Generational Affiliation as a Component of Culture: Focus Group Perspectives of Three Generational Cohorts

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GENERATIONAL AFFILIATION AS A COMPONENT OF CULTURE: FOCUS GROUP PERSPECTIVES OF THREE GENERATIONAL COHORTS
GENERATIONAL AFFILIATION AS A COMPONENT OF CULTURE: FOCUS GROUP PERSPECTIVES OF THREE GENERATIONAL COHORTS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the multicultural elements related to generational affiliation. Much of current generational literature is anecdotal and does not empirically explore the culture of each generation. A constructivist ground theory approach was applied to the study of three generational cohorts (Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials) using focus groups to (a) explore the values, beliefs, and worldview inherent to each generation, and (b) extend theory on multiculturalism.

Data from nine focus groups, three for each generational cohort, were analyzed for key themes within each generational cohort. Results indicated that, in keeping with the American Counseling Association's call for counselors to be multiculturally competent, generational culture should be incorporated into counselor training and continued education.
This dissertation is approved for
Recommendation to the
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This process has been one rooted in community and relational support, for which I am forever grateful.

To Dr. Roy Farley, my dissertation chair, thank you for your steady calm and reassurance throughout this process. I have deeply appreciated your feedback and guidance throughout these last few years. Thank you for your investment in this process and in me. To the other fabulous members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Kristin Higgins, Dr. Lynn Koch, and Dr. Jim Hammons, thank you for your support and guidance. I am especially thankful to Dr. Lynn Koch for your willingness to be my qualitative go-to person. You calmed my anxieties throughout this endeavor and were always available for a quick pep-talk, or to validate that I was on the right track after all. Thank you all for serving on my committee this year and for being a part of my journey over the last four.

In addition to my committee, I would like to take this time to thank a few very special people who have not just been instructive in my life, but have shaped the core of who I am. Professor Judy Stephen, you have been my rock, my life-giver, and my place of safety throughout a rather tumultuous journey. Your authenticity, openness and willingness to prioritize being a holistic person have modeled the type of woman, counselor, and counselor educator I desire to be. Thank you Judy for your mentorship, friendship, and genuine care. I also want to thank and memorialize Dr. Daryle Woodward for being more than just a teacher and supervisor. A godly man who shared his heart generously and lived his faith every day, Daryle invested heart and soul into my development as a person, a clinician, and as an academic. A walking example of the
The redemptive and restorative power of Jesus Christ, Daryle passed too soon but his legacy will live on in those of us who were blessed to share part of life’s journey with him. I would not be here without his investment in me and I only wish he could be here to see this process come to fruition. Thank you Daryle!

Many, many thanks to my community of family and friends both near and far. Whether in phone calls, coffee talks, or Skype conversations you have sustained me and enabled me to maintain my sanity in this process. To my parents (Gary & Hanna Nesbit) and sisters (Tasha Kell & Rebekah Nesbit), thank you for your faithful support, patience, understanding and prayers throughout this journey. I am blessed with such an amazing family and could not have gotten here without your love and encouragement. Alycia, thank you for being such a good friend, roommate, and pseudo-dog-owner. Undoubtedly, neither Sasha nor I would have survived these last four years without you. Finally, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his sustaining grace and provisions in my life, and specifically in this journey.

I am blessed and thankful beyond words. Thank you all for being you, and sharing your lives with me.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Which means the most to you: Elvis joins the army, Jimi Hendrix dies, MTV debuts, or Kurt Cobain dies? Your answer may not only have personal relevance, but also relevance to your generational culture (Arsenault, 2004). Much discussion has come about in recent years regarding the concept of generational cohorts. While anecdotal evidence abounds as to their distinctive characteristics, clashing perspectives and challenges, little empirical evidence exists outlining the characteristics of generational cohorts, or cultures. This study explores how members of three generational cohorts co-construct their cultural identity through their values, beliefs, and worldview, as well as how membership in a generational cohort influenced these constructs.

Although the American Counseling Association (ACA) calls for its members to be multiculturally competent counselors (ACA, 2005), they have neglected to include generational cohorts as a significant area of multicultural study or attention. Multicultural counseling is defined by the ACA (2005) as that which “recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts” (p. 20). ACA standards also state that multicultural competence is “a capacity whereby counselors possess cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge is applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups” (p. 20). While an ethical requirement to be multiculturally competent is important, one must first understand what culture is before one can recognize and embrace its uniqueness. Therefore, the ACA also provides a definition of
culture, stating that it is "membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are co-created with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors" (p. 20).

Gaps in the multiculturalism literature lend credence to the need to explore what other cultural subpopulations exist (D'Andrea & Heackman, 2008). With counselors called to adhere to these ethical standards, as laid out by the ACA, it is important that one explore additional dimensions of one's identity that could contribute to culture, such as generational affiliation, in order to ensure that opportunities to better serve a variety of clientele are not being inadvertently overlooked. This study explores how members of three generational cohorts co-construct their cultural identity through their values, beliefs, and worldview. As values, beliefs, and worldview are part of the definition of culture, this study then proceeds to explore the possibility of considering generational affiliation a construct to be added within the multicultural counseling field.

Rationale for the Study

Whether referred to as a "cohort" or a "generation," the concept speaks to "an identifiable group (cohorts) that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (times)" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). This span of time is usually between 15 and 22 years long, and can be broken down into three waves, lasting five to seven years each (Kupperschmidt). Kupperschmidt goes on to state that unique "generational characteristics include relatively enduring values, attitudes, preferences, and behaviors that form the filter through which cohorts interpret subsequent life experiences" (p. 66). For the purposes of this study, I will use the word "generation"
to encapsulate this concept. American society has attempted to give labels and boundaries
to the generations of the 20th Century (Howe & Strauss, 2000). For the purposes of this
study, Americans born between 1925 and 1945 are referred to as the Silent Generation,
Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X represents those
born between 1965-1981, and Millennials are the youngest of the recognized generations
being born between 1982 and 2001 (Brownstein, 2000; Hart, 2006; Howe & Strauss,
2000). Of primary concern in this study are the youngest three generations as they are
also the most populous generations in the United States today (United States Census
Bureau, 2000), and the most likely to be clients within a counseling setting.

The concept of multiculturalism is not new to most Americans, and the concept of
multicultural competence is something with which most counselors are familiar. Despite
familiarity with these broader concepts, counselors are still left to ask how to best define
"culture" and what distinguishes one culture from another. The answer to these questions
can inform much of the understanding a counselor has of his or her own cultural identity
and that of their clients. As with any cultural group, no one explanation, stereotype, or
definition will perfectly explain every person within the group. Cultural explanations and
definitions have the assumption that people who belong to a similar group will likely
share similar beliefs, values, and characteristics (UNESCO, 2002). Pedersen (1991)
contributed to this understanding of culture by including variables such as demographics
(e.g., age), status (e.g. social, economic, etc.), affiliations, and ethnographic information
(e.g., nationality, language, etc.). In light of these variables all contributing to a broad
definition of culture, an exploration of each generation as a separate culture is warranted.
The anecdotal literature is full of adjectives that attempt to define and explain the unique characteristics of each generation. The proverbial “they” are the authors of such information, but little empirical research exists to corroborate such hypotheses. For example, Baby Boomers are said to be known for questioning authority, acting in the hopes of invoking change, and being driven by their shared characteristics of idealism and optimism (Hart, 2006; Manning, Everett, & Roberts, 2005). In contrast, Generation Xers are the “me generation” (Twenge, 2006) known for their cynicism, emphasis on individualism, and independence, leaving them reluctant to attach to groups and preferring to connect to individuals (Hart, 2006; Howe, 2005). Different still are said to be the Millennials who are purported to be seen as special, sheltered, confident, team oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Howe, 2005). Interestingly, little empirical evidence exists to support such generalizations, yet the anecdotal literature is filled with suggestions for managers, educators, and anyone else in conflict with a coworker, boss, or employee due to these unique generational characteristics (Atkinson, 2004; Brownstein, 2000; Hammill, 2005; Hart, 2006; Kupperschmidt, 2006; Verespej, 1999).

While one could infer from the anecdotal literature what characteristics are distinctive to each of the three generations, little empirical or research based literature has addressed this topic as cultural identity of each generation, or generational affiliation as a culture in and of itself. The research that has been conducted focuses primarily on the fields of information technology (IT) and business leadership and management (Davis, Pawlowski, & Houston, 2006; Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007). Of particular interest is that virtually no counseling specific
research exists regarding the topic of generational culture. At best, the literature provides summaries of the characteristics of each generation in a compare-contrast style, with some authors discussing how these contrasting characteristics could impact management styles in business and nursing (Hammill, 2005; Hart, 2006). The literature leaves readers to infer from these other fields how the information pertains to counseling, without specifically addressing multicultural counseling.

**Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this study is to explore the how members of three generational cohorts co-construct their cultural identity through their values, beliefs, and worldview. Building on grounded theory and with the use of a constructivist paradigm, this study seeks to explore how participants construct understanding of their cultural identity as it relates to their generational affiliation, and how participants express their cultural identity through values, beliefs, and worldview. More broadly, this study seeks to expand the multicultural counseling literature to include generational affiliation.

**Research Question**

This study, will explore the following primary research questions:

- What are the co-constructed values, beliefs, and worldviews of each generation (Baby Boomer, Generation Xers, and Millennials) under study?

- How has membership in a generational cohort influenced the development of their values, beliefs, and worldviews?

**Significance of the Study**

Much work has been done related to multicultural counseling in which culture is defined primarily by race, ethnicity, and gender (D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Hays,
2008), but there remains a void in the literature as it relates to generational affiliation as a component of multicultural counseling. Given the plethora of anecdotal literature on this topic, it would seem of particular importance and relevance to explore in what ways, if any, generational affiliation may need to be considered as a component of culture. In particular, this study helps to inform counselors and counselor educators of the possible impact that generational affiliation has on cultural identity, and therefore provides them with information to more thoroughly execute the ACA's (2005) call to be multiculturally competent.

**Researcher’s Relationship to the Problem**

Prior to beginning this study, I was greatly interested in the anecdotal literature related to generational characteristics. In particular, I read a great deal on the Millennial generation’s entrance into the higher education system and the changes that college and university administrators were making to meet the unique needs of this cohort of students. Being on the cusp of a generational boundary myself, I wondered where I fit within this alleged phenomenon as compared with those who clearly fit within a generational cohort. I began to wonder if generational affiliation was, in itself, a part of what shapes my culture and worldview. Specifically, I considered how my view of politics, religion, social justice, authority, and the work/life balance differed from that of my parents and of my sisters (who are born well within the Millennial generation’s birth years).
Definition of Terms

• Beliefs:

Something one accepts as real and true, trust, confidence; what one believes (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980, p. 74)

• Constructivist Paradigm:

the viewpoint that concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 10)

• Culture:

membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are cocreated with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors (ACA, 2005, p. 20)

• Generation:

an identifiable group (cohorts) that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (times)

(Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66)

• Grounded Theory Method:

a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1)
• Multicultural Competence:

*a capacity whereby counselors possess cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge is applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups*  
(ACA, 2005, p. 20)

• Multicultural Counseling:

*counseling that recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts*  
(ACA, 2005, p. 20)

• Values:

*an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.* (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5)

• Worldview

*how a person perceives his/her relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people, things, etc.)... Not only are world views composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts, but also they may affect how we think, make decisions, behave, and define events.* (Sue, 1981, p. 17)

**Delimitations**

In order to avoid confounding the results by other variables this study required a rather specific and limited sample. Delimitations of the study included restricting each
focus group to those born in the United States of America in order to mediate characteristics and traits accounted for by broader ethnic and country-related culture. Additionally, focus groups maintained homogeneity by restricting participants to the assigned generational cohort based on a specific date range (i.e. 1946-1964), in order to allow for the collective, co-created perspective of each generation to emerge.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study included the location in which the focus groups were conducted. All taking place at a university in the mid-south limited the geographic scope of the study. While participants were not all born and raised in the same region of the United States, they all currently do reside in the same region. A further limitation was the age variance between generational cohorts. Specifically, as Millennials were in their 20’s, Xers predominantly in their 30s, and Boomers primarily in their 50s, maturational or developmental differences between groups may also be a limitation of this study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years the topic of generational characteristics or generational differences has gained much attention in the popular press and even more recently within the academic literature. It is argued that when you were born (your generational cohort) informs the culture which you will experience (Twenge, 2006), thus shaping both your understanding and expression of the world around you. While much of the literature related to generational characteristics is anecdotal, there has begun to emerge a body of empirical literature exploring these generational characteristics and traits. What has yet to be explored is the link between generational affiliation or one’s birth cohort and perceived culture. The following review of literature demonstrates both the gaps in the existing literature as well as the possible associations between one’s perceived culture and one’s birth cohort or generation.

Culture

Defining culture can be a rather challenging endeavor as various disciplines can add their own approach or emphasis. Regardless of the discipline, the concept of culture encapsulates some common themes such as values, beliefs, worldview, historical experiences, and the inclusion in a system. Depending on where one looks, the definition of culture takes on a different nuance or angle. For example, Hofstede (1984) defines culture as, “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (p. 51), whereas Lederach (1995) states, “culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them” (p. 9). Additionally, an even simpler definition of culture is provided by Useem and Useem (1963), “as the
learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings" (p. 169).

Given the elusive and extensive nature of culture, and the specific focus of this study, the definition of culture used in this study comes out of the counseling literature. One widely accepted definition of culture from within the counseling field is provided by Sue (1981):

> In simple terms, "culture" consists of all those things that people have learned to do, believe, value, and enjoy in their history. It is the ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which each member of society is born. (p. 37)

While the above definition is that which many counseling professionals may have encountered, the American Counseling Association (ACA), the professional authority for the counseling field, provides a different definition. The ACA (2005) defines culture as “membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are cocreated with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors” (p. 20). This definition from the ACA will be the working definition of culture for this study. Specifically, this study will use elements within the definition of culture to explore the characteristics of each generation under study.

Given that culture, as defined above, is a socially constructed phenomenon, a constructivist paradigm is fitting in exploring this concept. Constructivism comes in contrast to an objectivist perspective which assumes that data and its analysis are unbiased and independent (Charmaz, 2006). Instead, a constructivist view assumes that "both data and analyses are social constructions that reflect what their production entails... [and] sees facts and values as linked" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). This framework is important to note as it shapes the lens through which the literature is reviewed and the current study is conducted.
Multiculturally Competent Counseling

Within counseling, it is not enough to simply know what culture is or to be able to identify a culture different from your own. The standard has been set higher than that, calling counselors to engage in multicultural counseling and to do so competently. The ACA (2005) defines multicultural counseling as that which “recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts” (p. 20). Additionally, multicultural competency takes this understanding one step further in requiring “a capacity whereby counselors possess cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge is applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups” (p. 20). Counselors then are ethically bound to not just know and understand the uniqueness of their clients and client groups, but also to apply that knowledge in their work with clients.

D’Andrea and Heckman (2008), in their review of multicultural counseling outcome research, found that most multicultural studies address racial or ethnic cultural groups and recommend that future research address a broader understanding of culture. In this study, the authors reviewed forty years of multicultural counseling outcome research and concluded that while theoretical understandings of multicultural counseling abound, the empirical evidence needed to validate an understanding of culture beyond race and ethnicity is still needed.

Generations

A generation is defined as, “an identifiable group (cohorts) that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (times)”
(Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). Howe and Strauss (1991) provide an additional element to this definition stating that a generation “is a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (p. 60). This span can be anywhere from 15 to 22 years, as this is the time needed for the oldest in the generation to reach adulthood, and can be broken down into three waves, lasting five to seven years each (Kupperschmidt, 2000). According to most researchers, there are four generations of adults in America today: Silents, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials (Arsenault, 2004; Dries, et al., 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola & Sutton, 2002).

While generational titles and birth years vary slightly from one author to another, the differences are minimal. The oldest generation is known as the Silents (Dries et al., 2008; Sessa et al., 2007), the Matures (Sessa et al., 2007), or the Veterans (Farag, Tullai-McGuinness, & Anthony, 2009). The Silents, born between 1925 and 1945 (Dries et al., 2008), currently account for approximately 39 million Americans (US Census, 2009). The Baby Boomers typically claim birth years between 1946 and 1964 (Dries et al., 2008; Maples & Abney, 2006; Smola & Sutton, 2002) and account for approximately 83 million Americans (US Census, 2009). Generation X, born between 1965 and 1981 (Hart, 2006; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008) are also called X-ers, Generation Me, or the 13th Generation because of their place as the 13th generation in American history (Dries et al., 2008; Howe & Straus, 1991; Twenge, 2006). Generation X is significantly smaller than its surrounding generations with only 61 million Americans in its cohort (US Census, 2009). The youngest identified generation is that of the Millennials, born after 1981 with no end date yet established (Brownstein, 2000; Hart, 2006; Howe & Strauss,
Also called Generation Y, Generation Next, Nexters, and the Echo-Boom (Arsenault, 2004; Dries et al., 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2000), Millennials have approximately 82.5 million Americans in their cohort (US Census, 2009) and are expected to be the largest generation in American history by the time they all reach adulthood.

Within counseling literature, few studies have addressed the concerns of individual generations in the counseling relationship (Kirk & Belovics, 2005; Maples & Abney, 2006), and these have focused primarily on counseling clients of the Baby Boomer generation. These authors have focused on the use of counseling to help Baby Boomers transition into the later phases of life including retirement (Blanchette, & Valcour, 1998; Maples & Abney, 2006), second-career (Kirk & Belovics, 2005), and becoming care-takers for aging parents (Maples & Abney, 2006). While these topics are of interest, the articles are still anecdotal and lack the support of empirical evidence. Furthermore, nowhere in this limited research do any of the authors address the cross-cultural, cross-generational impact within the counseling relationship. In light of this gap in the research, this study seeks to build the beginning of a research base and a foundation for understanding the role of generational affiliation within the concept of multiculturalism. This lack of literature surrounding generational affiliation helps to support the need for the current study.

Part of the difficulty in discussing generational identity is the lack of empirical evidence in defining what exactly these generational characteristics are. While a substantial amount of anecdotal support discusses unique generational characteristics, few discuss the qualitative nuances or the quantitative findings which may underlie this
research topic. The following section seeks to identify both anecdotal and empirical literature, which serves as the foundation for this study.

**Anecdotal Generational Traits**

As previously stated, the empirical literature related to generational characteristics is slim, but the anecdotal literature abounds in nursing (Hart, 2006; Kupperschmidt, 2006), business (Hammill, 2005), and education (Brownstein, 2000; DeBard, 2004; Strauss, 2005). Each discipline and its authors provide summaries of the perceived characteristics of each generation and how it could impact their field. The following summarizes these discussions and provides a review of the anecdotal literature related to each generation. While four generations are often included in the literature on generations, this study focuses only on Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, as they are the generations most commonly represented in the American workplace, higher education and mental health settings.

**Baby Boomers**

The Baby Boomer generation consists of individuals born between 1946 and 1964 (Hart, 2006), and has been heralded as the largest generation in American history with approximately 83 million members (United States Census Bureau, 2009). Born primarily to veterans of World War II, Boomers came into adulthood during the Civil Rights era, the Vietnam War, and Roe v. Wade, all of which served to shape Boomers’ view of politics, family, gender roles, and authority. The least ethnically diverse of the three generations being addressed, only 24.1% of Boomers are non-white (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Born during a time in which the “nuclear family” was the norm, Boomers, as a whole, grew up in a two-parent home with one or two siblings, and a mom who stayed
home (Manning et al., 2007). While time in history and basic demographics are important to understanding the Boomer, there are some unique personality traits of this generation to be addressed.

**Who are the Boomers?** A large cohort, the Boomer generation shares a powerful voice and influential persona within American culture. An “idealistic, optimistic, and driven” (Hart, 2006, p. 26) generation, Boomers have a reputation for questioning authority and protesting in order to invoke change (Manning et al., 2007). Coming of age during the Vietnam War, this generation’s questions and arguments focus on “war and country” (Brownstein, 2000, Table 1), producing a group mindset that focuses more on uniting for a cause or for the sake of the national good than on an individual need. At the same time, seemingly contradictory values of personal gratification, personal health and wellness, and personal growth, are also shared by this generation. Moving forward and refusing to do things a certain way, simply because it was the way they have always been done, captures the heart of the members of this generation.

A team-oriented generation, Boomers tend to attach to organizations (compared to attaching to individuals), and entered the workforce with the thought that they would stay with that company until retirement. Hard work is a focus for the members of this generation, to the point where many “work to live” and have brought the concept of workaholism into the American vocabulary (Hamill, 2005, Table 3). According to Manning et al. (2007), the average adult Baby Boomer works 55 hours per week. Within the workplace, Boomers appreciate a team oriented workplace, like to have meetings, and value a “pay your dues” type of leadership (Hart, 2006, p. 26). While a good team player,
Boomers are driven by the desire for personal fulfillment, rather than on the regular feedback of their superiors. Monetary rewards are worth more than free time to most Boomers who brought the “buy now, pay later” mentality to the American economy (Hammill, 2005, Table 2). An incredibly proactive, internally motivated, and large generation, the Baby Boomers have left a significant impression on the whole of American culture.

**Generation X**

The beginning of Generation X has been placed anywhere between 1961 and 1965, but seems most appropriately fitted to 1965, as 1965 was the year when the United States saw birthrates return to pre-World War II levels (Maples & Abney, 2006). Born between 1965 and 1981, Generation X is a relatively small generation, with an estimated population just over 61 million members according to the United States Census Bureau (2009). The Generation X cohort is more ethnically diverse than Boomers with 32% of Generation X classified as non-white (Howe & Strauss, 2000). During the childhood of Gen-Xers, national divorce rates reached an all-time high, single parent homes became the norm, and more families consisted of only-children, with the average family having 1.7 children (Manning et al., 2007). “Latch-key kids” became one of the defining labels of this “lost” generation.

**Who are the X-ers?** The smallest cohort among the previous four generations, Generation X was identified only after most of its members had reached young adulthood in 1991 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Independent, patient, and skeptical describe the heart of Gen-X members. Born in a time when children were generally viewed as a hindrance to their parents’ personal and career goals, this self-raised generation learned that they could
only count on themselves. Labeled the “me generation,” Gen-Xers are far less group oriented than the Boomers that came before them and tend to be quite self-sufficient (Manning et al., 2007; Twenge, 2000). This independent generation, seeking non-conformity, went about their rejection of social norms differently than did their Boomer parents. Having felt lost in the shuffle of society, Gen-X brought about grunge rock, Music Television (MTV), South Park, and the “goth” look as a show of their presence, independence, and disenchantment with social rules. While some may parallel the rebellion of the Gen-Xers to that of their Boomer, hippy parents, the Gen-Xers rebellion is said to come more out of disenchantment, jadedness, and apathy in comparison to their parents’ push to ignite societal change through their demonstrations.

Out of their self-sufficiency, Xers developed a conscientious and pragmatic orientation to life (Manning et al., 2007). They tend to value a more informal approach to tasks, viewing too much formality as inefficient and unnecessary to getting the job done. In sharp contrast to the Boomers before them, Xers have little if any allegiance to groups or organizations but instead attach to individual people. Having watched their Boomer parents give their lives to their work only to be down-sized, Xers quietly resolved not to follow that example but instead pursue balance between work and fun (Hart, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Manning et al., 2007). Fun and freedom are the heart’s cry of Gen-Xers who brought risk-taking recreation into the public eye with increased interest in activities such as bungee jumping, skydiving, and other extreme sports.

In the workplace, Xers see themselves as free agents, lacking the organizational loyalty of their Boomer parents (Hammill, 2005). In their pragmatism, they desire a leader or boss who is competent, not simply one who has “paid their dues” to get there.
Meetings, bureaucracy, and repetitive tasks fly in the face of the Gen-X culture. Instead, Gen-Xers prefer a work system in which questions are welcomed, every voice is equal, and assignments or projects are open-ended but clearly purposeful (Hart, 2006; Hammill, 2005). They appreciate regular feedback and a mentor-type relationship from their superiors, and view freedom as the greatest reward. Unlike their Boomer parents, Xers would appreciate more time off over a financial bonus.

Unlike their Boomer parents, Gen-Xers tend to be very inactive in politics. Where Boomers fought for issues of war and country, Xers are concerned with issues of gender and race (Brownstein, 2000). Rather than a national focus, the “me” generation has a focus on self and the individuals with whom they feel allegiance. As with their disillusionment with big business, Xers tend to be disillusioned with government and politics as well, but take a more passive approach than their Boomer parents in the expression of their disenchantment. A small, relatively silent and “lost” generation, the Xers have left their mark on American culture through their attempts to be noticed and acknowledged more then by their attempts to invoke societal-wide changes. Pragmatic and cynical, this generation’s culture flies in direct contrast with much of the cultural characteristics of the Boomers before them.

Millennials

Born between 1982 and 2002, the Millennials have the additional labels of “Generation Y” and the “Echo Boom,” but self-elected to be called “Millennials” in a 1997 online poll hosted by www.abc.com. Comparable in size to the dominating Boomer generation, Millennials’ numbers were estimated to be over 82 million in 2006 according (United States Census Bureau, 2009), with just under 36% of them being non-white,
making them the most ethnically diverse generation in the United States (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Primarily children of Boomers, some of the younger Millennials also have Gen-X parents. Possibly the most talked about, written about, and researched generation, Millennials grew up “special” (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials were born during the financial boom of the 80s and through the steady income growth of the 90s. As a whole, Millennials were born to parents who were intentional about waiting to have children and deliberate in the way they wanted to parent (Manning et al., 2007). This societal shift from seeing children as a potential barrier to self-discovery to seeing children as a result of self-discovery dramatically changed the world in which Millennial children grew up from that of the generations before them.

Who are the Millennials? Howe and Strauss (2000) identify seven key characteristics of the Millennial generation: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional. The Millennials were born to parents who placed “baby on board” stickers on their cars when their children were little, and who later became the “helicopter parents” that colleges today are learning to deal with (Howe & Strauss, 2003). The first generations to have educational standards above those of the generation before them, Millennials are raised to believe that they cannot only achieve but can succeed beyond the level of those before them. As a generation, this group of people has been taught since infancy that they hold the power to change the world, and they believe it. With this sense of empowerment, the children of “soccer moms” are also quite pressured to live up to their “trophy kid” image (Howe, 2005). This generation has the opportunity to begin ACT preparatory courses in junior high, take college prep courses as freshmen in high school, and is told that their future rides on their high school
grade point average (GPA) and involvement in extra-curricular activities. This generation is one-third more likely to volunteer their time than those in previous generations, and has demonstrated an ability to produce average SAT scores higher than the United States has seen in 30 years (Howe, 2005).

