HANDBOOK OF COMMUNICATION AND AGING RESEARCH

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The Role of Age Stereotypes in Interpersonal Communication

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In the first edition of this handbook, we noted that much of the literature on communication and aging pointed to negative age stereotypes as a major influence on speech accommodations to older adults (Coupland & Coupland, 1989; Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988; Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995; Hummert, 1994a; Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986). Accordingly, our chapter reviewed the literature on age stereotypes, age attitudes, beliefs about aging, and communication (see Hummert, Shaner, & Garstka, 1995). That review highlighted the complex nature of age stereotypes, showing that they include positive as well as negative views of older individuals. It also revealed that the relationship between age stereotypes and communication was more complex than initially conceptualized. As a result, we suggested four research questions for future research:

> (1) What factors in the communication situation lead to positive or negative stereotyping of older adults? (2) What individual differences between communicators are related to positive or negative stereotyping of older adults? (3) What communication behaviors are associated with positive or negative stereotyping of older adults? and (4) How do the communication behaviors of the conversants affect stereotyping and self-perception processes? (Hummert, Shaner, et al., 1995, p. 125).

In this chapter, we consider recent research on age stereotypes and communication relevant to these questions. The chapter begins with an overview of the literature on age stereotypes (for comprehensive reviews, see Hummert, Shaner, et al., 1995; Hummert, 1999). Two recent advances in research on age stereotyping receive special attention: implicit age stereotyping and self-stereotyping. The chapter then outlines two models of how age stereotypes are involved in the communication process, illustrating how recent

research speaks to these models and our four guiding questions about age stereotypes and communication. We conclude with a consideration of directions for future research that, we believe, will help us build the insights necessary to reduce the negative effects of age stereotyping in communication.

THE NATURE OF AGE STEREOTYPES

The cognitive perspective (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Hamilton & Trolier, 1986) constitutes the predominant approach to the study of age stereotypes today (Hummert, Shaner, et al., 1995; Hummert, 1999). From this perspective, age stereotypes are viewed as person perception schemas that use age as the primary categorization principle, with "older adult" operating as a superordinate category that subsumes several subordinate categories or subtypes of older adults.

Researchers have used trait generation, trait sorting, and photograph sorting tasks to investigate the structure and content of age stereotype schemas (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Brewer & Lui, 1984; Hummert, 1990; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). It became clear through this research that age schemas encompass both positive and negative subcategories, or stereotypes, of older adults. Further, the similarities and differences in the stereotype schemas of young, middle-aged, and older persons suggest that these schemas become increasingly complex over the course of a lifetime. The findings of the most recent of these studies (Hummert et al., 1994) are illustrative.

Hummert et al. (1994) first asked one group of young, middle-aged, and older individuals to generate traits that they associated with the category *older adult*. Next, a separate group of young, middle-aged, and older adults sorted the resulting 97 traits (adjectives describing general physical health, and cognitive and personality characteristics) into groupings that described individual older persons. Cluster analysis of the trait groupings showed that participants of all ages had both positive and negative age stereotypes, and that the complexity of the stereotype schemas increased across the three age groups. That is, older participants had more stereotypes (12) than did the middle-aged and young participants (10 and 8, respectively), and the additional stereotypes included in the sets of the middle-aged and older participants were subcategories of broader stereotypes held by the young.

Despite these differences in complexity, similarities across the age groups were apparent. As shown in Table 4.1, seven stereotypes emerged in the stereotype sets of all three age groups: 3 positive (Golden Ager, Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative) and 4 negative (Severely Impaired, Despondent, Recluse, Shrew/Curmudgeon). As Hummert et al. (1994) stated, these stereotypes appear to represent cultural archetypes of aging. That is, adults of widely varying ages have stereotypes corresponding to these categories even though their individual cognitive schemas for the stereotypes may include slightly different configurations of traits. Further, only a few of these stereotypes describe older adults with cognitive, emotional, and physical problems. Other stereotype research from the cognitive perspective has shown that attitudes toward the stereotypes vary

TABLE 4.1
Stereotypes of Older Persons Held by Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Adults*

Negative Stereotypes and Traits	*Positive Stereotypes and Traits*
Severely Impaired: Slow thinking, incompetent, feeble, incoherent, inarticulate, senile	**Golden Ager:** Lively, adventurous, alert, active, sociable, witty, independent, well-informed, skilled, productive, successful, capable, volunteer, well-traveled, future-oriented, fun-loving, happy, curious, healthy, sexual, self-accepting, health-conscious, courageous
Despondent: Depressed, sad, hopeless, afraid, neglected, lonely	**Perfect Grandparent:** Interesting, kind, loving, family-oriented, generous, grateful, supportive, trustworthy, intelligent, wise, knowledgeable
Shrew/Curmudgeon: Complaining, ill-tempered, prejudiced, demanding, inflexible, selfish, jealous, stubborn, nosy	**John Wayne Conservative:** Patriotic, religious, nostalgic, reminiscent, retired, conservative, emotional, mellow, determined, proud
Recluse: Quiet, timid, naive	

Note: Trait sets include traits grouped with the stereotype by those in all three age groups plus additional traits grouped with the stereotype by those in two age groups.
*As reported in Hummert et al. (1994).

consistently with the valence of the traits, and that both positive and negative stereotypes are viewed as equally representative of the general older adult population (Hummert, 1990; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1995; Schmidt & Boland, 1986).

Implicit Age Stereotypes

Lately, attention has turned to the ways in which age stereotypes may function automatically (i.e., outside conscious awareness) in perception to affect judgments and behaviors. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) defined implicit stereotypes as "the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate attributions of qualities to members of a social category" (p. 15). Perdue and Gurtman (1990) found evidence for implicit age stereotypes in two studies. In the first, participants primed with *old* remembered more negative trait words in a subsequent recall task, whereas those primed with *young* remembered more positive traits. In the second, participants made semantic judgments about negative traits more quickly when primed with *old*, but they made judgments about positive traits more quickly when primed with *young*.

Recent studies have attempted to measure implicit age attitudes and stereotypes, focusing on the strength of implicit cognitions and their content. This interest developed as research on other stereotypes suggested that automatic or implicit attitudes may differ

from those participants offer on standard questionnaire measures, primarily because responses on questionnaires (and similar direct, self-report measures) are sensitive to self-presentational effects (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). For example, in a study of racial prejudice, Devine (1989) found that indirect measures of attitudes revealed implicit racial prejudice among participants who reported low prejudice on a standard prejudice questionnaire. The studies of implicit age attitudes and stereotypes have used the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), a computer-based task that was developed specifically to measure the strength of automatic or unconscious social perceptions. We provide a brief overview of the IAT here. (For a full discussion of the IAT and its development see Greenwald et al., 1998.)

