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# Communicative Predictors of a Shared Family Identity: Comparison of Grandchildren's Perceptions of Family-of-Origin Grandparents and Stepgrandparents

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## Abstract

From an intergroup perspective on family relationships, the current study investigates family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents to determine similarities and differences in communication and relational dimensions. Participants ( $N = 88$ ) completed questionnaires on family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparent relationships. From the perspective of young adult grandchildren, the research explores the role of supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, nonaccommodative communication, and parental encouragement in predicting a sense of shared family identity with each grandparent type. Results are discussed in terms of implications for intergroup research, grandparent-grandchild communication, and stepfamily relationships.

Family communication scholars have long-realized that the notion of a “traditional family” fails to capture the actual variety of family forms and relationships existing in today’s society and, therefore, are now focusing their attention on understudied family forms or relationships (Floyd & Morman, 2006). Two family forms that are receiving increased

attention are stepfamily relationships (e.g., Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2004; Golish & Caughlin, 2002) and grandparent-grandchild relationships (e.g., Harwood, 2000; Lin & Harwood, 2003; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). In both cases, social and demographic trends show that these are common family forms. Bumpass, Ralley, & Sweet (1995) claim that approximately 30% of children will live with stepparents and/or stepsiblings (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2004). Likewise, the aging of the "baby boomer" population and the increased life span of older adults has resulted in more intergenerational family relationships than in the past (Hetzl & Smith, 2000; Mares, 1995).

Logically, an increase in stepfamilies coupled with an increase in grandparent relationships suggests that stepgrandparent relationships are becoming more common in families (Szinovacz, 1998a). Hence, the current study merges these two areas of family scholarship. From an intergroup perspective, the research explores specific communicative dimensions of this family dyad that are associated with perceptions of a shared family identity to gain a better understanding of family-of-origin grandparent and stepgrandparent relationships.

### *Intergroup Perspective on Family Relationships*

Based on the tenets of Social Identity Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory, an intergroup perspective highlights the notion that our interactions are influenced by personal characteristics as well as more extensive social group orientations (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation; Harwood & Giles, 2005). In other words, communication is often times influenced by intergroup distinctions emerging from our categorization of the social world into ingroups and outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) is an appropriate framework for situating families in this intergroup perspective as it argues that negative aspects of intergroup interaction may be ameliorated through (re)conceptualizing the intergroup context as *intragroup* by focusing on a shared (i.e., common ingroup) identity. For example, the discrimination that often taints interracial/ethnic interactions may be reduced if the interaction is reconceptualized as *intragroup* (e.g., "we are all Americans"). In family relationships, the "family" serves as a common ingroup identity and is, perhaps, "the most salient ingroup category in the lives of individuals" (Lay et al., 1998, p. 434).

However, family relationships may also be characterized as *intergroup* when interactions are influenced by divergent social orientations (e.g., relationships between older and younger family members, interethnic and interfaith family relationships). Hence, perceptions of a *shared family identity* represent family relationships in which intergroup distinctions are minimized. For example, Banker and Gaertner (1998) address family as a common ingroup identity by exploring the relationship between categorization of stepfamily members (e.g., "us/them" vs. "we") and stepfamily harmony.

The nature of contact between ingroup-outgroup members is recognized as a facilitating condition for (re)conceptualizing a common ingroup identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). However, contact has typically been oversimplified in its conceptualization (e.g., positive-negative interaction, favorable-unfavorable contact). Hence, a more complex view of the communication is important for understanding the process of categorization in intergroup contact.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) has been the dominant theory guiding research on intergroup interactions (Williams & Harwood, 2004) as it takes into account the role of social identities in influencing behaviors of conversational partners. In general, CAT focuses on the manner in which individuals adjust communication to appropriately accommodate the perceived needs of their conversational partner whether they alter communication in excess of what is desired (i.e., overaccommodate), or whether they fail to adjust communication to the needs or desired of their conversational partner (i.e., underaccommodate).

Appropriate accommodation is associated with more satisfying relationship and its theoretically indicative of a more personalized approach where group differences are not salient. On the other hand, over and under accommodation are more reflective of group-based distinctions (e.g., young adult-older adult) as the intergroup nature of the relationships is salient. Hence, in the family, accommodative behaviors are more strongly associated with a shared family identity whereas nonaccommodative behaviors are representative of outgroup distinction (Soliz & Harwood, 2006).

