Communication Disconnect:

Generational Stereotypes between Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers

in American and Chinese Organizational Communication

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This thesis is dedicated to

My mother, Fanghua Zhang, who taught me everything about love

My sister and her husband, Yuyan and David Moore, who showed me how to live a life

Huanghuang, my love of seven years and counting

Abstract

This research explores organizational communication between Generation X/Y and the Baby Boomers within the American and Chinese groups using social identity theory. Twenty participants were interviewed about their opinions on this issue. Thematic analysis was used to examine themes in the responses. The themes were organized into six categories: outlining Generation X/Y, outlining Baby Boomers, generational communication, generational stereotypes, cultural influences, and favorable solutions. Two referent elements were used through the whole discussion, social identity and cultural characteristics. The study revealed a strong social identity with all the four generational groups, difficulties in communication and stereotypes because of the identities. Collectivistic elements such as respect, care, harmony, conflict avoidance were spotted from the responses of the Chinese participants. It was suspected that despite Chinese old generation (age 45-60) and Chinese young generation (age 18-28) had their own generational identities, they shared a superordinate cultural identity.

Key Terms: generational communication, stereotypes, generational identity, Generation X, Generation Y, Baby Boomers, post 80s, post 90s, American, Chinese, social identity theory

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Generation labels have become very popular in current society. There has been much discussion about different generations, especially young generations including Generation X and Generation Y. In an article by Renn (2008), *Debunking Generational Differences*, the author claims that everyone have been labeled, categorized, sometimes even stereotyped simply according to our date of birth. The author also argues that "it has become commonplace to attribute closely held views, values, and behaviors to generational differences" (p.23).

Research Context

There are multigenerational employees in today's work force. Even though generalization about the characteristics of these generations can help people to understand other generations easier, it leads to overgeneralization and stereotypes as well. Besides, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Abrams & Brown, 1989), intergroup bias implies that there could be stereotypes between workers from different generations.

However, even though generational stereotypes are not completely accurate about the characteristics of each generation, they do contain some truth about the group attributes. In another article by Walker and Derrick (2006) from Public Manager, *Talkin' 'Bout My Generation*, they claim that the different characteristics possessed by different generation workers reveal themselves in work values and attitudes. These differences in work values and attitudes lead to tension between workers from different generations. In a survey quoted in this article, conducted by Lee Hecht Harrison (a career management company), more than 60 percent of employers reported that they were experiencing tension between employees from different generations.

From the discussion above, two causal factors can be identified for communication conflicts between workers from different generations. The first one is generational stereotypes which are caused by overgeneralization and hostile attitudes in intergroup competition. A tentative definition at this time for generational stereotypes is negative and inaccurate perception of the other generations from one generation caused by generational differences and hostile attitudes.   The second reason for generational communication disconnect is that different generations tend to behave differently and hold different values and attitudes in organizational settings.

Previous Studies on Generational Communication

Studies and researches in this area have mainly focused on the latter causal factor, the differences in generational characteristics and their impact on employees' organizational values, attitudes, and behaviors. Day (2007) examined the differences between Baby Boomers and Generation X in their preference of organizational culture with the purpose of enhancing generational relationships, especially boss-worker relationships. Wilson, et al. (2008) gathered information from registered nurses of Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y to find out the differences in their motivational preference. Cooman, et al. (2008) surveyed nurses of Baby Boomers and Generation X and found their differences and similarities in work values. Generational differences in status, recognition, commitment and idealism were also researched (Busch, et. al., 2008). The overall aim of these studies is to outline generational differences and provide possible solutions to enhance generational communication.

Comparatively, there has been few studies done on the first causal factor for communication disconnect or generational stereotypes. Macon and Artley (2009) described general stereotypes of four generations, Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y. Jurkiewicz (2000), Faber (2001), and Wallace (2006) identified some stereotypes of

Generation X in analyzing the collected data in their research. Day (2007) showed that the stereotypes hindered positive communication among generations. Most of the studies merely mention generational stereotypes in producing results of the research, the focus of which is outlining generational differences. Little research has been dedicated to the study of the function of stereotypes in generational communication.

Even though Generation X or Y shares some unique characteristics as a group, there are certainly stereotypes which are ascribed to the group from mainly older generations. These stereotypes contain something true about the younger generations; however, they also carry some negative information about these younger generations. The negativity in stereotyping Generation X/Y works against them in organizational communication with employees from other generations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand generational communication of American and Chinese groups in a large Eastern private university. By using in-depth interviews as the method of the phenomenological inquiry, this study helps to understand the role of generational stereotypes in communication disconnect between participants from Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers of these two ethnic groups.

Because the United States and China are two of the largest economic leaders in the world, while having very different cultures and traditions, the comparison from the results of the studies with two ethnic groups can bring broader, multicultural significance into this research and offer valuable insight to the knowledge of management of multigenerational work force in both countries.

Rationale for Research Subjects

This paper explores generational communication disconnect between Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers. Generation X and Y are grouped together instead of being separately discussed compared to Baby Boomers for the following three reasons.

First, there are many different opinions regarding when to separate these two groups. There is no consensus over the exact birth date that defines these two younger generations. The separating year varies from 1980 up to 1990 based on different opinions. Even according to Wikipedia.org, an interactive internet site, Generation X ends in early 80s; however, it also states that Generation Y starts from the mid 70s (Wikipedia.org, 2011). Wikipedia.org, despite its non-academic nature, reflects society's opinions toward this issue. This gray area makes the attempt of discussing these two generations separately regarding the research topic difficult to comprehend.

The second reason is that both Generation X and Y are considered young generations. They share many characteristics as young generations such as familiarity with computer technology, multitasking and short span of attention (Macon & Artley, 2009; Deeken, Webb, & Taffurelli, 2008; Young, 2009). Comparatively, they are very different from Baby Boomers. This research deals with communication between old generation and young generations. Thus, it does not contradict the purpose of the study to group Generation X and Y together.

The last reason is that much of the past research has found that Generation X and Y are similar in terms of organizational behaviors, communicational styles, and organizational values. For example, Generation X and Y are usually motivated by similar elements and methods, such as pay and benefits, flexible work schedule (Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley, & Tourangeau, 2008). Montana and Petit (2008) found that the factors that motivate Generation X will be effective with Generation Y as well.

Research Questions

The overall aim of this investigation is to explore the behaviors during generational conflicts so that possible solutions can be proposed.

The research questions that guided this study are:

RQ 1. How do Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers perceive each other and their own group?

RQ 2. How does perception of the other generation shape communication with that group?

RQ 3. How do cultural characteristics effect generational communication, and what are the differences between Chinese and Americans in this particular issue?

RQ 4. How can communication between Baby Boomers and Generation X/Y be enhanced?

In the following parts, literature review will be given to provide a theory basis to guide the research and research context for this study. More specific explanations will be given on how this qualitative study will be conducted and the methods will be explained in methodology.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This literature review is written to serve as an academic background for the issue and justification on the purpose of this research. It consists of the following seven categories. The first category focuses on theory basis, social identity theory and its application in intergroup communication. Because social identity theory has been in the academic field about thirty years, and it has also been widely used in psychology and other social science disciplines, it is impossible to present an exhaustive review of the theory. Due to the nature of this paper and the purpose of the study, the literature review mainly focuses on its function of explaining intergroup competition behaviors (outgroup bias, ingroup favoritism, and intergroup stereotyping), its solutions to improve intergroup relationships, and its legitimate use in the social science fields.

The second category examines characteristics of four generations, which exist in today's work force in the United States, Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. The literature of this category consists of two parts, the first one focuses on how generational identity forms, the second part focuses on how these generational differences manifest in work values, attitudes and organizational behaviors.

The third category gives a review on characteristics of five generations, which exist in today's work force in China, New China generation, Cultural Revolution Generation (the Lost Generation), Post 70s, Post 80s (Me Generation), and Post 90s. In this part, a brief historical review on the characteristics of each generation will be given, and the researcher also examines how these generational characteristics display themselves in world views, work values, life attitudes, and other behaviors.

The fourth category looks into generational stereotypes, especially stereotypes of Generation X/Y from older generations, particularly in stereotypes which Baby Boomers and

Generation X/Y are holding against each other. This part of literature also examines how generational stereotyping can result in a communication disconnect.

The fifth category examines literature of generational communication, which consists of the following three specific areas. These are relationship between Generation X/Y worker and worker from other generations, how the environment and climate of organizations is changed by the coming of Generation X/Y workers, and finally communication disconnect caused by generational differences and generational stereotypes.

The sixth category explores one important aspect of Chinese culture and American culture, collectivism/individualism. The literature of this section first compares these two cultures in this dimension, then it will focuses on how these cultural characteristics shape the general ideas of generations, the general impression of other generations (young generation toward the older one, and older generation toward the young one) and generational relationships and communication.

The last category discusses solutions proposed by scholars in past literature to solve generational communication problems. The examination on this section can lay a ground for analyzing the solutions proposed by the participants in the study.

Social Identity Theory and its Application in Intergroup Communication

Social identity theory is a theory expounded by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. Two main aspects have been discussed in this theory: self-categorization and intergroup discrimination; and social identity and social comparison. It mainly consists of four basic elements: categorization, identification, comparison and psychological distinctiveness. According to the authors, successful intergroup bias creates or protects relatively high in-group status, thereby providing a positive social identity for in-group members and satisfying their need for

positive self-esteem. The need for self-esteem is only thought to motivate intergroup bias that is designed to bring about social change.

According to Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979), ingroup favoritism refers to any tendency to favor the ingroup over the outgroup. Intergroup bias refers to differential or discriminatory intergroup behavior which brings positive promotion to group identity. These scholars attribute these phenomenon to social comparison with a goal of possessing a positive social identity.

Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) summarized this theory as follows: "Social identity theory is intended to be a social psychological theory of intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self."(p. 259) They further explained the core concepts of this theory:

> The basic idea is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category… Each of these memberships is represented in the individual member's mind as a social identity that both describes and prescribes one's attitudes as a member of that group --- that is, what one should think and feel, and how one should behave. Thus, when a specific social identity becomes the salient basis for self-regulation in a particular context, self-perception and conduct become in-group stereotypical and normative, perception of relevant out-group members become out-group stereotypical, and intergroup behavior acquires competitive and discriminatory properties to varying degrees depending on the nature of relations between the groups. (p. 259-260)

In 1989, Abrams and Brown enriched social identity theory by comparing it with self-awareness theory. Social identity theory characterizes group behavior as highly regulated in terms of the self-concept as a group member. Self-awareness theory characterizes group behavior as resulting from a loss of self-regulation and lowered accountability. The results

from the research revealed that there was high positive relationship between higher private self-consciousness behaviors and social identity. When social identity was salient, group behavior showed well-organized self-regulation among group members concerned with a shared social identity.

In 1995, Hogg and White contributed to the development of the theory by a critical comparison with identity theory. Both of the theories are similar perspectives of understanding the interactive relationship between individual behavior and social structure. According to the authors, even though these two theories shared some similarities, they differed greatly in terms of level of analysis, the role of intergroup behavior, the relationship between roles and groups, and salience of social context and identity. It was also pointed out that social identity theory might be more useful in exploring intergroup dimensions and in identity dynamics.

Hogg and Ridgeway (1995) claimed that even though social identity theory had psychological roots; it could be and had been engaged in sociological studies. It could be used as a framework to understand the social characteristics of individuals in social groups, such as employees in organizations. The theory could contribute to the understanding and dealing with some core interests of sociological studies, such as the relationships between groups, self-identity, and social behavior. According to this justification, social identity theory could be used effectively in a number of fields, such as the study of intergroup relations, group processes, social cognition in the psychology field, management science, and organizational communication.

Brown (2000) wrote an article providing a comprehensive review of social identity theory, including its past achievements, current problems, and future challenges. The author claimed that social identity theory had been very powerful in explaining outgroup bias, intragroup homogeneity, stereotyping, "and changing intergroup attitudes through contact"

(747). This paper also pointed out that social identity theory had been widely used in many

fields that dealt with intergroup relations. "Given the main focus of the theory on intergroup

relations it is evident that its most obvious areas of applications lie in those domains where

groups—be they national ethnic or religious—are in dispute with each other." (768) Basically,

this statement expands the legitimacy of using the theory to where any troubled intergroup

relationships exist.

It is clear that there is a trend in using this psychological-rooted theory in sociological

areas because of its nature in understanding the behavior of individuals in a group of some

form and the behavior of intergroup interaction. Organizational communication is one of the

areas that this theory is heavily used to understand how people act as a member of a group

and interact with outgroup members. With different cultural and historical backgrounds,

different generations in organizations can be considered as groups with salient group

identities. Thus, this theory is employed to understand the generational communication and

communication disconnect in the interaction in organizational settings.

Generational Characteristics (United States)

People are generally labeled with generation markers based on the date of their birth

into five main categories in the United States, Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X,

Generation Y and Generation Z (Macon & Artley, 2009; Deeken, Webb, & Taffurelli, 2008;

Young, 2009). This paper only deals with generations in the work force, which excludes

Generation Z. Date of birth is the reference to grouping people, not necessarily the direct

reason why a generation is formed. McMullin, Comeau, and Jovic (2007) identified some key

factors in forming a generational identity, such as major social upheavals, music or other

types of popular culture. The authors pointed out that there was a stronger relationship

between the development of computer technology and the forming of a generational identity.

It was found that development in computer technology provided a basis for generational formation and identity.

Macon & Artley (2009), Deeken, Webb, & Taffurelli (2008), Burns, Reid, Toncar, & Wells (2008), and Young (2009) examined and described the characteristics of different generations, including background, preference, characteristics and so on. A brief summarization is given on Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y in the following paragraphs based on the studies of these scholars.

Veterans characteristics include the following: This generation is considered to lack initiative. They believe in authority, fairness, openness, due process, and expertise. They are not risk-takers and prefer to follow 'old' way of doing things. They also prefer lifelong employment and are committed to their job. People from this generation are often resistant to technology, and expect an appreciation for their long history and knowledge.

