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Patronizing Young and Elderly Adults: Response Strategies in a Community Setting

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ABSTRACT *Within the context of an elaborated model of the communication predicament of aging, the effects of particular response strategies to patronizing, intergenerational talk were investigated with written vignettes depicting a community situation. Young adults (N = 222) evaluated a patronizing speaker more negatively than a non-patronizing speaker, and they also judged both conversational partners to be more satisfied from patronizing speech was absent. As compared to cooperative responses, assertive responses from the patronizee led to evaluations that she was higher status, more controlling, less nurturing, and less satisfied. Patronizing individuals receiving an assertive response were evaluated as less in control and satisfied than when they received a cooperative response.*

our group of respondents viewed patronizing talk in a negative light, independent of the target



From left: Ellen Bouchard Ryan, Jake Harwood, Angie Williams, Susan Fox, and Howard Giles. Ryan is affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry and Office of Gerontological Studies, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The others are affiliated with the Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Recent investigations of secondary “baby talk” and patronizing talk to elderly persons, both in experimental and field settings, have indicated that greater attention to such talk is warranted (Caporael, 1981; de Wilde & de Bot, 1989; Giles, Fox & Smith, 1993; Ryan, Bourhis & Knops, 1991; Ryan & Cole, 1990). As conceptualized in the communication predicament of aging model of Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, and Henwood (1986; see also Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988), younger adults frequently modify their communication behaviors with older adults on the basis of stereotyped expectations, especially with frail elders in dependent roles.

Patronizing talk (inappropriate modifications based on stereotyped expectations regarding incompetence and dependence) from young individuals is perceived as a problem by institutionalized and non-institutionalized elders, some of whom see such talk as demeaning and restricting (Caporael, 1981; Giles, *et al.*, 1993; Ryan & Cole, 1990). The speech choices of younger individuals may then limit and alter the linguistic options of elderly individuals, who can find they are unable to express themselves adequately in intergenerational contexts. In addition, this type of talk may have profound implications for elderly individuals’ mental and physical well-being and future interactions (Rodin & Langer, 1980). As such, the investigation of patronizing talk is an intrinsically applied issue, with immediate implications for younger individuals’ communication with elderly adults and older people’s dilemmas in dealing with young people’s speech.

Elaboration of the Communication Predicament Model

Building upon the 1986 model and the emerging literature in language and aging, Figure 1 presents a revised version of the communication predicament of aging. Drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory (Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991), the new model addresses the choices available to an elderly person in an intergenerational setting in responding to stereotype-driven speech behavior. The previous conception of the communication predicament can be traced by following the path marked “cooperative response.” The speech behaviors of both participants in an intergenerational interaction are seen as constraining the elderly individual’s opportunities for communication, and leading to (generally negative) changes in the elderly individual’s physiology, psychology and sociocultural surroundings. The right hand side of the model illustrates a new realm of possibilities that may open up for the elderly individual in light of a more “assertive” response to patronizing talk. Such a response is seen as leading potentially to improved opportunities for communication, and increased personal control and self esteem for the elderly individual. These effects may (in the short term) bypass the potential negative impact that stereotyped expectations have upon the communication. In the long term, such assertive response strategies may lead to improvements in the elderly individuals’ physical and mental health, and in their sociocultural surroundings.

Other developments reflected in this model should be noted. First, evaluations and attributions being made by the interactants are included in the model. These will be crucial in determining interlocutors’ response strategies and future interaction strategies. If an elderly individual sees patronizing talk as a deliberate attempt to control, then an assertive response strategy would be more likely. Similarly, if a