Both stepfamily relationships and grandparent-grandchild relationships must manage *intergroup* categorizations for positive relationships. For stepfamilies, many of the barriers to developing a sense of a collective family stem from an "us vs. them" distinction (Banker & Gaertner, 1998). Similarly, grandparent-grandchild relationships may be hindered by perceived age difference in the relationship (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005). Hence, stepgrandparent relationships may be characterized by multiple levels of distinction (i.e., stepfamily vs. family-of-origin family, young adult vs. older adult).

### ***Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships***

Despite research demonstrating the various types and roles of grandparenting (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Szinovacz, 1998b), societal perceptions of grandparent-grandchild relationships have been fairly static, most likely due to an influence of stereotypical representations of grandparents (Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994). Moreover, compared to other family relationships, grandparent-grandchild relationships have been relatively understudied (Soliz, Anderson, Lin, & Harwood, 2006). However, this family relationship is important considering that, aside from parents, grandparents may be the *most influential* family member in the lives of children and young adults (Kornhaber, 1985). Specifically, the grandparent plays an important role in the lives of the grandchildren in terms of passing down family history, introducing family identity, transmitting values and beliefs, reinforcing cultural/ethnic or religious identity, providing emotional and financial support, and/or serving as a primary caregiver to grandchildren (Block, 2002; Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Cogswell & Henry, 1995; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1981; Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000).

However, grandparents and grandchildren must overcome challenges unique to this specific relationship (see Soliz et al., 2006). Perhaps the most significant barrier to quality grandparent-grandchild relationships is age. Specifically, for young adults, the age difference may play an important role as relationships with grandparents who "seem old" (i.e., age is salient in interactions) are typically more negative than relationships where age is not a factor. Within the framework of an intergroup perspective on families, age represents

an outgroup distinction whereas a perceived sense of shared family identity represents an *intragroup* categorization of the relationship. Not surprisingly, age salience and shared family identity have been shown to be negatively related in previous research on grandparent-grandchild relationships (Soliz & Harwood, 2006).

The intergroup perspective has been used as a framework for understanding the grandparent-grandchild relationship by applying CAT to investigate the communicative aspects associated with overcoming the age barriers to create a sense of shared family identity. The following discussion highlights important communicative dimensions of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

*Supportive communication and reciprocal self-disclosure*

Within the framework of CAT, perceptions of appropriate accommodation from grandparents are related to satisfaction in these interactions (Harwood & Williams, 1998; Williams & Giles, 1996). Both *supportive communication* and *reciprocal self-disclosure* are theoretically representative of accommodating communication.

In any personal relationship, the role of supportive interaction is not only important in the everyday coping but also to the development and maintenance of that relationship (Burlison, 1990; Leatham & Duck, 1990). Within the context of the grandparent-grandchild relationship, social support has emerged as a key characteristic in classifying styles of grandparenting (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). In addition to providing wisdom and knowledge (Kivnick, 1981), grandchildren turn to grandparents for financial support (Block, 2002), emotional support (Sanders & Trygstad, 1993), and as “sounding boards” concerning stressful events (Block, 2002; Kennedy, 1992) and during family strife (Cogswell & Henry, 1995; Findler, 2000). Likewise, from a relational standpoint, self-disclosure is an important dimension in relational development (Altman & Taylor, 1987) and closeness (Berg & Archer, 1983; Parker & Gottman, 1989; Rubin & Shenker, 1978).

In terms of a shared family identity, both supportive communication and reciprocal self-disclosure are person-centered communication styles which were shown, in the previous research, to be strongly associated with relational satisfaction as well as strong predictors of a shared family identity (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). In other words, supportive communication and reciprocal self-disclosure are associated with interactions where intergroup salience is minimal and the interactions are operating under a common ingroup identity—in this case, a shared family identity.

*Nonaccommodation*

Under and over accommodation are communication styles typically associated with negative perceptions of the interaction (Harwood & Williams, 1998). Overaccommodation is highlighted by a patronizing style of communication on the part of the grandparent (e.g., treating the grandchild like a “little kid”). Meanwhile, underaccommodation is characterized by failure to appropriately adjust communication styles to the needs or desires of the grandchildren (e.g., complaining about health). Nonaccommodative communication can

create social distance between individuals and, thus, is associated with group distinctiveness. Hence, grandparent nonaccommodation may make age salient in that the grandchild attributes this more negative communication to age differences.