Baby Boomers tend to have the following characteristics: They strive for economic prosperity and are lifelong learners. Throughout most of their lives, the Boomers have comprised the largest demographic cohort and ruled discussions and culture. They respect authority, and believe the younger generations are rude. The Boomers believe in teamwork, but expect to be the best person on the team. They have good work ethics and expect others to have the same.

Generation X characteristics include the following: They spent considerable time at home alone when they grew up because most of them had parents who both worked. This generation is familiar with information. The Xers are independent, not intimidated by authority; creative but cautious. They are committed to family values and local causes, but also think globally. This generation wants less structure with more dialogue. They are serious about life and self-reliant, and enjoy a good work-life balance. They have a high work ethic and a drive to succeed, and are great at multitasking and cope with changes quickly. The Xers

ask questions and want to know not only how to do the job, but why. They are also considered results-oriented but need feedback to improve.

Generation Y tends to have the following characteristics: They have always been around technology and have been able to be constantly connected via computers, cell phones, and the Internet. This generation has the lowest parent- child ratio in United States history, and many have grown up in single parent households. They are more family oriented and deal better with chaos. Change is the norm for them. This generation enjoys teamwork and is better at multitasking than Generation X. They have short attention spans and need constant stimulation. People in this generation like to keep busy and ask lots of questions, and need to be structured and require deadlines.

Through the summarization above, it can be seen that Generation X is different in many ways from Generation Y. Even though the work force nowadays is still in the process of adapting to the characteristics of Generation X, Generation Y bring their unique characteristics and potential impact on work force as they start to begin their careers. Organizations should be cognizant of their differences.

Based on these generational differences, it can be expected that organizational behavior could be very different among these four groups. For example, Generation X employees prefer to be part of a performance-based culture which emphasizes short-term commitment and high levels of production, while Boomer employees prefer to participate in a seniority-based, or hierarchical, work culture (Day, 2007).

Twomey, Linehan, and Walsh (2002) compared the differences in organizational behavior between male Xers and female Xers by conducting a qualitative study of interviewing 12 male and 12 female accountants with the following goals: whether there was a tendency for male dominance; whether gender affected one's ability of the young

accountants to balance their home and work lives. The results confirmed that young female accountants encountered obstacles because of their gender.

Much research shows that Generation X and Y share many similarities in organizational behaviors. These two young generations tend to hold similar values compared with Baby Boomers. One major issue for organizations is motivating their employees. Employees of different generations tend to be motivated differently. Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley, & Tourangeau (2008) surveyed 6541 registered nurses of Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y and analyzed the data. It was found that Baby Boomer employees were more satisfied than the young generations. They were more satisfied with professional opportunities, praise and recognition, and control and responsibility. However, Generation X and Y were more satisfied with pay and benefits, and freedom in scheduling arrangements.

Montana and Petit (2008) employed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to conduct a survey with 200 Gen Xers and 200 Gen Yers to examine their preference in motivational approach. The authors also drew a comparison with Baby Boomer generation. It was concluded that the factors that motivate Generation X will be affecting Generation Y. Farrington (2006) claimed that the traditional theories of organizational motivation had not adequately addressed the importance of employees' age in the decision of adopting an appropriate motivation approach. The author thought that the age of employees should play an important role in motivation. It was also suggested that certain environment needed to be created to meet different needs from different generations to boost the efficiency and cohesiveness of the organization.

Other than motivation preference, workers of different generations are expected to be different in work values and ethics. In a study conducted by Cooman, Gieter, Pepermans, Bois, Caers, and Jegers (2008), 344 newly graduate Belgian nurses were questioned in a survey. Results from the survey showed that some traditional values were still important to

new generation nurses. Most of them listed "helping" the most important item in their work values. A majority of them listed "work hours" the least important item in the list. Another research study which was conducted in the nursing field by Leiter, Jackson, and Shaughnessy (2009), compared work values of Baby Boomers and of Generation X based on the analysis of data collected from a survey of both generation nurses. The results indicated a greater person/organization value mismatch for Generation X nurses than for Baby Boomer nurses. Sudheimer (2009) addressed the differences in work ethic and values between these age groups and showed how such differences effect satisfaction with professional nursing. Faber (2001) indicated there were generational conflicts between Generation X and older generations in terms of work values.

Besides the examination of work values, research has also looked into other areas of organizations. Busch, et al. (2008) designed a study to find the generational differences in status, need for recognition, workplace commitment, and idealism, through the analysis of their possible behaviors in soft knowledge situations. The results confirmed that there were differences in the key elements, such as status, need for recognition, etc. for different generations.

Generational Characteristics (China)

As noted in the previous literature, social upheavals are one of main factors in forming generational identity (McMullin, Comeau, and Jovic, 2007). China is commonly known to the world as a country experiencing tremendous changes for the past sixty years. It came from a closed, socialized and poor country to an open, free market-guided and relatively prosperous nation. These enormous social changes have been deeply imprinted in the identities of different generations. There are mainly five generations under age 60 (excluding children) in current China society, New China Generation, Cultural Revolution

Generation (the Lost Generation), Post 70s, Post 80s (Me Generation), and Post 90s

according to social common knowledge.

The idea of generations was not new to Chinese society even before it opened its door

to the outside world in 1978. There had been distinct generations in the society because of the

social movements it went through. However, the first generational label which has been

created, heatedly discussed and widely shared in the media is "Post 80s" (describing a

generation which was born in 1980s). This generation caused much social discussion because

of its unique characteristics compared with previous generations. This generational label and

related discussion impact how people view its previous generation and the following one.

Terms "Post 70s" and "Post 90s" were created following the model of "Post 80s" to describe

these generations. Since its adoption of an Open Door policy, China has changed rapidly in

every aspects of the country. Thus, grouping people into generations in ten year units matches

the rhythm of the country.

The following part provides a comprehensive summary of these generations in

historical contexts, including their world views, work values, life values and other behaviors.

New China Generation (1949-1959).

Modern China was born 62 years ago after Mao Zedong won a civil war and founded

a socialized state in 1949. "Over the next three decades, the country endured great turmoil

and suffering as Mao lurched from one disastrous initiative to another." (Wines, 2009, p.20)

Several significant events that define this generation are the Anti-Rightist and Great Leap

Forward Movements in the 1950s. Dou, Wang, and Zhou (2006) called this group "the Red

Generation", and noted that self-sacrifice was inherent in their value system. "They were

once firm believers in communism, but experienced disillusionment after the Cultural

Revolution." (p.102)

Sun and Wang (2010) identified that the overall climate of idealism, collectivism, heroism, and enthusiasm of the period certainly affected the identity of this generation. Bandsuch (2009) provided a summary sketch of this generation with the following key phrases: "loyalty, respect formal authority identifiable rules, adherence to institutional precepts Chinese tradition." (p.27)

Cultural Revolution Generation "the Lost Generation" (1960-1969).

The Cultural Revolution was another disastrous initiative launched by Chairman Mao in order to clean the "poisonous" elements and bring the country to the "right" path. It lasted ten years (1966-1975) and caused tremendous destruction to every aspect of the country. Bonnin (2006) stated that the Cultural Revolution was unique in world history because it was the result of the demiurgical will of one man, Mao Zedong, to create a whole generation of "revolutionary successors" entirely devoted to the cause of socialism and to the realization of Maoist ideals. The failure of Mao's endeavor left its mark on the young people who experienced it; the mark "was deep enough to form a very specific and particularly self-conscious generation" (p.245).

One of major consequences of this chaotic movement was the destruction of traditional values. "The Cultural Revolution was a period in which those who represented traditional values were persecuted. ··· Anyone, or anything, that was associated with tradition was removed or altered to comply with the values of Communism." (Mjelde-Mossey, 2007, p.112)

Weber (2002) indicated that the Government had control over the lives of this generation and this control extended to all parts of their existence. They accepted the Government's right to direct its endeavors for the interests of the group or country. Even though privately they voiced their personal desires, they conformed to external pressure.

As for personal values, this generation was "obligated by political and social forces to reject individualism in their youth, but few of these adults would want to bring back the coercive collectivism of that age" (Moore, 2005, p.375). Dou, Wang, and Zhou (2006) also pointed out that this generation was "disillusioned by the collapse of communist ideals in China and is cautious in their social perspectives, much like the Red Generation." (p.103) Bandsuch (2009) provided a summary sketch of this generation with the following key phrases: "distrustful and questioning of formal authority, apprehension and self-protection." (p.27)

Post 70s (1970 to 1979).

The historical event that had the most influential impact on this generation was China's Open Door policy in 1978. As the name indicates, China adopted many policies to open the country to the world and to reconnect with other countries. The government followed the guideline of encouraging globalization (promoting importing, exporting, foreign investment and investing abroad) since then. Thus, Post 70s grew up in a society that changed dramatically. When they were young, the country was very much like China their parents lived in; however, when they grew up, they saw a totally different world.

Weber (2002) pointed out that this generation faced a range of different challenges and experienced different influences. A core value for them to live their life is "get rich is glorious". They put their attention away from the old collective ideals and focus on realizing individual efforts and wealth.

Wang (2003) borrowed the term "New Mankind" from Japanese culture to refer to this generation. "With the emergence and development of new interest group, new values and new ways of life were born accordingly, ⋯ all kinds of opinions and ideologies have clashed. Therefore, new values and new ways of life have also been easily accepted by the youth." (p.53) The article also lists some common values hold by this generation: they put more

emphasis on spiritual freedom, independent thinking, and individual values; they choose their own way of life, work on jobs which bring them enjoyment and satisfaction; they enjoy a sound economic foundation and use brand-name products, and are always well dressed. Dou, Wang, and Zhou (2006) also stressed this aspect of Post 70s, they concluded that they "take pride in individual accomplishments and have stronger interests in themselves than the previous generations" (p.103).

Wang (2003) attributed the forming of their social identity to the development of the Internet use in China. The Internet influenced Post 70s in three ways: it strengthened their awareness of a global village; it caused them to lose their communication skills in real life or the willingness to communicate face to face; and it caused confusion in their value system, however, it provided new values to be adopted at the same time.

Post 80s "Me Generation" (1980 to 1989).

One of historical events that distinguishes this generation from all the previous generations is the implementation of One Child policy. China government adopted this policy thirty years ago, and the first generation of only children in China has entered adulthood and work force (Meulenberg, 2004). Arora (2005) also identified how this policy influenced the identity of Chinese "Gen Y". She noted that the policy had resulted in a generation of "little emperors", and people from this generation "are bucking the imperialist and collectivist traditions of China's past and defining themselves as individuals" (p.1), embracing the ideas from the West. This individualistic mentality manifests in many aspects of their life. For instance, they prefer a self-actualization lifestyle rather than traditional "work really hard and get rich" philosophy. In the poll conducted by Arora (2005) with Chinese Gen Y, she found that 37% of urban respondents indicate that they would like to start their own business or work for themselves. The author concludes this generation differs from older generations

dramatically, they are individualistic, entrepreneurial, and under heavy influence of Western

life style.

Li (2008) also pointed out China's population-curbing policy and economic reform

impacted greatly how the social identity of Post 80s was formed. On one hand, they are

spoiled by parents and grandparents; on the other hand, they want to get rich to have a better

life in terms of possessing materials. "In the eyes of Chinese sociologists, the character of this

generation is mixed with numerous contradictory elements. They are reliant and rebellious,

cynical and pragmatic, self-centered and equality-obsessed." (p.18)

Individualism has been associated with this generation in the social discussion. Moore

(2005) used phrase "Generation *Ku*" to refer this generation. The author indicates:

The millennials are the children of the Cultural Revolution generation.

Largely because of globalization, their viewpoints and attitudes are

profoundly different from those of their parents. A central feature of these

attitudes is a kind of individualism that stands emphatically opposed to the

collectivist spirit promoted during the Cultural Revolution, an individualism

that is influenced by Western pop culture and is linked to the new Chinese

slang term "*ku*," derived from the English slang term "cool." The *ku* of

China's millennials is not a carbon copy of Western styles. There are different

ways to be *ku* in contemporary China, but all reflect Western kinds of

modernity and individualism. (p. 357)

Cao (2009) examined Post-80s in the contexts of China being shifting from

collectivism to individualism since its adoption of Open Door policy. The author highlighted

several new individualistic characteristics in this generation: unlike their parents' work

attitude, they prefer challenging work and would not hesitate to change any "unpleasant" jobs;

they usually spend more than they make because of their materialistic ideology; they tend to

get married and have children late and prefer to enjoy more freedom and the pleasure of life. Cao used the following terms to refer to this generation to show their life attitudes and behaviors: "the fashion maker", "the extensive traveler", "the recreation indulger", "the freedom seeker", and "the unique arts expresser" (p.48).

In Dou, Wang, and Zhou (2006)'s article, they outlined this generation with a summarization of their characteristics and major differences from older generations. This generation enjoys more educational and personal development opportunities, and they are well exposed to Western popular culture. Besides, "they have a strong interest in self-indulgence and personal entertainment, and tend to hold materialistic values" (p.103). And this generation shows preference for entertainment-based media programs over information-based media programs.

Even though the older generations consider this generation a lucky one which could take control of their own fate and live a happy life, it does not turn out to be that way. "This is a generation under enormous pressure to find employment, affordable housing and a way to chart their own future." (Haines, 2010, p.1) A quote from one member of Post 80s in Haines article underlines the story of many Post 80s, "We are the happy generation who can't see where this happiness lies, but have to fight our way, looking for our future." (p.1) However, the author found out that this generation was also known for its positive and confident attitudes.

McEwen, Fang, Zhang, and Burkholder (2006) spoke highly of this generation by stating that it has increasing drive, hopes, and demands; it is a highly educated and information-savvy group that refuses to be taken for granted, it is open to Western ideas and products, yet still proudly supportive of their own culture.

