Intergenerational and Peer Communication in the Workplace: An Analysis of
Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

By

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Intergenerational and Peer Communication in the Workplace: An Analysis of
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Abstract

This research used an on-line survey to examine intergenerational communication in the workplace. Respondents were 165 young, middle-aged, and older working adults randomly assigned to report on workplace communication with either peer or intergenerational co-workers. All completed a questionnaire assessing satisfaction with communication with coworkers in the target group, and 134 respondents also provided descriptions of a satisfactory and a dissatisfactory work conversation with a member of the target group, following Williams and Giles (1996). Young and older respondents reported greater satisfaction with peer than intergenerational coworker communication on the questionnaire as predicted, but middle-aged respondents indicated equivalent satisfaction with peer and older coworker communication. Emergent theme analysis of the conversational descriptions revealed that, consistent with communication accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991), satisfactory conversations were characterized by accommodative communication behaviors, positive feelings, and goal accomplishment, whereas dissatisfactory conversations were associated with underaccommodative communication behaviors, negative feelings, and goal non-accomplishment. Although the forms of accommodation and underaccommodation varied in emphasis across age groups and descriptions of peer and intergenerational conversations, more similarities than differences were noted. The ways in which the work context shapes conceptions of age were also identified. Together, these results provide evidence that the work context may foster a shared identity that serves to

reduce the salience of age in workplace interactions, consistent with the common

ingroup identity model (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), but that shared identity at the

interpersonal level does not necessarily lead to general communication satisfaction

with intergenerational coworkers.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Roberta and Jene Henderson, who did not live to see me complete this degree. They would have been very proud to know they instilled in me a life-long desire to learn.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the Administration on Aging (2008), the number of Americans

aged 65 and older has grown more than twelve times since the start of the 20th

century, increasing from 3.1 million and 4.1 percent of the population in 1900 to 37.9

million and 12.6 percent of the population in 2007. These figures will rise markedly

between the years 2010 and 2030 as the "baby boom" generation reaches age 65. As

the population ages, the face of employment is changing. Between 1977 and 2007, the

number of workers aged 65 and older increased 101 percent and the number of

employees aged 75 and older increased by 172 percent. During the same period,

overall employment grew by only 59 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

The increase of older workers is not entirely due to the aging of the

population, however. While the percentage of older workers increased more than 100

percent from 1977 to 2007, the number of people aged 65 and older increased less

than 60%. Older people are working longer and more are entering or re-entering the

workforce than in the past (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Older employees are

projected to continue working beyond traditional retirement ages for a variety of

reasons. Many working adults have not saved enough to fund their retirement, and the

economic downturn of the last year has substantially decreased the value of what little

savings they have in place (Giandrea, Cahill, & Quinn, 2009; McCune, 1998; Schoen,

2009). The majority of Americans (53%) report having total savings (retirement funds

and investments) of less than $25,000, not including home values, and 20 percent say

they have amassed less than $1000 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2009).

In addition to financial need, those over age 65 may choose to continue working because they find work personally and socially rewarding. Older individuals benefit from the intellectual stimulation and social support they receive in the workplace (Aquino, Altmaier, Russell, & Cutrona, 1996). People are not only living longer than in the past, but they are also healthier than previous generations. Many in this cohort enjoy their work, want to stay busy, and feel productive (Linn, 2009, July 29).

Although older workers are becoming more prevalent in the workplace, they may face obstacles such as age discrimination and bias based or negative age stereotypes. Older workers and applicants are less likely to be considered for employment opportunities, training, or advancement than their younger counterparts with similar skills and experience (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995; Finkelstein & Burke, 1998). Age discrimination in the workplace continues to be an on-going, pervasive problem (McCann, 2003). Age stereotypes often put forth a negative image of older employees, even when those stereotypes have been refuted (Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

Age discrimination is a burden not only to older workers, but also to employers as it affects their ability to retain experienced employees. According to DeLong (2004), employers are not prepared for the mass exodus that would occur if all baby boomers decided to retire at age 62, or even at age 65. Employers recognize that relevant company history is not stored in data bases or documentation manuals, but rather in the experiences of their long-term employees. The best way to transfer

knowledge to the next generation of employees is through investment in knowledge retention programs including positive interactions and shared experiences. In other words, companies are looking for ways to better foster intergenerational communication (DeLong), the focus of this research.

Purpose of this Research

While intergenerational communication has been studied in depth in social and family contexts, very little research has examined intergenerational communication in the workplace (McCann & Giles, 2002). This study addresses the need to investigate intergenerational communication in the work context, where today the aging of the workforce has created situations where 20 year old employees work side by side with 60, 70 or even 80 year old employees. This study compares the satisfaction of young, middle-aged, and older workers with workplace conversations involving coworkers of similar age (peers) to their satisfaction with intergenerational conversations involving significantly younger or older coworkers. In addition, this research identifies the characteristics that working adults in the three age groups associate with satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations with peer and intergenerational conversational partners.

Further background illustrating the importance of this research is provided in the sections that follow, including information on the changing workforce demographics, the role of age bias and age stereotypes at work, and prior intergenerational communication research.

Changing Workforce Demographics: Employees Are Working Beyond

Traditional Retirement Years

As noted earlier, there are two primary reasons why people continue to work into their sixties, seventies, and even eighties: (a) financial need, and (b) the social stimulation which can contribute to psychological and physical health.

Financial Need

Financial concerns keep many older workers in the workforce today. For instance, legislative changes have forced some people into a financial position where they need to work longer. The Social Security retirement age is increasing from age 65 to age 67 (Social Security Administration, 2009). People who rely on Social Security income for all or a substantial portion of their retirement needs must continue to work to receive their maximum benefits.

Changes in retirement plan funding methods have created further need for employees to continue working longer than originally planned. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), large corporations have shifted from providing defined benefit retirement plans that guarantee employees a certain level of income for the duration of their retirement years, to defined contribution funding methods where employees and at times, employers contribute monthly or annually to a retirement fund. Upon retirement, the accumulated funds produce whatever income the total account value allows. In defined contribution plans, the employee bears the risk of funding the plan sufficiently to maintain his or her lifestyle throughout retirement.

Most employees do not adequately fund their retirement plans and recent stock market adjustments have substantially decreased the value of contributions to those plans. As of 2008, half of American workers age 55 or older have saved $50,000 or less, mostly less. Some 30% or more of workers age 55 or older report total savings of less than $10,000 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2009). In sum, more older Americans are working because they simply do not have enough money to retire.

Social Stimulation

Some employees keep working to maintain their social connections, to stay active, and to feel productive. Earlier research identified the value of social connectivity that employees receive from workplace interactions (Aquino et al., 1996). Health benefits have been associated with continued employment. For example, a recent news article by Fernandez (2009) reports the comments of Thom Guthrie, who returned to ministry after retiring from teaching and suffering a heart attack: "It helps in so many ways not to be idle. . . When you work, you're forced to keep moving" (para. 3 and 20). Research supports the belief expressed by Guthrie that working has positive health benefits. A recent study found that if work is socially, cognitively, or physically challenging, it helps older people preserve their overall cognitive function, and that further, the intellectual stimulation from work or other challenging activities has been associated with a lower risk of Alzheimer's development later in life (Hertzog, Kramer, Wilson, & Lindenberger, 2008.) Another study found that older people who continued working full-time and actively

volunteered "were protected against a decline in psychological well-being" (Hao, 2008, p. S69). Joe Reddington, 79, 'unretired' 12 years ago, because he "could not stand the nothingness of not working" (Fernandez, 2009, para. 33). He experienced physical benefits as well: Upon returning to work, he lowered his blood pressure and dropped 30 pounds.

Ageism and Age Stereotypes in Employment

Even with their increasing numbers, older workers face barriers associated with ageism, defined by Glover and Branine (2001) as biased or discriminatory views about employees based upon their actual or perceived age. Older workers are viewed as less interested in learning new skills and as less able to learn quickly than younger employees, even though there is no empirical support for these beliefs (Reio & Sanders-Reio, 1999; Wrenn & Maurer, 2004). Older workers tend to hold more positive attitudes about other older workers than do their younger counterparts, a finding that has been consistent for more than 30 years (Bird & Fisher, 1986; Finkelstein & Burke, 1998; Kirchner & Dunnette, 1954).

A meta-analysis of empirical studies found that attitudes toward older people are indeed more negative than attitudes toward younger people (Kite & Johnson, 1988). The results of this analysis were confirmed in an updated meta-analytic review (Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005), but the new study also revealed that the issue of age bias is complex, and the levels of negativity toward older adults varied by the age of the rater. In most situations, older adults identified fewer differences between young and old while younger adults identified greater differences. The

authors reason that this may be because the older adults, while in a different age cohort now, were once young also.

Age discrimination in the workplace is not just found in the United States. In the UK, a study to identify age discrimination in the workplace found that over 30% of employees over age 45 felt they had suffered discrimination because of their age (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). Collectively, this research suggests that employers value youth and potential are valued over age and experience.

Age discrimination became such a pervasive problem that in 1967 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission passed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act to protect employees and job applicants age 40 and older from discrimination because of age. This act has been updated several times over the years to increase the ages covered by the act, eventually eliminating any age cap in 1986, and to protect retirement benefits (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009). Despite these efforts, age discrimination still exists today. In 2008, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received over 24,000 complaints of age discrimination (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009), but age discrimination remains difficult to prove. Of all claims filed with the EEOC, 63 percent are eliminated due to insufficient evidence. Most cases that are seen as valid are resolved out of court. Approximately 90% of the age discrimination cases filed never make it to court, and if they do, the process takes two years or more to complete (Dennis & Thomas, 2007; McCann, 2003).

Communication and Ageism

Ageism is particularly relevant to communication scholars because, as Williams and Giles (1998, p. 159) wrote that ageism "receives its impact through and is shaped in turn by communication." Ageist language has become common in society and in the workplace. Words or phrases commonly associated with older employees include pre-retired, inflexible, lonely, frail, unproductive, old school, and lacking energy (McCann & Giles, 2002; Nussbaum, Pitts, Huber, Raup Krieger, & Ohs, 2005). Collectively, older workers are seen as emblematic of the graying of the work force. These descriptions enforce negative age stereotypes of older workers, contributing to the development of institutional ageism.

Institutional ageism is an established set of attitudes, rules, or practices that discriminate against older people, that can emerge in written and spoken language, and may be intentional or unintentional (Dennis & Thomas, 2007). Age discriminative statements reflecting company or managerial philosophy, such as, "In a forest you have to cut down the old, big trees so that the little ones underneath can grow," exemplify institutional ageism (McCann & Giles, 2002, p. 181). Such statements and demeaning conversations or jokes about age, create a negative work environment for older workers that limit their opportunities (McCann & Giles, 2002).

Age Stereotypes

Ageism is representative of prejudice about old age that is socially constructed and is potentially more harmful to older people than the actual aging process (Duncan, 2001). Negative perceptions of old age enforce negative age stereotypes

which have been shown to affect intergenerational communication (Hummert, Shaner, Garstka, & Henry, 1998). Research confirms that not all old age stereotypes are negative and people hold multiple stereotypes of the elderly, both positive and negative (Hummert, 1990, Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994). Indeed, Posthuma and Campion (2009) found evidence not only of negative stereotypes of older workers such as the inability to learn new skills and inflexibility, but also of positive stereotypes such as being more dependable and less likely to miss work. However, they noted that more negative characteristics than positive ones were attributed to older workers.

Negative age stereotyping and ageist language is harmful to employees who may suffer from lower self esteem and depression, and to employers who, as a result, may encounter greater employee turnover, productivity losses, and age discrimination complaints (McCann & Giles, 2002). Age stereotypes in the workplace have been shown to result in adverse decisions regarding the hiring or advancement of older employees (Duncan, 2001; Finklestein, & Raju, 1995). Hiring rates continue to be lower for older workers (Adler & Hilber, 2009). This is particularly unfortunate at a time when employers need to attract and retain older workers to maintain growth and profitability (Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

In addition to age stereotypes, younger and older workers face other communication barriers. Employees of different generations often lack shared symbols or metaphors that allow them to connect regarding abstract ideas. For example, an older employee in a research setting was overheard saying, "The 35 year

olds in our group have no clue what I'm talking about when I use a certain symbol

that us older researchers take for granted. Here we are in the same field but we have

different training that keeps us from communicating with each other" (DeLong, 2004,

p. 196). Lack of common terminology causes experienced employees to be frustrated

with the training of their younger co-workers, and the younger employees to view the

older methods as antiquated or irrelevant. Better understanding of communication

barriers will help companies build an environment of mutual respect necessary for

effective intergenerational communication (DeLong, 2004).

Recognizing the Value of Older Workers

Age discrimination creates problems for employers as well as employees,

causing productivity losses, age discrimination complaints, and increased employee

turnover that limits an employer's ability to retain the most skilled workers (McCann

& Giles, 2002). Many employers recognize the value of older workers and are

seeking new ways to hire and retain senior employees. AARP (2009a) offers support

to companies that actively attract and retain older workers. The Home Depot,

Borders, Walgreens and many other large corporations have teamed with AARP to

launch national hiring partnerships (AARP, 2009b). AARP identifies and recognizes

the best companies for older workers. Each year, AARP sponsors a contest in which

companies compete for recognition as one of the "Best Employers for Workers over

50" (AARP, 2009a). One company, recognizing the need to attract older workers,

uses the phrase, "65 is the new 50" (Reynolds, 2004, p. 1).

As the population ages and the baby boomers begin to retire, employers will

be losing employees with the experiential knowledge and history of their companies. In a knowledge-based economy like that in the United States, this "brain drain" will impact companies of all sizes. When employees leave, their knowledge leaves with them. To combat this loss of intellectual capital, companies need to foster opportunities for older and younger employees to communicate and share experiences (DeLong, 2004). From an employer's perspective, intergenerational communication is a necessary component for preventing lost knowledge.

Intergenerational Communication Theory and Research

The growing number of older workers and negative attitudes regarding older or younger workers create the need to better understand intergenerational communication in the workplace. Research on intergenerational communication is grounded in two complementary theories, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and communication accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Social identity theory posits that humans are social creatures who segment society into categories and see themselves within or apart from those social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Age represents one way of segregating society into groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Age categorization is somewhat unique in that for many social categories such as ethnicity or gender, a person stays associated with that category for most of much of his or her life. With age, a person moves from one category (young) to another category (middle age, or old) simply with the passage of time (Hummert et al., 1994). One's identity as a member of a certain age group provides the basis for both social categorization and self-

identification (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2001).

Communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1991) considers the ways in which awareness that communicators are members of different social groups can influence interpersonal communication. In particular, it predicts that when a communicator views the communication partner as a member of an outgroup, he or she will adopt communication strategies that are attuned to the perceived needs or styles of individuals from the outgroup. Often, these strategies or accommodations are based on stereotypes about the outgroup. The communication predicament of aging (CPA) model draws on communication accommodation theory to illustrate the implications of negative age stereotypes for intergenerational communication (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986).

According to the CPA model, when a young person meets with an older person, physical or situational cues such as appearance or surroundings may trigger negative age stereotypes such as incompetence, dependence, or frailties. These cues may result in the younger person modifying his or her speech or nonverbal behaviors to accommodate to the perceived communication needs of the older person. Accommodation may include slowing one's speech, elevating volume, or censoring language or topics. Unfortunately, these modifications may be over-accommodations that are inappropriate for the intended receiver. The older person may then react in a way that is dissatisfying to the younger partner. The CPA model predicts that over-accommodation leads to a negative feedback cycle that may constrain possibilities for meaningful conversation and may create a destructive cycle of communication that is

dissatisfying to both partners (Ryan et al., 1986).

The CPA model originally focused on young to old, harmful interactions. Hummert (1994) extended the CPA model to include reactions to positive stereotypes as well as negative. According to the resulting age stereotypes in interaction model, when the older person is seen as representing a positive age stereotype, the speech modifications outlined in the CPA model are unlikely to be employed (Hummert et al., 1998). These findings may be particularly relevant to research in the workplace where the surroundings themselves may be less likely to trigger old age cues.

Prior Intergenerational Communication Research

The existing body of research regarding intergenerational communication is extensive and continues to grow. Williams and Giles (1996) used recall methodology to identify the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations in non-family conversations. In this study, built on accommodation theory, young respondents were asked to respond to a written survey which included several questions regarding intergenerational communication and requested an overall satisfaction rating of conversations with people who were much older (age 65-75) than the respondents. In addition, respondents were asked to describe, in writing, a recent satisfactory and dissatisfactory intergenerational conversation with a non-family member. Results showed that young participants were more satisfied with conversations with people their own age than with conversations with people significantly older.

Consistent with communication accommodation theory, content analysis of

the conversational descriptions revealed that young participants described dimensions of dissatisfying intergenerational conversations that included older underaccommodation. Underaccommodation was defined as behaviors of the older partner which did not meet the conversational needs of the young participant. Notably, many of the underaccommodative behaviors reflected negative age stereotypes of inflexibility, inattention, interfering, sad, and out of touch, consistent with the CPA model (Hummert et al., 1994; Ryan et al., 1986). For example, young participants described their older conversational partners as inattentive or not showing interest or enthusiasm. An example provided to characterize inattention was, "He seemed a little reserved and he asked short-ended questions which made him seem like he wasn't especially interested" (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 233). Nonlistening or engaging in another activity while the respondent was talking emerged as another form of older persons' underaccommodation. As an example, one respondent wrote that ". . . she was too busy yelling at me about it that she didn't hear me" (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 233).

Unwanted attention was identified as a third type of older underaccommodation. This occurred when the older partner repeatedly offered food or discussed topics of little interest to the respondent (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 233). Older participants were also described as being closed minded or not showing concern for what the young partner said. And finally, older target underaccommodation included being out of touch, for instance, being unaware of current fashions or trends. The young respondents also found older individuals'

tendency to talk about negative emotional experiences (e.g., illness, grief) underaccommodative, as well as statements that indicated negative stereotypes about young people.

Other characteristics of dissatisfactory conversations identified by Williams & Giles included communication restrictions which described physical limitations of the older person such as hearing and speech problems. In their descriptions of the dissatisfactory conversations, some of the young respondents indicated that the underaccommodative behaviors of older partners made them feel defensive and/or obliged to be polite and accommodating.

Young adults also identified characteristics of satisfactory conversations with an older partner that included socioemotional support or the demonstration of interest and attentiveness or being extremely accommodative. These and other satisfactory accommodative behaviors reflected positive age stereotypes (Hummert et al., 1994), supporting the age stereotypes in interaction model (Hummert, 1994). For example, one respondent wrote that "She understood everything I said" (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 236). Young participants found storytelling a positive conversational behavior. Their comments indicated that they enjoyed both hearing stories told by an older person and sharing their own stories with an attentive listener. Another supportive conversational characteristic prevalent in the descriptions was mutuality or shared common ground, for example, "It was obvious he didn't think of himself as more superior than me. I talked to him as my equal and vice versa" (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 238). Astereotyping was identified as a dimension of satisfying

conversations, where young people described their older conversational partner as being different than their expectations of older people in general. Positive emotional expression was another characteristic of satisfactory conversations where the older person was smiling and laughing during the conversation. Such behaviors, in turn, caused the younger person to react similarly. The final dimension of satisfactory conversations identified in this study was that of perceived elder accommodation where the older conversational partner was sensitive to the needs of the young person by showing restraint and avoiding awkward topics of conversation.

While the Williams and Giles (1996) study provided sound methodology and useful insights into the nature of accommodation and underaccommodation in intergenerational conversations, it was limited to the perceptions of young participants describing interactions with older conversational partners. Zhang and Hummert (2001) extended the work of Williams and Giles by using interviews to gather the perspectives of both young and older individuals in China about satisfactory and dissatisfactory intergenerational conversations. Thematic analysis identified positive intergenerational communication behaviors, negative intergenerational communication behaviors, and ideal intergenerational communication.

Similar to the results found by Williams and Giles (1996), young participants identified positive intergenerational communication behaviors that included communication accommodation such as helping, caring, sharing experiences, and providing support. Also similar to the findings in Williams & Giles (1996), young

participants identified negative intergenerational communication behaviors of older

conversational partners, though somewhat different categories of

underaccommodation were identified. Zhang and Hummert cited young participant's

descriptions of older underaccommodation as expressions of superiority that included

being verbally condescending, scolding, and being overly negative, bossy,

demanding, or patronizing. Unique to the Chinese culture, young participants

described a negative communication style, *Laodao,* or endless repeating. *Laodao*

leads young people to avoid conversations with older adults.