*Parental encouragement*

Parents typically encourage grandchildren to communicate and maintain relationships with their grandparents although the role of parental encouragement in stepgrandparent relationship is not as clear. From an intergroup perspective, parental encouragement is indicative of “institutional support” (Allport, 1954), an important factor in transcending intergroup differences. Accordingly, parental encouragement has been shown to be positively associated with relational satisfaction as well as predicting a sense of shared family identity with the grandparent (Soliz & Harwood, 2006).

Research on accommodating behavior in grandparent-grandchild relationships has focused exclusively on family-of-origin grandparents or did not specifically differentiate between these grandparents and stepgrandparents. Hence, we know little about the communicative and relational dynamics of stepgrandparent relationships.

*Stepgrandparents and shared family identity*

Research on stepfamilies has focused on how family members manage relational issues and stepfamily development (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2004). This line of research has increased our understanding of stepfamily development (Braithwaite et al., 2001), challenges stepfamilies face and strategies for overcoming the challenges (Golish, 2003), uncertainty and topic avoidance in stepfamily interactions (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Golish & Caughlin, 2002), communication and coparenting in the family (Braithwaite, McBride, & Schrodt, 2003), and dialectical tensions in stepparent-stepchild relationships (Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant, & Wagner, 2004). Braithwaite and colleagues (2001) summarize some of the unique challenges.

Issues of solidarity and loyalty to family-of-origin, lack of family history with stepfamily members, feelings of loss or guilt toward noncustodial parents, and parental pressure to “become a family” are all barriers to connection and closeness with stepfamily members. The negative implication of failing to overcome these barriers is evidenced by the fact that stepfamilies relationships may not be as close as relationships between family-of-origin members (Fine, Voydanoff, & Donnelly, 1993; Kurdek & Fine, 1991). Hence, achieving a sense of shared family identity is a challenge most stepfamilies must face (Golish, 2003).

Much of the research on stepfamilies has focused on the immediate family (i.e., parent-child) because most stepfamily interactions take place within this family context. However, as stepgrandparents are becoming more common, family researchers should also turn their attention to the grandparent-grandchild relationship in stepfamilies as grandparents play a significant role in grandchildren’s lives.

The stepgrandparent is a unique family figure in that he or she represents two potential intergroup barriers—age salience and stepfamily distinction—to achieving a shared family identity. As research on grandparent-grandchild relationship has shown, age (and, therefore, age salience) is communicatively negotiable (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995) in that this barrier can be overcome to develop a sense of shared family identity. Likewise, these

same communicative behaviors should also alleviate challenges and barriers associated with the intergroup distinction of family-of-origin vs. stepfamily.

Although not specifically positioned in the intergroup approach, much of the research on stepfamilies centers on the role of communication in achieving family solidarity, or a shared family identity. If supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, and parental encouragement alleviate age-based distinctions in family-of-origin grandparents, they should play a similar role in alleviating barriers associated with stepfamilies. In other words, in comparing family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents, we would expect to see the similar trends in the role of supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, and parental encouragement in predicting shared family identity.

- H1: For family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents, perceptions of grandparent supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, and parental encouragement are positively associated with shared family identity.

In a similar vein, we would also expect nonaccommodative communication to operate in a similar manner.

- H2: For family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents, grandparent nonaccommodative communication is negatively associated with shared family identity.

Although it is expected that these communicative behaviors will predict shared family identity in similar patterns across family-of-origin and stepgrandparent relationships, it is unclear as to: (a) whether there are significant differences between these grandparent types, and (b) the degree to which shared family identity can be reached. In terms of the latter point, one possibility is that, regardless of the type of communication present in the relationship, there will always be a stronger sense of shared family identity with family-of-origin grandparents. On the other hand, one could argue that, because stepgrandparent relationships are not as clearly "defined," the type of communication will play a more significant role in predicting shared family identity. Therefore the following research questions are put forth:

- RQ1: Is there a difference between family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents in perceptions of supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, parental encouragement, nonaccommodative communication, and shared family identity?
- RQ2: Is there a difference between family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents in the predictive value of communicative dimensions on perceptions of a shared family identity?

## Method

Data were collected as part of a larger study (see Soliz & Harwood, 2006) on grandparent-grandchild relationships consisting of 369 participants recruited from introductory classes at a large Midwestern university who received course credit for their participation. The current study analyzes a subset of the data from this larger study. Specifically, of the 369 participants, 88 (23.8%) indicated stepgrandparent relationships. Hence, the following discussion provides information about participants, materials, and procedures *relative* to those participants from the larger study who had relationships with both family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents.