Whereas the Xers before them were independent and avoided group affiliations, Millennials are team players who think of themselves in the collective sense (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In school, this plays out in Millennials preferring group assignments and group learning experiences over individual work. While more collectivist than previous generations, Millennials place strong identity in being Millennials, as opposed to “Echo Boomers” or “Yers,” with the importance in their name indicating their value in being seen as separate and different from all that have come before (Howe & Strauss, 2000). For this generation, a name that identified them as unique and separate was important. To be known as the “Echo Boomers” placed their primary identity in being children of Boomers and “Yers” placed their identity as simply those who followed the Gen-Xers. Therefore, the term Millennial gave them a title separate and unique to who they saw themselves to be. Additionally, for Millennials, being unique does not conflict with being part of a group, as it would for Gen-Xers.

Fast, immediate, instant, 24/7, and continuous are all words that resonate with the Millennials (Hart 2006; Manning et al., 2007). The first generation to truly grow up with computers, email, internet, cell phones, and iPods, Millennials expect instant results and fast service to the point where they “value speed over the finer details” (Hart, 2006, p. 26-27). This desire for instant accessibility is also evident in their emphasis on feedback and their “need” to receive feedback from parents, teachers, and bosses on a regular
basis. Whereas previous generations saw silence as acceptance, Millennials see silence as rejection or disapproval. While they expect feedback from others, Millennials expect others to value what they have to say as well. Even in their youth, Millennials became accustomed to being asked their opinions, their reactions, and their impressions about things. They are used to having a voice, and having it be heard; a vast difference from the Xers before them.

In stark contrast to both Gen-Xers and Boomers, Millennials are more conventional than the generations before them (Howe, 2005). Embracing the greater sense of traditionalism that comes with a more post-modern perspective, According to a recent Gallup Youth Survey, Millennials are “less likely than their parents were to use alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana” (as cited in Howe, 2005, par. 35). Additionally, they are reported to have more conservative moral and religious values than their parents (Howe, 2005). With the rise of the Millennial generation, the United States has seen rates of drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy, abortion, high school sexual activity, violent crimes, and suicide fall dramatically, some rates to all-time lows (Howe, 2005). For many Millennials, a more conservative view comes out of an appreciation for clear cut rules that come with explicit, pragmatic explanations as to their purpose. Unlike a Xer, a Millennial has no problem following common rules, given they can see their purpose.

In the workplace, Millennials do not have the same allegiance to a company or organization that their Boomer parents may have had (Hammill, 2005). Their confidence and pragmatism combine creating a generation that is likely to jump from one job to another as it seems beneficial or potentially career advancing for the Millennial. A workplace that emphasizes teamwork, varied work experiences, and a goal-directed
orientation will attract the Millennial as these factors will unite many of their key elements as a generation. Millennials view direct, regular, and immediate feedback as a necessity, even as they reach adulthood. They are accustomed to the use of email and voicemail and will not hesitate to use it, and they expect their superiors to have the same levels of competence (Hammill, 2005).

With many Millennials only beginning to enter their 20s, it is yet to be seen how much power this generation will truly exert within American culture. With the potential to be the largest generation in American history, and possibly the most ambitious of the last few decades, the potential for substantial impact is certainly present. A unique group of people, passionately united under the title of “Millennials,” this young American generation has only begun to make its mark on American culture.

**Empirical Generational Differences**

The empirical literature related to generational characteristics is limited at best, and rests primarily in the realms of business and nursing. In particular, most studies related to generational traits have focused on leadership style (Farag, Tullai-McGuinness, & Anthony, 2009) and work values (Dries et al., 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Conflicting results emerge regarding whether or not significant differences appear when comparing generational cohorts (Dries et al., 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Wong et al., 2008). In a category all her own, Twenge and colleagues examined various personality traits among college-aged students of the early 2000s compared to college-aged students in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s (Twenge, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008b; Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). Twenge
and her colleagues provide research that supports the idea that the younger “Generation Me” (those of college age in the late 1990s and early 2000s) has significantly different scores on psychological trait assessments related to extraversion (Twenge, 2001), self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2001), locus of control (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004), and narcissism (Twenge, et al., 2008a) in comparison to older birth cohorts (those of college age in the 1960s and 1970s).

**Leadership Style**

Much of the literature approaches the topic of generational characteristics from the perspective of leadership, leadership style, and perceptions of leaders (Arsenault, 2004; Farag et al., 2009; Sessa et al., 2007). In each of these studies, the authors undertook to quantitatively examine the values of each generational cohort as they applied to leadership. As previously stated, the majority of these studies were conducted within the field of business management, again demonstrating the lack of information on these topics from a counseling perspective.

Arsenault (2004) utilized two instruments to assess generational differences and leadership values. Using five open-ended questions, the author asked his sample of 790 participants to identify important national and world events from the previous 50 years. Additionally, participants rank ordered 10 qualities they most admire in leaders. For the purposes of this study, the authors identified the generational cohorts as Veterans (1922-1943), Baby Boomers (1944-1960), Xers (1961-1980), and Nexters (1981-2000). Due to most Nexters in the sample being close to the generational cusp (being born close to the generational cut-off), results for Xers and Nexters were discussed together. The author refers to those born on either edge of a generation as “tweeners” and purports that their
answers could have a “crossover effect” (p. 126). The study concluded that “the open-ended responses strongly supported generational differences” (p. 135). Concerning leadership qualities, significant differences were found on eight of the ten characteristics. Similarities were found between the generational cohorts with honesty being the top characteristic for each generation, and competence and loyalty falling within the top four for each generation. Differences were found as Veterans preferred more hierarchical and authoritative leadership, Baby Boomers preferred caring and competent leaders, and Xers and Nexters preferred a leader with determination and ambition. In light of these findings, the study concluded that generational differences are just as important to one’s view of diversity “as race, religion, and gender are” (p. 137).

Similarly, Sessa et al. (2007) examined how generational cohorts view leadership values and behaviors. In this study, the generations under examination were categorized as Matures (before 1946), Boomers (1946-1963), Xers (1964-1982), and Millennials (1982 and after). The authors categorized the Boomer and Xer cohorts into early and late subcategories. Using the Leadership Descriptives Sort, 447 participants chose the attribute (with definition provided) from a list of 40 that they felt was most important in a leader. Overall, the results indicated that six of the top 12 attributes were significantly different between generations. In particular, Matures valued leaders who had a global view and were farsighted, placing value in leaders who delegated more than any other generation. Early Baby Boomers (1946-1954) preferred leadership values of trustworthiness, experience, and big-picture orientation, while late Baby Boomers (1955-1963) preferred leaders who were truth-worthy and had a clear focus. Early Xers (1964-1976) were similar to late Boomers in that they too valued trustworthiness and a clear
focus, but also added to their preference the characteristics of optimism and persuasiveness. Similar to Late Xers, early Xers also valued leaders who are encouraging and are good listeners. Late Xers (1977-1982), more than any other generational cohort, valued a leader who listens. Additionally, a leader who is perceptive, encouraging, and provides feedback was of high value to Late Xers. Finally, Millennials (1983 and after) separated themselves from other generations by placing high value on a leader who is dedicated, creative, and who cares about them personally. Of the generational cohorts, Millennials placed dedication, focus and optimism higher than any other cohort, while placing credibility and farsightedness lower than any other generation.

The second part of this study (Sessa et al., 2007), addressed perceived leadership behaviors, with Millennials not being assessed due to their recent entry into the workforce. While differences were found in how generational cohorts perceived manager behavior, the differences were minimal and were better accounted for by a maturational effect than by generational differences. Although differences were found to exist between the desired qualities of a leader and the perceived behavior of managers from differing generational cohorts, the differences were not as stark as much of the anecdotal literature describes.

The field of nursing has also taken an interest in generational differences. Farag et al. (2009) addresses how Boomers (1946-1964) perceive manager’s leadership style and work climate in comparison to Xers (1965-1980). Using the Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire and the Organizational Climate Questionnaire, 475 participants provided results that in some ways contradicted the findings of Sessa et al. (2007). In particular, the study indicated that there were no significant differences in the perception of
leadership style between Boomers and Xers, but there were significant differences in how each of these generational cohorts perceived work climate. In particular, Boomers found their work climate warmer, providing a greater sense of belonging than did their Xer colleagues.

In summary, the empirical literature addressing leadership and generational cohorts indicates that while significant generational differences do exist, they may not be as profound or stark as the anecdotal literature suggests. Additionally, the literature is unable to fully address the preferences and characteristics of the Millennials (born 1982 or after) due to their only recent arrival into the work force.

**Work Commitment and Values**

The topics of work commitment and work values have also gained a lot of attention as they pertain to generational cohorts. The fields of business and information technology (IT) have dominated this literature, focusing primarily on Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. Specific topics of work commitment (Davis et al., 2006), perceptions of career success and satisfaction (Dries et al., 2008), work values (Smola & Sutton, 2002), and motivation (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008) have been researched.

Smola and Sutton (2002) provide the seminal study regarding generational differences and work values. The authors explored the differences between their 1999 exploration of work values to those found in a similar 1974 study. The authors used this method in order to help differentiate between what was a maturational effect and what was part of generational identity. The 1999 study utilized responses from 350 participants, while the 1974 study had a sample size of approximately 450. The results indicated there are significant generational differences both among participants in the
1999 study and between participants in the two studies (1974 and 1999). They also found that work values appear to change as workers grow older. Specific results indicated that Gen Xers (1965-1977) were less loyal to their company, wanted to be promoted more quickly, were less likely to view work as an important part of self-worth or identity, and were more likely to quit work if they won a large sum of money in comparison to their Boomer (1946-1964) counterparts. No significant differences were found regarding pride of craftsmanship between the two generations. Additionally, the study found there were significant differences in work values between participants of the same age (example: 27-40 year old in 1974 compared to 27-40 year olds in 1999). Finally, it was concluded that workers’ values do change as they mature, specifically that workers have a less idealized view of work as they age. While some changes in work values may be attributed to a maturational effect, this study indicates that a greater influence on work values is attributed to generational identity.

Davis et al. (2006) took one element of Smola and Sutton’s (2002) study and looked specifically at differences in work commitment between Baby Boomers (1942-1962) and Gen Xers (1963-1981). Based on a survey of 382 IT professionals across the United States, their study looked at work involvement, job involvement, work group attachment, organizational commitment, and professional commitment. Veterans (a.k.a. Silents) and Millennials were removed from the study due to small sample numbers. In comparing Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, no significant differences were found in regard to work involvement, work group attachment, affective commitment to the organization, continuance commitment to the organization, affective commitment to the profession, and normative commitment to the profession. Interestingly, Xers were significantly
higher in their levels of job involvement and normative commitment to the organization, while Boomers were significantly higher in their levels of continuance commitment to the profession. In particular, the authors argue that the Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers “may be more homogeneous than different in their beliefs about the value of work and commitment to their organizations and the profession” (p. 46). These results, in many ways, are contrary to both Smola and Sutton’s (2002) findings and much of the anecdotal literature related to generational differences.

Two similar dissertation studies were conducted to assess differences in organizational commitment between Baby Boomers (1943-1962) and Generation Xers (1963-1975) (McGuinness, 1999) and Generation Xers and Generation Y (1977-1994) (Patalano, 2008). In McGuinness’ study (1999), no differences were found between Boomers and Xers in their organizational commitment, whether measuring affective (desire to stay with an organization), normative (perceived cost of leaving organization), or continuance (sense of obligation to stay with an organization) commitment. When comparing Xers and Yers, Patalano (2008) found that Xers had significantly higher levels of affective commitment and normative commitment, while Yers had significantly higher continuance commitment. In many ways, these results echo the findings of Davis et al (2006) which indicate more similarities between Boomer and Xers than significant differences.

How one generation defines a successful or satisfying career is the topic of Dries et al.’s (2008) study. Conducted in Belgium, this study asked 750 participants to rate the career success of 32 fictitious people described in various vignettes. Additionally, the study looked at the participants career type as categorized by Verbruggen, Sels, and
Forrier (2007) (as cited in Dries et al., 2008), and the level of importance they placed on organizational security in their jobs. Despite model assumptions being violated for all analyses, some significant trends were observed in this study. In particular, significant differences were found in the types of careers held by members of each generational cohort. The results indicated a U-shaped pattern with the oldest and youngest generations placing the most importance on organizational security. Specifically, significant differences were found between Silents (1925-1945) and Boomers (1946-1964), between Silents and Generation X (1965-1980), and between Generation X and Generation Y (1981-2000). No significant differences in organizational security were found between Silents and Generation Y or between Boomers and Generation Y. Neither were significant differences were found in how each generation evaluated career success. Again, this study indicates that while there may be some validity to the anecdotal literature, the differences between generations (particularly between Boomers and Xers) while present, may not be all that extreme. Overall, the results of this study indicate that generational cohorts have unique views on organizational security and that generational affiliation has an impact on the differences in career type, but that the generations unite in how to evaluate career success.

In their Australian study, Wong et al. (2008) examined the differences in personality and motivation across generational cohorts. Using the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (Bartram, Brown, Fleck, Inceoglu, & Ward, 2006) and the Motivational Questionnaire (as referenced in Wong et al., 2008), responses from 3535 participants were analyzed. Minimal differences between Baby Boomers (1945-1964), Gen Xers (1965-1981), and Gen Yers (1982-2000) were found. Related to personality,
non-significant differences were found on the scales of variety seeking and independent mindedness. Personality differences were found on the scale of achieving, with both Gen Xers and Gen Yers being significantly higher on this scale than Baby Boomers. Generation Y was also significantly higher in affiliativeness than either Boomers or Xers, and higher in conscientiousness than Xers. Contrary to most anecdotal literature, Boomers were found to be the least affiliative of the three generations. However, Baby Boomers scored significantly higher than Yers in the optimism scale.

Scales assessing scores on motivation, like those assessing personality, were mixed. Similar to the findings of Smola and Sutton (2002), results in Wong et al.'s (2008) study showed that Gen X and Gen Y were significantly more motivated by progression, or promotion. Similar to the affiliative scale related to personality, Gen Y was significantly more motivated by affiliation than were Boomers. Finally, having or gaining power was significantly less motivating to Yers than to Xers and Boomers, and significantly less motivating to Xers than to Boomers. Non-significant differences in motivation were found on the factors of immersion (working beyond a normal schedule) and personal growth. In comparison to the work of Dries et al. (2008), Wong et al. (2008) found no significant differences between generations related to ease and [job] security. Overall, the concept of generational differences is supported related to both personality and motivation, while also providing some challenging conclusions to both the anecdotal literature and previously discussed empirical literature (Dries et al, 2008).

Similar to the literature related to leadership, the literature related to work values provides some support for the concept of generational differences, or unique characteristics for each generation, but challenges the extreme nature of these differences
found within the anecdotal literature. Due to the young age of the Millennials in most of these studies, their representation is limited within the literature. In addition to needing further research which includes representative samples of all three generational cohorts, further research is needed to clarify some conflicting results found between the studies reviewed thus far.

**Personality and Generations**

Cross-temporal meta-analyses examine the results of the same measure, with the same aged participants, completed at different points in history. For example, results of college students in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995 who all completed the same inventory on anxiety are compared for differences over time. The goals of this type of research are to account for age and developmental differences while better isolating the effects of generational or birth cohorts. Twenge and her colleagues have conducted a variety of studies in this fashion to address the generational effect on an assortment of psychological traits such as extraversion (Twenge, 2001), anxiety (Twenge, 2000), self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2001), locus of control (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004), and narcissism (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a). Twenge and her colleagues argue that different sociocultural environments exist for those born at different times in history thus providing “an influence on personality characteristics beyond the usual variables of genetics and individual family environment” (Twenge & Campbell, 2001, p. 322). Additionally, Twenge, Zhang, and Im (2004) state that “the study of birth cohort/time period differences is primarily a study of culture, as historical eras are different cultures” (p. 309).
Twenge (2000) examined the changes in neuroticism and anxiety for college students and school aged children between the 1950s and the 1990s. One-hundred and seventy samples of college students (40,192 individuals) employing the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Inventory (Taylor, 1953), the Eysenck Personality Inventory scale (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968), the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), and the State-Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Luschene, 1970) were analyzed. Additionally, 99 samples of school aged children (12,056 individuals) employing the Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale (Castaneda, McCandless, & Palermo, 1956) were used to examine changes in children’s anxiety scores. Both groups demonstrated a steady and linear increase in mean scores of one standard deviation. Birth cohort in this study accounts for approximately 20% of the variance in the personality trait of anxiety/neuroticism. Twenge points to historical and environmental changes within American culture to explain such a dramatic increase in anxiety among both children and college-aged students. Additionally, Twenge contends that just as the culture of a country influences the beliefs and personality of a citizen, so does the unique social environment that is produced by different times in history (birth cohort).

Using the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), Twenge (2001) also explored birth cohort changes in extraversion. Using a cross-temporal meta-analysis of 59 studies comprising of 16,846 American college students Twenge concluded that scores in extraversion have risen nearly one standard deviation between 1966 and 1993. The study found that extraversion scores were positively correlated with the year in which the measure was completed, and increased in a linear manner. Specifically, birth cohort
explained between 14 and 19% of the variance in extraversion scores. Twenge proposes
the argument that these results indicate either a true rise in extraversion or that the social
desirability of extraversion has changed. Regardless of the reason behind the rise in
extraversion scores, Twenge argues that these results represent a change in the social
environment and evidence that “the historical era and social context have a strong
influence on the psychology of individuals” (p. 745).

Twenge and Campbell (2001) conducted a cross-temporal meta-analysis of self-
esteeem scores as reported in 355 samples using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
(Rosenberg, 1965) for adults and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith,
1967) for children. The results of this study indicated that college students’ self-esteem
scores increased about two-thirds of a standard deviation between 1968 and 1994. Again,
the authors propose the idea that these results may indicate either a true increase in self-
esteeem, an increase in social desirability for high self-esteem, or a combination of both
effects. The implications for these findings also support Twenge and colleagues’
hypothesis that different cultures present with different psychological or personality
traits, thus implicating generational cohorts as separate cultures.

Locus of control was the psychological trait of interest for Twenge, Zhang, and
Im (2004). Utilizing 97 samples of college students (18,310 individuals) who took
Rotter’s Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) this study examined the
change scores between 1960 and 2002. The results of the study indicated that in
comparison with college students in the early 1960s, 80% of college students in 2002
were more external in their locus of control, with the mean scores increasing .82 standard
deviations. Similarly, children’s locus of control scores between 1971 and 1998 also
increased .79 standard deviations. Birth cohort accounted for 14% of the variance in locus of control in this cross-temporal meta-analysis. The authors discuss these findings as being an indication of other “uniformly negative” (p. 315) implications including increases in depression and anxiety scores, an inability to delay gratification, and poor coping strategies for dealing with stress. These empirical findings give support to much of the anecdotal literature regarding late Gen-Xers and Millennials (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Brownstein, 2000).

A change in the levels of narcissism between 1979 and 2006 was the focus of Twenge et al.’s, (2008a) cross-temporal meta-analysis. Using 85 samples of American college students (16, 475 individuals) who completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981) the authors found scores to have increased .33 standard deviations since 1982. Scores were significantly correlated to the year in which they were collected, with the change being both linear and steady over time. As in previous studies by Twenge and colleagues, the authors assert a reciprocal relationship between social changes and changes in the assessed personality trait. This study supports the anecdotal literature which focuses on the “special” trait of Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Trzesniewski, Donnellan, and Robins (2008) challenged the findings of Twenge et al. (2008a), stating that the sample used by Twenge et al. was one of convenience and therefore could not be generalized. Specifically, the authors argue that the findings of Twenge et al., could not be reproduced using samples from California college students. Finally, Trzesniewski et al. argue that the changes in narcissism scores are representative of the changes in the type of people who attend college or participate in psychological
research, rather than true changes in narcissism levels. Twenge et al. (2008b; Twenge & Foster, 2008) provide a rebuttal to the challenges from Trzesniewski et al. Twenge et al. support their sampling methods by citing various studies which used college student samples to generalize to the larger population. Additionally, they critique Trzesniewski et al.'s argument that the results were not reproducible with California college samples citing the impact of California having disproportionately large Asian-American representation in their colleges and universities, as compared to nation-wide demographics.

Summary

To date, the research indicates that differences between generations are not as vast as the anecdotal literature suggestions. As Twenge (2006) states, “like it or not, when you were born dictates the culture you will experience” (p. 2). What is left to be empirically discovered is how each generation perceives the culture into which they were born. While the anecdotal literature provides a place to start in this journey of discovery, the shift now is to uncover and understand what Massey (1979) labeled as the “gut-level value systems” that differ so dramatically between generations (p. 21). Additionally, an in-depth qualitative study has not yet been done on participants' perspectives of their generation. In light of these two points, the focus of ongoing research should be on gaining a thick description of generational perspectives in order to expand understanding of generational theory. This exploration and understanding of generational culture may then enable an increased level of multicultural competency for American counselors.
CHAPTER III: METHOD

In the United States today the largest three generations are Baby Boomers, Generation-Xers, and Millennials. Each of these generations represents a birth cohort, united by age location and the sharing of “significant life events at critical developmental stages” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). The research questions of interest to this study is (a) What are the co-constructed values, beliefs, and worldviews of each generation (Baby Boomer, Generation Xers, and Millennials) under study? and (b) How has membership in a generational cohort influenced the development of their values, beliefs, and worldviews? For the purposes of this study, culture is understood to mean, “membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are cocreated with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors” (ACA, 2005, p. 20).

To date, much of the literature examining characteristics of each generational cohort is anecdotal, with few articles addressing the core elements of culture such as values, beliefs, or worldviews (Brownstein, 2000; DeBard, 2004; Hammill, 2005; Hart, 2006; Kupperschmidt, 2006; Strauss, 2005). Furthermore, what limited empirical literature that does exist focuses on particular differences between cohorts related to leadership style (Farag et al., 2009), work values (Dries et al., 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002), or specific personality characteristics and traits (Twenge, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004).

The purpose of this exploratory investigation is to understand how generational cohorts co-construct understanding of their cultural identity by exploring their values,
beliefs, and worldview. As stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), "researchers are the go-betweens for the participants and the audiences that they want to reach" (p. 49). In this study the desired audience is anyone working in a cross-generational setting who desires to be aware, respectful, and multiculturally competent in their approach to those of differing generational cohorts. Specifically, for professional counselors who are ethically bound (ACA, 2008) to practice competence in multicultural counseling, the purpose is to expand theory on multicultural counseling to incorporate consideration of how generational affiliation influences the construction of cultural identity.

**Paradigm Situation and Theoretical Grounding**

The intent of this exploratory study is to examine the perceptions of the Baby Boomer, Generations Xer, and Millennial generations (or birth cohorts), regarding how generational affiliation influences their construct of cultural identity through values, beliefs, and worldview. Building on grounded theory and with the use of a constructivist paradigm, this study asked focus groups of each generation to describe how their generational affiliation influenced their cultural identity as seen through the values, beliefs and worldviews particular to their cohort.

As culture is a concept of collective experience and understanding which shapes the way in which one sees the world (ACA, 2005; Robinson-Wood, 2009) it was determined that focus groups would be the most appropriate method for data collection, as they allow participants to use social interaction in the collective and collaborative development of their answers (Krueger, 1998). A criticism of focus groups is that responses do not reflect individual perspectives and are instead a hybrid or collective perspective shaped by the group interaction and processes (Krueger & Casey, 2009).
However, the synergistic effects of group interaction are critical in the exploration of the phenomenon under study in a way that allows for co-constructed understanding among group members. Specifically, this construct of generational affiliation and identity builds on the notion of co-constructed and shared identity, understanding, and lived experiences. Thus, the use of focus groups serves to draw out the constructed perceptions of the cohort over that of the individual, as the group (cohort) is the subject of interest for this study.

The current study uses a constructivist paradigm to explore how members of three cohorts describe their generational affiliation as influencing cultural identity, as understood through the lived experiences of the research participants. A constructivist paradigm works from “the viewpoint that concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 10). Specific focus group questions concentrate on participants’ collective perception of their generation’s values, beliefs, and worldview in order to gain insight to their constructed understanding of their generational culture.

**Researcher Relationship to the Data**

I, as the researcher, am a Caucasian, female, doctoral student in Counselor Education at a university in the mid-south who was born in 1981. While I self-identify as a Gen-Xer, being born in 1981 places me as a “cusper,” bordering between Gen-X and the Millennial generation. I received my masters degree in counseling from a graduate institution in the Rocky Mountain region. During my masters training, I became interested in the shifts within the theological and philosophical domains from modernism to post-modernism during the 20th century. Upon beginning my doctoral studies, I took
this interest and focused it within the fields of higher education and counseling, finding that these disciplines were identifying similar paradigm shifts but were linking them to generational cohorts rather than philosophical ideologies. Specifically, the literature discussing the seemingly unique characteristics of Millennials drew me to the topic, and I began to focus my academic experiences on the unique characteristics of Boomers, Xers, and Millennials in the higher education classroom as well as in the counseling session. In my pursuits, I began to see parallels between generational descriptions and key elements in the definition of culture but was unable to locate research that linked these two concepts. As a counselor, I brought an awareness of and an interest in multicultural counseling competencies, and a desire to expand the working understanding of culture to include more than just race or ethnicity to the study.

**Participants**

A purposeful sampling method was implemented in the recruitment of participants for this study. As described by Patton (2001), this method involves selecting individuals who offer “useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001, p. 40). In the case of this study, the phenomenon of interest is how one’s birth cohort or generational affiliation influences construction of cultural identity. To be included in the Baby Boomer focus groups, participants had to have birth years of 1946 to 1964. For the Generation X focus groups, participants had to have birth years of 1965-1981. Finally, the Millennial focus groups participants needed to be born in or after 1982 and be at least 18 years of age at the time of the group meeting.

Participants were recruited primarily from a medium sized university in the mid-south of the United States. Specifically, flyers were posted in high-traffic locations
around the university, on the electronic announcement board of the university, and specific email invitations were sent to faculty in social science programs with the request to forward the invitation on to their students. Additionally, email invitations were sent to acquaintances of the researcher throughout the community, with the request to forward the invitation to any who might meet participation requirements. Word of mouth and snowballing were also implemented in the recruitment of participants. These recruiting methods were used in an attempt to recruit a sufficient sample for each generational cohort. Ten focus groups were conducted, nine of which were used in data analysis, before data saturation was reached. The nine focus groups utilized 61 participants, and in keeping with best practices (Kruger & Casey, 2009) each focus group comprised five to eight participants and was homogeneous in regard to generational affiliation (Baby Boomer, Generation-Xer, or Millennial). Three focus groups per generational cohort were conducted for use in this study. It was decided that an additional Millennial group was to be run after the second Millennial focus group was determined to be inadmissible in the data analysis process, thus bringing the total number of Millennial focus groups to four by the end of the study. This decision was made based on the feedback of participants in the second Millennial focus group who stated, after the completion of the group, that their thoughts and opinions were not expressed due to another member dominating the conversation. Multiple attempts by both the researcher and other group members to redirect the conversation away from the dominant member proved ineffective in guiding conversation back to the group as a whole.
Demographics

The data in this chapter was collected through focus group discussion and participants’ written statements made prior to the focus group. Each focus group lasted 90 minutes and was conducted on the campus of a university in the mid-south. Each focus group was comprised of six to eight members, with a total of 10 focus groups being conducted and nine of them being used in analysis (see Methods for the reasoning behind excluding one group’s data).

