We evaluated an intergenerational program bringing together older people and adolescents to examine assumptions underlying intergenerational programming and determine if either generation changed its attitudes toward the other. Program components allowed older people and adolescents to act as either intergenerational helpers or recipients of help. The amount of intergenerational contact prior to participating in the program was examined. Only one group's attitudes changed following participation in the program: adolescents who helped older people showed more enjoyment in being with older people, decreased social distance, and a more positive perception of older people's attitudes toward the young.

Key Words: Evaluation, Program, Elderly, Teenagers, Attitudes

The Effects of Intergenerational Experiences on Adolescents and Older Adults¹

Nancy J. Chapman, PhD,² and Margaret B. Neal, PhD³

Intergenerational programs (organized activities designed to bring together two generations for the purpose of attitude change) are generally based, explicitly or implicitly, on a number of assumptions. First is the assumption that older people and youth have negative attitudes toward each other. Second, programs assume that in our mobile society youth and the elderly often have relatively little contact (Sussman & Pfeifer, 1988). Third, they assume that increasing the amount of contact between the generations will build understanding and more positive attitudes. Although many programs have been developed to increase contact and to encourage formation of better relationships between adolescents and older adults, relatively little is known about the accuracy of the assumptions upon which such programs appear to be based, nor have many evaluations of such programs been conducted.

This paper examines these assumptions through an evaluation of a 1985-86 intergenerational program, the Elderly-Youth Exchange (EYE) program, which brought together older people and adolescents. The program was unique in that it involved youth and elders as either helpers or recipients of help in a variety of contexts involving intergenerational contact. In addition to assessing changes in attitudes and behavioral intentions among participants as a result of participation in the program, intergenerational relationships and attitudes existing at the outset of the program were examined.

Evidence in the literature for the assumptions listed above is lacking in some cases, and in others is not entirely supportive. Although there is a widespread belief that people in American society have negative attitudes toward older persons and that older persons also have negative attitudes toward teenagers, both positive and negative attitudes have been found. For example, Lusczc (1985-86) reports that middle-aged and elderly persons were viewed more positively than adolescents on three dimensions but more negatively on one. Kite and Johnson's (1988) meta-analysis of studies of attitudes toward young and old finds that, of the 43 analyses included, 30 show more negative attitudes toward the elderly, 11 show more positive attitudes toward younger people, and 2 show no difference. They and others (e.g., Greenshields, Roberts, & Stewart, 1980; Lusczc, 1983) find consistent evidence that attitudes are more likely to be positive when responses are to specific rather than generalized older persons or situations.

Concerning the assumption that older people and teenagers have little contact, some (e.g., Sussman & Pfeifer, 1988) argue that the smaller family sizes during the Depression and again beginning in the 1970s mean that some cohorts of older people have few grandchildren. At the same time, Hagestad (1985) and others point out that increases in longevity mean that today's youth are more likely to have living grandparents and great-grandparents. Little is known about the presence of contact and close intergenerational relationships among nonkin.

A premise underlying all programs that bring the young and old together is that contact between the generations will lead to more positive attitudes. There is a theoretical basis for this assumption in Heider's (1958) balance theory and Homan's (1974) exchange theory. Both theories expect that associa-

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Chicago, November 1986. The research was supported by a grant from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust to the Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University. We thank the sponsoring agencies, Westside Youth Service Center and Neighborhood House, and key staff members Joan Meyerhoff and Larry Reeves for their work in implementing the program, as well as Berit Ingersoll-Dayton and Maria Talbot for their critical reading of an earlier draft.

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tion will lead to more positive attitudes, but only if the individuals discover similarities as a result of contact. There is the danger, found in at least one study of intergenerational contact (Auerbach & Levenson, 1977) and numerous studies of interracial contact (Amir, 1969), that contact can cause negative rather than positive attitude change. Contact is most likely to lead to positive attitude change when the two groups are of equal socioeconomic status, when the social climate favors group contact, when contact is pleasant and at an intimate level, and when the groups interact in functionally important activities (Amir, 1969).