### Participants

Of the 88 grandchildren, 78% were female and 22% were male ranging in age from 18 to 26 years old ( $M = 19.67$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ). Most were White/European-American (86.7%). The rest were Hispanic/Latino (3.6%), African American (2.4%), and other/multiple ethnic groups (7.4%).

### Materials and Procedures

Participants completed multiple sets of questionnaires as part of the larger study. For the current analysis, only data from the *Grandparent Relationship Questionnaire* and *Grandparent Questionnaire* were used.

The *Grandparent Relationship Questionnaire* instructed participants to “briefly describe (e.g., name, relationship to you, appearance) the grandparents you have had contact with during your life regardless of the nature or length of the relationship.” Participants were instructed *not* to include the grandparent if they could not remember the relationship. However, they were instructed to include deceased grandparents *if* they could thoroughly recollect aspects of this relationship. Participants were also instructed to *include* great-grandparents and nonbiological grandparents (e.g., stepgrandparents). Of the participants from the larger study who had stepgrandparent relationships, a majority indicated one stepgrandparent (63.7%). Nearly a third (32.9%) indicated two stepgrandparent relationships, and a small minority indicated three stepgrandparent relationships (3.4%). Stepgrandparents were predominantly parents of a young adult’s stepparent. However, there were cases in which the stepgrandparent is the spouse of a family-of-origin grandparent. In terms of family-of-origin grandparents, a majority of participants reported on three grandparents (37.5%) with most of the remaining participants reporting on four grandparents (30.7%) or two grandparents (27.3%). Only 4.5% of participants reported on only one grandparent.

After indicating the number of grandparent relationships, participants completed the *Grandparent Questionnaire* for each grandparent indicated on the *Grandparent Relationship Questionnaire*. For example, if a participant indicated three grandparents and two stepgrandparents on the *Grandparent Relationship Questionnaire*, he or she would have completed five *Grandparent Questionnaires*. These *Grandparent Questionnaires* instructed participants to respond to items assessing relational and communicative dimensions of the grandparent-grandchild relationship as well as personal characteristics of the grandparent.

The following discussion summarizes only the measures on the questionnaires used for the current analysis. All measures achieved acceptable reliability across *all* grandparents. Unless noted, all items were measured on 5-point scales. Alphas are reported as ranges because reliabilities were assessed for each grandparent or stepgrandparent.

*Supportive communication*

A 6-item social support subscale of the Quality of Relationships Inventory (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991) was used to measure perceptions of grandparent support (alpha = .93-.94 for family-of-origin grandparents; .95-.97 for stepgrandparents).

*Reciprocal self-disclosure*

Self-disclosure was assessed with six items derived from Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) in Harwood et al.'s (2005) study on the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The items assessed the grandchild's level of self-disclosure and the perceived self-disclosure of the grandparent, e.g., How much do you express your feelings? How much personal information does this grandparent disclose to you? (alpha = .92-.95 for family-of-origin grandparents; .93-.97 for stepgrandparents).

*Nonaccommodation*

Ten items measuring nonaccommodative behavior were derived from prior research on the grandparent-grandchild relationship (e.g., Harwood, 2000; Lin & Harwood, 2003). Subjects responded to items measuring perceived *grandparent overaccommodation* (e.g., My grandparent negatively stereotypes me as a young person; Talks down to me), and *underaccommodation* (e.g., My grandparent complains about his/her life circumstances; Complains about his/her health). Items were averaged for a composite measure of nonaccommodation (alpha = .90-.92 for family-of-origin grandparents; .87-.89 for stepgrandparents).

*Parental encouragement*

Four items developed in previous studies (Soliz & Harwood, 2006) were used to measure parental encouragement of grandparent-grandchild contact (My parent(s) and this grandparent get along; In general, my parent(s) encourage me to have a relationship with this grandparent; My parent(s) remind me to telephone, write, and/or email this grandparent; My parent(s) ask me to come along when they visit this grandparent; alpha = .77-.80 for family-of-origin grandparents; .75-.87 for stepgrandparents).

