CULTURAL AND GENDER INFLUENCES ON AGE IDENTIFICATION

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Age identification plays a significant role in young adults' mass, interpersonal, intergenerational, and intercultural communication. This research examines cultural and gender influences on young people's age identity by measuring the social age identity of male and female young adult members of five cultures varying in individualism/collectivism (Laos, Thailand, Spain, Australia, and the U.S.A.). We found cultural influences on age identity to be both unexpected in nature and modest in effect. American and Laotian respondents had similar and nominally higher levels of age identity than Australian, Thai, and Spanish respondents, with all having a markedly different age identities than those of Japanese respondents as reported by other researchers. No direct effect for gender on age identity emerged, though American females were more age identified than all other respondents. Across cultures, the social identity scale was found to be a reasonably adequate measure of age identity.

In today's increasingly age-conscious society, where children want to be adults, adults want to be children, and those in their twenties and thirties are considered to be in the "prime of their life" in terms of vitality, communication scholars are reporting important age-differentiated outcomes on media preferences, language, and interpersonal interactions (see, for review, McCann & Giles, 2002; Ng, 1998; Nussbaum & Coupland, 1995; Williams et al., 1997). For example, gratifications sought through media use vary across the lifespan (Bleise, 1986; Blumler, 1985; Harwood, 1997, 1999a; Mundorf & Brownell, 1990; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989), while linguistically, such features as syntactical encoding, lexical selection, and discourse planning change as people age (Kemper, 1994; Kemper & Hummert, 1997). Interpersonally, people are highly attentive to age. People "celebrate" significant transition ages (e.g., 30-, 40-, 50-years old) (Logan, Ward, & Spitze, 1992), increasingly receive "aging messages" during our 50s (Karp, 1988), and selectively conceal our age based on our gender and to whom we are speaking (Harris, 1994). People judge others' social/relational roles (e.g., parent, marital status) on the basis of their age (Logan et al., 1992), think highly age-discrepant romantic relationships are unlikely to succeed (Cowan, 1984), and differentially prefer spending time with people of different ages (Harris, Page, & Begay, 1988).

Most age-identity research focuses on older and middle-aged people, examining "active resistance toward aging" (Rose, 1965, p. 8), aging fears (Montepare & Lachman, 1989), age transitions and roles (George, 1990; Marini, 1984), age identities and health (Ward, LaGory, & Sherman, 1988), "ideal" (most desired) age (Barak, Stern, & Gould, 1988; Zola, 1962), and denials of old age (Traphagan, 1998; Ward, 1977). Despite the focus on older and middle-aged people in research, age identity is likely not absent from young adults' sense of self. Communication scholars are therefore calling for research to understand the role age identification plays in young adults'

To date, the following is known: (1) Compared to other young adults, age-identified young adults prefer and view more TV shows featuring young characters (Harwood, 1999a, b); (2) Age-identified young adults communicate less apprehensively (Harwood & Williams, 1998); (3) Young adults’ beliefs as to how old they are regarded by others are strongly linked to how dominant, affiliative, confident, and socially potent they view themselves to be (Montepare, 1991); (4) Young adults report satisfying intergenerational conversations when older people neither act nor communicate like other older people; they blame the elderly when judging their intergenerational encounter unsatisfactory, and they suggest the way to improve the conversation is for the elderly to accommodate them more (Williams & Giles, 1996); and (5) Young adults judge elderly people’s communication with them in terms of expected affect/emotions, their own communication poise/anxiety and need to accommodate (speaking more slowly/loudly; being polite, etc.), and the elderly person’s complaining and attunement to them (attentiveness, supportiveness, helpful/welcome advice, complimenting) (Harwood & Williams, 1998). As intergenerational communication research continues to develop, it provides intriguing inklings as to the importance of young adults’ age identity on their communicative behavior. The research reported here focuses on how and why young adults become age identified as a means of understanding the genesis of these outcomes.

Young Adults’ Age Identity: An Intergroup Perspective

Because much of the age-identity research focuses on older and middle-aged adults, an incomplete and not-at-all comprehensive picture exists about young adults’ age identity. Young adults are perceived as a distinct social group, and are stereotypically expected to be attractive, strong, active, and healthy (Harwood et al., 1996; Harwood et al., 2001). When applied to aging, explanations of intergroup prejudice and discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963) suggest that young adults are likely to identify with their age group (Giles, Fox, Harwood, & Williams, 1994) because they can gain self-esteem by evaluating positively their youth and evaluating negatively others’ being elderly (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995). From this intergroup perspective, the elderly and the young are viewed as distinct social groups that are in competition for material gain (Sherif, 1966) and psychological wellness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Theoretical models of communication and aging (e.g., Hummert, 1994; Hummert, Gartsk, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994; Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986) argue that physical cues trigger social stereotypes in intergenerational encounters that, in turn, trigger certain types of speech behavior from the younger to the older consistent with age stereotypes (Hummert et al., 1997; Hummert & Shaner, 1994), such as high volume or patronizing speech with the elderly (Ryan, Hummert, & Boich, 1995) and various responses by elderly individuals to patronization to interrupt stereotypically-driven behaviors (Harwood & Giles, 1996; Harwood, Giles, Fox, Ryan, & Williams, 1993; Harwood, Ryan, Giles, & Tyososki, 1997). Age identity seems to act as a “pre-interactional” tendency whereby a strong sense of identification with a particular group (e.g., young adults) influences communication with outgroup members (e.g., older people). From an intergroup communication perspective, age identi-
fication brings self-esteem rewards to younger adults and stereotypically cues communication toward older adults during intergenerational encounters.