Hume (2008) identified the characteristics of female Chinese Millennials compared with their mother generation from the interviews with several members. These young females

have proven that they can adapt to the changing culture very well, and are more ambitious in their career than their mothers. In life, they adopt ideas of consumerism and materialism from the West.

King and Bu (2005) conducted a exploratory study with recruits (average age 21.5-22.5) from China and US and found out that they hold many similar beliefs on employer-employee obligations, "such as employers' obligations to provide high pay, job autonomy, long-term job security, financial reward for obtaining IT certificates, exciting projects and opportunities to work on leading-edge technology, and employees' obligations to work extra hours when needed, to be loyal and to volunteer to do non-required tasks." (p.46) As for cultural difference, Chinese put greater emphasis on receiving project milestone bonuses than their American counterparts; Americans put greater emphasis on rapid career advancement, motivations from boss, and task completion on time than Chinese.

Lynton (2010) discussed the work ethics and attitudes of this generation. It is noted that the urban Post-80s members are well-educated and smart; they still hold on to many traditional values, however, they challenge the preeminence of hierarchy; going through academic pressure from family and school, many grown up members suffer from unhealthy perfectionism (any work that is less-than-perfect is unacceptable and merits criticism), which creates self-doubt, performance anxiety, and ultimately, procrastination.

Post 90s (1990 to 1999).

After many years' social discussion on Post 80s, the focus of media is gradually switching to the next generation since most of Post 80s have already assumed their positions and responsibilities in society. In a news article published in The New York Times, Wines (2009) provided a historical context for Post 90s. "The 115 million Chinese between age 14 and 18 are the first generation to come of age as China assumes its new role as a global power. As adults, they will live in a nation that could pass the United States as the world's

largest economy. Never has China held such high expectations for its young, who are

pampered-and pressured-like never before."(p.18)

Even though this generation is gaining more and more attention from media, there is

not yet much academic research on them. In a couple of years, members from this generation

will start their careers, thus, organizations need knowledge about this generation to be able to

manage them and handle the transition smoothly.

One issue which has been associated with Post 90s and discussed a lot is the use of

"Martian Language". Martian Language is one kind of internet language, which is written

from Chinese by means of various substitution methods. It is called Martian Language

because it is very difficult for people from other generations to understand. This netlingo

enables Chinese Millennials to be set apart from other generations with a unique identity.

Even though Millennial enjoy their unique communication, previous generations have

different opinions. According to an article on trib.com, *Chinese youth outrage elders with Net

lingo*, parents express concerns that their children are using a "secret" language. They worry

about the young generation's psychological and social well being, as well as a

communication disconnect between them and their children (trib.com, 2010).

Sun and Wang (2010) conducted a research with data collected from a survey of 2350

respondents in Shanghai, China to examine the impact of social change on people's values in

China and how this change varies among different generations. The authors concluded:

> The results show that the younger generations in China have already shifted from
>
> traditional values to modern values in a recent social transformation process. In
>
> addition, the younger generations tend to be more secular. They are more likely to
>
> regard self-development as the most important thing in life rather than making
>
> contributions to the country and society. Further, the younger generations are more
>
> individualistic than the old generations. They are more likely to live according to their

own lifestyles regardless of what others think. Thus, they are less likely to follow the

traditional collective ideology. Overall, the study shows significant generational gaps

in value orientations in China. (p.65)

Specifically, this study examined generational communication between people who

are 18 to 28 years old and people who are 45 to 60 years old in both Chinese and American

communities. Thus, the younger group for Chinese was mainly from Post 80s and Post 90s.

The older group for Chinese was mainly from the New China generation and the Cultural

Revolution generation. In order to correspondent with American equivalent groups, the

younger Chinese group would be referred as Chinese Generation X/Y, and the older Chinese

group would be referred as Chinese Baby Boomers in later discussions.

Generational Stereotypes

Macon and Artley (2009) discussed general stereotypes of four generations after the

discussion of their characteristics. It seemed that many stereotypes derived from a number of

factors. In the workplace, workers saw others in the same generation and in other generations

through their own experiences, pre-conceived notions, and biases. Each generation in the

workforce had both positive and negative stereotypes. Some common stereotypes are shared

in each group.

Veterans: They have intense loyalty to their employers, consistent performance, and

strong work ethic and are conservative in finance. These employees put organizations in front

of their own interests (Macon and Artley, 2009).

Baby Boomers: They are considered idealistic, and work hard to achieve success.

Employees from this generation are generally considered excellent at networking and seeking

consensus with others. However, these individuals are complained of being political and

micromanaging (Macon and Artley, 2009).

Generation X: They are considered to be people of pragmatism, alienation and cynicism. This generation is considered poor at networking and skeptical of authority. These individuals are assumed to be more independent and disloyal. They are also portrayed to have a better sense of corporations and work-life (Macon and Artley, 2009).

Generation Y: Employees from this generation are good at multi-tasking and team working. They are considered to be optimistic in performing tasks but expect instant feedback. Some negative stereotypes include having little understanding of history, having diminished intellectual capacity and being poorly read, and having poor communication and problem-solving skills (Macon and Artley, 2009).

Although there are many differences between the generations, these differences may not be so significant as people suggest.

Jurkiewicz (2000) conducted a study with 63 Gen Xers and 178 Boomers from public sectors. The results revealed that there were many similarities between these two groups which contradicted the literature and stereotypes on generational differences.

Faber (2001) tried to find out whether there were differences in ethical stances between this generation and older generation personnel through surveys. Surveys which were designed to tell the differences on six work-related values were distributed to 68 students and 8 instructors. It was concluded in the results that some of the popular expectations for Generation X turned out to be invalid stereotypes.

Wallace (2006) examined generational stereotypes in the legal field. According to traditional thinking, it was believed that Generation Xers were less committed to work, career and employers than Baby Boomers. The results from the Wallace study showed that there was no significant generational difference in work commitment.

Day (2007) reached a conclusion in analyzing the tension between Generation X and Baby Booomers and selected proper ideologies by reviewing on-line published "how to" texts

and management consulting websites. It showed the stereotypes that workers had toward the other generation hindered the positive communication between the groups.

This part of the literature starts with examining and summarizing the general characteristics of four generations. Next, the implications of the differences in organizational settings are discussed. Then a review of literature is given on the differences in general organizational behaviors, motivation preference, work values and ethnics, and other areas, such as status, commitment, etc. However, generalizations of these groups are not necessarily perfectly true. There might be overgeneralization which could lead to stereotypes. Besides, according to social identity theory, the tension between groups leads to negative stereotypes of each other as well, especially when there is a competition for resources and benefits between them.

Generational Communication

As the earlier literature implies, managing multigenerational work force can be very challenging in organizations. One of the difficulties is fostering good generational relationships and maintaining good generational communication. It is difficult to achieve because of generational differences and particularly because of generational stereotypes. Social identity theory indicates that members tend to have ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. Thus, communication conflicts and disconnect are inevitably going to happen in organizations.

The coming of Generation X brings changes into work environment with their distinguishing factors and has potential impact on organizations. O'Bannon (2001) implied that Generation X was gradually changing the working environment with their unique Xer factors in the direction of benefiting the family unit and reaffirming individualistic spirit. Jurkiewicz (2000) claimed that with the new generation joining the work force, traditional human resource mechanisms are not functioning as well as before. Cordeniz (2002) examined

the unique characteristics of Generation X and potential impact on the work place. It was

claimed that even though Xers were new to the field, they had their own ideas about what the

work place should look like and how they should work. Mayer (2006) looked at generation

factors in the perspective of education to find out how the new generation learned and

worked. With new generation teachers joining the work force, the education field had an

generational nature in diverse career aspirations, work motives and values. It was concluded

that the characteristics of Xers had potentially dominating impact on future working

environment.

One result caused by the joining of Generation X is the establishment of new

relationships. Day (2007) examined a special kind of relation in organizational positions,

older worker-young boss relationship. The authors considered competition for scarce

resources and benefits as one of major reasons for creating tension between workers of two

generations. Different ideologies heeded by different generations hindered effective

communication between them. On the other hand, Cordeniz (2002) examined a more

common position relationship in organizations, Baby Boomer boss-Generation X worker

relationship. Baby Boomers who were in leadership positions had different attitudes toward

work from Generation X workers, such as self-worth, contribution, dedication and personal

fulfillment. It was challenging to promote harmonious relationships between the two groups.

Faber (2001) indicated there were generational conflicts between this generation and the

older generation in terms of work values.

O'Bannon (2001) tried to find the reasons for generational conflicts in the background

of these two generations and believed that their background had an impact on their way of

communication by influencing their workplace attitudes and perceptions. It was claimed that

if this issue of generational communication disconnect could be discussed openly, the

communication and relationship among generations could be more positive in workplace.

Cultural Characteristics

Because of differences in historical development in China and the United States, Chinese culture is very different in many ways from American culture. This part of the literature review examines and compares one important dimension of these two cultures, collectivism/individualism. This cultural dimension is expected to have tremendous influences on how members of these societies behave, including how people communicate and maintain relationships across generations.

Hofstede (2001) identified individualism and collectivism as one of the five dimensions of Culture. According to his elaboration, the individualism and collectivism (I-C) dimension is "the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society", reflecting "in the way people live together" (2001, p.209).

Hofstede (1991) claims that societies where individualism prevails, the ties between individuals of which are loose. People are expected to merely look after themselves and their immediate family and are only responsible for the consequences of their behaviors. Hofstede (2001) indicates that individualistic societies match the following descriptions: people usually live in small, nuclear families and family members are more or less equal in decision; independence and independent opinions are expected in children education; the emotion of individualists are ego-focused, therefore, marriages tend to be less stable; students are supposed to be treated as individuals, and teachers are expected to reinforce self-esteem of students; free market, entrepreneurship, social contract, equality, freedom and self-improvement are valued.

Kapoor and Wolfe (1995) tested the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension with university students in the United States. They found "a qualified support as American, on the whole, opted for Individualist values" (p. 112). MacNab and Worthley (2007) argued in their study of cultural dimensions in the U.S. and Canada that both of these countries could

be grouped into Type I culture and Anglo clusters of culture. This means that culture of these two countries "are exemplified as individualistic, small power distance, and weak uncertainty avoidance" (p. 5). They made the following conclusion about this dimension of culture in organizations:

> The observed interaction between individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance has relevance as it bridges a cultural dimension relating how people interact within organizations (individualism/collectivism) to a cultural dimension that predicts how organizations are structured (uncertainty avoidance). These findings generally support that higher levels of individualism will require less organizational formalism. (p. 15-16)

As for high-collectivism cultures, Hofstede (2001) outlines some typical social practices. Members of collective cultures place greater emphasis on the interests of group; people live closely to each other with their extended families; parents are in charge of the family, children need to learn bearing from others' opinions; emotions tend to be other-focused and therefore, marriages are more or less stable; teachers have absolute authorities in classroom, which students are not supposed to challenge; economy tends to be centre-controlled and planned; family security, social order, harmony, good social relationships, face, and honoring parents and elders are important.

Chung and Mallery (2000) found in the results of their study with university students from the U.S. and China that higher collectivism scores were associated with an increased desire to compare in general, an increased desire to make upward comparisons. They speculated that upward self-improvement comparisons for the sake of the group might be more common for those high in collectivism.

China has been clearly identified as a high-collectivism culture in this cultural aspect. Chung and Mallery (2000) state that Eastern Asian cultures tend to be high in collectivism,

and China, in particular, is based on a collectivist political system. In general, members in this culture work for the group and not for their own personal gain. Family relations are extremely important, and decisions are made within the family. "Conformity and compliance to social or group norms are more frequently displayed by those with collective views of the self. ··· They also believe that the group is entitled to know and regulate what the individual does and thinks in private matters. In sum, any action of an individual within a group affects the group and may cause public criticism." (p. 340)

Moore (2005) pointed out that the essence of Chinese collective culture was group. "There are some groups to which individual Chinese typically belong, and to which they defer in their daily activities and decision-making. Chinese and others concur that the demands made on individual Chinese by these groups are more pervasive and powerful than those made on most Westerners." (p. 361) He also pointed out that the most typical group in China was family, or extended family.

Weber (2002) indicated that collective aspect of Chinese culture had deep historical roots. He referred to the words of Confucius: "If one wants to establish himself, he should help others to establish themselves at first" (p. 352). According to the author, the collective needs are traditionally higher than "the autonomy and the self-actualization of Chinese individuals" (p. 352). Mjelde-Mossey (2007) also emphasized the role of Confucianism and stated, "The traditional Chinese self, as rooted in Confucianism, exists primarily in relationship to significant others in a collectivity of extended family and kinship networks." (p. 109) The author situated and examined generational relationships in historical and cultural contexts:

> For a traditional Chinese, old age is anticipated as the time when they will be
> venerated by younger generations because of a clearly defined traditional role and
> status within the family. Old age is revered throughout the greater society and

relatively high social and economic status is accorded to elders regardless of gender

(Chow, 1996; Gernet, 1982). Social power is accorded to elders through the ancient

practice of filial piety. Filial piety⋯， based in Confucianism, it includes honoring

and obeying elders. In this way one honors their ancestors and brings honor to the

greater community as well. (p. 109)

Thus, it is clear to notice that elders in Chinese culture are honored and young

generations not only pay respects to them but also need to obey them. Even though China has

been a traditionally collective country, many scholars and researchers noticed the transition

from collectivism to individualism in the past three decades, especially with the young

generations (Weber, 2002; Moore, 2005; Cao, 2009). Cao (2009) argues that "individualism

is a consequence of wealth and economic growth" (p. 45). The author concludes that the

transition is highly related with the number of choices than individuals have. "The

significance of choices implies that individuals may arrive at different decisions, depending

on the available information through mass media, education, travelling, and mobility, with

the resources and wealth under his disposal obtained from the development of the economy."

