

Unscathed: The Millennial Generation and the Pivotal Decade that Shaped It

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Unscathed:

The Millennial Generation and the Pivotal Decade that Shaped It

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May 2011
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Susan Michalczyk for guiding me throughout my time at Boston College. Her passion for her students is unrivaled, and her commitment to her values is inspiring.

Thank you to my mother, Duyen Vu, for your support and for understanding how time-consuming this project has been.

Dr. Donald Fishman, thank you for being my thesis advisor and helping me throughout this process. From the very beginning when I had almost no clue what I wanted to do, I appreciate the guidance you gave me about this whole process.

Thank you to the Presidential Scholars Program for giving me everything I needed to succeed at BC and beyond. Dr. Dennis Sardella, thanks for your help since senior year of high school. Jennie Thomas, thanks for your support in all areas – it shows that you really care about the PScholars. Fr. James Keenan, thanks for all the passion you have shown for the Program and for issues on campus and worldwide.

Thank you to everyone in the communication department – I will take everything I have learned and apply it to the real world.

Thank you to the one hundred people who took my survey and the people who agreed to expand on their thoughts. Without you, this thesis would not have happened. From the responses and interviews, I found our generation both thoughtful and inspiring. Our generation will be known for holding onto ideals even while facing devastating circumstances. That takes courage.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The idea that a large number of people have similar traits based purely on when they were born may seem a bit fantastical—some even totally dismiss the existence of generational trends. But sharing the same experiences does help bring a mutual understanding of the world and shape how people interact within society, and many have worked to unearth the mysteries behind how generations form.

The generation after Generation X has been given multiple names—“Millennials,” “Generation Y,” “Generation Me,” the “iGeneration,” just to name a few. This is indicative of the fact that people are still unsure of what defines this generation, especially since it is still maturing into its roles in the world. The only thing many experts on this subject agree upon is that this generation was approximately born from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s, and its total effect on the world remains to be seen.

Some have faith that this is one of the best generations there has ever been and will become a pillar of society, helping to steer the generations to come in a good direction. Others say this generation is narcissistic, self-centered, and not loyal professionally.

This thesis will call them “Millennials” because without a doubt, the new millennium has had an effect on growing up and developing an identity around this time. Current events play a major role in shaping a generation, and the Millennial Decade—2000 to 2009—was the first decade people could witness how this generation would function as adults in society. Some consider the high school

graduation class of 2000 as the first of the new generation, so this decade was also when the Millennial Generation could start making an impact.

Of course, the Millennial Decade looks horrible in review—some have deemed it the “Awful Aughts.” So one of the many questions will be how this decade has shaped this young generation. One of the memories this generation will forever hold as part of their growing up is September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into the World Trade Center buildings. How does an event so grave affect young people growing up, especially if it is engrained into the memory and conscience of society?

With the presidential election in 2008, young people helped elect Barack Obama by grassroots campaigning and turning out to vote. Perhaps this will be considered the first time the world witnessed the Millennial Generation’s effect and its ideals. But how does this accomplishment affect future characteristics of this generation?

The Good, the Bad, and the Cruel

Everyone seems to want to be a critic when it comes to analyzing the Millennial Generation. Those who are positive about this generation are overwhelmingly so, citing their helicopter parents and need for overachieving. But others are not so ready to give this generation such praise.

Neil Howe, William Strauss, and R.J. Matson stated in their book *Millennials Rising* that Millennials will be one of the generations that will direct the path of where our society will be moving. Eric Greenberg and Karl Weber mention how

they see this generation as being other-centered in their book *Generation We*. They write about traits such as teamwork and an emphasis on the common good.

But author Mark Bauerlein has gone as far in the opposite direction as titling his book "The Dumbest Generation." He states that this generation is obsessed with itself and media produced by its own, which makes this generation shallow in its understanding of the world: "Young Americans today are no more learned or skillful than their predecessors, no more knowledgeable, fluent, up-to-date, or inquisitive, except in the materials of youth culture" (Bauerlein, 9).

In her book *Generation Me*, Jean Twenge also writes about the same idea. An obsession with the self makes this generation unconcerned with accomplishments of past generations and allows this generation to feel entitled.

Many books recently published are about understanding this generation in the workplace, as they have only joined the workforce within the Millennial Decade. In *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*, Ron Alsup stated that this generation does not believe in a hierarchy based on seniority but rather merit. This idea, understandably, can make older generations resent the presence of Millennials in their workplaces.

However, if there can be an understanding of how Millennials see society, then maybe there would not be such fear of this generation. Clearly, this topic is still up for debate as the Millennials are relatively young. But there are already people who have lined up on either side of the issue.

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to further understand the Millennial Generation and how it sees the world, through finding out what events they deemed the most important in the decade and why. This thesis will also analyze how others view this generation, and then compare those descriptions to how this generation views itself. This will help bring the Millennial Generation's views of itself into the picture, and possibly, this will show where there is common ground and where there are conflicting opinions.

What will occur is not only a check on what others have written about this generation, but also a way to see if assumptions made by older generations are accurate and if Millennials can see their own strengths and faults. Millennials will then offer their thoughts on what they view their generation's role is in the world with regard to the other generations and their goals for the future.

Another purpose, however, is to see if there are any events that have defined this generation or has ended one and started another, particularly during the Millennial Decade. The reason why this may be the case is that the early Millennials grew up in times of prosperity for the United States. The economy was booming and America as the leader of the world was a given. David Brooks described the perfect environment in which the first Millennials grew up: "There have been no senseless bloodbaths like World War I and Vietnam, no crushing economic depressions, no cycles of assassination and rioting to foment disillusionment" (Brooks, 49).