Determinants of Young Adults' Age Identity

A fundamental requirement of the social identity explanation of communicative differences in intergenerational encounters is that young adults be age-identified. Preliminary evidence by communication scholars using quite limited samples suggests that young adults have elevated levels of age identity, especially when compared to middle-aged individuals (Garstka et al., 1997). The current research helps add to this evidence by providing a more exhaustive test of young people's age identification across a significantly larger and more diverse sample of young individuals.

A second requirement of this intergroup communication explanation for age-identified communication outcomes is that the factors that influence intergenerational communication also influence young adults' age-identification. Intercultural and gender differences in communicative behavior, including intergenerational encounters, are widespread (Coupland, Coupland, Giles & Henwood, 1988; Giles, McCann, Noels, & Ota, 2002; Hummert et al., 1994; Ikels et al., 1992; Ng, Liu, Weathrall, & Loong, 1997; Paolletti, 1998; Williams & Giles, 1996). For example, young people in Western cultures report more favorable, satisfying, and positive intergenerational communication experiences than their Eastern counterparts (Giles, Liang, Noels, & McCann, 2001; McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003; Noels, Giles, Gallois, & Ng, 2001), and young adult females have more positive intergenerational experiences than young adult males (Ng et al, 1997). Given the importance of culture and gender to intergenerational interaction, this intergroup perspective expects young adults' age-identity to be similarly influenced.

Culture. Because age concepts are culturally-linked (Uotinen, 1998), cultural factors likely influence the age identification of young adults. Age frequently is used to determine one's position in society (Harwood, Giles, Pierson, Clément, & Fox, 1994), and cultures differ in their veneration of the old. Filial piety (xiào), central to many traditional views on aging in Asian cultures, is a Confucian-based doctrine that focuses on care and respect for the aged (Ho, 1994; Sung, 1995). The ethic of filial piety is particularly strong in collectivist Asian cultures. For example, Thailand is a newly industrialized, highly collectivist (Hofstede, 1984; McCann & Honeycutt, 2003) and an extremely hierarchical (Hofstede, 1984; Mulder, 1996) Southeast Asian country with strongly held normative filial expectations about caring for the elderly (Knodel, Saengtienchai, & Sittitrai, 1995). Laos, Thailand's less economically developed neighbor, is a small, landlocked Southeast Asian country of roughly five million people where more than 80% of its population lives in rural areas and is involved in farming. Laos and Thailand share similar cultures and languages—Laotian is very similar to the Thai Isaan dialect (Mansfield, 1997). Under the doctrine of filial piety, older people in collectivist cultures—such as Laos and Thailand—are supposedly venerated (by the young and middle-aged) because knowledge, sagesness, and experience accompany old age.

Cultures do not uniformly care for and respect their aged. The obligatory forms of filial piety often found in collectivist Asian cultures are quite different from the considerably more voluntary forms of filial piety frequently found in more individualistic Western cultures, such as the United States and Australia. For example, young adult East Asians tend to look after older adults in terms of tangible (i.e., financial)
support, while Westerners appear to be more committed to social types of support for older adults (Gallois et al., 1999). Because the obligatory filial piety ethic seems stronger the more collectivist the culture, it is expected that young adults in collectivist cultures will age identify less than young adults in individualistic cultures. Cultures with strong, obligatory filial piety ethics (e.g., Thailand, Laos) may lower young adults’ motivation to identify with their age group, whereas cultures with voluntary and/or weak filial piety ethics (e.g., USA, Australia) may provide no motivation to inhibit, and perhaps even encourage (by positively valuing youth) young adults to identify with their age group.

While the filial piety of moderately collectivist cultures is not well known, this collectivism/care-of-the-aged relationship suggests a moderate ethic of obligatory filial piety in moderately collectivist cultures. Spain is a Mediterranean European culture which falls between the more collectivist cultures of Laos and Thailand and the more individualistic cultures of the United States and Australia (Hofstede, 1984). Although one study by communication scholars conducted in Spain found that young Spanish adults patronize the elderly in their speech (Viladot & Giles, 1998), it is still likely that the influence of the collectivism/care-of-the-aged relationship will be strong enough so that young Spanish adults will venerate the old more than those in the USA and Australia, and less than those in Thailand and Laos. The ethic of obligatory filial piety appears to rise and fall with cultural collectivism.