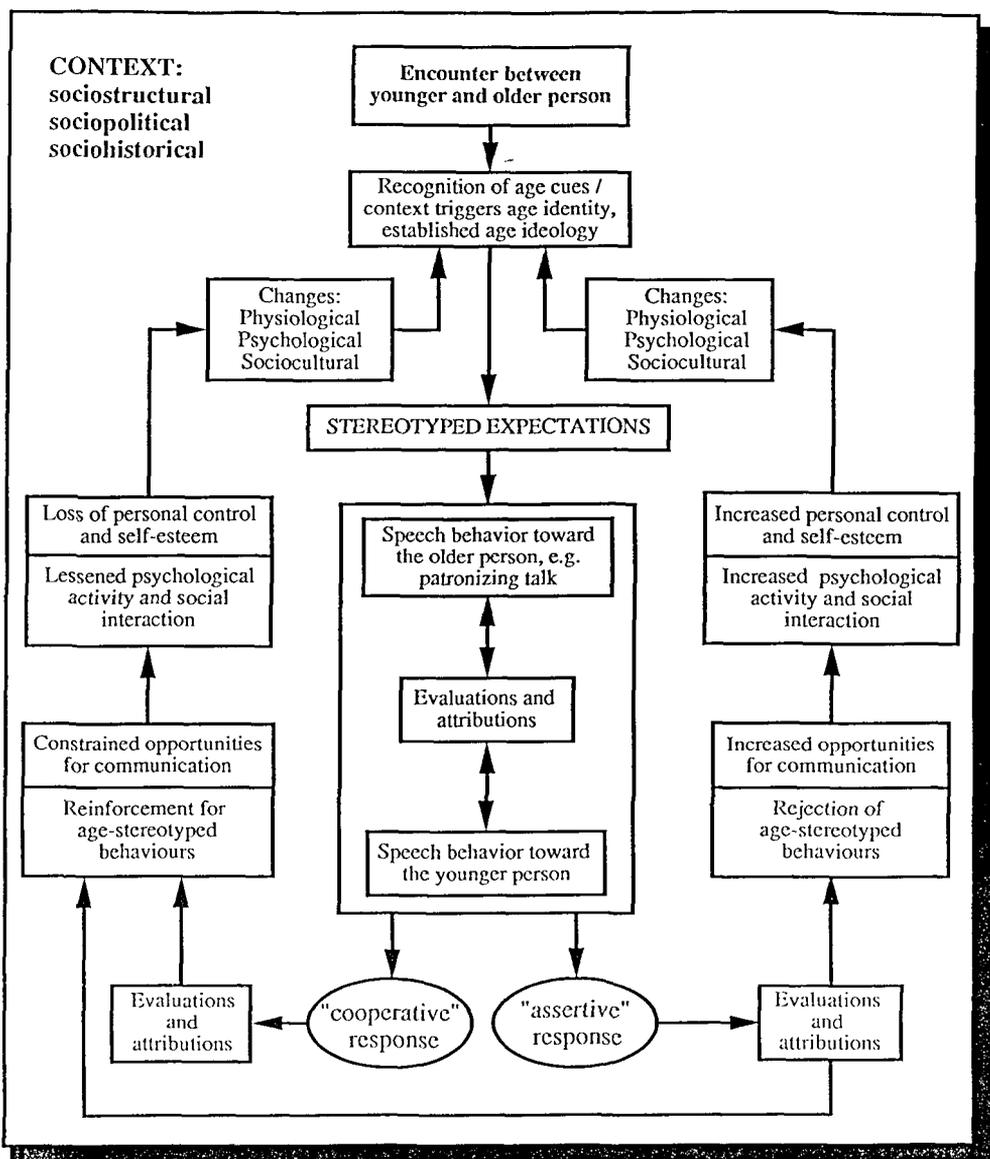


Figure 1. Revised model of the communication predicament of aging (after Ryan, *et al.*, 1986; Coupland, *et al.*, 1988)

younger individual chooses to interpret an assertive response strategy in terms of negative stereotypes of the elderly (cantankerous, cranky; see Dillard, Henwood, Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1990), then the positive outcomes of the right side of the model fail to open up to either participant.

Naturally we are aware of the limitations upon taking the “assertive response” pathway. First, an assertive response (in the terms of our study) will not always be appropriate, for as yet we have only a modest grasp upon what types of strategies

would be useful for whom in what situations. (Indeed the notion that the elderly individual "chooses" from one of two options is undoubtedly an over-simplification). Second, the decision to choose an assertive strategy may well depend upon whether the elderly individual perceives such a strategy as holding any social utility. If elderly recipients of patronizing talk perceive few cognitive alternatives to their societal position (i.e., they perceive it to be fair and unlikely to change), then the use of assertive strategies may be seen as ineffectual and possibly counter-productive (see Dowd, 1981; McGee & Barker, 1982; Turner & Brown, 1978). Those who perceive cognitive alternatives, on the other hand, may be particularly likely to attempt assertive strategies. Despite the inevitable limitations, we would argue that the model is a real advance in terms of suggesting an active role for the elderly participants in determining their own fate within intergenerational interactions. In addition, the model allows for the possibility of positive outcomes from such interactions, whereas previous models have considered only the negative outcomes that might emerge. In other words, this is a first attempt to find a way *out* of the communication predicament that has been the feature of so much previous work. With this in mind, the current focus has been on the elderly participant in such exchanges. This is not to underestimate the problems faced by the young in communicating with the elderly, and themselves attempting to manage patronizing exchanges (Coupland *et al.*, 1991).