There were a total of 21 (n = 21) Baby Boomer participants, 15 females and six males evenly spread across the three Baby Boomer focus groups. Boomer participants ranged in age from 46 (born 1963) to 61 (born 1948), with the average Boomer participant being 54.4 years old. In regard to education, two (n = 2) Baby Boomers listed “did not complete high school” or “other,” two (n = 2) stated they had attended “some college,” five (n = 5) indicated they had a “college degree,” and 12 (n = 12) stated they had a “graduate degree.” Racial data was not included on participant demographic forms but based on participant comments and observation, all Boomer participants were Caucasian except for one (n = 1) African American male.

A total of 18 participants were Generations Xers with 16 female participants and 2 male participants. There was one all-female focus group while the other two Generation X focus groups each had one male participant. The Generation X participants ranged in age from 30 (born 1979) to 44 (born 1965), with the average Xer participant being 36.7 years old. In regards to education, all Generation X participants had attended at least “some college.” Specifically, ten (n = 10) indicated having a “graduate degree,” six (n = 6) held a “college degree,” and two (n = 2) indicated having attended “some college.”
Racial data was not included on participant demographic forms but based on participant comments and observation all participants were Caucasian except for one (n = 1) Pacific Islander American female.

There were a total of 22 (n = 22) Millennial participants, 12 female and 10 male relatively evenly distributed amongst the three focus groups (four males in two groups, two males in third group, and four to six females in each group). The Millennial participants ranged in age from 19 (born 1990) to 27 (born 1982), with the average Millennial participant being 23.1 years old. In regards to education, two (n = 2) Millennial participants indicated having a “graduate degree,” five (n = 5) indicated having a “college degree,” while the remaining 15 (n = 15) stated they had attended “some college.” Racial data was not included on participant demographic forms but based on participant comments and observation two (n = 2) male participants were African American, one (n = 1) male and one (n = 1) female participant were Hispanic/Latino, and one (n = 1) male participant was Middle Eastern.

**Delimitations**

As this study focuses on generational affiliation and cultural identity, it was critical that I restrict the focus group participants based on their birth year. Specifically, I screened out recruits interested in participating in the study if they were born before 1946 or were younger than 18 years old. Additionally, participants within the Baby Boomer focus group were required to have been born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X focus group participants were required to have been born between 1965 and 1981, and Millennial focus group participants were required to have been born between 1982 and 1991.
Given that this study utilized focus group interviews, the sampling pool was limited to those within the same geographic area as me, the researcher. As such, participants were limited to a community in the mid-south, or those willing to travel to this community in order to participate in the study.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The development of theory is the “act of constructing an explanatory scheme from data that systematically integrate concepts, their properties, and dimensions, through statements of relationship” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 64). For this study, data comes from the responses provided by focus group participants related to their perceptions of what ways, if any, generational affiliation does (or does not) influence their cultural identity as identified through their values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Specifically, data sources for this study include transcriptions from focus groups, flip-chart notes taken during each focus group, researcher memos and field notes, and participant feedback forms. Each of these data sources provides a form of verification of data as they enable me as the researcher and the research participants to describe, clarify, and verify the co-constructed understanding of cultural identity as influenced by generational affiliation.

Following approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, and prior to the commencement of the actual study, key information regarding the study was provided to all recruits. In particular, recruits were sent an introductory letter by email which included a brief overview of the study's purpose, dates and times for each generational focus group, my contact information as the researcher, and the primary research question. Individuals interested in participating in the study contacted me to sign up for their
generationally appropriate focus group. Upon registering for the study, I sent participants additional information related to the research project including definitions of key terms related to the study, the informed consent, a demographic questionnaire that they turned in at the time of the focus group, a list of the three research questions to be discussed in the group, and a reminder of the day and time of their focus group meeting. Additionally, I employed a snow-ball sampling method as each interested recruit was asked to pass on the invitation to any others they thought would also be interested in participating in the current study.

Nine focus groups, three for each generational cohort, were conducted, each lasting 90 minutes on the campus of a mid-south university. The first five to ten minutes were used to allow group members to socialize over snacks that the researcher provided, allowing them to get to know one another prior to the commencement of the focus group. During the remaining 80 minutes, I conducted a focus group with participants addressing their perceptions of their generational culture and influences on their cultural identity as expressed in values, beliefs, and worldview. Each focus group session was audio and/or video recorded. Using the audio and video recordings, I transcribed each focus group session verbatim. The transcriptions of these sessions are one of the primary data sources for the study.

Due to the paucity of research regarding generational affiliation, the counseling field, and culture, this study serves as an exploratory investigation. As such, when seeking to understand and compare a phenomenon between groups, it is important to ask the same questions of each group in order to ascertain both commonalities and differences. For this reason, I used an interview guide with the same three questions
within each of the focus groups. The following are examples the questions implemented within each of the focus groups:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946 and 1964 shaped your values?
- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1965 and 1981 influenced the development of your beliefs?
- In what ways, if any, has being born after 1982 impacted your worldview?

I used additional probes as needed to clarify, gain understanding, and obtain elaboration of participants’ responses. An example of a probe used to clarify included: “Tell me more about what you mean by “authority figures.”

At the end of each focus group meeting, participants were offered the opportunity to complete a reflection sheet that had space for them to write their individual responses to the focus group questions. This was done in order to obtain one more form of triangulation and allow participants who were either less verbal or who continued to think about the discussion after its conclusion to provide me with additional information. While there were no participants who actually followed through with this opportunity, various participants from each generational cohort came to the group with their thoughts to each question already written out and provided these to the researcher as additional data sources. Additionally, participants were asked if they would be interested in reviewing the final results and providing feedback following transcription and analysis. Name and contact information was obtained for those who agreed to such additional follow up.

Following the completion of each focus group, all recordings were transcribed.
Transcriptions were coded and analyzed for themes in keeping with grounded theory coding methods as identified by Charmaz (2006).

**Reciprocity**

Participants were provided food and refreshments as a form of reciprocity for participating in the current study. Additionally, a summary of the results was available to any and all interested participants following the completion of study. No other compensation was provided to participants for their engagement in the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

While the nature of the focus groups was to gain an understanding of the collective perceptions of each generational cohort, it was important to me that participants were still granted confidentiality. I explained to participants that their participation and contribution to the discussions would remain confidential, including the use of pseudonyms in the transcription and data analysis processes. Additionally, session recordings and transcriptions were kept on a secured computer to which only I had access.

**Grounded Theory Data Analysis**

Grounded theory approaches qualitative research from the perspective of “a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1). Within this approach, the researcher works to understand and specify the relationship between developing and abstract concepts (Bryant & Charmaz). Additionally, grounded theory attempts to use comparative analysis to understand the current research in conjunction with the developing theory. “Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather
than a particular theoretical content” (Patton, 2001, p. 125). Grounded theory informed the development of research questions as well as the design of the focus groups, analysis of the data, and the use of member checks.

Grounded theory analysis uses various strategies in order to make meaning of the qualitative data. For the purposes of this study a constant comparisons method was employed as it is an “analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65). As analysis is an ongoing and continuous process in grounded theory research, the use of comparative analysis was implemented following the first focus group and continued through the remainder of the study. Additionally, triangulation was implemented in the development of accurate classifications of data through the use of member checks and investigator checks through the use of a additional researchers who also assessed the data (see “Verification” below).

In addition to implementing a constant comparison method with the data obtained through focus group interviews, additional data sources were also included to facilitate the process of data analysis and triangulation. Other data sources incorporated in the constant comparison included my field notes and memos as the researcher, written responses that participants provided prior to the focus groups, and research from the literature review. Although participants were also asked to provide follow-up responses following the completion of the focus group, none were supplied.

Following each focus group I engaged in a reflexive activity myself in which I noted the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions I had regarding the group, as well as any themes that seemed to stand out. I completed the transcriptions of each focus group as soon as possible in keeping with best practices as outlined by Krueger and Casey (2009).
Due to the frequency of the groups being run, often three to four groups per week, most transcribing took place following the completion of all focus groups. The constant comparative analysis of data was ongoing within my memo writing following each focus group. Within a constant comparative analysis, data from one group are compared with data from another “to find similarities and differences” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54).

Additionally, as an exploratory and constructivist study, suggestions from participants regarding follow-up questions were implemented within the subsequent groups. For example, the first group run (a Baby Boomer group) suggested that a follow-up question related to beliefs should be one that asked specifically about religious beliefs. Additionally, it was suggested by participants that groups discuss where they geographically grew up and the implications of location on their cultural identity development. Such questions were then asked of subsequent groups with the explanation that the questions were suggested by other participants.

I used various coding techniques in order to compare and analyze the data. Coding is the process by which labels are attached “to segments of data that depict what each segment is about” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). These codes, or labels, serve to summarize, categorize, and account for “each piece of data” (Charmaz, p. 43). Within grounded theory, one uses different types of coding in order to identify categories and subcategories within the data, and find linkages among categories.

Initial or open coding was the first step in analyzing transcription data. In this step broad themes, concepts, and categories were labeled within the transcription, implementing line-by-line coding as described by Charmaz (2006) for this process. In the initial coding stage, the researcher begins to take note of repeated words, phrases, and
concepts and attaches codes to these incidents within the transcript. In the current study, I implemented the use of in vivo codes, using participants' own words to create codes whenever possible. Specifically, the use of the flip-chart during the focus groups provided a starting point for many of these codes, and an opportunity to receive immediate member checks regarding the construction of the codes. As such, the majority of the open coding process took place during the focus groups. Additional open coding was conducted utilizing line-by-line coding, as explained by Charmaz (2006), within the transcripts of each focus group. In this process, in vivo coding was used as much as possible to identify both implicit and explicit themes within the participants’ responses.

Following initial coding, the next step undertaken was to identify both focused and axial codes. In this stage of coding, the line-by-line codes were compiled by generational cohort onto one coding sheet. The codes were then examined for significance and frequency across the generational cohort’s data (Charmaz, 2006). In keeping with the constant comparative process, memos were kept regarding similarities and differences across cohorts. In this process, each theme or code was recorded on a code sheet for the appropriate generational cohort. Repetition of a theme/code was noted with an asterisk on the coding sheet following the identified code. For example, if more than one participant in a cohort noted “equality” as a value or belief, each mention received an asterisk following the word “equality” on the coding sheet. Following the listing of all open codes, I began to group them according to theme. These over-arching themes or concepts then became the focused codes for each generational cohort. The specific codes, which supported the identified focused codes, then became axial codes. Axial coding “specifies the properties and dimensions of a category… [and] answers
questions such as ‘when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences’” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). Although a concurrent process in many ways as axial codes and focus codes often emerged simultaneously, axial codes were generally identified first and then used to identify the focused codes which tied them together. In each generational cohort 12 to 17 focused codes were identified out of the respective data.

Finally, theoretical coding of the data was implemented in which the developing theory began to be identified. In keeping with grounded theory this approach does not seek to test a theory, but rather to discover, develop, or define a theory. As such, “these codes not only conceptualize how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). For each generational cohort a total of five to six theoretical codes were identified out of the focused codes, shaping the theoretical direction of each generation’s cultural identity. For example, within the Baby Boomer group, the theoretical code of “The world” encapsulated the three underlying focused codes of “The world – then and now,” “Historical events,” and “Fear.”

A foundational tenet of grounded theory is the concept of saturation. Saturation occurs when “additional interviews are yielding so little new information that more interviews would be a waste of time” (Hood, 2007, p. 161). As the purpose of this theoretical approach is to allow the data to speak for itself in a way that informs an emerging theory, it is critical to explore participant perspectives until saturation is believed to be obtained. The current study reached saturation with three focus groups per generational cohort.
Verification

As previously stated, upon the completion of analyzing the focus groups’ data, group participants who expressed willingness to serve in the member check process were contacted and asked to review the conclusions and provide feedback. Specifically, one member check for each generational cohort was conducted. The participants involved in the member check process were sent the focused codes identified by the researcher for their generational cohort and a clean transcript from their particular focus group. Their feedback was included in the final analysis as a form of triangulation and verification of results. Additionally, a Millennial colleague trained in ground theory methodology who did not participate in the focus groups reviewed the transcriptions and codes, adding an additional form of triangulation and verification of themes. This colleague received one transcript from each generational cohort, along with the focused codes of each generation. I chose to provide her with a different transcript than those reviewed in member checks to allow for additional observations and greater analysis across the data.

Just as with other cross-cultural studies and qualitative inquiries, keeping one’s own bias as the researcher out of the process is virtually impossible (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I, as the researcher, being on the cusp between Generation X and Millennials, was mindful of the influence my own generational affiliation may have had on the perspective I brought to the process of data analysis. For this reason, peer debriefing and the discussion of biases and assumptions, research reflexivity, along with data triangulation by individuals of different generational cohorts was implemented to help obtain a more neutral perspective on data analysis.
As both the "researcher and participants co-construct the research" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31), the role of researcher reflexivity cannot be under-valued. As I am also a member of a generational cohort, a critical piece of the data collection and analysis process involves me examining my own values, beliefs, and worldview as related to my generational affiliation. This is in keeping with both grounded theory and a constructivist paradigm which states that "theory depends on the researchers' view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it... constructivists attempt to become aware of their presuppositions and to grapple with how they affect the research" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130-131). In order to address this desire and need for researcher reflexivity, one of my dissertation committee members, familiar with the study and trained in qualitative research asked me the same questions posed to each of the focus groups prior to the beginning of the study. From this interview, the key themes that I discussed were those of independence, simplicity, family, self-sufficiency, lack of trust in authority, the inevitability of change, and respect for diversity. Although barely an Xer by birth, my key themes ended up being very much in line with others in my cohort. The data from this reflective interview contributed to the integrity, self-awareness, and understanding of the role that I have in co-constructing meaning with the focus group participants. Additionally, I maintained an on-going journal and memos throughout the research process to document my own thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the data and the process.

**Development of Theory**

As grounded theory builds on the foundation of developing theory, the question of what to do with the data is a valid and necessary one to be answered. It is the purpose of this study to explore the influence of generational affiliation on cultural identity and
develop or refine counseling theory to reflect my research findings. Specifically, I sought to understand if and how counselors should take into consideration the values, beliefs, and worldview of each of the three generations explored, in order to meet the ethical call (ACA, 2005) to be multiculturally competent. The findings will enable me to begin to develop theoretical guidelines for counselors and counselor educators regarding how to incorporate consideration of generational cohorts into multicultural counseling practice.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The primary focus of this chapter will be to present the data collected from nine generational focus groups and the themes which emerged through axial and selective coding. Additionally, matrices will be utilized to illustrate these themes. The chapter concludes with a description of the grounded theory that emerged from the data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to explore how generational affiliation influence cultural identity. Nine focus groups were used in the analysis of data, three for Boomers, three for Xers, and three for Millennials. The following sub-questions were asked of focus group participants:

1. In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced your beliefs?
2. In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced your values?
3. In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 impacted your worldview

Results

Themes which emerged from the data will be discussed by generational cohort. In addition to this discussion, focused codes will be displayed in tables using matrices at the beginning of each generation’s results, as well as a figure showing the movement from axial codes to focused codes. Support for these focused codes will be provided using significant statements made by participants and placing them in the corresponding space within the matrices. A discussion of the axial codes found within each focused code will follow. Finally, focused codes were narrowed to develop the grounded theory.
Baby Boomers

The following discussion section starts with an overview of the six focused codes identified within the data. A matrix (Table 1) is provided which outlines the six focused codes and provides supportive statements from the data. Figure 1 is then provided to illustrate the movement from axial to focused codes, followed by a discussion of the 16 axial codes which underlie the six focused codes.
Table 1: Baby Boomers

**Baby Boomer: Focused Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Identity: Theirs &amp; Ours</th>
<th>The World</th>
<th>Relationship with Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“we’re clearly the best generation.”</td>
<td>“The world got smaller, and life got bigger.”</td>
<td>“Family is still so very important in our lives.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well wouldn’t you say our generation has seen the most changes in our lifetime compared to anybody else, between technology and cultural and all that.”</td>
<td>Defining Events: JFK assassination, Martin Luther King, Moon Landing, Rachel Carson – Silent Spring, Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War</td>
<td>“You name your family. You create your family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Responsibility and accountability. They’ve lost both of that. We had responsibility and accountability and I don’t think they do.”</td>
<td>“There’s a little more truthfulness now. We’re not scared of saying the truth now, you know what I mean? You tell a four year old they’re adopted, they understand.”</td>
<td>“it’s got to be a worldview of environmental-ism.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think it’s very, very important that if a person says they’re going to do something, they’re going to do it... but some of these younger generations that you’re also working with I don’t think they have that same, even, meaning.”</td>
<td>“You know because you keep to yourself because you’re afraid of the repercussions of some kind. But yeah, the whole, the values were different then.”</td>
<td>“if it’s not for you to volunteer in your community, you won’t have a community.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We had good role models...” “...I think there’s a really big lack of role models in the community... or wrong ones. The community, the family, sometimes the church, I think we’re just lacking in role models.”</td>
<td>“I really think that parents now they don’t take their parenting responsibilities seriously.”</td>
<td>“you couldn’t really trust the government anymore. (emphasis added) So you can’t trust your family, you can’t trust the government...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We were very proud of our country, we had a good sense of our nationalism and helping society is very dear to us.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (cont.)

Baby Boomer: Focused Codes (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media &amp; Technology: Its role &amp; effects</th>
<th>Living on Principle</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every year something new came out: radio, television, computers, umm, man on the moon”</td>
<td>“with enough hard work, people can accomplish anything they want to”</td>
<td>“freedom to make the choice to find the religion and decide for ourselves”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I mean, the radio’s one thing, but television and radio and music, and you know, all being exposed to these same things has a homogenizing effect”</td>
<td>“you pretty much had to be self-sufficient”</td>
<td>“Religion was no longer a family value. The way you were raised was no longer the only way”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The music that we listened to underscored all these beliefs about dignity and love, and that love doesn’t really have boundaries, it’s not bound in certain traditions”</td>
<td>“That’s probably the most profound value for me as a southerner from this generation: equality”</td>
<td>“it wasn’t so much a religion, it was the faith that you had, that you believed it. It was a personal commitment…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“everything’s got a spin-factor to it”</td>
<td>“I need to be heard, you need to be heard”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“you earned your own way”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“not anything’s possible anymore”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion of Focused Codes for Baby Boomers

The first focused code was that of “generational identity.” Within this theme topics related to how Baby Boomers viewed their own cohort identity as well as their perspective on the cohort identity of those younger than them. While Boomers found some positive things to say regarding their conceptualization of the generations that follow them stating, “So, these kids are amazing, and they could do great things if they choose too,” they also hold a general sentiment of disagreement, disappointment, and
sadness regarding the direction of American society. Baby Boomers, more than any other generation, spoke of themselves as a collective cohort, freely making generalizations about themselves as a group.

The second identified focused code was that of “the world.” Within this theme, Baby Boomers discussed significant historical events that shaped their identity, the changes in their perspective of the world from their childhood to the present, as well as how fear has shaped much of their perspectives of the world over time. More than any other generational cohort, Baby Boomers talked about significant historical events and readily articulated how those events changed their values, beliefs, and worldview. Baby Boomers also spoke in comparisons between past and present more than any other generation, making statements such as, “I think so too because now people move for jobs a whole lot more than they did.”

The third identified focused code was that of “relationship with others.” Within this theme, Baby Boomers discussed how they saw their relationship to family, community, authority, country, and the world at large. Connectedness and responsibility to these connections rang true throughout this theme, as reflected in statements such as, “I look at myself as a citizen in the world. I am responsible for everything that goes on, and being involved.” Baby Boomers referenced their personal identity in relationship to their interaction and connectedness to those around them, specifically in regard to the concept of community, which they saw as being defined differently for themselves than for Millennials. “Community to me means a specific thing: it’s my neighbors, the people right around me. What can I do to help my community? Community to a Millennial is anybody on Facebook.” Within this theme of relationship with others, a strong emphasis
was placed on family ties and relationships for Baby Boomers. This is seen in statements such as, “we were given some independence but yet, we were, my sister and I still had that family tie.” While respectful of authority, and expressing more patriotism than any other generation, Boomers also expressed a strong distrust of institutional authority and a deep sense of responsibility to question the established rules.

The fourth focused code was that of “media and technology: its role and effects.” Within this theme Baby Boomers expressed the benefits of expanding media and technology in making the world “more accessible to our generation.” On the flip side, media and technology also enabled the tragedy and traumas of the world to be “broadcast into people’s living room.” Where news was once trustworthy, Baby Boomers now view everything with skepticism and perceive it to be delivered with “spin.”

The fifth focused code was identified as “living on principle.” This focused code served to capture various concepts that Baby Boomers recognized as guiding factors in their lives and decision making processes. Hatred for injustice, pursuing equality, giving voice to the unheard, and making sure one’s own voice was heard all undergird the way in which Baby Boomers make sense of themselves and the world around them. Additionally, this category also identifies themes of “hard work” and “making your own way” as critical concepts. Finally, the cohort’s conclusion that “not anything’s possible anymore” also contributes to the general principles by which Baby Boomers are understood.

The sixth and final identified focused code is that of “religion.” While each generation discussed this theme it is critical to understand how each generational cohort defined and made sense of its application in their lives. For Baby Boomers the discussion
focused primarily on their distrust of organized religion, followed by a time of “religious exploration.” Finally, Baby Boomers made the distinction between religion and spirituality, and emphasized the role of personal faith and commitment in whatever one chooses. The following figure (Figure 1) demonstrates the movement between axial codes and focused codes for Baby Boomers. A description of these axial codes follows Figure 1.
Figure 1: Baby Boomers Axial and Focused Codes

**Axial Codes**

Generational Identity

Other Generations

The World - Then and Now

Historical Events

Fear

Family

Community

Authority

America, Patriotism, and Nationalism

Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects

Work Ethic

Responsibility

Equality

Hope and Change

Money and Things

General Principles

Religion

**Focused Codes**

Generational Identity

The World

Relationship with Others

Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects

Living on Principle

Religion
Discussion of Axial Codes for Baby Boomers

**Generational identity: Theirs and ours.** Within this focused code, two separate subcategories (axial codes) were identified. Baby Boomers spoke of how they conceptualized their own generational identity ("generational identity") and of how they conceptualize the identity of Generation X and Millennial cohorts ("other generations"). Specifically, Baby Boomers saw themselves as the generation which, "has seen the most changes in our lifetime compared to anybody else, between technology and culture and all that." Additionally they identified themselves as "clearly the best generation" or at least the generation that was responsible for creating the best (speaking of their parenting skills).

In speaking of other generations, Baby Boomers saw Generation Xers and Millennials as having been “sheltered... [from] the hell of war.” This was expressed primarily as a negative trait as Boomers felt that “the empathy’s not there” when speaking of younger generations and their response to those on the other side of 9/11 and the effects of American military efforts on other countries. Additionally, Boomers viewed younger generations as lacking integrity, responsibility, and accountability. Specifically,

"I think it’s very, very important that if a person says they’re going to do something, they’re going to do it. And when I say I’m going to do something, I’m going to do it. And I think, real close to 100% of the time I live that, but some of these younger generations that you’re also working with I don’t think they have that same, even, meaning."

In a separate Boomer focus group, it was stated that, “responsibility and accountability. They’ve lost both of that. We had responsibility and accountability and I don’t think they do.” While being disappointed in younger generations who lack the values that Boomers hold dear, Boomers also look on younger generations with a sense of sadness. In
particular, Boomers see “a really big lack of role models in the community... or wrong ones. The community, the family, sometimes the church, I think we’re just lacking in role models.” Subsequently, Boomers saw this vacancy as contributing to the diminishment of these values in the younger generations. While Boomers expressed this sadness and disapproval towards the younger generations, they were also quick to affirm their parenting, stating, “we’re not the best! The ones I just created are the best!” Seemingly unaware that the generation they are criticizing was raised primarily by Boomer parents.

**The world.** Within this theme, three separate subcategories (axial codes) were identified: the world – then and now, historical events, and fear. Baby Boomers constructed this theme by comparing the way life was during their childhood to how they experience it currently. These comparisons were developed organically by the groups themselves, having never been asked by the researcher to conduct comparisons. A repeated theme of changes in the value of family roles and responsibilities, parental roles, and discipline of children was seen clearly in one member’s statement that, “I really think that parents now they don’t take their parenting responsibilities seriously.” In regards to their view of the world, Boomers commented that, “The world is not as huge as we used to think, it’s very small,” and “the world got smaller, and life got bigger.”

Another subcategory (axial code) within this focused code was identified in the key events (“historical events”) that Boomers referenced as having shaped their cultural identity. Different from any other generation, Boomers repeatedly referenced events such as the Kennedy assassinations, Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, the Civil Rights movement, the Moon Landing, and the Vietnam War when explaining why they valued, believed, and saw the world as they did.
Finally, "fear" was identified as a subcategory (axial code) related to how Boomers saw and interacted with the world. This concept of fear was spoken of in reference to not fearing the world during their childhood, but growing in fear as they aged. Specific fears identified by Boomers included fear for one’s safety, the safety of one’s children, and even fear of telling family secrets. In speaking of the fear that has developed in regards to helping others, one group member stated, “You know because you keep to yourself because you’re afraid of the repercussions of some kind. But yeah, the whole, the values were different then.”

**Relationship with others.** This focused code encapsulates four subcategories (axial codes) that move from a micro level to a macro level of interaction. Relational interactions were primary for Baby Boomers, with relational context being of greater importance than independence or individualism. For Boomers, who they are in the context of relationship (whether with an individual or with the world) is critical to understanding their cultural identity. The first identified subcategory (axial code) is that of “family.” Boomers stated that, “it doesn’t even have to be a question of who’s living together. I mean, we’ve lost a lot of ‘family,’ blood-family over the years... But we picked up people... You name your family. You create your family.” They identified a loyalty to their family, “the people you care about.” Additionally, Boomers talked often of “family ties” and having a sense of belonging and responsibility within their family. One participant stated it as, “You had responsibility in your family. That you were relied on. That you knew your place in the family. You didn’t ever have to question that, you were part of it.”
The second identified subcategory (axial code) was that of “community.” For Baby Boomers, community encapsulates relationships near and far, but focuses primarily on community as, “my neighbors, the people right around me.” Additionally, there was an expressed sense of responsibility to those people as, “you took care of your community.” This care for others included a sense of duty in giving back and volunteering in one’s community. Specifically, “if it’s not for you to volunteer in your community, you won’t have a community.” Going beyond one’s immediate sphere of influence as community, Baby Boomers also identified themselves as “citizens of the planet” or “a citizen in the world.” As such, Baby Boomers also hold a high value in environmentalism, stating, it’s got to be a worldview of environmentalism. It can’t be, “Oh it’s okay for us to pollute our backyard and it won’t matter to the rest of the world.” We have to be responsible stewards of the earth, not my backyard, or the United States, it has to be a worldview of that.

For Boomers, community involved both a personal connection and personal responsibility. It started in their back yard and extends to their broad sense of global connections.