Participants completing the IAT are asked to assign target items (e.g., photos of young and old persons) to category poles (e.g., young or old) as quickly as possible. The computer records the time it takes to make each judgment. Making such single category assignments is quite easy. However, the critical IAT tasks require that participants consider target items from two bipolar categories within the same set of trials. As an example, the categories for an age attitude IAT might be age (old or young) and pleasantness (pleasant or unpleasant). Target items for the age category would be photos of old and young persons, whereas target items for the pleasantness category would be pictures of pleasant and unpleasant objects (e.g., teddy bear, roach, etc.). The poles of the categories are assigned to response keys in pairs so that the pairings are either consistent with presumed implicit associations (e.g., young/pleasant and old/unpleasant) or inconsistent with them (e.g., young/unpleasant and old/pleasant). The IAT is based on the assumption that paired judgments consistent with implicit associations are easier to make, and thus made more quickly, than judgments that are inconsistent. Therefore the difference in the time it takes to make consistent and inconsistent judgments on the IAT (the IAT effect) provides a measure of the strength of implicit associations. A growing body of research attests to the validity of the IAT as a measure of implicit social cognitions (Dasgupta, McGhee, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2000; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Greenwald et al., 1998; Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 2001; see Greenwald & Nosek, 2001, for a review based on more than 30 published or in press articles using the IAT).

Studies of implicit age attitudes (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Hummert, Garstka, O'Brien, Greenwald, & Mellott, 2002; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001; Mellott, Greenwald, Hummert, & O'Brien, 2001) using the IAT have found a negative bias toward older people in comparison to young people that is consistent with that reported in prior research on general attitudes toward older people (Crockett & Hummert, 1987; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Kite & Wagner, 2001). However, these implicit attitudes had only low and nonsignificant correlations with standard questionnaire measures of age attitudes and, in some cases, indicated differing attitudes from the questionnaire measures. For instance, young adults' IAT responses showed more favorable attitudes toward young people than old people, but their responses on attitude questionnaires were more favorable toward old people than young people (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Hummert et al., 2002). As Hummert et al. concluded, the latter finding confirms the value of the IAT in assessing attitudes that participants may hesitate to express on questionnaires.

The IAT has also been used to assess the strength of implicit positive and negative age stereotypes (Hummert, Garstka, O'Brien, Savundranayagam, Zhang, & Geiger, 2003),

providing information helpful in interpreting conflicting evidence from prior stereotype, attitude, and communication research. For instance, although the evidence for multiple positive and negative age stereotypes is substantial, reviews of the age attitude literature have shown that negative attitudes seem to dominate in people's perceptions about older adults (Crockett & Hummert, 1987; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Kite & Wagner, 2001). Likewise, much of the research on intergenerational communication has suggested that negative stereotypes have more influence on communication behavior than do positive stereotypes (e.g., leading to patronizing communication; Caporael, 1981; Hummert & Shaner, 1994; Hummert, Shaner, Garstka, & Henry, 1998; Kemper, Ferrell, Harden, Finter-Urzcyk, & Billington, 1998). The initial studies of implicit age stereotypes indicate that differences in the strength of positive and negative stereotypes may explain this paradox.

For example, Hummert and colleagues (2003) asked young (ages18–25), middle-aged (ages 30–59), young-old (ages 60–74), and old-old (ages 75 and older) participants to complete age-stereotype IATs: old-positive (old as wise, young as foolish) and young-positive (young as open, old as closed). Results revealed that those in all four age groups had equivalent implicit stereotypes of young people as open (and older people as closed), but that only those in the three older age groups had an implicit positive stereotype of older people as wise (and young people as foolish). Even so, their implicit stereotype of older people as wise was significantly weaker than their stereotype of young people as open. This research confirmed the post hoc explanation for the seeming conflicts between the multiple stereotype, age attitude, and communication and aging research: Positive stereotypes of older people are less accessible than those of young people, particularly for young individuals. As we will discuss later, this finding has clear implications for the role of age stereotypes in interpersonal communication.

Implicit Age Stereotypes and Self-Stereotyping

The relationship of implicit age stereotypes to self-stereotyping in older adults is another line of research that has developed since the publication of the first edition of this handbook. Levy (1996) introduced this topic with a study that measured memory performance of older and younger participants before and after exposure to subliminal priming of positive (e.g., wise) or negative (e.g., senile) age stereotypes. Results showed that older participants primed with negative age stereotypes showed poorer pre- to posttest memory performance, whereas those primed with positive age stereotypes (e.g., wise) showed improved memory. The memory performance of young participants was unaffected by the priming manipulation. Levy and her colleagues have also reported similar effects of implicit stereotyping on older participants' handwriting (Levy, 2000), their cardiovascular responses to stress (Levy, Hausdorff, Hencke, & Wei, 2000), and their responses to hypothetical medical situations (Levy, Ashman, & Dror, 2000). In each of these studies, the implicit positive age stereotypes had beneficial effects on participants' behavior (i.e., more controlled handwriting, lower levels of cardiovascular response to stress, greater acceptance of interventions to prolong life), but the implicit negative stereotypes had detrimental effects (i.e., shakier handwriting, higher levels of cardiovascular response, and greater refusal of interventions to prolong life). The implications of the self-stereotyping research for communication will be addressed later in this chapter.

Summary

By considering age stereotypes as knowledge structures or schemas possessed and employed at some level by all perceivers, the cognitive perspective on age stereotypes offers several advantages to scholars of communication and aging (Hummert, 1999). First, it emphasizes that stereotyping is a process that is instantiated in interactions. Second, it invites study of the various aspects of that process: how age stereotypes become salient during interactions, when they affect perceptions and behaviors, and how they develop over time. Third, by identifying stereotyping as a normal part of the perceptual process, the cognitive perspective can help to remove the stigma that may interfere with individuals' acknowledging—and perhaps changing—their own age stereotypes. Finally, attention to the role of implicit stereotypes and self-stereotyping may help us to clarify the ways in which age stereotypes at times function outside conscious awareness, becoming incorporated into the self-perceptions of older individuals with potentially detrimental effects. We turn now to two models of communication and aging that have adopted the social cognitive perspective on age stereotypes as the key to identifying how age stereotyping processes are implicated in interpersonal interactions.