Empirical Background

Ryan *et al.* (1991) provided the initial foray into evaluations of patronizing talk. Using a vignette of a middle-aged nurse talking with an elderly nursing home resident, they found uniformly more negative evaluations of the nurse using patronizing talk as compared to when the nurse used a more neutral style. Moreover, inferences about what the speech sounded like confirmed the association of shrillness and exaggerated intonation with the patronizing style. Subsequent studies with adults of varying ages and with professionals have replicated the unfavorable views of patronizing speech across different conversational contexts within the institutional setting, with additional data concerning the negative nonverbal behaviors associated with such speech (Ryan, MacLean, & Orange, 1992; Ryan, Meredith, & Shantz, in press).

In a follow up study, Giles *et al.* (1993) explored potential differences in the evaluations of patronizing speech between young and elderly respondents. While the data were consistent with Ryan *et al.* (1991) in that patronizing talk was perceived as uniformly inappropriate, Giles *et al.* (1993) found that elderly respondents were more likely to be sensitive to the characteristics of the individual receiving the patronization. The authors note both positive and potentially negative implications of such sensitivity. At one level this implies that older adults incorporate contextual cues in their evaluations of particular episodes of talk, whereas younger individuals appear less inclined to do so. However, the Giles *et al.* (in press) study also indicates that elderly persons may be more willing to denigrate their peers on dimensions of competence and the like as a result of younger individuals' talk towards them.

Giles and Williams (in press) performed a series of studies examining young people's reactions to patronizing talk from older adults to adults their own age.

Undergraduates reported that they were the recipients of patronizing speech from older people quite frequently and that this bothered them a lot. These respondents were asked to describe the ways in which older people patronized them. From a content analysis of these data eight categories emerged. In a second study, undergraduates were presented with two examples of each of these categories and were asked to make similarity judgments of each combination. A non-metric multi-dimensional scaling analysis showed that they cognitively represented the different kinds of patronizing speech in three clusters: non-listening (e.g., "the elderly don't listen to what I have to say"); disapproving (e.g., "you're all party animals!"); and over-parenting (e.g., "when you get older you will see this was best"). In the third study, these three different kinds of patronizing forms were utilized for social evaluation in a typical vignette study alongside a non-patronizing (control) variety. Patronizing of any of the types by a 70-year-old or by a 40-year-old was seen very negatively by young adults, but a hierarchy of judgments did emerge: over-parenting was viewed as somewhat caring and therefore the least unfavorable, non-listening was judged as uncaring, and disapproving communicated the strongest negative intent.

The Present Study

We aimed to extend the research reviewed above in three ways. First, we examined patronizing talk from the young to the elderly and from the elderly to the young within a single design. Our study systematically manipulated the age of the individual producing the talk (patronizer) and the recipient (patronizee). In so doing, we also made a first attempt to apply Giles and Williams' (in press) tripartite conceptualization of *patronizing markers* to talk from young to elderly. Second, it seemed important to extend previous examinations of such talk in institutionalized settings (primarily nursing homes) into non-institutionalized, community settings. Ryan and Cole (1990) had observed significantly greater acceptance of simplified speech by elders residing in an institution as compared to those residing in the community. Hence, our vignettes were placed in a context where the patronizer was a receptionist in a dentist's office and the patronizee was a client. Third, we were interested in various response strategies to patronizing talk, not least with a view to formulating recommendations for appropriate strategies to ward off unwanted patronization. It should be noted that patronization inevitably resides in the eye of the beholder. What might be evaluated as patronizing by an observer might be seen as optimally nurturing by a given recipient. Our concern is hence with unwanted patronization (see Ryan & Cole (1990), where some elderly recipients positively evaluated some potentially patronizing modifications). Hence our study includes a condition of cooperative responses to patronizing talk, and a condition of what we describe as assertive responses to such talk. Previous studies have often portrayed the elderly individual as a passive participant in patronization, and hence possibly as colluding with the patronizing behavior. In line with the elaborated model of the communication predicament of aging presented earlier, we wished to confront the dilemmas faced by the patronizer and the patronizee in negotiating the multiple problematic elements in patronizing episodes. Specific hypotheses of the study are outlined following a description of the design.

In common with previous studies, a written vignette methodology was adopted.

The 2 x 3 design reflected the variables under consideration. The first factor reflected the manipulation of client and receptionist age. At one level of this factor the client was young (28 years of age) and the receptionist was older, although young enough to be realistic given her occupational role (69 years of age). At the other level these two ages were reversed. The client and the receptionist were female in our vignettes. This choice reflects a particular concern in the field with the aging woman, who frequently outlives her partner and may have to cope with more extensive discrimination than the aging male. In any case, our pilot data (described below) indicated that sex differences are not of concern in this experimental setup.