The third identified subcategory (axial code) is that of authority. For Baby Boomers, more than other generations, there was an expressed respect for authority combined with a distrust of authority. Specifically, there was a respect for elders such as parents and identified role models. At the same time, there was a strong distrust in governmental and institutional authority. Speaking of the government, one group member summarized their sentiment by stating, “We don’t believe the frosting put on the cake they like to feed us.” Particularly as it related to issues of war, Baby Boomers distrust of government was evident in not only what they said but the emotion with which it was stated. For example, in regard to the Vietnam War one participated commented, “I think
what the Vietnam War did, it created a suspicion of the government and the decision that they were making, that maybe they really weren’t in our best interest.” One participant noted the increased emotion in the dialogue surrounding the lack of trust in the government and stated, “I think we’re still pretty mad about all that too!”

Additionally, the distrust that Boomers carry spread beyond governmental authority and included religious leadership as Boomers saw changes happen within many organized religions. One participant expressed the cohort’s distrust by stating, “they started changing the rules of their religion, I think you’re going to see people questioning their beliefs. How can the church, this church has been telling me this all along, how can they just now change their mind?” While Baby Boomer distrust of authority touched government and religion, it also spread to corporate institutions. For many Boomers, they had watched their parents dedicate their professional lives to a company and retire with pensions and retirement gifts, but as Boomers participated in the workforce they found corporate rhetoric just as distrustful as they found governmental promises. One participant captured the sentiment of the cohort with her own story of corporate disappointment. She stated,

I’m an IBM retiree, I retired from IBM, and when I started with IBM I mean, I still got it, I can go home and find it. I signed an agreement with them and they were going to pay; here’s how your pension will be calculated in thirty years, and here’s we’re going to pay for your medical care for life, and all that. And as you got into it, starting in the ‘90s, oh, that’s not true anymore, we’re going to change our minds, we’re not going to do that anymore… we’re going to cut like one-third of your pension, we’re not going to give you what we’ve promised you all these friggin’ years, twenty-some years, we told you this is what your pension’s going to be. Well that’s not true anymore.

The distrust and disappointment in authority that Boomers expressed was frequent, strong, and unified. Much of the disappointment expressed by Boomers came out of a sense of
betrayal in that they felt they lost trust in authority rather than never having it. One participate captured this sentiment stating, “you couldn’t really trust the government anymore (emphasis added). So you can’t trust your family, you can’t trust the government…” Summarizing the collective distrust and disappointment in various types of authority, another participant noted,

church became questionable, church leaders and stuff. Yeah, I distinctly recall the day it kind of dawned on me that there, like, really wasn’t anybody in charge. You thought, when you were a little kid, somebody was watching this whole deal and they had it figured out. And then you finally realize, you see, like, well god, dad ran out of gas, that’s not real bright. And then you see something else, and then you, you know, you hear a rumor about the preacher doing something ugly, and you know what I mean? The more exposure you have to being able to understand what happens with the president and the world leaders and stuff like that, you just like, “Aaahh! There’s just nothing going on that’s very good.”

Finally, “America, patriotism, and nationalism” was the fourth identified subcategory (axial code). Unlike any other generation, Boomers spoke of a loyalty and love of country. While expressly distrustful of the government, Boomers still spoke of great patriotism and particularly of pride in the military servicemen and women:

So it was, to me, there was never a question about the importance of the military, the value placed on our veterans. There was just never any question about that, it’s just the way we lived. And, I think we had such pride in our country and what we stood for.

While collectively the Boomers spoke of the lack of support for veterans following the Vietnam War as being “un-patriotic,” they connected a sense of duty to protesting the war because, “I believe that it is patriotic to try to tell your country when they’re doing something you believe is wrong.” In this sense, the Boomers made a great distinction between supporting veterans as a form of patriotism, and yet also protesting the government that sent and sends these veterans into a war providing justifications that the cohort felt were “a bunch of crap.”
In addition to a strong sense of patriotism, Boomers also spoke of a belief that, “we can be victorious over anything we want to, any challenges in this country.” Additionally, “we were very proud of our country, we had a good sense of our nationalism and helping society is very dear to us.” A sense of national pride and belief in the potential of the country in which they are a part were distinct themes within the Baby Boomer cohort. In light of this belief in the potential of the country, Boomers also took very seriously their role to actively participate in government. One participant explained this role by saying,

I’ve laughed in the last dozen years, who thought back in 1965 you’d still be on a protest march in Washington DC!? An anti-war march. But, you know, I’m still doin’ it, and probably always will. I can’t envision my life without having that as a part of it: to be active, to participate in things.

Out of love for, and belief in America, Boomers hold great value for not simply blindly following governmental decisions, but caring enough to speak out, protest, and challenge them when they seem unjust. To them, this is an act of patriotism.

**Media and technology: Its role and effects.** This focused code serves as its own axial code as it holds no other underlying themes but was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. Baby Boomers spoke of media and technology in separate terms. Related to technology, they spoke primarily of the developments they experienced during their lifetime such as the invention of microwaves and the increased inclusion of televisions in daily life. “And the fact that we aren’t, nothing was ever going to be the same. Every year something new came out: radio, television, computers, umm, man on the moon.”

Specifically speaking of media, Baby Boomers expressed mixed feelings related to its role and effects. The accessibility of TV news is seen by Boomers as contributing to
making the world more accessible and seem less far away. In speaking of growing awareness of societal changes one participant stated, “I think media opened, just made it very vocal that this is happening, and just spread it abroad, you know, broadcast daily, several times a day.” Additionally,

Everybody, in all parts of the country, wherever we lived, watchin’ the same TV: “Ah, this how the people, this is what they wear, this is how they talk to each other.” You know? I mean, the radio’s one thing, but television and radio and music, and you know, all being exposed to these same things has a homogenizing effect.

The unifying effects of media were not simply felt through television, but also through music.

I didn’t mean to be trivial when I said the influence of the Beetles. The music that we listened to underscored all these beliefs about dignity and love, and that love doesn’t really have boundaries, it’s not bound in certain traditions. And I really think, for me at least, a significant value… The music was huge. It was hugely important to hear over and over these things.

In addition to the unifying effects of media, Boomers also saw it as coming with a double-edged sword. The increased influence of media brought exposure to the world, allowing access and information to world events that previously would not have been heard until “days later.” Additionally, one participant summarized the effect of media exposure by stating, “I think it’s brought, like, now, it’s brought the world to us. Like before, we knew nothing about the world. And now, with, you know, all this technology it’s brought the world to us.”

Finally, media served to foster fear and distrust in Boomers. Remembering back to days when “you could trust Walter Cronkite,” Boomers expressed a view that “everything’s got a spin-factor to it… you’ve really got to search to figure out what’s really happening, who’s really telling you the truth.” While media opened up a door to
the rest of the world, it also brought with it awareness of great tragedy and a sense of fear that the Boomers had not known in their childhood.

**Living on principle.** Within this focused code the greatest number of subcategories (axial codes) were found. Baby Boomers spoke often of principles and making decisions based on these identified principles, as opposed to being guided by immediate gratification or feelings in the moment. Specifically, six different subcategories (axial codes) were identified.

The first subcategory (axial code) was that of “work ethic.” While repeated often by Baby Boomers, the message is simple, “with enough hard work, people can accomplish anything they want to.” Additionally, a strong work ethic was of value having been “taught at a young age... If you don’t work you’re not going to have things,” and that, “if you worked hard you’d get ahead.”

Second, the subcategory (axial code) of “responsibility” was identified. For Baby Boomers the concept of being responsible or having responsibility ran across multiple topics and overlapped into other coding categories. Namely, “you pretty much had to be self-sufficient” whether in playtime as a child or household skills as an adult. In addition to having a responsibility for oneself, Boomers also identified with being responsible to others on both a micro and macro scale. On the micro level, “you had responsibility in your family. That you were relied on.” Moving out to the macro level there was the need to “be a responsible citizen” and a “citizen of the world.” For Boomers, this sense of responsibility was coupled with accountability as “you were expected, I was expected, to do whatever I needed to do whether they [parents] were there or not.”
Third, “equality” was a subcategory (axial code) of great importance to this generation. One participant expressed the magnitude of this concept by stating, “that’s probably the most profound value for me as a southerner from this generation: equality.” For Baby Boomers it was not enough to simply be for equality, they also expressed “a hatred for injustice.” This emphasis on equality focused on fighting against racial and gender inequality, promoting tolerance, and promoting the notion that, “I need to be heard, you need to be heard.” For this generation, racial segregation was a reality in their childhood and they spoke of how they, “just couldn’t tolerate it. I couldn’t understand it, I didn’t like it, nobody could explain it to me of course.” One woman shared her experience, living in Mississippi as a child in the early ‘60s:

There was a lady named Katie Lee, who was a black lady who used to babysit us. And Katie Lee had to come stay with us while mother went with dad in the, well it wasn’t even an ambulance good-gosh it was a hearse because they didn’t even have ambulances! But anyway, it came time to go to bed and I said to Katie Lee, “Well, mom and dad aren’t here so why don’t you just sleep in their bed.” “Oh! I can’t do that!” And I said, “Why not!?”, “I can’t sleep in white folks bed.” And I said, “Where are you gonna sleep?” And she said, “I’m sleepin’ on the living room floor.” I said, “Then so am I!” And our little sister said, “Well then so am I!” and he [brother] said, “Well I am too!” And we all just slept on the floor because, it was like, if she, you know I wasn’t about to go crawl into bed and have Katie Lee who we loved and respected so much, sleep on the floor in our house! Despite these deep-rooted values of equality and a strong desire to fight against injustice, cohort members also spoke of an internal conflict in which they still fight the imbedded seeds of bigotry:

I caught myself many times over the last few years thinking about how my first reaction is to somebody I met on the street, or I pass, or whatever. I think of my first reaction and think, “Doggone you’re being bigoted! What are you thinking?! That’s another human being that’s not somebody to judge because of the color of their skin or what they’re wearing or what their occupation is.”
The battle against injustice and inequality is not something this generation takes lightly, nor is it something they place as the responsibility of others. It is a personal battle that spurs them to “promote tolerance.”

The fourth subcategory (axial code) identified was that of “hope and change.” For Baby Boomers, a belief that change is possible pushes them forward in activism, in hope, and in their fights against injustice. As one participant stated, “And you have to be optimistic to think that the change will have effect, and yet you have to be cautious, and somewhat an alarmist to get someone to get their butts in gear and do something.”

Next, “money and things” served as a subcategory (axial code) that described Baby Boomers’ perspective and approach to wealth and materialism. For Baby Boomers, there is a great sense of ownership with their money and material possessions, and a sense of individual responsibility to earn these for oneself. Specifically, “you earned your own way” and made great distinction between what was your parents’ money and possessions and what was yours. Additionally, “when we grew up, the money was more for your basic needs” and, raised by Depression era parents, a valuing of “save your money” was also instilled. For Baby Boomers, money and material possessions reflect their efforts, their work, their priorities and great value is placed on earning or obtaining them for oneself, taking care of one’s own needs whether now or in the future.

Finally, the subcategory (axial code) of “general principles” was used as a catchall for the remaining concepts within this broader theme. When asked what they believe (interview question number two), Baby Boomers stated, “That you can’t believe anything.” However, with this disbelief also came the conclusion that, “principles had to come before everything.” Most of the principles by which Boomers said they live have
already been addressed, such as a lack of belief (a distrust) in authority, or will be discussed under the next subcategory (axial code) of religion. The remaining principles of traditional values, manners, a clear sense of right and wrong, and an acknowledgment that “anything is possible” may be seen within this code but may also stretch to overlap into other themes as well.

Repeatedly Boomers spoke of having rejected what they saw as traditional values, but as they aged becoming, “convinced that the old values were right, but I don’t know how we can apply them and get to them exactly.” Others identified these “traditional values” or “morals” as being “kindness... being compassionate.” In reference to traditional values and how things were during their childhood, Baby Boomers also referenced a value of “good manners” as something they value which has been lost.

Citing their life experiences, Baby Boomers identified themselves as having a clearer sense of right and wrong than younger generations.

So you can make those decisions: that’s right, that’s wrong. That’s morally correct, that’s horrible... Chances are you’ve seen the situation or something similar before. You don’t want to get fossilized and lose your ability to go back and re-examine it if you have to, but you don’t want to waste all your time re-thinking the same situation every time it comes up.”

In addition to this greater sense of discernment, Boomers also identified themselves as having a disregard for how they are perceived by others for acting on this sense of right and wrong, connecting it to their value of equality and being heard: “I’m the one that will say, ‘Guess what, there’s a problem.’ And they’re hiding back there behind me, you know. But I don’t care, what do I care? What are they going to do to me?”

Finally, while living on the principles of hope and change, there was also an equally weighty principle that, “we were raised as anything’s possible, but not anything’s
possible anymore.” This principle was not meant to contradict or discredit their value and belief in hope and change, but rather to temper some of that hope within the context of realistic possibilities that are guided by other values, such as honesty.

**Religion.** This focused code also serves as its own axial code as it was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. As with other institutional authority, Baby Boomers expressed mixed feelings regarding religion. On one hand, all participants talked about their exposure to organized religions, even if not deeply involved in at some point in their lives. As such, they identified many core values as having been rooted in religious beliefs. At the same time, organized religion was not exempt from Baby Boomers’ underlying principle of questioning authority, as well as the distrust and animosity that was felt toward government and institutions. Questioning the beliefs and rules of whatever religion one was exposed to was a common experience for Baby Boomer participants stated that they valued the “freedom to make the choice to find the religion and decide for ourselves.” In making individual choices about religion, Boomers spoke of seeking out opportunities to explore and be exposed to other forms of religion and spirituality than they had grown up with. One participant explained:

I experienced a lot of them [alternative religions] in the ‘60s. That the Native American, the Buddhist, yeah, we had never known what a Mormon was. So I think there was just, and everybody went to church and it didn’t matter what church you went to, but now it was like “come to my church”, “Oh, I want to go to your church next week.” So religion was no longer a family value. The way you were raised was no longer the only way.

The concept of spirituality instead of religion was emphasized by the Baby Boomers. In speaking of a family member who held “those beliefs” [speaking of organized religion] but “didn’t go to church,” one participant stated, “it’s kinda hard to
say religion, I think spiritually. Spirituality is a good term for it, but it’s so important.”

For those who were still a part of a religious institution they too made a distinction that:

- it wasn’t so much a religion, it was the faith that you had, that you believed it. It was a personal commitment to Christ or whatever that you yourself relied on. It was not a, just, I went to church. It was personal commitment.

Regardless of what one calls it, religion, spirituality, or one’s personal belief system, the concept is of great important to Baby Boomers who placed strong emphasis on it being a construct that one explores and chooses for oneself.

**Generation X**

The following discussion section starts with a matrix (Table 2), followed by a an overview of the five focused codes identified within the data for Generation X. Figure 2 is then provided to illustrate the movement between axial and focused codes, followed by a discussion of the 13 axial codes which underlie the five focused codes.
Table 2: Generation X

*Generation X: Focused Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Identity: Theirs &amp; Ours</th>
<th>Media &amp; Technology: Its role &amp; effects</th>
<th>Making Your Own Way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We all lead different lives in this generation&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I don’t trust the media&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I have to do it myself, no one’s going to help me, and I’m going to do it my way&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We Xers don’t believe anything! We wouldn’t dare, it would be a lie! It would be, it would be a lie.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I think about, how did that, like seeing Bill Cosby up on stage and stuff. I think that changed our, it really did help us reinforce that, well I guess we already talked about it, everyone is equal.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Well we had the initiative to go figure out how to find that path&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I notice with the kids now, you have to take them by the hand and lead them to step B and then you lead them to step C. But they also need you to say, &quot;Oh you did such a good job!&quot; That’s what they need, lots of platitudes.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;we were taught to respect the media but we’ve learned not to&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I might act like I’m following the rules for a while, but … I always have the freedom, you know, inside I’m not really following the rules… I make my own rules!... that’s part of being unconfined, part of being independent&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I feel more connection to the younger generation than the older.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I think media, it was a big thing for our generation, but it’s an even bigger thing for the next ‘cuz it’s been like a constant barrage.”</td>
<td>&quot;I feel like I’m honoring them [parents, previous generations] by exploring my options… I feel like I am honoring them because they did, and especially women before them made a lot of sacrifices for us, to have these choices&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;the impression I have of Boomers is that they’re self-indulgent.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;the value of change… like you can always improve&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (cont.)

*Generation X: Focused Codes (cont.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Your Own Way (cont.)</th>
<th>Relationship with the World &amp; Others (Past, Present &amp; Future)</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;And we're [older generations] not going to give you role models because every role model we've ever given you we've deconstructed for you&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I think I do believe that we're interconnected but my goodness it feels really overwhelming&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I am a spiritual person, I am not a religious person. I am extremely skeptical about religion&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;the world is getting smaller&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;if I wanted something I would also have to work for it and it wouldn't just be handed to me&quot;</td>
<td>Defining Events: Nixon leaving the White House Iranian hostage crisis Ollie North Jonestown Challenger Explosion 1980s economic boom Berlin Wall OJ Simpson Trial 9/11 Attacks Prayer in school</td>
<td>&quot;We have an opinion about it, whether we're skeptical of it, whether we espouse a religion, we take it seriously. It's serious stuff to us&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;do something that you love, just make sure you'll be able to support yourself&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Purpose to help people in dire circumstances… I'm a sell-out if what I do doesn't help people.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;having the freedom to believe however you want&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I need to be responsible for my sphere of influence, my part of the puzzle&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;when I really go back to who I looked up to, I mean the most significant people in my life were my family&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I believe equality... I want it fair for everybody&quot;</td>
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Discussion of Focused Codes for Generation X

The first focused code was that of “generational identity.” Within this theme, topics related to how Generation Xers constructed their own cohort identity as well as their perspective on the cohort identity of Baby Boomers and Millennials are discussed. In regards to their own cohort identity, Xers spoke of themselves as being a collective of individuals. Overall, Xers had much more to say regarding their perspective on Millennials than they did regarding Boomers. A general sense of being disconnected and separate from Boomers was evidenced by their lack of discussion regarding Boomers, except to speak of shortcomings, disappointments, and disagreements they had with the older cohort.

The second focused code identified was that of “media and technology: its role and effects.” For Xers, little was said about technology, aside from “My biggest belief is in science and technology.” Instead, the focus of their discussion was related to the role and influence media, television in particular, had in their lives. One participant summarized the cohort’s perspective on media by simply stating, “I don’t trust the media,” which was echoed throughout the cohort’s responses. Additionally, a sense of betrayal at the direction mass media has gone since their childhood also undergirded the sentiments Xers expressed about media.

The third identified focused code was that of “making your own way.” Within this theme, Xers discussed concepts related to individualism, specifically that their success in life, their choices, and their desired pursuits rest solely on their shoulders. Xers expressed a strong sense that they are alone in the world, a community of individuals, who cannot depend on anyone else in their journey, but must make their own way. Whether speaking
of fallen heroes who leave them without role models, or choosing between environmentalism and parenthood, Xers detailed out the duty they feel to find their own path in life. One participant summarized the sentiment within this theme by stating, “I have to do it myself, no one’s going to help me, and I’m going to do it my way.” In relationships, work, and general life pursuits, Xers assumed they were on their own and must rely on no one but themselves to reach whatever they are striving for.

The fourth focused code identified was that of “relationship with the world and others (past, present and future).” Xers’ perspective on their relationship with the world and others is aptly summarized by the statement, “everything is interconnected.” Within this category, Xers discussed the role that historic events played in shaping their understanding of the world, themselves, and the people around them. Moving closer to home, Xers describe the role of immediate family members as “the most significant people in my life.” At the same time, the decision to start a family of one’s own is something quite weighty to Xer as they fear family may be “something confining.”

For Generation Xers, principles of responsibility, equality, as well as balancing skepticism, cynicism, and hope underpin the ways in which they interact with those around them. Xers expressed a belief that they are “to be responsible for my sphere of influence, my part of the puzzle” in order to hopefully effect change in the greater world. Additionally, a belief in equality motivated the questioning, the service, and the care of people and things involved in the Xers world.

Finally, the fifth focused code identified was that of “religion.” The skepticism that is a hallmark for the Xer generation is no less relevant as cohort members discussed religion, specifically organized religion. Seeing themselves as spiritual, rather than
religious, Xers placed high value on being informed and intentional about one’s belief system, regardless of what those beliefs may be. “We have an opinion about it, whether we’re skeptical of it, whether we espouse a religion, we take it seriously. It’s serious stuff to us.” Although deeply skeptical of organized religion, Xers took a very personal and opinionated stance on this particular theme.

The following figure (Figure 2) demonstrates the movement between focused codes to axial codes for Generation X. An expanded description of these focused and axial codes follows Figure 2.
Figure 2: Generation X Axial and Focused Codes

Axial Codes

Generational Identity
Other Generations

Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects
Independence and Freedom
Choice
Striving
Authority and Role Models
Work

Focused Codes

Generational Identity
Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects
Making Your Own Way

The World: Then and Now
Responsibility
Family
Equality
Skepticism and Cynicism vs. Hope

Relationship with the World and Others (Past, Present, & Future)
Religion

Religion
Discussion of Axial Codes for Generation X

Generational identity: Theirs and ours. Within this focused code, two separate subcategories (axial codes) were identified. Generation Xers spoke of how they conceptualized their own generational identity ("generational identity") and then also spoke of how they conceptualize the identity of Baby Boomers and Millennial cohorts ("other generations"). Two of the strongest elements within the Xers’ generational identity were the concept of individuals in community and that of skepticism. One participant captured the skepticism and distrustfulness of the cohort by stating, "We Xers don’t believe anything! We wouldn’t dare, it would be a lie! It would be, it would be a lie." This theme of skepticism will be addressed more thoroughly as an axial code within the focused code of "relationship to the world and others."

The second characteristic of individualism and independence was of great importance to Xers. Emphasis was placed on being an individual, doing your own thing, and yet still doing it within community. One participant put it this way, "Cuz everyone wanted to be an individual but then you wanted to have friends, so you had to find those friends who… friends who wanted to be just like you… could be individuals with you.” This collective sense of individuality also came through in another participant’s statement that, “We all lead different lives in this generation.” Consistently members of the Generation X cohort spoke of non-conformity, individuality, and a search to make their own way and forge their own identity separate from collective standards or expectations. Unlike their Boomer predecessors, these pursuits were not described as ones of protest or outspokenness, but rather individual choices and decisions made on the most micro and personal levels. This broad theme of independence and individual identity undergirds
much of the other themes discussed by Xers and will be demonstrated throughout the other focused code discussions.

More than any other generational cohort in this study, Xers spoke of how they perceived the identity of the generations surrounding them (Boomers and Millennials). While comments regarding Boomers were limited, what was said was overwhelmingly critical or communicated a sense of disappointment in or needing to make up for the perceived mistakes of the older generation. For example, “But I also felt like we got shoved that we were supposed to fix everything. That the Boomers did their part and now it’s our turn.” Additionally, it was stated:

In case you couldn’t tell I had a lot of influence from the Boomers that was shoved down my throat. ‘Cuz I believe the difference in our generation is that we were more okay in the grey area to say, “ok, then do this over there.”

This concept of being handed or shoved responsibilities from Boomers carried throughout Xer conversations about the older generation and was met with conflicting emotions of resentment and understanding. Specifically, resentment was expressed for being told what to be responsible for and understanding was expressed for the importance of certain causes such as environmentalism and social equality, but with a desire to not make everything as absolute as they feel Boomers conceptualize issues.

In regards to disappointment with the Baby Boomer generation, one participant commented on growing up with Boomer parents, stating,

I think about the, as far as the hippie parents thing, there’s a dark side to it too. There’s the incredibly self-absorbentness, that’s not a word but, of that generation which is like the opposite of the Greatest Generation. And that can be, whether they went and became a yuppie or didn’t, either way, there’s like some serious issues there with being selfish, I think.
This statement was followed up by another participant’s agreement with and expansion on the comment stating, “Yeah, I think self-indulgent, more than selfish. Yeah, yeah, that’s kind of the impression I have of Boomers is that they’re self-indulgent.”

While Xers spoke minimally of Baby Boomers, they had much to say regarding the generation that follows them, the Millennials. Views on this generation were mixed, expressing great disappointment and disagreement in what Xers saw as the values and ways of life in the Millennial generation, but also great hope in who they could be as they age and mature. According to Generation Xers, Millennials are “entitled,” “selfish,” “sheltered,” “indifferent to religion,” “activists... [with a] cohesiveness in the group,” and unable to “think for themselves.” Additionally, where Xers defined themselves around individualism and independence, they saw Millennials defined by the systems in which they function: “They’re in a world full of systems. Everything’s a system – their computer is a system, their video game system, their school system, everything’s referred to as a system.” While Xers saw Millennials as being defined by their “system,” there was also a sentiment that,

this younger generation, they just don’t even have a clue all this important stuff. No I’m serious, they don’t respect things, they’re spoiled, they don’t believe everything’s interconnected and the purpose, all this stuff that’s our core values they’re just in the world.

A general sense of being unaware, sheltered, over-protected, too trusting, and lacking in the life experiences needed to truly define themselves summarized the conceptualization of Millennials, as seen by Xers. With that being said, Xers still expressed a belief in the potential of the Millennial generation, regarding them as “the only hope really that there is.”
Media and technology: Its role and effects. This focused code serves as its own axial code as it holds no other underlying themes but was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. As with most topics discussed by Xers, opinions related to media and technology were strong and united for this cohort. The strength of these opinions were expressed by the increased rate and volume in participant responses related to this topic, as well as participant responses being hedged by “Yeah!” and other markers of intense agreement to other participants’ statements. Xers saw one role of media as being responsible for bringing awareness of world events, making the world smaller and more accessible.

I think, to me, the world is, or got to be a very small place. And, because we were the generation that really did, we watched Jonestown happen on TV. I remember the Time Magazine with the grape kool-aid, that’s very, very prominent in my mind; watching Nixon leave the White House. You know, the Iranian hostage crisis. All that stuff is very... Ollie North... Oh God, I forgot about that!... How could I forget Ollie North? Don’t get me started on him. But I think our, the world was a real big place at one point and then with media we watched all this stuff happen, and we lived it, and that’s, we hold on to it. And I just think it’s that piece that it’s very small to me.

At the same time, more access and information available through media had created a “distrust of corporate media and political media” and a general sense of skepticism regarding what is broadcasted. This distrust was something the Xers talked of as being an acquired position stating, “we were taught to respect the media but we’ve learned not to.”

Much like the Boomers before them, Xers referenced watching news with Walter Cronkite as a time when news and media were trustworthy, but see things like CNN 24-hour news as changing that foundation, as “everybody wants to get the first word out there immediately, as soon as they can. And they don’t check their sources, they just want to be the first one out there so that they can get the headline.” Furthermore,
I think media makes you more skeptical too. ‘Cuz there’s always… you always get so many different messages… Yeah, and then you think you believe in one health study, and then the next year comes out and says no, and there just an unending amount of things that get proven and disproven.

Xers’ general sentiments about media are clearly expressed in statements such as “I don’t trust the media” and “I don’t believe the media.”