To the authors’ knowledge, there are only three studies examining age identity cross-culturally (Barak, Mathur, Lee, & Zhang, 2001; Ota, Harwood, Williams, & Takai, 2000; Uotinen, 1998) and only two others examining subjective age identity among ethnic groups in the USA (Bastida, 1987; Markides, 1980). Consistent with the above reasoning, young American adults report higher levels of age identification than young Japanese adults (Ota et al., 2000) and a more youthful age identity than young Finnish adults (Uotinen, 1998). The present study represents an important addition to this literature in that it examines age identity in four previously unstudied cultures (Laos, Thailand, Australia, Spain), tests the stability of age identification in American young adults, and explores the stability of age identification across collectivist cultures in this research (Laos and Thailand) and in comparison to Ota et al.’s (2000) research (Japan).

Similarly, collectivist/individualistic cultures might differ in age identity. Cross-cultural differences within collectivistic Asian cultures emerge in age-related stereotypes and intergenerational communication perceptions (e.g., Harwood et al., 2001; Williams et al., 1997), and some evidence suggests that age identification may not be strictly related to filial piety ethics in Thailand and other parts of Asia (i.e., PRC), where recent studies paint a more complex picture of intergenerational relations (i.e., suggesting that a rather negative intergenerational communicative climate exists between young and old Chinese and Thais) (e.g., McCann et al., 2003; Noels, Giles, Cai, & Turay, 1999). In fact, filial piety is eroding in countries throughout Asia (e.g., Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan) (see, e.g., Chow, 1999; Mehta, 1997; Ogawa & Rutherford, 1993), so that similarly collectivist cultures (e.g., Laos and Thailand) may differ in age identity despite traditionally strongly held, though perhaps differentially eroding, cultural filial piety ethics. Though untested, differences among similarly collectivist cultures in age identification may also emerge among similarly individualistic cultures, despite theoretical claims to the contrary (see, e.g., Hansford, 1992). Although it is hypothesized that cultural individualism/collectivism influences young adults’ age identity, this research allows for and explores differences among similarly collectivis-
tic/individualistic cultures. Thus, the age identity of young adults in five countries—Laos, Thailand, Spain, Australia, USA—is analyzed separately with an eye towards determining if young adults’ age identification is influenced by cultural collectivism/individualism.

**Gender.** Gender, as well as culture, may influence young adults’ age identification. Women consider themselves to be older at a younger age than men (Sontag, 1979), look forward less to growing old (Harris, Page, & Begay, 1988), frequently conceal their age (Harris, 1994), accept the double-standard of aging (i.e., the greater acceptability and value of the aging man), at least in an American context (Cowan, 1984), and traditionally have been negatively age-stereotyped (Barak & Stern, 1986; Nuessel, 1982). Because material rewards are attached to being young for women, it is expected that young adult women will age identify more than young adult men.

Given that there is so much societal pressure, in no small part due to the media, on young American females to stay young and slim, it is hardly surprising that so many young American women are obsessed with dieting, cosmetic surgery, and staying trim. In America’s “youth worshiping” culture, full of female role models in their 50s and 60s who look to be in their 20s (e.g., Cher, Tina Turner), and those in their 20s and 30s who look to be in their teens (e.g., Kate Moss), the authors expect young adult American women to be more highly age identified than young adult American men and/or women in other cultures. Although the authors’ cannot call on any cross-cultural age identity studies to directly support this point, beauty has been found to be equated with youthfulness and thinness in an American context (see, for review, Hurd, 2000), while cross-cultural studies on female body image have found that American women are more concerned about losing weight than Spanish women (Raich, Rosen, Deus, & Perez, 1992), more likely to have negative feelings about their bodies than Chinese women (Chen & Swalm, 1998), and are more concerned about weight, more body conscious, and diet more than Australian women (Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1988). The research undertaken here offers direct evidence of the age identification of young adult men and women across five cultures to test simultaneously the influence of gender and culture on young adults’ age identity.

**Age-Identification Measurement**

A variety of age identity measures have been used in past research, including chronological (“are”), psychological (“feel”), physical (“well-being”), subjective (“think”), ideal (“best”), societal/occupational (“do”), intellectual (“interest”), and disparity (“acceptance/rejection of”) age (see, e.g., Barak, 1987; Barak & Stern, 1986; Barak et al., 1988; Baum, 1983–84; Bultena & Powers, 1978; George, Mutran, & Pennybacker, 1980; Kastenbaum, Derbin, Sabatini, & Artt, 1972; Logan et al., 1992; Montepare, 1991; Mutran & George, 1982; Rodeheaver & Stohs, 1991; Sato, Shimonaka, Nakazato, & Kawaii, 1997; Uotinen, 1998; Ward, 1977). For the most part, these measures of age-identity are English-language measures used in English-speaking countries. To the authors’ knowledge, only a few age identity measures have ever been used cross-culturally. Measures used cross-culturally include Barak’s (1987) subjective and ideal age scales used by Uotinen (1998) in Finland, and then again by Barak et al. (2001) in India, Korea, and China, as well as Garstka et al.’s (1997) age identity scale used by Ota et al. (2000) in Japan. Although a few studies have focused on the association between “ideal” (most desired) age and gender (Montepare, 1991; Ruoppila, 1992; Zola, 1962), the authors are unaware of any intergroup-oriented scale which has done so.
The authors are interested in social age identity, that is, the manner in which people perceive themselves in terms of age. As defined, “social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from . . . knowledge of . . . membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Social age identity involves the importance of a person's age group to his/her self-concept—that is, the valuing, liking, and being proud of one's age group; one's age group membership being important and central to who a person is; and the sense of attachment, inclusion, and belonging with one's age group (Garstka et al., 1997; Harwood, 1999a). Social age identity is the importance of a person's age group to his/her sense of self.