In the same research, older participants identified both positive and negative

communication behaviors of young conversational partners. Older adults described

young positive accommodative communication behaviors that were unique to the

Chinese culture including displaying *Ke Qi*, or showing politeness, care, or

consideration for elders and *Xiao*, or filial piety, the respect and support of older

family members. *Xiao* is considered to be an outward expression of love for older

family members.

Older participants identified negative characteristics of conversations with

young adults as the young participants being condescending, withholding personal

information, and unique to this culture, using wrong *Chenghu* or inappropriate forms

of address.

In this study, participants also were asked to describe the characteristics of

ideal intergenerational communication situations. Both young and older participants

endorsed filial piety as a goal. However, young participants expressed the need for

equal status in intergenerational conversations, while older participants emphasized their desire to remain superior and feel respected. The Zhang and Hummert (2001) study extended the Williams & Giles (1996) research by including the perspective of both young and older conversational partners. With the exception of those perceptions that are clearly unique to the Chinese culture, older workers in the United States may have similar perceptions of what behaviors of younger workers are satisfactory and dissatisfactory.

Giles, Ryan, and Anas (2008) extended intergenerational research to include young, middle-aged, and older Canadian participants in evaluations of the communication of both young (persons aged 17-30) and older (persons aged 65 and older) non-family adults. Consistent with prior research, older targets were perceived as more nonaccommodative than young targets. Young participants indicated that they felt obligated to show greater respect to older adults than to peers and reported more avoidance of older adults than peers. Older adults rated their peers and young adults as similar in nonaccommodative and accommodative communication. However, middle-aged participants evaluated older targets as more accommodative than young targets. The authors hypothesize that the middle-aged group may be the recipients of more accommodative communication from older individuals because they are closer in age to older persons than are young people. Interestingly, the authors identified the middle-age participants as possible mediators or "brokers" between younger and older adults. No comparable research has assessed the perspectives of middle-aged adults about their communication with older and younger

co-workers.

   While much intergenerational research has been conducted in the United States, intergenerational communication has also been studied in different cultures. As examples, research has investigated intergenerational communication in China (Zhang & Hummert, 2001), in Taiwan, (Lin, Harwood, & Hummert, 2008), and in Thailand and Japan (McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003). Consistently, young adults report more problems in communication with older adults than with other younger people including older underaccommodation and the feeling that they must be respectful to older people regardless of whether older people are respectful to them.

Intergenerational Communication as Intergroup or Ingroup

   The majority of the research on intergenerational communication has approached the relationship of young and older individuals from an intergroup perspective. That is, it has directed participants to focus on their age differences in assessing communication. There may be relationships between individuals from different age groups in which the focus may be more on a shared group membership rather than their distinct age group memberships. Harwood and colleagues (Anderson, Harwood, & Hummert, 2005; Harwood, 2000; Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005; Soliz & Harwood, 2006) have investigated this issue by examining perceptions of communication within the grandparent-grandchild relationship to see whether a shared family identity may serve to minimize the salience of age differences.

   Harwood (2000) investigated the communication predictors of solidarity in

grandparent-grandchild relationships. This research takes into account the importance of the existing grandparent-grandchild relationship which affects accommodative behaviors (Giles et al., 1991). In this research, grandchildren and their grandparents completed written surveys. Results showed that existing relationships were strong predictors of accommodative behaviors. In another study accounting for existing relationships, Harwood and Soliz (2006) examined the ways in which communication and relationships lead to the perceptions of age salience and shared family identify. In this study, young participants completed written questionnaires that included descriptions of their grandparents and assessments of grandparent social support, self disclosure, communication accommodation, perceived health, age salience, quality of contact, attitudes toward older adults, and attitudes towards ones' aging. Findings indicated that grandchild identification with the identity of the family and parental encouragement were associated with high levels of family identity, consistent with social identity theory (Harwood et al., 1995). Whether the workplace may function to provide a similar shared identity that can minimize the intergroup nature of intergenerational communication is not known.

Anderson, Harwood, and Hummert (2005) found somewhat different results investigating grandparent-grandchild relationships. These authors found that for young people, the grandparent-grandchild relationship did not predict more positive age stereotyping of grandparents than of older acquaintances. In fact, they found just the opposite: young people employed more positive stereotyping with older acquaintances than with their grandparents. However, the authors did find that the

closeness of the relationship did predict more positive age stereotyping. In other words, the quality of the grandparent or acquaintance's interpersonal communication skills affected stereotyping. It is not known how the quality of communication and the age of the older conversational partners may affect conversational satisfaction in the workplace.

Intergenerational Communication Research in the Workplace

To date, intergenerational communication research has primarily focused on social or family situations such as grandparent/grandchild relationships. An exception is a study by McCann and Giles (2006) which investigated intra and intergenerational communication among young bankers in both Thailand and the United States. In this study, bank employees were recruited to complete the Global Perceptions of Intergenerational Communication (GPIC) questionnaire, which was developed by the authors. Participants used a five-point Likert-type response to rate perceptions of both intergenerational and peer communication. As predicted, older bankers in both Thailand and the United States were seen as more nonaccommodative than young bankers, and young bankers reported feeling greater obligation to show respect to older bankers than to their peers. Overall, Thai bankers reported more non accommodation in general than did US bankers.

Because of the rapidly growing numbers of older workers, one would expect significant research to be conducted in the workplace regarding intergenerational communication. Unfortunately that is not yet the case. McCann and Giles (2002, p.164) argue that, "Intergenerational communication plays a central, though as yet

understudied, role in workplace ageism."

This study extends the current body of intergenerational communication research by employing existing methodologies to examine the perceptions of young, middle-aged, and older workers about peer and intergenerational communication in the workplace. The methodology used by Williams and Giles (1996), in which participants rated their satisfaction with peer and intergenerational conversations and described both satisfactory and dissatisfactory intergenerational conversations, provides the methodological framework for this research.

Research Hypothesis and Research Question

This study answered the call of McCann and Giles (2002) to extend the study of intergenerational communication into the workplace. The first part of this study extends this prior research to examine young, middle-aged, and older workers' satisfaction with peer versus intergenerational workplace conversations. In prior research, younger participants rate peer conversations more positively than intergenerational conversations with older non-family members (Giles et al., 2008; McCann & Giles, 2006; Williams & Giles, 1996). In these studies, participants were asked to evaluate general targets in different age groups. Such instructions may serve to increase the salience of age, heightening the intergroup focus in the evaluations. Accordingly, similar results were expected in this research when participants were asked to report on their satisfactions with either peer or intergenerational conversations with co-workers. The following hypothesis was tested:

H1: Participants in all age groups who consider peer conversations will report greater satisfaction with workplace conversations than will those who consider intergenerational conversations.

The second part of this study employed the recall methodology of Williams and Giles (1996) and Zhang and Hummert (2001) to investigate young, middle-aged, and older workers reports of the characteristics of satisfying and dissatisfying workplace conversations with peer and intergenerational conversational partners. Zhang and Hummert asked participants to describe satisfying and dissatisfying conversation styles 'in general' with either significantly younger or significantly older adults. Participants were steered away from describing conversations with family members but were not directed to a specific context for communication. Williams and Giles asked young respondents to describe a specific satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversation with an older 'nonfamily member,' but did not establish further context. This research differs from those studies, however, in that participants were asked to focus on conversations with coworkers, establishing a specific context rather than conversations in general with individuals from another age group. This approach emphasizes the interpersonal relationship with the targeted individual where age is just one characteristic of the relationship. As Harwood et al. (2005) found in their study of grandparent-grandchild contact and attitudes toward older adults, a shared group identity may minimize the perception of age differences. It is possible that in the workplace, shared group identifications -- such as being an employee in the same company or department -- may be more salient than age in reports of the

characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations. Therefore the following research question was investigated in this study:

> ***R1:*** *What do young, middle-aged, and older workers' descriptions of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations with peer and intergenerational co-workers reveal about (a) the characteristics of those conversations and (b) the salience of age in the workplace?*

Chapter Two: Methodology

The hypothesis and research question which guided this study were investigated in a cross sectional research design using an on-line survey of working adults in three age groups: young, middle-aged, and older. Half of the respondents in each age group provided assessments of peer conversations in the workplace, while half gave their assessments of intergenerational conversations. The surveys consisted of three sections: demographic information, a 17-item scale on satisfaction with workplace conversations (either peer or intergenerational), and open-ended descriptions of a satisfactory and a dissatisfactory workplace conversation (again, either peer or intergenerational). Information on the participants, survey sections, and methods of analysis are presented in this chapter.

Survey Participants

Participants for this on-line survey were recruited using snowball sampling methodology. The names and e-mail addresses of potential participants were gathered from coworkers, friends, family members, and acquaintances of the investigator. Only names of those eighteen years of age or older and employed at least part-time were solicited. Each potential participant received a personal e-mail invitation requesting his or her participation. Individual invitations were necessary to balance the responses across survey types and age groups and to allow for accurate response rate calculations.

Age Ranges for Identifying Participants in Young, Middle-aged, and Older Age

Groups

Early research regarding age categories defined young, middle-aged, and old categories, with old age beginning at approximately age 65 (Neugarten, 1974; Social Security Administration, 2009). Over time sub-groups within the old age category emerged (Neugarten, 1974). Particularly relevant to this research is the emergent subgroup of older people age 55-75. These people are relatively healthy, relatively affluent, and active (Neugarten, 1974). As the workforce continues to age, members of this older age group are more prevalent in workplace environments. Accordingly, age ranges established by Finkelstein, Burke, and Raju (2004), who have called for more consistency across studies, were used to guide recruitment and assignment of participants to age categories for this research. Participants 18-34 years of age were considered young, those aged 35-54 were defined as middle-aged, and those aged 55 and above were classified as older.

Response Rate

The response rate for this research was high. The e-mail invitation was sent to 209 potential participants, and 178 of those individuals began the survey. A few ($N =$ 13) answered only a portion of the demographic questions and did not proceed further into the survey. Responses from these individuals were considered invalid and removed from the sample. The remainder ($N = 165$) completed the demographic questions and the 17-item Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale, yielding an overall response rate of 79%.

Of those who completed the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale, 134 (81%) also completed the third section of the survey requesting open-ended descriptions of a satisfactory and a dissatisfactory workplace conversation. In one, the respondent provided only a satisfactory conversational description and in one, the respondent provided only a dissatisfactory description. While fewer participants completed the open-ended section of the survey than the satisfaction scale, they provided 266 descriptions of workplace conversations, a number more than sufficient for analysis.

Characteristics of Survey Participants

Participants indicated their age by selecting the representative age interval from a provided list. The intervals were collapsed into age groups; young, middle, and older. Table 1 shows the composition of each age group by the age interval selected by participants. Table 1 reveals that most young and middle-aged participants were in the older of the two age intervals defining their age groups (i.e., 25-34 and 45-54, respectively), while most older participants were in the younger of the two older age group intervals (i.e., 55-64).

Table 1

Age Group Composition of Survey Participants

	Young				Middle				Older				Total	
	18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65+			
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Total	21	38%	34	62%	17	29%	42	71%	43	84%	8	16%	165	100%

Note: $N = 165$ total survey participants: $N = 55$ Young, $N = 59$ Middle, and $N = 51$ Older.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the survey participants by age group (young, middle-aged, and older participants). Most participants were from the Midwestern United States and were employed in a wide variety of businesses and educational institutions.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Variables	Young N = 55		Middle N = 59		Older N = 51		Totals N = 165	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Gender								
Female	37	(67%)	43	(73%)	29	(57%)	109	(66%)
Male	18	(33%)	16	(27%)	22	(43%)	56	(34%)
Sub Total	**55**	**(100%)**	**59**	**(100%)**	**51**	**(100%)**	**165**	**(100%)**
Part Time / Full Time Employment								
Part Time	16	(29%)	8	(14%)	6	(12%)	30	(18%)
Full	37	(67%)	38	(64%)	30	(59%)	105	(64%)
Non-Response	2	(4%)	13	(22%)	15	(29%)	30	(18%)
Sub Total	**55**	**(100%)**	**59**	**(100%)**	**51**	**(100%)**	**165**	**(100%)**
Management / Non-Management Positions								
Management	6	(11%)	19	(32%)	16	(31%)	41	(25%)
Non-Mgmt	49	(89%)	40	(68%)	35	(69%)	124	(75%)
Sub Total	**55**	**(100%)**	**59**	**(100%)**	**51**	**(100%)**	**165**	**(100%)**
Hours per week spent in Intergenerational Talk								
< 2 Hours	18	(33%)	18	(30%)	13	(25%)	49	(30%)
2 – 6 Hours	20	(36%)	24	(41%)	17	(33%)	61	(37%)
6 – 10 Hours	7	(13%)	7	(12%)	7	(14%)	21	(13%)
> 10 Hours	10	(18%)	10	(17%)	14	(28%)	34	(20%)
Sub Total	**55**	**(100%)**	**59**	**(100%)**	**51**	**(100%)**	**165**	**(100%)**

Note: N = 165 total survey participants: N = 55 Young, N = 59 Middle, and N = 51 Older.

Table 2 reveals that approximately two-thirds of the respondents were women, although in the older age group approximately equal numbers of men and women participated. While not all participants reported their part-time versus full-time employment status, the majority in all age groups indicated that they were employed full-time. However, more young participants indicated part-time employment than did middle-aged and older respondents. The majority of participants in all age groups indicated that they held non-management positions, although as might be expected the proportion of older and middle-aged participants in management positions was higher than in the young age group.

The respondents were also asked to identify the amount of time, each week, spent speaking with a coworker of a significantly different age. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the participants of all ages reported spending less than six hours per week in intergenerational workplace conversations. However, nearly a third of older participants indicated that they spent ten hours or more per week in intergenerational conversations.

On-line Survey Instrument

The on-line survey consisted of three sections:

1. A set of demographic items to collect information on participant age, gender, employee status, and hours spent in intergenerational conversation;

2. A 17-item scale to assess satisfaction with conversations in the workplace, with a focus on either peer or intergenerational conversations;

3. Open-ended questions to gather detailed retrospective accounts of

satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations, with a focus on either peer or intergenerational conversations.

Section 1. Demographic Items

Each participant was asked to provide specific demographic characteristics used to direct the participant to the appropriate version of the survey and to provide information for comparative analysis. Participants were asked to identify their gender: Male or Female. They were then asked to select their position in the company from a provided list and they were prompted to "Check as many as apply:" Part-time Employ, Full-time/Hourly, Full-time/Salaried, Supervisor, Manager, Executive, Other (please specify). Participants were asked to provide their Job Title in an open field. Respondents were asked to select the approximate number of hours per week "spent in conversations with coworkers who are of a significantly different age than you;" Less than one Hour per Week, 1-2, 2-4, 4-6, 6-8, 8-10, or More than 10 Hours per Week. Finally, participants were asked to select their appropriate age range; 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, or 65 and Over.

Section 2. Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants would report greater satisfaction with peer than intergenerational conversations. To address this hypothesis, a modified version of the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Hecht, 1978) was developed to measure satisfaction with workplace conversations. The Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory is a unidimensional, 7-point (1 = agree to 7 = disagree) Likert-type scale that includes 19 items regarding conversational

satisfaction, interest, and enjoyment. Examples of items include, "I felt that we could laugh easily together," "The other person genuinely wanted to know me," and "I did *not* enjoy the conversation."

This inventory was chosen as the basis for the workplace conversations scale because it is widely used and accepted as a standard measure of communication satisfaction (Burgoon, Birk, & Hall, 1991; Harwood, 2000; Lamude, Daniels, & Graham, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1989; Rucker & Gendrin, 2007). While the Hecht (1978) inventory directs participants to indicate satisfaction with "the conversation you have just had," it has been demonstrated to have acceptable reliability and validity when adapted to "recall conversations in general" (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1989). In other studies, this scale has been used to measure specific types of communication satisfaction at work, such as communication between superiors and subordinates (Lamude et al., 1988) and between physicians and patients (Burgoon et al., 1991). A 16 item condensed version of the satisfaction inventory was also introduced (Hecht, 1978).

For this research, the 16 item satisfaction survey was used as the items in this version were most relevant to workplace conversations. In addition, a 17th item of overall satisfaction was added to further emphasize conversational satisfaction.

For this study, the original instructions for the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Hecht, 1978) were modified to focus attention either on peer or intergenerational workplace conversations. The peer instructions for all age groups read: "The purpose of these questions is to investigate your reactions to conversations

with coworkers who are approximately your age. When responding to the survey, think of typical workplace conversations that you have with people you perceive to be approximately your same age." To encourage a consideration of intergenerational conversations, the instruction was changed to "coworkers who are significantly older than yourself; people you perceive to be age 55 or older" for distribution to young and middle-aged participants. Whereas the instruction was changed to "coworkers who are significantly younger than yourself; people you perceive to be between 18 – 34 years of age" for distribution to older participants. Although participants may not have known the specific chronological ages of their coworkers, their perceptions of coworkers' ages as similar to or significantly different from their own was the relevant age judgment for the purposes of this study (Hummert, Garstka, & Shaner, 1997).

Respondent ratings of scale items. Participants were directed to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each item by checking the appropriate response (strongly agree, moderately agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, moderately disagree, or strongly disagree). The scale items were also modified to direct the participant to consider either peer conversations (approximately your age) or intergenerational conversations (significantly older (or younger) than yourself). For example, the original item, "The other person let me know if I was communicating effectively" became "Older coworkers let me know …" in the intergenerational scale for young and middle-aged participants, "Younger coworkers let me know . . ." in the intergenerational scale for older participants, or "Coworkers who are about my age let

me know . . ." for the peer scale for all age groups. A complete list of survey items as modified for the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale is included in Table 3.

Table 3

Survey Items in Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale

(Older coworkers, Younger coworkers, Coworkers who are about my age) let me know if I communicate effectively.
Nothing is ever accomplished in these conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age).
I would like to continue having conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age) like the ones I have now.
(Older coworkers, Younger coworkers, Coworkers who are about my age) genuinely want to get to know me.
I am very DISsatisfied with my conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age).
I have better things to do than these conversations.
During conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age), I am able to present myself as I want others to view me.
(Older coworkers, Younger coworkers, Coworkers who are about my age) show me that they understand what I say.
I am very satisfied with these conversations.
(Older coworkers, Younger coworkers, Coworkers who are about my age) express a lot of interest in what I say.
I do NOT enjoy these conversations.
I feel I can talk about anything with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age).
Generally, we each get to say what we want.
Generally, we laugh together easily.
Conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age) flow smoothly.
We usually talk about something I am NOT interested in.
Overall, conversations with (older coworkers, younger coworkers, coworkers who are about my age) are very satisfying.

Note: Total items included in the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale derived from The Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Hecht, 1978).

Reliability of the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale.

Reliability coefficient alphas for the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory have ranged from .72 to .97 (Hecht, 1978). For the modified Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale, the reliability estimate, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was lower at .64. The items lowering the reliability score were the two of the negatively worded statements: "I do NOT enjoy these conversations" and "We usually talk about something I am NOT interested in." Without these two items, the scale reliability increased to .78. As a result, participants' satisfaction with peer or intergenerational conversations was computed as the mean of the15 reliable scale items.

The low reliability for the two negatively worded items may indicate that these working individuals experienced some difficulty labeling conversations with coworkers as dissatisfactory or negative. This was reinforced in some responses to the open-ended questions about characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations in Section 3 of the survey. Three respondents stated that they could not describe a dissatisfying conversation with a co-worker because, *"I honestly can't think of one! I get along very well with everyone at work"* and "I talk daily with younger coworkers in the 18-34 years of age range. I have not had dissatisfying conversations with them." One respondent apologized: "I am sorry, but I cannot remember any dissatisfying conversations with coworkers at this company."

Section 3. Descriptions of Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Workplace Conversations

To identify the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations and to identify age salience to answer Research Question 1, each participant was asked to recall and describe both a satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversation with either peer or intergenerational partners. This recall methodology mimics the strategy used by Williams and Giles (1996), who asked young participants to describe in writing a prior satisfying and dissatisfying conversation with an older person who is a non-family member. Young participants described their partner, the encounter, their feelings, and what they "did or did not say that was that was (dis)satisfying." Similar methodology was also used in Zhang and Hummert (2001) where younger and older participants were asked in interview format to describe positive and negative interactions with people of a significantly different age, including their resulting feelings and the reasons for those feelings.

Following the methodology in these prior studies, participants in this study were asked to respond in the on-line survey to a series of open-ended questions describing a satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversation. Specific directions were used to encourage greater detail in the conversational descriptions. Table 4 identifies the specific instructions each participant received.