Beyond cultivating attitudes of skepticism and distrust, Xers took their discussion of the role of media on their lives one step further, seeing it as influencing their general feelings of powerlessness and jadedness toward the world as a whole as it has brought tragedy to their living rooms. As the world is brought closer through media, it also desensitizes.

We see death and destruction happen on even small and grand scales live. We grown up with this so it’s kind of like, if something happens somewhere across the world, when we’re visually exposed to it, it makes us like, “well, I can’t do that. I can’t fix it, I can’t make it better, so might as well enjoy myself while I can, ‘cuz it could happen to me any day”… It’s desensitized us too… And it’s made us feel, like, powerless and that’s why they say we’re the “why not” generation, that we’re so jaded because, we do, I feel that powerlessness in a sense that I don’t think the younger kids feel.

Additionally, Xers expressed not only a distrust of the information provided by media, but a distrust of the motivations of media as well, and therefore saw themselves approaching media with almost a dualistic mentality of intrigue and protectiveness.

Media wants to crush people. And I wonder if we, and maybe I’m wrong about this, if we’re more attuned to that. Like, we can see, we don’t trust the media, like we can see through their little games and we just ignore them, but we also, I think we get caught up in the hype too.

Another example of Xers holding two, seemingly conflicting views of media is seen in a desire to know the truth of a story, and yet be entertained at the same time.

I get real frustrated ‘cuz it’s like, who can I find who’s unbiased, who can give me the real deal… Just give me the bottom line, the real deal!... But the real deal is
boring, that’s the thing… and that’s why nobody knows the real story! We want to be entertained.

The first generation to grow up with television fully accessible throughout their lives, Xers noted the changes in media over their lifetime and felt betrayed by the directions in which it has gone. In particular, they spoke of seeing television as being the social equalizer, that which brought people together and demonstrated the equality that matters so much to this generation. One participant, in speaking of various television shows and pop culture personalities stated, “I think about, how did that, like seeing Bill Cosby up on stage and stuff. I think that changed our, it really did help us reinforce that, well I guess we already talked about it, everyone is equal.” The cohort also spoke of the changes in media, namely MTV’s shift from airing mostly music videos to the recent production of shows like “My Super Sweet 16” and feeling a sense of betrayal, as “MTV was ours!”

Overall, Xers described of media as having a significant role in shaping their view of the world as well as themselves. On the one hand, Xers valued the information and entertainment provided by media, but on the other hand, felt betrayed by the lack of credibility they felt has taken over a once trustworthy source. As with other themes discussed by Xers, conflicting sentiments about media and its role shaped the view that Xers have toward this cultural institution.

Making your own way. Within this focused code five separate subcategories (axial codes) were identified. These subcategories, although distinct in their own conceptualizations all contribute to the Xers’ central theme of making their own way in life. This principle was applied to themselves and to those around them, believing that others should also be responsible for their own path in life. Subcategories (axial codes) of
“independence and freedom,” “choice,” “striving,” “authority and role models,” and “work” all came together to express the essence of this focused code.

The first axial code within this broader theme was that of independence and freedom. For Generation Xers the principles of independence and freedom underlie nearly everything else that they say and do. If any one subtheme captures the Xer cohort it is this concept of independence and freedom, and is something that they view as being unique to their cohort:

Freedom and independence. That those are big factors when I’m taking about Millennials, and when I’m discussing with them, and maybe Boomers too. I don’t know if we have quite even the same level of value on freedom and independence as they did even. I don’t know, I think we have a lot more value on it than the kids younger than us.

Additionally, Xers spoke of “being unconfined” and having both the freedom and initiative to find their “own path.” Three cohort members collectively spoke of this concept as they talked over each other to complete the following quote:

I might act like I’m following the rules for a while, but ... I always have the freedom, you know, inside I’m not really following the rules... I make my own rules!... that’s part of being unconfined, part of being independent.”

Within this concept of unconfined freedom, there was a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency and self-initiative. For most Xers, there was an assumption that one would never ask for help, “I have to do it myself, no one’s going to help me, and I’m going to do it my way.” There is a “trust in yourself” that supersedes any trust in someone or something else. In addition to depending on themselves to go their own way, they also viewed themselves as having “the initiative to go figure out how to find that path.”

Xers also spoke of how so much freedom and independence left them without a sense of direction in life. This contributed to Xers’ statements of valuing commitment but
fearing being stuck in those decisions, and always looking for the freedom to change their mind. One cohort member put it this way, “as far as something that I’ve experienced with friends in my age group is that we have some commitment issues.” This fear of commitment nicely connects this axial code of independence and freedom to the next axial code of choice.

The second axial code within this broader theme was that of choice. In addition to having freedom and independence in making their own way, Xers valued and expected to be able to make their own choices. These choices included, but are not limited to career paths, free-time, and parenthood. For many, the concept of choice was a double-edged sword. While there was much value placed on the freedom to make individual choices, many expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by the choices they do have. As collaboratively stated by two cohort members,

I know that I experienced that where, because I’ve had so many choices I have bopped around to different jobs, and different places, and there are times that I wish sometimes I didn’t have so many choices... it is overwhelming... We have some commitment issues... yes, as a generation I think we do... you know, I have a couple girlfriends who they’ve had, ummm, partners for a long, long, long time and they’ll never get married to them because they just want to feel like, “I can leave if I want to leave.”

This theme of choice was something that Xers did not take for granted, and recognized that they are the first generation to have many of the choices in career, reproduction, family life, etc. that they did. These freedoms in choice were seen by Xers as a, “luxury that we’ve had growing up.”

In addition to seeing choice as a valuable luxury, Xers also saw the execution of those choices as a way of expressing appreciation for those who made those choices possible for them.
I feel like I’m honoring them [parents, previous generations] by exploring my options. Even though sometimes it’s too many, you know, I see the pride that they have. Like, “Look at all the cool stuff she’s done” and, you know, and them really supporting that and enjoying that. And that’s, yeah, I really enjoy that though. I feel like I am honoring them because they did, and especially women before them made a lot of sacrifices for us, to have these choices.

While choice is of high importance to Xers, and something to be fought for; it was not something that they take for granted.

The choice to have children was a recurring theme among both men and women within the Generation Xer cohort. The choice to have children is something to which Xers gave great weight and importance.

People are making tough choices. And it started with our generation, like a lot of us women are choosing not to have kids for one reason or another. Sometimes it’s economics, and sometimes it’s just I don’t know that I want to bring a child here. Not consciously make a decision, and we have that choice now. That seems like a really heavy burden to me to say, “Yeah, I want to get pregnant and have a child and bring them here.”

Whether they chose not to have children because it would limit their future choices and confine them or that they chose to become parents, the decision was seen as their individual choice. One female cohort member expounded on the tension she felt between having children and her value for environmentalism and living sustainably:

when I talk about not having kids, and I don’t know where you are with that, I’m talking about like, seriously, like I wouldn’t be able to do some of the sustainable things in my lifestyle that I do now because I would have to be pouring everything that I could into the child, which is very little... Well, what if you wanted to have a child and wanted to maintain your, the things that you believed in, and you just ended up not being able to.

Additionally, a male cohort member expressed his fear of starting his own family stating, “I swore I was never going to have a family... I had relationships and stuff, I don’t know, I just I valued being able to be mobile and not confined. And I picture family, like, something confining.” For those who chose to have children the comments were mixed.
Some Xers with children stated that it did limit their options and expressed that, “once I don't have that responsibility [children at home] I feel like I might just go off and do something totally different.” Other cohort member indicated they were able to maintain their sense of freedom and choices, stating, “I never let that [having children] get in my way.” For Xers, regardless of the issue, the value of choice comes hand in hand with the recognition that making one choice, then in turn, influences future choices. In light of this recognition, Xers placed a high value on their choices and did not take the responsibility of those choices lightly.

The third subcategory (axial code) within this broader theme of “making your own way” was that of “striving.” As a cohort, Generation Xers spoke often of the things they were in pursuit of, that they were striving for. Regardless of the object of their pursuit, Xers agreed, “just be sure you do it 100%, whatever it is that you choose.” This all-or-nothing sense of pursuit dovetails with the Xers’ value of independence as they see their potential for success resting solely on their own effort. While this general sentiment of individual striving and pursuit was seen in many of the things Xers discussed, the two most repeated things that they talked about striving for were happiness and change.

Happiness, or rather the pursuit of happiness, was something near and dear to the heart of Xers, so much so that it is seen as more important than nearly any other principle or value. One cohort member explained the importance of happiness in light of staying in an unsatisfying marriage:

in terms of personal sacrifice and my happiness, I just don’t know that I could do that… not for a moral code where there’s a little bit more of a, “yeah I know I promised to stay together forever. I promise this, and I promise that, and I made this vow, but my happiness isn’t there anymore.” And that trumps almost, and I hate to even say that, I think that is something that the past generation did
differently. That their moral code trumped their happiness, their personal happiness, and that doesn’t exist anymore.

This pursuit of happiness was echoed throughout the cohort in statements such as, “we value happiness,” and “it’s not necessarily the me-happiness, and my happiness… it’s other people’s happiness too that we’re concerned about.” Xers did not see striving for happiness as just a self-serving pursuit, but as something they wanted for themselves and those around them.

Striving for change was another concept that Xers repeatedly returned to. As a concept, change was something that Xers see as inevitable in life, and as the method for cultivating growth. While Xers spoke of themselves as “the nostalgic generation,” valuing what they saw as the happier days of their childhood, they also found themselves dissatisfied with remaining stagnant and desired to move forward, chasing change. One cohort member captured this sentiment by discussing change as both a value and a “belief that there’s always better; that you can always make something better. Umm, and that may be going along with the value of change, like you can always improve… I’m like, “I’m not satisfied, make it better.”” This pursuit of change was also rooted in a “hope for change,” that the current conditions in the world or in the individual's micro-world have the potential for growth. As with other concepts in this axial code, and the over-arching focused code, the heart and power of change rest exclusively in the hands of the individual.

The fourth subcategory (axial code) within this focused code was that of “authority and role models.” An axial code that was identified in one way or another by each generational cohort under study, its location under “making your own way” was unique to Generation Xers. Due to feeling that their role models and authority figures
have been “deconstructed,” Xers saw themselves being in a position to, once again, make their own way in life. Having seen major political, religious, and cultural leaders that they once admired “fall,” they were left saying, “we don’t trust authority.” In particular, they saw that, “distrust for government is maybe something our parents gave us,” as well as a distrust for organized religion (to be discussed under focused code “religion”).

Xers spoke of having received messages from authority figures (parents, teachers, etc.) that promoted their sense of individualism and freedom, but at the same time left them without guidance or role models. Two cohort members collaborated in the following statement, expressing messages they had received from older generations,

And we were supposed to figure it all out on our own because they were not going to set out our path. They’re not going to say, “You’re going to fix the world because you’re going to be a doctor.”... (How do I fix the world?!)... Yeah, I don’t know. You’re individuals, you know, we give you all the tools you need to develop on your own, we’re not going to give you anymore advice after that, just go... And we’re not going to give you role models because every role model we’ve ever given you we’ve deconstructed for you.

In light of this vacuum of role models, Xers identified their family and close friends as “that model of guidance and the model for your belief systems and whatnot,” but these models were chosen on a case-by-case individual basis, rather than having collective heroes or role models for the entire cohort.

The fifth and final subcategory (axial code) was that of “work.” Overlapping some with striving and independence, a sense of being on your own to forge your career path is something important to Generation Xers. A strong work ethic and putting in individual effort to obtain what you desired was seen in the statement, “I understood that if I wanted something I would also have to work for it and it wouldn’t just be handed to me.” Implementing from a young age the concepts of “having a strong work ethic, being
hard working, being able to fend for myself,” in addition to “you’re supposed to earn that
[money, things] yourself” were interwoven within the Xers framework.

While Xers spoke of work in terms of the effort they put forth in order to achieve
or obtain things themselves, they also spoke of it in terms of their job or career.
Connecting with their values of happiness, their perspective of work was no different,
stating it is “more important that you enjoy the work. That it’s something you want to do,
not about the money,” and that the internalized work-related message communicated to
Xers was, “do something that you love, just make sure you’ll be able to support
yourself.” The value of other’s happiness expressed itself in Xers’ desire that “in some
way what you do is supposed to help the world.” In regard to the value of change, Xers
saw themselves as,

the first generation to have multiple careers throughout our lifetime rather than
starting something and that’s the job you stay at for 45 or 50 years… And part of
that’s that we value the change, we value the challenge, we value not sitting at a
desk crunching numbers eight hours a day.

Finally, the role of balance between work and leisure was something expressed by
Xers as well. Connecting to the theme of striving, the role of work was “more like a
balance. Finding the balance between work and leisure, at least for me anyway.” While
Xers value hard work, there is also a desire for enjoyment and purpose in that work,
bringing benefit to both themselves and to whomever their work impacts. If this
collection of desires is not met, then Xers have no reservations about changing their job
in order to find a job that satisfies them fully.

**Relationship with the world and others (past, present and future).** This
focused code encapsulated five subcategories (axial codes) that all spoke to how Xers
conceptualized their relationship with those around them, whether on a micro, macro, or
theoretical level. The first axial code within this broader focused code was that of "the world: then and now." Generation Xers often spoke of their overall place in the world, as well as the changes and differences between the world of their childhood and the world of their present. First, Xers saw that "the world is getting smaller." Combining a sense of the world getting smaller, along with individual freedom one cohort member commented, with all of the technological advances and the media influence it was like, "Of course I can go to Japan tomorrow if I want to. Why not?" Maybe I'm a little too confined to do that right now, or poor to do that right now. But if I wanted to, absolutely, no big deal, I could do it.

As technological advances, such as travel accessibility and media contributed to the world getting smaller, Xers felt more and more "powerless" and "overwhelmed" in it as they felt that "everything is interconnected." One cohort member connected these two concepts by stating, "Actually, it really overwhelms me. Just, that, even the interconnected thing, I think I do believe that we’re interconnected but my goodness it feels really overwhelming. It’s too big. The responsibility is too big."

While Xers sense of responsibility will be addressed further under its own axial code, it also relates to their sense of interconnectedness and recognition that one choice will impact both future choices and those around them. Given this sense of interconnectedness, Xers saw themselves as needing to have "a more holistic view of the world." With this global and holistic perspective, Xers also took on a value of "environmentalism" including conversations related to efforts implored to "live sustainably," efforts in "recycling" and combating "global warming." Interestingly, Xers interconnected and global perspective on the world did not negate their individualistic perspective. As such, Xers saw themselves as responsible for their "sphere of influence"
bringing community to a micro level, and influencing the world by starting in their own backyard.

Similar to the Boomers before them, Xers spoke of significant historical events that shaped their cultural identity. For Xers old enough to remember, President Nixon was referenced repeatedly as a marker for changing the way Xers saw both authority and the world around them. Additionally, events such as the Iranian hostage crisis, the Challenger explosion, Jonestown, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, and the OJ Simpson trial were all referenced as events that influenced Xers’ view of the world, its realities, and the changes that were taking place around them. While not a specific event in and of itself, the role of the economic boom of the 1980s and the general role of capitalism in the world was also spoken of by Xers. Specifically,

Well for me, capitalism shapes my worldview, big surprise. And our special brand of it here in America, and how we’ve tried, well we have exported that to the rest of the world, and the effect that’s had and continues to have.

Another significant historic event identified by Xers was the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, and was summarized by, “then 9/11 happened and the whole world shifted. It just seemed like the planet shook on its axis. Everything changed, politically, economically, our culture seemed filled up with fear and anxiety.” Xers identified this event as something that did not surprise them, speaking of the United States as living “in this little bubble, thinking that we’re insulated from that and none of those things can touch us” when, “every other country on the planet has been dealing with this for decades, and we have not.” The inevitableness of world conflict was something undisputed by Xers, but nonetheless they maintained a value of peace and a desire “to leave the world better than I found it.”
The second subcategory (axial code) under the focused code of "relationship with the world and others (past, present and future)" is that of "responsibility." As seen in previous discussions, the concept of responsibility ran through much of Generation X's identity and included responsibility to self, responsibility to those around you, and responsibility to the world as a whole. Overarching everything else within this axial code is the interconnectedness that Xers saw between responsibility, accountability, and consequences. One cohort member put it this way, "I think that it's about accountability. I think we're also the last generation that is taking responsibility for our actions and thinks that there are consequences to our actions, and that there should be consequences to our actions." While Xers valued their freedom and independence, they also placed high importance on the duty they individually possess to be responsible and accountable to those around them.

Responsibility to self played out for Xers in seeing themselves as responsible to "get yourself educated about what's really going on in any given situation," being unable to trust that others have your best interest at heart (making your own way). Additionally, Xers saw themselves as responsible to question and not take things for granted, to question why things are done the way they are done. One cohort member explained it as, "I think it's a belief in being allowed to and having a responsibility to question. To not take things for granted. To not be spoon fed." Furthermore, there was an expressed sense of responsibility to self to not be "a sell-out," which was defined as being someone who lost sight of their initial responsibility or pursuit. For Xers, this responsibility to self was summarized in a duty to ask questions, be informed, and never lose sight of the principles you set out to pursue.
Responsibility to others can be seen in the collaborative quote from two cohort members:

It’s almost a duty that’s been instilled in us. Like we’re going to help people (it’s a neurosis for me, but). Well, I mean, kind of. But if you look at the way my parents raised me and my brothers and sisters, yeah, it was definitely neurotic. You know every time, everything, you had to, but that really instilled in me then, it’s a very useful and purposeful and a duty of mine to go help everybody else.

More specific than simply helping others, was the Xer responsibility to positively impact their sphere of influence. A collective discussion of this topic demonstrated the significance of this concept to Xers:

I need to be responsible for my sphere of influence, my part of the puzzle... And then your sphere of influence goes out and explodes forward... overlaps into other people’s... So it’s a huge responsibility... It is! But it starts individually, we start individually.

This responsibility to others extended to those currently in their lives, their sphere of influence, but also then extended to whoever happens to come after them, whether that is in the immediate or future generations.

While Xers also spoke of a responsibility to the world, for many this concept was acknowledged as important but overwhelming. As such, they often conceptualize their ability to help the world through a less direct, more immediate avenue, seeing their responsibility to others as a way of being responsible to the world.

Like, what I do for you will hopefully make you a better person, which in turn will make you better somebody else, which will hopefully make them act better. Kind of like a domino effect, you know, that’s kind of how I see it. That’s how I think about my ability to make the world better.

For other Xers the responsibility to the world was expressed through environmentalism and a general sense of taking care of the planet through “sustainable living.” In regards to their sense of responsibility, Xers felt that “the only thing that I can do is local,” and that
their local efforts would then “domino” onward. “Overwhelmed with all the problems” they see, starting small and on a micro level enables Xers to fulfill their duty to be responsible and enables them to see the change they so value in their immediate spheres.

The third subcategory (axial code) is that of “family.” The role of family in the lives of Generation Xers was spoken of differently by this cohort than it was by the generational cohorts surrounding them. Where both Boomers and Millennials spoke of family as a place where they obtained a sense of belonging and identity, Xers spoke more of family as something that is chosen, about specific individuals that one chooses to include in life, and even as something that is restricting. Additionally, Xers saw the role of family as having shifted in their generation as families became more mobile and did not always stay in the same community as extended family due to career or other economic decisions.

I value family too, but I value immediate family. And this may not be like a generational thing, but for me, you know, there was that value of independence so we go out, we do, like my parents would do, and you know, start their lives. And what that meant was that we weren’t around a lot of our extended family. So, we had to really focus on each other, you know, and a lot of our friendships and all that, you know, were reliant just on each other.

Xers spoke of individual immediate family members as being their replacement for lost or fallen social heroes. Having felt a loss of role models from the greater community, Xers looked to individuals within their immediate circle for guidance and support. One cohort member stated it as,

another thing is the reliance on family as a replacement perhaps for that model of guidance and the model for you belief systems and whatnot. More so, and maybe more central than an outside influence. That maybe the older generations might have had, “I look up to my president; I look up to the police officer; I look up to the teacher.” And now it’s your family, and I would throw in friends.
Even more specifically, “when I really go back to who I looked up to, I mean the most significant people in my life were my family.”

While immediate family served a significant role in the lives of Xers, many also made the distinction between the family they were born into and the decision to have their own family. A 31-year-old female cohort member stated,

I guess I just never felt it [getting married and having kids] was something I had to do. I really love my family and so I feel like I had a good model for parenting and for a good marriage model as well. But, I’m still single, so I don’t know. I don’t feel like a desperate, like I have to have this. And I do feel like there have been times where I would have felt like it would make me stuck. Actually, I kinda still feel like that.

This sentiment of feeling “stuck” or confined was echoed by a 42 year old male cohort member who had recently had his first child. He stated,

I swore I was never going to have a family. Literally. My parents got divorced and I just was like, I’m not even going there, I’m just going. I mean I have an infant daughter now and things have changed. But that wasn’t like how I saw myself. I saw myself, like, I saw family as something that kind of confines you almost. Until the last, you know, pretty recently actually. Honestly I had relationships and stuff, I don’t know, I just I valued being able to be mobile and not confined. And I picture family, like, something confining.

As seen by both cohort member statements, regardless of a positive or painful family experience growing up, Xers expressed apprehension about starting their own families.

The themes of choice and responsibility were again seen in this concept for Xers as they saw their decisions to start a family as being interconnected with the rest of their circumstances and influential on future choices. For one cohort member this interconnectedness of decisions, choices, and responsibility meant that choosing to have children then came with the decision to put her career aspirations on hold in order to be home with her children, stating,
At least there was a choice. There was a choice that I was able to make, however focusing allowing him to finish his career, but one of us had to stay home, ‘cuz again we couldn’t afford to send them anywhere. But then I didn’t want to have children to have someone else raise them. So it was at least my choice where I don’t think it was our mothers’ choice.

The choices their parents made also influenced Xers perspective on family. Having seen many of their parents, and friends’ parents, divorce, Xers attached their value of happiness to marriage and committed relationships. Specifically, Xers expressed being “angry at my parents because they stayed together for us, and ... [they] sacrificed [their] happiness to stay together for us.” In addition to extending the value of happiness to their parents, Xers also extended the value of choice to their parents, and as such the role of family is not a predetermined model but allows for choices, change, and individualism.

Yeah, I think, who has divorced parents? [five out of six group members raise their hand] I think that’s a big thing too, we became more open to our parents having alternate lifestyles too. Like we kind of had to adjust to, well my parents are going to get divorced and my dad’s going to have three more wives. Or, my mom’s going to have a wife. You know, we had to be open to our parents being individuals too, and you know, more open to their journey. I think that may have shaped the way we thought about adulthood. You know, ‘cuz we would see our parents go through these major changes that their parents didn’t go through... I think a lot of people got divorced at a later time because they were just coming into that too. Nowadays people get divorced when their kids are two. But you know, like, I was older, you were older.

While Boomers spoke of family as being their foundation, the place from which they launched, Xers spoke of immediate family being a place of mutual exploration and a collective group of individuals journeying together.

The fourth subcategory (axial code) was that of “equality.” Whether speaking of gender equality, class equality, or racial equality, Xers loudly spoke of the importance they place on equality for all.

I think it’s not just racial equality though. It’s equality overall. I think we’re the first generation to believe that all men are created equal, as well as women. And I
think we’re, I think our generation is more accepting of homosexuality and bi-racial relationships, and all of that stuff.

Another cohort member spoke of equality in regards to rules and expectations being applied to all stating, “I believe equality, that’s what I stand on the most. I want it fair for everybody. If these rules apply to this person, then they better apply to that one, because that’s the way it should be looked at.” While Xers wanted fairness for all, there was also the belief that “life is unfair,” and Xers identify this one principle as one of the few things they know they believe.

In speaking of equality, Xers spoke of being “lucky” to have always lived in an integrated society, seeing men and women, regardless of race, on equal footing.

We were talking about earlier, just about women’s liberation, and just how this is the first generation that we had so many choices, that we really, viably had. And it’s also true what you’re saying, it was the first generation where, I don’t know, we were just more on equal footing, even though there were different cultures around us, we were not taught to, as a whole, think any differently about different cultural groups or ethnic groups. You know, it was just we’re all here.

This value on equality spread beyond race and gender for Generation Xers and extended to include economic class as well. While they acknowledged that material possessions served as a distinguishing factor between people, stating, “a value of material worth is higher than the value of paternal material worth,” Xers made the insistence that this was not necessarily a reflection of social status as, “you could be poor as hell and spend all your money on Girbaud jeans and be cool.” Collectively Xers created the following explanation for how they conceptualize class and equality:

Maybe we were the ones to dissolve it when you really look at it, I mean, the ability to intermingle, to have football friends, to have hippie friends, to have, you know, those kind of friends... To have class not be so much of an issue too. That where you come from and your money isn’t what define who you are and who you hang out with... it’s not necessarily class equality but something about materials instead of people having more. Yeah, it was more about what clothes
you wore, stuff like that. Instead of, “Oh, I come from this neighborhood or something”... Oh yeah, I didn’t care if you lived in a trailer home if your stuff was cool that’s what mattered to me, I didn’t care if you lived in a dumpster if your stuff was alright, man, then that’s where I was going to be.

In addition to a general value on equality for all, Xers made the distinction between equality, fairness, and justice. Specifically, “we believe more in fairness... often times more than justice” and that, “Don’t just hang ‘em, let ‘em sit for a second, we’ll see if we can rehabilitate ‘em, then put ‘em back... he didn’t have his Miranda rights read to him, we better let him go.” For Xers, “everyone’s equal, and everyone should have equal opportunities” whether that be in career, social opportunities, or rehabilitation, and that “everyone has value and significance, and purpose.”

The final, and yet likely most influential subcategory (axial code) within the focused code of “relationship with the world & others (past, present & future)” was that of “skepticism and cynicism versus hope.” Captured in their self-description, “We Xers don’t believe anything! We wouldn’t dare, it would be a lie! It would be, it would be a lie,” Xers aw themselves as cynics, distrustful and powerless in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Connected strongly to the responsibility to question and to be informed, Xers expressed their skepticism through questioning because they, “don’t trust anything unless you’ve questioned it thoroughly yourself.”

The skepticism coupled with cynicism in what Xers identified as their “Apocalypse mentality” and sense that, “I could die, I might as well have a good time” because they felt “powerless” to change all the negative things they see in the world around them. While these feelings of powerlessness and being overwhelmed by the tragedy in the world left Xers cynical as to the influence they could have, these feelings were still coupled with a hope that “positive change is possible.” Throughout Generation
X cohort discussions much dialogue was held going back and forth between feelings of powerlessness and cynicism and then feelings of both hope and responsibility to evoke as much positive change as possible. The following quotes demonstrate the dualistic dialogue regarding these interwoven concepts of skepticism, cynicism, and hope.

For me, like, the strong belief is like this everything is connected, interconnected, everything is changing. And when I think about it the world’s either going to fall apart or the world’s going to get better, and that’s where the hope comes in for me. It’s not, that’s where I just hope that I can make a difference.