The second factor reflected the three different combinations of speech style in which we were interested. The first level reflected a neutral speech style from both the client and the receptionist (further detail on the specific nature of, and rationale for, these manipulations is provided below). The second level reflected a patronizing style of talk from the receptionist, with the client maintaining a cooperative style. The third level of this factor reflected a patronizing style from the receptionist and an assertive response from the client. We propose a number of hypotheses, outlined below, which are based on previous research in the area.

H1: The producer of patronizing talk will be perceived as more controlling, lower status, and less nurturing than the producer of neutral talk.

H2: The participants in a patronizing exchange will be perceived as less satisfied after the conversation than the participants in a neutral exchange.

The work of Ryan *et al.* (1991) and Giles *et al.* (1993) indicates that the producer of patronizing talk is viewed negatively and the recipient as generally unhappy with the experience. There seems to be little scope for positive evaluations of the patronizing experience for either target.

H3: The assertive responder to patronizing talk will be evaluated as more in control, higher status, less nurturant, and more satisfied than the cooperative respondent.

H4: The recipient of an assertive response to patronizing talk will be evaluated as less in control, lower in status, less nurturant, and less satisfied than the recipient of the cooperative response.

These hypotheses point to a prediction that an assertive response will result in a shift of control from the patronizer to the patronizee. As a result, the patronizee may be seen as less frustrated with the encounter, and the patronizer will be seen as more frustrated.

H5: A younger individual patronizing an elderly individual will be perceived more sympathetically than an elderly individual directing such talk to a younger individual.

Two factors suggest this hypothesis. First, we are sampling younger respondents, who are likely to identify with the younger individual and be more resentful of patronizing behavior directed at her than the same behavior directed at the older individual. Second, the communication predicament model of aging suggests that patronizing talk toward elderly individuals, while not evaluated positively, may be more acceptable than patronizing talk to young adults because of the support of stereotyped expectations (see Kite & Johnson, 1988).

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 222 undergraduates in an introductory communication class at a university in Southern California. They received extra credit points for their contribution. The sample was age-homogeneous, with a mean of 19.06 years. Given that a focus of the study was an age-related variable, subjects who were outliers in terms of age were deemed inherently problematic and had been eliminated from the sample. The sample was predominantly female (62%) and white (70%) or Asian-American (15%).

Materials and Procedure

The respondents were presented with the questionnaire and instructed to read it carefully. This consisted of a standard consent form, followed by one of six vignettes prepared for the study. Each vignette was introduced with a context which included the actors' names, ages, and roles in the situation. The vignettes presented a situation where a client was arriving late for an appointment at a dentist's office and talking with the receptionist. The six versions of the passage (averaging 108 words), reflected the 2 (relative age: young client-old receptionist vs. old client-young receptionist) x 3 (speech style: neutral-cooperative reaction; patronizing-cooperative reaction; patronizing-assertive reaction) design. The passages with four conversational turns for the client and three turns for the receptionist were kept as similar as possible, given the manipulations.¹ Across the age conditions, the passages within each speech style condition were identical, with one minor change. The older client introduced herself as "Mrs. Paxton", while the younger client introduced herself as "Veronica Paxton". This variation was thought to be consistent with favored terms of address for the two age-groups (see Wood & Ryan, 1991). The age variable was manipulated in the introductory portion of the text. The two characters were introduced with either the client labeled as 28 years old and the receptionist as 69 years old, or vice versa.

Across the speech style conditions, the content and number of conversational turns were kept constant. In the neutral-cooperative condition, markers which might be seen as patronizing or assertive were kept to a minimum in both participants' talk. In the patronizing-cooperative condition, a number of patronizing markers were added to the receptionist's talk. These markers fell into the three types outlined above from Giles and Williams (in press). These types seemed clearly applicable to *elder* targets as well as young, and can occur in combination. Hence, we combined them in our study. As "disapproving" can be extremely negatively motivated, we wanted to avoid demand characteristics, and so crafted our "disapproving" markers in terms of a somewhat mild stereotype regarding lack of competence.

The talk of the receptionist remained identical across the two patronizing

¹Space restrictions do not allow for the printing of the vignettes. Copies of these may be obtained from the fourth author.

conditions, while the talk of the client was varied. In the patronizing-cooperative condition, the client responded to the patronizing talk in a similar (arguably passive) fashion to that employed in the neutral-cooperative condition and in previous studies. In the patronizing assertive condition, a number of more assertive markers were added to the talk of the client. These included rejection of some of the receptionist's derogatory comments (in response to the comment concerning getting mixed up about the appointment times, "no, the bus just didn't come on time"), and assertions of competency (with regard to the forms "I'm *sure* I'll be able to deal with them just *fine*, thank you," emphasis in original vignette).