Fast-forward to today, and it is clear that this is no longer the case for the last of the Millennials, including the Iraq War and the economic recession people are still

trying to fix. Within the past few years, there has been a dramatic shift in our understanding of the United States' role in the world. With China, India, and Brazil growing rapidly, America no longer has the same influence. The US dollar has weakened. Our educational system's superiority is now up for debate. And the recent recession and high unemployment has exposed how our country's self-confidence is often bravado.

The last of the Millennial Generation is most likely in an uncertain place. They carry the same work ethic and drive that older Millennials had. But the world—in the eyes of Americans—is much more uncertain now. This ambiguity will without a doubt play a role in defining this generation and the generations after.

Methodology/Data Base

This thesis will survey 100 random current American college students from across the United States. It was limited to this group of Millennials because they have been immersed in the Millennial Decade by growing up during those years, but they also have not gone into the “real world,” which may alter their views.

The survey, which also includes basic demographics questions, has two main questions: 1) “What were the five biggest events that occurred from 2000 to 2009 to you? This can be anything, including new products or technology or people rising to power, etc. Please rank from most influential to least.” and, 2) “What do you think defines our generation? This can be anything, including trends, personalities, achievements, goals, etc.”

Then a select group of respondents will be interviewed to further explain the positions they took on the survey. Their narratives and goals will be the final part of the thesis. Those selected for interviews will be based on representation of the whole data set and answers that stand out from the pool of responses.

Secondary sources will be books written about the Millennial Generation and will be used to compare and contrast what other generations think about this generation to what they think about themselves. These will range from books about this generation in general to books about how to manage Millennials in the workplace.

Time magazine covers from 2000 to 2009 will also be consulted, showing what *Time* believes are the most important events of that decade to compare to the answers given by the 100 respondents.

The top five events as determined by the survey of the Millennial Decade will be examined through the eyes of Millennials. Then at the end of each of these chapters, interviews will be used to answer how those events affected our generation and how the respondents think these events will affect our future and how we see the world. These will counterbalance each other to see if the realities of both the media and of this generation meet.

Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

Chapter 2: The Millennial Decade

Chapter 3: The Millennials

Chapter 4: September 11th

Chapter 5: Social Media

Chapter 6: Obama's Election

Chapter 7: Apple, Inc., the iPod & the iPhone

Chapter 8: Economic Crisis

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Chapter Two—This will be about the significant events that occurred during the Millennial Decade based on covers of *Time*. This will then be compared to what this generation says was important to them during this time and why. What are this generation's thoughts about the Millennial Decade?

Chapter Three—This will be a summary of what older generations are saying about Millennials: What are some of the traits others are seeing? How are they in the workplace? It will also include self-reflections from the survey and the personal interviews, critically looking at themselves and their peers. This will find out what Millennials think about themselves.

Chapter Four to Eight—Each chapter will focus on one event that was determined by the survey as the most significant events to the Millennials during the Millennial Decade. Interviews of Millennials will try to encapsulate what their thoughts on the events are. Millennials will also be asked how they believe those events will affect how this generation will proceed in furthering society. The number of times the topic was on the cover of *Time* will also be determined to see the topic's prevalence.

Chapter Nine—There will be a discussion about where this generation believes will be its next few steps and what its legacy will be, based on the interviews.

Conclusion

The main goals of this thesis are to further the discussion on what defines this generation and to give a voice to Millennials in this discussion. Hopefully, if conventional analysis of this generation is deemed accurate even among the Millennials themselves, then there will be a look into what their motivations are.

Also, this thesis will look at the events in the Millennial Decade that have helped shaped or totally changed the direction in which Millennials are moving and why Millennials believe this to be true.

For the reader, no matter what generation he or she is a part of, it is with hope that he or she will think about how history helps shape whole groups of people. Experiences are powerful, and when they are shared, their effect can be felt on a wide scale. But how much the Millennial Decade has helped shape the Millennial Generation and how lasting the Decade's influence will be is still undetermined and is hard to predict.

Chapter Two: “The Decade from Hell”

In the December 7, 2009 issue, *Time* fondly declared the Millennial Decade as the “Decade from Hell.” In that article, Andy Serwer said that it “will very likely go down as the most dispiriting and disillusioning decade Americans have lived through in the post-World War II era” (Serwer, 31). Without a doubt, this type of environment would shape how the Millennial Generation sees the world, as it was still growing up during that time span and waiting for the chance to hit its stride.

While the Y2K scare was a dud, America would be shaken to its core on September 11, 2001, by terrorist attacks, which *Newsweek* deems this generation as “Generation 9-11” because of how tremendous a change it was for college students at that time: “The kids who grew up with peace and prosperity are facing their defining moment” (Kantrowitz & Naughton, 47).

Politics had already become heated and uncertain with the 2000 presidential election, but now, it looked as though core American values, such as privacy, had to adapt to the changing times. The United States entered into two wars and this altered not only how Americans viewed their government, but also they saw how gripping a tale war is, especially since “The End” is not in sight.

This decade was also bookended by two economic meltdowns, the latter sending the economy into free fall—and some are not even sure if the current slow recovery is permanent. People pitted Wall Street against “Main Street,” a phrase that grew to mean the common American who is not a part of the corporate world (Sloan, 24).

America also seemed as though it was losing its influence on the world. China's economy was becoming stronger, and India and Brazil also seemed as though they were gearing up to be the next super power. Some Americans even felt cheated by their educational, health care, and economic systems when compared to the rest of the world.

But not everything was bleak.

The Digital Revolution continued to change the way we interact with the world and share information—more people are connected. Online, news is at everyone's fingertips, and sites such as Wikipedia even allow users to input content.