Another cohort member also commented on this dualism, stating,

I’m like, I want to care, because I was jaded and I was cynical, and I was just like, “oh white men suck and the United States sucks, and everything sucks, and this sucks and that sucks.” But I was hoping for that one shining moment. I want to have that hope and that miracle. I want to believe in that miracle. I want to have that happiness, that some glowing part of the world where everything is okay! You seek out that, and you hunt for that, and it’s so hard to find. Especially I don’t know me, maybe it’s easier for other people to see. But I agree with you, I really want to look for the positive, but it’s hard.

Coming back again to their own sphere of influence, Xers saw that “the world’s either going to fall apart or the world’s going to get better” and just “hope that my efforts in my world will make a difference in the bigger world.”

The skepticism that Xers have extended beyond being skeptical of their power in the world, and included skepticism of those in authority and their ability to evoke positive change. One cohort member explained this sentiment by stating, “it goes back to that skepticism thing. You know, I remember growing up thinking, ‘Oh the mayor, he knows what he’s doing,’ or, ‘the city government knows what they’re doing, ’and now it’s just like, ‘ugh.’” Relating back to fallen heroes and a loss of trust in authority, as well as a value in questioning, Xers’ skepticism of government, religious leaders, as well as social and institutional authorities rang true through cohort discussions. Statements such as, “we
don't trust the media,” “we’re just more skeptical of organized religion,” “questioning authority,” and “question reality” are a small sample of this cohort’s sentiments. One participant summarized their cohort’s position by stating,

It’s a combination of both [cynicism and skepticism]. While it would be nice to take things at face value, we can’t always do that. It’s argument, I need to know why you want me to believe that this happened when I see something that, you know, negates that.

**Religion.** This focused code also served as its own axial code as it was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. Xers saw spirituality, not organized religion, as foundational to who they are, stating,

It seems like we all believe in God, or the spiritual or something higher... There’s some kind of intention to all of these systems that are in the universe, you know, that it’s not chaotic or happenstance. But I don’t want that defined.

Xer skepticism was seen in their attitude toward religion as one participant summarized the cohort position stating, “I am a spiritual person, I am not a religious person. I am extremely skeptical about religion... people talk about Christian values and Christian principals but then, they’re not very Christian.” While Xers spoke of valuing particular religious principles such as, “Treat others as you wish to be treated,” there was a deep refusal “to go blindly into it.” As with other authority figures, Xers approached religious institutions with the mentality that,

you can’t tell me what to do. I might act like I’m following the rules for a while, but I always have the freedom, you know, inside I’m not really following the rules... I make my own rules!... I’m pretty sure my rules are better.

This sentiment was repeated by another cohort member stating, “Don’t tell me how to think, don’t tell me what to say, don’t make rules... we can make our own decisions.”

In keeping with their responsibility to be informed, Xers were “not indifferent” to topics of religion and spirituality. Instead, “we have an opinion about it, whether we’re
skeptical of it, whether we espouse a religion, we take it seriously. It’s serious stuff to us.” Additionally, the desires for freedom, independence, and choice in beliefs was echoed throughout cohort discussions as others stated, one must “decide for yourself” what you believe, as they value “having the freedom to believe however you want.”

For members of Generation X, religion, spirituality, and beliefs in a higher power held a place of great importance. On the whole, they rejected organized religion and put a greater emphasis on being informed and being intentional about one’s beliefs. If that led someone to organized religion, than the freedom of that choice was to be respected for it was then a decision based on information rather than conformity.

**Millennials**

The following discussion section starts with a matrix (Table 3), followed by an overview of the six focused codes which were identified within the data for the Millennial generation. Figure 3 then provides a visual description of the movement from axial to focused codes and is followed by a discussion of the 10 axial codes which underlie the six focused codes.
Table 3: Millennial Generation

*Millennials: Focused Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Identity: Theirs &amp; Ours</th>
<th>Media &amp; Technology: Its role &amp; effects</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;we’re incredibly immature for our age&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I think that we are probably one of the most liberal generations, as far as, like, with the media what we’ve grown up seeing, like we grew up seeing nudity, just in like everyday ads and music&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Not just public school education, but people should have the right to go to college, or technical school, or something beyond high school if they want. Or, we kind of expect it, like everyone does now&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;we haven’t had enough experiences&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I don’t feel like they [Boomers &amp; Xers] really cared as much, like to make a difference in the world&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I mean there’s pros and cons to being more, I guess, worldly and knowledgeable about how life really is. At the same time there’s a certain innocence lost in all of that&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We definitely want to know why. Definitely&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We have such passion and energy now that I want to avoid whatever happened to them, that made them so rules oriented&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I’m very aware that there’s a lot of information and it like, on the one hand it makes me open minded or like willing to adjust what I believe, or like just realize that maybe I’m wrong. And, on the one hand that’s positive, but on the other hand it makes me kind of like insecure about what I really know, or what I can know. It’s almost too much&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I feel like we have, we have had a lot of stuff handed to us compared to other people&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Millennials: Focused Codes (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pursuing</th>
<th>Holding Two (conflicting) Truths</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“we are mortified by the fact that there are those in the world that can’t be individuals”</td>
<td>“it does change the nature of communication because it’s so constant, so abbreviated, it lacks some of the depth that like letter writing or like the longer phone conversation has</td>
<td>“if you’re talking what you actually believe it’s almost like preaching”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“family is going to ultimately kind of shape who you are, who you are developing to be as a person”</td>
<td>“teams of individuals”</td>
<td>“we agree to disagree, some people might be this religion, some people might be that religion, but you still have the right to choose what religion you want to be”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Like if your mom was going to be like, “Hey, this is not good, you shouldn’t do this.” You know? That’ be okay, but not from my friends”</td>
<td>“this person is essentially the same as me, they just don’t have the same opportunities, they’re capable of helping themselves, if they had the resources, then we’ll be equal to or both contributing equally. So, right now both of us are deprived of the contribution that this person could make.”</td>
<td>“For some people it is much more kind of pick and choose your own, and make up your own beliefs about religion based on maybe many different ones or none of them at all, and you just pick and choose”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we don’t trust”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“we value success more than hard work”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“at this point in time we’re not, we haven’t had enough experiences”</td>
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Discussion of Focused Codes for Millennials

The first focused code was that of “generational identity.” Within this theme topics were discussed related to how Millennials constructed their own cohort identity, as well as their perspective on the cohort identity of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. In regard to their own cohort identity, Millennials saw themselves as being too young (the oldest member of the generation being 27 at the time of study) to have a clear sense of who they were because, “we haven’t had enough experiences.” As such, Millennials spoke more of who they want to be and hope to be, while describing who they currently are as temporary and not necessarily descriptive of who they will be. When speaking of the generations that came before them, Millennials compared the older cohorts to how Millennials see themselves. For example, when speaking of Baby Boomers, “We have such passion and energy now that I want to avoid whatever happened to them, that made them so rules oriented.” Overall, Millennials saw older generations as less passionate, less energetic, less open-minded or tolerant, more future and long-term oriented, and more hard-working than they themselves are.

The second focused code identified for Millennials was that of “media and technology: its role and effects.” Within this focused code, Millennials expressed the profound and ever-present role that media and technology had in their lives. Unique among the three cohorts under study, Millennials have lived much of, if not their entire lives with television, computers, the internet, and cell-phones, enabling them to connect with the world constantly and immediately (see focused code of “expectations”). While Millennials expressed their expectations for and appreciation of the access and information provided to them by technology, many also expressed feeling overwhelmed
by the vast amounts of constant information and simultaneously expected the option to turn off the television or select for themselves what information they will take in. Technology has impacted the development of many other Millennial themes and yet this cohort recognized that they are still “in transition” and have not yet formed solid beliefs regarding the use and implementation of all the technology available to them.

The third focused code identified for Millennials was that of “expectations.” Unlike the cohorts before them, Millennials continually spoke of things, experiences, and opportunities that they expect to have access to in their lives. This focused code expounds on general expectations that Millennials held as well as the specific expectations to have choices in everything, and to have constant and immediate access to that which they desire. For this cohort having access and opportunity to pursue higher education was an expectation they value highly. It was not that this option has to be pursued, as they also expected to get to make a choice for themselves about what was best in their life, but simply that the opportunity was made available to all. Being able to question everything went beyond a value and becomes an expectation for this cohort. Understanding the “why” behind any instruction or even suggestion was critical for this generation as they expected to be adequately informed and then given the opportunity to decide for themselves. Going a step further, asking why and being informed was expected to come with immediate answers and constant access to whatever they sought to know, understand, or experience. Ease and speed were also expectations in these endeavors as one cohort member explains that, “I feel like everything is easy to us. And everything we’ve grown up with is technology is right there, it’s really fast. And everything gets fixed really fast, if you need it to.” From education to immediate gratification this cohort
brings with it expectations of how the world should function as well as their interaction with the world.

“Pursuing” was the fourth focused code identified for Millennials. Similar to Generation X’s theme of “striving,” Millennials spoke often of that which they were trying to achieve, reach, or obtain. These pursuits included their own individuality, first and foremost, as well as community, success, and change. For this generation, understanding, defining and expressing themselves as individuals was of the utmost importance and was the “the big capital letter title of the whole generation… the arc for everything.” This pursuit of individualism, both for themselves and for others, created a lens through which every other value and pursuit was seen. For this generation concepts such as equality, tolerance, family, marriage, mentors, and trust, while pursued, must first be seen in light of pursuits of individualism and individuality.

The focused code of “holding two (conflicting) truths” was the fifth focused code identified for Millennials. This focused code discusses seemingly contradictory or conflicting truths that Millennials express simultaneously. For example, Millennials spoke of valuing community and helping others, but also expressed deep distrust in others and feeling the need to look out for themselves above all else. What is important about this focused code is to view it in light of this cohort feeling too young and inexperienced to fully express their values, and to see how a third principle or value may enable the understanding of how two seemingly contradictory principles may be held in functional tension for this generation.

The final focused code for Millennials was that of “religion.” This focused code, although less thoroughly discussed than previous generations, served as a theme which
demonstrated the application of many other themes near and dear to the heart of Millennials. For this cohort religion was a topic of great tension and uncertainty while also being one of value. Similar to those generations before them, Millennials emphasize spirituality and choosing one’s beliefs rather than simply adhering to whatever one was taught. As seen in other focused codes, being able to have the opportunity to think critically about the topic and then choose for oneself was more important to this generation than what religious or spiritual beliefs one ascribes to.

The following figure (Figure 3) demonstrates the movement between focused and axial codes for Millennials. An expanded description of these axial codes follows Figure 3.
Figure 3: Millennial Generation Axial and Focused Codes

**Axial Codes**

- Generational Identity
- Other Generations
- Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects
- Expectations
- Choices
- Constant and Immediate
- Individualism & Individuality
- Community (and Relationship to Others)
- Success
- Change
- Holding Two (Conflicting) Truths
- Religion

**Focused Codes**

- Generational Identity
- Media & Technology: Its Role and Effects
- Expectations
- Pursuing
- Holding Two (Conflicting) Truths
- Religion
Discussion of Axial Codes for Millennials

Generational identity: Their and ours. Within this focused code two separate subcategories (axial codes) were identified. Millennials spoke of how they conceptualized their own generational identity ("generational identity") and then also spoke of how they conceptualized the identity of Baby Boomers and Generation X cohorts ("other generations"). While Millennials did speak some to who they saw themselves to be, there was also the expressed underlying principle that their generational identity was still being formed as they "haven’t had enough experiences" to fully know who they are yet. This uncertainty is expressed by one participant as transcending multiple arenas in life,

I mean, now, we’re not even sure we want to believe in our own president and our own country. You know, we’re just not sure of it. We’re hopeful, but we’re not sure. I just think it’s gonna take more time for us to have that worldview. They bring to this forming identity a sense of hope, believing themselves born in a “time of transition” and that they are the generation that truly can “make a difference” in the world.

It is important to note that Millennials, more than any other cohort, struggled to speak collectively. Repeatedly, participants would hedge their statements with comments such as, “and that might just be me,” “I think personally for me...,” and “I don’t know if you guys will agree with me, but...” In no instance were these verbal hedges met with disagreement by other cohort members, but were rather validated, affirmed, and agreed with.

In line with believing they could make a difference in the world, Millennials also saw themselves as the leaders of tomorrow stating, “and it’s something we identify with,
it’s not just something we’ve been told. It’s something that’s the core of us.” As a whole, this cohort was optimistic about the world and their potential role in it, they saw themselves “as fixers” of the world. At the same time, they expressed that “we’re incredibly immature for our age” in comparison to previous generations, and that those who have chosen to pursue higher education have remained “under my parents’ umbrella” rather than being “in and of the world.” While speaking of being taken care of by their “parents’ umbrella” of health care, finances, material provisions, Millennials also identified themselves as “being less sheltered than previous generations” due to the exposure of media and readily available information via the internet.

Regarding previous generations, Millennials had some mixed reviews. Millennials respected older generations for being more “hard working” than themselves and for being more committed to things whether it be a job or a marriage. Conversely, Millennials saw the older generations as lacking some characteristics that they hold quite dear. One cohort member stated, “I don’t feel like they [Boomers & Xers] really cared as much, like to make a difference in the world.” Another stated,

I think the previous generations are more hooked on war, like, “just go get ‘em!” Like, “smoke ‘em out of their hole.” You know, instead of, “let’s have a meeting and talk about it.” … so I just think our generation’s more like, “hey we can do things other ways, there are other methods.” Like, we don’t necessarily have to go this extreme. I think we’re easier to bargain with, like, we’re more reasonable. Like, you can have a conversation… I think we might be a little more peaceful than other people.

In addition to disagreeing with previous generations attempts at international conflict, Millennials saw previous generations as being less open-minded about religious differences as well. One cohort member expressed this perspective by stating, “someone who’s like in the Baby Boomer generation, if they were like, just incredibly religious
usually they were pretty narrow minded.” Millennials viewed themselves as being “more tolerant” than previous generations, regardless of the issue.

**Media and technology: Its role and effects.** As with the previous two cohorts, this focused code serves as its own axial code as it held no other underlying themes but was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. For Millennials, unlike the previous generations, technology was something they “take for granted” as television, the internet, cell phones, etc. have been available and easily accessible since their childhood, if not since their birth. Millennials relied on technology to expose them to the rest of the world, provide information at their fingertips, and enable them to communicate with friends and family instantly. The ability to “get the information immediately” and “immediate gratification” were the key elements to understanding the role of technology in the lives of Millennials. Additionally, Millennials attributed the development of some of their other values, such as individuality, having choices, and wanting constant and immediate feedback or information to the influence of media and technology in their lives.

Overall, technology and media were valued in the lives of Millennials as it offered them “exposure” to the rest of the world. Millennials saw themselves as “being less sheltered” and more “liberal” because of media. One cohort member explained it by saying,

I think that we are probably one of the most liberal generations, as far as, like, with the media what we’ve grown up seeing, like we grew up seeing nudity, just in like everyday ads and music, like [two indistinguishable words] people take it to the extreme. So I think, in a way, we’re not, well as far as I, I can only speak for myself, I’m not really surprised by anything anymore. You know, whereas previous generations can’t believe that that’s going on, or, I guess we’ve just become, what’s the word, I don’t know the word… numb… there you go. We’re just like, okay, there’s another naked person dancing around and okay.
While exposure brought valued awareness of the world, Millennials did not see this increased awareness as something that promotes involvement or care about the tragedies of the world.

I think that the media has, like, desensitized our view of umm, like world poverty and stuff. Like, we’ll see a hungry kid on TV and be like “Oh, that’s sad” and then watch our sitcom. I don’t know, I just think we’re more desensitized to it then our parents. We might be more aware of it, but that’s just how I feel.

Furthermore, Millennials saw too much exposure by the media as taking away some sense of innocence as they saw themselves as a generation that “values childhood less” than it values the information and exposure made available through media. This loss of innocence brought about by media exposure was echoed throughout the cohort as another member stated, “I mean there’s pros and cons to being more, I guess, worldly and knowledgeable about how life really is. At the same time there’s a certain innocence lost in all of that.”

Beyond simple exposure and awareness, Millennials looked to media and technology to provide information. This access to information, similar to exposure, was a double-edged sword to this generational cohort. While on the one hand they valued the knowledge and information as it motivated change, it could also be rather overwhelming as they felt they are being shown “too much.” One cohort member spoke of this tension by stating,

It’s ugly that we have to see that type of stuff. But at the same time it’s reality. It’s ugly that we have to be exposed to it. All these terrible instances, it’s ugly, it’s terrible that we have to be exposed to that, but at the same time, we have to look at it and say, “This is what’s really going on, what can we do to change this? What can we do as individuals to make a difference for our generation? What values do we need to show, to make a difference.
While Millennials value media for the information and exposure it provides, there was a limit to what they wanted to see and know, as too much “could scar a person. Some of that stuff is pretty intense.” Although Millennials felt inundated by information at their fingertips, they did not necessarily feel equipped to handle all of this information that has been made available to them:

I’m very aware that there’s a lot of information and it like, on the one hand it makes me open minded or like willing to adjust what I believe, or like just realize that maybe I’m wrong. And, on the one hand that’s positive, but on the other hand it makes me kind of like insecure about what I really know, or what I can know. It’s almost too much. I feel like, as a society we’re going through this transition where accessibility to information is changing and there’s like, a certain arrogance that sort of goes along with that, like, we can know so much more, be so much more informed in our decisions but I feel like we have to figure out a way to like adapt to that, that at least I personally don’t feel like we have.

Another cohort member stated, “I don’t think we know, I think we think we know” in reference to television and media coverage of celebrities and the outside world.

Moreover, this cohort expressed feeling that they had greater opportunity than previous generations to be informed, but often came back to examples where they chose not to be informed whether related to politics, world events, health, etc. due to the overwhelming amount of information and what they perceived as a lack of relevance to their personal lives. One cohort member stated,

I think we’re more informed about the world then previous generations have been because of technology… we have the opportunity to be informed… we’re more informed but we aren’t necessarily more concerned because we are so used to being informed that we’re like, “okay, okay that’s great.”

In addition to valuing media and technology for the access and exposure to the world that it provided, Millennials valued the ways in which technology had made communication easier and more immediate, but at the same time felt they have been
isolated by all the technology. This concept was seen in the following dialogue between three cohort members:

And it [technology] does change the nature of communication because it’s so constant, so abbreviated, it lacks some of the depth that like letter writing or like the longer phone conversation has... Also, to comment on what Seth is saying about how it kind of isolates you. Just thinking about Facebook, I don’t even have to call people to ask what they’re doing. Like, their update already tells them, like “oh, that’s what they’re doing today.”... Yeah, you don’t really value it the same way you would if you hadn’t talked to somebody in a long time, and you call them or you get a letter from them. And like, now, you can just, now you’re so inundated with peoples’ updates and stuff that like, it’s communication but you feel almost, like, desensitized from it. Sometimes I even feel annoyed by it.

Regardless of the avenue of life or the value expressed, Millennials repeatedly returned to the role media and technology played in their everyday lives. Unlike previous generations, media and technology for Millennials were not things that they have learned to incorporate or make use of, they were the avenues by which they gather information, make sense of the world, and interact with one another.

**Expectations.** This focused code encapsulates three subcategories (axial codes) that all spoke to the expectations and assumptions that Millennials have in life. Some of these expectations Millennials clearly connected back to either direct life experiences or to the role of media in their lives. The first axial code within this broader focused code was simply that of “expectations” and included assumptions that Millennials held regarding what they would have access to in life and how they interacted with the world around them. To begin with, Millennials expressed having an expectation to have access to education, particularly higher education.

Does anyone else feel like we really believe that everyone has a right to an education now? Not just public school education, but people should have the right to go to college, or technical school, or something beyond high school if they want. Or, we kind of expect it, like everyone does now.
While higher education was of value for Millennials, there was an acknowledgement that the United States’ kindergarten through twelfth grade educational system was not as respectable in comparison to the rest of the developed world.

Well it really is, like, intriguing to me how focused we are on higher education. Like, our public school systems, like elementary are pretty bad, like in pretty bad shape. Like kids aren’t really, like, I don’t know, I just know that if you compare it to the rest of the world like, our public education system is pretty bad.

In light of this awareness regarding education, Millennials saw higher education as the means through which they can acquire status and achieve success in their lives. As one cohort member put it,

you have to have an education, you have to have a college degree. They don’t just, I mean it’s not based on experience anymore. A lot of it is how far you went in school is what determines, like, where you’re going to be, where your placement is in your jobs.

Millennials expected to have access to higher education because they felt the world expects them to be educated.

In addition to expecting education, Millennials expected to be able to ask questions, particularly to ask “why” questions. One cohort member put it simply, “We definitely want to know why. Definitely.” For Millennials, there was a desire to question, “in a critical way, more than just accepting things as they are. I don’t know how to put those two together, but it’s, I think our generation values questioning everything we come across.” At the same time, the cohort saw some differences amongst their generation and stated that while there was an overarching value of being able to ask questions, not everyone pursued this opportunity as, “It takes a lot of work to form your own opinions, and your beliefs, and your values and not everyone’s gonna want to do that.”
Finally, Millennials simply expected to have access and felt entitled to this access. One cohort member explained the generation’s position by stating, “I would wonder if we feel entitled to that [access]?” When asked to clarify what she meant by entitled, the cohort member responded, “Like, we should have it, or expect it.” Furthermore, we expect to be able to access college, and people, and, it goes over lots of different media too. That’s why, like, we’re the first generation that really likes, like, “The Real World.” I know Generation X watched it, but we have a lot more shows like that. And we have [undecipherable word] where we stalk celebrities. Like, we kind of expect to have that kind of access to everything. To knowledge, to people.

This entitlement was something the Millennials expected simply because, “I feel like we have, we have had a lot of stuff handed to us compared to other people, and like, umm, we want something and we get it more often than people in the past have.” In addition to expecting access and entitlement, speed and ease were also expected as one cohort member explained, “I feel like everything is easy to us. And everything we’ve grown up with is technology is right there, it’s really fast. And everything gets fixed really fast, if you need it to.” Whether it is education, information, or simply access to whatever they did not currently have, Millennials expected to be able to pursue and acquire what they desired with speed and ease.

The second subcategory (axial code) within the focused code of “expectations” was that of “choices.” For Millennials the availability of choices in just about everything was something they had come to expect in life. Similar to Generation X before them, they did not want to feel confined and valued the freedom that came with choices. Choices were seen by Millennials as the avenue through which they could express their own identity, and the uniqueness of that identity (see focused code of “pursuing” for further discussion on identity). A choice was not simply something a Millennials appreciates as
an add-on to life, but rather was something they expected to have available to them in all aspects of life, from clothing, to electronics, to business and religion. An example of this expectation in business and work environments was expressed by one cohort member’s statement,

I think we’re a generation that’s like, “I don’t have to listen to you just because; I don’t have to do things the way you did it just because you’re my boss or my parent or my preacher, or my teacher, professor, whatever.” That I can, I will listen to what you have to say, and maybe there’s a new way to do it that works better or works for me [I will] take it into consideration. Yeah. And I don’t think we need to be rude about it or anything, it’s just that we value or believe that there should be that choice and freedom.

Furthermore, this expectation of having choices connected to a deeper value of being “in control of their own lives,” and by having choices Millennials then felt that their lives are not being controlled by others, allowing each cohort member to “be yourself.”

For Millennials, the principle of having choices was connected to a value of “critical thinking” as they desired choices not only in what they own or what they do, but in how they thought and what they believed. As such, the value of choice not only applied to themselves, but was then also expected to be extended to those around them.

And now it seems like we’ve moved toward understanding that your belief is your belief and someone else’s belief is their belief. Just like he said, “my personal belief” or “my personal value” and not thinking that there’s one absolute… And that we tend to want to know why there’s the main belief. It’s like, “Okay, I give you that you believe that, but why? Why should I believe that?” And, I don’t know if that’s a value or a belief or a worldview, but it’s the kind of, it’s, if someone tries to change our belief or value in some way, we want to know why they’re questioning it… And not just taking things, like taking what someone says as true, but finding out for yourself.

At the same time that Millennials expect an opportunity to question and think critically about things, they also recognized that “some people are more than happy to just accept things on face value and go on with their lives” and attributed the differences within their
cohort to those who have pursued higher education and those that have not. Whether or not they personally had chosen to think critically, Millennials held deep respect for those that have thought for *themselves* and made their own choices in life. One cohort member explained this concept by stating,

> we find value in those that have gone through that process [to think critically]. And when we see somebody who has not gone through that process, as a generation, we almost write them off. You know, we think, you know, you look at the vernacular, we’ll call people like that “tools.” Umm, you know, it’s there, or we think people are, you look at politicians we’ll say, “well they’re not thinking for themselves, they’re just working for the special interests” and we completely write them off. Umm, even though they still bring value. I think that’s more what your point was, is that we find value in people who go through this process, and we hold them up as being worth listening to.

For Millennials, personal beliefs were individual constructs based on their own experiences and on the choices they have individually made about what is right or wrong for them. As one cohort member reflected, “I mean what’s right to me and what’s right to Eric might be two different things.” Additionally, when speaking to the given definition of beliefs in this study, another cohort member expressed their relativism by stating, “I don’t believe in beliefs” emphasizing the lack of absolutes they hold in approaching decisions. Everything comes back to individual choice for this generation, but a choice that is hopefully critically examined and thought through.

The final identified subcategory (axial code) within this focused code was that of “constant and immediate.” Along with expecting choices Millennials expected to have access to those choices immediately and constantly and attributed this expectation to the role of media and technology in their lives. Millennials spoke about certain things in their lives happening constantly, continuously. Some of these things included constantly receiving and filtering information, constantly communicating, constantly changing what
"we think we know," as well as beliefs that were "constantly changing because there’s such an influx of information that we’re forced to sort through all the time." In regards to constant communication with others, whether by Facebook, cell phone, or some other medium one cohort member stated,

It’s like we believe that contact is the standard. We almost rely on it to be stimulated with, even to the point that if somebody doesn’t respond to a text message in 20 minutes we think that they’re ignoring us.

This expectation of constancy also brought with it an expectation and value of "immediate gratification." Millennials want what they want, and expected to have immediate if not constant access to those desires. This concept of immediacy went beyond gratification and became the framework for how Millennials made sense of things. In particular, choices and decisions are framed through the lens of, “how is this going to affect me now?” This value of immediacy and living in the here and now went so far as to impede the way Millennials approached other values such as social justice and care for the world around them. This phenomenon was seen in one cohort member's statement that, “I very much want to influence another generation… I want to effect society but my world of here and now won’t let me do that.” The immediate, the here and now is what mattered to Millennials as their reality was perceived as constantly changing and all they felt they can know or trust was what was in their current and immediate experience.

**Pursuing.** The focused code of “pursuing” held within it four subcategories (axial codes) and spoke to that which Millennials were striving to obtain, trying to pursue. This focused code in broad description was similar to the Generation X focus code of "striving" but focused on very distinct subcategories that are unique to Millennials. The
subcategory (axial code) of “individualism and individuality (both mine and yours)” was identified out of this focused code of pursuing, and included additional concepts such as equality and self-focus. This concept of individualism was so pervasive for Millennials that it influenced the way they answered focus group questions in that they struggled to speak for the group, but repeatedly made comments such as, “I can only speak for myself,” or “that’s just how I view it” (see focused code of “generational identity” for further discussion of individualism as it relates to cohort identity).