Garstka et al.'s (1997) Age Group Identification Scale (AGIS) focuses on social age identity and is, to the authors' knowledge, the only scale that taps this intergroup aspect of the construct of age identity. All items in this scale (e.g., /value being a member of my age group, my age group is central to who I am as a person) are intergroup in nature. Despite AGIS being quite new, its use is steadily increasing by communication scholars (Garstka, et al., 1997; Harwood, 1999a, b; Harwood & Williams, 1998; Ota et al., 2000).

Per the theoretical underpinnings of the scale, AGIS has (once) been used cross-culturally (in Japan) by Ota et al. (2000), and so its use here offers opportunity for important cross-research comparisons. The research herein, as well as that of Ota et al., examines young adults—which is not the case in many other age identity studies—and both include collectivistic (Ota: Japan; this study: Thailand, Laos) and individualist cultures (Ota: USA [Kansas]; this study: USA [California], Australia). While both studies look at American young, the Ota et al. (2000) study examines young adults in the US Midwest—generally considered to be one of the more “traditional” and “conservative” areas of the country (see Vandello & Cohen, 1999)—and this study examines young adults in California—who are generally considered to be more “liberal” in their outlook on life. The authors feel that it is important to test the scale’s utility with a significantly larger and more varied cross-cultural sample, both within and across cultures. (It is worth pointing out that these are the first empirical social scientific data to emerge from Laos.) This research, therefore, provides a published assessment of the AGIS by analyzing its structure across a larger and more diverse international sample to provide a stronger test of the scale’s reported unidimensionality (Garstka et al., 1997; Harwood & Williams, 1998; Ota et al., 2000).

Hypotheses

This research tests whether (1) the AGIS structure remains stable across five countries varying in collectivism (e.g., Laos, Thailand, Spain, USA, Australia), (2) young adults show elevated levels (above the scale’s theoretic mean) of age identification, (3) young adults’ age identity is highest in the USA and Australia, moderate in Catalonia, Spain, and lowest in Thailand and Laos, and (4) women are more age identified than men, and (5) age identity is most elevated among American female adults (vs. American male adults and female adults from the other four cultures).

METHOD

To test these hypotheses about age identity, individuals in five cultures varying in collectivism—Laos, Thailand, Spain, Australia, and the USA—self-assessed age identity on Garstka et al.'s (1997) English language-developed, 13-item age identity scale using
TABLE 1  

AGE IDENTITY ITEM MEANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Thai.</th>
<th>Aust.</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value being a member of my age group.</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My age group membership is important to me.</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like being a member of my age group.</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to be a member of my age group.</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My age group is central to who I am as a person.</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that being a member of my age group is a positive experience.</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel an attachment to other members of my age group.</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a clear sense of my age group identity and what it means to me.</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel similar to other members of my age group.</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel included with other members of my age group.</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a strong sense of belonging to my own age group.</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find support and comfort from being a member of my age group.</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I identify with being a member of my age group.</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All items are measured on -3 to +3 Likert scales, μ = 0. Means greater than 0 reflect age-identification.

7-point Likert responses (−3 = strongly disagree to +3 = strongly agree).

The scale was translated and then back translated in Lao (Laos), Thai (Thailand) and Catalan (Barcelona in Spain). In Thailand, Laos, Australia, and the USA, the age identity scale was the final measure in a larger packet on intergenerational communication perceptions, while in Spain, the age identity survey was administered on its own. The intergenerational communication perceptions packet took roughly 30 minutes to complete, while the age identity instrument took roughly 2–3 minutes. Table 1 lists the 13 items in Garstka et al.’s (1997) age identity scale.

A sample of 548 participants, of which 544 were retained, completed the age identification scale. The overall sample ratio of 162 males to 382 females was similar for each of the 5 cultures (USA n = 152: 43 M, 109 F; Thailand n = 102: 23 M, 79 F; Australia n = 93: 29 M, 64 F; Laos n = 103: 41 M, 62 F; and Spain n = 94: 26 M, 68 F; x²(4) = 7.95, ns). Participants were young adults–university students ranging in age from 17 to 30 (M = 20.9, SD = 2.66) who differed somewhat in college age across the five cultures due primarily to large sample sizes, F(4, 539) = 34.23, p < .001, η² = .20. The Australians (M = 19) were a little younger, and the Laotians (M = 23) a little older, than the Thais (M = 20), Americans (M = 21), and Spanish (M = 22). Participants were students, studying English in Laos (Vientiane) and Thailand (Bangkok), psychology in Spain (Barcelona) and Australia (Brisbane), and communication in the USA (Santa Barbara). All students were studying in urban centers. Santa Barbara (approximately 95,000 people) and Vientiane (in the region of
350,000 residents) represented the least populated cities in the sample, while Barcelona (roughly 4,800,000 inhabitants) and Bangkok (about 6,500,000 people) were the most populated. Brisbane, with about 1,500,000 inhabitants, fell in the middle of the sample (World Gazetteer, 2003). In exchange for completing the survey, all students except those in Spain received extra credit in their university courses. Most participants filled out the survey during their free time outside of class. The response rate in all cultures was close to 100%.