*Shared family identity*

A six-item shared family identity scale was developed and validated in previous research (Soliz & Harwood, 2006): I am proud to be in the same family as this grandparent; My shared family membership with this grandparent is not that important to me; Above all else, I think of this grandparent as a member of my family; This grandparent is an important part of my family; I feel as if we are members of one family; I feel as if we are members of separate groups (alpha = .90-.94 for family-of-origin grandparents; .94-.95 for stepgrandparents).

*Relational satisfaction*

Relational satisfaction was assessed with an adapted version of the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986) which had been used for nonmarital family relationships. The scale uses 7-point semantic differentials to assess eight specific and one global dimensions of relational satisfaction (e.g., miserable/enjoyable; hopeful/discouraging; completely satisfied/completely dissatisfied). High scores represent high relational satisfaction. One item (does not give me much chance/brings out the best in me) was removed due to its seemingly low relevance to this particular relationship (alpha = .96–.98 for family-of-origin grandparents; .97–.98 for stepgrandparents).

**Results**

Prior to addressing the hypotheses and research questions, two preliminary steps were taken. First, scores for stepgrandparents and scores for family-of-origin grandparents were averaged to create two composite measure of each dimension for both types of grandparent. Second, zero-order correlations between relational satisfaction and shared family identity were computed to verify that a common ingroup identity was associated with a more satisfactory relationship—an important tenet of the intergroup framework. Results support this in that relational satisfaction was positively related to shared family identity for both stepgrandparents,  $r(86) = .80, p < .01$ , and family-of-origin grandparents,  $r(86) = .78, p < .01$ . Moreover, the magnitude of the correlation was similar for each type of grandparent relationship.

To determine if there are significant differences in communication dimensions and shared family identity across grandparent types (RQ1), paired sample *t*-tests were run for each dimension. Descriptive statistics and results are provided in Table 1. Grandchildren perceived higher degrees of reciprocal self-disclosure, parental encouragement, nonaccommodation, and shared family identity with family-of-origin grandparents compared to stepgrandparents. There was no significant difference for relational satisfaction or supportive communication.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Mean Comparison of Relational and Communicative Dimensions for Family-of-Origin Grandparents and Stepgrandparent Relationships

	Stepgrandparents	Family-of-Origin Grandparents	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Shared Family Identity**	3.84 (1.04)	4.28 (.68)	3.70	.50
Reciprocal Self-Disclosure*	2.38 (1.03)	2.60 (.85)	2.08	.23
Supportive Communication	2.91 (1.16)	3.18 (.96)	1.90	—
Parental Encouragement**	3.56 (1.08)	3.93 (.82)	3.34	.38
Nonaccommodation**	1.71 (.76)	2.01 (.72)	2.79	.40
Relational Satisfaction	5.34 (1.58)	5.39 (1.24)	.25	—

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

The hypotheses and RQ2 were examined in two regression analyses—one model for stepgrandparents and one model for family-of-origin grandparents. Using the “Enter”

method for each analysis, the criterion variable was shared family identity and predictor variables were reciprocal self-disclosures, supportive communication, nonaccommodation, and parental encouragement. The regression model for stepgrandparents was significant,  $F(4, 83) = 49.83, p < .01$ , accounting for 69% of the variance in shared family identity with parental encouragement, supportive communication, and nonaccommodation emerging as significant predictors: parental encouragement,  $\beta = .47, t = 5.95, p < .01, pr^2 = .30$ ; supportive communication,  $\beta = .32, t = 3.89, p < .01, pr^2 = .15$ ; nonaccommodation,  $\beta = -.16, t = 2.48, p < .01, pr^2 = .015$ . Self-disclosure was not a significant predictor,  $\beta = .10, t = 1.27, p = .21$ .

Likewise, the regression model for family-of-origin grandparents was significant,  $F(4, 83) = 26.40, p < .01$  accounting for 54% of the variance in shared family identity with the same significant predictors: parental encouragement,  $\beta = .37, t = 3.96, p < .01, pr^2 = .16$ ; supportive communication,  $\beta = .44, t = 3.50, p < .01, pr^2 = .13$ ; nonaccommodation,  $\beta = -.25, t = 2.91, p < .01, pr^2 = .09$ . Self-disclosure was not a significant predictor,  $\beta = -.19, t = 1.66, p = .10$ . Hence, the hypotheses were partially supported.