Pilot Test

The vignettes employed in the study were first tested on a sample of 62 Southern Californian undergraduates who received extra credit for their participation. These participants were not part of the larger group who participated in the main study. The pilot test served two functions. First, we wished to test that our general category of patronizing speech was perceived as such, and whether our three subcategories (over-parenting, not listening, and disapproving) were contributing to this effect (Giles & Williams, in press). Second, we were concerned that the vignettes were perceived as realistic. Third, we were interested in whether changing the sex of the actors in the vignette would have any effect on evaluations of the vignette.

Initially, we tested for the level of patronization perceived in the three different speech style conditions. Dependent variables used in the pilot were seven point Likert measures of receptionist patronization, receptionist disapproval, receptionist parenting, receptionist listening, vignette realism, and client assertiveness. A single factor MANOVA revealed highly significant effects for speech style ($F [14,98] = 13.31, p < .001$). All but one of the items were significant (receptionist patronization, $F [2,59] = 65.34, p < .001$; receptionist disapproval, $F [2,59] = 28.70, p < .001$; client assertiveness, $F [2,59] = 6.18, p < .005$; receptionist parenting, $F [2,59] = 14.91, p < .001$; and receptionist listening, $F [2,59] = 71.43, p < .05$) indicated that the direction of differences was as expected. The two patronizing conditions were perceived as considerably more patronizing, with the receptionist seen as engaged in more disapproving, more parenting, and less listening than in the non-patronizing condition. No differences were found between the two patronizing conditions on these variables. The client was seen as most assertive in the patronizing-assertive condition, and least assertive in the patronizing-cooperative condition. Univariate F-tests indicated no significant effect for the vignette realism item ($F [2,59] = 2.93, p > .05$). This was as we had hoped, since we were looking for equivalent realism across all three conditions.

Further items on the pilot test examined possible gender effects on evaluations of the vignettes. Only two of twelve of these items showed any significant effect, both indicating that males would be more assertive in certain situations. We decided, therefore, to retain only female targets in the main study, consistent with previous research, and in the knowledge that target sex is not a potent factor in this experimental paradigm. Overall, the pilot test was seen as successful in demonstrating the validity of the vignettes to be used in the main study described below.

Dependent Measures

Four primary sets of dependent measures were employed in the main study. Participants were asked to complete trait attributions of each target person based on the conversation they had read. Seven-point Likert scales (with one representing strong disagreement and seven representing strong agreement) were used on a series of items derived from previous work in the field, and designed to measure three primary dimensions. A *status* dimension was measured by the items for successful, competent, professional, confident and intelligent (for receptionist and client, Cronbach's alpha = .78 and .75 respectively). A *control* dimension was measured by the items for dominant, assertive, passive (reversed), controlling and distant (for receptionist and client, Cronbach's alpha = .79 and .81 respectively). A *nurturing* dimension was measured by the items for caring, understanding, distant (reversed), supportive and helpful (for receptionist and client, Cronbach's alpha = .92 and .80 respectively). Finally, a fourth set of measures related to how the two individuals involved in the conversation felt about the interaction after it had occurred. Inferences were elicited about each character's happiness, anger, frustration and satisfaction following the interaction; these measures were chosen to reflect Russel's (1990) circumplex model of affect. This *satisfaction* measure yielded Cronbach's alpha of .83 for receptionist and .92 for the client. All further analyses were run on measures constructed by averaging the subscales contributing to a particular scale.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

A number of manipulation checks were performed. First, at the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to recall the ages of the two actors in the vignette, without turning back in the response booklet. We required that participants recall the elderly individual (whether client or receptionist) as being over 60 years of age, and that they recall the younger individual as being under 30 years of age. All respondents succeeded in this.

Second, a measure was included in the questionnaire of how patronizing the receptionist was being (this was embedded with the other questions). As expected, we found that the patronizing-cooperative and the patronizing-assertive conditions were rated as overwhelmingly more patronizing than the neutral-cooperative condition, and no difference was found between the two patronizing conditions ($F [2,216] = 71.62, p < .001$, means: neutral-cooperative = 3.29; patronizing-cooperative = 5.92; patronizing assertive = 6.19; Tukey's indicate second and third means significantly different from first, not significantly different from each other, $p < .05$). Hence we could conclude that our patronization manipulation was effective.