RESULTS

Prior to testing whether culture and gender influence age identification, the authors assessed the individual items and item structure of Gartska et al.'s scale measuring age identity.

Age Identity Scale Assessment

Garstka et al.'s (1997) scale was assessed to ensure that the scale's structure remained unidimensional and its reliability consistent (Garstka et al., 1997; Harwood & Williams, 1998; Ota et al., 2000) for the cultures studied here.

Unidimensional structure analysis. Structural analysis examined the AGIS items as a set, and ideally the pattern of responses across items will be similar across cultures. Three types of structural assessments (i.e., rank order, factor loadings, and item-clustering) were made. Table 1 lists the mean endorsement of each scale item across the 5 cultures.

Rank order. Rank order correlations (Spearman-rho) were calculated to test relative stability in item endorsement across cultures (see Table 1). The pattern of responses evidenced in the rank order of item means was found to be similar and stable across cultures, except for Laos. The item-mean agreement order was most stable between the USA and Australia (ρ = .96) and these cultures showed better stability with the other non-Laotian cultures (USA, ρ = .77; Australia, ρ = .77) than did either Spain or Thailand (Spain, ρ = .66, Thailand, ρ = .63). The rank order agreement between cultures tended to be low when Laos was involved, suggesting that Laotians were not responding to the set of items in line with respondents from other countries (Laos w/ others ρ = .47, range ρ = .41-.53; all cultures, ρ = .61, range ρ = .41-.96; with Laos removed, ρ = .71, range ρ = .57-.96). These results suggested that the AGIS may be less suitable for Laotian, and to a lesser degree Thai (and even Spanish) participants. It is worth noting that these three cultures have languages other than English as a native language (vs. the USA and Australia), which makes it quite plausible that translation and/or other cultural issues play some role in this discrepancy.

Ota et al. (2000) also reported a low item rank order agreement between Japan and the USA, ρ = .11, as well as highly similar findings when the rank-order agreement of item endorsements was calculated between their American Kansans and this study's American Californians, ρ = .92. The pattern of responses to items was similar in rank order of mean item endorsement for the English speaking samples (two different USA samples & for Australia and the USA) but, unfortunately, less so for non-English speaking samples from Spain, Laos, Thailand, and Japan.

Factor analysis. Factor analysis was conducted to test the existence and stability of item intercorrelations overall and by culture. First, the 13 items were found to be
TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS FOR CULTURAL GROUPS AND OVERALL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Import</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Proud</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Attach</th>
<th>Clear</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Identify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above diagonal = USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.713</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.525</td>
<td>.573</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>.430</td>
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intercorrelated: (a) the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix overall: (Bartlett's test of sphericity, app. $\chi^2(78) = 3528.38$, $p < .001$), or by culture (Bartlett's test of sphericity, app. $\chi^2(78) = 498.05$ (Laos) to 1503.12 (USA), $p < .001$); (b) a sufficient percent of inter-item correlations, which are listed in Table 2 for each culture and overall across cultures, were greater than .3 overall (100%), and by culture except for
Laos (USA, 100%; Thailand, 95%; Australia, 91%; Spain, 72%; Laos, 56%); (c) with few exceptions, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacies were “marvelous” (> .90) or “fine” (> .80) (Kaiser, 1963) for the 13 items considered simultaneously as a set overall (KMO = .93) and by culture (Laos KMO = .81; Spain KMO = .84; Thailand KMO = .88; Australia KMO = .91; USA KMO = .92), as well as when considered item by item overall (range: item KMO = .90–.97) and by culture (range: USA item KMO = .87–.97; range: Thailand KMO = .85–.92; range: Australia item KMO = .88–.94; range: Laos item KMO = .69–.90; range: Spain item KMO = .73–.90); and (d) communalities were generally high overall (.43–.60 for all items except *attachment* .36 and *central* .37) and by culture except for Laos (range: USA .47–.70 for all items; Thailand .41–.61 for all items except *central* .39 and *value* .32; Australia: .43–.73 for all items except *important* .32; Spain .42–.61 for all items except *proud* .33, *positive* .30, and *attachment* .11; Laos .48–.60 for only 5 items, i.e., 8 items have communalities below .40—*central* .14, *positive* .26, *clear* .30, *value* .31, *attachment* .32, *support* .32, *important* .38, and similar .39). Laotian responses were problematic in that they evidenced poor and the worst inter-item correlations, the worst sampling adequacies, and poor and the lowest communalities, though responses to the 13 items of AGIS were otherwise, as desired, intercorrelated.