"Social networking" is the catch phrase of the decade, creating a new understanding of what it means to be connected and what is deemed as social currency. This decade truly brought the democratization of media courtesy of the Internet.

Of course, the Digital Age was not without its casualties. Those who worked in media did not recognize their work environment anymore. Media companies were losing the piracy battle to young people who find taking content so easy, it hardly seems like a crime.

The Millennial Decade was a turning point for many areas at the core of society and what it means to be a citizen of the world.

Communication

Technology was clearly the spark for most of the changes in the Millennial Decade. With its ease of use, portability, and capabilities, technology has changed

how people communicate on an interpersonal level and on a global level, shrinking the size of the world around them. Namely, people are constantly connected to each other through such things as smart phones and social networking sites, and this has both negative and positive effects. In the 21st Century, it is hard to escape technology.

The proliferation of portable technology during this decade was key to the communication turning point, especially the cell phone. The cell phone, while already invented, became popular with the average adult and even younger ages. Also, the uses of the cell phone surpassed simply making calls. The ability to send text messages and, later, to connect to the Internet, changed how people viewed what communication was – no longer was face-to-face time absolutely necessary.

The text message has revolutionized how people convey messages, and has become one of the most preferred ways to contact others, especially the Millennial Generation. “Texting” is the phenomenon of using one’s phone to send written-word messages via phone. With the rise of texting, messages sent may be shorter and less obtrusive, but they require much more interpretation of context and tone.

Cell phones are also now connecting people of all ages to the Internet, among other things, such as games and music. With constant connection to email, the line between work and private life has been blurred.

The main way people are staying connected this century is through social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter. These sites allow users to share everything from pictures and personal information to links to news articles.

But the positive changes in communication and technology also had a major downside—the loss of jobs: “While the Web opened up new worlds ... it displaced workers at travel and government agencies, at newspapers and magazines and at stores like Circuit City and Tower Records—traditional distribution points for services, information and goods” (Serwer, 34).

This communication revolution changed many industries at their core, allowing young people with a firm grasp of the new technologies to rise to the top. Of course, this may also cause resentment among those of older generations.

Media and Entertainment

With new technology, people’s habits of media consumption have changed dramatically. Media that rely on advertising took a hit this decade, as most media became free—legally or illegally—on the Internet. But also, businesses hit by the recession did not have the means to advertise as usual.

The newspaper industry was hit hard, and many newspapers either went to an online-only model (to reduce production costs), went out of business, or laid off many of their workers. The television news industry was also not spared, as people largely looked to the Internet for their news.

But with the problems facing established media companies, a new class of content producers rose in prominence and helped with the democratization of media. This led *Time* to choose “You” as the “Person of the Year” in 2006, and the cover had a reflecting mirror-like material, noting: “It’s about the many wrestling

power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes” (Grossman, 40).

Since posting on the Internet is easily done and inexpensive—if not free—bloggers and amateur filmmakers had a way to reach the masses. Many times, content can go “viral,” which means to become popular on the web, mostly through word of mouth and sharing on social networking sites.

There are critics, such as Brian Williams, who say that the democratization of media is not as good as it may initially seem: “Does it endanger what passes for the national conversation if we’re all talking at once? What if ‘talking’ means typing on a laptop, but the audience is too distracted to pay attention?” (Williams, 78).

People were no longer required to sit in front of a television or a radio during a specified time or to physically have a printed copy of a newspaper or book. People could view media whenever they want and wherever they want, and this caused media consumption to be much more personalized, such as iPods and eReaders.

Williams also criticizes the personalization of media, because with it comes a complacent isolation: “The danger just might be that miss the next great book or the next great idea, or that we fail to meet the next great challenge ... because we are too busy celebrating ourselves and listening to the same tune we already know by heart” (Williams, 78).

American Politics

American politics was a hot topic throughout this decade. With three presidential elections and four appointments to the Supreme Court, the Millennial

Decade was full of political moves that will undoubtedly affect policies many years to come.

From the “hanging chads” of the 2000 presidential election to the pioneering candidates of 2008, elections were riddled with problems and achievements. As it is one of the most—if not the most—powerful positions in the world, the presidency of the United States proved to demand intense races.

The 2000 presidential election was marred by voting issues, among other problems. According to Serwer, it was the “most divisive and confusing presidential election in history, a discombobulated drama that we once thought could occur only in the Third World” (Serwer, 32).

Because the number of votes for then-Vice President Al Gore and for George W. Bush was so close, some wanted a recount. During the election, problems arose, such as voter ballots that did not clearly indicate for which candidate the vote was intended, and complicated the voting process (Gibbs, 32).

Ultimately, the recount was determined as “unconstitutional” by the US Supreme Court, and Bush was declared the winner (Pooley, 33). This was, however, a month after Election Day, causing Americans to question the voting process.

The presidential election of 2008 was pivotal because it brought candidates—from both sides of the aisle—to the political stage, who previously would have not had a legitimate chance. Hillary Clinton was the first viable female presidential candidate and was the frontrunner on the Democrat side for quite some time. Barack Obama was the first viable mixed-race (some consider him Black) candidate.

Sarah Palin was a revolutionary personality for the Republican Party, becoming a spokesperson for the Tea Party.

Obama would be elected, and *Time* chose Obama as the “Person of the Year” in 2008. And many consider Palin a potential presidential candidate for the 2012 election (Drehle & Newton-Small, 44).

But all the action was not concentrated on the Executive Branch alone. With the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Bush appointed John Roberts. Bush also appointed Samuel Alito in 2006. When Obama came became president, he was also able to appoint two justices, Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina justice, and Elena Kagan (www.supremecourt.gov).