MODELS OF AGE STEREOTYPES IN COMMUNICATION

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) focuses on "the social cognitive processes mediating individuals' perceptions of the environment and their communicative behaviors" (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987, p. 14). Appropriately, CAT provides the theoretical framework for much of the research on communication and aging, including the two models on which we focus here: the Communication Predicament of Aging Model (Ryan et al., 1986) and the Age Stereotypes in Interactions Model (Hummert, 1994a). Both models provide accounts of the role of age stereotypes in communication that have received considerable empirical support. In recent years, the models have been extended to other cultures (e.g., Giles, Harwood, Pierson, Clément, & Fox, 1998; Lin & Harwood, 2003; Noels, Giles, Gallois, & Ng, 2001; Zhang & Hummert, 2001), as outlined by Pecchioni, Ota, and Sparks (Chapter 7, this volume). Our review in this chapter highlights studies conducted in the Western cultures where the models originated.

Communication Predicament of Aging Model

The Communication Predicament of Aging Model (CPA; Ryan et al., 1986) outlines how intergenerational encounters may unfold when negative age stereotyping occurs, evolving into a negative feedback cycle for the participants (Rodin & Langer, 1980). As shown in Fig. 4.1, the recognition of age cues (physical features, voice, context, etc.) in an encounter with an older individual may make negative age stereotypes salient to younger persons. Such age stereotypes are likely to carry with them beliefs about deficits in communication skills (e.g., poor hearing) and cognitive abilities (e.g., inability to recall names) that often accompany aging. Consistent with the tenets of Communication

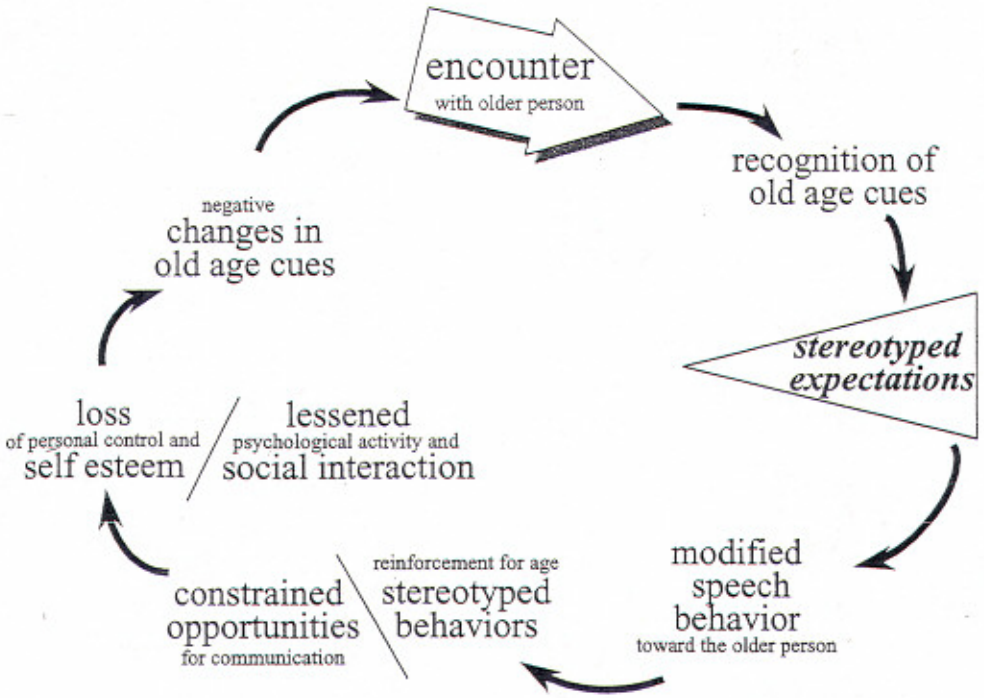

FIG. 4.1. Communication Predicament of Aging Model (Ryan, Meredith, MacLean, & Orange, 1995, p. 91).

Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1987; Giles et al., 1991), younger individuals may adapt their communication to the older individual to meet these presumed deficits. In other words, they may overaccommodate to negative age stereotypes in their talk, perhaps by speaking more loudly than normal, rather than adapt their communication to the actual competencies of older communicators. Such overaccommodations contribute to a negative feedback cycle by reinforcing negative age stereotypes for both participants. For older individuals, such reinforcement may lead to constrained opportunities for communication, lower self-esteem, and functional declines in physical and cognitive abilities consistent with those stereotypes.

The CPA model has provided a useful heuristic for research on communication and aging, with over 90 citations in refereed journal articles in the last 10 years. Empirical support for the relationships represented in the model is substantial.

Support for the CPA Model. Evidence that the recognition of age cues leads to perceptions consistent with negative age stereotypes comes from research on age-related characteristics of voice, facial structure, and nonverbal behavior. Vocal cues to age can suggest negative age stereotypes to listeners. A number of studies have demonstrated that listeners evaluate older speakers more negatively, in comparison to younger speakers, on personality and attitude scales, particularly on competence dimensions (Giles, Henwood, Coupland, Harriman, & Coupland, 1992; Ryan & Capadano, 1978; Ryan & Johnston, 1987; Ryan & Laurie, 1990; Stewart & Ryan, 1982).

Age-related changes in facial structure can also suggest negative age stereotypes. Physical changes in facial features with age include the size and placement of the eyes, nose, and mouth; the proportional relationships of the chin, cheeks, forehead, and skull; and the characteristics of the skin (e.g., wrinkling) and hair (e.g., graying; Berry & McArthur, 1986). A number of studies have demonstrated that people with young facial features are associated with more positive traits and behaviors by college students and children than are persons with older facial features (Berry & McArthur, 1985, 1986, 1988; McArthur, 1982). For example, faces that were perceived younger (or more "babyfaced") with large, round eyes, high eyebrows, and a small chin were positively correlated with perceptions of the stimulus person's naivete, honesty, kindness, and warmth (Berry & McArthur, 1985). In addition, Montepare and Zebrowitz-McArthur (1988, 1993) found that nonverbal behavior like walking can influence perceivers' evaluations. When participants observed 5- to 70-year-old walkers depicted in point-light displays, they perceived the younger walkers as more powerful and happier than older walkers.

Other research shows that declines in communication competence are believed to accompany old age (Giles, Coupland, & Wiemann, 1992; Ryan & Cole, 1990; Ryan, Kwong See, Meneer, & Trovato, 1992). Ryan and colleagues (1992) developed the Language in Adulthood questionnaire (LIA) to assess beliefs about the communication competence of older adults. They asked young and older adults to provide assessments of their own language abilities on the LIA, as well as those of either a typical 25-year-old or a typical 75-year-old. Consistent with the CPA model, those in both age groups rated typical 75-year-old targets as experiencing more problems in receptive and expressive communication than typical 25-year-old targets. Receptive problems included difficulty in understanding others in noisy situations, losing track of the topic in conversation, losing track of who said what in conversation, and so on. Expressive problems included declining use of difficult words, dominating the conversation, finding it hard to speak when pressed for time. The older targets were rated as more skilled than younger targets on only two items: sincerity in speaking and story telling ability, both expressive communication skills.