Principle axis factoring (with varimax rotation) was undertaken to test the nature and stability of the inter-item correlation structure, with results revealing a unidimensional structure overall and for each culture. *Overall*, across the five cultures, a unidimensional structure emerged. Although 2 eigenvalues were greater than 1 (6.53, 1.17), a 2-factor solution was unwarranted as neither factor was well-defined, nor was the two-factor model powerful. Every item but one with primary loadings (.40 or higher) on the first factor also had secondary loadings (.25 or greater) on the second factor, and all but two items with primary loadings on the second factor also had high secondary loadings on the first factor. The second factor (variance accounted for = 6%) and overall two-factor model were weak (variance accounted for = 52%). By *culture*, similar findings emerged, where items did not load uniquely on factors and factors other than the first were weak: eigenvalues suggested a 1-factor solution for Australia (6.83), a 2-factor solution for the USA (7.80, 1.24) and Thailand (6.46, 1.19), a 3-factor solution for Spain (5.68, 1.66, 1.16), and a 4-factor solution for Laos (5.10, 1.37, 1.16, 1.01). Ota et al. (2000) report nearly identical results, eigenvalues, and accounted-for variance for both Japan and the USA.

The results suggested a one-factor solution was the best fit overall and by culture for the items on the AGIS scale. Overall, across cultures, all 13 items initially loaded on the first factor of the unrotated solution, which is an indicator of a unidimensional structure, and 11 loaded very highly (ave. loading = .71; range = .61 to .78; *central* .61 and *attachment* .65 loaded the least highly). By culture, items also loaded very highly on the first factor of the unrotated solution (ave. loading = .77, .70, .72, .62, .65 for the USA, Thailand, Australia, Laos, and Spain, respectively), though *central* and *attachment* typically had the lowest loadings (*central*: ave. loading = .61, range = .38 to .72; *attachment*: ave. loading = .61, range = .33 to .80) and failed to load at all in one culture each (*attachment*, .33 in Spain; *central*, .38 in Laos). *Identify* was, by far, the highest loading item overall (ave loading = .78), and among the highest for each culture (ave. loading = .77, range = .72 to .85). Across cultures, Laos had lower item loadings than the other countries (Laos ave. loading = .62). Though reporting more limited analyses, Ota et al. (2000) and Gartska et al. (1997) also found unidimensional structures
for the age identity scale. Thus, AGIS evidenced stability in its unidimensional structure across cultures, though least well for Laos.5

Reliability

The reliability of AGIS was excellent overall, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .92 \), and by culture, range: Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .87 \) (Laos) to .94 (USA). Though somewhat problematic in previous analyses, central and attachment added to the scale’s reliability by culture (except by a reduction in Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) of .0014 for central in Laos and .0033 for attachment in Spain), though these two items had the lowest item-total correlations (central item-total \( r = .54 \), attachment item-total \( r = .60 \), range: other items item-total \( r = .60 \) to .72). Ota et al. (2000) reported similarly high reliabilities for the AGIS for both Japan, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .92 \), and the USA, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .95 \), as did Gartska et al. (1991) for an American sample, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .95 \). Three other studies similarly reported very high scale reliabilities, also in American samples, range: Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .90 \)–.96 (Harwood, 1999a, b; Harwood & Williams, 1998). It is felt, the AGIS is highly reliable, even for Laos and even with the least reliable items (central, attachment) included, therefore suggesting that the scale, with better modifications for languages other than English, continue to be used in age identity research.

Age Identity

This unidimensional structure and high reliability of AGIS warranted calculating one score for each participant as to their age identity. Hypothesis 2 predicted that young adults would be age identified, a prediction confirmed for participants in this research. First, young adults’ age identity scores covered only the upper part of the scale’s theoretic range (−39 to +39) overall (−18 to +39) as well as in the USA (−18 to +39), Laos (−3 to +39), Spain (−15 to +39), Thailand (−18 to +39), and Australia (−17 to +39). Second, young adults’ age identity scores were elevated above (i.e., not centered on) the scale’s theoretic mean (\( \mu = 0 \)) overall, \( M = 17.68, t(531) = 35.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70 \), and by culture, USA: \( M = 21.43, t(151) = 21.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .76 \); Thailand: \( M = 15.12, t(99) = 14.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .68 \); Australia: \( M = 14.68, t(90) = 11.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .58 \); Laos: \( M = 19.62, t(94) = 19.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .80 \); Spain: \( M = 15.30, t(93) = 13.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .67 \). Calculations that could be made from Ota et al.’s (2000) reported data also revealed similarly age identified young adults overall, adjusted for scaling differences: \( M = 13.78, t(199) = 13.75, \eta^2 = .49 \), and by culture, Japan: \( M = 6.11, t(94) = 4.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16 \); USA: \( M = 20.67, t(104) = 16.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .72 \) (range, skewness, and kurtosis unavailable). From this, it can be concluded that young adults in all five cultures identified with their age groups, thus supporting Hypothesis 2.

In order to test Hypothesis 3 that male and female young adults from the USA, Australia, Thailand, Laos, and Spain have differing levels of age identity, a 2 (gender) × 5 (culture) ANOVA was conducted. Table 3 provides the mean age identity for men and women for each of the five cultures. Age identity was found to vary by culture, but in a pattern not as expected nor as strongly as predicted, \( F(4, 522) = 4.87, p < .001, \omega^2 = .03 \). Student Neuman-Keuls tests revealed that young adults in the USA and Laos were more age identified than young adults in Australia, Thailand, and Spain. Surprisingly, culture had very little effect (3%) on participants’ age identity. While the authors had no expectation about age identity’s variance across cultures, it was largely homogeneous (Levene’s Statistic = 1.69, df = 4, 527, n.s.). These results suggest the effect of culture on age identity may be quite modest, at least for student samples.
TABLE 3
MEAN AGE-IDENTIFICATION BY CULTURE AND GENDER

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<th>Laos</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Thai</th>
<th>Aust.</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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<td>17.86</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19.62&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.30&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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Note: Age identity scores can range from -39 to +39, μ = 0. Means greater than 0 reflect age-identification. Means with the same letter are not significantly different from each other.