For this generation anything that contributed to their efforts to be unique and individual was to be pursued as they attempted to make themselves “stand out” from the crowd. A self-identified theme, one cohort member summarized the generation’s view on individualism by stating that it “could be the big capital letter title of the whole generation, I think… that is the arc for everything.” Furthermore, this cohort held individualism as such a high value that “we are mortified by the fact that there are those in the world that can’t be individuals.” Millennials attributed this value of individuality to the influence of media and as a rejection of what they perceive to be their parents’ value of conformity, stating,

growing up as a kid, there were a bunch of commercials and the cartoons, in between the cartoons, the commercials that were about being yourself. I saw a mayonnaise commercial the other day that was like, well maybe it was Miracle Whip, “this mayonnaise is for you, it’s unique!” It was, “we won’t back down, we will speak out” and I was like, that’s so geared toward us!

And,

People who are in college and high school right now, really value realness and uniqueness and that’s not something that came from our parents or their parents because they valued fitting in. That you shaped yourself to be okay with society, it was much more conservative. And we’re much more, we want people to be real and honest. We value uniqueness in people.
Individualism and the pursuit of being unique were of the highest focus for Millennials and was seen as influencing every other decision they made.

In addition to pursuing their own individuality, Millennials connected individuality to values of equality and respect, as they expressed a desire for the individuality of others to also be respected. For Millennials, a value on individuality comes with a removal of hierarchy or power inequality and the implementation of respect for all, regardless of status. Respect from Millennials was not seen as something given simply on the grounds of title or position, as everyone deserves equal opportunity to be respected for who they are, not for the title they hold. One cohort member expressed the generation’s sentiment by stating,

"you get respect by showing respect. Just because you’re a teacher, professor or something that’s a higher position in a job, technically, doesn’t mean that they deserve the respect. You might show it to ‘em just to not be rude, but just ‘cuz you’re the boss, the CEO of WalMart, doesn’t mean that you can treat everyone else like crap and expect to be respected back."

Interestingly, while this sentiment of getting respect by showing respect was expressed across all Millennial focus groups their sense of entitlement also came through in that the expectation was that they must be shown respect before they would extend respect. Millennials expressed feeling entitled to being treated equally and respectfully before they would then offer the same in return.

In addition to valuing respect and equality, Millennials also included tolerance in their pursuit of individualism. Allowing others to hold differing beliefs, as part of their individuality, and being tolerant of such differences was of great importance to Millennials. Agreeing to disagree is what tolerance and respect are about for this cohort. One cohort member, when speaking of the generation’s view of tolerance, elaborated on
how their lack of absolute truth connected to this pursuit of tolerance by stating, “it seems like we’ve moved toward understanding that your belief is your belief and someone else’s belief is their belief. Just like he said, “my personal belief” or “my personal value” and not thinking that there’s one absolute.”

Millennials also identified themselves as being self-focused and placing value on “being your own person, doing what’s best for you.” Within this cohort, one of the ways in which this principle was expressed was through the pursuit of balance between work, family, and personal time. Three cohort members collaborated in expressing this idea by stating,

it’s a valuing our own time more. Like, “No, I’m not going to work on Saturday, that’s my time. Not my family time, but that’s my time.” That makes us sound horrible! We’re materialistic and selfish! But I think that’s healthy in a way. It’s like, this is my time. This is when I unwind and I do things that make me healthy and happy… We’re more balanced as a generation… Yeah, and I think that we believe that it’s important to be balanced… Maybe we aren’t [balanced] but we believe that it’s definitely something we should strive for.

Personal time, desires, and pursuits all must be weighed in the decision-making process in order to preserve individual identity and not allow others to confine or determine who this generation wants to be, or what they want to do. In the midst of these pursuits of individuality, Millennials affirmed that they have received messages of being able to be whomever or whatever they desire (see axial code “success” under focused code of “pursuing”) but see themselves as lacking instruction in reaching that which they are pursuing. One cohort member explained it by saying,

we’ve been told our whole lives that we can do anything and we believe it. But we haven’t been taught how to manage our time, or manage our goals. We haven’t been taught how to form priorities, you know, we’ve been told we can do anything we want but at that same time we’ve been told that you have to pick one thing. And we haven’t really been taught how to do that.
Although Millennials felt entitled and empowered to be their own individual and unique person, they struggled with knowing how to go about this pursuit.

The second subcategory (axial code) identified within this focused code was that of “community (and relationship to others).” While Millennials value their individuality, they also bring with them a high value on belonging and community, along with strong opinions about how interactions between people should be. Various kinds of relationships fall under this axial code including marriage and family, friendships, global interactions, as well as the trust or loyalty related to these interactions. One cohort member summarizes the generation’s perspective on pursuing community while also maintaining individualism in stating that,

I think community is a good word for it. And that’s why I was kind of like... “I can do anything” and “I’m going to make my own choices” and “I’m going to be my own person.” But at the same time that, I think at least for me and probably for a lot of other people, just wanting to be a part of something else and being able to, like identify with other people around you so that you don’t feel so alone in that individualism. And I think, that’s the community aspect, and we’ve gotten that ever since, while we were growing up: doing group projects in school, and joining clubs, and doing sports, and all these you know go out and be with other kids your age and hang out type things. And then you get to college and it’s all about creating community in your residence halls and creating, you know getting involved in things, and service learning.

For Millennials, being a part of a community was seen as another choice that they get to make. Whether it be family, friends, or work community, Millennials expressed the expectation of having the opportunity to choose who will, and will not, be a part of their micro community. One cohort member explained,

we seek out tribes of specific interests... Not just because the opportunity’s there but because there are so many specific tribes available to us where we can say “my interest is here, there’s a tribe for that” and there’s a tribe for this and there’s a tribe for this.
Who Millennials identified as their “tribe” was free to change as interests or needs to be met shifted, but nevertheless, a Millennial’s tribe was seen as a place of community involving a limited number of people within their immediate sphere of contact. One cohort member explained, “I think that we rely on smaller groups like our friends, our family, the smaller communities, we’re more small community based.” Unlike previous generations, Millennials may include people to be in their “small community” even if they are separated by thousands of miles so long as technology brings them together on a regular basis.

Expanding out from their chosen community or tribes, Millennials saw that their relationship with “family is going to ultimately kind of shape who you are, who you are developing to be as a person.” Similar to previous generations, Millennials saw family not as simply those connected through law or biology, but as those they chose to associate with as family, as those included in the small inner circle of community. Another concept related to family was that of marriage. For Millennials, values related to marriage were interwoven with their values of independence and individuality. When speaking of her generation’s view on marriage and divorce one cohort member explains, “You may hold family values, but family ties may not be so strong, you know what I’m saying? So it’s like, the first thing you want to do is protect yourself, so it’s all about independence now.” Other cohort members went on to elaborate on this sentiment stating, “It’s all about independence… It’s all about what makes you happy and then creates an almost selfish view of marriage, you know, “how can my partner make me happiest the most,” not, “how can I make my partner happy.””
While previous generations spoke of fallen heroes, Millennials spoke of choosing mentors within their community. For this cohort a mentor was simply someone that they allowed to speak into their life, both to challenge and to support, and these mentors could be of any age. Millennials made the distinction that they wanted their friends to “just be supportive,” while they wanted mentors to be “frank and honest.” One cohort member explained this distinction by giving the example that, “Like if your mom was going to be like, “Hey, this is not good, you shouldn’t do this.” You know? That’d be okay, but not from my friends.” In the pursuit of community, Millennials valued different roles from different individuals.

In their pursuit of community, Millennials also spoke of being quite fearful of rejection and this fear underlying their desire to have friends who were supportive and not so challenging, like their mentors. This fear went hand-in-hand with the lack of trust in others that this cohort repeatedly expressed. Simply stated, whether it is institutions, friends, or media, “we don’t trust.” When elaborating on who can or cannot be trusted one cohort member expressed their general distrust for anyone or anything other than themselves but stating,

Is it just the institutions though? It seems like, to some degree, you can’t even trust people. Umm, in some place, in most places you really have to trust yourself only because people will take you for granted or they’ll mistreat you or just take whatever it is you have to offer and then once that’s used up then it’s over. And so it’s almost like people can’t be trusted in some instances.

This lack of trust combined with a fear of rejection has created a generation that feels isolated, despite having more ways of connecting than ever before. One cohort member discussed this sentiment by stating, “You’re afraid. You don’t want to be judged or told, you know, that they don’t agree with it. You want the support so you’re almost afraid to
jump out there.” Others echoed these feelings in saying, “But, then there’s that same kind of fear: well maybe I don’t have a lot of backup or support; I don’t want to share my opinions with other people, they might steal them.” Furthermore, this is a generation that, despite being connected through innumerable kinds of technology, they saw themselves as “kind of lonelier, more isolated individually.” It appears that fear and individualism compete with Millennials’ desire to be in community and connection with other.

The third subcategory (axial code) identified within the focused code of “pursuing” was that of “success.” The pursuit of success, whether it be educational, professional or personal was of great importance to this generation. They have been told they “can do anything” and they brought this message into their perspective on life aspirations. With that being said, this generation also recognized that their pursuit of success did not equate with a value of hard work, rather they valued the hard work of others, but desired success without effort in their own life. One cohort member summarized the generational position by stating, “we value success more than hard work” with success being defined as “who can be the best… it’s like huge competition.” For Millennials, their pursuit of success reflected both their individualism, as they strive to outperform someone else, as well as their fears of sharing their thoughts and opinions with others as “they might steal them.” One cohort member expressed the interconnectedness of these principles by stating, “It’s like competition, success, and independence are all tied together in a way. It’s like you want to be independent but you want to compete against everybody, even your friends and your family to be the most successful.” The pursuit of success was not seen as something easy for Millennials as it ends up enveloping values of immediate gratification and individualism, along with fears
of isolation and lack of trust. As seen in the focused code of “holding two (conflicting)
truths” Millennials were left to balance seemingly contradictory desires and goals as they pursue success.

Finally, the subcategory (axial code) of “change” was identified within the focused code of “pursuing.” In many ways, connecting to Millennials’ desire for things to be constant and immediate, they also pursued change. Having been born and raised in a technological era in which a newer and better iPod or cell phone was just around the corner, remaining stagnant was not seen as an option for this cohort. Change was seen as both inevitable and desired, and simply stated, “we prefer change over stagnation.”

Millennials, on an individual level, felt this value for change as they were pursuing the acquisition of the newest, best, and most prestigious electronics, clothes, or cars, but was also seen in the way they viewed the world. In not wanting their lives to be stagnant, they expressed wanting to pursue change in the world around them and believed they could make a difference. One cohort member spoke of this belief in their ability to make changes in the world stating,

That’s something I think that our generation values more [making a difference]; we’re more enthusiastic. Not that other generations weren’t, they all had their big moments where they changed, like the Civil Rights movement, the Feminist movement. They had big movements. I see our generation as much more enthusiastic about doing things individually and on smaller scales to make a difference.

Simply stated, “I think that we all, as a generation believe that individuals can change the world and can make a big difference.” Unlike the generations before them, this generation coupled its belief in change with a hope that their efforts will make a difference. They expressed themselves as optimistic and holding tightly to “a belief in hope” that their pursuit of change would bring about what they desired and aspired to.
Holding two (conflicting) truths. Within this focused code, no additional axial codes were found as the category defined itself in the exploration of examples in which Millennials identified ways in which they lived in the tension of two separate, yet equally influential principles. For some of these concepts the tension was truly between two conflicting principles, for others the tension was between two seemingly conflicting principles that may be explained by examining a third principle held by this generational cohort. Many of the themes within this focused code have been alluded to throughout the previous focused codes but are summarized more clearly in this section.

The Millennial generation’s strong emphasis on individualism seems to hit up against other values and principles that this cohort ascribed to. As stated above, Millennials viewed themselves first as individuals but then deeply desired community; they are “teams of individuals.” Furthermore, this individualism often kept them from seeking out the community they so desired, as they feared others taking away that which made them an individual (their ideas and opinions). While their lack of trust fostered the value of individualism it hampered their pursuit of community and connection with others.

This tension between community and individualism was also seen in how one Millennial cohort member spoke of the tension between constant technological connection and feeling isolated stating, “it does change the nature of communication because it’s so constant, so abbreviated, it lacks some of the depth that, like, letter writing or like the longer phone conversation has.” Constant access to others ironically left this generation feeling more connected and yet more isolated due to technology.
This tension between community and individualism was further seen in the cohort’s desire to change the world and be involved in charity outreaches, and yet they felt unable to trust the world as they had to look out for number one. These two principles were seen in comments by cohort members stating that, “whatever can benefit you is what you want to. It’s not what can benefit other people, it’s, like, number one. You want to benefit only yourself” while at the same time they were “very charity oriented” and actively engaged in volunteer efforts related to social justice and improving the conditions of others. Another cohort member seems to make sense of this tension by explaining their reasoning for wanting to help others by stating,

this person is essentially the same as me, they just don’t have the same opportunities, they’re capable of helping themselves, if they had the resources, then we’ll be equal to or both contributing equally. So, right now both of us are deprived of the contribution that this person could make.

In this case, the seeming contradiction between looking out for yourself and wanting to be involved in caring for others was mediated by pursuing change in order to obtain equality for everyone. Again, it may be important to note that for this generational cohort their own self-admission that, “at this point in time we’re not, we haven’t had enough experiences” to fully understand and articulate their cultural identity in the way that older generations were able to, simply due to age and development.

Religion. As with the previous two cohorts, this focused code serves as its own axial code as it holds no other underlying themes but was a concept large enough in itself to be addressed in detail. As with the older generations, Millennials had very specific things to say about religion and its role in their lives. For this younger cohort, their desire to question, critically think through, and make their own choices all filtered into the way they saw the topic of religion and spirituality. Similar to the generations before them,
religion and spirituality were seen as two separate concepts with cohort members seeing religion as an institutional concept while spirituality was something personally chosen. Dissimilarly, Millennials were not as open and did not elaborate as much on this topic as previous generations.

Regardless of affiliation, everything came back to respecting personal choices for this generation, as expressed by one cohort member’s statement that, “we agree to disagree, some people might be this religion, some people might be that religion, but you still have the right to choose what religion you want to be.” Furthermore,

I can have my beliefs, I can do whatever I think makes me good, and you can do whatever you think makes you good. Live and let live kind of attitude towards religion. I don’t think we saw that a lot in past generations.

This concept of religious tolerance and respect for differing positions was interwoven into most of the discussion Millennials had regarding the topic. This desire to be respectful and tolerant of others carried over into Millennials feeling uncomfortable expressing their own personal beliefs, for fear of offending those who may disagree. One cohort member expressing this sentiment stated, “I want to be live and let live, and I just, I feel like we’ve been taught, you know, if you’re preaching, if you’re talking what you actually believe it’s almost like preaching.”

The role of critical thinking in the choice of religion or spirituality was also very important to the Millennial cohort. For this generation, they expected the opportunity to question and be informed about whatever affiliation they were ascribing themselves to. Even those cohort members who identified themselves with an organized religion expressed the importance of questioning the specific requirements, values and principles of the religion and being allowed to make decisions for themselves regarding what it
meant to have a particular religious or spiritual belief and not be “boxed in.” They explained that, “For some people it is much more kind of pick and choose your own, and make up your own beliefs about religion based on maybe many different ones or none of them at all, and you just pick and choose.”

Millennials spoke of approaching religion with a questioning eye and emphasized the importance of choosing their own way. Many of the principles dear to this generation were expressed in the way they approached religion. Whether it be their values of equality and dissolving power hierarchies, or rejecting institutional religion in order to choose for themselves, or “picking and choosing” their spiritual beliefs were seen as an expression of their own individuality. For Millennials, religion and spirituality were a theme in which the other core themes of this generation were expressed.

Comparisons Across Generations

Within an exploratory grounded theory study, it is important to not simply look at the characteristics of each group under examination, but then to also make comparisons across groups to identify similarities and differences that emerged, and develop theory that is grounded in the data. There appears to be many similarities between generational cohorts, as evidenced by focused codes of the same theme appearing in all three generations (e.g. “Religion). At the same time, it is also evident that although each generation may have the same title for a focused code, the way each generation expresses their thoughts, values, and perspective on the themes within that code can differ across cohort groups. The following section explores some of the similarities and differences found between cohort characteristics, as well as similarities and differences in their process of cultural identity development.
Expression of Cultural Identity

*Similarities.* As all three generational cohorts are members of the broader American culture, it is expected to find some overlap in how they conceptualize the influence of generational affiliation on their cultural identity. Some of the similarities centered around the topics that were important to each cohort such as discussing religion, the importance of equality and tolerance, and constructing their generational identity in view of the generations surrounding their own cohort. In regards to religion, although addressed with differing levels of detail and emphasis, each generation stressed the importance of it being a personal and informed choice. Additionally, organized religion whose leadership went unquestioned was seen as something to be challenged by every cohort under study. In speaking of generational identity, each generational cohort expressed their feelings of disappointment or discouragement with surrounding generations while emphasizing the strengths of their own. Of interest to this study is that no group was asked to compare themselves to surrounding generations but did so spontaneously within each focus group.

Themes of equality, tolerance, and “people are people” were expressed by all three cohorts. While each cohort addressed these themes, the foundation or personal connection to these themes varied for each cohort. For Baby Boomers, these concepts were addressed in light of having to fight for them or defend them within the broader culture, citing historical events such as the Civil Rights Movement. For Generation Xers the discussion focused more on living within the equality that had been won by those before them (Boomers) as well as their sense of responsibility to move forward in pursuing further equality for others, such as dissolving social class barriers. With the
Millennial generation these concepts were spoken of as expectations rather than as things to be fought for, won, or furthered as they are seen as givens for this youngest generation.

Boomers and Xers shared hope coupled with doubt regarding the potential and abilities of the Millennial generation. Each of the older cohorts identified positive attributes they saw within Millennials, but collectively saw them as lacking initiative, hard work, and discipline. Additionally, both felt that responsibility and accountability had been lost as values in the younger generation.

Similarities between Xers and Millennials are found within the Millennials focused code of “pursuing” and in the Xers axial code of “striving.” These younger two generations united in having ideals and principles that they spoke of trying to obtain, but not yet fully acquiring. For Millennials this was large enough to encapsulate a full focused code, but was less prominent within Xers as it only satisfied an axial code. Nevertheless, this sense of pursuing ideals that each generation hopes is obtainable but has not fully actualized is an apparently shared theme.

Differences. Just as there are similarities across cohorts, there appear to be some very blatant differences that set these cohorts apart from one another. While all three cohorts spoke of the influence of technology in their lives, differences were seen in how each cohort conceptualized the depth and breadth of that influence. For Boomers and Xers, technology was seen primarily as media, specifically television. Its roles in providing information, serving as a medium that brought the world to their living rooms, and bringing awareness of the shared experiences across cultures and continents was primary. For Millennials technology includes media but expands to also include any advancement that makes their lives faster, smoother, or makes access to the world more
immediate and constant. Additionally, Millennials were the only generation to repeatedly return to media as the greatest influence on other values and principles they ascribe to. For the older two generations, media is seen more as a reflection of who they already are or were, rather than the creator of who they are.

Another difference seen between the cohorts is the influence of individualism. While each cohort addressed the importance of either independence of thought or individualism, or both, the emphasis on its influence shifted across cohorts. Specifically, this shift can be seen in how each cohort framed their responses to the focus group questions. For example, Baby Boomer cohort members would state their answers as “we believe,” or “we value,” or “for us…” and in general did not hesitate to speak in the collective. This shifted some with Generation X as they would answer with “I think…” or “for me…” at the beginning of the focus group, with other cohort members saying, “me too” or offering some other form of validation (e.g. support story that validated the principle stated). The group discussion would then move to more collective comments including “we” statements instead of “I” statements for the remainder of the focus group discussion time. With the Millennial groups the value on individualism seemed nearly impossible to overcome as cohort members would hedge their verbal responses with phrases such as, “I can only speak for myself,” “that’s what I think…,” “I don’t know, I might be way off…” and even, “I do think it’s hard to classify as “society believes”…” At the same time, Millennial cohort members rarely contradicted one another and despite hedges of individualism still provided collective cohort responses. Particularly when comparing Boomers and Millennials the differences between collective and individualistic responses is quite stark.
While each cohort also spoke of community, how each generation constructed the
meaning of this word looks a little different. Contrary to the anecdotal literature, which
speaks of Boomers being more national-focused, Xers being more international, and
Millennials being global, the responses in this study seemed to support the opposite
(Howe & Strauss, 2000). For Millennials “community” involved those that directly
touched their lives, although that connection could be physically next door or connected
by a social networking site. Conversely, for Boomers in this study, “community” was
seen as the web of people connected by global events and happenings, seeing themselves
as “citizens of the planet,” who start taking responsibility in their own back yards but
expect their efforts to have a ripple effect. As you move into the younger cohorts, the
sense of interconnectedness almost appears to be too overwhelming, drawing them back
to their “sphere of influence” as the place to identify community.

Formation of Cultural Identity

One of the things that emerged out of this study was that, on their own, each
cohort addressed the question of how their generational affiliation influenced the
development of their cultural identity. This was not an original research goal of the
current study but rather was an organic process that came from the participants
themselves. Across cohorts, some common themes were found in how participants
described the influences on their cultural identity. The first influence on cultural identity
was that of parents. Each generational cohort spoke of how they originally received their
values, beliefs, and worldview from their families, particularly their parents.
Interestingly, they all then spoke of evaluating, analyzing, rejecting, accepting, or altering
the values, beliefs, and worldviews they were taught in order to make them their own. As
such, each cohort spoke of their cultural identity being a response to or rejection of the
generational culture before them. Connected to this concept was that each generation
explained their cultural identity by describing what they were not, specifically how they
were not like the generation(s) before or after them. Additionally, each cohort spoke of
how their identity came out of a desire to fix or compensate for what the previous
generations had (or had not) done. At no point during the study were participants asked to
make comparisons, but on their own, each focus group co-constructed their identity in
relationship to the generations around them.

The second influence on the process of cultural identity formation was that of
history and place in time. While participants were never asked what historical events
influenced them in their lives, each focus group came to this topic on their own.
Specifically, each group referenced points in their shared history that altered the way they
saw the world, authority, the people around them, or themselves in relationship to others.
Whether it be the Vietnam War changing the way Baby Boomers saw the American
government, or the role of television influencing Xers’ sense of equality, each generation
came back to shared historical events that altered the way they were to the way they are.

Connected to the influence of historical events is that of cultural or social shifts.
Sometimes linked to a specific event, like the integration of schools for Boomers, and
other times to broad social experiences, like launching new iPods for Millennials, each
generation spoke of their identity being formed out of their response and reaction to
cultural shifts. As the world around them changed, each generation was forced to decide
who they were in response to such changes: did they accept or reject the changes? Did
they fight for them or against them? Whether specific events or broader shifts over time,
each generation's identity was constructed in the collective response and interplay with such experiences.

Furthermore, each generation spoke differently about their position in regards to time. For example, Boomers situated themselves in a place where their identity formation started before they were even born. In order to understand who they were, they had to understand who had come before them. They were children of World War II veterans and children of parents who lived through the Depression. Who their parents and grandparents had been was the beginning of their cultural identity. For Xers, their identity started when they started. Who they are was a reaction to those who came before them, but who they were did not start with those who came before them. Finally, for Millennials, their identity has not yet started. Where Boomers and Xers spoke a lot about what had been, who they had been, etc., referencing the past to make sense of the present, Millennials spoke almost exclusively in the present tense. Who they are is here and now or what will be, not what has been.

Media also played a large role in influencing the process of each generation's cultural identity. Each cohort spoke of the role of media in their lives, again without prompting by me as the researcher. For Baby Boomers, the introduction of media, namely television, changed the world that they had known and brought the world "into people's living room." It served to homogenize the generation as everyone was now hearing and seeing the same information, music, and entertainment all across the United States. For Xers, media was a double-edged sword that, on one hand, brought information but on the other often sensationalized material for the sake of entertainment. It showed Xers families, stories, and situations in which their values of equality, tolerance, and
independence were being lived out (inspiring hope), but then also exposed them to the realities of war, political and religious scandal, and human suffering (cynicism and skepticism). To Millennials, media was combined with technology, proving to them that they were entitled to more, to better and faster, and to practically anything that would let them be unique and set apart from everyone else. Boomers and Xers spoke of remembering the days when they could trust Walter Cronkite on the evening news, but how that trust in media has dissolved over time. For Millennials, the media was never trustworthy and was always running on some channel like CNN. Interestingly, across the generations, the type of media watched or engaged with has moved from informational (a way to learn about the world) to entertainment (a way to escape the world). For Boomers, media expanded their knowledge of the world and their place in it. For Xers, media showed them who they could be, both good and bad. Finally, for Millennials, media told them who to be and what to want in life.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory looks at "how - and sometimes why - participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations" (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 130). Additionally, this approach “means being alert to conditions under which such differences and distinctions arise and are maintained” (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 131). For the current study, using a constructivist approach meant joining with participants as they collectively constructed the themes that contributed to their cultural identity as a generational cohort. As with any constructivist theory, the view of the researcher is inherent to the development of the theory and, “the theory depends on the researchers’ view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 130). Therefore, the
The theory that emerged out of this study spoke to what the values, beliefs, and worldview of each cohort were as well as how membership in a generational cohort influenced these pieces of cultural identity. While separate questions and elements to generational cultural identity, they come together in the description of what it means to describe a generation. Shaped by their place in history, shared experiences, their reactions and response to the generations around them, and the role of media in their lives, each generational cohort within the broader American culture came to be understood and defined by its own unique values, beliefs, and worldview.

Being a Baby Boomer means seeing the world divided between then and now as war, technology, and social movements transformed the society and world of your childhood to what you experience today. These literally life-changing experiences have created within the cohort a sense of camaraderie and unity, as they have fought collectively for change in the pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice across their lifespan. Being a Baby Boomer also means holding to a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility for your own success in life. This sense of responsibility cuts across all relationships and aspects of Baby Boomer life and undergirds the expression and ownership of other cohort values. In contrast to the following generations, Baby Boomers have a deeper sense of patriotism that includes a responsibility to protest and speak out against the governmental decisions that violate other values and principles this cohort holds dear. A proactive, engaged, and passionate generation, Baby Boomers bring with them a collective power and voice as they seek to make change in the world around them.
For Baby Boomers, the world is an ever-expanding place with media and technology enabling the far corners of the earth to come into their living rooms. For this generational cohort community includes everyone from next-door neighbors to someone they have never met who lives on the other side of the globe, as they identify themselves as “citizens of the planet.” Additionally, this sense of global community also includes the people who come after them, and therefore brings to this cohort a deep sense of environmental responsibility in order to take care of the future and not just the present.