(p. 45) The author also provided a detailed historical path of how this transition happened in

China and how this transition impacted the young generation and their values. Much of this

transition has already been mentioned in the previous section of outlining Chinese

generations.

Overall, Chinese culture and American culture locate at different side of the spectrum

of collectivism/individualism dimension. The literature implies that people in Chinese culture

have a stronger sense of group identity than people in American culture. The interests of

group or significant others have more impact on Chinese individuals than on American

individuals. This implies that American individuals tend to behave according to their will

rather than the other's, which leads to conflicts more easily than when people are aware of

how the other people might respond and modify their behaviors in collective cultures.

However, there is no direct reference from the past literature about how generational conflicts

differ because of cultural differences.

Besides, cautions should be taken in reaching conclusions because there is a transition

from collectivism to individualism in China. It is very interesting to see how this transition

modifies traditional generational communication in China. However, at the same time, it is

more complicated to comprehend the characteristics of this phenomenon. The researcher

must proceed with caution to avoid oversimplification in findings.

Proposed Solutions to the Generational Disconnect

Understanding the causes for generational communication disconnect is vital in the

process of trying to solve problems and improving the quality of organizational

communication. From theoretical perspective, several solutions have been proposed in the

development and application of social identity theory. In Brown's (2000) article reviewing

this theory, he summed up three models/methods to decrease intergroup bias/hostile attitudes

from the past literature.

The first is Brewer and Miller's decategorization model, they "concluded that the best

way of reducing intergroup differentiation was to make those categories less useful as

psychological tools" by various tactics such as "personalizing the intergroup situation or

finding additional categorical dimensions that cut across the original ones" (752).

The second approach "seeks to redraw the category boundaries so that any outgroup

become subsumed into a new and larger superordinate category. Because ingroup and

(former) outgroup members now share a 'common ingroup identity', they should be drawn

closer together and intergroup discrimination should be reduced." (752)

Both of these two approaches involve the dissolution of social identity boundaries and

hence the abandonment of subgroup identities, which is not practical and realistic in some

real life situations. Thus, a third approach which utilizes the method of optimizing contact conditions while retaining some group salience has been proposed. Several specific tactics have been shared by scholars as well. "There are various ways this has been investigated: one approach has been to stress the typicality of the outgroup members with whom the contact was occurring; another is simply to draw the participants' attention to their respective group memberships during the encounter." (752)

From the perspective of communication, O'Bannon (2001) suggests solving this problem by open discussion about the issues between relevant generations, scholars have proposed other solutions. Macon and Artley (2009) argued that managers needed to study and understand the differences that existed between the generations and between the various employees who reported to them. It was important for companies to spend the time and resources to understand the potential vulnerabilities in their particular business and industry. Setting up the right processes and practices, and developing proper attitudes towards the need for succession planning would help companies remain sustainable over the long term.

Mayer (2006) offered a solution based on the generational differences in motivation. Understanding their needs and keeping them satisfied would further reduce potential conflicts and difficulties in communication. McGuire, Todnem By, and Hutchings (2007) presented a model that proposed HR solutions towards achieving co-operative generational interaction to solve the problem of generational disconnect.

Sudheimer (2009) claimed that the key to improved job satisfaction was the development of understanding and talking through differences between the two groups. Stories appreciating both sides of the generation gap could clarify misunderstanding and reduce stereotypes to achieve a better understanding of each other in order to accomplish a more harmonious relationship.

This literature review focused on five areas: the first area is social identity theory and its application in intergroup communication; the second area is the characteristics of four generations, which focuses on how generation identity forms and how these generational differences manifest in work values, attitudes and organizational behaviors; the third area concentrates on generational stereotypes and how generational stereotypes result in communication connects; the forth area is generational communication, which especially focuses on communication difficulties and disconnect; The last area presents studies which focus on solving generational disconnect.

Literature on social identity theory focuses on the development of the theory in a chorological order and indicates that this psychological-rooted theory can also provide a valid framework in understanding behavior of individuals with a group identity in sociological fields. Organizational communication is one of the fields that this theory can be employed to understand intergroup interaction. In this case, it is used to study the communication between employees of different generations.

Literature on characteristics of generations in both America and China provides a holistic view and background for understanding the generations as groups. These differences and their implication in organizational settings leads to potential conflicts and stereotypes of each other.

Generalization about the characteristics of these generations helps people to understand other generations better, however, it has potential of overgeneralization and stereotypes. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Abrams & Brown, 1989), stereotypes between workers from different generations are expected because of ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias.

Tensions exist between different generation workers due to their differences, misunderstandings and stereotypes. Communication disconnects can happen if there is no

true understanding and appreciating of the other generation. It is vital for organizations to cope with this issue and help workers of different generations to communicate well with each other.

Cultural aspect, collectivism/individualism shapes communicative behaviors and the relationship between members from different generations. This cultural variable plays an important part in explaining tensions between different generations and how people approach the conflicts. Thus, better solutions can be explored once this important variable has been understood.

Past literature promotes truly understanding each generation, especially Generation X/Y which has been stereotyped and helps eliminate misunderstanding, stereotypes and intergroup bias. This study applies social identity theory to examine what the relationship between generational stereotypes and generational communication disconnect is. A qualitative approach will be employed to gather and analyze data to serve the purpose of this study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

According to Creswell and Miller (1997), the function of a research methodology is to provide "a philosophical base or frame of reference for approaching research that complements a content area of inquiry" (p.33). Of the three different approaches, a qualitative interpretive approach emphasizes "how participants in a study make sense or meaning of a situation" (p. 37). The nature of this study was exploratory and interpretive concerning generational communication, thus a qualitative method was applicable and suited the purpose of the research well.

This research used a qualitative approach to investigate generational communication between Generation X/Y and older generations in an organizational context, and draws a comparison between American and Chinese ethnic groups. Social identity theory was used in the study to understand the use of generational stereotypes as outgroup bias to increase ingroup favoritism. Since this theory was designed to help understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination in sociological behaviors (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), a qualitative approach helped the researcher to know how people in a group make sense of generational stereotypes in maintaining relationships and communicating with another group. According to Hogg and Ridgeway (1995), methods often used in the application of social identity theory in sociological studies include interview, observation, experiment, and so on. Because of limitations in time and resources, this study utilized interviews as the main method to gather data.

The participants in this study engaged in a 25-30 minute interview. The interviews were used to explore the participants' experience and understanding about generational communication by asking open-ended questions. All of the participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and identity. After all the data was collected, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data.

Participants

According to the purpose of this study, the researcher examined generational communication between Baby Boomers and Generation X/Y from American and Chinese ethnic groups. Thus, participants of the following four categories were interviewed, American Generation X/Y, American Baby Boomers, Chinese Generation X/Y (The group of Chinese who share the same age range with American Generation X/Y) and Chinese Baby Boomers (The group of Chinese who share the same age range with American Baby Boomers). The age of Generation X/Y participants ranged from 18 to 28. The age of Baby Boomers ranged from 45 to 60. There are five participants in each category, twenty participants in total.

This study controlled demographic characteristics of the participants to best serve the purpose of the study. First, all the participants needed to have some experience in an organizational setting and maintaining generational relationships and communication on a regular basis since this research focuses on organizational communication.

Second, Baby Boomer participants with experience of managing younger generation were selected in the first place since managing younger generation in organizations is currently a challenging issue (Day, 2007; Wilson, et. al., 2008; Cooman, et. al., 2008; Busch, et. al., 2008), thus the results could bring greater applicable significance into the field.

Third, this study only deals with generational communication among the same ethnic groups and compares it between two ethnic groups, thus the participants were limited to the ones who mainly dealt with generational relationships and communication within their own cultural group. People who had regular experience with intercultural generational communication were excluded, which enabled the researcher to show the cultural characteristics of generational communication in Chinese groups and how this differs from American groups. Then, a comparison could be drawn to evaluate the similarities and differences between the groups.

Sampling Process

For American Generation X/Y, the researcher used students from a large Eastern U.S. Christian university who were in two sections of Communication 101, a required course for all undergraduate students. Although this was a sample of convenience, the pool could be considered random because students were of different majors, years, genders, races and other backgrounds. For Chinese Generation X/Y, the researcher used the Chinese student community at the same large Eastern U.S. Christian university. These Chinese students represented different majors, years, genders and geographical origins. All the students from both pools were asked verbally or by email to participate in the study. Students who agreed to participate were screened according to participants' requirements which were stated before.

For Baby Boomers, this study adopted a snowball sampling strategy. According to Goodman (1961), a snowball sampling is a technique for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. The researcher started the snowballing process by talking with personal acquaintances. The researcher asked them whether they had regular generational communication in an organizational setting. If the response was positive, they were asked to participate in the study as interviewees. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked them to recommend any potential participants who fulfill the requirements of the research. Thus the participants of Baby Boomers were assembled one by one to meet the needs of the research. The majority of Chinese Baby Boomer participants were Christians, however, whether the American Baby Boomer participants were Christians or not was not specified.

Procedures

Each participant was asked to sign an agreement form giving their consent to participating in the study (See Appendix A). All the participants were informed that they would be identified or referred to with coded names (use letters and numbers) as a means of

maintaining confidentiality. They were then asked several questions to acquire their demographic information before the interview (See Appendix B).

All the interviews were audio recorded. During interviews, the researcher took extensive notes on the participants' responses. During the semi-structured, individual interviews, the researcher asked in-depth questions which could be divided into the following parts.

First, participants were interviewed about their experience of communicating with other generations. They briefly described the context of their generational relationship and communication and specified the roles of people in the relationship, such as manager-worker, owner-employee, instructor-student, etc.

Second, the participants were asked to briefly describe from their understanding of their generation and of the other generation, including the merits and shortcomings of both generations.

Third, the researcher asked questions about the participants' feelings and impressions of communicating with the corresponding generation, whether there were any difficulties in their opinions, and if there were, what they were.

Fourth, Generation X/Y participants were asked whether they were stereotyped by Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers were also asked whether they were stereotyped by the young generations. If there were any stereotypes, participants were asked to explain what they were.

Finally, the participants were asked what possible solutions might be employed and applied to enhance the quality of generational communication in an organizational setting.

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted in informal settings according to the participants' choice such as a dining hall, a library, and so on. The researcher let the participants talk as freely as possible because the purpose of this study was to find out what the participants think about this particular issue. In order to get the most accurate response

from the participants, the Chinese participants were interviewed in Chinese, and the American participants were interviewed in English.

As stated above, extensive notes were taken during the interviews. Notes emphasized key ideas and messages from the participants which also helped the researcher to organize data and code it to identify themes later. The researcher reflected on the data during the gathering data process. Reflections and analysis about the study were kept in the form of memos as preparation for organizing data for analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to examine generational communication between Chinese and American groups. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within a data set. It brings out identifiable patterns and themes of living or behavior (Aronson, 1994). One of the characteristics of thematic analysis is its flexibility. As Braun and Clark (2006) noted, its flexibility is due to its nature of theoretical freedom, not being confined within any theoretical framework, thus the method can provide "a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p.78).

Several major stages are included in the process of thematic analysis: familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher focused on the broader level of themes after all data was initially coded, which involved sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. In this stage, the researcher analyzed the codes and considered how different codes maybe combined to form an "overarching theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After a set of preliminary themes were generated, they were reviewed in order to make sure that they formed a coherent pattern. In this phase, the researcher read all the collated extracts for each theme, and considered whether they appear to form a cohesive group. The researcher also took into consideration the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set.

The next step in the process was mapping out the candidate themes in a systematic and logical way. After the thematic map was decided, the themes were defined and refined in order to be presented in the analysis. The aim at this stage was to identify the essence of what each theme was about, and determine what aspect of the data each theme captured. In the end, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher should be able to provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting interpretation of the responses from the participants which are organized around the identified themes.

Validation Strategies

Creswell and Miller (2000) proposed nine different types of procedures to ensure internal validity, three of which were employed in this study: member checking, clarifying research bias, and peer debriefing. Those measures provided perspectives and lens from study participants and people external to the study other than the researcher.

First, the researcher asked the participants in the study to check the researcher's interview notes to ensure for accuracy. Second, the researcher created an open and honest narrative to clarify the bias. Comments were included to address how the researcher's interpretation of the findings was shaped by his background. Finally, the researcher located one Chinese and one American (peer debriefers) who reviewed and then asked the researcher questions about this study to ensure the objectivity of the account.

Ethical Considerations

All of the participants were treated in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. There were no identifiable risks for participating in this study, although the participants have felt uncomfortable sharing their generational communication experiences. All participants were reminded of their right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from interview process. As for maintaining confidentiality, as stated before, the researcher used the coded names to refer the participants in the study to make sure they cannot be identified.

Specifically, the research questions that guided this study are

RQ 1. How do two generations perceive each other and their own group?

RQ 2. How does perception of the other generation shape communication with that group?

RQ 3. How do cultural characteristics effect generational communication, and what are the differences between Chinese and Americans in this particular issue?

RQ 4. How can communication between Baby Boomers and Generation X be enhanced?

This study applied a qualitative approach to examine the relationship between generational stereotypes and generational communication disconnect among American and Chinese ethnic groups in organizational setting. Analysis from the responses of the participants in this issue helped the researcher to better understand the difficulties in generational communication and possible solutions proposed to enhance the relationship and communication between Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers.

Comparison between two different ethnic groups, Chinese and American, helped to reveal the function and impact of cultures in this issue, thus the results could have greater

significance for the discipline and wider application in serving as recommendations for

solving the generational communication disconnect.