Table 4

Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Conversation Description Directions

"Describe your (older, younger, or similar age) conversational partner (including estimate of age)."
"Describe your professional and social relationship to this person."
"Describe the details of the encounter, including the purpose for the encounter, the exchanges that occurred, and outcome of the conversation. Did you accomplish your goals of the conversations?"
"Describe any feelings that you experienced during this conversation."
"Describe and explain what you and your conversational partner did or did not say that was (dis)satisfying."
"Indicate what you or your conversational partner could have done to improve the conversation."

Note: Directions provided to participants describing satisfactory and
dissatisfactory workplace conversations, derived from similar methodology
used by Williams and Giles (1996).

Consistent with their assignment to rate either their satisfaction with peer or

intergenerational conversations on the Satisfactions with Workplace Conversations

scale, approximately half of the respondents in each age group were asked to describe

satisfactory and dissatisfactory peer conversations with "Coworkers you perceive to

be approximately your same age." The remaining participants were asked to describe

satisfactory and dissatisfactory intergenerational conversations. Young and middle-

aged participants were instructed to describe conversations with "Older coworkers

you perceive to be age 55 or older," whereas older participants were directed to

describe conversations with "Younger coworkers you perceive to be approximately

18 – 34 years of age." The order in which participants were asked to recall a

satisfactory and a dissatisfactory conversation was counterbalanced within the peer

and intergenerational survey groups.

Versions of the Survey

Six versions of the survey (two peers and four intergenerational) were created to accommodate the peer and intergenerational focus within age groups and to allow for counterbalancing the order of descriptions of a satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversation. The two peer versions varied only in the order in which participants were asked to provide descriptions of a satisfactory and a dissatisfactory conversation. Two intergenerational versions focusing on "coworkers you perceive to be age 55 or older" were directed to young and middle-aged respondents, with the order of requests for descriptions of a satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversation across the two versions. The remaining two intergenerational versions focusing on "coworkers you perceive to be approximately 18 – 34 years of age" were directed to older respondents, with the order of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversation descriptions varied across the two versions. Within age groups, half of the respondents were randomly assigned to answer one of the two versions of the intergenerational surveys and half to answer one of the two versions of the peer surveys.

The six versions of the survey were:

1. Peer Conversations: Demographics; Satisfaction with Peer Workplace Conversations Scale; Satisfactory Peer Conversation Described First

2. Peer Conversations: Demographics; Satisfaction with Peer Workplace Conversations Scale; Dissatisfactory Peer Conversation Described First

3. Intergenerational Conversations with coworkers 55 and older (for young & middle-aged respondents): Demographics; Satisfaction with Intergenerational Workplace Conversations Scale; Satisfactory Intergenerational Conversation Described First

4. Intergenerational Conversations with coworkers 55 and older (for young & middle-aged respondents): Demographics; Satisfaction with Intergenerational Workplace Conversations Scale; Dissatisfactory Intergenerational Conversation Described First

5. Intergenerational Conversations with coworkers significantly younger (for older respondents): Demographics; Satisfaction with Intergenerational Workplace Conversations Scale; Satisfactory Intergenerational Conversation Described First

6. Intergenerational Conversations with coworkers significantly younger (for older respondents): Demographics; Satisfaction with Intergenerational Workplace Conversations Scale; Dissatisfactory Intergenerational Conversation Described First.

The full text versions of the peer and intergenerational surveys are presented in Appendices A – C.

Procedures for Survey Administration

Participants were recruited via e-mail and the survey was administered on-line employing web-based survey technology. E-mail and web technology was used to reach this audience because the respondents were all working adults. E-mail is a

common, meaningful method of business communication used to share information and express personal feelings and opinions (Rosenberg, 2006). E-mail recruitment is consistent with the communication patterns of working adults. According to Rosenberg, e-mail has been considered to be a business tool as essential as the telephone for some time. E-mail usage is pervasive, with 87% of US adults reporting access to the internet, 88% of those with on-line access reporting daily use of e-mail (Forrester Research, Inc., 2009).

Survey Monkey, a professional on-line survey service, was used to administer the survey and collect the data. Survey Monkey was chosen because the instrument is professional and easy for the respondent to navigate. Appendix D presents the overall look of the survey instrument on-line. The background was soft shades of blue. Survey Monkey provided skip patterns that enhanced the management of the different survey instruments by directing the participant to the correct version of the survey when participants indicated their age interval.

Potential participants received a personal e-mail message from the researcher describing the study and requesting his or her participation in the survey (See Appendix E). The e-mail described the purpose of the study, introduced the researcher, and assured recipients that their responses and their e-mail addresses would remain confidential. The link in the introductory e-mail in combination with the skip pattern in Survey Monkey directed each respondent to the correct version of the survey instrument for their age group, conversational partner (peer/intergenerational) focus, and order of describing satisfactory/dissatisfactory

conversations.

Pilot Test

Prior to administering the full survey, a pilot test was conducted to verify that the use of the demographic responses to assign participants to each of the survey versions worked correctly, the questions were understandable, and the responses to the open questions about the satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations provided adequate detail for analysis. For the pilot, an e-mail invitation was sent to 30 people, 27 of whom completed the survey. Completion time was reported to be 10 to 15 minutes. The pilot data confirmed that the survey worked to appropriately assign participants to survey versions as designed and that the questions were easily understood. The responses to the open questions produced ample detail for analysis of the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations. The data from the pilot participants were not included in the main analyses, but their descriptions of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations provided a starting point for identifying emergent themes regarding those conversations. A spelling error was corrected prior to administration of the survey in the full study, but no other changes were made to the survey as a result of the pilot.

Data Collection

Collection of the data for the full study began by sending approximately 120 e-mails to potential participants who were randomly assigned to a peer or intergenerational version of the survey within age groups. This research required equal numbers of intergenerational and peer responses. Responses also needed to be

spread equally across the three age groups. To accomplish this goal, after the first 100

responses were received, a few e-mails with survey links were sent each day to insure

the appropriate mix of responses in each cell. The target enrollment was set at 25

respondents per cell of the age group (3) by conversational partner (2) design. The

survey was closed when that minimum was achieved in all cells. The end result,

presented in Table 5, was an appropriate spread of respondents across age groups and

conversational partner.

Table 5

Number of Respondents by Conversational Partner and Age Group

Variables	Young N = 55		Middle N = 59		Older N = 51		Totals N = 165	
	N	*(%)*	*N*	*(%)*	*N*	*(%)*	*N*	*(%)*
Conversational Partner								
Intergenerational	29	(53%)	29	(49%)	25	(49%)	83	(50%)
Peer	26	(47%)	30	(51%)	26	(51%)	82	(50%)
Sub Total	**55**	**(100%)**	**59**	**(100%)**	**51**	**(100%)**	**165**	**(100%)**

Note: N = 165. The survey quota was a minimum of 25 participants in each cell of
Age Group by Conversational Partner design.

Preparing the Data for Analysis

Survey Monkey captured the results in a format that was easily downloaded

into an Excel spreadsheet. The open-ended conversational descriptions were also

transferred to an Excel spreadsheet and then transferred to NVivo 8, specialized

qualitative analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2008). NVivo 8 facilitates

qualitative coding of multiple themes throughout large quantities of information. This

software was particularly valuable for modifying codes throughout the iterative

process of emergent theme analysis and for tabulating coding results.

Data Analysis Plan

Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale

Satisfaction with peer and intergenerational communication at work was computed as the mean of the 15 reliable items on the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale. Prior to computation, the closed ended responses were reverse coded to accommodate negatively worded questions. This variable was analyzed in a 3 (Age Group: Young, Middle, Older) X 2 (Conversational Partner: Intergenerational, Peer) Analysis of Variance to address the research hypothesis of this study. Results are presented in the next chapter.

Descriptions of Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Workplace Conversations

Respondents provided their descriptions of satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations by responding to a series of specific statements such as, "Describe your conversational partner," and "Provide the details of the encounter." Each participant's responses regarding a specific conversation were collapsed into a single conversational description for analysis. Of the 165 respondents who returned the survey, 134 answered these questions, resulting in 136 respondents (42 young, 46 middle-aged, 48 older) providing descriptions of peer conversations and 132 (42 young, 46 middle-aged, 44 older) detailing conversations with intergenerational partners. In most instances, each respondent provided a description of one satisfactory and one dissatisfactory conversation except in two situations where one respondent provided only a description of a satisfactory conversation and in another a respondent

provided only a description of a dissatisfactory conversation yielding a total of 266 descriptions of workplace conversations (133 satisfactory and 133 dissatisfactory) for analysis.

Manipulation check. A manipulation check was conducted to ensure that the descriptions were referenced either satisfactory or dissatisfactory conversations per the instructions. Participants were asked to rate the satisfaction of each conversation they described on a 5 point Likert-type scale (5 = Very Satisfactory, 3 = Neutral, 1 = Very Dissatisfactory). Analysis confirmed that the instructions were successful in eliciting descriptions of the two types of conversation. The satisfactory conversational descriptions were rated as significantly more satisfactory ($M = 4.59$, $SD = .54$, Range 4-5) than the dissatisfactory conversations ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .67$, Range 1-3), *paired t* (128) = 34.99, $p < .01$)

Qualitative software. The conversational descriptions were transferred to NVivo 8 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2008), specialized qualitative analysis software, which facilitates coding of emergent themes in large qualitative data sets. This software is particularly valuable for identifying hierarchical relationships among themes throughout the iterative process of emergent theme analysis and for tabulating results of that analysis.

Word counts. The conversational descriptions varied substantially in length and level of detail ranging from several short phrases to lengthy, detailed descriptions (a range of 13 words to 457 words). A 3 (participant age group) X 2 (conversational partner: peer/intergenerational) X 2 (conversation type: satisfactory/dissatisfactory)

mixed model analysis of variance was used to analyze whether the length of the descriptions (as measured by the number of words) varied across the types of descriptions. Conversation type served as a within-subjects factor in this analysis. Results revealed three significant main effects: conversation type, $F(1, 128) = 7.11$, $p = .009$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, conversational partner, $F(1, 128) = 4.27$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, and age group, $F(2, 128) = 3.02$, $p = .052$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. The age group linear contrast was also significant, indicating that the length of the descriptions decreased significantly from young to middle-aged to older participants.

However, these main effects were qualified by a significant three-way interaction among the factors, $F(2, 128) = 4.83$, $p = .009$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. To investigate the interaction, separate mixed model analysis of variance tests examined the effects of conversational partner and conversation type within each age group. For young participants, the analysis produced only a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 40) = 8.65$, $p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. As shown in Figure 1, young participants wrote more when describing satisfactory intergenerational conversations than dissatisfactory ones, but in describing peer conversations, they wrote more about dissatisfactory conversations than satisfactory ones. For middle-aged participants, the analysis revealed only a significant main effect for conversation type, $F(1, 44) = 4.80$, $p = .03$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Regardless of conversational partner, middle-aged participants wrote more in describing dissatisfactory conversations than satisfactory conversations. Finally, no significant effects emerged in the analysis of older participants' data, indicating that the length of their descriptions did not differ by

either type of conversation or conversational partner (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Comparison of Word Count Satisfaction and Word Count Dissatisfaction by Age Group and Conversational Partner
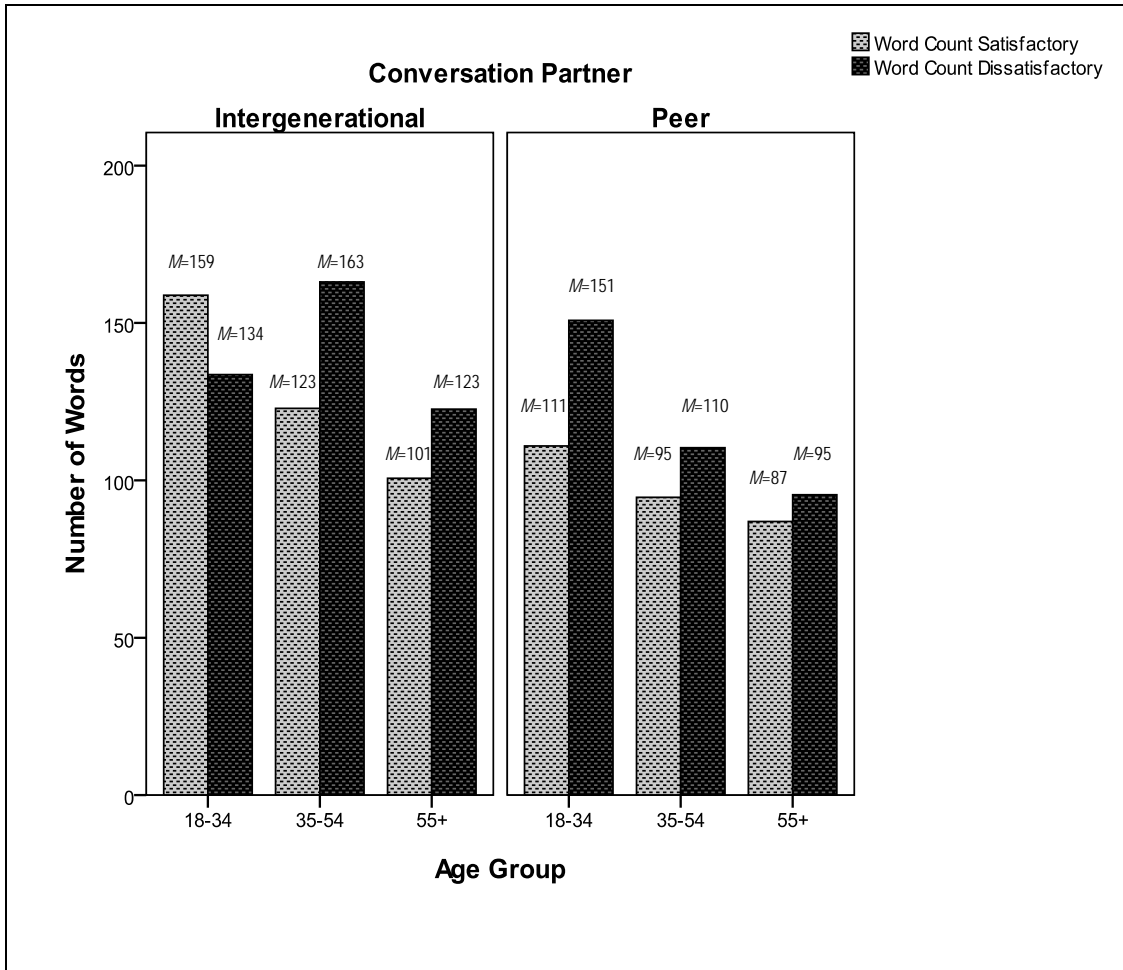
Figure1. A comparison of word counts of descriptions of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations by age group and conversational partner. $M =$ Mean number of words, rounded to the nearest whole number.

Although these differences in the length of the descriptions across

conversational partners and types of conversation was not a focus of this research and

are presented here simply for descriptive purposes, they may provide an indication of the extent to which these factors affect the memorability of interactions.

Thematic Analysis

The descriptions of workplace conversations were fully reviewed numerous times using emergent theme analysis to identify patterns and commonalities across responses. This process allowed the characteristics of satisfying and dissatisfying conversations to emerge from the data by identifying consistent messages across multiple descriptions (Luborsky, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Potential themes were identified from the pilot responses and from themes found in prior intergenerational communication satisfaction research (Giles et al., 2008; Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). These themes provided a starting point for the analysis. Using an iterative process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), these initial themes were modified and new themes unique to workplace conversations were identified. Similar thoughts or ideas expressed by several respondents were noted as potential themes. As the analysis proceeded, themes were identified and organized into major themes and sub-themes. References consistent with each emergent theme were noted in each description regardless of whether the description was of a satisfactory or dissatisfactory conversation, a conversation with a peer or intergenerational partner, or from a young, middle-aged or older respondent.

The analysis yielded themes that fell into three superordinate categories: partner characteristics, communication behaviors, and conversation outcomes. Major

themes within these categories were associated with two or more sub-themes.

Partner characteristic themes. The survey instrument asked the participants to describe their conversational partners. Two major themes emerged from these statements describing partners: relationships and age-related talk. Participants tended to describe their relationship to the partner in ways that yielded two sub-themes: hierarchy and friendship, Table 6 presents descriptions and examples of these themes.

Table 6

Partner Relationship Themes

Partner Relationships	Conversational partner relationships include descriptions of the conversational partners in terms of their workplace relationships and relationships that may extend beyond the workplace.	
Sub-Themes of Partner Relationships		
Emergent Sub-themes	Description	Examples
Hierarchy	Hierarchy includes references to a person's title, statement of a reporting relationship, or statement of job position in reference to the respondent. Hierarchy includes statements of equal or disparate levels in the organization.	"She is my boss " "IT manager" "We are Peers" "This person reports to me"
Friendship	Friendship is the identification of the conversational partner as "a friend" or inclusion of qualities of friendship such as "we socialize outside of work." Describing the conversational partner as a "friend" reveals an extension of the relationship beyond traditional workplace interaction.	"She is a friend" "Friend" "my best friend at work" "We socialize with our husbands outside of work and on weekends."

Descriptions of partners also often included references to the partner's age and their age-related characteristics. Such references were organized under the age talk theme. In the process of analysis, four sub-themes emerged: working age, negative

age-related characteristics, positive age-related characteristics, and irrelevance of age.

These sub-themes are described and presented with examples in Table 7.

Table 7

Age Talk

Age Talk	Age Talk includes descriptive language that is directly related to age, including direct statements of the conversational partner's age or other age related language. Age Talk can be neutral or laced with age stereotypes and age bias.	
Sub-Themes of Age Talk		
Emergent Sub-Themes	Description	Examples
Working Age Characteristics	Working age characteristics are statements related to working time; tenure, years of experience, or years to retirement.	"Age 65, Nearing retirement" "Has worked there for 30+ years" "Has been there forever."
Negative Age-related Characteristics	Negative age talk used to describe conversational partners that enforce or highlight age-related characteristics representative of negative age stereotypes or age bias.	"Age 55, high tension, chronic health problems." "Tall, overweight, balding." "Kind of a punk."
Positive Age-related Characteristics	Positive age talk used to describe characteristics of conversational partners associated with positive age stereotypes.	"Mid 50's. Italian, Worldly." "Thoughtful, pleasant to work with."
Irrelevance of Age	Age talk was occasionally used to stress that age in general was not relevant to the discussion or should not be relevant in workplace conversations.	"It did not digress into an age issue." "No focus on age difference."

Communication themes. Throughout the conversational descriptions, participants wrote about the communication behaviors of their partners, both those that seemed to facilitate the interaction and those that they indicated interfered with optimal communication. These two types of behaviors were organized under two major themes, communication accommodation and communication underaccommodation,

based on prior research (Giles et al., 2008; Harwood & Soliz, 2006; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Several sub-themes emerged from these overarching themes.

   Communication accommodation. Participants described communication behaviors that seemed to enhance the conversations to best meet the needs of the conversational partners. Such behaviors have been termed communication accommodation in prior intergenerational communication research (McCann & Giles, 2006; Zhang & Hummert, 2001; Williams & Giles, 1996). Statements that indicated accommodative communication behaviors were identified in the conversational descriptions under the major theme of communication accommodation. These yielded four sub-themes: mutuality (Williams & Giles, 1996), interpersonal competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002), mentoring, and helping (Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Table 8 presents descriptions and examples of these sub-themes.

Table 8

Communication Accommodation Themes

Communication Accommodation	Communication accommodation is an expression of socio-emotional support and is closely related to positive feelings and satisfaction with a conversation. Communication accommodations are the actions employed or words spoken to enhance the conversation and meet the needs of the conversational partners.

Sub-Themes of Communication Accommodation		
Emergent Sub-Themes	Description	Examples
Mutuality (Williams & Giles, 1996)	Mutuality occurs when there is an equal or mutual exchange of conversation or information. Mutuality may consist of social sharing or working together to complete a shared task. Respect is prevalent in mutuality.	"We talk for pleasure. We visit with each other and just purely socialize." "Relaxed conversation with ideas from both parties." "Acknowledgment of each other's point of view."
Interpersonal Competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002)	Interpersonal competence occurs when one or both conversational partners exhibit positive interpersonal skills that enhance the conversation including smiling, saying thank you, offering compliments or being polite. Interpersonal competence often includes praise and positive feedback that bolster the self esteem of the other person.	"Compliments; clear tone of voice." "He was attentive and asked questions when things were not clear." "Much of it was laughing. She also kept telling me how good I am at the job. She made me confident."
Mentoring	Mentoring accommodation occurs when a person in a higher or equal position shows interest in or supports the career growth of the conversational partner. Mentoring includes providing positive feedback, coaching, making suggestions, and giving support.	"A manager and mentor that is confident in me, treats me as her equal and tends to favor me over most other employees." "Interest was clear in my work; support and encouragement were clear."
Helping (Zhang & Hummert, 2001)	Helping is a description of one person saying or doing something for the other. In the work environment, helping is often *task* oriented, where one person is assisting another to complete a work-oriented task.	"I was pleased with her willingness to help me." "Warmth knowing that he wanted to help me & made me feel at ease."