Studies specifically relating attitudes toward the elderly with amount of previous intergenerational contact have found evidence of a positive relationship (Knox, Gekoski, & Johnson, 1986; Naus, 1973; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969) and of no relationship (Drake, 1957). Similarly, the findings of evaluations of intergenerational programming have been inconsistent regarding the effects of these programs on the attitudes of young people toward the elderly. For example, Auerbach and Levenson (1977) found that having older people as college classmates produced more positive attitudes among the younger students, a finding the authors attribute to feelings of unfair competition. Doka (1985–86) found no effect of an oral history project on the attitudes of the adolescent interviewers. However, educational or training programs in gerontology that did not involve personal contact have been found to have significant positive effects on attitudes (Glass & Trent, 1980; Labouvie-Vief & Baltes, 1976). No evaluations of programs focusing on changing the attitudes of the elderly toward adolescents were found.

To investigate these assumptions and expectations, the following hypotheses were formulated: (1) a substantial number of both the elderly and youth participants will lack significant intergenerational contact at the outset of the program; (2) a substantial number of participants will have negative attitudes toward the other generation at the outset of the program; (3) those who have more choice about participating will have more positive attitudes at the outset than those with less choice (i.e., there will be self-selection of those with positive attitudes); (4) participation in the program will be associated with positive change in attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the other generation, especially among those with little intergenerational contact prior to the program and those with more hours of intergenerational contact during the program.

Description of the Program

The EYE program had two components: one in which youth helped members of the older generation, and one in which older adults helped youth. The program was implemented and directly supervised by staff from a senior services agency and a youth services center in Portland, OR, a metropolitan region with a population of 1.4 million. Program objectives included fostering reciprocal rather than one-way relationships, fostering longer term contacts between the generations (i.e., more than one or two visits), and providing needed services and meaningful work for both age groups.

The program component in which youth helped elders was an employment program in which youth gained work experience and job skills by providing house and yard care for older persons. Youth received 30 hours of training, learning about aging and job skills, then continued to meet as a group for one or two hours each week during the next 6 months. Each youth provided 3 or 4 hours of service per week to each of two older persons over the 6-month period. The median number of total hours of intergenerational contact for participants in this component was 96 for youth and 49 for older adults.

The program component in which elders helped youth (the education/recreation component) included tutoring individuals and groups, and leading or teaching in recreation programs for disadvantaged youth (summer camps and a basketball program), a youth emancipation program through the YMCA, and special educational programs in several schools and with the Campfire Girls. The median number of hours of contact was 10 for youth and 14 for older adult participants.

Methods

Sample

Participants in the EYE program consisted of four independent groups: youth helpers (n = 45) and older recipients (n = 82) in the employment component; and youth recipients (n = 163) and older helpers (n = 25) in the education/recreation component. For analyses requiring data gathered both before and after participation in the program, the n is reduced to 90 youth (41 helpers and 49 recipients) and 87 older participants (17 helpers and 70 recipients). The large reduction in the number of youth recipients is due to a school class that took the pretest but for which an intervention was not developed.

Among those who completed the program, the ages of the youth participants ranged from 9 to 18, and those of the older participants ranged from 53 to 92. Youth recipients were likely to be somewhat younger than youth helpers (means of 13.9 and 15.7 years, respectively), and older adult helpers were younger (means of 70.7 vs. 75.3 years), better educated, and healthier than older adult recipients. Females predominated in all four groups, but especially among the older participants, ranging from a high of 80% (older recipients) to a low of 53% (youth recipients).

Participants responded to a questionnaire both before and after completion of their participation in the program. The questionnaire was administered as a self-report instrument to both groups of youths and to the older helpers. The older recipients were interviewed in person.

One might argue that an intergenerational program will attract only those with positive attitudes at
the outset. Such self-selection was least likely to be present among the youth recipients because most of these participants did not know that older people would be involved in the activity when they chose to participate. The other three groups were recruited explicitly to work in or receive services through an intergenerational program, and thus might be expected to have positive attitudes toward the other generation. For example, a few potential older recipients refused to receive in-home service from a teenager, and thus self-selected out of the program. The effects of self-selection on attitudes are analyzed and reported below.