Chapter 4 - Results and Discussions

Responses from 20 interviewees coming from four demographic groups (American Generation X/Y, American Baby Boomers, Chinese Generation X/Y, and Chinese Baby Boomers) were gathered and analyzed by following the guidelines of the thematic analysis. Even during the process of interviewing, the researcher sensed some common themes in the responses among different interviewees. After all the data was collected, the researcher listened to audio recordings multiple times and identified themes in the data and placed these themes in a structure of six categories for systematic discussions on the phenomenon of generational communication in organizational settings. These six categories were outlining Generation X/Y, outlining Baby Boomers, generational communication, generational stereotypes, cultural influences, and favorable solutions. Before elaborating on these categories, a section providing basic demographic information is included to give a foundational knowledge about the interviewees so that readers can have a better understanding of the later discussions.

Demographic Information

In order to avoid verbiage in the following discussions and for the convenience of the researcher and readers, the following acronyms are used to identify the four demographic groups: AXY for American Generation X/Y, ABB for American Baby Boomers, CXY for Chinese Generation X/Y, and CBB for Chinese Baby Boomers. Interviewees were coded with numbers, for example, interviewee number one from ABB is to be referred as ABB-1, and interviewee number three from CXY is referred as CXY-3. The following tables provide the basic demographic information about the 20 interviewees:

Table 1: *Demographic information of AXY*

	Gender*	Age**	Occupation	Main Organizational Setting

AXY-1	Male	20	Undergraduate Student	University
AXY-2	Female	19	Undergraduate Student	University
AXY-3	Male	21	Undergraduate Student	University
AXY-4	Female	19	Undergraduate Student	University
AXY-5	Male	19	Undergraduate Student	University

* The gender ratio for this group is 3:2 (M:F).

**The average age for this group is 19.6.

Table 2: *Demographic information of CXY*

	Gender*	Age**	Occupation	Main Organizational Setting
CXY-1	Male	20	Undergraduate Student	University, Church
CXY-2	Female	19	Undergraduate Student	University, Church
CXY-3	Female	20	Undergraduate Student	University, Church
CXY-4	Male	24	Undergraduate Student	University, Church
CXY-5	Female	25	Graduate Student	University, Church

* The gender ratio for this group is 2:3 (M:F).

** The average age for this group is 21.6.

Table 3: *Demographic information of ABB*

	Gender*	Age**	Occupation	Main Organizational Setting
ABB-1	Male	53	Mechanic	Company
ABB-2	Male	57	Engineer	Company, Church
ABB-3	Male	57	Construction Worker (Retired)	Company
ABB-4	Male	52	Engineer	Company

| ABB-5 | Male | 60 | Professor | University |

* The gender ratio for this group is 5:0 (M:F).

** The average age for this group is 55.8.

Table 4: *Demographic information of CBB*

	Gender*	Age**	Occupation	Main Organizational Setting
CBB-1	Male	45	Professor	University, Church
CBB-2	Male	45	Graduate Student	University, Church
CBB-3	Male	60	Agricultural Specialist (Retired)	Company
CBB-4	Male	50	Engineer	Company, Church
CBB-5	Female	55	Investment Consultant	Company, Church

* The gender ratio for this group is 4:1 (M:F).

** The average age for this group is 51.

Participants from AXY group were mixed gender undergraduate students, ages 19 to 20, and the main organizational setting for them was university. Participants from CXY group were also mixed gender university students, ages from 19 to 25, and the main organizational settings for them were university and church. Participants from ABB group were male, age ranges from 52 to 60, from various occupations and organizational settings. The CBB group was a male-dominated group with participants age ranges from 52 to 60, from various occupations and organizational settings.

After viewing these four tables, it is obvious that both X/Y groups reflect a more balanced gender ratio than the Boomers groups. The Boomer groups have a male dominated ratio. The overall gender ratio for all the participants was a 7:3 (M:F) ratio. However, as for average age, the X/Y groups were located very close to the smallest end on the age spectrum (age 18-28); the Boomer groups displayed a better average age in terms of representing the

generation than the X/Y groups because their average age was not extremely close to any end

on the age spectrum (age 45-60).

Besides gender balance and average age, the Chinese participants differed from the

American ones in their organizational settings. It was common for the Chinese interviewees

to consider church as one main organizational setting for their generational communication.

This was because these participants were currently residing in the U. S. or visiting here. One

main organization for them to communicate with members from another Chinese generation

was Chinese church, which was not the same for the Americans because they probably have

other organizations to be considered as primary settings. It is also noticed that the Boomers

had various organizational backgrounds; however, the organizational settings for the X/Y

groups were limited. Further discussions on these factors will be given in the section of

research limitations and recommendations.

Outlining Generation X/Y

This category and the next category (outlining Baby Boomers) discuss RQ 1: How do

Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers perceive each other and their own group?

American Generation X/Y

A self perspective

Several themes emerged from the responses of five AXY interviewees. Responses

from the participants were really mixed, some were extremely negative criticisms, some were

fairly positive. In general, AXY interviewees took a very aggressive stand in criticizing their

own generation.

Lazy/irresponsible: All the interviewees mentioned this in some way as a distinctive

characteristic that was unique to their generation. A general trait for this generation was

shunning their responsibilities. AXY-2 said that her generation only worked if they had to.

AXY-5 said that many people in this generation would do the minimum to get by and they

felt that they did not need to work. AXY-3 also considered that members of his generation take a pretty relaxed attitude toward work and do not take responsibilities too serious. AXY-4 used the word "lazy" and "lackadaisical" to describe her generation. She claimed that her generation was not motivated to work and they were not working as efficiently as the previous generations. "Basically, we do what is required in order to get what we want. Not push to exceed." It is possible that this mentality is somewhat due to how they were brought up---they have been well taken care of and offered many things in their life. In summary, this characteristic of AXY has been widely and strongly recognized and agreed upon among the AXY participants.

Fun-seeking/live for the day: These phrases summarize their life style and attitudes toward life. AXY-2 said that her generation was "all about fun" and have it while it lasts". AXY-3 said that people in his generation did "not wait around" and "like it now". AXY-5 compared his generation with his parents' generation and concluded that people in his generation did not appreciate the value of working hard for what they wanted in their life. They just buy and think they deserve what their parents usually worked many years to get.

Morals/values diminished: Some respondents believed that their generation lost values and morals once firmly hold by their parents' generation. For instance, AXY-4 gave the following statement: "Values, like I feel that, more diminished as we see sex craze in our generation. But, that plus, I feel like we are getting very confused with our culture, like general lack of morals and diminishing of that as well, just bring controversies and political movements." She said that this generation was so focused on materials possessing instead of relying on internal morals and values. However, only two out of five respondents spoke firmly about this point.

Good foundation/having potentials: The participants admitted that their generation enjoys a better foundation in knowledge, information, technology, education, economic

support than previous generations. Thus, they foresee a possible better future for themselves. The bottom line is that they have great potential to shaping the future. AXY-2 considered that her generation is "modern" and had new ideas. AXY-4 said that their generation had "lot potentials to keep moving forward." However, they were pessimistic in general because they worry that their generation is too lazy to make full use of their good foundation.

Mixed attitudes toward information technology: AXY groups have mixed attitudes toward IT. On one hand, they admitted that relying on IT separates them from other generations, which gives them an inherited generational advantage. AXY-1 said that even though he personally was not really connected to the computer as much as his peers, he admitted that using the computer, especially social networking, was really common for his generation. On the other hand, the participants indicated that they felt that their generation lost the ability to communicate face to face and think critically because of too much use of IT. AXY-3 stated: "we lost the ability to communicate because we always text, or to just AIM or skyper or whatever. So we don't know how to relate to each other person to person. I feel like that we lost a lot of things even though we gain a lot of things with technology."

In general, the self perspective of AXY was negative; however, almost every participant declared that they are not like their typical peers. In another aspect, the participants experienced a fairly similar understanding of their generation, which means that their generational identity is relatively clear and strong. Next, the researcher will examine ABB's impressions and will compare AXY's impressions to find if the descriptions match together.

A perspective from ABB

This perspective was also mixed like AXY's. Responses from ABB on AXY focus on the following aspects:

Lack of work ethics/morals: Even though some participants did not necessarily agree with this point, believing that these young people just need to mature and will end up fine with ethics and morals, many others felt very strong about the lack of work ethic and morals in AXY. ABB-1 expressed that the members in the young generations did not care about quality and only did the minimum to get by. According to him, the only exception was that people would work hard if they wanted to move up. ABB-3 said that these young people "are sometimes lazy." ABB-5 claimed that the younger generation did not care about what means to take to get the goal, they would "cut corners or lie just to get what they want," and there was no pride in what they were doing. ABB-5 also compared his generation with AXY and expressed that AXY groups did not stay with the company and were "motivated completely by money."

Live for the day/materialism: ABBs thought that the younger generations tended to live for the day and focus on material possessing far too much. ABB-2 said that "they want things right away," which took their parents 20 or even 30 years to get. The ABB thought that the young people rely on borrowed money or they are given money to achieve their material desire, which can lead to personal financial problems. ABB-5 also believed that the young people got into the habit of paying for unnecessary materials with a credit card so that they could enjoy things now.

Self-centered/self-conceited: In general, the ABB participants felt that the AXYs were too self-conceited and tended to only think about themselves. ABB-1 said that the young people were about "me, me, me," and sometimes could be considered naive because they acted like they knew everything. Even though he admitted that every young person might act in this way including themselves when they were young, he thought that this young generation carried this attitude too long in time duration and it seemed they could not grow out of it. However, ABB-2 thought that it was only part of being young. He claimed that "the

young people feel they are invincible, they are not, they will know when they get older." He thought they would get wiser and more mature as they grow older.

Good with IT/knowledge advantage: This was one thing that some members of ABB admired about the AXYs. ABB-3 spoke very highly of the AXYs' comprehension of the new technology. Even though he personally did not like the new technology, he thought that it enabled the young people to get much more information than he could imagine, and they could do information related jobs.

After examining the two perspectives, it is very obvious that there was consistency between them and their overall impression of the AXYs was fairly negative. However, the ABB participants' opinions were not as unified as the AXY's, maybe because of their different backgrounds. Next, the researcher will outline CXY from two perspectives as well.

Chinese Generation X/Y

A self perspective

The participants offered some critical comments on the characteristics of their own generation, some of which were positive, and some of which were negative in nature. Four themes emerged from the process of thematic analysis:

Mature earlier/open to new things: The participants pointed out that societal changes shaped their generation's identity. CXY-2 said that the members of their generation came across and accepted many more foreign ideas because of the Internet, and matured in mind earlier than their parents after digesting the incoming information. CXY-3 said people in her generation were premature in romantic relationships; however, they were not mature at all in other aspects of life. The members of CXY were born after China's adoption of its Open Door policy. Families in China began to prosper in their economic condition. With the widespread use of televisions and computers, CXY had easier and better access to information and new ideas from outside world.

Money-centered/sex open-minded: The participants sensed that their peers emphasized money in their life value system and world view. Unlike their parents generation or even earlier generations, the majority of these people did not have ideals that other than money to strive for. CXY-2 stated that they focused more on money and being rich was the only thing that they were proud of. CXY-5 stated that the post 90s were totally driven by money in their life. The other negative characteristic mentioned by the participants were their attitudes toward sex. People in younger generation were more tolerant and open-minded about sex. CXY-2 gave an example of high school girls getting pregnant, and sex was a more openly discussed topic than before.

Self-centered/fun-seeking: Because of the One Child policy in China, most of CXY were raised as the only child in the family. Many of them were spoiled by their parents and grandparents. Thus, people in this generation tend to be very self-centered or even selfish. The word "selfish" has been identified in some participants' responses. The life of these young people centered on fun according to the participants. CXY-5 concluded that this generation had characteristics such as being superficial, fun-seeking.

Pursuit of their own dreams/individualism: CXY-1 said that they were relatively independent and some of them had the striving-for-good attitude. CXY-2 said that even though people in her generation were weak in their ability to be independent or survive, they dared to chase their dreams. CXY-3、4、5 all stated that people in their generation were still relatively hard-working and had their own opinions about the future and worked for their dreams despite possible objections from family. The last characteristic of this generation was due to the transition from collectivism to individualism. This shift was partly due to this generation's growing up experience and partly due to the influence from the West through Internet and other media.

A perspective from CBB

The following themes emerged from the CBB participants' responses. Overall, the responses were positive about CXY. The last two negative themes were not heavily mentioned by the participants.

Good foundation/great potentials: Compared to their own experience, the CBB participants admired the good foundation the CXY groups have in their life. Both CBB-3 and 5 thought that this young generation would be able to carry the beam of the society and make greater contributions to the society. Besides family support, they also pointed out how the technology, especially information technology, could enhance their performance and develop their potentials. Their families could provide a better support in finance and education, thus, they have a much better start than the older generations.

Having own opinions/less bounded: CBB-2 stated that because CXY did not go through as many social changes and ideology changes as the previous generations, they were less likely to be influenced by these old ideologies. CBB-4 said that the thoughts of CXY were not as limited as that of older people. He said, "They do not need to be concerned with other people's feelings as much as us." In general, according to CBB, people in CXY are less likely to be influenced by their parents and other people. They have their own opinions and are less bounded by social rules and family influences.

Self-centered/spoiled/moral reduced/reckless spending: Some CBB participants also charged CXY with these negative impressions. CBB-1 called this young generation "the spoiled generation." CBB-2 associated money, sexual liberation and early romantic relationships with this generation. CBB-5 claimed a small group of CXY from rich families showed unacceptable attitudes toward money. She said they squander money from their rich parents for fun and would not be able to go through the trials of life if they no longer had the financial support.

Lack of critical thinking/less hard-working: CBB-2 thought that CXY was not doing as good as the older generation in critical thinking about their life and society. CBB-4 thought that CXY did not work hard and, therefore, had a weaker foundation in knowledge and experiences.

Outlining Baby Boomers

American Baby Boomers

A self perspective

Having morals/ethical standards: This is the thing that most of the ABB participants were very proud of. Jobs were not considered a method of getting money. They attached their reputation and ethics to their jobs. ABB-1 even said that his generation was "the last generation that has morals." They "give their bosses fair work for fair pay" and take pride in their work because "your name goes on it". ABB-2 said that his generation had a very good reputation for being honest.