Communication underaccommodation. The conversational descriptions also included references to actions taken or words spoken or not spoken on the part of one or both of the discussion partners that damaged or diminished the conversation, resulting in a failure to meet the needs of the conversational partners. Such behaviors fit the definition of communication underaccommodation (Harwood, 2000; Williams & Giles, 1996). The statements that described communication underaccommodation behaviors produced six sub-themes. Four of these sub-themes reflected underaccommodative behaviors identified by Williams and Giles (1996): inattention, unwanted attention, closed minded, and out of touch. The other two underaccommodation sub-themes that emerged from this data were rudeness and age-stereotypic underaccommodation. Table 9 provides descriptions and examples of the emergent sub-themes of communication underaccommodation.

Table 9

Communication Underaccommodation Themes

Communication Under-Accommodation	Communication underaccommodation is the failure to meet the needs or expectations of the conversational partner. Communication underaccommodation is closely related to negative feelings and dissatisfactory conversations.	
Sub-Themes of Communication Underaccommodation		
Emergent Sub-Themes	Description	Examples
Rudeness	Rudeness occurs when one or both participants use rude or demeaning language. Rudeness includes slight abuses to larger indiscretions. Mild examples include not saying thank you, not smiling, omitting casual conversation, interrupting, or unwanted repetition. Greater abuses involve verbal attacks including demanding, patronizing, or hurtful language intended to inflict injury on another.	"I felt talked down to – frequently feel as if I am not an equal in intelligence to him; feel inadequate and under-appreciated." "She repeated herself too many times." "I said hello and how she was doing and she was short and rather rude"
Out of Touch (Williams & Giles, 1996)	Out of Touch can be described in two ways: being out of touch with the task at hand which includes ineptitude, living in the past, or responding inappropriately. Or, one may be out of touch when the conversational partners are simply not able to connect, including missing the point of the conversation or misunderstanding.	"There was some communication difficulty. Difficult to describe but did feel there was a lack of understanding between us." "I am never quite sure if he gets it." "He doesn't understand the financials, does not know how to read a balance sheet."
Inattention (Williams & Giles, 1996)	Inattention occurs when the conversational partner is not fully attuned including not paying adequate attention, being non-responsive to requests, showing disinterest, ignoring verbal and non-verbal communication cues, or *clearly not listening*.	"He doesn't listen to me. " "The manager seemed distant, uninterested and indirect with her response" "Basically ignore or disregard my comments."
Closed Minded (Williams & Giles, 1996)	Close minded communicative underaccommodation happens when one of the conversational partners is not open to learning new skills, hearing new ideas, considering different options, or talking through to a solution. The conversational partner is unwilling to consider other options or try alternatives.	"Very defensive, unwilling to approach a problem in a new way." "He wasn't willing to see reason with any information he was given." "Refusal to see the other side of the situation."

Emergent Sub-Themes	Description	Examples
Unwanted Attention (Williams & Giles, 1996)	Unwanted attention occurs in workplace conversations when one person is sharing more about a person, a story, or a situation than the other person is comfortable hearing. This includes venting, being inconsiderate of another's time, interfering when uninvited, and trying to hijack a situation.	"This co-worker called me daily for 1 ½ weeks . . . I understood she was being told to check on it by her boss, but it was getting annoying." "She was in my office wanting me to talk about someone who was not there."
Age-Related Under-accommodation	This sub-theme includes descriptions of age-related impairments that the respondent characterizes as interfering with the conversation.	"Discussing memory issues with an older coworker is not a pleasant experience. …You can't remember not remembering." "I need to remember to compensate for hearing difficulties by deepening the tone of my voice, facing them. . ."

Conversational outcomes. Participants were asked to describe the outcome of the conversation in terms of whether they accomplished their goal, as well as to discuss their feelings resulting from the interaction. Responses regarding conversation goals yielded a goal accomplishment theme with three sub-themes: goals accomplished, goals not accomplished, goals partially accomplished. Descriptions and examples of these themes are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Goal Accomplishment Themes

Goal Accomplishment	Goal accomplishment identified the outcome of the conversation regarding the stated goals. Each response was reviewed and labeled as either Goal Accomplished or Goal Not Accomplished. In some descriptions, goal accomplishment could not be determined. In just a few, respondents described accomplishing some goals and not accomplishing others.	
Sub-Themes of Goal Accomplishment		
Emergent Sub-Theme	Description	Examples
Goal Accomplished	The goal of the conversation was accomplished.	"We were able to accomplish our task."
		"We laughed and felt accomplished with our efforts."
Goal Not Accomplished	The goal of the conversation was not accomplished.	"We did not have a goal, except to enjoy our walk. I did not accomplish that."
		"I did not accomplish my goal of soliciting her support"
Goals Partially Accomplished	The goal of the conversation was partially accomplished and partially not accomplished.	"Yes and no."
		"Some plans made. Didn't accomplish all of our goals."

The conversational descriptions included references to a wide variety of feelings, yielding both positive and negative feeling themes. Each of these major themes included four sub-themes. Table 11 describes and provides examples of the four sub-themes of positive feelings: happiness/joy, accomplishment/satisfaction, respect/inclusion, comfort/relaxation. Table 12 describes and provides examples of the four negative feeling sub-themes: frustration/anger, disrespect, sadness/hurt, discomfort.

Table 11

Positive Feeling Themes

Positive Feelings	Positive feelings capture the positive emotional outcomes of the conversations. Positive feelings are closely associated with Satisfactory conversations.

Sub-Themes of Positive Feelings		
Emergent Sub-Theme	Description	Examples
Happiness or Joy	Respondents describe feelings of happiness, joy, enjoyment, laughter, excitement, pleasure, and humor.	"I was happy and grateful" "I enjoy talking to her" "I also was happy and laughed"
Accomplishment or Satisfaction	Respondents report feeling accomplished, satisfied, and confident.	"I experienced feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment." "We were both satisfied with the conversation."
Respect or Inclusion	Respondents describe feeling respected, included, prideful, appreciated, and grateful.	"belonging, effectiveness in doing my job" "I felt appreciated and respected. " "The feeling of being a *team player*"
Comfort or Relaxation	Respondents express feeling comfortable, relaxed, relieved, and at ease.	"Relaxed. I never feel uncomfortable around her" "I felt comfortable and confident" "Relief, calm, a sense of understanding"

Table 12

Negative Feeling Themes

Negative Feelings	Negative feelings capture the negative emotional outcomes of the conversations. Negative feelings are closely associated with Dissatisfactory conversations.	

Sub-Themes of Negative Feelings		
Emergent Sub-Theme	Description	Examples
Frustration or Anger	Respondents describe feeling frustrated, angry, or annoyed.	"frustration with students"
		"I felt annoyed during the conversation."
		"I felt angry and frustrated."
Disrespect	Respondents report feeling disrespected or inadequate.	"I felt unappreciated and unheard."
		"(I felt) Old and irrelevant"
		"I felt put out. I wanted to have some input."
Sadness or Hurt	Respondents report feeling sad, bad, hurt or regretful as a result of the conversation.	"I felt awful and we aren't friends anymore. "
		"I was hurt that she thought I was a bad coach"
		"I experienced some hurt feelings."
Discomfort	Respondents describe feeling uncomfortable, anxious, embarrassed, bored, and confused; all feelings of being ill at ease.	"Overall I left the conversation feeling uncomfortable and dissatisfied."
		"I felt anxious and cautious about what I should say to her since she's a co-worker"
		"Feelings of edgy tenseness always invades the conversations"

Analysis of emergent themes. To answer Research Question 1 regarding the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations and age salience, the emergent themes described above were examined to identify patterns, relationships, similarities, and differences across participant age groups,

conversational partners (intergenerational or peer) and conversation type (satisfactory

or dissatisfactory).

Chapter Three: Results

This chapter contains the results of both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the survey. The quantitative survey results are presented first, followed by detailed descriptions of the qualitative results.

Analysis of Satisfaction with Peer and Intergenerational Conversations

The hypothesis predicted that participants in all age groups would rate peer conversations more satisfying than intergenerational conversations. Participants in each age group were randomly assigned to rate their satisfaction with either peer or intergenerational conversations on 17 items, using a seven point Likert-type scale. The dependent variable for testing this hypothesis was the mean of the 15 reliable conversational satisfaction items, with higher numbers indicating greater satisfaction.

A 3 (participant age group) X 2 (conversation partner: peer/intergenerational) analysis of variance was used to evaluate the effects of age group and conversation partner on the conversational satisfaction mean. Both age group and conversation partner were between subjects factors. The results revealed a significant main effect of conversation partner, $F(1, 159) = 14.8$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$, and a significant interaction between conversation partner and age group, $F(2, 159) = 3.42$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. The main effect for participant age was not significant, $F(2, 159) = .49$, $p = .62$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$.

Tests of the simple main effects of conversation partner within age group were used to investigate the interaction effect. As shown in Table 13 and illustrated in Figure 2, results provided partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Table 13

Means and Standard Deviations for Conversational Satisfaction by Participant Age and Conversational Partner

	Conversation Partner				
	Peer		Intergenerational		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
Participant Age					
Young	5.01	.56		4.39	.81
Middle	4.83	.63		4.81	.52
Older	5.00	.69		4.45	.76

Note: Conversational satisfaction was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). For both young and older participants, the significant interaction demonstrated that Peer conversation partners rated the conversational satisfaction higher (ps < .01) than Intergenerational conversational partners. For Peer: Young $N = 26$, Middle $N = 30$, Older $N = 26$. For Intergenerational: Young $N = 29$, Middle $N = 29$, Older $N = 25$.

Figure 2

Conversational Satisfaction Mean by Age Group and Conversational Partner
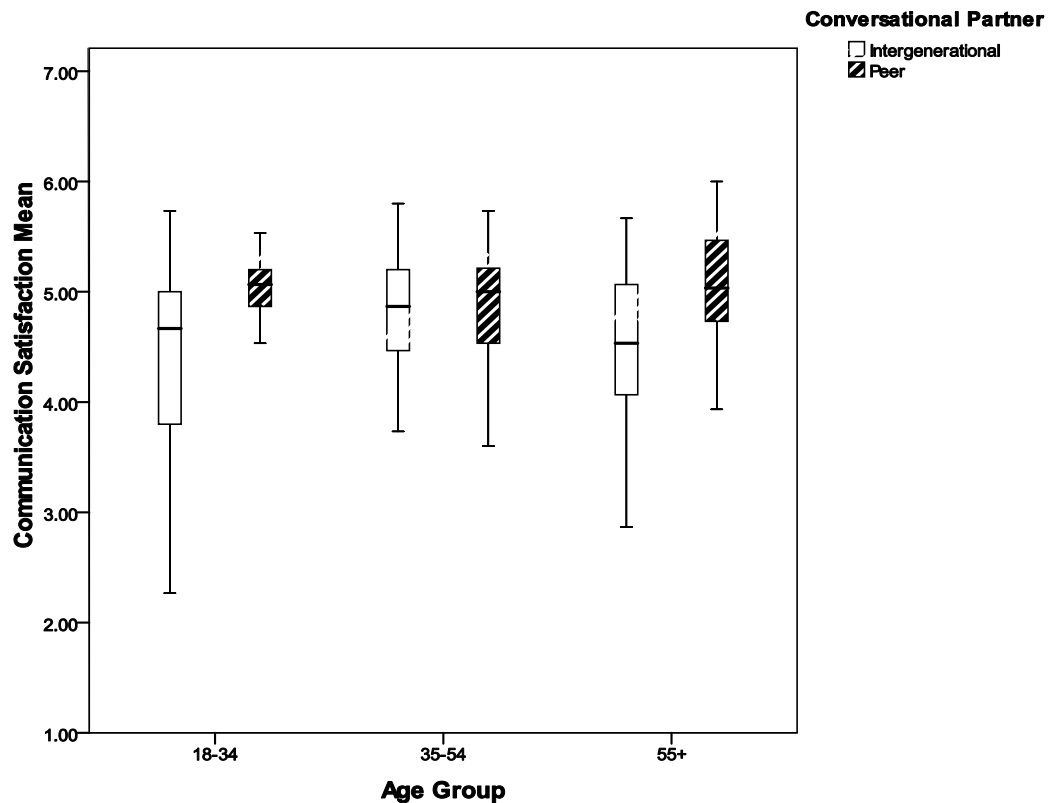
Note: Communication Satisfaction Mean ratings were made by rating 15 items on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). For Peer: Young $N = 26$, Middle $N = 30$, Older $N = 26$. For Intergenerational: Young $N = 29$, Middle $N = 29$, Older $N = 25$.

Supporting the hypothesis, younger participants and older participants who focused on peers reported greater conversational satisfaction than did those who considered intergenerational partners, young $F(1, 159) = 11.95$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$; older participant $F(1, 159) = 8.76$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. However, contrary to predictions, middle-aged participants reported similar levels of conversational

satisfaction with peer and intergenerational partners, $F(1,159) = .02$, $p = .89$, partial

$\eta^2 = 0$.

Thematic Analysis of Descriptions of Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Workplace Conversations

Respondents provided 266 on-line descriptions of conversations with

coworkers. Half ($N = 133$) of the descriptions were of satisfactory conversations and

half ($N = 133$) were of dissatisfactory conversations. The descriptions varied in length

and level of detail. Some of the descriptions were complete stories including details

of the exchange and context of the conversation. Other responses were brief,

comprised of single words or short phrases.

Thematic analysis of these conversation descriptions was conducted to answer

Research Question 1 regarding (a) the characteristics of satisfactory and

dissatisfactory interactions of peer and intergenerational coworkers at different age

groups and (b) age salience in workplace conversations. The analysis yielded

emergent themes in reference to four areas: descriptions of conversational partners,

characteristics of satisfactory conversations, characteristics of dissatisfactory

conversations, and conversation outcomes. The coding definitions for all of the

emergent themes were described in detail in the previous chapter. A short description

of each theme is included within the results section that follows.

Descriptions of Conversational Partners

The survey instrument asked respondents to include a description of their

conversational partners, including their professional and social relationship to the

partner and the partner's age. Analysis revealed three themes in those descriptions of

the partners: hierarchy, friendship, and age talk.

Hierarchy. Hierarchy was the most frequently occurring theme in descriptions of conversational partners. Of the 266 partner descriptions, 227 or 85% included some mention of the hierarchical relationship of the respondent to the partner. Statements of hierarchy included information such as the conversational partner's job title, reporting relationship, position in the company, or organizational level. For instance, a young person reporting on a satisfactory conversation, described an older conversational partner by stating, "I have the same professional title as this person." In describing her same-aged conversational partner in a dissatisfactory conversation, a middle-aged respondent offered the phrase, "Woman is one level higher in another work group."

The use of hierarchy to describe the relationship was prevalent across all respondent age groups (Older $N = 80$, Middle $N = 78$, Younger $N = 69$), in reference to both peer ($N = 117$) and intergenerational partners ($N = 110$) and to partners in both satisfactory ($N = 114$) and dissatisfactory ($N = 113$) conversations, illustrating the centrality of hierarchy to perceptions of organizational relationships.

Friendship. Friendship is another theme that emerged in the descriptions of conversational partners. Describing a conversational partner as a "friend," signifies an extension of the relationship beyond traditional workplace interaction. For example, a young man described his same-aged conversational partner by stating, "He and I have been friends for a very long time." Similarly, a young respondent reported her relationship with an older coworker in a satisfactory conversation as, "We are

friendly toward each other and often talk about things outside of work."

Reference to friendship appeared in 39 (15%) of the 266 partner descriptions. Friendship was primarily referenced in descriptions of partners in satisfactory conversations (Satisfactory $N = 33$, Dissatisfactory $N = 6$) and of partners who were peers (Peer $N = 30$, Intergenerational $N = 9$). In addition, references to friendship with partners were made more often by young respondents than by middle-aged and older respondents (Young $N = 19$, Middle-aged $N = 10$, Older $N = 10$).

Age talk. Respondents were asked to include an estimate of their partner's age in the conversational descriptions. As a result, 251, or 94%, of the 266 conversational descriptions made reference to the partner's age or used age related language in their descriptions.

Often, the age descriptions were simply a statement of the perceived chronological age of the conversational partner or the partner's age in comparison to that of the respondent. For instance, a young woman described her older partner in the conversation as "another female, 55 years old." Similarly, a middle-aged person described an older coworker as, "Approximately 62 years of age. Male." In another example, a middle-aged woman communicated her peer coworker's age as, "Similar age teacher in the same department." Likewise, an older respondent described a peer as, "same age within 2 years."

However, at times, respondents' descriptions of the partners included not only estimates of their chronological age, but also statements about their age-related characteristics. For example, a young woman in a discussion with an older employee

reported, "This conversational partner is 60-65, female, around 5' 1 with a thin build and generally comes across as cold and difficult to connect with." These comments tended to emphasize one of four aspects of the partner's age: working age (e.g., years of employment), negative age-related characteristics, positive age-related characteristics, and the irrelevance of age in the context of work.

Working age characteristics. Because these descriptions were of workplace conversations, often the age talk was related to tenure, years of experience, or years to retirement. In a satisfactory conversation, a young person portrayed an older coworker as, "Female, 60-ish, senior VP at company, has worked there for 30+ years." Correspondingly, a middle-aged respondent described an older coworker as, "He is approximately 60 to 62 years of age. He has been with the company for approximately 20 years and started on the production floor." In a dissatisfactory conversation, a middle-aged person represented her older conversational partner as "nearing retirement, been in the same job for 20+ years." Such references to long term employment or years to retirement tended to come from young and middle-aged participants describing older employees, though not entirely so as the next example illustrates. In a satisfactory peer conversation, a middle-aged woman related, "He is nearing retirement and we talked about when is a good time to retire. It was timely because we are near the same age, although I plan to work longer."

Older respondents also mentioned tenure of their partners. For example, an older employee recounting a satisfactory interaction with a young coworker reported, "Younger coworker, Titia, that just started. Probably age 25." In commenting on a

dissatisfactory conversation, an older worker described a similar-aged peer as, "Same age. Fairly new to the position."

Negative age-related characteristics of partners. The descriptions sometimes used age talk to enforce or highlight age-related characteristics representative of negative age stereotypes or age bias. In the case of young and middle-aged respondents describing intergenerational partners, negative age characteristics of old age stereotypes emerged. For instance, in a satisfactory conversation, a young respondent described his older conversational partner as, "Age about 55, high tension, chronic health problems." In a dissatisfactory conversation, a young woman described her older partner by stating, "Another nurse in our clinic, 55+, grouchy all the time." In similar fashion, a young person portrayed an older coworker as, "Age about 60, kind of absent minded, pretends to be busy." In another dissatisfactory conversation, a middle-aged man speaking with an older coworker recounted, "She is 60 years old. She shows signs of dementia and often is lost in thought. She is moderately active and works hard." Similarly, a middle-aged respondent described an older coworker as, "55 years, one of my superiors. Curt and to the point." Likewise, a middle-aged participant depicted her older conversational partner as, "Male, 71 years old, hard of hearing, the hearing aids he wears are not totally effective."

Reference to characteristics of negative age stereotypes about young people also emerged, however, in descriptions by older respondents of their young coworkers. In a dissatisfactory conversation, an older respondent described a young

partner by stating: "I don't know. Sometimes young people have made up their minds no matter what is said." In a dissatisfactory conversation, an older respondent described a younger coworker as, "He does not show much initiative. Seems to be pre-occupied, spends too much time with his cell phone." Likewise, another older respondent, in conversation with a young employee reported, "There are seldom ready answers to my questions---he doesn't seem to keep a lot in his head."

Respondents also described their peers in terms associated with negative age stereotypes. In one dissatisfactory instance, a young man described a peer coworker as, "We are the same age, about 20. He is short and athletic. He is also kind of a punk." In another, a middle-aged woman describer her peer coworker by saying, "37 year old who acts much younger, approximately the age of someone in their early 20's." Similarly, an older woman described a timid peer as, "Age 55, too agreeable, she didn't want to be honest, not direct, too ready to accept responsibility for blame, didn't want to deal with conflict."