**Measures**

Measures of intergenerational contact were derived from nine questions about the extent and nature of participants’ previous intergenerational contact. Participants were asked how many relatives they had who were, for the respective age groups, either elderly or teenagers, and how many elderly or teenage relatives and nonrelatives they felt close to. Each participant was asked to identify the elderly or teenaged person to whom he or she felt closest and to rate the intimacy of that relationship. A scale measuring intimacy of prior relations was created by combining responses to two items: the number of relatives and of nonrelatives from the other generation the participant felt close to.

The quantitative dependent measures, described below, included scales that measured affective response to the other age group (via the semantic differential), behavioral intentions toward the other age group (the social distance scale), self-esteem, and several single-item evaluations of the program. Average scores for all scales were obtained by summing the items and dividing by the number of items answered. Scales for which an individual was missing more than one or two items (depending on the number of items in the scale) were assigned as missing.

**Semantic Differential.** — Separate semantic differential scales comprising different bipolar adjectives were created for the youth (17 items, \( \alpha = .84 \)) and older adult (19 items, \( \alpha = .79 \)) questionnaires. The adjectives for the older adult questionnaire were chosen from existing semantic differential scales developed by Rosencranz and McNevin (1969), Eis dorfer and Altorcchi (1961), Kogan and Wallach (1961), and Thomas and Yamamoto (1975). Examples were included from each of the three factors (evaluative, activity, autonomy) typically identified in factor analyses of intergenerational semantic differential scales. The adjectives on the youth scale were those used by Ward-Beamon (1984). Youth were asked to “circle the number [on a 7-point scale] that best describes the average older (age 60 or over) person.” The procedure was altered for older adults based on the difficulty some had with the bipolar response format in pilot testing; only one end of the scale (sometimes negative, sometimes positive) was presented, and older respondents were asked whether the adjective was “very descriptive, usually descriptive, sometimes descriptive, or not at all descriptive of the average American teenager.”

**Social Distance.** — The social distance scales were adapted slightly from those developed by Kidwell and Booth (1977) and by Ward-Beamon (1984). The scales’ nine items form a Guttman scale of behaviors that the respondent would be willing to engage in with a person of another generation, such as the likelihood of starting a conversation with an unknown teenager/older person, or willingness to spend a week’s vacation with a teenager/older person.

**Self-Esteem.** — Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale (10 items, \( \alpha = .84 \) for youth, \( .80 \) for elderly), with its four response choices for each item, was used.

**Other Quantitative Measures.** — Single-item pre- and post-measures included, “How much would you say you enjoy being with teenagers/older persons?” (7-point scale), “How would you say older people feel about younger people?” (7-point scale, youth only), and a variety of items evaluating participants’ responses to the program and to the intergenerational contact.

**Qualitative Measures.** — Open-ended questions in the posttest included, “What do you feel you learned about teenagers/older persons as a result of your participation in EYE?” and “Did you learn anything about yourself as a result of your participation?”

**Results**

The first four sets of analyses describe the intergenerational contact and attitudes of the youth and older adults at the outset of the program. All participants who completed the pretest are included.

**Intergenerational Experience Prior to Participation in the Program**

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of the youth had older kin to whom they felt close, but a minority...
had older nonkin friends. In contrast, the older generation reported much less contact with both teenage kin and nonkin. Among the elderly, the older recipients in particular (those receiving household help) were more likely to lack intergenerational contact and less likely to identify any teenager to whom they felt close. Among the youth, the helpers were more likely than the recipients to have older friends and to have older people, kin or nonkin, to whom they felt close.

**Attitudes of Youth and Elderly Prior to Participation**

The mean scores on the semantic differential, the social distance scale, and the single item measuring enjoyment of intergenerational contact were on the positive side of neutral for all four groups. However, scores on the latter item revealed that almost 20% of the teenagers, but only 5% of the older people, reported a dislike for intergenerational contact.