Overall, politics in the United States became much more polarized and the rhetoric was often heated – the fires stoked by political pundits. – and much of that stems from fear, which some say is created:

The old American mind-set that Richard Hofstadter famously called ‘the paranoid style’—the sense that Masons or the railroads or the Pope or the guys in black helicopters are in league to destroy the country—is in flames again, fanned from both right and left (Drehle, 32).

But this distrust of politicians is not necessarily surprising, as it seems perfectly logical with disillusionment of the political system, which has been a common thread throughout the Millennial Decade.

Domestic Policy

While the United States was dealing with big issues around the globe, there were also issues at home that vied for the attention of Americans and politicians, including the economy, healthcare, and gay rights.

With the meltdown of Wall Street, the economy was on the minds of most Americans—and throughout the world—by the end of the decade and beyond. With foreclosed properties and high unemployment, many were tangibly affected by the financial crisis. Corporate giants, such as Kmart, United Airlines, Lehman Brothers and General Motors, filed for bankruptcy (Serwer, 32).

A buzzword during the collapse of Wall Street was “bailout,” and Americans questioned whether or not the federal government should have given the banks money or to let them fail (Serwer & Sloan, 32).

Another hot political topic during the decade was illegal immigration. Both political parties seemed to agree that something had to be done to fix the policies, but how to proceed, they both seemed unsure. Some politicians wanted to create a path to citizenship, while others wanted to take a tougher stance against illegal immigration and deport those who are caught (Tumulty, 30).

By the end of the decade, healthcare reform made headlines. Democrats wanted a universal healthcare plan, some fighting for a public option, which they said would save America money. Republicans felt that such a plan would weaken the economy and cause the system to operate inefficiently, among other drawbacks (Tumulty, 26). It was not until 2010 that a bill was passed for universal healthcare, and the debate still has not been settled yet.

These issues have not yet been solved and will take much more debating. They also clearly will impact the Millennial Generation because the issues pertain to life in America. It will be up to the Millennial Decade to help make these decisions, as they will most likely pay for the wrong choices and be rewarded if the right ones are made.

Foreign Policy

As technology has helped with connecting the world, events that happen abroad affect the United States and vice versa. This decade had high peaks and low troughs with regard to foreign relations of the United States. Right after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there was a lot of international support for America. But when the United States went to war with Iraq, other countries were not so supportive: "... the Administration's push for war and its failure to satisfy the world's objections to it mean that American troops are about to fight, and die, in a war that major U.S. allies do not endorse" (Ratnesar, 22).

The main foreign policy of the Millennial Decade was with regard to terrorism, which led to two wars—in Afghanistan and Iraq. The group who allegedly orchestrated the terrorist attacks on September 11th is Al Qaeda, and its leader is Osama Bin Laden, who was in Afghanistan at that time.

The war in Iraq was much more complicated. The Bush administration said that they had reason to believe that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction," and connections to terrorist organizations. While there was international support for

the United States to enter Afghanistan after September 11th, there were not many countries that supported a war in Iraq (Ratnesar, 22).

America started the war in 2003, and later that year, Saddam Hussein, then President of Iraq, was seized and executed in 2006. While combat ceased in 2010, American soldiers are still in Iraq to help with stabilizing the new government.

The rise of other countries, particularly China, also dominated the headlines, causing many to predict that the end of America's superiority is near. With the rapid growth of the economies of some countries, some speculate that the United States will lose its position in the world (Zakaria).

As the world gets smaller, events are hardly ever isolated to one country. As evidenced by September 11th, America is not safe simply because of its location or status on the world stage. Like the attack on Pearl Harbor, the "Sleeping Giant" was awoken again. But this time, going back to sleep is not really a choice.

Lifestyle

The way people live and the laws that govern it have always been a good indication of the direction of change. Two main occurrences that have made headlines in America are that people are "going green" and gaining weight.

With the awareness of global warming that Al Gore helped make mainstream through "An Inconvenient Truth," many people are living more environmentally friendly. Recycling and using biodegradable materials are becoming much more a part of the average American's daily life, and there is a mainstream consciousness about green initiatives. For example, the cover article for the April 2009 issue of

Time was “The Global Warming Survival Guide: 51 Things You Can Do to Make a Difference.”

This decade also saw continued growth in the percentage of obese Americans, with *Time* stating that it is “hardly news anymore that Americans are just too fat” (Lemonick, 58). In 2004, two-thirds of US adults were considered overweight – half of those are obese (Lemonick, 58). Throughout the decade, and even today, obesity is seen as a problem, but with stress levels high and fast food too convenient, this epidemic will not solve itself.

The main way that this decade changed people’s lives is their understanding of security, in all senses of the word. With terrorism, people are much more wary of the environment around them for their personal safety. But on a societal level, people understand that even though structures, such as economic entities, seem mostly stable, at any second, everything can go wrong: “We have seen the destructiveness of deferral and neglect on infrastructure, national and global politics, financial markets and corporate governance, and I think it’s safe to say that the awareness of that danger is much higher now” (Serwer, 38).

Hindsight on a Decade

Clearly, this decade had more negative aspects than positive, especially for the average American: “To paraphrase the question Ronald Reagan posed years ago, Are you better of today than you were at the beginning of the decade? For most of us, the answer is a resounding no” (Serwer, 32).

And undoubtedly, the events of this decade have helped shape how people will see the world in the future. Some would say that older generations had the luxury of rising to the top during the economic boom of the 1990s—and they are allowed to be disillusioned by the decade if they so choose.