Positive age-related characteristics of partners. At other times, respondents wrote about characteristics of their partners associated with positive age stereotypes. For instance, a middle-aged man described his older conversational partner as, "Male, age 85. Very sharp and energetic. Sincere." In a satisfactory conversation, a young person depicted an older coworker as, "Motherly, Nice. Easy to talk to, about 52, female." Another example of positive age stereotyping was a middle-aged woman who highlighted her older coworker's mentoring qualities: "She is about 56 years old. She used to be the director of market research. She is very nurturing, confidence-

inspiring, and smart." In another satisfactory conversation, an older man described his much younger coworker by stating, "Good that we have some bright young employees coming along to take over."

Irrelevance of the partner's age. In a few descriptions, age talk was used by the respondent to stress that age in general was not relevant or should not be relevant in workplace conversations. In describing a satisfactory conversation with an older coworker, a young person wrote that as, "I am not really inclined to think that all this was a matter of her age, rather more a matter of her personality." Similarly, an older person recounted a conversation with a younger coworker by stating, "I believe it is the personality and flexibility of the teachers, not their age. This person saw something working." In another example from a description of a satisfactory conversation, an older person describing a conversation with a younger coworker said, "No focus on age difference which takes all of the self consciousness out of the conversation." These statements were made by participants in all age groups when describing a person of a significantly different age.

Prevalence of age talk across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Age talk was prevalent throughout the conversational descriptions and many statements of age talk extended far beyond establishment of chronological age, including age stereotyping and age bias. Table 14 shows the frequency of age talk themes that fell into two broad categories: age only and age plus age-related characteristics. As the table illustrates, slightly fewer than half of the 296 individual statements about partner age ($N = 139$, or 47%) across all conversational categories

specified only the chronological age of the partner, while slightly more than half ($N =$

157, or 53%) supplemented chronological age with information about the partner's

age-related characteristics. Although those partner descriptions that included details

about the partner's age-related characteristics appeared across all respondent ages and

conversation categories, Table 14 reveals that they were offered by respondents more

often when they were describing dissatisfactory than satisfactory conversations and,

by young and middle-aged respondents, when describing partners in intergenerational

(older) than peer conversations.

Table 14

Frequency of Age Talk Themes in Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory
Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Satisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Age + Age Characteristics	18	11	11	6	11	14	**71**
Age Only	5	10	12	16	19	10	**72**
Age Talk Subtotal	**23**	**21**	**23**	**22**	**30**	**24**	143
Dissatisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Age + Age Characteristics	18	13	20	7	16	12	**86**
Age Only	6	9	12	17	13	10	**67**
Age Talk Subtotal	**24**	**22**	**32**	**24**	**29**	**22**	153
Total Age Talk	**47**	**43**	**55**	**46**	**59**	**46**	**296**

Characteristics of Satisfactory Conversations

Respondents were asked to describe the exchanges that took place in both satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations. Thematic analysis revealed themes of accommodative and underaccommodative communication behaviors, although accommodative themes predominated.

Accommodative communication themes in satisfactory conversations. Accommodative communication behaviors are defined as the actions taken or words spoken on the part of one or both of the discussion partners to enhance or improve the conversation. Respondents described a variety of accommodative communication behaviors that combined to form four emergent themes: mutuality, interpersonal competence, mentoring, and helping. Each emergent theme is described below, followed by examples that typify and add richness to the descriptions of the themes.

Mutuality. When describing satisfactory workplace conversations, respondents most often recounted mutual or equal exchanges shared between the conversational partners. Mutually satisfying interactions were sometimes work-oriented or purely social exchanges. One respondent, a young person writing about a conversation with an older coworker, described a work-oriented mutual exchange as follows: "It wasn't the words that were said that was [sic] satisfying but being able to work together without trying to take control or get frustrated with each other when we couldn't find something right away." In another example of a mutual social exchange, an older person described a conversation with a peer as, "Just a personal conversation about our families. It was good to hear from her that her family is doing well. The

give and take was satisfying."

Because the descriptions are of workplace conversations, respondents more often described encounters that were at least partially task-oriented. For example, a young person working with a same-aged peer said, "We usually just pass each other in shifts. We accomplished a lot this day, organizing better displays, cleaning. Plus we had fun doing it. We both felt great. We laughed and helped people and had fun all day."

Interpersonal competence. Interpersonal competence included respondent descriptions of one or both of the conversational partners using positive communication skills such as complimenting, listening, articulating, or showing kindness to enhance the conversation. An older person describing a conversation with a younger coworker stated, "I was amazed at her knowledge, experience level and skill to communicate it to me." A young person describing an older coworker wrote, ". . . a good listener. Patient and easy to talk to." Of a peer conversation, a young woman reported that, "My partner in the conversation used kind words about the student but also did not sugar coat the issues that were at hand. She presented data that supported her concern and we were able to move forward after that." Likewise, an older respondent related that a younger coworker ". . . tried to say something different every time so she was not always repeating herself. I was impressed that she thought of that. She smiled and laughed easily. She was kind to everyone. Lots of spunk!"

Mentoring. Career mentoring is unique to workplace conversations.

Respondents described mentoring as behavior that occurred when one conversational partner coached, complimented or encouraged the other in a way to benefit his or her career. As an example, a young person recounted the mentoring behavior of an older coworker in the following words: "She told me about her jobs and her road to retirement. She had done a lot of different things in her life and it gave me hope that I can have an equally satisfying life." In another instance, a young man recalling a conversation with his boss said, "He gave me feedback. Made some recommendations and also recommended restaurants. The outcome was that I followed his advice."

In their statements that revealed mentoring, the respondents usually wrote about ways in which the conversational partner contributed to the development of the respondent, as indicated by the examples presented in the previous paragraph. However, a few incidents were cited where the respondent described his or her own mentoring behaviors in support of a coworker. For example, an older respondent recalling a satisfactory discussion with a young coworker wrote, "Helping train young start-up salesmen is an important part of my job." That statement implies that the respondent takes pride in fulfilling that mentoring role.

Helping. Respondents described helping behaviors as acts of assisting another person. In one example, a young person shared her interaction with an older coworker by saying, "She acted like it was no big deal to have helped me so much." In a peer conversation, an older person recalled the helping behavior of his similar-aged coworker as, "I told the person I wanted to take an extended vacation and asked if he

would work extra hours to cover my work. He readily agreed to do so and I feel I accomplished my goal. I felt [sic] warmth knowing that he wanted to help me feel at ease."

Prevalence of accommodative communication behaviors in satisfactory conversations across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Of the 133 descriptions of satisfactory conversations, 129 (97%) included at least one reference to an accommodative communication behavior. Fourteen respondents described two or more such behaviors. Table 15 shows the frequency of accommodative responses in satisfactory conversations across the accommodative sub-themes, type of partner (peer or intergenerational) and respondent age. Respondents wrote 145 statements recounting accommodative communication behaviors. As the column totals reveal, accommodative communication behaviors were reported with consistent frequency by respondents of all ages, regardless of whether they were describing intergenerational or peer conversations.

Table 15

Frequency of Accommodative Communication Behaviors in Satisfactory Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Satisfactory Conversations

	Young Intergen	Peer	Middle Intergen	Peer	Older Intergen	Peer	Sub Total
Mutuality	7	17	11	17	13	20	**85**
Interpersonal Competence	8	5	3	2	4	1	**23**
Mentoring	9	1	7	2	2	0	**21**
Helping	4	3	2	1	4	2	**16**
Total Accommodation	**28**	**26**	**23**	**22**	**23**	**23**	**145**

Table 15 also reveals, however, that the sub-themes of accommodative communication behavior varied in their prevalence across respondent age groups and whether the conversation was with a peer or intergenerational partner. For instance, statements of mutuality, which was the dominant sub-theme, were found more often in descriptions of peer than intergenerational conversations. This disparity was especially evident in the reports of younger respondents. In contrast, respondents provided more accounts of interpersonal competence and mentoring when reporting about intergenerational than peer conversations, with young respondents reporting the most experiences with interpersonal competence of partners. Consistent with the expectation that mentoring is directed from an older person to a younger one, almost all statements describing mentoring behaviors were offered by young and middle-aged respondents in accounts of interactions with older coworkers.

Underaccommodative communication themes in satisfactory

conversations. In addition to the accommodative communication behaviors prevalent

throughout the satisfactory conversations, a few underaccommodative communication

behaviors were described within the context of satisfactory conversations.

Descriptions of communication underaccommodation were noted across most of the

emergent themes including rudeness, out of touch, inattention, unwanted attention

and age stereotypes. Emergent themes of underaccommodative communication

behaviors are discussed in detail in Characteristics of Dissatisfactory Conversations

below. In one example, a young person recalling an *inattentive* older coworker stated,

"I walked into her office to ask how a meeting went with a vendor that we all work

with. I was invited to attend the meeting, but was unable to attend, so I was hoping to

find out how it went. She was timid in her response and gave me some very vague

and general answers. I tried to let her know I was interested yet she didn't seem to

care and was put out by my enthusiasm." Although the older coworker displayed

inattentive behaviors, the conversation was considered satisfactory because the

respondent was able to show, "I cared about her meeting and apologized for not being

there."

In another example, an older person speaking with a peer recounted receiving

unwanted attention by stating, "She was complaining about the amount of increased

work given to the teachers. Didn't want to discuss. Wanted to leave the room

graciously." Even with this unwanted attention, the overall conversation was

considered satisfactory because the respondent was pleased that the partner "could

trust her."

Prevalence of underaccommodative communication behaviors in satisfactory conversations across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Table 16 shows that underaccommodative communication behaviors, while infrequent, were noted throughout the satisfactory conversations, indicating complexity in workplace conversations. Table 16 reveals that underaccommodative communication behaviors in satisfactory conversations were more often expressed by young and middle-aged participants describing older coworkers and more often in intergenerational conversations

Table 16

Frequency of Underaccommodative Communication Behaviors in Satisfactory Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Satisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Rudeness	1	1	1	0	0	0	**3**
Out of Touch	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Inattention	2	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Close Minded	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Unwanted Attention	0	0	0	1	0	1	**2**
Age-Related Underaccom	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Underaccom Subtotal	**3**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**9**

Characteristics of Dissatisfactory Conversations

Participants provided 133 descriptions of dissatisfactory conversations. Themes of both accommodative and underaccommodative communication behaviors were revealed through emergent theme analysis, with underaccommodative themes predominating.

Underaccommodative communication themes in dissatisfactory conversations. Underaccommodative communication behaviors are actions taken and words spoken on the part of one or both of the discussion partners that diminished the conversation. Participants described a variety of underaccommodative communication behaviors that in combination formed six emergent themes: rudeness, out of touch, inattention, close minded, unwanted attention, and age stereotypes. Each emergent theme is described below, followed by examples to typify and add depth to the thematic descriptions.

Rudeness. When recalling dissatisfying workplace conversations, respondents described rude behaviors that included using demeaning language, omitting conversational pleasantries, walking away, or rambling. For example, a young person recounted an older coworker's rude behavior by stating, "He said he wanted to make a change too late in the game. As far as things he didn't say, he did not apologize for not having engaged sooner and being there when his team needed his input initially." A middle-aged woman described the rude behavior of a peer as, "I approached her to ask why she chose not to obey the rules she had instated. Instead of discussing the matter, she verbally attacked me and began bringing up other, non-related matters. I

was not able to withstand her attack and retreated." Similarly, an older participant recalled an interaction with a younger coworker as, "She was rude and made it clear that she did not want to make the copies. She acted like it was beneath her." An older employee recounted a discussion with a peer by stating, ". . .he was trying to make me look bad in front of others [sic]. He mentioned all of the money we "Waste" on my projects."

Out of touch. Respondents described their conversational partners as being out of touch if they did not "get it," including misunderstanding, inability to perform given tasks, living in the past, or not connecting with the conversational partner. In one instance, an older person recalling a conversation with a peer wrote, "I needed for him to supply some information. He said he would do so, but not in the time that I needed. He was making the request much too hard and estimating way too much time to complete the request - it was really simple." A middle-aged teacher describing an encounter with an older teacher who seemed focused on the past said, "We were in the staff lunch room and we were discussing some of the students whom we felt were very disrespectful to adults. She felt the 'olds' were better times in that children learned to speak respectively to adults or they would get slapped." A middle-aged participant speaking with a peer stated, "(We met) to talk about a report. We just did not connect." A young person describing an older coworker shared, "Though he means well, he was not on target . . . I felt kind of sad for him again since he tries so hard fit in, and he tries to have the right opinion, he is well thought out but it's just not right."

Inattention. Inattention occurred when the conversational partner was disinterested, not listening, or not paying adequate attention. A young respondent provided an example from a conversation with an older coworker: "The purpose of the conversation was to get some questions answered and details figured out before going out of town. She was in a hurry and did not concentrate on my questions. She acted like I did not matter." A young person describing a peer stated, "Through the conversation I got the feeling she wasn't paying a lot of attention and I had to repeat myself a few times." Similarly, an older employee requesting an ad layout from a younger coworker said, "…After a couple of iterations, I got what I had originally asked for. I felt frustrated in that she clearly had not paid close attention to what I originally gave her." A middle-aged respondent recalling an older coworker stated, "active listening was not used by my colleague."

Close minded. Closed minded behaviors occurred when the partner would not consider another point of view. A young respondent described a close minded older coworker as, "He would ask me how he was supposed to respond to a specific customer question. I would then give him the information, but he would offer an excuse as to why that wouldn't work. He wasn't willing to see reason with any information he was given." Similarly, an older teacher recounted an interaction with a younger teacher: "I was trying to make her understand the purpose of using board games to develop social skills for a student I have with Asperger Syndrome. She did not want me to allow him to 'play games' in the classroom even though I explained the purpose for this… I believe she was opposed to the idea of trying something

different than what she learned in her classes." A middle-aged person, offering suggestions to an older coworker stated that he, "Would not listen, didn't want to hear anything negative." Likewise, a middle-aged woman describing a peer said that he "refused to see the other side of the conversation,"

Unwanted attention. Respondents described receiving attention they did not want or attention that was inappropriate in their descriptions of dissatisfactory conversations. In one example, a young respondent recalled a conversation with her older boss: "My boss came into my office to discuss another coworker. I asked her to be fair and treat everyone the same. She back peddled and agreed that we should do that." Similarly, a young woman citing a conversation with her peer said, "Began as a work conversation but it turned to personal. She wanted to talk about our 'friendship' and how she didn't feel as though we were as close as we used to be. I explained that I didn't feel as though it was appropriate to share everything about my life with her because we are coworkers. She said that she understood but that she considered me a close friend of hers." In a peer conversation a middle-aged person reported, "Very typical conversation is that he tells me all about his kids or his medical problems. He has no interest in me or most people. He prefers to talk about himself." In another peer example, an older worker wrote, "discussing in-service activity, no goal--just venting. Our planning time is so important and I hate to waste it just listening to someone complain."

Age-Related Underaccommodation. In these few examples, respondents described behaviors directly related to negative old age stereotypes including hearing

problems and dementia. All responses in this category were provided by young and middle-aged respondents writing about dissatisfactory conversations with older coworkers. In one example, a young teacher described the behavior of an older teacher as, "She is 60 years old. She shows signs of dementia and often is lost in thought. . . This causes [sic] frustration, anxiety, anger, sympathy. She asks the same questions over and over again."

In another example, a middle-aged respondent described the ways in which she feels she must modify her own communication to accommodate the needs of an older coworker: "I need to remember to compensate for hearing difficulties by deepening the tone of my voice, facing them, speaking clearly and slowly, and I need to remember that they often don't understand the slang language that I use that I pick up from my teenagers. Adjusting for these two things would make things go more smoothly with most seniors."

Prevalence of underaccommodative communication behaviors in dissatisfactory conversations across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Of the 133 dissatisfactory conversational descriptions, 122 (92%) included at least one reference to an underaccommodative communication behavior. Six respondents recounted two such behaviors. Table 17 shows the frequency of underaccommodative responses described in dissatisfactory conversations. Respondents provided 128 statements about underaccommodative communication behaviors. As column totals reveal, underaccommodative communication was described with consistent frequency across all age groups and regardless of

conversation partner (intergenerational or peer).

Table 17

Frequency of Underaccommodative Communication Behaviors in Dissatisfactory Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Dissatisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub Total
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	
Rudeness	6	7	4	6	6	6	**35**
Out of Touch	3	4	8	6	7	7	**35**
Inattention	5	2	3	4	6	1	**21**
Close Minded	4	2	4	4	2	4	**20**
Unwanted Attention	2	5	1	2	1	2	**13**
Age-Related Underaccom	1	1	2	0	0	0	**4**
Underaccom Total	**21**	**21**	**22**	**22**	**22**	**20**	**128**

Table 17 also reveals, however, that the prevalence of the sub-themes of underaccommodative communication behavior varied somewhat across age groups and conversation type. For instance, middle-aged and older respondents described conversational partners as out of touch more frequently than did the young. Conversely, statements of unwanted attention were provided more often by young participants and in peer conversations. Inattention was found equally across the age groups, but was expressed more often in reports of intergenerational conversations than conversations with peers. The underaccommodative statements of age

stereotypes were expressed by young and middle-aged respondents.

Accommodative communication behaviors in dissatisfactory

conversations. Unlike the descriptions of satisfactory conversations that also

included several reports of underaccommodative communication behaviors,

dissatisfactory conversations included only two statements of accommodative

behaviors. In both, the respondents recognized the underaccommodation may have

been an anomaly. In one instance, a middle-aged person, in a dissatisfactory

encounter with an older coworker stated that normally this person is, "Warm and

fuzzy in that regard." In the other instance, an older participant described a

dissatisfactory conversation with a peer that lacked information but also included,

"cooperation and mutual admiration."

Outcomes of Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Conversations

Some of the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were outcomes

of the conversations. The themes resulting from the conversations included both

positive and negative feelings and the accomplishment or lack of accomplishment of

the goals of the conversation.

Positive and negative feelings. Respondents were asked to describe their

feelings in the conversational descriptions. As anticipated, both positive and negative

feelings emerged from the conversations.

Positive feelings in satisfactory conversations. The positive feelings listed by

respondents constituted four major themes: happiness/joy,

accomplishment/satisfaction, respect, and comfortable/relaxed. Positive feelings were

primarily associated with satisfactory conversations.

Happiness/joy. Respondents frequently expressed feelings of happiness, joy, pleasure, excitement, and good humor. For example, in one satatisfactory conversation, an older respondent described the feeling from a conversation with a younger partner as, "everyone was happy, especially the customer." In another satisfactory example, a young person speaking with a similar-aged coworker conveyed her feelings as, "We both felt great. We laughed and helped people and had fun all day long." A young woman reporting a pleasant conversation with an older coworker said, "Part of the joy was that we laughed. She is very funny." Similarly, a middle-aged woman recalled a satisfactory conversation with an older male coworker as, "happy, positive, cooperative." An older woman speaking with a peer stated, "she made me feel good about myself and our friendship."

Accomplishment/satisfaction. Consistent with workplace conversations, respondents expressed positive feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction from a job well done. A young woman recounted her feelings from a conversation with an older coworker as, "I felt satisfied with the outcome of the project…" Likewise, a middle-aged woman conveyed her feelings from a conversation with a much older male as, "Satisfaction comes from solving a problem, either he helping me or me helping him." A middle-aged woman talking with a peer stated, "I had a feeling of accomplishment; the fact that I hadn't let him down."

Respect. Participants cited positive feelings of respect, appreciation, pride, gratitude, and inclusion resulting from feeling valuable and being a part of the team.

A young nurse, as a result of a conversation with her surgeon, said, "Made me feel like part of the team and made me feel confidant in my job by discussing the patient and the surgery." A middle-aged person described feelings resulting from a conversation with an older coworker as, "It's not necessarily what was said, but a respect and comfort in speaking with someone who understands you." Likewise, an older person expressed feelings resulting from a conversation with an older peer as, "I felt appreciated and respected."

Comfortable/relaxed. Participants described feeling comfortable, relaxed, relieved, or at ease as a result of certain conversations. One young person, recalling a conversation with an older coworker said, "I felt very comfortable with being myself." A middle-aged woman, in a conversation with an older coworker stated, "Very relaxed conversations - productive when they involve work, but otherwise a good exchange" An older worker expressed feelings of comfort with a similar age peer as, "Understanding, empathy, warmth, comfortable, non-threatening."

Positive Feelings in dissatisfactory conversations. Positive feelings themes were most often recalled in descriptions of satisfactory conversations, though not exclusively so. The few positive feelings that were expressed in the dissatisfactory conversations emerged mainly in the subthemes of happiness/joy, satisfaction/accomplishment, and respect. For example, an older person recalling a very frustrating conversation with a younger person expressed his happiness with the outcome: "After I was done I had made a friend. I felt good about helping out this individual." Another respondent, a younger man who had been abruptly corrected by

his older supervisor, described his sense of accomplishment after the dissatisfactory interaction by saying: "I also felt good that I was able to handle the situation on my own and show him I was very able to do so." An older participant who described a difficult conversation with a peer, left feeling, "animated, connected, involved."