As Ryan and colleagues (1992) pointed out, beliefs about the communication skills of older adults may suggest appropriate communication strategies to use with them. That is, if one believes that older adults have difficulty hearing, remembering words, and processing language, one might believe that it is appropriate to speak loudly, slowly, and in simple sentences to them. These adaptations are associated with the overaccommodations to age stereotypes in the CPA model (Ryan et al., 1986). These overaccommodations have been variously termed elderspeak (Cohen & Faulkner, 1986; Kemper, 1994, 2001; Kemper & Harden, 1999), dependency-supporting communication (Baltes, Neumann & Zank, 1994; Baltes & Wahl, 1996), and patronizing talk (Hummert & Ryan, 1996; Ryan, Hummert, & Boich, 1995; see Hummert & Ryan, 2001, for a review). Secondary baby talk (Caporael, 1981) or infantalizing speech (Whitbourne, Culgin, & Cassidy, 1996) is an extreme form of patronizing talk that might be used with highly impaired older adults.

A variety of research demonstrates that these overaccommodations contribute to the negative feedback cycle that is the essence of the CPA model (Ryan et al., 1986). First, experimental studies that have manipulated the type of communication addressed to older targets show that patronizing talk reinforces negative age stereotypes in both observers

and older recipients. When asked to evaluate older recipients of patronizing communication in comparison to recipients of nonpatronizing communication, observers rate the recipients of patronizing communication as less satisfied, more dependent and less competent (Harwood, Ryan, Giles, & Tysoski, 1997; La Tourette & Meeks, 2000; Ryan, Meredith, & Shantz, 1994) and select traits of negative age stereotypes to describe them (Hummert & Mazloff, 2001). The work of Kemper and colleagues (Kemper & Harden, 1999; Kemper, Othick, Warren, Gubarchuk, & Gerhing, 1996) shows that the negative stereotyping extends to self-perceptions of older listeners: Older participants who were addressed with the modifications of patronizing communication (elderspeak) within the context of a referential communication task gave lower assessments of their own communication abilities on the Language in Adulthood Questionnaire (Ryan et al., 1992) than participants who did not experience the patronizing talk.

Second, O'Connor and Rigby (1996) provide suggestive evidence supporting the CPA model's hypothesized link between age-modified communication and lower self-esteem in older individuals. In that study, community-dwelling seniors and nursing home residents completed measures of perceptions of secondary baby talk (patronizing talk) and neutral talk scenarios, frequency of exposure to secondary baby talk, and self-esteem. Results showed that for those with negative perceptions of baby talk, more exposure to this communication style was related to lower self-esteem. However, this pattern did not hold true for those with positive perceptions of baby talk, although this does not preclude other negative effects of baby talk (e.g., self-stereotyping, Levy, 1996) on these individuals.

Finally, other research shows that modifications based on an age stereotype of dependency contribute to functional decline in older individuals, as suggested by the CPA model. For example, Baltes and colleagues (1994) used behavioral analysis to examine interaction patterns between older adults, their caregivers, and their family members. Baltes and Wahl (1996) summarized the results of a series of such studies that found an increase in dependent behaviors of nursing home residents when caregivers used a dependency-supporting script. Within families as well, care-recipients who perceived their family caregivers' communication as patronizing reported reduced well-being (Edwards & Noller, 1998).

The Age Stereotypes in Interactions Model

Despite its power, the CPA model applies only to those situations in which negative age stereotyping occurs. Hummert (1994a) proposed a model of the role of age-related stereotypes in interactions that extends the CPA model in two ways. First, it specifies characteristics of the communicators and the context that contribute to negative age stereotyping in interactions. Second, it accounts for the influence of positive as well as negative age stereotyping in the communication process. As a result, this model allows not only for the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model, but also for a positive feedback cycle and for disruption of the negative feedback cycle. In Fig. 4.2 we present the essential elements of the Age Stereotypes in Interactions Model (ASI), adapted from the complete model as presented in Hummert (1994a). The ASI model highlights the perspective of an individual communicating with an older person. For the sake of clarity,

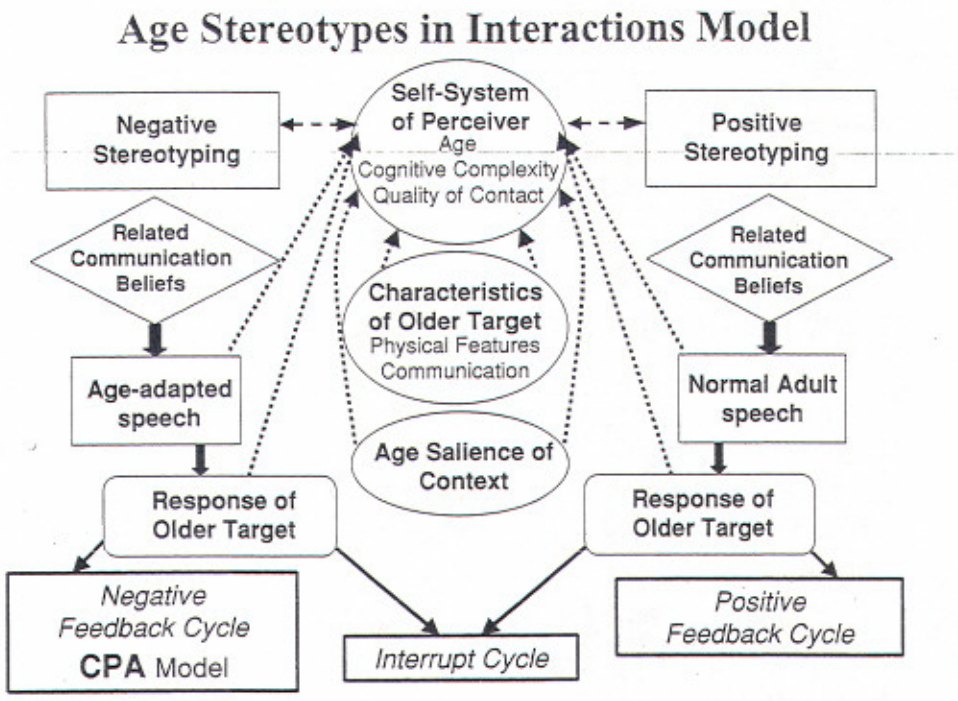

FIG. 4.2. Age Stereotypes in Interactions Model (Hummert, 1994a; modified to highlight perspective of perceiver and connection to the Communication Predicament of Aging Model).

that person is termed the Perceiver and the other person is designated the Older Target, although we realize these designations do not acknowledge the transactional nature of the communication process. As the ASI model shows, the self-system of the perceiver, the characteristics of the older target, and the context play significant roles in whether the perceiver categorizes the older target positively or negatively.