But this country and the world are slowly becoming the responsibility of the Millennial Generation, and to be “dispirit[ed]” and “disillusion[ed]” by this decade, as Serwer suggests, is not necessarily an option. How this generation picks up the pieces and pushes forward will determine whether or not this generation is as great as Howe, Strauss, and Matson say it is, or how self-possessed and ignorant of the world Bauerlein and Twenge see it as.

Chapter Three: We R Who We R

Even though Millennials are still finding their place in the world, critics have started to make generalizations about them. Some are more sympathetic than others, especially analyses that were done earlier when the generation was younger. Later ones are much more critical.

Generally, Millennials are considered as being born in 1982 and after, and the time and events that occurred during their youth definitely affected how they are as adults. In a survey in 1999, the high school class of 2000 stated that the events that made the biggest impression include the following:

- 1) The shooting at Columbine
- 2) War in Kosovo
- 3) The Oklahoma City bombing
- 4) Princess Di's death
- 5) The Clinton impeachment trial
- 6) O. J. Simpson trial
- 7) Rodney King riots
- 8) Monica Lewinsky scandal
- 9) Fall of Berlin Wall
- 10) McGwire-Sosa homer derby

(Howe & Strauss, 19)

One could infer that there would be traits of fear and mistrust, particularly of political figures. However, the characteristics Howe and Strauss found at the

beginning of the Millennial Decade were quite the opposite, according to Howe and Strauss, as the Millennials were optimistic about the future.

Of course, it must be stated that they looked at Millennials when they were graduating high school and prior to experiencing the totality of the “Awful Aughts.” Potentially, events that occurred in the Millennial Decade could have highlighted some character traits and trivialize others.

According to Twenge, the time period in American culture when they were born has affected the generation at its core: “Born after self-focus entered the cultural mainstream, this generation has never known a world that put duty before self” (Twenge, 1). She also discusses how adults have passed on messages such as self-love and following one’s passion, which helped direct Millennials’ attention inward.

Others, such as Baurelein, place more emphasis on current technology as the main reason for the traits of the Millennials. Without a doubt, many of the technological advances have helped differentiate this generation’s skills from older ones. Of course, some say one step forward has led to two steps back in other ways.

Ways to look at a generation include how the people relate on multiple levels, including interpersonal, interpersonal, societal and global. Often, however, there are conflicting theories.

The Good

In *Millennials Rising*, Howe and Strauss describe the Millennials as “wanted,” “protected,” and “worthy” (32). They were born in a time when adults took the

development of children seriously, from movies that celebrated children to regulations that protected children. The protection of the Millennials provided by the adults in their lives—and helicopter parents—definitely affect their characteristics.

Their research found this generation to exhibit many positive traits: “[Millennials] are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct” (Howe & Strauss, 4).

Through their research, Howe and Strauss found that, compared to previous generations, Millennials are “cooperative team players” and not self-absorbed: “Unlike Gex Xers, the believe in their own collective power. By a huge ten-to-one majority, they believe it’s their generation—and not their parents’—that will do the most to help the environment over the next twenty-five years” (Howe & Strauss, 8).

Collective power is definitely on the side of the Millennials as the generation is very large, according to Howe and Strauss, which in total, including all immigrants, may ultimately be more than 100 million members (74).

Howe and Strauss believe that Millennials are more team-oriented, especially due to witnessing the shortcomings of the past generation: “Surrounded by individualistic older people, yet optimistic about their own abilities, Millennials have stepped into a teen world with little cohesion, decided they don’t like it that way, and are trying to turn it around” (180).

But Millennials are rule followers and respect authority, according to Howe and Strauss, even if they like to do their own thing. They point to statistics of juvenile crimes and how violence has decreased (Howe & Strauss, 8).

Another trait that Howe and Strauss saw was commitment to community and initiative to make a positive impact. They note various projects that Millennials started to improve their community, such as a public bicycling system of feeding the homeless program (Howe & Strauss, 215). Even with new projects such as these, Howe and Strauss state, Millennials are coming together to solve problems:

“Millennials aren’t doing this as entrepreneurial loners. Instead—in keeping with their generation’s team orientation—they’re banding together, in their own clubs and class, on-line, and (especially) in national uniformed service organizations” (Howe and Strauss, 215).

Overall, Howe and Strauss saw connection among the Millennials and a sense of duty to the community to make a difference, among other positive attributes, such as better relationships with their parents, more rule following and better views toward education. The list of good traits is expected, though, since the subtitle of their book is “The Next Great Generation.”

Born [Into] This Way

On the other hand, one of main assessments of this generation made by others is that this generation is concerned with the self. Some have even dubbed it the iGeneration or Generation Me: “This is a generation unapologetically focused on the individual, a true Generation Me” (Twenge, 2).

Twenge explains that Millennials are focused on the self because of the culture in which they were born and grew up, especially in America: “[Millennials] speak the language of the self as their native tongue. The individual has always come first, and feeling good about yourself has always been a primary virtue” (Twenge, 2).

The messages given to the Millennials have encouraged them to be more focused on themselves and their dreams, rather than focus on other things, such as duty or family and community:

We are driven instead by our individual needs and desires. We are told to follow our dreams, to pursue happiness above all else. It’s OK to be different, and you should do what’s right for you.... The choices of the individual are now held so paramount that the most common advice given to teenagers is “Just be yourself.” (Twenge, 19)

The message of “just be yourself” continues to be pervasive in this generation’s culture, especially demonstrated through popular music. At the beginning of the Millennial Decade, Christina Aguilera sang, “I am beautiful / No matter what they say... / I am beautiful / In every single way.” Later, songs that dominated the airwaves and sales charts would include Ke\$ha’s “We R Who We R” and Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way.”