Hard-working/taking initiative: This generation is well-known for hard working and striving hard for a better life, which was also recognized by the participants. ABB-2 said that some companies would rather hire people in his generation not only for their experience but also for their work attitude rather than hiring the young people. ABB-3 answered in a retrospective manner that he worked hard all that he could. When he was unfortunately laid off from work, he did not sit back and live on unemployment, but went out and tried hard to find a new job.

Save/manage money conservatively: The ABBs differed greatly from the AXYs in approaching money and managing personal finance. ABB-2 said that members in this generation "tend to be conservative and tend to save". ABB-1 compared his generation with the young generation and said that people in his generation usually only took loans for two

things, house and car. As for the other things, people saved and then bought. Credit cards were for emergencies, which is a totally different mentality from the young people's.

Trying to catch up with IT: People from different backgrounds displayed different levels of IT proficiency. Generally speaking, learning from the respondents, people involved in manual labor work tend to show a lower IT proficiency than people in knowledge work. ABB-3 said that he was illiterate in computer and did not like new technology. Even for phones, he did not like many new functions and only used his cell phone for emergency communicative purposes. He preferred face to face communication over technology mediated communication, which was also found to be true with other participants. Even for people who know enough about computers and the Internet, they tend to only use computer for work use or basic use only such as checking emails, and searching for information.

The overall self perspective from ABB was generally positive and fairly consistent among them. They tend to have similar attitudes toward work and show an indifferent view toward the new technology. Next, a perspective from the AXYs will be provided for comparison.

A perspective from AXY

Next, the researcher examined AXY's perspective about ABB. This perspective was fairly positive and matches some descriptions from ABB well, for instance, the approach to money. However, it also offered some unique views from the standpoint of AXY, such as ABBs' influence on AXY.

Having morals and good work ethics: The AXY participants unanimously noticed that the ABB generation had more values and morals than they did. AXY-1 thought that they worked harder. AXY-2 said that "they have more values and morals, and they still go by the way they were raised." AXY-3 said that "they hold family and work much dearer to their heart than us" and they are "more in tune with working hard to get what they want for their

life." AXY-4 considered this generation "driven to succeed." AXY-5 thought that people in this generation had good ethics and knew how to work. In general, they focused more on the work ethics than on hard-working which is heavily mentioned by the ABB participants.

Simpler/traditional: Comparing with their life, the AXYs thought that the ABBs lived a simpler life. AXY-2 said that "they are more like traditional and simpler." AXY-3 thought that "they are more of old-school mentality." AXY thought that the ABB lived a simpler life because they were not attracted by many temptations such as internet games, online chatting, etc. They were considered traditional because they had relatively clear values about life and work.

Save/wiser with money: Besides work ethic and life style, the AXYs also thought that the ABB group approaches money differently from them. AXY-5 thought that "they (the ABBs) were wiser; they understood the value of dollars, and how much they needed for their life, and saved the money before buying them."

Having influence on AXY: Some participants expressed how they were affected or influenced as a generation by the ABBs. AXY-5 said, "In a way, they are wiser (with the money), they still made some mistakes. You know, we are having effect now." AXY-4 provided a more comprehensive account:

> I hate to put blame on everything, but they, their generation is what we are based off of, like their ideologies. And so, with whatever they decided to do when they were teenagers, either became hippies or going after the war, like, that does affect us. Usually what we've seen is that generations tend to want to give their kids what they didn't have. Because they still don't feel that they had enough, even though technically we've been getting more and more and more. So, they didn't, I don't feel like they expect it, any of this happen. But, they don't know how to control they're afraid to be their parents, they're afraid to enforce or punish or do anything.

This account provides a unique perspective on how the older generations might affect the formation of generational identity of the young generations. Overall, the AXYs positively commented on the ABBs. However, responses from AXY showed they have fairly limited understandings about ABB based on how short and narrow their responses were. In the next part, the researcher will outline CBB from their own perspective and from the perspective of the CXYs'.

Chinese Baby Boomers

A self perspective

Historical imprints/established value system: Most of the CBB participants started their response with a historical account, which showed how the societal changes in China affected their growth and generational identity. CBB-2 recalled Cultural Revolution, higher education restoration, student movements, and economic changes and their influences on his generation's value system. She stated that there were many waves of thoughts, ideas, and values in the storm of changing. Some of her peers might find it hard to establish a clear system of values, however, most of her generation managed settle down on their belief and became less radical than before. CBB-3 emphasized the changes in economic policies and climate. They had a root in socialism and had a hard time adjusting to capitalism and policy changes. CBB-5 stated that her generation went through different eras, each of which bore a distinctive political climate and ideology, sometimes as cold as an iceberg, sometimes as hot as a volcano. Her said that all of these experiences made her generation able to view things in a clear, calm and cool manner now.

Established life/emphasis on family and work/less ambitious: The participants expressed that most of people in their generation lived a stable life and paid much of their attention to family and work. CBB-1 and 3 stated that the focus of their generation were family, children and career. However, they were less ambitious about their career, which was

more like a natural part of life to them. CBB-3 stated that his generation was no longer asking

more things from society and life and was happy and contented with what they currently had.

Hard-working/the ability to bear hardship: Due to their early experience in hardship,

people in this generation were proud of their ability to bear hardship and hard-working ethic.

CBB-3 recalled his suffering through hardship and said he needed to eat some tree leaves

every year to survive during his teenage period. CBB-5 said that her generation worked hard

and strived hard for a better foundation for their children.

Save/thrifty: Also due to their early experience, this generation expressed appreciation

for life's opportunities. CBB-5 said most people in her generation lived a simple and thrifty

life and tried not to waste.

A perspective from CXY

The CXY participants gave a fairly brief description of their counterpart generation in

the study, which indicated their unfamiliarity with CBB. The responses focus on the

following themes.

Traditional/inflexible/stable/experienced: Compared with the CXY groups, CBB is

believed to be much more traditional and conservative in their values. CXY-1 commented

that CBB had more conservative thoughts, which lead to inflexibility sometimes. He said that

this generation cared about the young generation, such as the young generation's education;

however, they did not know how to communicate with young people because of their

inflexibility. CXY-2 traced back CBB's experience in Cultural Revolution as the reason for

CBB's traditional mentality. CXY-3 and 4 looked at this character more positively and

claimed that CBB was stable, reliable and experienced because of their life-long experience.

Therefore, they saw that the CBB generation did things step by step in a firm and solid

manner. CXY-5 thought that CBB was more practical than her generation, but that they

lacked creativity.

Hard-working/endurance: As for work ethics, the CBB generation was well-known for its hard work and endurance because they went through impoverished early life and strived hard for better conditions. CXY-4 claimed that the societal environment in the past had shaped their work ethics and their ability to bear hardship.

Save/thrifty: This characteristic of CBB is also due to their early experience in economic hardship. CXY-2 pointed out that in her opinion CBB liked to save and put money in banks and bought things according to plans. CXY-5 compared her generation with CBB and said that people in her generation tended to spend all they earned; however, CBB spent money with a long term perspective.

Emphasis on family and work: According to the responses gathered from CXY interviewees, the majority of CBB's emphasis is put on family and work. CXY-1 thought that they were very responsible for their family and work. CXY-2 thought that they usually sacrificed much for their family.

Having examined these two sections on the characteristics of two generations, it is easy to see that the generational identities of all the four groups were strong. According to the social identity theory, strong social identities lead to ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. Thus, it is easy to understand why the Baby Boomers think highly of their generations and look at the X/Y generations negatively. However, it is counterintuitive that the X/Y generations do not think highly of their generations but think more highly of the older generations. The reason for this counterintuitive phenomenon might lie in the X/Y generations' Christian background. The young participants might be more conservative than their normal peers. Several X/Y participants point out that they are not like others from their generations, which weakens their generational identity values.

Generational Communication

This category and the next category (generational stereotypes) discuss RQ 2: How does perception of the other generation shape communication with that group?

Between AXY and ABB

With AXY participants, all of them expressed their interests in communicating with the older generation. One of them thought it was hard to communicate with the old generation, however, all the rest did not think so. The situation was very different with the ABB participants. About 2 out of 5 thought it was hard to communicate with the younger generation and they did not enjoy generational communication in organizational settings. And 4 out of 5 ABB thought it was challenging in certain areas to communicate with the young people. From this study, it seems that AXY looks at generational communication more positively than ABB.

Even though the participants had different opinions about communicating with their counterpart generation, some were in favor, some were not, and some thought it was hard, some thought it was easy, four elements were identified that affect generational communication between AXY and ABB: interests, common ground, respect, and personality.

Interests: Participants who enjoyed communicating with the other generations generally showed genuine interest in them. ABB-1 said that he got along with many of the young generation well partly because he enjoyed knowing why people thought the way they thought. ABB-2 said he enjoyed teaching and mentoring young employees because they showed their eagerness to learn. The AXY participants who liked to talk with ABB were usually interested in the old generation's experience and life wisdom. AXY-2 thought it was important to communicate with ABB because they could learn a lot from them about experience, life, and how to manage money. On the contrary, people who disliked talking to the other generations were those who had not got much interest in the other generations.

ABB-5 felt really hard to communicate with the young generation in his organization because his students did not care about what he offered in class. He claimed that they only worked up to a level to get by, therefore, it is very hard to keep their attention.

Common ground: According to the responses, generational communication disconnect was also due to the failure of finding a common ground between two generations. ABB-1 found common ground with the young generation in recreational activities such as motorcycling and sports. However, he found it really hard to communicate with them about "more serious sides of life", such as work and family because of different values. ABB-4 found that there was no common ground between him and the young generations regarding the new technology and computer. Therefore, he felt distant from them because he could not "speak their computer language". AXY-4 thought that it was really hard to communicate with the old generation because both her generation and the old generation did not know how to relate to each other because of lacking in common ground.

Respect: People showed more willingness to communicate when they were respected. This was especially true with ABB. Those ABB participants who enjoyed communicating with the young people felt that they were being respected for their experience, knowledge, wisdom, and their moral values. ABB-1 and 5 felt their 20 plus years work experience and teaching were not respected by their coworkers and students. Therefore, the willingness to communicate was not there. On the other hand, the AXY participants who took the initiative to talk to the older generation generally admired and valued their experience and wisdom.

Empathy: This factor also played an important role in generational communication. ABB-1 said that he was open-minded; therefore, he could get along with his young co-workers fine. AXY-1 said that he could put himself in the other person's position so that communication could be smooth. In this sense, empathy can enhance understanding and communication.

Three out of the five ABB participants showed their preference in communicating with their peers over the young generation. This preference was due to common topics and common background. Besides, ABB-4 thought it was also because of the depth of the topics that he could reach with his peers. He enjoyed a much deeper and much broader communication with his friends in the same age group than with the young people. Only two out of the five AXY participants showed their preference in communicating with their peers over the old generation. Their preference to communicate with peers is due to common understanding of the new technology, new terms and similar mind frames. The AXY participants who showed no preference in either group enjoyed talking to the old generation for their experience, wisdom, and guidance. AXY-2 expressed that there were obstacles in communicating with peers which did not exist in generational communication. She was afraid of being judged on who she was, what she looked like, and how she acted.

Between CXY and CBB

As for generational communication between CXY and CBB, there were no hostile attitudes expressed toward each other. No participants expressed that they do not like to communicate with the other generation. Nevertheless, except two CBB participants, all the rest of them were not strongly in favor of generational communication. Most of CBB participants communicated with the young generation because they cared about the young people in a *zhangbei* way (*zhangbei* is a term with Chinese cultural meaning, which means elders. However, Chinese elders were respected for being elders, which has a connotation of power distance). The CXY participants communicated with the old generation mostly for experience and guidance or out of courtesy.

Several elements have been identified affecting the quality of generational communication between CBB and CXY. These four elements are common ground, respect, care, and interests.

Common ground: Common ground has three aspects, common topics, common knowledge, and common understanding. Most participants contributed their lack of communication with the other generation to the lack of common topics. CXY-1 said that there was nothing much to talk about with the old generation beyond "saying hello". CBB-1 expressed that it was challenging for him to communicate with the young generation because they had different focuses. Some of communication failures were also due to lack of common knowledge. CBB-2 enjoyed talking with the young people about almost everything except anything related to computers of which he had no knowledge. Common understanding requires a higher understanding of each other's opinions, values, and world views. This is the hardest aspect to achieve for different generations. The CXY participants felt it was hard to communicate with the elders because they had different opinions, thoughts, attitudes, way of expressing, or even way of talking. CBB-5 enjoyed her communication with the young people because she could totally understand how they thought. She thought that she did not have any generational gap with the younger generation because she progressed with the time and did the things that the young people would usually do. She said, "sometimes, my way of thinking is even more advanced than theirs."

Respect: Unlike ABB, not being respected is not the reason for the CBB participants' communication disconnect with CXY. Because of Chinese culture, the young generation usually respects the elders as *zhangbei* (elders). This respect can be a respect for their knowledge, experience, and wisdom; it can also be a respect for their authority coming from the culture. On one hand, it helps generational communication because the young generation enjoys getting experience and guidance in interactions with the old generation. CBB-5 said that her young co-workers enjoyed talking with her because they admired her expertise in finance and investment. The CXY participants have better generational communication in aspects like school, work, values, and attitudes toward life in which they benefit from the

elders' experience. On the other hand, this respect carries power distance in Chinese culture. Because in Chinese culture, members need to respect their elders for their authority; therefore, CXY-3 stated she felt uneasiness and was nervous when communicating with the old generation. She said, "you can argue with your peer; however, you can never do that to *zhangbei*." CXY-2 stated that she would be careful in how she framed her words when talking to *zhangbei*, and she felt that the elders always talk in a lecturing way.