The intergenerational attitudes of youth and elderly prior to participation in the program were compared by using t tests. Only two attitude measures at the pretest were comparable: the social distance scale and the item measuring enjoyment of intergenerational contact. The older participants (recipients and helpers combined) perceived significantly lower social distance toward teenagers than adolescents perceived toward older persons, t(199,106) = -7.66, p < .001, and they reported enjoying their contact with the other generation more, t(194,103) = -5.12, p < .001.

**Effects of Self-Selection**

If participants with more choice about being involved in the program had more positive attitudes at the outset, we would expect that the attitudes of youth recipients would be significantly more negative than those of youth helpers, and that there would be no difference between the attitudes of older recipients and older helpers. The t tests comparing helpers and recipients within each age group showed only one significant difference, and it was consistent with the hypothesis of self-selection: the youth helpers reported significantly less social distance between themselves and older persons than did youth recipients, t (45, 154) = 2.37, p < .05.

**Predictors of Prior Intergenerational Attitudes**

Were those with little prior contact with the other generation more likely to have negative intergenerational attitudes at the outset of the program, as expected? Multiple regression analyses using pretest data were carried out separately for the combined youth and combined older adult samples to predict scores on social distance, the semantic differential, and the single items, “How much do you enjoy being with teenagers/older persons?” and “How would you say older people feel about younger people?” The samples were combined to create an adequate sample size for the analyses. Independent variables were demographic characteristics of the participants and indicators of previous intergenerational contact (see Table 2).

Among the youth, girls and those with relatively few grandparents or great-grandparents were more likely to report enjoying contact with older people and had lower social distance scores (i.e., were more willing to engage in positive behaviors with older people). Those with few grandparents also had more positive scores on the semantic differential. Finally, adolescents who rated their relationship with their closest older relative or friend as more intimate had more positive scores on the semantic differential and had more positive perceptions of older people’s attitudes toward the young. Similar analyses for the combined older sample yielded no significant predictors of prior attitudes toward teenagers.

**Effect of the EYE Program on Attitudes**

Paired t tests were used to assess the effect of the program on the intergenerational attitudes of each of the four groups. Participants’ scores on the attitude measures as assessed prior to participation in the program were compared with their scores at the conclusion of the program. For only one of the groups, youth helpers (i.e., youth in the employment program), were there any significant changes in attitudes. As shown in Table 3, at the posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Enjoy elderly</th>
<th>Social distance</th>
<th>Semantic differential</th>
<th>How old feel about young</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of grandparents</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.04**</td>
<td>-.07**</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of grandparents youth feels close to</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of nonrelative older intimates</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy of relationship with closest older person</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom</td>
<td>6,167</td>
<td>6,173</td>
<td>6,173</td>
<td>6,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global F (df = 8, 117)</td>
<td>2.63*</td>
<td>3.66**</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.  **p < .01.
youth helpers reported more enjoyment in being with older people, $t(38) = 2.32, p < .05$; decreased social distance to older people, $t(40) = 2.69, p = .01$; and a more positive perception of older people's attitudes toward the young, $t(36) = 2.79, p < .01$. However, youth helpers also showed significant negative changes in items asked only of that group (not shown in Table 3); specifically, they showed decreased interest in working with teens/older persons, $t(39) = -2.31, p < .05$, engaging in a social activity with, $t(39) = -2.96, p < .01$, and volunteering with older people in the near future, $t(39) = -2.74, p < .01$.

To explore what factors distinguished those individuals whose attitudes changed from those whose attitudes did not change, multiple regression analyses were carried out for both the combined elder and combined youth samples. For the youth, the posttest attitude scores on each of the major outcome measures (social distance, semantic differential, enjoyment of contact, and perception of older people's attitudes toward the young) were regressed on the interaction of the two. Dummy variables for gender of the participant, the number of grandparents, the intimacy of prior relations with older adults, and the amount of time spent in contact with older persons during the program. Similar analyses were carried out for the older adults.