Third, a measure of client assertiveness was included in the questionnaire. A one way ANOVA on client assertiveness, using speech style as the independent variable, revealed a highly significant effect ($F [2,218] = 7.21, p < .001$). *Post hoc* Tukey tests of mean differences ($p < .05$) confirmed that in the patronizing-

TABLE 1
Mean Evaluations of Participants Across Speech Style Conditions

	Neutral/ Cooperative	Patronizing/ Cooperative	Patronizing/ Assertive
Receptionist			
Status	5.38 _a (0.8)	4.22 _b (0.9)	3.64 _c (1.0)
Controlling	4.43 _a (1.1)	5.67 _b (0.8)	5.21 _c (1.0)
Nurturing	5.59 _a (1.3)	2.93 _b (1.1)	2.47 _b (1.0)
Client			
Status	4.54 _a (1.0)	4.72 _{ab} (0.9)	5.01 _b (1.0)
Controlling	3.62 _a (1.0)	2.73 _b (0.9)	3.85 _a (1.1)
Nurturing	4.50 _a (0.9)	5.50 _b (0.8)	4.22 _a (1.0)

Across the rows, differing subscripts indicate significantly different means ($p < .05$).

assertive condition, the client was deemed significantly more assertive (mean = 4.69) than in the patronizing-cooperative condition (mean = 3.71).

The results are divided into four sections concerning participants' assessments of the characteristics of the receptionist and client (see Table 1) and subsequently ratings of their feelings about the conversation (see Table 2).

Evaluations of Receptionist

A 2 x 3 MANOVA was performed, with relative age and speech style as the independent variables. The dependent variables were the three evaluation scales described above concerning evaluations of the receptionist's status, control and nurturance. A significant main effect emerged for the age variable ($F [3,209] = 5.18$, Wilks' $\lambda = .931$, $p < .005$). All three scales contributed to this effect (Nurturance, $F [2,211] = 4.57$, $p < .05$; Control, $F [2,211] = 8.59$, $p < .005$; Status, $F [2,211] = 5.24$, $p < .001$). These differences indicated that a young receptionist is seen as more nurturant (young $M = 3.83$; old $M = 3.50$), less controlling (young $M = 4.90$; old $M = 5.30$), and of a higher status (young $M = 4.54$; old $M = 4.26$) than an older receptionist.

TABLE 2
Means for Inferred Participant Satisfaction Across Speech Style Conditions

	Neutral/ Cooperative	Patronizing/ Cooperative	Patronizing/ Assertive
Receptionist	5.43 _a (1.1)	4.62 _b (1.3)	4.49 _b (1.5)
Client	5.10 _a (1.5)	2.94 _b (1.2)	2.05 _c (1.2)

Across the rows, differing subscripts indicate significantly different means ($p < .05$).

A significant effect for speech style also emerged ($F [6,418] = 47.97$, Wilks' $\lambda = .35$, $p < .001$). Again all three scales contributed to this effect (Nurturance, $F [2,211] = 153.95$, $p < .001$; Control, $F [2,211] = 29.41$, $p < .001$; Status, $F [2,211] = 68.84$, $p < .001$). Tukey tests were performed in order to ascertain the detail of these differences. The receptionist in the neutral-cooperative condition was perceived as more nurturant than in the two patronizing conditions. There were no differences between the two patronizing conditions on the nurturance variable. Similarly, the receptionist in the neutral-cooperative condition was perceived as less controlling than in either of the patronizing conditions. The receptionist in the patronizing-assertive condition was seen as less controlling than in the patronizing-cooperative condition. Finally, the receptionist in the neutral-cooperative condition was perceived as of higher status than the two patronizing conditions, and in the patronizing-assertive condition was seen as having lower status than the patronizing-cooperative condition. This provides complete support for Hypothesis 2. Some support is found for Hypothesis 4, in terms of evaluations of control and status.

No interaction effects were found in any of the analyses described above, indicating a lack of support for Hypothesis 5.

Evaluations of the Client

A 2×3 MANOVA was performed on the status, control, and nurturance scales. A significant main effect for the age variable emerged ($F [3,210] = 11.95$, Wilks' $\lambda = .85$, $p < .001$). The control and nurturance variables contributed to this effect (Control, $F [2,212] = 12.94$, $p < .001$; Nurturance, $F [2,212] = 25.14$, $p < .001$). The pattern of these differences indicated that a young client was perceived as more controlling (young $M = 3.65$, old $M = 3.14$) and less nurturing (young $M = 4.34$, old $M = 4.94$) than an older client.