To further address RQ2, Hostelling *t*-tests were used to test for significant differences in the magnitude of predictors in each model. For stepgrandparents, there was no significant difference between parental encouragement and supportive communication,  $t(85) = 1.40, p > .05$ . However, parental encouragement,  $t(85) = 4.26, p < .01$ , and supportive communication,  $t(85) = 2.63, p < .01$ , had a significantly stronger associations with shared family identity than nonaccommodation. For family-of-origin grandparents, there was no significant difference between the predictors: parental encouragement–supportive communication,  $t(85) = .48, p > .05$ ; parental encouragement–nonaccommodation,  $t(85) = 1.12, p > .05$ ; supportive communication–nonaccommodation,  $t(85) = 1.68, p > .05$ . Further, using Fisher's *Z*, comparison of the stepgrandparent and family-of-origin models show no significant difference in the  $R^2$ -value for each model,  $Z = 1.65, p > .05$ .

## Discussion

From an intergroup perspective, the current research investigated family-of-origin grandparent and stepgrandparent relationships to determine communicative predictors of a shared family identity. Based on the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000), group-based barriers in these relationships may be transcended when the shared family identity is salient. Overall, the findings support and contribute to theorizing on common ingroup identity and family functioning in three ways.

First, building on Banker and Gaertner's (1998) work, the results further demonstrate the applicability of the CIIM for stepfamily research by focusing on stepgrandparent relationships. Although grandchildren perceived higher levels of shared family identity with family-of-origin grandparents compared to stepgrandparents, the findings support the theoretical attributes of a common ingroup identity in that there was a strong association between relational satisfaction and a sense of shared family identity for both types of grandparents. Employing the CIIM will be beneficial in investigating other family relationships where intergroup distinctions exist (e.g., interethnic, interfaith relationships).

Second, research employing the CIIM has historically focused on one level of categorization. However, as in the case of stepgrandparents in which *multiple* intergroup distinctions exist (i.e., younger adult/older adult, family-of-origin vs. stepfamily), our interactions may operate on various levels of categorization. The findings demonstrate that a common ingroup can transcend the multiple group distinctions. Therefore, the CIIM is useful for understanding intergroup contexts within and outside of the family where multiple intergroup distinctions exist (e.g., interethnic couples with different religious backgrounds).

Third, the current study extends the CIIM by focusing on the communicative processes associated with developing a common ingroup identity. Specifically, supportive communication, parental encouragement, and nonaccommodation are associated with a shared family identity in both types of grandparent relationships. Although the research focused on family relationships, these communicative dimensions are relevant in other intergroup contexts. Both supportive communication and parental encouragement facilitate the perception of a common ingroup identity. Supportive communication reflects a more person-centered interaction and, thus, group-based categorization is likely minimized. The role of parental encouragement supports Allport's (1954) contention that one of the facilitating conditions for minimizing group-based barriers is support of intergroup contact which, in the context of grandparent relationships, often comes from parents.

Whereas supportive communication and parental encouragement are positively associated with a common ingroup identity, nonaccommodation is a negative predictor of shared family identity. In interactions, nonaccommodative communication accentuates group salience and, hence, is perceived as more negative. For example, nonaccommodation may accentuate age differences in family-of-origin grandparent relationships as well as accentuating age differences and stepfamily vs. family-of-origin distinctions in stepgrandparent relationships. For stepgrandparents, nonaccommodation has a weaker association with shared family identity compared to supportive communication and parental encouragement. Thus, in certain relationships, personalized communication is more influential in transcending group distinctions than a *lack* of more negative communication.

The role (or lack thereof) of reciprocal self-disclosure was somewhat surprising as it did not emerge as a significant predictor of shared family identity for either grandparent types. Perhaps, this is due to the nature of self-disclosure. Although traditionally viewed as a characteristic of positive relationships, individuals may vary on the scope and depth of disclosure they desire in their relationships (Baxter, 1990). The complexity of self-disclosure is further accentuated by the fact that painful self-disclosures (e.g., discussing health problems, bereavement) by grandparents have negative connotations (Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002) whereas reciprocal self-disclosure is typically perceived as positive. Hence, within the grandparent-grandchild relationship, self-disclosure can be perceived as both positive and negative thereby confounding the role in intergroup contact.

Although the communicative dimensions may be specific to this family contact, the findings demonstrate that theorizing on intergroup contact and common ingroup identity would benefit from a more developed conceptualization of communication. Specifically, future research should focus on personalized, accommodating communication (e.g., supportive communication), nonaccommodative communication, and support of contact (e.g.,

parental encouragement) to better understand the interactive processes for transcending group barriers.