For both the older adults and the youth, posttest scores on the dependent variable were significant predictors of posttest scores; there were no additional significant predictors for the older sample. Among the youth, the only dependent variable with significant predictors in addition to the pretest score was, "How would you say older people feel about younger people?" $F(6,63) = 6.28, p < .01$. Girls showed significantly more positive change in their perceptions of older people's attitudes toward the young, $\beta = .72, p < .05$, as did those youth with close relationships with older people prior to the program ($\beta = .28, p < .05$). Neither the role of the participant (i.e., helper vs. recipient) nor the number of hours of contact with older people in the program was associated with attitude change.

Finally, all participants responded to direct questions about their evaluation of the program and whether they felt their attitudes had changed as a result of their participation (see Table 4). Looking first at the absolute scores on the items, on average both youth and elders felt positive about the program and its effect on their understanding of and attitudes toward the other generation. Regression analysis was used to test for significant differences in self-assessed attitudes due to generation (youth/elder) and program (employment/education) and due to the interaction of the two. Dummy variables for generation and program were entered into the equation as a block (significance levels are shown in the columns labeled "main effects" in Table 4), followed by the interaction term (significance levels in the final column of Table 4). There were significant effects of generation for three questions: youth were more likely to report that the programs increased their understanding of the other generation and gave them a chance to know other generation and enjoying contact. In addition, participants in the employment program reported more positive impact of the program on their attitudes toward the other generation.

### Table 3. Change in Attitudes and Self-Esteem of Participants in the Elderly-Youth Exchange Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>Employment program (mean scores)</th>
<th>Education/ recreation programs (mean scores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth helpers</td>
<td>Older recipients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic differential</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.3*</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you enjoy being with teens/older persons?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.8*</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do older people feel about teenagers?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic differential</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social distance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4*</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you enjoy being with teens/older persons?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.4*</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do older people feel about teenagers?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.8**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Higher scores are more positive for all scales.  
*bSeven-point scale for youth; 4-point scale for older adults.  
*p < .05 significant difference on t test comparing pretest and posttest.  
**p < .01 significant difference on t test comparing pretest and posttest.
Significant interaction effects of generation with program type were found for two questions. In both cases, youth in the employment program and elders in the education program (both in helping roles) reported increased understanding of and positive change in attitude toward the other generation.

Qualitative Evaluation. — The program’s acronym, EYE, symbolized the program’s goal to help each generation see the world through the eyes of the other. The responses of participants to two open-ended questions help assess the attainment of that goal: “What do you feel you learned about older persons/teenagers as a result of your participation in the EYE program?” and “Did you learn anything about yourself as a result of your participation?”

The responses to the latter question were particularly interesting. Among the youth, three themes predominated. More than one-fourth of the youth helpers commented on their surprise at how easily they could develop a relationship with an older person. One said, “Basically, just that I am capable of carrying on a conversation with someone older just as easily as with someone my age.” Another common theme was a new awareness of aging and how to age well: “They were once like us — young. I guess I don’t feel as scared of growing old as I used to;” “I learned that growing old is only physical and not really mental. You can still enjoy life, you just can’t do all the things you did when you were young;” “A lot about how your attitude affects the way you age. It makes me think about my attitude a lot, but I find it hard to change.” A third theme was the teenagers’ growing awareness of their own stereotypes or shortcomings in interacting with the elderly. For example, one said, “I learned that I sometimes ignore them unintentionally. I don’t mean to at all. It opened my eyes to that. I’m working on correcting the situation.” Another commented, “Many older people are friendly and fun to be around; however, sometimes I don’t slow down enough to find their good qualities.” A more complex response reveals awareness of personal strengths and also of both differences and similarities to older people: “[learning] that I can be patient and understanding. Also that my views of the world are different from that of a person 60 years old. And I have problems — but I’m not the only one struggling.” The most common response to the question, “What have you learned about older people?” was the discovery of how diverse older people are.