A much different picture of cultural influences on young adults’ age identity emerged when estimating the importance of culture on age-identity from Ota et al.’s reported data. Ota et al. (2000) reported data showing that roughly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of young adults’ age identity can be culturally explained, η² = .23, though no difference existed in the level of age identity between Ota et al.’s American and this study’s American data, τ(198) = -.49, ns. A one-way ANOVA conducted across all seven samples from this and Ota et al.’s research yielded a lower, though more significant, cultural effect on age identity, F(6, 725) = 20.26, p < .001, η² = .14. Student-Newman-Keuls tests revealed that Ota et al.’s Japanese sample is significantly different from the remaining 6 samples (Ota et al.’s Midwest USA sample and this study’s 5 cultures). In sum, in this study’s sample, young adults’ age-identification was not strongly culturally-defined, though Ota et al. found culture to be much more powerful a determinant. Hypothesis 3, then, receives support, though weakly and not as predicted.

**Gender and Age Identity**

Hypotheses 4 and 5 predict that women will be more age identified than men, and that American women will be the most age identified participants. No direct effect on age identity emerged, F(1, 522) = .12, n.s., so Hypothesis 4 was not supported. As expected by Hypothesis 5, an interaction between culture and gender on age identity was uncovered, though it was not a strong effect, F(4, 522) = 2.44, p < .046, η² = .01. Contrasts were conducted to explore this interaction, of which only the significant findings are reported herein. As Table 3 details, males and females reported different age identity only in the USA, F(1, 526) = 17.97, p < .001, η² = .03, where females were more age identified than males. The age group identification of American males cannot be differentiated from Laotians (male and female), F(1, 418) = 1.32, n.s., Spanish (male and female), F(1, 418) = .90, n.s., Thais (male and female), F(1, 418) = 1.10, n.s., or Australians (male and female), F(1, 418) = 1.55, n.s. As expected, and supporting Hypothesis 5, young adult American females were more age group identified than all other respondents, F(1, 529) = 33.28, p < .001, η² = .06. The interaction of gender and culture on age identity was due to American women being more age identified than anyone else, but the effect is quite modest; and neither culture nor gender, by itself, had a strong effect on young adults’ age identification.

**DISCUSSION**

As was detailed earlier, many communication scholars have found that age identity plays a fundamental role in young people’s intergeneration communication.
Nevertheless, to the researchers’ knowledge, the Age Group Identification Scale (AGIS) is the only age identity scale which taps the “social” aspects of age identification, making AGIS an extremely important scale since many scholars highlight the importance of “intergroupness” to both communication and ageism research (e.g., Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995; Giles, 1999; Harwood et al., 1995). As for the quality of the AGIS, this research finds a replicable and reliable unidimensional structure to AGIS, though the scale works best in English-speaking countries (e.g., USA, Australia), and least well in cultures with more high-context languages (e.g., Laos, Thailand). The measure may, therefore, not translate that well, and may also be missing key aspects of age identity in these cultures.

Four unexpected issues requiring explanation arise from the results with respect to culture’s effect on age identity: (1) culture’s modest influence on age identity—at least with student samples; (2) the similarity in high levels of age identity of respondents from the USA and Laos; (3) the difference in age identity of the USA and Laotian respondents from the Australian, Thai, and Spanish respondents, where lower levels of age identification are found; and (4), the marked effect of Ota et al.’s Japanese sample when compared to USA samples (both in this study’s data set and Ota’s data set) on young adults’ age identification.

Culture likely has a minimal influence on age identification when certain critical conditions for cultural identification are unmet. Intergroup theories (e.g., Tajfel, 1978) presume that persons must be “culturally identified” for culture to have an effect on a person’s attitudes and behaviors. This study’s respondents consisted of predominantly English-language learners who, arguably, may be less culturally-identified than their non-English speaking counterparts (Gudykunst, 1997; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). At a minimum, the Thai and Laotian respondents may be more representative of young, urban, English-aware individuals in these Southeast Asian countries than of young Thai and Laotian adults. The Laotian sample, in particular, may be motivated to identify less with their native culture and more with American or other English speaking cultures than other respondents in this study’s sample. Given Laos’ position as the least economically developed country in the sample, and consistent with several studies that show that low-status groups favor the more prestigious out-group (e.g., Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987), it is possible that Laotians in this study may be particularly motivated—even when compared to their Thai neighbors—to identify less with traditional Laotian values and more with perceived Western values. Respondents may therefore not meet the condition of being culturally identified enough with their culture to subsequently influence their age identity to a great extent. Culture may very well “matter,” but be inadequately captured in this study. At a minimum, future research should explore variations in measured individual-level individualism-collectivism hand-in-hand with age identity, as well as collect future data from less urban respondents.