Prevalence of positive feelings across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Throughout the conversational descriptions, participants made 143 statements identifying positive feelings as outcomes of the conversation. As shown in Table 18, 136 or 95% of those statements were made in descriptions of satisfactory conversations. Expressions of happiness and joy were the most common positive feelings named as outcomes. Although the frequency of positive feeling statements in reference to satisfactory conversations was similar across age groups whether the respondents were focusing on peer or intergenerational partners, the frequencies suggest that age or the peer/intergenerational nature of the interaction may play a role in which feelings are associated with a conversation characterized as satisfying. Table 18 reveals that younger respondents were somewhat more likely to mention happiness and joy as outcomes than were middle-aged and older respondents, particularly in relation to peer interactions. Middle-aged and older respondents made more references to accomplishment and satisfaction as feeling outcomes than did young respondents. Likewise, those in the two older age groups made more statements about feelings of inclusion and respect in reference to satisfactory conversations with peers than with those from another generation.

Table 18

Frequency of Positive Feeling Themes in Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory
Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Satisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Comfortable or Relaxed	4	1	5	0	0	4	**14**
Accomplishment or Satisfaction	4	3	5	6	5	6	**29**
Happiness Or Joy	14	14	10	5	12	9	**64**
Respect or Inclusion	3	5	2	6	2	8	**26**
Other Positive Feelings	0	0	0	2	1	0	**3**
Positive Subtotal	**25**	**23**	**22**	**19**	**20**	**27**	**136**
Dissatisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Comfortable or Relaxed	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Accomplishment or Satisfaction	0	1	0	1	0	1	**3**
Happiness Or Joy	0	0	2	0	1	0	**3**
Respect or Inclusion	0	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
Other Positive Feelings	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Positive Subtotal	**0**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**7**

Negative feelings in dissatisfactory conversations. In addition to positive

feelings, respondents frequently cited negative feelings, primarily resulting from

dissatisfactory conversations. Four primary themes of negative feelings emerged:

frustration or anger, disrespect, sadness/hurt and discomfort.

Frustration or anger. Many respondents expressed feelings of frustration, anger, or annoyance resulting from dissatisfactory conversations. In one example, a young person described her feelings toward an older coworker as, "frustrated that she would not help." Likewise, a young female conveyed her feelings from a difficult discussion with a similar-aged coworker by writing, *"*I was angry at her for trying to drag me into this conversation." In another peer example, a young man reported his feelings as, "Frustration. I felt like I was trying to drive a toaster through a carwash." A middle-aged person recalling a conversation with an older employee stated, "I was frustrated that she wasn't tracking with what I was saying." Of a conversation with a young employee, an older worker commented, "Was frustrated to have to dig up the data he had also seen and bring out its importance." In a peer conversation, an older worker reported her feelings as, "Anger with the domination of the outcome."

Disrespect. Respondents described some conversations that made them feel disrespected, ignored, or inadequate. For instance, a young person wrote that after a conversation with an older coworker "I felt unappreciated and unheard." A middle-aged person said she felt, "rushed, inhospitable, compromised" as a result of a conversation with an older person. An older person described her feelings of inadequacy resulting from a conversation with a younger person as, "Old and irrelevant." As a final example, a young respondent said that a conversation with a peer left him feeling ". . . as if my opinion carried little value and that my expertise on the subject was not utilized."

Sadness/hurt. Some respondents reported they were left with feelings of sadness, regret, disappointment, and hurt as a result of the conversations. For instance, when a young person asked an older coworker about his grandkids, she said, "I felt sad for he said he didn't have any grandkids." A middle-aged teacher stated she felt, "… hurt that she thought I was a bad coach" as a result of a conversation with an older teacher. In a difficult conversation with a young client, an older worker described her feelings as, "I was offended and hurt." In a peer conversation, an older respondent recorded her feelings as, "left me feeling disappointed and discouraged about reaching out to her in the future."

Discomfort. Some participants described conversations that left them feeling uncomfortable, bored, anxious, confused, embarrassed or otherwise ill at ease. In one example, a young person speaking with an older coworker stated, "Overall I left the conversation feeling uncomfortable and dissatisfied." A middle-aged professional, as a result of a conversation with a peer, described feelings of "awkwardness and surprise. Discomfort in knowing how to end the conversation because it felt so uncomfortable." An older professor described an uncomfortable discussion with a young coworker which, "…included confusion."

Negative feelings in satisfactory conversations. Negative feelings were most closely associated with dissatisfactory conversations, however, not solely. In several instances, participants described negative feelings resulting from otherwise satisfactory conversations. For example, in a satisfactory conversational description, a young woman described accomplishing a goal that was satisfactory overall but took

too long to complete, resulting in feelings of frustration. She wrote that at the end of the conversation she was feeling "frustration mostly, but that was a remnant of the waiting." In another satisfactory conversation, a middle-aged male recounted helping an older coworker with a technology problem resulting in feelings of "frustration" but also included "satisfaction and success."

Prevalence of negative feelings across types of conversations and respondent age groups. Respondents made 140 statements of negative feelings as outcomes of the conversations. Table 19 shows that 119 or 85% of the negative feelings were expressed in the descriptions of dissatisfactory conversations. The most prevalent negative feelings identified as outcomes of the conversations were feelings of frustration or anger, accounting for 53% of all negative feelings cited in dissatisfactory conversations.

While middle-aged and older respondents reported fewer negative feelings resulting from intergenerational than from peer conversations, young respondents did not. Table 19 also reveals that young respondents were more likely than middle-aged and older respondents to report feelings of disrespect and discomfort after dissatisfactory intergenerational conversations. In fact, while the there were only a few statements of discomfort, they came almost entirely from young participants reporting outcomes of intergenerational conversations. Finally, Table 19 shows that older participants identified no negative feelings as outcomes of satisfactory conversations, while the young and middle-aged participants provided 21 reports of negative feelings within the context of the satisfactory conversations.

Table 19

Frequency of Negative Feeling Themes in Dissatisfactory and Satisfactory
Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Dissatisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Disrespect	7	3	2	5	4	4	**25**
Frustration or Anger	9	10	13	13	7	11	**63**
Sadness or Hurt	1	4	2	2	3	4	**16**
Discomfort	4	3	1	4	1	2	**15**
Negative Subtotal	**21**	**20**	**18**	**24**	**15**	**21**	119
Satisfactory Conversations							
	Young		Middle		Older		Sub
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Total
Dis-respect	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Frustration or Anger	4	2	3	4	0	0	**13**
Sadness or Hurt	1	0	2	1	0	0	**4**
Discomfort	2	1	1	0	0	0	**4**
Negative Subtotal	**7**	**3**	**6**	**5**	**0**	**0**	21
Total All Negative	**28**	**23**	**24**	**29**	**15**	**21**	**140**

Goal accomplishment. Respondents were asked to describe the details of the

encounter, including its outcome and whether the respondent's goal for the

conversation was accomplished. Each conversational description ($N = 266$) was

assigned a code for goal accomplishment based upon the conversational description.

For example, the description of a goal accomplished provided by a young participant in a peer satisfactory conversation stated, "I asked her how to handle a work situation with some other ladies our age – she told me the best way to handle differing views; (We) accomplished the goals." A goal not accomplished described by a young participant in a dissatisfactory intergenerational conversation with an older participant read, "I did not get the information I needed for my trip. I had to call in."

Respondents included information about the goal outcome in over two-thirds of the conversational descriptions ($N = 195$ or 73%), with more reporting that goals were accomplished ($N = 134$ or 50%) than not accomplished ($N = 58$ or 22%). A few responses described outcomes where some goals were accomplished, but not others ($N = 3$ or 1%).

As shown in Table 20, reports of goal accomplishment ($N = 134$) occurred more frequently in descriptions of satisfactory conversations ($N = 96$ or 72%) than dissatisfactory conversations ($N = 38$ or 29%). However, participant descriptions indicated that goals could be accomplished even though the conversation itself was unsatisfactory. For example, an older respondent described a dissatisfactory conversation with a peer by stating, "She accomplished her goal of transferring her duties, but I did not have any input." Similarly, a young person describing a dissatisfactory conversation with a peer stated, "I accomplished my goals but it took longer than it should have."

Table 20

Frequency of Goal Accomplishment in Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Conversations by Participant Age and Type of Conversation

Satisfactory Conversations

	Young		Middle		Older		Sub Total
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	
Goal Accomplished	16	15	17	14	16	18	**96**
Goal Not Accomplished	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
No Clear Goal Outcome	4	5	5	8	6	6	**34**
Some Yes/ Some No	1	1	0	1	0	0	**3**
Subtotal	**21**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**22**	**24**	**133**

Dissatisfactory Conversations

	Young		Middle		Older		Sub Total
	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	Intergen	Peer	
Goal Accomplished	9	6	10	2	6	5	**38**
Goal Not Accomplished	7	11	7	13	9	11	**58**
No Clear Goal Outcome	6	4	4	8	7	8	**37**
Some Yes/ Some No	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Subtotal	**22**	**21**	**21**	**23**	**22**	**24**	**133**

In contrast, all of the conversations where the goals were not accomplished were in the dissatisfactory conversation category. In several of these descriptions, the respondents seem to indicate that the failure to accomplish the conversational goals derived from the general dissatisfactory nature of the interaction. For example, a young respondent described the goal outcome of a dissatisfactory peer conversation

by stating, "The goals were not accomplished since I felt a bit 'cut off' and that he was taking over the conversation with a pessimistic attitude." In another example, a middle-aged person describing a dissatisfactory conversation with a peer wrote, "We finally agreed to disagree. She was very rude and didn't make sense. I felt awful and we are not friends anymore."

Table 20 reveals that this pattern of results held across participant age groups and descriptions of peer and intergenerational conversations. Together these results suggest that in workplace conversations, whether a stated or implied goal is accomplished is closely associated with conversational satisfaction.

Results Summary

Results from the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale partially supported hypothesis 1. As predicted, young and older participants rated their satisfaction with peer conversations significantly higher than intergenerational conversations. Middle-aged participants indicated equal levels of satisfaction with peer and intergenerational conversations.

In response to research question 1, emergent theme analysis of the workplace conversations revealed that satisfactory conversations are closely associated with accommodative communication behaviors, positive feelings, and goal accomplishment in both peer and intergenerational conversations. Dissatisfactory conversations are associated with underaccommodative communication behaviors, negative feelings, and goal non-accomplishment in both peer and intergenerational conversations. Hierarchy and age related language, both factual statements of age and

age descriptions with meaning, were used to describe partners in most of the

conversational workplace descriptions.

Chapter Four: Discussion

As the population ages, the workforce in America is aging. Employees are choosing to stay in the workforce longer for a variety of reasons, creating environments where older employees face both barriers and opportunities in the workplace. They continue to experience age bias, age stereotypes, and age discrimination that limit growth opportunities. At the same time, employers are seeking more ways to hire and retain experienced workers and slow the lost knowledge that occurs as the baby boomers retire. Employers realize the need to transfer knowledge and experience from senior employees to younger employees by fostering opportunities for positive intergenerational communication (DeLong, 2004). Despite the scope of the situation and the importance of intergenerational communication in the workplace, little research has been conducted in this area (McCann & Giles, 2002). The purpose of this research was to extend the intergenerational communication literature by employing established research methodology to explore intergenerational and peer communication in the workplace. This study investigated satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations for both intergenerational and peer conversation partners across young, middle, and older age groups.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants in all age groups would rate workplace conversations with peers more satisfying than intergenerational workplace conversations. Results from 165 responses to the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale, a modified version of the Hecht Interpersonal Communication

Satisfaction Inventory (1978) supported this hypothesis for young and older participants. Contrary to expectations, middle-aged participants rated satisfaction of intergenerational conversations much the same as peer conversations.

Research Question 1 sought to identify (a) the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations of both intergenerational and peer conversation partners across the age groups and (b) age salience in workplace conversations. Descriptions of 266 workplace conversations were analyzed to identify the emergent themes of satisfying and dissatisfying workplace conversations. Emergent theme analysis revealed satisfactory workplace conversations, both peer and intergenerational, were associated with communication accommodation, positive feelings, and goal accomplishment. Both peer and intergenerational dissatisfactory workplace conversations were more closely associated with communication underaccommodation, negative feelings, and goal non-accomplishment. Both similarities and differences were noted between intergenerational communication in the workplace and intergenerational communication in different contexts.

This chapter reflects on these results regarding the impact of aging in the workplace including prior research on ageism (Duncan, 2001; McCann & Giles, 2002), age stereotypes (Hummert, 1990; Hummert et al., 1994; Hummert, Garstka, Ryan & Bonneson, 2004), social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Harwood et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1991; Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987), the communication predicament of aging model (Ryan et al., 1986) and the common ingroup identity model (Dovidio,

Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009). Further, the prior intergenerational communication literature, including satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001), grandparent-grandchild relationships (Anderson et al., 2005; Harwood, 1998; Soliz & Harwood, 2006) and accommodative-non accommodative communication behaviors (Giles et al., 2008; McCann & Giles, 2006) were used to frame the discussion of these results. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this research and an outline of suggestions for future research.

Satisfaction with Peer and Intergenerational Communication in the Workplace

The survey results of the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale partially supported the hypothesis. As expected, younger and older participants reported higher levels of conversational satisfaction with their peers in the workplace than with coworkers from another generation. This pattern is consistent with the prior intergenerational communication research which shows that young people favor communication with their own age group over communication with those in other age groups (McCann & Giles, 2006; Williams & Giles, 1996). These studies did not assess conversational satisfaction from the perspective of older or middle-aged adults, however.

The middle-aged participants in the current study, on the other hand, indicated similar levels of conversational satisfaction whether they were directed to consider their peers or older coworkers. This result may be partially explained by the extent of the age differences between participants and the intergenerational coworkers they

were asked to consider. Younger participants, who ranged in age from 18 to 34, were directed to focus on coworkers 20 or more years older than themselves (i.e., ones they perceived to be aged 55 or older). Similarly, older participants were instructed to consider coworkers who were 20 or more years younger than they were (i.e., ones they perceive to be 18 – 34). In contrast, middle-aged participants in the intergenerational condition focused on individuals who, at 55+, may have been only a few years older than the participant him or herself. In fact over 70% of the middle-aged participants fell in the 45-54 age range.

This similarity in age between the middle-aged participants and the intergenerational coworkers they considered may account for the similar levels of satisfaction they reported for peer and intergenerational coworkers. In other words, for these participants, who tended to be in later middle-age, conversations with older coworkers may be more like peer or ingroup conversations than they are for younger individuals. Similarly, Giles et al. (2008) found that middle-aged Canadians rated older targets as more accommodative than younger targets. These authors speculate that their results also reflect the fact that older individuals are closer in age to middle-aged than to younger people, which in turn may mean that there is greater accommodation in middle-aged and older person interactions than in young and older person interactions. The Giles et al. study did not include middle-aged peer targets, thus middle-aged peer results were not available for comparison to the results of this study.

The reports of higher satisfaction with peer than intergenerational

conversations by young and older respondents are consistent with social identity

theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979),

showing that age can be a salient social classification in the workplace just as it is in

other contexts. The responses of middle-aged participants, however, suggest that age

may not be salient when the gap in age between one's peer group and those defined as

being in another age group is small (Giles et al., 2008).

Communication in Satisfactory and Dissatisfactory Workplace Conversations

Communication accommodation and underaccommodation have been

identified as key factors of satisfaction and dissatisfaction respectively in

intergenerational communication (McCann et al, 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996;

Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Emergent theme analysis of the satisfactory and

dissatisfactory workplace conversations identified specific themes and sub-themes of

communication accommodation and underaccommodation. Analysis of these themes

revealed much about the extent to which age is a salient factor in perceptions of

satisfactory and dissatisfactory communication at work. While many of these themes

overlapped with those reported in prior research, they provide insight into the ways in

which the work context influences conceptions of accommodation and

underaccommodation.

Accommodation in Satisfactory Workplace Conversations

Consistent with communication accommodation theory and as shown in prior

research, satisfying conversations were closely associated with accommodative

communication behaviors (Harwood, 2000; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang &

Hummert; 2001). Nearly all of the satisfactory workplace conversational descriptions

-- whether of interactions with peer or intergenerational coworkers, or whether

offered by young, middle-aged, or older respondents -- included descriptions of

accommodative communication behaviors. Four accommodative communication

behavior themes emerged in the conversational descriptions: (1) Mutuality, i.e.,

shared or equal exchanges between coworkers; (2) Interpersonal competence, i.e., the

use of positive communication skills such as complimenting, actively listening,

articulating, or showing kindness to enhance the conversation; (3) Mentoring, i.e., one

conversational partner coaching, complimenting, or encouraging the other in a way to

benefit his or her career; and (4) Helping, i.e., assisting another coworker in the

completion of a task or solving a problem.

Three of the themes of accommodative communication behavior that emerged

were similar to categories of accommodation identified in prior intergenerational

communication research or defined in prior literature. These themes were mutuality

(Williams & Giles, 1996), helping (Zhang & Hummert, 2001), interpersonal

competence or positive communication behaviors (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002; Zhang

& Hummert, 2001). However, one theme, mentoring, was unique to the workplace.

Prior accommodation research described supportive communication

accommodation such as parental encouragement of intergenerational communication

(Soliz & Harwood, 2006) or socioemotional support (Williams & Giles, 1996), but

mentoring emerged in the descriptions of workplace conversation as a specific form

of social support directed at advancing the conversational partner's career. For

example, one participant described her satisfactory conversation as, "We talk a lot about best practices. She has tried lots of things to help the students. I needed something new and she gave me some good ideas. . . . The best part is that I know she wants to help me. She wants me to succeed."

Even for the three themes identified in prior research, the specific examples provided within the themes were sometimes substantially different in the workplace descriptions. Examples include the following. The accommodative communication behavior of 'helping' in prior intergenerational research was described as encouraging or supporting younger conversational partners (Zhang & Hummert, 2001). In the workplace, helping was described as assisting in the accomplishment of a task. For example, one respondent described the helping behavior of a coworker as, "He sat with me at my computer and guided me on how to perform the task."
In the workplace, the communicative accommodation described as interpersonal competence, or positive communication behaviors, included complimenting, listening, and being polite. These behaviors are conversational tactics that enhanced the conversations, similar to the description of interpersonal competence used by Sptizberg and Cupach (2002). Such behaviors are somewhat different from the positive communication behaviors described by Zhang and Hummert (2001) that included showing support and caring that made the recipient feel loved and provided for.

The role of age in perceptions of satisfactory workplace conversations.
Accommodation themes appeared equally important in descriptions of peer and

intergenerational conversations by participants in all age groups. However, the form of accommodative behavior (i.e., mutuality, interpersonal competence, mentoring, or helping) referenced in the descriptions did vary either in its association with the age of the conversational partner, the age of the participant, or both.

Mutuality, an equal exchange between coworkers, was the most frequently referenced accommodative behavior, but appeared to be an especially distinguishing characteristic of satisfactory peer conversations. Participants in all age groups made more references to mutuality when describing satisfactory peer conversations than intergenerational conversations. The descriptions of mutually shared exchanges were more relationship-oriented and often included a social element. For example: "many of our conversations are about social aspects of our lives. . ." or "catching up on work and personal stuff. . ." or "talked about family events and spring break trip. . ." or ". . .we talk about kids and grandkids." One explanation for peers more often describing mutual accommodative communication behaviors is that in the workplace, employees may be more likely to seek out mutual relationships with coworkers of a similar age. This explanation is consistent with the survey data from this study showing that younger and older participants found peer conversations more satisfying than intergenerational conversations and with results of prior research (McCann et al. 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996).

Other forms of accommodation were described much less frequently than mutuality, but also provided insights into the role of age in conversational satisfaction at work. Mentoring, which involved one conversational partner coaching,

complimenting or encouraging a coworker in ways to benefit his or her career, was

found almost exclusively in the accounts of young and middle aged respondents.

Further, it was referenced by participants in these age groups more often to describe

intergenerational conversations with an older coworker than with a peer. Supporting

the association of the act of mentoring with older individuals, the two references to

mentoring by older participants addressed the satisfaction received from mentoring a

younger coworker. Mentoring behaviors may be related to roles in the workplace.

Older employees are much more likely to be in managerial or supervisory positions or

positions of influence and are likely to have more experience. Therefore, young and

middle-aged participants are more likely to be in a position to be mentored than older

participants.