     Care: This factor comes mainly from the responses of the CBB participants. Generally, the CBB participants expressed that they show care to CXY as *zhangbei* when communicating with them. CBB-1 said he looked at the young generation with more tenderness since he had his own child. When he looked at them this way, he would not be picky about their behaviors and mainly cared for them from the angle of *zhangbei*. The care attitude sets a more positive and harmonious tone for generational communication.

     Interests: Overall, the CXY participants showed fewer interests in generational communication than the CBB ones. The two CBB participants who enjoyed communicating with the young generations show high interests in the young people. CBB-3 liked to talk to the young people because he enjoyed learning new things from them. CBB-5 also enjoyed connecting with the thoughts and life style of the young generation.

     All the participants expressed their preference with their peers over the other generation in communication. The CBB prefer to communicate with people from the same generation for the common topics and the common background in life experience and for the depth they can reach for the life experience. The CXY prefer to communicate with their peers for the common topics and the common way of thinking. However, they also express that they prefer to talk to the elders in certain topics such as school, life guidance, and values.

Generational Stereotypes

Stereotypes against AXY

Four out of the five AXY participants saw generational stereotypes against their generation from ABB. They were viewed as "internet generation" and "texting all the time". ABB also saw AXY "a little bit lazy, not driven to succeed, not goal wise, and don't have respect to older generation." The other stereotypes included: not motivated, rude, and incompetent in communication. AXY-5 thought that AXY had been perceived as they did not care to communicate. However, he thought it was not necessarily true because AXY simply did not know how to communicate with ABB. AXY-4 thought her generation generally did fit these stereotypes.

According to the responses, these stereotypes affected generational communication negatively. AXY-3 stated, "I feel like, I have to overcome their stereotypes of my generation, and prove to them that not all of the Generation Y is like that."

Stereotypes against ABB

Four of the five ABB participants felt that their generation had been stereotyped by AXY. ABB was charged for their failure to catching up with the times. ABB-1 stated, "They think we don't move on like them. We don't change.··· We are dinosaurs because we are not into the new technology." ABB-5 felt that they were considered as "old fogies", "out of date", and "don't know what we are talking". ABB-2 thought that one big stereotype for his generation was that the younger generation did not believe the older generation could understand them. However, he thought that he could understand most of what they were going through in life because he had been there when he was young. This generation is also criticized for being too tight with money.

ABB-5 thought generational stereotyping was mutual among generations. "We think they are out of the line. They think we are out of the line. I mean, that's a forgone conclusion.

I think, it's a mutual agreement that we don't understand each other." ABB-2 thought

generational stereotyping was true with every two generations. He recalled that they had

generational stereotypes against their parents generation as well, According to ABB-5, "the

key for my generation is to think like the younger generation."

Stereotypes against CXY

All the CXY participants felt very strongly about being stereotyped by CBB. Some

stereotypes concerned their fun-centered life style. CBB thought that CXY spent money

recklessly, and were too much into materialism, and displayed irresponsible attitudes toward

romantic relationships and sex. Some stereotypes regarded their life and work attitudes. They

were viewed as irresponsible, lacking loyalty, impractical, superficial, and as having lack of

endurance. Some stereotypes regarded their abilities. They were perceived as weak in coping

with real life problems, and the ability to handle pressure.

Some participants thought these impressions were over generalizations about their

generation because they thought only a small group of people fit into these stereotypes. CBB-

1 said because these stereotypes existed, in order to have a good communication, he needed

to explain to the older generation that he was not like his typical peers. CBB-3 stated that as

long as these stereotypes were not about something that she really cared; these stereotypes

then did not affect her communication with the old generation.

Stereotypes against CBB

Four CBB participants were positive of being stereotyped to some extent by the

younger generation. Compared with CXY, their feeling of being stereotyped were not as

strong. Some main stereotypes of CBB were that they were being too conservative, outdated,

unable to catch up with the time, narrow minded, being too austere, and unable to enjoy life

as much as the young generation.

CBB-1 stated that these generational stereotypes were common for every generation. He said that his generation also had stereotypes against their parents generation. From his personal experience, he thought it took long time for the young generation to understand and appreciate the kindness and wisdom of the older generation. CBB-5 agreed that stereotyping affected communication in a negative way because it created distance and misunderstandings.

From the examination of these four groups, it is evident that stereotypes generated by generational differences and lack of communication are strongly sensed and recognized by all the four groups. The participants also acknowledged the negative functions of these stereotypes on their communication with the other generations. The Generation X/Y participants specially expressed that it required extra efforts to overcome the stereotypes to establish a good impression with the old generation.

Cultural Influences

This category discusses RQ 3: How do cultural characteristics effect generational communication, and what are the differences between Chinese and Americans in this particular issue?

American culture

Only two participants identified that American culture had impact on their communication with the other generations. AXY-1 found that members in his culture communicated in a more straightforward manner than some other cultures. ABB-2 thought that different cultures had different ways in communicating between different generations. AXY-2 said that she did not think there were any principles in her culture which she could follow in communicating with elders. AXY-3 stated,

> As far as the American culture's concerned, I think it has more to do with your
>
> upbring and your parent and what values they instill in you. But, I don't feel a sense

of anything, rules, or guidelines in the American culture teaching me, you know,

that's how you should treat an older generation.

Generally speaking, the American participants failed in perceiving their culture and its

distinctive features among the other cultures regarding this issue.

Chinese culture

On the contrary, Chinese participants showed a strong and uniform sense of Chinese

culture in generational communication. The participants could list general guidelines and

teachings about how to conduct generational communication. The most accepted guidelines is

zun lao ai you, an ancient Chinese term which has been mentioned by the majority of the

participants in this study. *Zun lao* means respecting the elders, and *ai you* means caring for

the young people. This guideline contained two elements, respect and care, which guide how

different generations treat each other based on age difference.

Respect the elders: CXY-2 stated that the young generation should show respect and

should not be willful in communicating with the elders, and she tried to avoid some topics

that might offend older generation's feelings. CXY-3 also pointed out that Chinese culture

required the young people use honorific (words of respect) and to show respect. Because of

these requirements from the culture, she thought that she could feel very easy in talking to the

elders. CXY-5 felt that she could not express her ideas and thoughts freely in front of the

elders because of this cultural aspect.

Care for the young people: ABB-1 said the one aspect of the Chinese culture was the

elders showing sympathy and care for the young people. Showing respect and care carries a

sense of family, which is consistent with the collectivistic characteristics of the Chinese

culture. The sense of family is evident in Chinese culture and society. For instance, terms

used for calling relatives are also commonly used for calling non-family members. It is

normal for a person call a stranger *shushu* (uncle) or *ayi* (aunt) whose age is about that

person's parents age (it is very rude to call somebody who is older by their first name). Thus, it is expected that generational communication and relationship carries a sense of collective sense which is very different from generational communication in American culture.

Other features: People tend to avoid straightforward communication in Chinese culture, which is especially true with generational communication because of power distance. CXY-5 said that people tend to let the other people guess what they wanted to communicate instead of being straightforward, which could lead to misunderstanding. CBB-5 said that Chinese tended hide their true feelings. Besides not being straightforward, CBB-1 thought that Chinese tried to avoid open arguments and tried not to offend the other people in communication. CBB-5 thought that communication and relationships in Chinese culture were built on the foundation of *renqing* (favors and affection), which also differed from communication in American culture.

In conclusion, Chinese participants demonstrated a much stronger sense of the whole culture and being guided by cultural principles. Respecting the elders, caring for the young people and other features all display the collectivistic characteristics of Chinese culture. Even though some scholars (Weber, 2002; Moore, 2005; Cao, 2009) indicate there is a transition from collectivism to individualism in Chinese society and the young generations are becoming more individualistic than the old generations, it was surprising to find that the Chinese culture still has important influences on the young generation judging by their collective thoughts and values. McEwen, Fang, Zhang, and Burkholder (2006) actually conclude that proudly supporting their own culture is one characteristic of the current young generation in China.

Previous sections revealed that Chinese generational communication is not as negative as generational communication in American culture despite that CXY and CBB claimed that they have a strong sense of generational identity. The reason might lie in their

strong acknowledgment of Chinese culture. Social identity theory scholars proposed a concept called superordinate identity which is a broader identity that could subsume both ingroup and outgroup (Brown, 2000). In this case, the Chinese culture can be recognized as a superordinate identity covering both CXY and CBB. The destructive function of generational identities is limited by the overall cultural identity.

Favorable Solutions

This category discusses RQ 4: How can communication between Baby Boomers and Generation X/Y be enhanced?

Between AXY and ABB

The responses from the participants on possible solutions for generational communication disconnect focused on two elements, increasing mutual understanding and creating common ground. Increasing mutual understanding could enhance generational communication by reducing misunderstandings and negative stereotypes. Creating common ground helps generational communication by increasing similarities in generational identities. Therefore, people can have more common topics to communicate about and are able to have a common perspective.

Increasing mutual understanding: Many of the participants called for more communication because it can increase understanding of each other. AXY-3 said that people could improve generational communication by simply speaking to each other. ABB-5 suggested establishing a kind of forum in organizations which could bring people from different generations together to share and collaborate, so that people have better understanding of each other. AXY-1 and 4 suggested starting more generational communication from family and then building better generational communication in a societal level. ABB-4 claimed that personal experience in generational communication outside of work could prepare people to better communicate with different generations.

Creating common ground: Finding common ground between two generations requires compromise and efforts from both sides. AXY-2 thought that her generation needed to learn about previous generations and their history, and ABB should be aware what was happening in the young generation's life. AXY-3 also agreed that it "takes a bit work on both sides". AXY needed a bit more patience, and ABB needed to try to catch up with technology and fast paced life style. AXY-5 concluded that AXY should be more principled, ABB should widen their views. ABB-1 thought that the media, school and family all needed to shape the AXY's mentality in the direction of being more self-responsible and hard-working, so that "they will know what you (ABB) are talking about, you (ABB) would understand what they were going through". ABB-2 suggested that ABB should not act like know-it-alls. "Just because you had that experience, doesn't mean that you can always solve the problems. There are things that are different. The technology is different. The cultural communication is different." He suggested AXY "should slow down to listen, put away computers and get out to do more things and interact with others and people."

Between CXY and CBB

The responses from the participants on possible solutions for generational communication disconnect focused on three elements. Besides increasing mutual understanding and creating common ground, Chinese participants also focused on setting a harmonious tone for generational communication. Setting a harmonious tone is used to maintain a harmonious relationship by avoiding offensive speech and action, utilizing respect and care.

Increasing mutual understanding: CXY-1 claimed that it was very important to help the older generation understand the younger generation. He suggested three ways to help: the media and the Internet should report about the younger generation with a more balanced view; the younger generation should communicate more to CBB about who they really were, and

they also needed to prove to CBB that their stereotypes were not always right. CXY-2 also

suggested more communication with ABB to understand their world view and values. CXY-4

and 5 encouraged more communication and perspective-taking. CBB-1 thought it was

important not to understand the other generations in his perspective, but tried to understand

them without any bias. CBB-4 and 5 encouraged their generation to get to know the young

generation more to avoid misunderstandings in order to avoid conflicts, resentments and

judgments. CBB-3 suggested having more generational communication friendly places, such

as city parks, church, etc.

Creating common ground: The Chinese participants did not emphasize this element as

much as the American participants. CBB-2 suggested finding more common topics because

people could not have much communication without common interests. CBB-5 thought that a

better communication required her generation to stay in connection with the current

mainstream mind frames and thoughts, and the young generation to be less conceited. CXY-3

suggested the older generation learn about computers in order to connect with the young

generation.

Setting a harmonious tone: CXY-3 suggested avoiding speech and actions that might

provoke the old generations, such as wear less revealing clothes, not use internet language,

not use any swear words. The young generation should find topics that are enjoyed by the

older generation, such as commenting on the flowers and plants (many Chinese elders grow

flowers as a hobby). Many CBB participants encouraged their generation to adopt a more

tolerant and caring attitude toward CXY. CBB-2 thought his generation needed to love the

young generation. With love, generational communication could be conducted in a more

positive way.

As the literature previously noted, there were three models/methods to improve

intergroup relationship according to Brown's (2000) review on social identity theory. These

three approaches were decategorization model, creating a superordinate identity, and

optimizing contact conditions. Increasing mutual understanding reflects the first approach

which seeks to reduce intergroup differentiation. Creating common ground is a reflection of

the second approach which "seeks to redraw the category boundaries so that any outgroup

become subsumed into a new and larger superordinate category" (752). This means to create

a more inclusive identity which can cover both groups, so that they feel less different from

each other than before. Setting a harmonious tone is consistent with the third approach which

promotes optimizing contact conditions to reduce intergroup tensions "while retaining some

group salience" (752).

Summary of Results Responding to RQs

RQ 1. How do Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers perceive each other and their own

group?

Overall, the perceptions from both Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers on the

characteristics of the X/Y were negative. Yet, the perceptions from both Baby Boomers and

their counterpart generation about this older generation were fairly positive. Most

characteristics of these four groups revealed from this study are consistent with what the past

literature implies.

RQ 2. How does perception of the other generation shape communication with that

group?

The generational perceptions that affect communication between the generations

focus on two different areas, general communication and stereotypes. In the area of general

communication, this paper identified four elements that affect communication between AXY

and ABB: interests, common ground, respect, and empathy, and four elements between CXY

and CBB: common ground, respect, care, and interests. All the four groups were aware of

being stereotyped by their counterpart generations, and admitted that stereotypes were destructive in generational communication.

RQ 3. How do cultural characteristics effect generational communication, and what are the differences between Chinese and Americans in this particular issue?

Compared to Chinese participants, American participants failed to identify the cultural influences on generational communication. Chinese participants had a strong sense of their cultural guidance in how to communicate with different generations. And the cultural guidance was collectivistic in nature.

RQ 4. How can communication between Baby Boomers and Generation X/Y be enhanced?