As an alternative explanation to cultural identification, modernization theory (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972) suggests that urbanization and industrialization in agrarian societies, which are traditionally characterized by reverence and respect for older people, erode the norms of respect for the aged and replace these norms with a general devaluation of the wisdom and skills of older people. Thus, it is possible to speculate that weakened filial ethics in Laos may cause Laotian youth to positively value youth and identify more with their own age group. This type of identification would mirror the type of age identification supposedly found in Western cultures (e.g., USA) where it is argued that little societal motivation is provided to inhibit age identification.
Although modernity theory fails to explain why collective Laotians, Thais, and Japanese differ in their age identification, it may account for the young Laotians' unusually high levels of age identification. Culture may matter, but with the influx of Western media, the Internet, and other new technologies, traditional notions of culture may be changing.

Ota et al.'s Japanese respondents differed significantly from all other samples of respondents (i.e., were less age-identified). Although young Japanese have less positive stereotypes about older people than do young Australians (Ota et al., 2002) and are less likely to practice filial piety than young people in several other cultures (Gallois et al., 1999), it is still possible that young Japanese cling to some traditional values that value older people and devalue youth. These traditional values could, in turn, lead to lower levels of age identity among Japanese youth. However, the Japanese have also been found to be less group oriented than in the past (Yamaguchi, 1994). Ota et al.'s Japanese sample, then, could be rejecting the idea that they belong to any age-related group, whether it be young or old, which could also reduce age identity levels.

Few similarities exist between the Spanish, Thai, and Australian cultures which might help to understand why the youth in these cultures have similar (and lower) levels of age identification. Arguably, Thailand is changing from a largely agrarian to an industrial society, which brings it more in line with a country such as Spain that has been moving toward industrialization since the first half of the nineteenth century (Tamames, 1991). This economic change, and its subsequent effects on societal norms and values, could potentially hasten the blurring of cultural boundaries and create a scenario where all of these cultures were somewhat alike in their “Westernization.” Australia has been impacted by waves of Asian immigration, which could also potentially account for its young people's age identification similarities with Thailand and Spain. These cultures might represent a small part of a more widespread Western drive toward homogeneity and cultural convergence among youth, and especially among students who are subjected to many of the same academic cultural pressures (see Bond & Forgas (1984). Indeed, communication scholars have found that “student identity” can be even more salient than ethnic identity (Jones et al., 1999), and a similar pattern (i.e., student identity vs. age identity) may be at play here. Age identity almost certainly competes with other identities according to context (e.g., classroom, church, etc.) (see, Gallois & Pittam, 1996), and should be investigated in the future.

In contrast to this cultural convergence perspective, the findings of this study suggest the importance of attending to variation both within and between collectivist and individualist cultures. Other intergenerational communication studies with student samples also reveal considerable variation among respondents in both Eastern and Western countries (Harwood et al., 1996; Williams et al., 1997). Variation within culture might result from a variety of social and individual factors, including socio-economic status, exposure to Western media, and gender. Variation within culture due to gender might influence age identity, as it did in the results for Californian females. In the case of California youth, gender may in fact be a much more influential predictor of age identity than culture. Women in the USA are bombarded with media images of young, thin, attractive models and actresses, not to mention the plethora of cosmetic surgery advertisements and the non-stop parade of television shows that tout the best and easiest new fad diets. Given this youthful and body-focused environment, where women report more frequent concerns and body image than do men (Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1988), it was expected that young adult American women were highly age identified. In sum, this research finds that the AGIS is an acceptable instrument for
measuring social age identity, though areas for improvement exist, and that gender and culture have more modest influences on students’ social age identity than anticipated.

NOTES

1Not only do age-identified young adults evidence a stronger preference for TV shows featuring characters their age, but young adults who display this strong preference also later display increased age identification (Harwood, 1999a).

2The authors recognize that all items suggesting high age identity are positively scored and the authors believe that the scale might benefit from the inclusion of items needing recoding.

3There is very little missing data: 536 of the 548 participants completed all items on the scale and no items are missing responses from more than 4 participants. Four individuals are removed as outliers as 4 or more of their 13 responses deviate significantly from other participants’ responses (|z| > 2.58, p < .01). Individual items have very few deviant responses that fall within an acceptable range (mean z = 3.11 overall, 3.08 USA, 2.92 Thailand, 2.98 Australia, 3.34 Laos, 3.23 Spain).

4According to Kaiser (1963), item by item sampling adequacies are interpreted as “marvelous” (.90), “fine” (.80), “adequate” (.70), and “mediocre, but can be used” (.60). In this study, the sampling adequacies are all greater than .8 for all items overall and by culture except for 5 items in the Laotian data (central, positive, clear, support, identify) and 2 items in the Spanish data (value, attachment). Therefore, in general, the items show good inter-correlations based on their sampling adequacies.

5A cluster analysis was also conducted for comparative purposes to Ota (2001), with a 1-cluster solution best fitting the AGIS item endorsements. Detailed results are available from the first author.

REFERENCES


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