Lessons on self-esteem were taught to this generation at a young age. Twenge discusses how children’s books were starting to reflect this change, such as in 1991, when the book *The Lovables in the Kingdom of Self-Esteem* was published. A self-esteem coloring book titled *Be A Winner* was even created. Children in this generation were also the ones who were given trophies for every little thing they

did, win or lose, and these messages can create those who are self-important and who feel a sense of entitlement.

Even Howe and Strauss saw this in their research: “[O]lder generations have inculcated in Millennials the sense that they are, collectively, vital to the nation and to their parents’ sense of purpose” (Howe & Strauss, 43).

A message developing from this elevated understanding of self-esteem, perpetuated by those such as fans of Oprah Winfrey, is that a person must love him or herself before he or she can love another: “It is now commonly accepted that you should have your own life and develop your own identity first, before you settle down with someone” (Twenge, 90). And what this has turned into is that the ultimate value is not depending on anyone else, which has created isolated people.

This exposes an irony—even though this generation is supposed to think highly of itself, there is a higher rate of anxiety and depression. Twenge, citing Abraham Maslow, explains that self-esteem is truly gained through relationships with others: “Study after study shows that people who have good relationships with friends and family are the happiest—these things consistently trump money or job satisfaction as predictors of happiness and life satisfaction” (Twenge, 92).

But Twenge is not totally harsh with Millennials. She believes that this generation’s views on self are not as simple and selfish as some may deem them to be: “GenMe’s focus on the needs of the individual is not necessarily self-absorbed or isolationist; instead, it’s a way of moving through the world beholden to few social rules and with the unshakable belief that you’re important” (Twenge, 49). And what

this permits is a re-evaluation of social norms and a determination of what is valued and what is an old way of thinking.

The message that Twenge has is that this phenomenon of self-love was nothing new when Millennials attached themselves to it: “Generation Me had no need to reincarnate ourselves; we were born into a world that already celebrated the individual. The self-focus that blossomed in the 1970s became mundane and commonplace over the next two decades, and GenMe accepts it like a fish accepts water” (Twenge, 49).

No Generation Is An Island

Bauerlein believes that technology has made this generation more self-centered. With information being easily accessible with new technology, Bauerlein says that this generation has used technology to further its own culture, instead of utilizing it to increase one’s awareness of history or of current events: “[Y]oung Americans today are no more learned or skillful than their predecessors, no more knowledgeable, fluent, up-to-date, or inquisitive, except in the materials of youth culture” (Bauerlein, 8-9).

Bauerlein goes on to explain that it is not because Millennials do not care about other subject matter, but rather there is a barrier: “[T]hey are encased in more immediate realities that shut out conditions beyond—friends, work, clothes, cars, pop music, sitcoms, Facebook” (Bauerlein, 13).

To him, information has become personalized, and that takes away from topics that could stretch young minds into other directions: “Each day, the

information they receive and the interactions they have must be so local or superficial that the facts of government, foreign and domestic affairs, the historical past and the fine arts never slip through” (Bauerlein, 13).

The result is a generation that is obsessed with its own way of life, neglecting responsibilities of living in a community to the point of belittling anything else:

An anti-intellectual outlook prevails in their leisure lives, squashing the lessons of school and instead of producing a knowledgeable and querulous young mind, the youth culture of American society yields an adolescent consumer enmeshed in juvenile matters and secluded from adult realities. (Bauerlein, 16)

Bauerlein also calls this generation “dumb” because books do not matter to them—he calls Millennials “bibliophobes”: “Today’s rising generation thinks more highly of its lesser traits. It wears anti-intellectualism on its sleeve, pronouncing book-reading an old-fashioned custom, and it snaps at people who rebuke them for it” (Bauerlein, 41).

While some may argue that the Harry Potter series discredits this argument, he states that it is one more example of how youth only love perpetuating their own culture: “Kids read Harry Potter not because they like reading, but because other kids read it.... [T]o reach the numbers that the series does requires that it accrue a special social meaning, that it become a youth identity good” (Bauerlein, 43).

To Bauerlein, technology has increased the value of social currency, which is then fed into the vending machine of all things youth culture. Instead of expanding

the minds of Millennials, it keeps them preoccupied with what young people view as important: themselves.

Contrasting Conclusions

While their reasons are not exactly similar, Twenge and Bauerlein share the sentiment that Millennials believe they are perfect the way they are, even to the point of being narcissistic. It should be noted that their books came out towards the end of the Millennial Decade, whereas Howe and Strauss's book came out in the beginning.

The optimism that Howe and Strauss note could have faded and turned into the anxiety that Twenge notes partially because of the devastating events that occurred between their dates of publication (2000 and 2006), such as September 11th, the "War on Terrorism," and the bursting of the dotcom bubble.

Without a doubt, the Millennial Decade woke Millennials up to the realities of the world. As Millennials went looking for jobs, the economy was in dire straits. Terrorism could happen anywhere at any time, even by a fellow citizen. Political parties were working against each other, not for the people of the United States.

Perhaps it is not surprising that this generation, which grew up in an idyllic environment in America only to have its world turned upside down, would shy away from the chaos outside, turn inward, and become obsessed with superficial youth culture. And perhaps the reason Millennials no longer believe in rules and traditions is that the fabric of society received many have been torn apart too many times during the Millennial Decade.

Chapter Four: September 11th

Talal Rojas has an image that will forever be imprinted into his mind: A peer's mother coming into his school, wearing a safety mask and covered in dust and debris. "She looked like she had gone through hell and back again," Rojas said. "It was pretty horrific" (personal communication, March 14, 2010).

Rojas, now a senior in college, was in 7th grade at a school in New York City on September 11, 2001. "September 11th was such a horrific event that it will stay with me for the rest of my life," he said.