First, the ASI model posits that three aspects of the perceiver's self-system are centrally involved in the stereotyping process: age, cognitive complexity, and quality of prior contact with older adults. These characteristics have implications for the nature of the perceiver's age stereotype schemas and for the tendency to make category-based judgments of others. For example, older individuals have more complex age schemas (Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989; Hummert et al., 1994) and more accessible positive age stereotypes (Hummert et al., 2003) than do younger ones; and those higher in cognitive complexity are more likely to use person-centered communication strategies than are those lower in cognitive complexity (Burleson, 1984; Delia & Clark, 1977; Denton, Burleson, & Sprenkle, 1995). Research has shown that the quality of contact with older adults, rather than the frequency, is positively related to attitudes toward and perceptions of older adults (Hale, 2000; Knox, Gekoski, & Johnson, 1986; Rose-Colley & Eddy, 1988). Therefore, as perceiver age, cognitive complexity, and the quality of contact with older people increase, negative age stereotyping of the older target should be reduced and positive age stereotyping should be enhanced.

Second, the model shows how the characteristics of the older target may influence the stereotyping process, with the target's physical features and communication behaviors suggesting either positive or negative age stereotypes. Based upon research on beliefs about age-related changes over the life-span (Heckhausen et al., 1989; Ryan, 1992; Ryan & Kwong See, 1993), the ASI model predicts that the negative stereotyping of the CPA model should occur primarily when the age cues of the older target suggest advanced age (i.e., the old-old age category, 75 and over; Neugarten, 1974). Likewise, negative stereotyping may be based on other physical features (e.g., frowning facial expression, stooped posture, etc.) and communication behaviors (e.g., painful self-disclosures; Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; Coupland, Coupland, Giles, Henwood, & Wiemann, 1988) of older individuals that are consistent with the traits of negative stereotypes. Conversely, positive stereotyping is more likely when the individual's physical features and communication behaviors (e.g., young-old age of 60–74, smiling expression, interesting anecdotes) are consistent with the traits of positive age stereotypes (Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; Hummert, Garstka, & Shaner, 1997).

Third, the ASI model includes the influence of context on the stereotyping process. Contexts may vary in the extent to which they (a) make age stereotypes salient and (b) feature the positive or negative aspects of those stereotypes. As an example, a grocery store is an age-neutral context in the sense that the setting is not linked (in any obvious way) with age stereotype schemas. A nursing home, however, not only makes age salient but also calls forth the negative aspects of age stereotypes, as suggested by the incidence of secondary baby talk in nursing home settings (e.g., Caporael, 1981; Sachweh, 1998; see Ryan et al., 1995). In contrast, a 50th anniversary celebration may favor positive age stereotyping (e.g., the Perfect Grandparent).

According to the ASI model, these three elements (perceiver's self-system, characteristics of the older target, context) are jointly implicated in the stereotyping process. The perceiver's self-system is central to the process, however, because it provides the cognitive framework that selects, weighs, and interprets the other two elements. It is only when the stereotyping process leads to negative categorization of the older target that the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model is initiated. Positive stereotyping, in contrast, is followed by beliefs about communication that are consistent with the use of normal adult speech. In this way, the ASI model shows how a positive feedback cycle may be initiated. Finally, by including the response of the older target in the model, the ASI model acknowledges that the communication behaviors of the individuals may serve to reinforce or alter initial perceptions. As the two individuals converse, their communication behavior itself may suggest positive or negative age stereotypes. Through communication, the older target may change the perceiver's original categorization to a positive one, thereby interrupting the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model. The alternative—interruption of a positive feedback cycle—is also possible, of course.

Research has provided support for the ASI model (e.g., Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; Bieman-Copland & Ryan, 2001; Mulac & Giles, 1996; Harwood & Williams, 1996; Hummert et al., 1997; Ryan, Kennaley, Pratt, & Shumovich, 2000; Thimm, Rademacher, & Kruse, 1998). Here we discuss that research as it relates to the following aspects of the model: characteristics of older individuals and the activation of age stereotypes, age stereotypes as antecedents of communication beliefs and behaviors, perceiver age, and

the role of older individuals' responses in interrupting the negative feedback cycle of the CPA.

Characteristics of Older Individuals and the Activation of Age Stereotypes. Like the CPA model, the ASI model views the characteristics of the older individual as an important influence on the activation of age stereotypes in a perceiver, but it specifies how those characteristics may lead to positive or negative stereotyping. Support for the model comes from studies of physiognomic cues to age (Hummert, 1994b; Hummert et al., 1997), vocal cues to age (Hummert, Mazloff, & Henry, 1999; Mulac & Giles, 1996), and perceptions of age-related communication behaviors (Bieman-Copland & Ryan, 2001; Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; Ruscher & Hurley, 2000; Ryan, Bieman-Copland, Kwong See, Ellis, & Anas, 2002).

Hummert et al. (1997) gave young, middle-aged and older participants sets of 18 photographs of older men and women (with either smiling or neutral facial expressions) and asked them to pair the photographs with trait sets of positive and negative age stereotypes from Hummert and colleagues (1994). Results supported the ASI model in that photographs of those who appeared to be in their 80s and 90s were paired most often with traits of negative stereotypes. In contrast, photographs of those who appeared to be in their sixties were paired most often with positive stereotypes. Facial expression moderated the strength of the association between perceived age and negative stereotyping, with a smile reducing the negative stereotyping of those who looked the oldest, particularly if they were female, and a neutral facial expression increasing the negative stereotyping of those who looked the youngest.

Results of studies that have examined the relationship between the perceived age of an older speaker and evaluations of the speaker also show support for the ASI model. Mulac and Giles (1996) collected young listeners' social perceptions of older speakers ranging in age from 59 to 92 and found that vocal variables (unclear, strained, vowel elongation, and lack of coarse voice) predicted the perceived age of the speaker, and that perceived age was correlated with negative stereotype traits (frail, illnatured, subdued, incompetent, and dependent). Similarly, Hummert et al. (1999) asked young listeners to make stereotype judgments of 30 older speakers (aged 61–89; 15 men and 15 women). As predicted within the ASI model, participants selected more negative stereotypes for the voices of old-old speakers and more positive stereotypes for the voices of young-old speakers, although this effect was significant only for judgments of female speakers.