Other differences noted by age or conversational partner were more subtle.

Interpersonal competence, which included descriptions of behaviors such as

complimenting the partner, listening attentively, articulating, or showing kindness,

were more prominent in young participants' accounts of satisfactory conversations

than those of middle-aged and older participants. In addition, however, both older and

younger participants referenced interpersonally competent behaviors more often when

describing satisfactory conversations with an intergenerational coworker than with a

peer. Finally, the accommodative communication behavior of helping was described

consistently in both peer and intergenerational conversations, although somewhat less

by middle-aged participants than by young and older ones.

Consistent with these conclusions, Zhang and Hummert (2001) found that

both young and older participants described intergenerational communication accommodation behaviors in satisfactory conversations, although the types of accommodation described differed by age. To date, however, little intergenerational communication research has compared the specific types of accommodative communication behaviors in peer and intergenerational conversations to identify how the types of accommodation may differ by conversational partner. However, there is support for the evidence reported here that the general performance of accommodative communication is similar in peer and intergenerational interactions. For example, Giles et al. (2008) found that young and older participants gave similar ratings of accommodation to both peer and intergenerational conversational partners. Other studies also found that age was not significant in determining accommodation (McCann et al., 2003; McCann & Giles, 2006). These results at least partially support the similarities noted between the accommodative communication behaviors described in peer and intergenerational conversations.

   Outcomes of satisfactory workplace conversations and the impact of age. Positive feelings and goal accomplishment were common outcomes of satisfactory workplace conversations with respondents describing at least one positive feeling resulting from the exchange, including happiness/joy, accomplishment/satisfaction, respect/inclusion, or feeling comfortable or relaxed. Young participants described feeling happiness or joy, the most commonly described feeling, somewhat more often than middle-aged and older participants and middle-aged and older participants described happiness more often as an outcome of intergenerational than peer

conversations. Older and middle-aged participants described feeling accomplishment or satisfaction somewhat more often than did the young respondents. Feelings of respect or inclusion were stated more often in reference to peer than intergenerational conversations by those in all age groups.

In addition to descriptions of positive feelings, several young and middle-aged participants included descriptions of negative feelings resulting from satisfactory conversations. Interestingly, no older participants described negative feelings resulting from satisfactory conversations.

Prior research identified positive feelings resulting from intergenerational conversations, including happiness, relaxation, high self esteem (Williams & Giles, 1996), feelings of security, and feeling loved (Zhang & Hummert, 2001). These feelings were described as a "positive dimension of accommodative talk" and resulted from positive interpersonal interaction; i.e., "She was smiling and laughing and in turn made me smile and laugh (Williams & Giles, 1996, p. 239) or "I always feel loved when I am with (older adults)" (Zhang & Hummert, 2001, p.210). Positive feelings in the workplace were at times the result of accommodative behaviors and interpersonal interactions, similar to prior research; i.e., "I was happy and we laughed" or "he enjoys my company and I enjoy his." However, unique to the workplace, some positive feelings resulted from completion of a task or accomplishment of a goal; i.e., "I felt satisfied at the outcome of the project" or "I was pleased to have our task done so quickly." The task orientation of many workplace conversations adds an additional dimension to workplace interactions.

Interpersonal interactions are discussed in greater detail in the section below titled, 'Implications for Satisfactory Peer and Intergenerational Communication in the Workplace.'

Goal accomplishment was a common outcome of satisfactory conversations, identified in most satisfactory conversational descriptions and with consistent frequency across all age groups and conversation partners. Goal accomplishment is unique to the context of workplace conversations, reflecting the goal or task orientation of many of the workplace conversational descriptions. Unlike positive feelings that have been discussed in prior intergenerational communication research, goal accomplishment is an outcome that has not previously been investigated. Goal accomplishment was not a criterion for conversational satisfaction as not all satisfactory conversations included accomplished goals, and a few stated that the goal was only partially accomplished.

Underaccommodation in Dissatisfactory Workplace Conversations

Consistent with communication accommodation theory, and reported in prior research, dissatisfactory workplace conversations were closely associated with underaccommodative communication behaviors (McCann et al., 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Nearly all of the dissatisfactory conversational descriptions, across all age groups and whether in intergenerational or peer conversations, included accounts of underaccommodative communication behaviors. Six underaccommodative communication behavior themes emerged in the conversational descriptions: (1) Rudeness, i.e., demeaning language, omitting

pleasantries, walking away, or rambling; (2) Out of touch, i.e., not connecting with the conversational partner or a conversational partner who does not 'get it' including misunderstanding or ineptitude; (3) Inattention, i.e., being disinterested, not listening, or not paying attention; (4) Close minded, i.e., not considering another's point of view; (5) Unwanted attention, i.e. interference or being presented with information that was intrusive, uncomfortable, or inappropriate; (6) Age stereotypes, i.e., communication limitations attributed directly to old age impairments such as hearing difficulties or dementia.

The themes of underaccommodative communication behaviors in dissatisfactory workplace conversations were similar to those identified in prior intergenerational communication research: rudeness, out of touch, inattention, close minded, unwanted attention, and age stereotypes (Giles et al., 2008; Williams & Giles, 1996). While the emergent themes were similar, the specific examples within the themes were at times substantially different in workplace conversations.

Differences in underaccommodative communication behaviors in the workplace include the following examples. The theme of 'out of touch' was previously described as the older conversational partner being out of touch with current fashions or cultural trends (Williams & Giles; 1996). In the workplace, out of touch was described as not being able to connect with the conversational partner or being unable to perform a given task. As an example, one respondent described an out of touch coworker as, "I really wanted to help her, but I was frustrated that she wasn't tracking with what I was saying."

Unwanted attention was described in previous research as offering a conversational partner food when they were not interested or discussing topics of little or no interest to the respondent (Williams & Giles, 1996). Unwanted attention in workplace conversations was described somewhat differently as someone interfering where they were not wanted or sharing information that should not be shared. One respondent described unwanted attention as, "I had a little anger for him stepping into a situation and trying to take control."

Williams and Giles (1996) identified an underaccommodative theme they titled communication restrictions that included physical impairments that restricted conversation. In the workplace, a similar age-related underaccommodation theme referenced age limitations such as hearing problems and dementia. Williams and Giles divided the themes of inattention and nonlistening. In the workplace, being inattentive and not listening were combined into a single theme of inattention as the two were difficult to differentiate in workplace conversations.

The role of age in perceptions of dissatisfactory workplace conversations. The overarching theme of underaccommodative communication behaviors was described with consistent frequency and importance across all age groups and regardless of conversational partner when participants were describing dissatisfactory conversations. However, the individual sub-themes of underaccommodation (rudeness, out of touch, inattention, close minded, unwanted attention, or age-related underaccommodation) described in the workplace conversational descriptions showed some variation by the age of the participants or by conversational partner. References

to their partners being out of touch were made more often by middle-aged and older respondents regarding both peer and intergenerational conversations than by young participants. Inattention or not listening was expressed by all age groups but more often by young and older participants about intergenerational conversations than conversations with their peers. Unwanted attention was described most often by young participants in peer conversations. Age stereotypes, an underaccommodation directly associated with aging impairments, were provided by young and middle-aged participants usually describing older coworkers.

Prior intergenerational communication research has shown dissatisfactory intergenerational conversations to be associated with underaccommodative behaviors (McCann et al., 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Older conversational partners are consistently seen as more underaccommodative than younger partners and age has been shown to be a predictor of underaccommodative communication behaviors (Giles et al., 2008; McCann et al., 2003; McCann et al., 2006). However, the results of this research in the context of the workplace show that underaccommodative communication behaviors were described in dissatisfactory conversations with equal frequency across young, middle, and older age groups, and in regard to both peer and intergenerational workplace conversations. One potential explanation for the similarities is that the focus of workplace conversations described in this research was more interpersonal than intergroup. Similar to the research of Soliz and Harwood (2006), who revealed that shared family identity served to minimize age salience, organizational identity may also emphasize ingroup

interaction and de-emphasize age. The implications of this explanation in relation to the salience of age in the workplace will be considered later in this chapter.

      Outcomes of dissatisfactory workplace conversations and the impact of age. Negative feelings were identified by Williams and Giles (1996) as common characteristics of dissatisfactory conversations. Similarly, participants identified negative feelings resulting from most dissatisfactory workplace conversations in this study, including frustration or anger (the most frequently mentioned theme), disrespect, sadness or hurt, and discomfort. Only a few descriptions of negative feelings differed by age group and conversational partner. Specifically, middle-aged and older respondents, but not young respondents, reported fewer negative feelings from intergenerational than peer conversations. On the other hand, young participants were more likely to identify feelings of disrespect and discomfort than were middle-aged and older participants.

      Prior research identified negative feelings resulting from interpersonal conversations as anger, frustration, anxiety, sadness, powerlessness (Williams & Giles, 1996), boredom, and feeling patronized (Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Prior research has also shown negative feelings resulting from intergenerational conversations have caused young people to avoid conversations with older conversational partners (McCann & Giles, 2006; McCann et al., 2003). In the workplace, similar negative feelings resulted from underaccommodative communication behaviors in dissatisfactory conversations. However, in the workplace, avoidance may not be an option due to the demands of one's position.

Goal non-accomplishment, unique to workplace conversations, was identified as an outcome in about half of the dissatisfactory conversational descriptions. Substantial numbers of dissatisfactory conversations included descriptions of goals that were accomplished or where the goal outcome was not identified. Goal non-accomplishment, while common in dissatisfactory conversations, was not a necessary criterion for conversational dissatisfaction. Interpersonal interaction was also important in determining dissatisfaction. In some examples of dissatisfactory conversation, the conversational goals were accomplished, but the interaction was so uncomfortable that the overall outcome was dissatisfaction. For example, a middle-aged respondent described a dissatisfactory interaction with an older coworker as, "requesting info on technical feasibility for a feature requested by a customer. Exchanges included trying to keep the conversation on topic, and not about his boat. Eventually got an answer for the specific questions that I asked. Frustration at having to keep the conversation on topic, and knowing I was missing possible enhancements and details." Interpersonal interaction is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Implications for Satisfactory Peer and Intergenerational Communication in the Workplace

The analysis of the conversational descriptions revealed that satisfactory workplace conversations were closely associated with accommodative communication behaviors, positive feelings, and goal accomplishment, whereas dissatisfactory conversations were closely associated with underaccommodative communication behaviors, negative feelings and goal non-accomplishment. Yet the

results were not consistent across the conversational descriptions, suggesting that no single element was sufficient to define the necessary components of a satisfactory or dissatisfactory conversation. The conversational descriptions were complex. Although respondents may have provided an overall characterization of a conversation as satisfactory or dissatisfactory, their descriptions, in some instances, included both accommodative and underaccommodative communication behaviors, mixed feelings, and mixed goal resolution. Unfortunately, the current analysis examined retrospective accounts and so cannot provide insights into how these factors interact to leave respondents with an overall sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Two examples illustrate this point. First, in satisfactory conversations, displaying accommodative communication behaviors may generate positive feelings that may create an environment more conducive to goal accomplishment. A second and alternative path to satisfaction is that the shared desire to accomplish a goal may encourage accommodative communication behaviors that result in positive feelings. The same relationships may underlie reports of dissatisfactory conversations. Underaccommodative behaviors may lead to negative feelings that may limit the ability to accomplish goals. Or, disagreement or lack of clarity about goals may lead to underaccommodative communication behaviors and negative feelings. Future research should investigate the interaction of (under)accommodation, goal (non)accomplishment, and feelings regarding their impact on conversational (dis)satisfaction and look for potential causal relationships.

Conceptions of Age in the Work Context

Most of the conversational descriptions included some statement of the partner's age as participants were asked to identify the age of their conversational partner. While many of the descriptions were simple statements of chronological age, many of the participants also described their partner's age in terms of tenure or employment age. For example, age descriptions included the partner's years until retirement, years in their current position, or years with the company. Using different criteria to establish age is consistent with recent research that identified as many as five different meanings of workplace age including chronological age, functional or performance-based age, psychological or subjective age, organizational age, and the lifespan concept of age (Kooij, Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008). As employees may not be aware of the chronological age of their coworkers, they instead base their perceptions of age on factors such as motivation (Kooij et al., 2008), or negative attitudes toward work (including a strong desire to retire), and intergenerational competition (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008).

Chronological age has been shown to serve as an index or proxy for other age-related characteristics. Individuals of the same chronological age may differ significantly regarding health, ability, or other meaning classification (Kooij et al., 2008). Giles et al., (2008) identified a relationship between age and vitality. In addition to chronological age, Kooij et al. (2008) found that in the workplace, age can be conceptualized based upon work performance, psychological or subjective attributes such as health, looks, or age stereotypes, tenure or years to retirement, or a

person's life stage such as family status. These different age indices may be more influential in establishing age cohorts in the workplace than chronological age.

Age Stereotypes and Age Bias in Workplace Conversations

While many of the age descriptions of the conversational partners were neutral statements of chronological age or tenure/employment age, some of the age descriptions included clear statements of age bias or age stereotypes. Age talk, including age stereotyping and ageist language in the workplace is important as it has been shown to hinder hiring, training, and advancement opportunities (Duncan, 2001; Kite & Johnson, 1988; McCann & Giles, 2002). Some of these conversational descriptions contained age talk that enforced negative age stereotypes and age bias. For example, the young and middle-aged participants described older coworkers as "kind of absent minded" or "curt and to the point." Older employees described young employees as not showing "much initiative" or acting "very immature." Intergenerational conversational descriptions contained more negative age talk than did peer conversations and, consistent with prior research, dissatisfactory conversations contained more negative age talk than satisfactory conversations (Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). Unlike much of existing intergenerational communication research, the workplace conversational descriptions included only a few descriptions of physical impairments associated with old age such as hearing problems, loss of memory, or dementia.

Prior research has shown that not all age stereotypes are negative (Hummert et al., 1994), and that positive age stereotypes can trigger more positive

communication cycles in intergenerational communication (Hummert et al., 1998). Similarly, not all age talk or age stereotypes in workplace conversations were negative. Positive age talk was used to describe characteristics of intergenerational conversational partners associated with positive age stereotypes. For instance, younger and middle-aged employees described older coworkers as, "Motherly, nice, easy to talk to," and "very sharp, energetic." Older participants described younger employees as, "bright young employees coming along to take over," or "eager to learn."

Peer conversations also contained examples of both positive and negative age talk and age stereotyping. Age talk was more likely to be negative in dissatisfactory peer conversations and more likely to be positive in satisfactory peer conversations. Consistent with prior research, older participants have been shown to apply both positive and negative age stereotypes when describing other older individuals (Hummert et al., 1994). Most prior intergenerational research has not included a comparative analysis of peer conversations.

Is some cases, respondents stated that age should not be emphasized in workplace conversations. For example, one respondent stated, "I am not inclined to think this was a matter of age, rather more a matter of personality," another said, "I notice no difference in conversations across various age groups," and another noted, "I believe it is the flexibility and personality of the teachers and not their age."

Organizational Hierarchy and Friendship: Alternatives to Age in Defining Work Relationships

Age was not the only way in which participants described their relationship to their conversational partners in the work context. Most participants provided information about the hierarchical position of their conversational partner, usually in relationship to themselves. For example, "He is my boss," or "We are peers." While hierarchy was mentioned frequently and consistently by participants of all ages and in both peer and intergenerational conversations, it was most often mentioned as a neutral fact and seldom carried emotion or implied meaning. Hierarchy, unique to workplace conversations, is central to the thinking of people in organizations and contributes to their understanding of self (Trevino, Weaver, & Brown, 2008). Respondents are vividly aware of their position in their organization relative to others. Consistent with social identity theory, organizational hierarchy is a salient point of intergroup comparison (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2001).

In addition to hierarchy, friendship emerged as a conversational theme. Several participants described their conversational partner as a friend, identifying a relationship that extends beyond a traditional working relationship. Friendship was most often mentioned in satisfactory conversations, used to describe peers rather than intergenerational conversational partners, and by the young more often than middle-aged and older participants. Prior intergenerational research has considered the impact of existing relationships, both the type of the relationships and the closeness of the relationship. Anderson et al., (2005) found that the closeness of the grandparent-

grandchild relationship was a predictor of age adaptive communication behaviors but relationship type (grandparent-grandchild versus other older individual) actually predicted negative age stereotyping rather than positive age stereotyping as predicted, stressing the need for further work in this area. However, the references to hierarchy and friendship reinforce the notion that age may not be the only way in which workers define their group membership and relationships.

Implications for Theory: The Salience of Age in the Work Context

While the workplace conversational descriptions included examples of age stereotypes and ageist language in some instances, overall the results showed that age related talk in workplace conversations was often more descriptive than judgmental or evaluative. Consistent with social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) the participants were aware of the age of their conversational partners relative to their own age. However, age appeared to play a minimal role in their descriptions of workplace conversations. Prior research reveals different results regarding the impact of age salience in intergenerational conversations. Anderson et al., (2005) found that the age of the older target did not predict stereotyping or age adaptive behavior. Soliz and Harwood (2006) however, found that group identity (in this case, family identity) moderated the impact of age. This same result may hold true in the workplace where shared company identifications may create ingroups that are more salient than age. These results of comparison between peer and intergenerational workplace conversations present opportunities for further research to better understand the impact of age salience in workplace conversations.

Review of the characteristics of satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations raise the question regarding group identity in the workplace. In most intergenerational conversation research, emphasis is placed on intergroup conversational differences that emphasize age differences. However, participants in intergenerational workplace conversations, where age may be less salient and company identifications more salient, may experience greater ingroup identification than intergroup identification based upon age. Part of the explanation may be operational and part theoretical. Operationally, in some intergenerational research, participants were asked to describe 'conversations in general' with people of a certain age group (McCann & Giles, 2006; Zhang & Hummert, 2001). This directive places emphasis on age and causes the participants to identify age characteristics associated with the specified age group, enforcing age stereotypes. This 'conversations in general' approach was used to administer the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale that showed significant differences between peer and intergenerational conversational satisfaction at the young and older ages.

The directive given to the participants when describing workplace conversations was to describe a recent satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversation with a person from a specified age group. This method has also been used in intergenerational communication research (Soliz & Harwood, 2006; Williams & Giles, 1996). While this method also emphasizes the age of the conversational partner, focusing on a conversation with a specific person may place greater emphasis on the interpersonal exchanges of that conversation. With this method, the emphasis

is on the interpersonal characteristics of a particular conversational partner rather than a summary of 'conversations in general' with a specified age group.

Theoretically, this reasoning is consistent with the common ingroup identity model, which describes that situations that emphasize interpersonal qualities tend to de-emphasize intergroup differences (Dovidio et al., 2009). Consistent with social identity theory, the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) posits that individuals with shared goals will re-categorize to create ingroup similarities and alter intergroup boundaries. In the workplace, employees of different age groups may likely create ingroups based upon shared goals or company identity that de-emphasize age differences.

These results are also consistent with the age stereotypes in interaction model which demonstrates how intergenerational interaction may initiate positive feedback cycles (Hummert, 1994; Hummert et al., 2004). The age stereotypes in interaction model posits that positive intergenerational cycles result from interactions in which the self esteem of the perceiver, characteristics of the older target, and conversational context interact in ways that result in positive age stereotyping. Workplace conversations promote positive intergenerational interactions as age-related health problems that would reinforce old age stereotypes are unlikely to be evident, and the work context emphasizes competence. In addition, older workers may be in positions of authority more than younger workers. In contrast, other contexts, such as a retirement home, may trigger negative age stereotypes that would lead to the negative feedback cycle described in the communicative predicament of aging model (Ryan et

al., 1986).

At the same time, the fewer differences noted by age and conversational partner in the interpersonal conversational descriptions than in the 'conversations in general' rating of the scale suggests that those individual encounters have not yet altered the age stereotypical impressions of intergenerational workplace conversations at the group level. This is consistent with prior research demonstrating that positive relationships with individual older persons do not always affect age stereotypes at the group level (Anderson et al., 2005; Harwood et al., 2005). Harwood et al., (2005) found that more frequent, positive, interpersonal communication is necessary to change the overall impressions of intergenerational communication at the group level. Participants in this study reported rather infrequent interaction with people of a different age group, with the majority reporting less than six hours per week interacting with people of a different age group, which may explain the results of this study.