There are few moments that are in a country's—possibly world's—collective memory, when everyone remembers where he or she was and what he or she was doing. The World Trade Center terrorist attacks were definitely the case, and for Millennials, it was one of the first major tragedies that hit close to home that they had experienced.

The shock of the terrorist attacks not only affected the United States, it also set the agenda for the future—two wars that are still on past the Millennial Decade, heightened security at airports that will most likely be permanent, and a general sense of suspicion when among strangers.

According to Allison Lantero, a senior in college from Illinois, her generation is defined by September 11th: "We were young and impressionable, and it was the first attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor, which was still farther removed." Lantero believes that because this happened when they were such a young age, it makes

them yearn for their childhood years before they occurred: “I think we have become nostalgic early,” she said (personal communication, September 27, 2010).

Of the 100 respondents in the survey for this thesis, 94 stated that September 11th was one of the five most significant events of the decade. The oldest members of this generation were just out of high school, and the youngest—those who are currently in college—were not even out of elementary school yet.

Shortly after the attacks, in a November 2001 *Newsweek* article, Barbara Kantrowitz deemed this generation “Generation 9-11,” due to how much September 11th changed life for Millennials:

At ... campuses all around the country, the generation that once had it all—peace, prosperity, even the dot-com dream of retiring at 30—faces its defining moment. College students are supposed to be finding their place in the world, not just a profession but also an intellectual framework for learning and understanding the rest of their lives. After the terrorist attacks, that goal seems more urgent and yet more elusive than ever. (Kantrowitz 2001)

But the Millennials Kantrowitz discussed were in college already. Younger Millennials, who are currently in college (and are the Millennials who took part in this thesis), were only in elementary or middle school, and it was an even larger shift in how they viewed the world.

According to Claudia Kalb in an article in *Newsweek*, September 11th had to have a huge impact on youth growing up at that time:

Ten is a formative age—not yet a teenager, no longer a little kid. Becoming independent, but still deeply attached to family. Aware of the world, but not yet cognizant of how it works. The events of 9/11 destroyed a sense of security for this cohort of children.... Children saw their teachers and parents worried and, in some cases, emotionally wrecked. They watched police officers and firefighters—community protectors—dying in piles of rubble. They got caught up in a collective sense of national dread: what next? And that was a question nobody, not even the highest officials in the country, could answer. (Kalb)

“September 11th was very important to our generation,” Rojas said, “specifically because of the repercussions, in terms of security—in terms of safety, in general.”

Rojas believes that it has given everyone a heightened awareness of security issues that people should have always had. “It’s teaching you to be proactive and not reactive,” he said. But Rojas also sees that being proactive to the point of paranoia can lead—and has led—to tensions in the United States and around the world regarding ethnicity and religion.

For Maddy Walsh, who is a freshman in college, September 11th opened her world, demonstrating to her that the world was a much bigger place than she had known prior to that event. “Just growing up in New Hampshire—fairly rural place—you’re just taught that life is, you go to school everyday, you come home and your parents are there, and that’s pretty much the extent of things,” Walsh said. “You

don't see ... our role in the global world and how everything is [connected]" (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

So while Walsh believes she would have eventually learned about the United States government and its role in the world, it made her learn that lesson quickly, harshly and early—in the fourth grade—and this idea is reinforced by Kalb's article: "The attacks of 9/11 forced young Americans into a crash course in world politics, terrorism, and Islam" (Kalb).

One of the traits that Andrew Slade would use to describe this generation is "worldliness," and this is a direct result of September 11th, according to him: "The instability of the Middle East is not something that most people necessarily paid attention to before or people probably didn't think much about terrorism or see it as a serious threat. But now, it's altered their world view and made them more thoughtful about our place in the world, how powerful we really are, how vulnerable we might be."

Kantrowitz, according to her article, also found that this forced students at the University of Michigan to start thinking about the world as a whole:

On Sept. 19, 800 people jammed a panel discussion of the attacks by historians and political scientists who specialize in the Mideast. Even the most uninvolved students understood that they could no longer ignore what was happening on the other side of the world. *The Daily* was running foreign news on its front page almost every day, and many professors, encouraged by the administration, incorporated discussions of the events into classes on a wide range of subjects.

September 11th demonstrated that America has its weaknesses. Prior to the terrorist attacks, the United States had not had an attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. While America seemed invulnerable due to its isolated geography, the Sleeping Giant would, once again, be rudely awakened, which had one major effect, according to Rojas. “We have to realize that, at some point,” he said, “the U.S., even though we’re a superpower, there are still threats.”

Slade had similar thoughts about how September 11th affected how people saw the United States’ role in the world: “[September 11th] precipitated the realization in a lot of people that we aren’t necessarily going to be the only superpower in the world... And I think that’s something that people found unsettling. And the way that we reacted to it, under the leadership of the Bush administration was not one that I agreed with. But it was kind of using as much force as possible to try to assert our dominance—to reassert our position in the world—to say: ‘You can’t do this to us without serious consequences.’ While it has its place, I don’t think it was well conceived or executed at all.”

Americans had to greatly change the way they saw their country in relation to other countries—many Millennials began to see interdependence as a necessary foreign policy for the success of the United States in the 21st Century.

While many Millennials began to open their eyes to the world, September 11th caused other Millennials to dig deeper within themselves. Rojas, whose mother is of Saudi Arabian descent, realized after September 11th that race is a bigger factor in a person’s life than he had originally thought. In the 9th grade, a

fellow student called Rojas a “terrorist,” and this marked the beginning of his journey of self-discovery.

“Being called a ‘terrorist’ was the first time I held onto the fact that I’m biracial,” Rojas said, who believes he lived in a virtually colorblind community in New York City, even though it was very diverse racially.