Evidence that conversational behaviors may serve as age cues and trigger stereotyped expectations of an older adult's competence comes from recent studies of painful self-disclosures (Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002), age excuses for memory failures (Ryan et al., 2002), repetitious verbal behavior (Bieman-Copland & Ryan, 2001), and off-target verbosity (Ruscher & Hurley, 2000). In general, perceivers associated each of these communication behaviors with negative age stereotypes. To illustrate, we consider the research on painful self-disclosures and age excuses.

Painful self-disclosures (PSDs) are negative, intimate revelations that some researchers have labeled an older adult phenomenon (Coupland, Coupland, Giles, Henwood, et al., 1988). Through discourse analysis of peer and intergenerational conversations between

young (in their 30s) and older women, Coupland et al. found that the older women revealed significantly more information about poor health, bereavement, loneliness, financial troubles, and similar problems than did the young women. In subsequent discussions with the researchers, the young women reported that they found these disclosures underaccommodative, and viewed them as typical older adult behavior (Coupland, Henwood, Coupland, & Giles, 1990).

Bonnesen and Hummert (2002) manipulated disclosure type (PSDs vs. Non-Painful Self-Disclosures) in videotaped scenarios to investigate the link between PSDs and negative age stereotypes. Participants included both young and old respondents. Those in both age groups found the PSDs more negative, more intimate, and less appropriate than the nonpainful disclosures (NPSDs), and rated those who revealed PSDs higher on negative stereotype traits and lower on the positive stereotype traits than those who revealed NPSDs.

With regard to age excuses, Ryan and colleagues (2002) asked young and older participants to evaluate forgetful older targets in their 70s who used their age, lack of ability, lack of effort, or the situation to explain forgetting. Consistent with the ASI model, participants viewed the targets who used an age excuse as older than their peers. In addition, young participants were particularly sensitive to the negative consequences of using such an excuse. They rated the user of an age excuse as more likely to forget in the future than the target using no excuse, and as more likely to elicit frustration from others than the target using an ability, effort, or situation excuse. The authors pointed out that these findings emerged even though participants viewed the age excuses as more believable and socially adept than the other excuse types.

Age Stereotypes as Antecedents of Communication Beliefs and Behaviors. Once a positive or negative age stereotype has been activated in a perceiver (e.g., based on the older individual's characteristics or behaviors, the context, etc.), the ASI model posits that the stereotype will lead to beliefs about the target's communication competencies that are consistent with the stereotype's valence. To test this hypothesis, Hummert, Garstka, and Shaner (1995) used the LIA (Ryan et al., 1992) to assess beliefs of young, middle-aged and older adults about the communication skills of four older targets representing two positive (Golden Ager, John Wayne Conservative) and two negative (Despondent, Shrew/Curmudgeon) stereotypes of older adults (see Table 4.1). As expected under the ASI model, judgments of the communication abilities of the targets differed according to the nature of the stereotype they represented: The two positive targets were viewed as experiencing significantly fewer communication problems and having better communication skills than the negative ones. Similarly, Harwood and Williams (1996) found that young respondents believed that interactions with a Despondent older target would be less satisfactory and produce more anxiety than interactions with a Perfect Grandparent target.

A key feature of the ASI model is its link of negative and positive age stereotypes not only to different beliefs about the communication competence of older persons, but also to age-adapted or normal adult communication styles. Studies that have examined the link between age stereotypes and communication behavior have found general support for the model, but also have shown that positive stereotypes may sometimes engender

age-adapted talk (Hummert & Shaner, 1994; Hummert et al., 1998; Thimm et al., 1998). For example, Thimm et al. reported that young participants' oral instructions about using a clock radio contained fewer patronizing features when directed to a competent older target than to a less competent one, or to an older person described simply by age (82 years old). However, the instructions to the competent older target contained more age-adapted characteristics than those to a 32-year-old target.

Hummert and colleagues (1998) found that context affects the extent to which positive and negative age stereotypes are associated with age-adapted or normal adult communication. Participants (young, middle-aged, and older) were placed in hypothetical situations and asked to give oral persuasive messages to two older targets. One target fit the Despondent stereotype, and the other the Golden Ager stereotype (see Table 4.1). For half the participants, the targets were presented in a context consistent with the stereotypes, so that the Despondent target was in a hospital setting and the Golden Ager target in a community setting. For the remaining participants, the context served to undermine the stereotypes, with the Despondent target presented in a community setting and the Golden Ager target in a hospital. Analysis of the resulting messages revealed three message types: affirming, a style analogous to normal adult-to-adult talk; overly nurturing, a patronizing style including some of the features of secondary baby talk; and directive, a patronizing style that was cold and controlling.

Results supported the predictions of the ASI model regarding the effects of initial categorizations on the incidence of age-adapted speech. Specifically, participants gave more patronizing messages (primarily overly nurturing) to the Despondent target than to the Golden Ager. The hospital context appeared to reinforce the Despondent stereotype, with the Despondent target receiving more patronizing messages in that setting (53%) than in the community setting (42%). However, messages to the Golden Ager target varied to an even greater extent across the two settings, with the percentage of patronizing messages increasing from only 30% in the community setting to 47% in the hospital setting. Further, the patronizing messages to the Golden Ager target were primarily of the directive style, which may be more dissatisfying at an interpersonal level than an overly nurturing style. As Hummert and colleagues (1998) concluded, this study showed not only that context and stereotypes may interact to affect expectations about appropriate communication with older individuals, but also suggested that positive categorizations of older persons may be less stable than negative categorizations. The apparent instability of positive categorizations may be associated with the differences in the strength of implicit positive and negative age stereotypes discussed earlier (Hummert et al., 2003).

Perceiver Age and the ASI Model. Several of these studies have included participants varying in age from young to old, providing information about the ASI model's prediction that older participants should be less likely to engage in negative age stereotyping and to use age-adapted communication than younger ones. This prediction was based on evidence that older individuals have more complex age schemas than do younger persons (Brewer & Lui, 1984; Heckhausen et al., 1989; Hummert et al., 1994). The age differences observed provide mixed support for the model. For instance, contrary to the predictions of the model, older participants were more likely than young and middle-aged participants to associate the physical features of advanced old age with negative age

stereotypes (Hummert et al., 1997). On the other hand, several studies show that age differences in communication beliefs and behaviors are consistent with the ASI model (Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; Hummert et al., 1998; Kemper et al., 1998; Ryan et al., 2002). Bonnesen and Hummert (2002) found that the older respondents rated the PSD disclosers less negatively than did the young respondents, and Ryan and colleagues (2002) found that older participants were less likely to engage in negative age stereotyping based on age excuses than were the young participants. In terms of patronizing talk, Hummert et al. (1998) reported that only 25% of older participants' messages to the Despondent target were in the patronizing categories, whereas 60% of middle-aged messages and 58% of young-adult messages were patronizing. Together, these results suggest that the differences between age groups lie not in their acceptance of negative age stereotypes, but in their beliefs about the implications of negative age stereotypes for communication.