Known for their rebellion and rejection of the established authorities, whether they be religious, governmental, or a part of another institution, this cohort does not see their protests or questions as a rejection of their broader culture or authority. Instead, they construct their own identity as a responsibility to help make those institutions better by fighting for individual equality, freedom, and justice. This approach reaches from global and national efforts on a macro level, down to family structure and gender roles on a micro level. Returning to some of the traditional values and principles they questioned in their youth, aging Baby Boomers maintain their cultural value of proactively and intentionally going about life, allowing for change, and yet still fulfilling the sense of responsibility they hold.

Being a Generation Xer means having a deep independence streak, and yet seeking to be individuals together, as independence does not equate with isolation. Xers see having choices, independence, and being unconfined as gifts or freedoms that undergird the way they approach every aspect of life. This cohort is acutely aware that these freedoms are theirs because the generations that came before them fought to obtain them, and carry a sense of responsibility to live out those freedoms and not take them for
granted. A fiercely independent generation, Xers are often mistakenly conceptualized as apathetic or uninvolved, when in fact they conceptualize themselves as being quietly altruistic and loyal to the causes they choose to connect themselves with. Bringing with them the mentality that whatever one pursues must be pursued fully means this generational cohort is selective and yet committed to their endeavors.

To Generation Xers the world is a very interconnected place in which decisions on a micro level can and do impact things on a macro level. What would otherwise feel like a very overwhelming endeavor is made tangible to Xers as they think of making changes in the world by first affecting their “sphere of influence.” Where Boomers brought with them a vision and passion for changing large-scale injustices, Xers conceptualize their role in the world as a responsibility to bring those large-scale changes to a micro level where individuals see and feel the impact in their own life.

While Xer independence rings as a hallmark trait of this cohort, skepticism and cynicism are also defining features of this generation. Pointing back to fallen leaders or heroes who proved untrustworthy, Xers carry with them a belief that they can only trust themselves as everyone else will eventually disappoint you and fall from whatever pedestal they have been placed upon. Xers hold this skepticism regarding the trustworthiness of the world and authority in tension with a hope that positive change will happen, that equality will be experienced, and that somehow they will have a positive impact on their sphere of influence.

While Boomers spoke of what they had accomplished and fought for as a cohort, Xers speak of what they are striving to obtain and accomplish. This sense of being in process and incomplete is seen throughout the theme of striving that this generation
repeatedly returned too. Despite feeling skeptical, cynical, and jaded Xers, more than Boomers or Millennials, spoke of a deep desire to be happy. For this cohort the pursuit of happiness is the trump card in life and underlies the rest of the things Xers are striving to obtain, whether it be success, education, or personal growth. Whether in pursuit of their own happiness or supporting others as they pursue happiness, Xers desire to see this value infused into life.

Being a Millennials means being in pursuit of that which makes you an individual, unique and different from anyone else. This cohort cites the role of media and technology in their lives in furthering this pursuit as they have received messages regarding the importance of their individuality since infancy. This value of individuality brings with it a value of tolerance and equality as *everyone* is seen as having this same right to be their own person, meaning no one is to be seen as better than anyone else and all are on the same level. Thus, hierarchical authority is something is generation avidly rejects as everyone’s voice and opinion should hold equal weight and importance.

While all three generational cohorts speak of striving or pursuing things in their lives, Millennials are the only cohort that speaks of expecting certain things in life. Millennials consider certain aspects of life to be a given or assumption, such as the opportunity to pursue higher education and the immediate and constant access to friends, family, and information. They see themselves as “entitled” to having easy and fast access to whatever they choose, and entitled to have options, having a say in their own life direction. Although they expect to have choices and be unlimited in what they can obtain, they also acknowledge that they feel unequipped to do or become that which they desire as “everything’s handed to us.” As this generational cohort moves further into adulthood,
the tension between their optimism and their actual resources will be something to explore further.

Millennials see themselves as not fully developed in their cultural or cohort identity as they do not feel that they have had sufficient life experiences yet to define their outlook on themselves or the world around them. The theme of “holding two (conflicting) truths” demonstrates some of the current tensions and lack of definition that this cohort expresses in their conceptualization of their identity. Drawing the comparisons themselves, Millennials see their cohort as delaying adulthood by remaining under the care and provision of their parents longer than previous generations may have. A generation still to be defined and developed, it is evident that the basic assumptions and perspectives on the world are different for Millennials than for Boomers or Xers, but how exactly they will take shape is yet to be fully realized as some Millennial members are still young enough to be in elementary school.

Regardless of generational cohort, certain characteristics were present, uniting the generational subcultures to the larger American culture. Themes such as independence of thought and thinking for oneself underlie each cohort in this study. How this value is expressed or pursued takes different shape depending on the generation, but nowhere is conformity or simply doing what has always been done seen as something to be pursued. Furthermore, the concept of religion was a unifying theme across generations. Regardless of cohort, the importance of making an informed and personal decision about religious beliefs was of value. The level of significance that religion or spirituality played in personal and daily life did vary across cohorts with Boomers and Xers addressing the purpose and meaning of spirituality in their lives, while Millennials expressed some
uncertainty as to its placement in their identity while still affirming the need for it to be a personal decision.

Another element of the theory that emerged from the data was that membership in a generational cohort served to influence the development of values, beliefs, and worldview, contributing to a unique cultural identity for its members. Specifically, each cohort’s place in time or history, including shared events and experiences influenced how the cohort saw themselves and the world around them. Additionally, it was seen that generational cultural identity formed in part out of a response or reaction to the generations around the cohort. For example, Boomer identity was shaped in part as a reaction against the way their parents had done life, politics, and religion. While a generation initially is exposed to the values, beliefs, and worldviews of their parents, who a generation becomes rests in their acceptance, rejection, or correction of these concepts.

Finally, the role of media serves as an influencer in the development of generational cultural identity. Specifically the amount, type, and trustworthiness of the media serves to inform a generational cohort’s sense of self. Whether a reflection of generational culture or a definer of generational culture, the role of media in American generational cultural identity cannot be dismissed.

The grounded theory that emerged from the data in this study speaks to the specific values, beliefs and worldview of each generational cohort, as well as to how membership in a generational cohort influenced the development of these constructs. Generational identity is to be understood both by its unique characteristics, but also by how it came to be.
Conclusion

As with any exploratory study, further research may be done to clarify or challenge the identified similarities and differences found within this study. What is evident is the evolving nature of American culture as it transitions from one generational cohort to the next. Key themes and principles remain, regardless of cohort, such as equality, tolerance, and freedom while other concepts emerge and shape themselves differently across the generations. Interestingly, when each cohort was asked directly if they felt their generation was a separate culture, if they would construct their values, beliefs and worldview differently from the other two cohorts the majority of participants answered "yes." The greatest exception was within the Baby Boomer group who felt that their values and beliefs could be seen within each of the following generational cohorts, but felt that their generational cohort was a separate culture from that of their parents’ generation (the Silents).
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The current study explored the ways in which members of three separate generational cohorts expressed their cultural identity as well as how membership in a generational cohort influenced their cultural identity. Through data analysis, it was discovered that although some similar themes emerged across the generations, unique elements of cultural identity within these themes were found for each cohort. In light of the results of this study, it is proposed that a theory of generational culture be developed and further researched. The following section briefly summarizes the key findings and describes the emergent grounded theory, the limitations of the study, the place of this study in relationship to current generational literature, and the recommendations to the field of counseling in light of the results of this study.

**Key Findings and Emergent Grounded Theory**

Two research questions were explored during this study, focusing on how generational cohort co-construct their cultural identity, as well as how membership in that cohort influences the development of their values, beliefs, and worldviews. The analysis of this study found that each generational cohort expressed their cultural identity in ways that were unique to them. This distinctive identity was shaped by the cohort’s place in history, their experiences with shared social events, their reactions to the generations that came before and after them, as well as by the role and influence of media in their lives.

**Relationship to Current Generational Literature**

To date, much of the literature addressing generational identity or characteristics is anecdotal with only a small handful of studies beginning empirical exploration of these concepts. The current study provides empirical insight into how generational cohorts
construct their own identity. These insights should inform the practice of multicultural counseling, adding to the counseling field’s understanding of cultural characteristics of generational cohorts.

One noted insight from the current study that differed from anecdotal literature was found in how each cohort conceptualized the world and community in which they lived. It has been said that Millennials have a global view of the world, thinking and acting on the macro level, while Boomers are nationalistic and only concerned with that which directly influences the United States (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Based on the responses of the participants in this study, this assertion is not supported. Instead, it was seen that Boomers view their life as globally connected and take deep interest in the macro-level of community. In contrast, while Millennials may have more exposure to the world through technology, they see community as those with whom they have specific and personal contact. Boomers spoke of themselves as “citizens of the world” while Millennials defined their identity based on the “tribes” they chose to be affiliated with.

Another insight brought by this study was a view of Xers as not simply being angry, cynical and detached in life. Instead, the Generation Xer participants of this study identified themselves as being cynical, yes, but also as hopeful for change and passionately involved in specific causes or relationships of their choice. An intentional and determined generation, they have chosen to express their identity on micro levels rather than the macro levels that the Baby Boomers pursue. This, while adding to the depth of Generation X’s identity, also supports the view of Xers being loyal or committed to individuals rather than groups (Hammill, 2005).
Another interesting insight across cohorts in this study was how the generations positioned themselves in time and in relationship to one another. Baby Boomers regularly spoke of themselves in light of the past, specifically in light of who their parents had been (WWII veterans, Depression era survivors, etc.) and in terms of the historic events that shaped them. In contrast, Generation Xers spoke of themselves in regards to the present and the future. For Xers, their sense of self and the world begins when they begin and extends forward, where Boomers sense of self began before their birth and extended forward. Finally, Millennials spoke almost exclusively in the present. Little, if any, was said regarding the past, including their own childhoods, and little was said regarding the future. The present moment of experience was how Millennials made sense of who they are. It would be of interest to explore this phenomenon further, as well as its implications on other aspects of cohort identity.

The current study supports the literature, both anecdotal and empirical, that identifies generations as different from one another, as well as the literature that indicates shared history is a part of what defines a generation (Arsenault, 2004; Dries et al., 2008). Specifically, the results of this study echo the findings of Arsenault (2004) which conclude that generational affiliation is equally as important to one’s understanding of diversity “as race, religion, and gender are” (p. 137).

In contrast with the current generational literature, this study did not find the cohorts to be as starkly different as some have proposed (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Instead, the cohorts share some common themes (equality, tolerance, media, etc.) but express them or experience them differently. Specifically, this study provides some challenge to the literature that defines the Millennial generation so concretely and
definitively (Howe, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000), and instead suggests that a developed sense of identity for the Millennial generation is yet to be formed. As with any construct of culture, generational cultural identity must be understood as a fluid concept that is constantly being influenced by the broader society in which it is found, being constructed by its members on a continual basis.

**Implications of Counseling and Counselor Education**

Potential benefits of this study to counselors and counselors in training is the insight gained regarding the values, beliefs, expectations, and needs of members of each generational cohort. Additionally, the information allows for counselors of each generational cohort to bring into the therapeutic relationship a greater understanding of their own generation’s cultural identity as well as greater understanding of the underlying principles and values that influence their client’s generational cultural identity. As with any other multicultural counseling situation, being aware of one’s own culture allows a counselor to better identify the similarities and differences between themselves and their clients, and hopefully then work out of a place of multicultural competence. For example, understanding how each generational cohort views power and hierarchy may be seen in the counseling relationship, potentially influencing the trust level felt between counselor and counselee, particularly if counselor and counselee are from different cohorts.

A specific example of how generational affiliation may play out in the counselor education setting can be seen in the following scenario. A Baby Boomer counselor educator is working with a Millennial counselor-in-training (CIT) in a counseling skills and techniques class. The CIT is constantly asking the educator “why?” and insisting on being able to use other skills that “are more me.” For a Baby Boomer, this may be seen
and felt as incredibly disrespectful, but to the Millennial they are living out their value of questioning (in order to understand) and individualism (in order to be unique). As with other cross-cultural work, it is important to be respectful and understanding of where someone from another culture is coming from. In this case that does not mean that the CIT must be given free reign to use whatever techniques enable them to feel “unique,” but it may mean that the educator will need to adapt their teaching style and class management techniques. Specifically, it may be helpful to plan to allow for class time to address the “why” questions, and to have research-backed, professionally grounded reasons for the requirements placed on students. As such, the requirements and standards of the counseling profession are not compromised but at the same time the CIT is enabled to feel engaged and grounded in the “why” of the instruction.

In a clinical setting, this generational culture may also be seen between colleagues and between counselor and client. Take for example a Baby Boomer and a Gen Xer working for the same agency. While both generational cultures value hard work, their expression of what hard work means may look different. For the Xer that hard work may come in a more autonomous or independent form of, “Tell me what I need to do and let me do it my way.” In addition to not always seeming like a “team player” because they want to be independent, they will also not be very likely to volunteer for overtime, weekend calls, etc., unless they feel it enables them to live out some other value at the same time (giving back, doing meaningful work, etc.). They will likely work the schedule they agreed to upon hire, see the clients they are supposed to see, and then be out the door once their time is done. Furthermore, if an Xer feels like their work is no longer meaningful, too bogged down by bureaucracy, or taking too much out of their personal
lives they will likely leave to find a position that will meet these needs. In contrast, your Boomer clinician is likely to show up for every staff meeting, work an extra on-call shift or stay late from time to time in order to live out their values of hard work, dedication, and responsibility. Both clinicians may equally value their work, respect their colleagues and clients, and desire to work hard, but how they express these values and how they balance them with the other parts of their identity may vary.

In order to effectively execute the American Counseling Association’s call to practice from multiculturally competent counseling, counselors and counselor educators should consider both the implications and the application of the findings from this study. It is recommended that generational cohort culture be introduced in multicultural counseling courses as part of the multicultural curriculum for counselors in training. An understanding of both the generational culture that one is from, as well as the generational culture of those that will likely be encountered in clinical practice could prove imperative to competent multicultural counseling practices. As with other multicultural studies, it is important that counselors and counselors-in-training develop a self-awareness of their own values, beliefs, and worldview, as well as an understanding of where those principles have come from. In regards to generational cohort, this includes the exploration of significant historical events that shaped each cohort and the broader, often more subtle messages received and shared among cohort members.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that no one lens of culture (race, socioeconomic status, gender, generational affiliation, etc.) fully encapsulates or explains who an individual is. Instead, it is imperative that counselors approach the concept of culture as a multifaceted construct that can be partially understood through a variety of
angles. Where much of the multicultural counseling literature has chosen to examine only one lens of culture at a time, it is this researcher’s suggestion that future studies and counselor education training include a multi-culture approach to multicultural counseling. As such, multicultural counseling courses and counselor training would introduce students to a variety of cultural lenses, enabling students to develop a multicultural competency that incorporates knowledge about diverse ways of looking at culture, in order to more fully understand the lens through which their client understands the world. A specific example of a multi-culture lens would be to explore the relationship of socioeconomic status, race, and generational affiliation on cultural identity, rather than simply looking at one of these constructs at a time.

Specific to generational culture, multicultural counseling courses and continuing education opportunities need to help counselors and counselors-in-training explore the subtle differences in the way each generation understands concepts like “family,” “authority,” “freedom,” and other major themes found in this study as each cohort expressed strong opinions and views regarding these concepts, but also spoke of them with subtle but significant differences. While each generation shares a common language and focus on similar words, the semantics of those words can differ across cohorts and a multiculturally competent counselor must strive to understand the meaning their client ascribes to these concepts based on their generational affiliation.

While future research is still needed, it is suspected that theoretical orientation of counselors and counselors in training may be influenced by their generational cultural values and worldview. Based on the characteristics that emerged in this study, it is hypothesized that Baby Boomers may be drawn to more of a cognitive-behavioral
approach to therapy, as well as Choice Theory. Both of these theoretical approaches
would be in keeping with Boomer’s values of autonomy and freedom, allowing them to
engage in the therapeutic process in ways that are in keeping with their framework of life.
Given the Generation Xers’ rejection of confinement and desire for autonomy, a non-
directive or Person-Centered approach may be most suitable for this cohort. Additionally,
an Existential perspective may also be in keeping with Xers’ sense of isolation and desire
to find meaning in life. Drawing on their expectations of having control and choice in
their own lives, Millennials may respond well to Choice Theory approaches and
interventions in the therapeutic process. Whether it is counselors choosing interventions
that are in line with their client’s generational values or a counselor educator working
with a counselor-in-training of a different generation cohort, it is important to keep in
mind the ways in which generational affiliation may influence theoretical orientation and
approach to change.

Incorporating generational culture into multiculturally competent counseling
practices and training is a necessary next step given the unique characteristics found
within Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. While all are a part of the larger
American culture, they hold their own unique values, beliefs, and worldview and it is
important that counselors and counselor educators bring with them both an understanding
and a respect for the cultural differences between these generational cohorts. Given the
findings of this study, it is proposed that multiculturally competent counseling be
expanded to include generational culture and that educational steps be taken to train
counselors and counselor educators in the characteristics of each generational cohort.
Limitations

While many benefits and insights were gained through this study, limitations exist due to the use of focus groups, limited geographic location, and varying ages of cohort members. The first set of limitations discussed address those directly related to the study's design. As with any focus group, limitations exist such as the possibility for conformance as responses become collective rather than identified by individual experience or perspective. In this study, focus groups were chosen because of this limitation as the concept under study was about the co-constructed perspective, rather than the individual lens. While triangulation and member checks were used in analyzing in order to mediate researcher bias as much as possible, the data interpretation is always influenced by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006), and therefore “different researchers may come up with similar ideas, although how they render them theoretically may differ” (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 130).

In regards to limitations not related to the study design, one limitation is the developmental variance between generational cohorts. While not practical for the purposes of this study, the fact that each cohort was at a different stage of life at the time of study does create limitations. Specifically, with the Millennials in the study being only age 18-27, most of whom were still working on their undergraduate education, unmarried, and without children the diversity of life experiences and simply life development is restricted. In comparison, the Baby Boomers who were between 45-63 years of age and had had the opportunity for a variety of life circumstances that, simply due to time, the Millennials could not have experienced (e.g. becoming grandparents, deciding to retire, etc.). As expressed by the Millennials themselves, their age limits their
sense of self-awareness and understanding as a cohort and more time is needed for them to fully develop their identity.

Additionally, the fact that the study took place on the campus of a university in the mid-south limits the diversity of participants. While a snowball technique was employed to recruit participants, most had university connections and therefore may not have represented well those in the larger community who were less formally educated. Furthermore, conducting all focus groups in the same geographic location potentially limits the understanding of this phenomenon across the United States. With that limitation being stated, nearly one-third of cohort members in the Baby Boomer and Generation X groups had been raised in another region of the United States and were not from the mid-south.

A further limitation of the study was the lack of male and minority population representation. Particularly for the Generation X group, the lack of male participants potentially impacted the collective perspective on generational culture. This may also be true for the Baby Boomers, although gender representation was a little less skewed for the eldest cohort. The Millennial cohort was more evenly represented across genders, and race, but still had a disproportionate representation of Caucasian participants. The lack of racial minority participants across all cohorts is a potential limitation of this study as race is factor in cultural identity that could not be accounted for in this study due to participant demographics.

**Future Research**

The current study provides a framework for understanding the cultural identity of three generational cohorts. As with any study of culture, the results must be understood as
generalizations, with the understanding that exceptions to these generalizations will exist. With that being said, in keeping with the American Counseling Association’s directive that counselors be multiculturally competent, further study regarding the unique characteristics and needs of each generational cohort’s culture needs to be conducted. As an exploratory study, more research is needed in order to expand the depth and breadth of understanding regarding each cohort. It is recommended that each generation be studied individually as its own culture. While it has been interesting and informative to study the generations through a constant comparison method, the amount of information uncovered is so vast, and each generation so rich and unique in its own right, that concentrated studies regarding each cohort may provide even greater depth and insight into the generational culture.

It is also recommended that future research on culture include a multi-cultural lens in which various approaches to culture are studied together. Rather than just studying race, or gender, or socioeconomic status, or generational affiliation, it is recommended to study these constructs in relationship to one another. An example would be exploring how African American females in the Millennial generation construct their cultural identity. This recommendation is rooted in the understanding of culture being a broad and often complicated construct that cannot be defined simply by one category alone. Instead, future research should take into consideration the multiple spheres or systems in which clients live in order to more fully and more holistically understand their cultural framework and identity.

Some further considerations for future research include expanding the geographical region of the study to include representation of all regions of the broader
American culture. Additional methods of study should also be used in order to clarify and expound upon the themes found in this study. Specifically, developing a generational cohort cultural identity model and/or scale would eventually be beneficial to counselors, much as racial identity models used today.

**Researcher Relationship to the Data**

I, as the researcher, found this process fascinating and deeply enjoyed the focus group discussions with all three generational cohorts. As an Xer, on the cusp of being a Millennial, I started this journey wondering where I would actually fit. Despite being close to the cut-off I found that I was most at home in the culture of the Xers and identifying themes for this cohort felt like second-nature. At the same time, I also found myself relating to much of what the Boomers held as values and beliefs, just without the historical or situational context. Finding themes for Millennials was the most difficult as they themselves are yet so undefined. Based on the anecdotal literature that describes Millennials so definitively and as having such strong traits (Howe & Strauss, 2000) I expected themes to explode off the page. This was not the case, and as such the focused code of “holding two (conflicting) truths) emerged to help make sense of the undefined tensions that Millennials expressed.

One of the interesting elements that I reflected upon at the end of the study was that I did not include racial information on the demographic sheet provided to participants. Upon further reflection, and in light of the scope of the study, parceling out other components of culture (such as race) would have taken on an entirely different lens to this topic. Instead, the goal was to explore generational culture in the United States as broadly as possible, with ideas for further research to explore the similarities and
differences within generational cohorts specific to racial or ethnic culture (i.e. African American Millennials). Additionally, my identity as a Xer (almost Millennial) could also have unknowingly influenced this omission as other topics of social justice (i.e. gender) have been given greater emphasis in my educational and personal development.

An Xer with Boomer parents and Millennial siblings, I find this topic of generational culture interesting and informative as to understand one small element of how someone makes sense of themselves and the world around them. While I am not defined solely by my generational culture, through this study I have come to believe that it definitely is a piece that strongly influences who I am.

**Summative Remarks**

The current study sought to explore the cultural identity of three generations. From the wealth of data collected through the use of focus groups, a theory emerged. Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials can be seen as separate cultures within the broader American culture, as seen through their distinct and unique values, beliefs, and worldviews. Shared historical events and social experiences serve to shape the development of values, beliefs and worldviews of a generational cohort, unique from those around it. Additionally, the placement of each cohort in relationship to the others also serves as an influence on their generational cultural identity as they define themselves in comparison to those who came before or after them. While the cohorts shared some common titles to their themes, the expression of these themes and the motivation behind them was unique to each cohort. In light of these results, it is hopeful that counselors, counselor educators, and counselors in training, begin to incorporate
information about generational culture into their studies and practice as multiculturally competent practitioners.
REFERENCES


Twenge, J. M., Konrath, S., Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Bushman, B. J. (2008a). Egos inflating over time: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality, 76*, 875-901.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation

Talking about your generation!

Greetings,

You are cordially invited to participate in a focus group discussion exploring your perspective on what impact, if any, your generation has on your values, beliefs, and worldview.

Individuals are needed who:

• were born between 1946-1964 to be a part of a Baby Boomer generation focus group,

• were born between 1965-1981 to be a part of a Generation X focus group,

• were born after 1981 to be a part of a Millennial generation focus group.

90 minute focus groups will be held at various times throughout the Fall 2009 semester in room 142 of the Graduate Education Building on the University of Arkansas campus. Most groups are held on Tuesday evenings, Thursday afternoons, and Fridays.

Contact Betsy Nesbit (enesbit@uark.edu or 803-984-3368) for more information or to sign up for your generation's focus group.

Please forward this to any and all who you think may be interested in joining this discussion.
Talking about your generation!

A dissertation study exploring culture as it relates to generational affiliation.

Come share your perspective on what impact, if any, your generation has on your values, beliefs, and view of life in general.

Are you a Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964)?

Are you a Generation X'er (born 1965-1980)?

Are you a Millennial (born after 1981)?

...then this discussion is for you!

When: throughout the semester
How long: 90 minutes
Where: Room 142 of the Graduate Education Building - University of Arkansas campus
Contact: Betsy Nesbit (enesbit@uark.edu) with any questions or to sign up for your generation-appropriate group.
APPENDIX C

Key Terms

- Culture:

  membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are cocreated with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors

  (ACA, 2005, p. 20)

- Generation:

  an identifiable group (cohorts) that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (times)

  (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66)

- Worldview

  how a person perceives his/her relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people, things, etc.)... Not only are world views composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts, but also they may affect how we think, make decisions, behave, and define events. (Sue, 1981, p. 17)
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

This study seeks to explore how members of three generations construct their cultural identity, specifically through the construction of their values, beliefs, and worldview. By signing this form, you agree to participate in the focus group(s) related to this study and to let your participation be audio and/or video recorded. The information gathered from focus groups will help the researcher better understand the possible role that generational membership plays in constructing cultural identity.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. All audio and video tapes will be destroyed after they have been analyzed. All personal information will be kept confidential.

I have read and understand the informed consent. _______ (Initial)

I agree to participate in the study. _______ (Initial)

I agree to be audio and/or videotaped. _______ (Initial)

Any questions may be directed to the researcher (Elisabeth Nesbit: enesbit@uark.edu, 479-575-2982) or to the researcher's advisor (Dr. Roy Farley: rfarley@uark.edu)

______________________________    _________________
Signature                      Date
First Name: ____________________

Age: ________  Birth Year: ________  Gender: ________

Birth Years of Parent/Guardian(s) Who Raised You: ________ & ________

Siblings’ Birth Years (if applicable): _______________________________________

Children’s Birth Years (if applicable): _______________________________________

Level of Education: (please check one)

   _____ Did not complete high school  _____ College Graduate

   _____ High school graduate/GED  _____ Graduate Degree(s)

   _____ Some College  _____ Other

Relationship Status: (please check one)

   _____ Single (not married or partnered)  _____ Partnered (in a relationship but not living together)

   _____ Cohabiting  _____ Partner’s birth year

   _____ Divorced  _____ Married  _____ Spouse’s birth year

   _____ Partner’s birth year  _____ Widowed

   _____ Other
APPENDIX F

Interview Guide

Question 1:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced your values?

Question 2:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced the development of your beliefs?

Question 3:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 impacted your worldview?
APPENDIX G

Follow-Up Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in today's focus group discussing generations and cultural identity. Sometimes, after a discussion like this, participants will leave the group with either ideas left unsaid or with ideas that come to mind after they go about their day. Any ideas, thoughts, or conclusions you may find yourself having now that the focus group is complete is still information that I consider valuable and important. Please do not hesitate to take the time to jot down some of your thoughts and send them my way, either by email (enesbit@uark.edu) or by US postal service (Elisabeth Nesbit; 121 Graduate Education Building; University of Arkansas; Fayetteville, AR 72701).

Key Questions from the focus group:

Question 1:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced your values?

Question 2:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 influenced the development of your beliefs?

Question 3:

- In what ways, if any, has being born between 1946-1964/1965-1981/since 1982 impacted your worldview?