontinue this study at any time I choose without penalty.

Signature of Subject _____ Date: _____

Signature of Project Director or her Authorized Representative:

_____ Date: _____

Signature of Witness to Oral Presentation:

_____ Date: _____

Information Form

Gender Male Female

Age _____

Marital Status

☐ Married
 ☐ Single
☐ Divorced
 ☐ Widowed

Race

☐ Afro-American ☐ Caucasian ☐ Other
☐ Asian ☐ Hispanic

Native Language

___ English ___ Spanish ___ Other

Education Level

☐ Less than grade 12 ☐ College graduate
☐ High school graduate ☐ Masters
☐ Vocational training ☐ Ph.D.
☐ 1-4 years college
 (not a graduate)

Employment

☐ Full-time
 ☐ Student
☐ Part-time
 ☐ Retired
☐ Unemployed
 ☐ Disabled

Do you wear

_____ glasses _____ hearing aid

Health

___excellent ___good ___average ___fair ___poor

Perceived Decoding Ability Scale

On the next few pages you will be asked to react to a number of statements. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes you. The 4 or middle position on the scale represents "undecided" or "neutral," then moving out from the center, "slight" agreement agreement or disagreement, then "moderate," then "strong" agreement or disagreement.

For example, if you strongly agree with the following statement you would circle 1.

For the most part, I enjoy talking with others.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

1. I can usually tell when someone feels hostile from the person's tone of voice.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

2. I can usually tell when someone is angry from his or her facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

3. I can usually tell when someone feels guilty from the person's tone of voice.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

4. I can usually tell when someone is afraid from the person's facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

5. When someone feels confident, I usually cannot tell from his or her tone of voice.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

6. I can usually tell when a person approves of something from his or her facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

7. When someone tries to please me, I can usually tell from his or her tone of voice.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

8. When someone feels grateful, I can usually tell from his or her facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

9. I usually try very hard to understand how others feel.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

10. I am often slow to realize if people don't really want me around.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

11. I usually decide whether I like someone from their nonverbal cues, not from what they say to me.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

12. I think I have a lot of insight into people.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

13. I can often tell what a person is going to say before he or she says it.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

14. When someone is lying, I can usually tell from his or her facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

15. I usually cannot tell when a person is nervous from the person's facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

16. I can usually tell when someone is surprised from his or her facial expression.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

Conversation Scenario: A Case Study of American Values

The following is an imaginary situation that we are asking you to participate in so that we may study communication behaviors across various age groups.

For the next 5 minutes you are to think of 5 objects which best symbolize current American values. These objects are to be placed in a time capsule which will not be opened for 500 years. Please write down the objects you choose on the paper provided for you.

At the end of the 5 minutes you will be asked to discuss your list of items with another person, and within a 10-minute time frame the two of you are to select a total of 5 items (from your combined lists of 10 items) to be placed in the time capsule.

Conversational Skills Rating Scale

Please rate your partner according to how skillfully he or she used, or didn't use, the following communicative behaviors in the conversation, where

1 = INADEQUATE (use was awkward, disruptive, or resulted in a negative impression of communicative skills)

2 = SOMEWHAT INADEQUATE

3 = ADEQUATE (use was sufficient but neither very noticeable nor excellent. Produced neither positive or negative impression.)

4 = GOOD

5 = EXCELLENT (use was smooth, controlled, and resulted in positive impression of communicative skills.)

PLEASE BE HONEST. YOUR PARTNER WILL NEVER KNOW HOW YOU RATED HIM/HER.

Circle the single best response for each behavior.

1. Use of eye contact

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

2. Initiation of new topics

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

3. Maintenance of topics and follow-up comments

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

4. Use of time speaking relative to partner

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

5. Interruption of partner

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

6. Speaking rate (neither too slow nor too fast)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
7. Speaking fluency (avoided pauses, silences, "uh," etc.)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
8. Vocal confidence (neither tense nor nervous sounding)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
9. Shaking or nervous twitches (weren't noticeable)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
10. Posture (Neither too closed/formal, nor too open/informal)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
11. Fidgeting (e.g., pencil, rings, hair, fingers, etc.)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
12. Asking questions
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
13. Nodding of head in response to partner's statements
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
14. Lean toward partner (neither too far forward nor too far back)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent
15. Encouragements or agreements (encouraged partner to talk)
Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

16. Speaking about partner (involved partner as topic of conversation)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

17. Speaking about self (didn't talk too much about self/own interests)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

18. Use of humor and/or stories

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

19. Articulation (language clearly pronounced and understood)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

20. Vocal variety (avoided monotone voice)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

21. Volume (neither too soft nor too loud)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

22. Expression of personal opinions (not too passive or aggressive)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

23. Facial expressiveness (neither blank nor exaggerated)

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

24. Use of gestures to emphasize what was being said

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

25. Smiling and/or laughing

Inadequate: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : Excellent

For the next 5 items, rate the person's overall conversational performance:

(26) Unskillful conversationalist: 1 2 3 4 5: Skillful Conversationalist

(27) Inexpressive: 1 2 3 4 5: Expressive

(28) Inattentive & Unresponsive: 1 2 3 4 5: Attentive & Responsive

(29) Anxious & Nervous: 1 2 3 4 5: Relaxed & Confident

(30) Inappropriate & Ineffective: 1 2 3 4 5: Appropriate & Effective

Communication Satisfaction Scale

On the next few pages please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes you. The 4 or middle position on the scale represents "undecided" or "neutral," then moving out from the center, "slight" agreement or disagreement, then "moderate," then "strong" agreement or disagreement.

For example, if you strongly agree with the following statement you would circle 1.

For the most part, I enjoy talking with others.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

1. The other person let me know that I was communicating effectively.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

2. Nothing was accomplished.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

3. I would like to have another conversation like this one.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

4. The other person genuinely wanted to get to know me.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

5. I was very disssatisfied with the conversation.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

6. I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted the other person to view me.

Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree

7. I was very satisfied with the conversation.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
8. The other person expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
9. I did NOT enjoy the conversation.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
10. The other person did NOT provide support for what he/she was saying.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
11. I felt I could talk about anything with the other person.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
12. We each got to say what we wanted.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
13. I felt that we could laugh easily together.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
14. The conversation flowed smoothly.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
15. The other person frequently said things which added little to the conversation.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree
16. We talked about something I was NOT interested in.
Agree: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : Disagree