Responses of Older Targets: Interrupting the Negative Feedback Cycle of the CPA. As illustrated in the ASI model, the way in which the older target responds to the other individual's communication can either reinforce the existing feedback cycle or interrupt it. Ideally, the response should reinforce a positive cycle initiated by the other's use of a normal adult communication style, but disrupt a negative cycle begun by the other's use of age-adapted or patronizing talk. Several studies have examined how older individuals can accomplish the latter goal (Harwood & Giles, 1996; Harwood, Giles, Fox, Ryan, & Williams, 1993; Harwood et al., 1997; Hummert & Flora, 1999; Hummert & Mazloff, 2001; Ryan et al., 2000).

In their review of the literature on patronizing communication, Hummert and Ryan (2001) outlined six different ways of responding to patronizing communication that have been investigated: passive, appreciative, assertive, humorous, condescending, and ignoring. To illustrate, we consider these response types in relation to a patronizing message from a nurse to an older patient who has asked about side effects of a new medication: "Now, dearie, why don't we just let the doctor worry about that." Passive responses involve unquestioning meek acceptance of patronizing (e.g., "Okay."), and the ignoring response offers an unrelated comment as if the older person has not heard the patronizing statement (e.g., "Oh, what did you say my blood pressure was?"). The other four response types challenge the message of incompetence inherent in patronizing talk, but vary in the directness and politeness of the challenge (Hummert & Mazloff, 2001; Ryan et al., 2000). Assertive responses state the challenge directly without embellishment: "I need to know that information myself." Appreciative responses also state the challenge directly, but consider the feelings of the patronizer: "I know that you're only trying to protect me, but I would also like to know that information." Humorous responses are less direct, but as a result may be more polite than assertive responses: "Oh, I think the doctor has enough to worry about! I'd better do my part as well." Finally, condescending responses counter the original patronizing remark with an attack on the patronizer: "Well that's just the type of insulting comment I've come to expect from you. Please remember to treat me like an adult in the future."

These response styles may vary in their ability to interrupt the negative feedback cycle of the CPA, however. Hummert and Ryan (2001) pointed out that the extremes of passive acceptance and confrontation carry obvious risks of confirming negative stereotypes,

and therefore these extreme styles may reinforce the negative cycle rather than disrupt it. At the same time, assertive responses may also be perceived negatively and thus not be effective in establishing a more positive feedback cycle. For instance, in nursing home contexts where passivity is the norm, assertive responders have been perceived more negatively than passive responders (Hummert & Flora, 1999; Ryan et al., 2000). This finding extends to community contexts as well. Assertive responders have been evaluated as less polite and respectful than passive responders in community contexts, even though the assertive responders were seen as more competent (Harwood & Giles, 1996; Harwood et al., 1993; Harwood et al., 1997). According to Hummert and Ryan (2001), the appreciative and humorous response styles seem to have the most potential for reversing the negative feedback loop in the CPA model because they project a competent image while avoiding potential face threat to the patronizer.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research investigating the role of age stereotypes in interpersonal communication has provided useful insights into the four issues we raised at the conclusion of our chapter in 1995: the factors that lead to positive or negative stereotyping, individual differences between communicators that are related to age stereotyping in interaction, what communication behaviors toward older adults are based on positive and negative stereotyping, and the relationship of communication behaviors of both young and older persons to stereotyping and self-perception. At the same time, this research has neglected some aspects of the communication and aging process as represented in the CPA (Ryan et al., 1986) and ASI models (Hummert, 1994a), and has demonstrated the difficulty of disrupting the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model.

Future research should continue to test and refine the CPA (Ryan et al., 1986) and ASI models (Hummert, 1994a). For instance, attention to the role of individual differences in cognitive complexity and interpersonal contact with older persons would advance our understanding of the ASI model. Recent research suggests that the grandparent-grandchild relationship may provide useful insights on how these individual differences affect age stereotyping and intergenerational communication (Harwood, 2000; Soliz & Harwood, in press; see Williams & Harwood, this volume). The roles of situational context and culture in the age-stereotyping and communication process also require additional study. Context has been manipulated primarily through verbal labels, which may not provide an ecologically valid test of its contribution to the process, and recent research on culture has revealed cross-cultural variations that require integration into the models (see Baker, Giles, & Harwood, this volume; Pecchioni et al., this volume).

Implicit stereotyping offers particular promise as a focus for future studies. In most discussions of the CPA and ASI models, scholars stress that speakers' overaccommodations to age stereotypes are often based on good intentions (Hummert & Ryan, 1996, 2001; Kemper, 2001; Ryan et al., 1995) as they try to adapt their communication appropriately to their partners. However, this does not mean that speakers consciously draw on these stereotypes in all instances. Instead, as Hummert (1999) argued, the adaptations

may reflect the implicit (automatic, unconscious) operation of age stereotypes. With the development of the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) and its use to measure age differences in implicit stereotypes, attitudes, and age identity (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2000; Hummert et al., 2002; Hummert et al., 2003; Mellott et al., 2001), future research may be able to address the contribution of implicit social cognitions to the communication process. Such research also has the potential to clarify the factors that underlie the observed age differences in perceptions of and communication with older individuals (e.g., Hummert et al., 1995, 1998; Ryan et al., 2002).

Research on implicit stereotyping should pay special attention to implicit self-stereotyping in the communication process. A major advance in research on communication and aging has been the move to consider how the communication of older adults (e.g., painful self-disclosures, Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002; repetitious verbal behavior, Bieman-Copland & Ryan, 2001; age excuses, Ryan et al., 2002; off-target verbosity, Ruscher & Hurley, 2000) may elicit age stereotypes in others. The ways in which these and other communication behaviors may contribute to or reflect implicit self-stereotyping have received less attention. For example, Ryan and colleagues (2002) noted that although age excuses are believable, they carry with them a message of incompetence. The danger is that the individual who uses the age excuse may start to believe it, and act accordingly. This danger derives from the recursive relationship between communication and individual cognitions as outlined in Giddens' (1979) Structuration Theory and illustrated by the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model (Ryan et al., 1986). According to Giddens, cognitions (e.g., stereotype schemas) are called forth and instantiated in interaction, with the result that the cognitions not only affect interaction but also are modified and reinforced in that process. Thus, by self-stereotyping, older individuals perpetuate negative age stereotypes not only in listeners, but also in themselves, contributing to the negative feedback cycle of the CPA model.