In addition a main effect emerged for speech style ($F [6,420] = 14.59$, Wilks' $\lambda = .68$, $p < .001$). All three variables contributed to this effect (Status, $F [2,212] = 4.88$, $p < .01$; Control, $F [2,212] = 22.07$, $p < .001$; Nurturance, $F [2,212] = 21.98$, $p < .001$). Tukey's post hoc tests revealed that the client was perceived as significantly more controlling and less nurturing in the patronizing-assertive and the neutral-cooperative conditions compared to the patronizing-cooperative condition (there were no significant differences between the neutral-cooperative and the patronizing-assertive conditions on these variables). Finally, the client was perceived as of a significantly higher status in the patronizing-assertive condition than in the neutral-cooperative condition. (Neither the patronizing-assertive nor the neutral-cooperative mean were significantly different from the patronizing-cooperative mean.) Thus, some support is found for Hypothesis 3 in terms of ratings of status, control, and nurturance.

Receptionist's Satisfaction with the Interaction

A 2×3 ANOVA was performed, with relative age and speech style as the independent variables, on the measure of the receptionist's apparent satisfaction with the encounter. While no significant effects were found for relative age, a significant main effect emerged for speech style ($F [2,215] = 10.7$, $p < .001$). Post hoc Tukey tests of mean differences indicated that the receptionist was perceived as

less satisfied in the patronizing encounters. Thus, more support was found for Hypothesis 1, but no support emerged for Hypothesis 4.

Client's Satisfaction with the Interaction

A 2 x 3 ANOVA was conducted with ratings of the client's satisfaction as the dependent variable. The only significant effect to emerge was a main effect for speech style ($F [2, 216] = 103.6, p < .001$). All possible pairwise Tukey comparisons were significant. The client was perceived as less satisfied in both patronizing conditions when compared to the neutral-cooperative condition, a finding consistent with Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the client was seen as less satisfied in the patronizing-assertive condition than the patronizing-cooperative condition, a finding contrary to Hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

To summarize, our results showed considerable support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. A patronizing receptionist, whether young or old, was perceived as lower status, more controlling, and less nurturing than a non-patronizing receptionist. Moreover, the patronizer and patronizee were both perceived as less satisfied in a patronizing rather than a neutral exchange. Some support was found for Hypothesis 3. The client who produced the assertive response was perceived as higher status, more controlling, and less nurturing than the client who produced the cooperative response. However, the assertive client was seen as less satisfied than client responding in a more cooperative manner—the reverse pattern to that expected. Little support was found for Hypothesis 4. The receptionist who received an assertive response to her patronization was perceived as lower in status and less controlling than a receptionist receiving a cooperative response, consistent with Hypothesis 4. However, no differences were observed on the satisfaction measure. No support was found for Hypothesis 5, indicating that age differences did not appear to mediate evaluations of particular speech styles, given our vignette and our particular measures.

Possibly most surprising in the results was the lack of any interaction effects between relative ages of patronizer and patronizee. Indeed, none of the effects could even be described as approaching significance. This was somewhat surprising given the focus on patronizing talk towards the elderly. Our group of respondents viewed patronizing talk in a negative light, independent of the target. This adds further weight to Giles and Williams' (in press) findings that patronizing talk from the elderly to the young is definitely potent. It should be noted here, however, that these findings are limited to the context and measures used within the studies. Indeed, even if the social meanings of patronizing talk are similar for young and old recipients, we would still argue for a special communication predicament of older adults. Special speech modifications addressed to elderly adults have been clearly documented (particularly in institutional contexts), and older adults are more likely to be vulnerable to the longterm social consequences of patronizing talk (Caporael, 1981; Coupland *et al.*, 1991; Ryan *et al.*, 1986).

In this particular study, there may be an additional explanation for the lack of age influence on the impact of patronizing speech, given the potent (and arguably offensive) level of patronization in the vignettes. The patronizing conditions both contained about six patronizing markers in only a short passage; these manipulations were perceived to be considerably stronger than those employed in earlier studies (e.g., Ryan *et al.*, 1991). This may have led to a very general sense of inappropriateness, with little discrimination between target age groups. Milder forms of patronization might potentially elicit the hypothesized evaluations and be deemed appropriate for an elderly recipient, but not for a young recipient. To this end, future work might look to vary the potency of patronization across conditions.

Only a limited number of age effects were found in our analysis. In general, the receptionist was perceived more positively (higher status, less controlling, more nurturing) when portrayed as younger, but the client is perceived more positively (less controlling, more nurturing) when portrayed as older. We might suggest that this is due to the actors' appearing in their traditional age-roles. When the younger client visits the older receptionist, the roles are out of place. Hostility could develop toward the older receptionist who might be seen as deviating from the norm as an older woman in the workforce. Similarly, the older client may well evoke sympathy in her visit to the dentist. Even this ostensibly age-neutral setting might evoke images of elderly dependence with the elderly client visiting for treatment in a somewhat medical context.