In addition to the theoretical implications for the CIIM, the study offers intriguing findings concerning similarities and differences in family-of-origin grandparent and stepgrandparent relationships. As previously stated, grandparents and, to a lesser extent, stepgrandparent relationships have been understudied in the family communication literature. Hence, addressing supportive communication, reciprocal self-disclosure, nonaccommodative communication, and parental encouragement connects scholarship on *these* family relationships with the broader area of family and interpersonal communication. Likewise, applying the intergroup framework, with a specific emphasis on accommodating behaviors, to other stepfamily relationships will complement our current knowledge on blended family functioning.

Supporting previous research (e.g., Block, 2002; Kennedy, 1992; Sanders & Trygstad, 1993), supportive communication is an integral aspect of this intergenerational family dyad. Not only is supportive communication associated with a shared family identity and, indirectly, relational satisfaction but grandchildren perceived similar levels of supportive communication from both types of grandparents. Further inquiries should focus on the content and type of support to investigate any qualitative differences in grandparent relationships.

Whereas previous research has focused on the mediating role of parents in grandparent-grandchild relationships, this factor has not been addressed in research on stepgrandparent relationships. Based on the grandchildren's perspective, parents are more likely to support intergenerational contact in families-of-origin compared to stepfamilies. In one sense, one might expect parental encouragement to be stronger in stepfamily relationships as parents attempt to facilitate development of a shared family identity. Perhaps parents realize the challenge the children are facing with other stepfamily relationships and, therefore, do not want to pressure familial contact with family members that are not deemed as important. Another explanation is the fact that parents of the grandchildren may be experiencing challenges with the mother or father-in-law of the stepparent. Although this type of parent-grandparent factor would not be unique to stepfamilies, the fact that some of these marriages may be fairly new would suggest that the parents are still developing relationships with their in-laws. Finally, grandchildren may be receiving "conflicting messages" from the divorced parents. One parent may encourage contact with their new spouse's parent (i.e., the stepgrandparent) whereas the other parent is not supportive or, perhaps, actively discouraging this contact.

Further, grandchildren perceived higher levels of self-disclosure in relationships with family-of-origin grandparents. Considering the nature of this type of communication, the difference in reciprocal self-disclosure could be a reflection of the length of relationship with the family-of-origin grandparents. If stepgrandparent relationships are still in the process of developing, then self-disclosing behaviors may not be considered appropriate. Further research on frequency of disclosure, type of disclosure, and, perhaps most importantly, *expectations* of self-disclosure in the grandparent-grandchild relationships is warranted.

Likewise, grandchildren perceived higher levels of nonaccommodation with family-of-origin grandparents. Because nonaccommodation is indicative of intergroup distinction,

we would expect these behaviors to be more common in interactions characterized by *multiple* intergroup distinctions (i.e., stepgrandparents). Perhaps a certain degree of familiarity—as expected in family-of-origin grandparent relationships—lends itself to less self-monitoring resulting in more over and/or underaccommodative tendencies. Hence, future research should investigate how nonaccommodation operates in personal relationships.

Finally, with the prevalence of stepfamilies, the role of the stepgrandparents in family functioning should receive more scholarly attention. For example, the stepgrandparent may actually be influential in creating a sense of solidarity in the immediate stepfamily (i.e., stepparents, stepsiblings). In other words, because grandparents are typically perceived as sources of wisdom, historical knowledge, and family history, stepgrandchildren may feel a sense of solidarity with their stepgrandparents. In turn, this relationship may positively influence stepchild-stepparent relationships. Likewise, depending on the quality and frequency of contact, the stepgrandparent may play an influential role in the lives of grandchildren. Obviously, this is an area of stepfamily relationships “ripe” for research.

The discussion has highlighted broader theoretical implication for studying grandparent relationships, stepfamilies, and other intergroup contexts. However, these implications should be considered taking into account specific limitations. Because the data were collected as a “snapshot” of the relationship, this area of inquiry would be enhanced by a focus on stepgrandparent relationship development (e.g., the influence of family-of-origin grandparent relationships on stepgrandparents relationships, significant turning points in the relationship). Further, the sample is fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity. Hence, researchers should make an effort to examine any cultural variations associated with family functioning. Finally, the method of analysis was based on average scores across grandparent types when there were multiple grandparents. Future research on stepgrandparenting should account for variability in when there are multiple stepgrandparent relationships.

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