Strengths, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

This research heeds the call to extend the study of intergenerational communication into the workplace (McCann & Giles, 2002). This research successfully accomplished that goal by adapting and transforming existing research methodology applied to a new context – the workplace. Accessing a large sample of working adults was a strength of this study. This sample of adult employees provided a wide range of participants to allow for comparisons across age groups, conversational partners, and conversation type. Participants in this research were

young, middle-aged, and older working adult, providing an extension to prior research which often included just younger participants or young and older participants (McCann et al., 2003; Soliz & Harwood, 2006; Williams & Giles, 1996; Zhang & Hummert, 2001.) Another important extension of this research was the comparison between peer and intergenerational conversation partners. Prior research has often attributed intergenerational communication accommodation and underaccommodation to age differences. Including comparisons to peer conversations sheds new light on these findings.

The development of the Satisfaction with Workplace Conversations Scale, a quantitative survey methodology based upon the Hecht (1978) Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory, in combination with qualitative open-ended, recalled descriptions of conversations (Williams & Giles, 1996) provided a broad array of information for analysis and comparison. The Satisfaction with Workplace Communications Scale provided comparisons of workplace conversational satisfaction between intergenerational and peer conversation partners at young, middle, and older ages. The between subjects design in the survey administration eliminated the need for participants to complete the survey twice.

Detailed descriptions of both satisfactory and dissatisfactory workplace conversations provided rich descriptions in an area where little information currently exists. Conducting emergent theme analysis of the conversational descriptions using the NVivo8 Qualitative Analysis Software provided a systematic method of reviewing the descriptions and refining emergent themes. NVivo8 provided assistance

identifying emergent themes, tracking frequencies, and making comparisons by age group, conversation partner, and conversation type.

E-mail and on-line data collection was both a strength and a weakness of this research. On-line data collection is an efficient method of gathering data, and is consistent with the communication patterns of working adults (Forrester Research, Inc., 2009). E-mail methodology allowed the participants to share the information that was most personally relevant without being influenced by an interviewer. Many of the resulting conversational descriptions included significant detail of interactions, contexts, and feelings. However, the level of detail provided in some of the conversational descriptions was a potential limitation. On-line data collection may not present information that is as rich as face-to-face interviews (Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987). Probing questions cannot be used in an on-line format to seek further understanding or further clarification of the conversational descriptions. Seeking ways to increase the level of detail provided in on-line data-collection for future research will enhance this methodology and offer greater insight into conversational dynamics.

The mix of men and women in the sample was a limitation in this study, as the sample included more women than men. Ideally, the sample would reflect equal numbers of men and women, with ample representation of both to conduct further analysis by gender. Future workplace research that included analysis by additional demographics such as education level, management status, or ethnicity would also be valuable.

The sample for this study was collected using a snowball methodology that resulted in participants from different types of corporate organizations and educational institutions. Future research should consider drawing a sample from a single large employer or a single industry to investigate possible cultural differences across industries (McCann & Giles, 2006).

Existing relationships were often described in the workplace conversational descriptions such as friendship, peers, or superior-subordinate relationships. This research noted the different types of relationships described in the conversational descriptions but did not investigate the impact of existing relationships. Future intergenerational workplace research should consider the type and depth of existing relationships between coworkers including hierarchy, friendship, or rivalries.

Intergenerational communication research in the workplace should also consider different interpretations of age. In this research, chronological age and tenured age were both used in the descriptions. As many as five different measures of age have been identified in the workplace (Kooij et al., 2008) that should be considered for future research.

In sum, this study was designed to identify differences and similarities in satisfaction with workplace communication that reflect the relative age of coworkers. Although it has accomplished that goal, it cannot provide a definitive answer to the question about why those age effects identified exist in workplace interactions. This is the primary question that should be the focus of future research. The specific

research directions outlined above will hopefully assist scholars in answering this larger question.

Conclusions

This study contributed to the literature by extending the study of intergenerational communication into the workplace. Results of the Satisfaction in Workplace Conversations Scale revealed that both young and older participants rated peer conversations as more satisfactory than intergenerational conversations. Middle-aged participants rated satisfaction with intergenerational workplace conversations similar to peer conversations. One explanation is that the groups are close in age, and therefore relate to one another more like peers than intergenerational conversation partners. Another explanation may be that older workers find it easier to accommodate to middle-aged than to younger workers, and middle-aged workers recognize this accommodation (Giles et al., 2008).

Results of the emergent theme analysis revealed that satisfactory workplace conversations were characterized by accommodative communication behaviors, positive feelings, and goal accomplishment in both peer and intergenerational conversations. Dissatisfactory workplace conversations were characterized by underaccommodative communication behaviors, negative feelings, and goal non-accomplishment in both peer and intergenerational conversations. This research revealed that the overall themes of accommodation and underaccommodation in workplace conversations were similar to the accommodation and underaccommodation in prior intergenerational research (Williams & Giles, 1996;

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Zhang & Hummert, 2001). However, the specific examples within the overall themes provided in workplace conversations differed substantially from the prior examples in other contexts, often reflecting the greater task or goal orientation of workplace conversations.

Differences in accommodative and underaccommodative communication behaviors were noted between peer and intergenerational conversational partners and by young, middle-aged, and older participants. However, the overarching themes of accommodation and underaccommodation were described with consistent frequency whether in reference to peer or intergenerational conversational partners, or by young, middle-aged, or older participants. One explanation may be an ingroup versus intergroup communication orientation in workplace conversations. Similar to the findings in Soliz and Harwood (2006) regarding group identity, workplace conversations may reduce age salience by emphasizing ingroup interactions based upon shared company identity or shared goals rather than emphasizing intergroup interactions based upon age. This reasoning is consistent with the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Age talk and age stereotypes, both positive and negative, were used to describe conversational partners by those in all age groups, in both intergenerational and peer conversational descriptions, and in both satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations. Age talk included several meanings of age, including chronological age, tenured age and years until retirement. In workplace conversational descriptions, age talk was often more descriptive than judgmental. Workplace conversational

descriptions included only a few mentions of old age impairments such as poor hearing, shaking, or loss of memory. Consistent with the Age Stereotypes in Interaction Model (Hummert, 1994; Hummert et al., 2004), healthy, active employees and workplace environments appear less likely to trigger old age cues that lead to more negative age stereotyping. Overall, this research successfully extends the existing body of intergenerational communication research and offers exciting opportunities for future research.

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Appendix A: Peer Survey, All Ages

Note: Two versions of the peer survey were administered, with the only difference in the two versions being the order the participants were asked to describe satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations

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1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Thank you for participating in this study regarding communication in the workplace.
To begin, please complete the following background information.

1. Your Gender

    O Male
    O Female

2. Please identify your position in the company (check as many as apply)

    O Part-time Employee
    O Full-time/Hourly
    O Full-time/Salaried
    O Supervisor
    O Manager
    O Executive
    O Other _____

3. Please provide your Job Title _____

4. Approximately how many hours per week do you spend in conversations with coworkers that are of a SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT AGE THAN YOU (20 years or more younger or 20 years or more older)?

    O Less than 1 Hour per Week
    O 1 to 2 Hours per Week
    O 2 to 4 Hours per Week
    O 4 to 6 Hours per Week
    O 6 to 8 Hours per Week
    O 8 to 10 Hours per Week
    O More than 10 Hours per Week

5. Your Age

    O 18 – 24
    O 25 – 34
    O 35 – 44
    O 45 – 54
    O 55 – 64
    O 65 and Over

2. COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION WITH PEERS

The purpose of these questions is to investigate your reactions to conversations with coworkers who are APPROXIMATELY YOUR AGE. When responding to this survey, think of typical workplace conversations that you have with people that you perceive to be approximately your same age. Please indicate, by checking the appropriate box, the degree to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes these types of conversations. The middle position on the scale represents "neutral," then moving out from the center, "slight," then "moderate," and then "strong" agreement or disagreement.

6. Communication Satisfaction

Statement	STRONGLY DISAGREE — STRONGLY AGREE
Coworkers who are about my age let me know if I communicate effectively	1 O O O O O O O 7
Nothing is ever accomplished in these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I would like to continue having conversations with coworkers of my age like the ones I have now.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Coworkers who are about my age genuinely want to get to know me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very DISsatisfied with my conversations with coworkers my age.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I have better things to do than these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
During conversations with coworkers about my age, I am able to present myself as I want others to view me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Coworkers who are about my age show me that they understand what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very satisfied with these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Coworkers about my age express a lot of interest in what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I do *not* enjoy these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I feel I can talk about anything with coworkers of my similar age.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we each get to say what we want.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we laugh together easily.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Conversations with coworkers about my age flow smoothly.	1 O O O O O O O 7
We usually talk about something I am *not* interested in.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Overall, conversations with coworkers about my age are very satisfying.	1 O O O O O O O 7

3. CONVERSATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

Dissatisfying and Satisfying Similar Age Conversations

For this portion of the research, you are asked to recall two specific, recent conversations with COWORKERS YOU PERCEIVE TO BE APPROXIMATELY YOUR SAME AGE. One conversation you recall should be a SATISFYING conversation with a coworker YOUR SAME AGE and one should be a DISSATISFYING conversation with a COWORKER YOUR SAME AGE. Take a moment to recall two recent conversations that fit these criteria.

PART A: SATISFYING CONVERSATION

Begin by answering the following questions regarding the specific SATISFYING conversation you recalled with a coworker you perceive to be approximately your same age. Please provide as much detail as possible.

7. Describe your SIMILAR AGE CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

8. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

9. Describe the DETAILS of the satisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

10. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

11. Describe and explain what you and your similar age conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was SATISFYING.

12. Indicate what you or your similar age conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

13. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

          Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying

14. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with coworkers of approximately your SAME AGE.

          Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at All Typical

4. DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

PART B: DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

Next, answer the following questions regarding a specific DISSATISFYING conversation you recalled with a COWORKER YOU PERCEIVE TO BE APPROXIMATELY YOUR SAME AGE.

15. Describe your SIMILAR AGE CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

16. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

17. Describe the DETAILS of the dissatisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

18. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

19. Describe and explain what you and your similar age conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was DISSATISFYING.

20. Indicate what you or your similar age conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

21. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

<div align="center">Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying</div>

22. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with coworkers of approximately your SAME AGE.

<div align="center">Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at All Typical</div>

5. FINAL THOUGHTS

23. Please provide any further information that you think will be valuable to this research. Otherwise, click DONE to exit the survey.

You must click DONE to exit this survey. Thanks you for participating.

DONE

Appendix B: Intergenerational Survey, Young and Middle-Aged Participants

Note: Two versions of the intergenerational survey were administered to the young and middle-aged participants with the only difference between the two versions being the order the participants were asked to describe satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Thank you for participating in this study regarding communication in the workplace.
To begin, please complete the following background information.

3. Your Gender

  O Male
  O Female

4. Please identify your position in the company (check as many as apply)

  O Part-time Employee
  O Full-time/Hourly
  O Full-time/Salaried
  O Supervisor
  O Manager
  O Executive
  O Other _____

3. Please provide your Job Title _____

4. Approximately how many hours per week do you spend in conversations with coworkers that are of a SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT AGE THAN YOU (20 years or more younger or 20 years or more older)?

  O Less than 1 Hour per Week
  O 1 to 2 Hours per Week
  O 2 to 4 Hours per Week
  O 4 to 6 Hours per Week
  O 6 to 8 Hours per Week
  O 8 to 10 Hours per Week
  O More than 10 Hours per Week

5. Your Age

  O 18 – 24
  O 25 – 34
  O 35 – 44
  O 45 – 54
  O 55 – 64
  O 65 and Over

2. COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION WITH PEERS

The purpose of these questions is to investigate your reactions to conversations with coworkers who are SIGNIFICANTLY OLDER THAN YOURSELF. When responding to this survey, think of typical workplace conversations that you have with people that you PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 55 OR OLDER. Please indicate, by checking the appropriate box, the degree to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes these types of conversations. The middle position on the scale represents "neutral," then moving out from the center, "slight," then "moderate," and then "strong" agreement or disagreement.

6. Communication Satisfaction

	STRONGLY DISAGREE — STRONGLY AGREE
Older coworkers let me know if I communicate effectively	1 O O O O O O O 7
Nothing is ever accomplished in these conversations with older coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I would like to continue having conversations with older coworkers like the ones I have now.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Older coworkers genuinely want to get to know me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very DISsatisfied with my conversations with older coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I have better things to do than these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
During conversations with older coworkers, I am able to present myself as I want others to view me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Older coworkers show me that they understand what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very satisfied with these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Older coworkers express a lot of interest in what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I do *not* enjoy these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I feel I can talk about anything with older coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we each get to say what we want.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we laugh together easily.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Conversations with older coworkers flow smoothly.	1 O O O O O O O 7
We usually talk about something I am *not* interested in.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Overall, conversations with older coworkers are very satisfying.	1 O O O O O O O 7

3. CONVERSATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

Dissatisfying and Satisfying Conversations

For this portion of the research, you are asked to recall two specific, recent conversations with OLDER COWORKERS YOU PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 55 OR OLDER. One conversation you recall should be a SATISFYING conversation with an OLDER coworker and one should be a DISSATISFYING conversation with an OLDER coworker. Take a moment to recall two recent conversations that fit these criteria.

PART A: SATISFYING CONVERSATION

Begin by answering the following questions regarding the specific SATISFYING conversation you recalled with an OLDER coworker you perceive to be AGE 55 OR OLDER. Please provide as much detail as possible.

7. Describe your OLDER CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

8. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

9. Describe the DETAILS of the satisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

10. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

11. Describe and explain what you and your OLDER conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was SATISFYING.

12. Indicate what you or your OLDER conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

13. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

                    Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying

14. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with OLDER coworkers.

                    Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at All Typical

4. DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

PART B: DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

Next, answer the following questions regarding a specific DISSATISFYING conversation you recalled with an OLDER COWORKER YOU PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 55 OR OLDER.

15. Describe your OLDER CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

16. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

17. Describe the DETAILS of the dissatisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

18. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

19. Describe and explain what you and OLDER conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was DISSATISFYING.

20. Indicate what you or your OLDER conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

21. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

              Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying

22. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with OLDER coworkers.

              Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at all Typical

5. FINAL THOUGHTS

23. Please provide any further information that you think will be valuable to this research. Otherwise, click DONE to exit the survey.

You must click DONE to exit this survey. Thanks you for participating.

DONE

Appendix C: Intergenerational Survey, Older Participants

Note: Two versions of the intergenerational survey were administered to the older participants with the only difference between the two versions being the order the participants were asked to describe satisfactory and dissatisfactory conversations

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23. **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Thank you for participating in this study regarding communication in the workplace.
To begin, please complete the following background information.

5. Your Gender

    O   Male
    O   Female

6. Please identify your position in the company (check as many as apply)

    O   Part-time Employee
    O   Full-time/Hourly
    O   Full-time/Salaried
    O   Supervisor
    O   Manager
    O   Executive
    O   Other _____

3. Please provide your Job Title _____

    23. Approximately how many hours per week do you spend in conversations
    with coworkers that are of a SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT AGE
    THAN YOU (20 years or more younger or 20 years or more older)?

    O   Less than 1 Hour per Week
    O   1 to 2 Hours per Week
    O   2 to 4 Hours per Week
    O   4 to 6 Hours per Week
    O   6 to 8 Hours per Week
    O   8 to 10 Hours per Week
    O   More than 10 Hours per Week

5. Your Age

    O   18 – 24
    O   25 – 34
    O   35 – 44
    O   45 – 54
    O   55 – 64
    O   65 and Over

2. COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION WITH PEERS

The purpose of these questions is to investigate your reactions to conversations with coworkers who are SIGNIFICANTLY YOUNGER THAN YOURSELF. When responding to this survey, think of typical workplace conversations that you have with people that you PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 18-34. Please indicate, by checking the appropriate box, the degree to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes these types of conversations. The middle position on the scale represents "neutral," then moving out from the center, "slight," then "moderate," and then "strong" agreement or disagreement.

6. Communication Satisfaction

	STRONGLY DISAGREE — STRONGLY AGREE
Younger coworkers let me know if I communicate effectively	1 O O O O O O O 7
Nothing is ever accomplished in these conversations with younger coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I would like to continue having conversations with younger coworkers like the ones I have now.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Younger coworkers genuinely want to get to know me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very DISsatisfied with my conversations with Younger coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I have better things to do than these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
During conversations with younger coworkers, I am able to present myself as I want others to view me.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Younger coworkers show me that they understand what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I am very satisfied with these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Younger coworkers express a lot of interest in what I say.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I do *not* enjoy these conversations.	1 O O O O O O O 7
I feel I can talk about anything with younger coworkers.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we each get to say what we want.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Generally, we laugh together easily.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Conversations with younger coworkers flow smoothly.	1 O O O O O O O 7
We usually talk about something I am *not* interested in.	1 O O O O O O O 7
Overall, conversations with younger coworkers are very satisfying.	1 O O O O O O O 7

3. CONVERSATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

Dissatisfying and Satisfying Conversations

For this portion of the research, you are asked to recall two specific, recent conversations with YOUNGER COWORKERS YOU PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 18-34. One conversation you recall should be a SATISFYING conversation with a YOUNGER coworker and one should be a DISSATISFYING conversation with a YOUNGER coworker. Take a moment to recall two recent conversations that fit these criteria.

PART A: SATISFYING CONVERSATION

Begin by answering the following questions regarding the specific SATISFYING conversation you recalled with an YOUNGER coworker you perceive to be AGE 18-34. Please provide as much detail as possible.

7. Describe your YOUNGER CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

8. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

9. Describe the DETAILS of the satisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

10. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

11. Describe and explain what you and your YOUNGER conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was SATISFYING.

12. Indicate what you or your YOUNGER conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

13. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

<div align="center">

Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying

</div>

23. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with YOUNGER coworkers.

<div align="center">

Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at All Typical

</div>

4. DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

PART B: DISSATISFYING CONVERSATION

Next, answer the following questions regarding a specific DISSATISFYING conversation you recalled with a YOUNGER COWORKER YOU PERCEIVE TO BE AGE 18 – 34.

15. Describe your YOUNGER CONVERSATIONAL PARTNER (including estimate of age).

16. Describe your professional and social RELATIONSHIP to this person.

17. Describe the DETAILS of the dissatisfying encounter, including the PURPOSE for the encounter, the EXCHANGES that occurred, and the OUTCOME of the conversation. Did you accomplish your GOALS of the conversation?

18. Describe any FEELINGS that you experienced during this conversation.

19. Describe and explain what you and YOUNGER conversational partner DID or DID NOT SAY that was DISSATISFYING.

20. Indicate what you or your YOUNGER conversational partner could have done TO IMPROVE THE CONVERSATION.

21. Please rate your overall level of SATISFACTION OR DISSATISFACTION with the conversation you just described.

<div align="center">

Very Satisfying   O O O O O   Very Dissatisfying

</div>

23. Please rate the TYPICALITY of the conversation you just described with other conversations you have with YOUNGER coworkers.

<div align="center">

Very Typical   O O O O O   Not at All Typical

</div>

5. FINAL THOUGHTS

23. Please provide any further information that you think will be valuable to this research. Otherwise, click DONE to exit the survey.

You must click DONE to exit this survey. Thanks you for participating.

DONE

Workplace Conversations 1F SD

1. Demographic Information

Thank you for participating in this study regarding communication in the workplace. To begin, please complete the following background information.

1. **Your Gender**

   O Male
   O Female

2. **Please identify your position in your company. (Check as many a apply)**

   O Part-time Employee
   O Full-time/Hourly
   O Full-time/Salaried
   O Supervisor
   O Manager
   O Executive
   O Other (Please specify)

3. **Please provide your Job Title**

4. **Approximately how many hours per week do you spend in conversation with coworkers who are of a SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT AGE THAN YOU? (20 Years or more younger or 20 Years or more older)?**

   O Less than One Hour per Week
   O 1 – 2 Hours per Week
   O 3 – 4 Hours per Week
   O 5 – 6 Hours per Week
   O 7 – 8 Hours per Week
   O 9 – 10 Hours per Week
   O More then 10 Hours per Week

Appendix E: E-mail Invitation

WEBMAIL   E-MAIL MESSAGE

To: E-mail of Specific Potential Participant

Cc:

Bcc:

Subject: Research Opportunity

Message: Dear Employee,

My name is Pamela Kennedy. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas. You are being asked to participate in an academic research project being conducted through the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas. The topic of the research is, "Communication in the Workplace."

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you wish to contribute to this research project by participating in the study, simply click on the web link below and the complete the on-line survey. The entire process will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete, depending on the length of your responses. Your responses will be recorded in a strictly confidential manner. You will not be personally identified in any way. At no time will your email address be retained or passed along for any further use.

Please click on this link if you wish to proceed.
      www.surveymonkey.psk10559.net (for example only at this time)

Thank your for your participation.

Pamela Kennedy
Department of Communication Studies
The University of Kansas