Particularly interesting, given the focus in the elaborated model on strategies for dealing with patronizing talk, are the comparisons of the patronizing-cooperative and patronizing-assertive conditions. Ratings of satisfaction were lower for both participants in the assertive response condition compared to the cooperative response. This implies that an assertive response of the sort in our scenario may be unlikely to produce a positive affective outcome for either of the participants. Of course, a negative outcome to a patronizing exchange may well be deemed positive by the patronizee in terms of discouraging such communication from others in the future. The perception of the client as less satisfied in the assertive response condition than the cooperative response condition was clearly contrary to prediction. This rating may reflect an evaluation of how frustrated and dissatisfied the client must have been to produce the assertive response, rather than her feelings following the speech. Alternatively, in terms of Communication Accommodation Theory, the client might have been viewed as frustrated by the uncertainty of how her response would be received (see Coupland *et al.*, 1991). Another possibility for the dissatisfaction rating is very much related to the specific conversational scripts used here. Since the patronizing receptionist in our scenario was not influenced by the client's assertive response, the client might have been perceived as especially frustrated by the lack of the anticipated improvement in her interlocutor's communication style. The positive predictions about assertive responses of the elderly as a strategy to overcome the communication predicament could readily be assessed in subsequent studies which address the reasons for the perceived dissatisfaction and also manipulate the behavioral responses of the receptionist.

In addition, the patronizee was seen as less nurturing and more controlling and the patronizer was seen as lower status and less controlling in the assertive response condition. The movement of an elderly patronizee from the nurturing role and into a

more controlling role might well serve to ward off further attempts to patronize. Hence, in gaining control through an assertive response, the client may also be gaining a more positive relative evaluation from others. Thus, while all such response strategies should be contextually sensitive, there seems to be value for a patronized individual in asserting herself, at least in terms of control evaluations. Of course, for the moment, these evaluations reflect only those of observers of a written vignette. Ultimately, we must aim to obtain the evaluations of participants in these encounters, something that might be partially achieved by means of asking participants to role play a variety of patronizing exchanges.

Future Research

In closing, we would recommend five directions for future research, in addition to those described above. First, further investigation of evaluations of a variety of response strategies to patronizing talk should occur, these determined via observation and interview. We would hope, given time, to formulate some concrete, and contextually variable, recommendations in terms of productive response strategies for the elderly and the young in the face of patronizing talk. Such recommendations might ultimately prove especially important in institutionalized contexts, where patronizing speech may exert the most powerful and damaging influence over its recipients.

Second, work should examine patronizing talk in naturalistic settings. While we are confident that the vignette methodology employed herein is a useful tool, it is essential that data from field settings are collected to ward off the dangers of methodological narrowness. We would advocate continued naturalistic and experimental work that considers patronizing talk in non-institutional and non-clinical settings. At the very least, future research might move toward using video-taped vignettes in experimental studies (see Edwards & Noller, in press). This would help insure age manipulations are salient to respondents.

Third, one currently under-investigated topic is the effect that the use of patronizing talk has on the patronizer. While considerable attention has been paid to the effects on the recipient of patronization, some attention should be given to the possible outcomes for the producer of patronizing talk. It seems likely that the patronizing act is part of a process of constructing old age in terms of decrement and decline (see Coupland & Coupland, 1990). From such a perspective, the effects of patronization may be quite devastating on the patronizer's attitude toward his/her *own* aging in the long run.

Fourth, we did not examine young-young or elderly-elderly patronization, either of which might have unique characteristics. Indeed, the intergenerational encounters investigated herein are fraught with the influence of societal power differences. Encounters between individuals of similar ages might well be more informative with regard to evaluations of the purely linguistic elements of patronizing talk.

Fifth, we are in favor of work which attempts to examine interactive phenomena within this paradigm. For instance, we do not know when positive or negative effects of patronizing talk emerge in interactions. Such a step would be made possible by obtaining evaluations of specific turns within a vignette before moving on to the next turn. Such studies would enable a clearer understanding of the

relationship between specific features and evaluations of participants within patronizing exchanges (see Genesee & Bourhis, 1988).

This article offers one step toward a full analysis of various response strategies to patronizing talk. It opens new areas of research in terms of developing productive, and ultimately contextually-sensitive ways to deal with communication that is problematic for the elderly. Naturally, we would recommend caution in making applied recommendations from limited data. However, the results reported herein begin a program through which we would hope to offer recipients of patronizing talk some means to regain control and power within conversations. The model presented in Figure 1 is a first attempt to illustrate how older persons may actively contribute to an improvement in their own intergenerational encounters. The next step must be to delineate more clearly the behaviors that will permit the elderly interactant to regain control.

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