Among the older participants, responses to these questions were quite varied but largely positive. Responses to the two questions were combined and included, “They are more polite and patient than I expected,” “My feelings were reinforced that teenagers are intelligent, sensitive, responsible, but often ‘immature’ in relation to their age,” and “You can’t expect a lot out of a teenager.” The old, like the young, commented on the need for patience in intergenerational contacts — some discovered that they were more patient than they had thought previously, others that they were more impatient. Several older people who had received help from teenagers commented on their increased trust of teenagers. About the youth who had worked for her, one said, “I liked him very much. I left him alone; I trusted him. I feel less afraid of teenagers.” Another said, “It woke up my feeling that they can be trusted. I feel they should be given a chance.” Others noted that they enjoyed the contact and were at times surprised at how easily they could develop a relationship with a teenager. One said, “I learned I’m good company with a youngster.” Another said, “I enjoyed interacting with a teen in my home and seeing my home and life through her eyes.”

Summary and Discussion

These data present a snapshot of intergenerational relations; they do not allow direct comparisons with previous cohorts, but they do present a picture of
relatively high levels of contact and positive attitudes between the generations. A closer look, however, reveals exceptions. The older participants, and especially the older recipients, reported lower levels of intergenerational contact, and all four groups were much less likely to experience close relationships with nonkin than with kin. The limited intergenerational contact of the older participants may in part be a consequence of the narrower age group encompassed by the category “teenager” as compared with the category “older person.” The older recipients were generally more frail and limited in their mobility than the older helpers, perhaps accounting for their relative isolation.

With regard to attitudes, a sizable minority of youth reported negative attitudes toward the elderly at the outset of the program despite the positive mean score. Contrary to our hypothesis, youth with more intergenerational contact (more grandparents) showed more negative attitudes at the outset, although those with more numerous close relationships with older people showed more positive attitudes. Thus, closeness, rather than quantity, may be the key. Among older participants there was no relationship between intergenerational contact and attitudes toward the younger generation.

For only one of the four groups was there any significant change in attitudes after participation in the program. Youth helpers showed more positive affective responses and behavioral intentions in general, and more self-assessed attitude change. In contrast, they also reported decreases in their interest in working with, engaging in a social activity with, and volunteering with older people in the near future. That the most change would occur among the participants in the employment program is not surprising, in that they had the most intense and extensive intergenerational contact. They received classroom exposure to issues of aging, as well as one-on-one contact. In addition, they were paid by the program for the help they provided, a fact that probably encouraged continued participation in the program. The youth in this program acted as helpers, a role likely to increase their self-esteem and to elicit positive responses from the older people they were helping. The teenagers may also have changed more than the other participants because they had less accumulated experience and knowledge of the other generation due to their youth, and thus new information had a greater impact.

The data provide relatively few clues about which of these explanations is most likely. Due to the confounding of program (employment/education) and role (helper/recipient), the effect of each cannot be completely disentangled. However, neither the amount of time spent in intergenerational contact nor the nature of the role played (helper/recipient) proved to be a significant predictor of attitude change. Helpers (youth and older adult) did show significantly more attitude change than recipients for two of the four measures of self-assessed change. Exploratory analyses were carried out to assess the importance of the closeness of the relationship between intergenerational contact and attitudes toward the younger generation.

With youth helpers, there was no significant change in attitudes after participation in the program. However, youth helpers showed more positive affective responses and behavioral intentions in general, and more self-assessed attitude change. Thus, closeness, rather than quantity, may be the key. Among older participants there was no relationship between intergenerational contact and attitudes toward the younger generation.

It is surprising that positive attitude change as a consequence of program participation was more likely to occur among youth helpers with pre-existing close relationships with older people rather than among those without such close relationships. Perhaps youth with a base of positive relationships with specific older people at the start of the program had begun to generalize their attitudes to older people in general as a result of their experiences. This is consistent with the finding that people have more positive attitudes toward specific persons of other generations than toward “typical” people (e.g., Luszcz, 1983). The finding that the youth helpers were less interested in working with, engaging in activities with, and volunteering with older people in the near future is discouraging. This sentiment may represent a short-term decline in interest due to the high time demands of the job over the previous 6 months.