The solutions for improving communication between the generations from both the Chinese participants and the American participants focused on increasing mutual understanding and creating common ground. However, Chinese also focused on setting a harmonious tone for the communication. These suggestions were consistent with what social identity theory implies.

Conclusion

In this section, the researcher examined generational communication in six categories: outlining Generation X/Y, outlining Baby Boomers, generational communication, generational stereotypes, cultural influences, and favorable solutions. Two referent elements were used through the whole discussion, social identity and cultural characteristics. The study revealed a strong social identity with all the four generational groups, difficulties in communication and stereotypes because of the identities. The elements that affect communication and the solutions for improving generational communication were consistent with what the social identity theory implied.

The cultural characteristics were especially evident in categories of generational communication, cultural influences and favorable solutions. Collectivistic elements of respect, care, harmony, conflict avoidance were spotted from the responses of the Chinese participants. It was suspected that despite CXY and CBB having their own generational identities, they shared a superordinate cultural identity. This explained why the generational communication among the Chinese was not as negative as the generational communication among the Americans.

Chapter 5 - Recommendations for Future Research and Conclusion

Research Limitations

Several limitations are exposed through this study in the process of exploring generational communication with two cultural groups. The first limitation lied in the Chinese background of the researcher which could have produced bias in the study. As a Chinese scholar, the researcher has a deeper understanding about the Chinese people, the culture, and the society than he has about Americans, the American culture and society. This might have led to over interpretations or inaccurate interpretations of the Chinese cultural influences in the issue. This might also have limited the researcher's detection of some valuable findings in the American responses for the lack of understanding of the American culture. The researcher should have employed strategies to reduce the effects from the bias from the outset of the study.

The second limitation lied in the demographic characteristics of the participants. As previous discussion indicates, the average age of Generation X/Y locates at the younger end on the spectrum (age 18-28), and the average age of Baby Boomers locates toward the older end on the age spectrum (age 45-60). Because the age difference between participants is greater than the difference between the average ages, the opinions from the participants could be more extreme than the mainstream opinions from each generation. The other demographic factor is gender. Even though the gender of the Generation X/Y is balanced, there is only one female participant in the total of ten interviewees with Baby Boomers. It is well understood and well researched that females communicate and maintain relationships differently from males. There is a lack of females' opinions toward generational communication from Baby Boomers, which also limits the overall representation of the generation as a whole.

The third limitation was related to the number of interviewees and their background. Even though twenty participants were involved in the process of interviews, there were only

five interviewees for each group. Reponses from five people could not be significant enough to represent each group very well. Because the researcher used convenience sampling and the research was conducted with participants at a Christian university and around, most participants were Christians including Chinese ones. Thus, it cannot represent people of various backgrounds for both cultures. Most of Generation X/Y participants spoke highly of the older generation possibly because of the X/Y's Christian background.

Fourth, because all the Chinese participants have lived in the American culture for months or even years, their opinions might have been affected by the American culture to certain extent. Future research should draw participants from Chinese society to reduce unnecessary variables.

The fifth limitation was not separating different types of organizations. Organization is a very general term which can refer to schools, churches, companies, charity organizations, clubs, governments, etc. One type of organization can be very different from the other type in function, nature, way of functioning, and relationships among people who are involved in the organization. Therefore, grouping them together may produce unreliable results and conclusions. Future research should at least categorize organizations into three groups, schools, companies and non-profit organizations, to explore the characteristics of generational communication.

The sixth limitation concerned how true and reliable the opinions were compared to people's generational communication in real life. The perceptions of the participants on these issues were not necessarily true reflections of what could happen in real communication. Responses from the participants could be a reference of their personal perceptions about their identity and cross-generational communication. Future studies can gather data from real life context to analyze how generational identity and generational stereotypes effects these two generations' communication with the others.

The last limitation lied in the coverage of the study. This study was designed to look at how generational identities affect communication negatively through misunderstanding, lack of understanding, and stereotypes. It was somewhat too ambitious to try to cover all the related aspects of this issue with two cultural groups in a limited paper.

Future Research

Despite the limitations, this paper opens a new path in exploring the function of generational identities in communication within two cultural communities. Besides some recommendations made based on limitations, future research can build on the current study with the following recommendations.

First of all, similar studies in the future should avoid convenience sampling and strive for participants who can better represent the researched generations from both countries. The background of the participants should be diverse in their geographic origins, education, religion, economic condition, and so on. The number of the participants should be enough to draw significant conclusions.

Next, this study is a qualitative study in nature which is a better approach in gathering richer and deeper descriptions of opinions and experience than other approaches. Yet, it is a disadvantage in including a broader scope on each aspect of the issue compared to a quantitative study. For instance, literature indicated many characteristics for each discussed generation; however, the responses from the interviewees only touched four or five characteristics. A quantitative study utilizing surveys could cover more categories for the participants to give their opinions on. A better way to research this issue could be employing a mixed method approach combining surveys and interviews to look at the issue with both a broader scope and a deeper understanding.

The third recommendation is the use of theories in future study. This study adopted social identity theory because it took the angle of exploring the influence of generational

identities on the generational communication. This theory, despite its psychological roots, helped the researcher to understand the function of generational identities and stereotypes in affecting generational communication negatively. However, future research can look into appropriate communication theories to examine the communication and relationship between generations to further the knowledge our knowledge of these communicative behaviors and provide a different perspective.

The preliminary purpose of this study was to understand communication between two generations. The purpose beyond this one should be to provide solutions for the organizations to improve and enhance generational communication between the members. The last recommendation for future research is to better serve this purpose by concentrating on proposing solutions and testing solutions. Future studies can propose specific models and methods based on the understanding of theories on relationship and communication and the knowledge gained from this study and other similar studies, and test them in real fields which can bring applicable knowledge to build a better organizational climate and organization.

Conclusion

People from different generations coexist in all kinds of organizations. Because of the new technology and fast paced societies, generational identities are more obvious and stronger than ever. More and more people from the young generations are stepping into positions in organizations; therefore, there are more interactions between these young people and the other generations in organizational setting. There is a need for the organizations to learn about these young generations and their characteristics to ensure a smooth transition. Additionally, literature reports that there are stereotypes attributed to the young generation which leads to negative impressions and attitudes from the other generations. Literature also implies generational differences and stereotypes are two reasons for poor performance in generational communication and sometimes leads to conflicts and hostile relationships.

In this study of generational communication conducted by the guidance of social identity theory, the researcher uncovered themes on the following six categories: Generation X/Y, Baby Boomers, generational communication, generational stereotypes, cultural influences, and favorable solutions. The perspectives from both Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers on the characteristics of the X/Y are negative in general. Yet, the perspectives from both Baby Boomers and their counterpart generation about this older generation are fairly positive. However, the generational identities for all four groups are very strong. According to social identity theory, strong group social identity produces strong ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. It is easy to understand most of the Baby Boomers participants think highly of themselves and look down upon the young generations. However, it cannot explain why the X/Y generations also think highly of the Boomers and criticize their generations negatively in general. One of the reasons might be the X/Y participants' Christian background, which makes them more conservative and different from their typical peers. Some of the participants also pointed that they were not like the typical member in their generation.

In the category of generational communication, this paper revealed four elements that affect communication between AXY and ABB: interests, common ground, respect, and empathy. The four elements that affect communication between CXY and CBB are common ground, respect, care, and interests. The element of respect in Chinese generational communication is different from the element of respect in American generational communication. This respect carries power distance and elder authority, which reflexes the collectivistic characteristics of Chinese culture. The other collective characteristic is the element of care.

All the four groups are positive in general about being stereotyped by their counterpart generations. The responses also acknowledge that stereotypes are destructive in nature because it leads to misunderstandings, indifference, distance, and requires more efforts

to overcome to have a better generational communication. As for cultural influences on the communication, American participants failed to identify the cultural influences on generational communication. Comparatively, Chinese participants had a better sense of their culture as a whole and more obligated to follow the clear guidelines which directed their behaviors in generational communication. The main guidelines are respecting the elders, caring for the young people, avoiding straightforward communication (especially when the message is negative), etc., reflecting the collectivistic characters of Chinese culture.

The study revealed that Chinese generational communication was not perceived as negative as American generational communication. The reason for this probably lies in the culture. Both CXY and CBB have a very strong and consistent sense of their culture and its functions in guiding generational communication. This sense of cultural acknowledgment provides them a superordinate identity over their generational identity. Since both groups share a similar superordinate identity despite their differences in generational identities, the negative influences from their generational identities on communication and relationship maintenance are restrained by this superordinate cultural identity.

In the end, the study summarized what solutions could be used to improve communication between generations from the responses. The solutions from the American participants focus on increasing mutual understanding and creating common ground. Increasing mutual understanding helps to clear the stereotypes between generations, and creating common ground reduces the negative influences brought by generational differences. These two concentrations are consistent with the proposed solutions rooted in social identity theory, for instance, the decategorization model and superordinate identity approach (Brown, 2000). For Chinese participants, besides these two elements, the solutions also focus on setting a harmonious tone for the communication, which emphasizes several collectivistic features such as respect, care, love. This concentration consistent with the third approach,

optimizing contact conditions, in social identity theory for solving intergroup conflicts

(Brown, 2000).

       Generational communication is a critical issue in current society. Researching in this

issue will bring benefits to organizations. This study starts a dialogue to discuss the

relationship between generational identities and generational communication. Due to the

importance of this issue, it is necessary to continue this dialogue to explore generational

communication further and propose more solutions for better communication between

generations. Cultural comparison between the American culture and the Chinese culture

invites a cultural perspective into the discussion and produces a broader application to the

related societies. Several participants expressed that generational communication is not

difficult if people work at it. Successful generational communication not only generates joy,

happiness, harmony, and creativity, but also ensures the successful carrying on of wisdom,

values, and morals.

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Appendix A - Interview Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Communication Disconnect: Are Generational Stereotypes Working Against Gen X and Y in Organizational Communication?

Yuxiang Du

Liberty University

Department of Communication Studies

You are invited to be in a research study of generational communication in organizational settings. You were selected as a possible participant because you are identified either as a Baby Boomer or a member of Generation X/Y. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Yuxiang Du, Liberty University, Department of Communication Studies.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of generational stereotypes in the communication disconnect between participants from Generation X/Y and Baby Boomers of American and Chinese ethnic groups.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

You will be engaged in a 30 minute interview about generational communication. The interview will be audio-recorded with a digital recording device. You will be given a chance at the end of this form to agree to or decline being audio recorded during the interview. Before the interview you will choose a pseudonym as a means of maintaining confidentiality. Then you will be interviewed about your opinions regarding generational communication in organizational settings. You might be asked to share some experience about this research topic. In the end, you will have the opportunity to verify the notes that the researcher takes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has minimal risks:

Please note you will be asked questions that require recollection, reference to generational relationship, and potential conflict between referenced parties. The researcher will verbally explain to you that stopping at any point during the interview process is permissible. You may choose to not answer or omit responses to questions that are deemed personal in nature.

Injury or Illness

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

There are no benefits or compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely for a minimum of 3 years and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Your name and contact information will not be discussed or disclosed to any other persons. You will be identified by coded names.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Yuxiang Du. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at 109 Moultire Place, Lynchburg, VA 24502, (434) 485-2288, ydu@liberty.edu, or Dr. Faith Mullen, Department of Communication Studies, Liberty University, 434-592-7602, fmullen@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

Please check one of the following responses:

_____I understand I will be audio recorded during my interview and agree to have my interview recorded.

_____I do not wish to be audio recorded during my interview.

I have read and understand the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian:_____ Date: _____

(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix B – Interview Protocols

I. Planning the interview

    A. Arranging the setting

        1. Eliminate surrounding distractions.

        2. Position the furniture/seats to allow a lower power distance.

    B. Arranging the time

        1. Arrange the duration of the interview: 30 minutes.

        2. Get to know the surrounding events of the interviewee.

            a. Avoid having interview immediately after a meal.

            b. Avoid having interview between two major events.

II. Conducting the interview (Conductor: the researcher self)

    A. Opening

        1. Greeting

            a. Give a brief self-introduction.

            b. Set emotional tone and establish common ground.

            c. Use positive, open nonverbal gestures.

        2. Orientation

            a. State the purposes of the interview

            b. Tell what information is needed and how it will be used.

            c. Ask for the permission to interview, and the permission to record with digital recording device.

    B. Body

        1. Responsibilities of the interviewer

            a. Control and focus the conversation.

            b. Listen actively.

            c. Use secondary questions and silence.

            d. Take extensive notes.

2. List of topics to cover

    a. Perceptions regarding Baby Boomer generation identity and Gen X and Y identities

    b. Roles of generational stereotypes and difficulties in generational communication

    c. Chinese and American cultural characteristics in generational communication

3. List of major questions:

    a. How do you think of your generation?

    b. How do you think of your counterpart generation (Baby Boomers/Gen X or Y)?

    c. What is your general opinion of communicating with your counterpart generation in an organizational setting?

    d. In your opinion, compared with communicating with peers, do you feel that it is more difficult to communicate with people from a different generation? What are these difficulties?

    e. Do you feel your generation is being misunderstood or stereotyped when you communicate with other generations? How does this affect your communication with them?

    f. Do you think that your culture affects how you communicate with the other generation? How?

    g. In your opinion, how can generational communication be enhanced in organizational settings?

4. List of minor questions:

    a. age, gender, year of study.

    b. participants are asked to describe the context of their generational relationship and communication and specify the roles of them in relationship, such as manager-worker, owner-employee, instructor-student, etc. This information can be general in nature.

5. Closing

    a. Ask if the interviewee wants to add more comments.

    b. Give a brief review of all the answers and clarify the results.

      c. Ask if future results are needed by the interviewee, and leave contact information.

      d. Conclude with pleasantries and "thank-you".

III. Analyzing the interview

   A. Listen to recording and take extensive notes for each interview.

   B. Keep a written record of notes.

   C. Verify notes with recording.

   D. Keep the correct date for each interview.