A recent study by Bonnesen and Burgess (in press) of the meanings and functions of the phrase *senior moment* reinforces this notion. *Webster's College Dictionary* defines *senior moment* as "a brief lapse in memory or a moment of confusion, especially in an older person" (p. 1198). Bonnesen and Burgess' analysis revealed more nuances in meanings of the phrase than this definition might suggest, but showed that the majority of meanings and uses stressed stereotypes about age-related memory loss. Although there were a few examples in which *senior moment* referred to a positive developm[illegible]n an older person's life (e.g., winning a senior golf tournament), it was used most often as an age excuse for a negative event that occurred to the speaker (e.g., putting the newspaper in the refrigerator). From a social identity perspective, by using *senior moment* to describe their own behavior, these individuals emphasized their shared membership in the category *older adult* and the negative traits associated with that membership rather than their individuating traits. In Hogg and Turner's (1987) terms, they depersonalized the self and engaged in self-stereotyping.

As Levy's research suggests (Levy, 1996; Levy, Ashman, et al., 2000; Levy, Hausdorf, et al., 2000), negative self-stereotyping in communication is potentially harmful to older persons, but positive self-stereotyping may entail benefits for older individuals. For example, older adults may emphasize their age group's experience and maturity—and by

extension, their own—in a context in which those attributes matter (e.g., political positions). Such self-stereotyping may increase their personal self-esteem and self-confidence, rather than induce the feelings of decline that may accompany painful self-disclosures or age excuses. Both forms of self-stereotyping communication behaviors should be addressed in future research.

In addition, to these issues, continued emphasis on ways of interrupting and reversing the CPA cycle is warranted. Baltes and colleagues (Baltes et al., 1994; Baltes & Wahl, 1996) have used a behavioral intervention to turn the dependency-supporting script into an independence-supporting script, with resulting gains in the functional health of nursing home residents. Interventions of this type may be usefully employed with professional caregivers, and, perhaps, with family caregivers. Perspective taking is another intervention that may reduce negative stereotyping. In two experiments, Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) demonstrated that participants who were encouraged to take the perspective of an older individual evaluated the target more positively and less stereotypically in written descriptions, and saw the target as more similar to themselves than did participants who were encouraged to suppress the stereotype. However, additional attention to how older individuals themselves may intervene to change the nature of the interaction is needed. The studies of responses to patronizing communication begun in the 1990s must be continued, with a move from the assessment of written scripts to the assessment of oral responses.

Here, too, older persons may either help to interrupt a negative feedback cycle for their peers or contribute to it. For example, in a study reported by Duval, Ruscher, Welsh, and Catanese (2000), young listeners who heard an older woman describe an older target echoed that description in a subsequent evaluation of a new older target. This held true regardless of whether the earlier description was stereotypically positive (e.g., mature, dignified), stereotypically negative (e.g., slow, stubborn), counterstereotypically positive (e.g., healthy, never forgets anything), or counterstereotypically negative (e.g., inexperienced, immature). However, hearing the same descriptions from a young speaker did not affect evaluations of the new target. These results suggest that as ingroup members, older individuals may be influential in perpetuating or changing age stereotypes as they are applied to their peers. This possibility requires further study, but it illustrates that older persons need not be seen as victims of age stereotyping in communication. Instead, they may productively challenge those stereotypes through and in their communication.

Of course, the ultimate goal would be to avoid the CPA cycle entirely. Ryan, Meredith, MacLean, and Orange (1995) conceptualized how this could be accomplished in the Communication Enhancement Model (See Fig. 4.3). In this model, Ryan and colleagues envision the communication encounter with an older person as a positive feedback loop. This positive cycle would be achieved through emphasizing a person-centered, as opposed to category-based, approach to communication with older individuals. This approach requires not only a consideration of the individual characteristics of an older conversational partner at the beginning of an interaction, but also a constant reassessment of the interaction as it progresses. If the partners engage in appropriate adaptations, the enhancement model sees positive outcomes for both parties in terms of empowerment, increased competence, satisfaction, health, and effective communication. Clarifying how

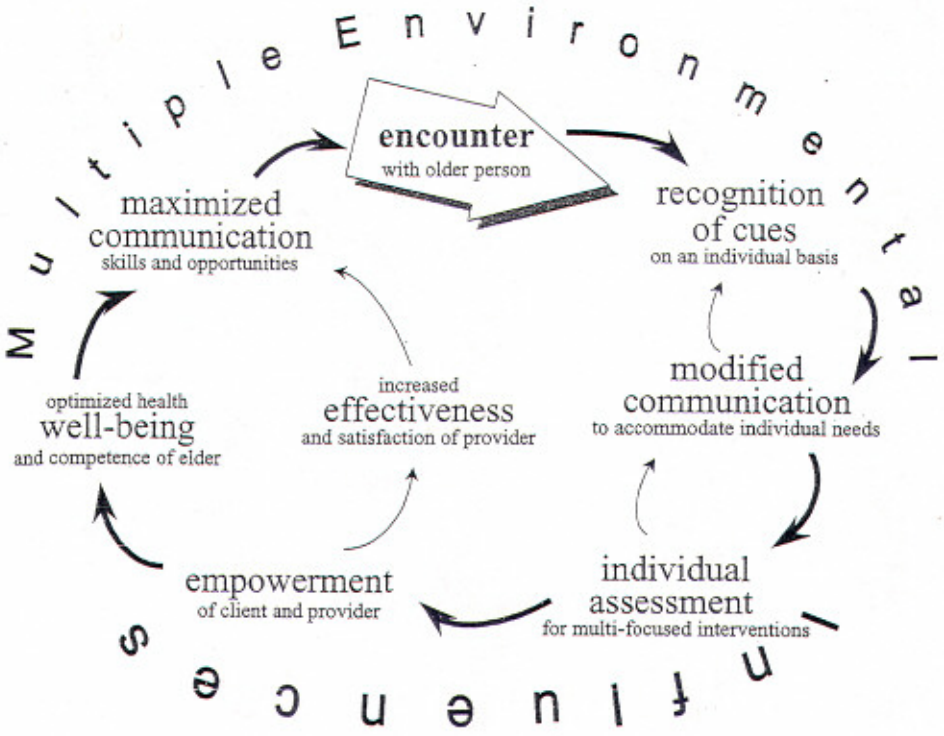

FIG. 4.3. Communication Enhancement Model (Ryan, Meredith, MacLean, & Orange, 1995, p. 96).

communication partners of all ages can enact this model must remain our goal. It is our hope that by moving research on age stereotyping forward in the ways we have outlined, we will gain insights that will help to meet this goal.

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