In considering the lack of attitude change among the older participants, it is important to remember that their attitudes toward teenagers were more positive at the outset of the project than were those of youth toward the elderly. There was, therefore, less room for positive attitude change. Although the youth were more likely to know and feel close to older people at the outset of the program than vice versa, the older participants’ current relationships and their experience in the program were weighed against a lifetime of experience that included their own adolescent years and usually included rearing adolescent children; the older participants were less likely to discover anything unexpected. The comments of the older adults about the youth were not entirely positive but did not appear to imply that they did not enjoy contact with youth. Rather, their comments indicate that they often consider negative attributes of youth to be simply a normal part of the developmental process, and not a reason for rejection or dislike. The findings are also consistent with Bengtson and Kuypers’ (1971) argument that the middle generations have a greater developmental stake in seeing themselves as similar to youth than vice versa. The argument may apply to the older as well as the middle generation.

A major concern in evaluating intergenerational programming is that positive attitude change will simply reflect the demand effects of the experience (i.e., participants will report change because they think it is expected of them) rather than true change (Kogan, 1979). If so, one might expect similar changes across participant groups and across measures. The finding that the impact of the program was not equal across participant groups nor across attitude measures makes demand effects a less likely explanation of the findings. The largely positive self-
assessed changes, however, are more likely to represent demand effects. Even here, however, we found evidence of differential change. More self-assessed change occurred among youth and participants of the employment program, findings that are consistent with the changes found comparing pretest with posttest scores.

What are the implications of these findings for practice in intergenerational programming? First, there are implications for the targeting of such programs, depending on their goals. If a program’s goal is to promote intergenerational contact, the findings of this study indicate that the older generation is more lacking in contact than the younger and, therefore, older people should be targeted. If the goal of the program is to improve intergenerational relations, youth are the most logical target due to their more negative attitudes at the onset of the program and their greater evidence of attitude change after participation. The findings of this study were mixed concerning whether boys or girls would benefit most from such a program. Boys had particularly negative attitudes at the beginning of the program, but the attitudes of girls were more amenable to change following participation.

In choosing an appropriate target for intergenerational programs, recruitment issues need to be addressed. In the study described here, recruitment of teenagers and older adults as participants in the employment program was relatively easy. Developing contexts in which older adults could help youth was much more challenging. Both older helpers and youth recipients were very busy, making it difficult to develop intensive long-term intergenerational involvement. Future older helper/youth recipient programs might focus most profitably on the school system as a setting where such relationships could be fostered, either in the classroom or in extracurricular activities involving the older person as a tutor, coach, or mentor.

A second set of implications relates to the design and structure of intergenerational programs. Because program type (employment or education) was confounded with role (helper or recipient), and because the two programs differed in a number of ways, we cannot attribute the attitude change among youth helpers clearly to either program characteristics or to the helping role. Future research is needed to examine the differential effects of participation in the recipient and helper roles on intergenerational attitude change. Our findings do suggest that having intimate relationships with members of the other generation, and not simply having a large number of such relationships, is associated with positive attitudes toward the other generation. Intergenerational programs, then, should be structured to promote opportunities for intimate relationships to develop over time. The optimal duration and frequency of contact are uncertain. It is possible that for the youth in the employment program the experience was too demanding of their time, and they became “burned out.” Perhaps less frequent contact over a longer time period would lead to greater attitude change and more interest in future involvement with older persons.

A final set of implications concerns the impact of such programs on developing a cohort of young people who will be future workers and caregivers in our aging society. The study found that, at the close of the project, youth helpers were actually less interested in working or volunteering with the elderly “in the future” than they were at the outset of the project. This may reflect a true negative change in attitude toward working directly with the elderly, or it may be a consequence of short-term changes in interest due to the adolescents’ relatively intense involvement with the project over the 6-month period. More research is necessary to address the long-term effects of such intergenerational programs on adolescents’ willingness to work with older people as well as their knowledge and understanding of the elderly.

References