“And then I sort of became obsessed with this race issue,” Rojas said. “[September 11th] shaped my identity.” Now, Rojas has a leadership role in a student organization that focuses on race at Boston College, something that might not have occurred had September 11th not happened.

Many respondents of the survey, including Walsh, stated that their generation is defined by the tragedies that have occurred in their lifetime, seemingly one after another—both man-made and from nature. They have been devastating, causing the deaths of thousands of humans, including many Americans.

September 11th truly opened the eyes of many American Millennials—and even older generations—by redefining not only what it mean to be “American,” but also what it means to be living during the turn of the century. Isolationism could neither be a choice for the country, nor for communities within America—a cloistered existence centered on the self would be insufficient for those growing up in today’s times.

“The consequences were vast,” Slade said. “From everyday things relating to security, travel, and then, obviously the wars in Afghanistan—it was used as justification for the war in Iraq. And those are conflicts that we’re still paying for

those conflicts today.... It changed the way a lot of people think about politics and society, who they vote for and what their priorities are.”

Jesse Fracois, a senior in college from Boston, Massachusetts, believes that, while September 11th was a huge event in the history of the Millennials, its lessons will fade for later generations: “I feel like with all disasters, it eventually goes to the past. But no one will ever forget [September 11th]. It’s something that we will take forward ... The unification it brought will never go away, even though it’s not the same as it first happened. ... But when a new generation of kids comes up, they won’t know what happened and it’s going to be completely different.”

By the end of the Millennial Decade, multiple tragedies—from terrorist attacks to natural disasters—occurred, and with the help of worldwide media organizations, many felt local. September 11th, though, was the first major tragedy that many Millennials experienced, signifying the start of a pretty awful decade.

Chapter 5: Social Networking

Juliana Joseph first opened a Facebook account in 2007, when she was a senior in high school. “At first, there were a lot of question marks about it,” Joseph says. “I just remember... ‘I don’t understand the concept of it. You put up pictures and people you don’t know are looking at your life?’ Just understanding where you cross the line, what is acceptable when it first came out.”

A few years into Facebook, people still have these questions about this new mode of communication—social networking. But clearly, it has been a vital development in the history of the Millennial Generation.

Facebook was first established in 2004 for college students, but then it later expanded to high schools and, even later, to the general public (Acar, 2008, p. 65). While it was not technically the first mode of connecting socially on the Internet, Facebook had a streamlined interface and was more exclusive at first, setting the tone of their form of social networking.

The proliferation of communication via the Internet was a major occurrence to Millennials. According to the survey of 100 Millennials currently in college, 14 stated that “social networking” was one of the five most important happenings of the decade. Sixteen people surveyed specifically noted Facebook, making the total 30 Millennials. Eight people stated that the growth of the Internet helped form this generation.

Some Millennials said that the development of the Internet is a large factor in their own development, and according to Caroline Haythornthwaite, the Internet’s

purpose is to put people into contact: “The Internet is a technical means of connecting people. It provides an easy way for individuals as well as groups and organizations to adopt peer-to-peer communication” (Haythornthwaite, 2005, p. 17).

According to Cheryl L. Coyle and Heather Vaughn, a “social network” is a “configuration of people connected to one another through interpersonal means, such as friendship, common interests, or ideas.” They state that the concept of social networking was created even before the Internet, as in 1958, Harry Harlow documented the need to connect emotionally with others through his study of rhesus monkeys and wire mothers (Cole & Vaughn, 2008, p. 13). But they do note that computers have allowed social networks to “expand and grow in ways that were previously unanticipated” (Cole & Vaughn, 2008, p. 13).

The Internet’s form of social networking usually consists of creating a personal profile, adding personal photos or videos and connecting with peers who are also on the network. This has expanded to connecting with celebrities and playing video games, which you can also play against people on your network. Sharing links to music and videos has also become a vital operation of these websites.

The definition of “social networking” online evolves constantly, as people find new ways and new purposes for connecting. Other types of networking online can be sharing a blog or journal with others who share those, as well, and forums allow users to discuss specific topics. Instant messaging services allow users to type in real time with others in their network, as well as, share some personal

information.

Haythornthwaite found that the information that is passed from these various websites are very diverse: "Combining what we know about the types of information available from strong and weak ties with the results found in the studies on the use of media suggests that we may find significant differences in the kinds of information circulating through different media" (2005). In other words, there is no one reason why people use social networking sites, and Millennials find different uses for them.

Talal Rojas believes people find a sense of belonging with social networking sites, especially with the idea of status updates: "With these status updates, anyone can see what you're doing. It's becoming more about a sense of belonging.... Everyone wants to feel like they belong to something, and Facebook allows that. You can say 'oh this is what I'm feeling right now,' and someone can comment and 'like' that [status update]. You don't even need to know the person. But just to have someone care that you actually said that."

In their study, Cole and Vaughn found that the reason most college undergraduates gave for using social networking websites was for "keeping in touch with friends" and that the communication was "trivial" (Cole & Vaughn 2008, 15).

Urista, *et al.*, discussed this as well: "[Social networking sites] are a useful and convenient tool for staying connected with the events of a friend's life with ease. Compared to calling a person and having a conversation, members of [social networking sites] can visit a member's profile or send them a quick message to find out what they want to know" (Urista, *et al.*, 2008).

The key is that social networking sites are not primarily used for meeting strangers, but that they allow people to control who they want to communicate with and also to make their connections public (Haythornwaite 2005).

But while many feel these websites only play a small role in their daily lives, to Millennials, it is hard to picture communication without them. Of course, with such frequent use—averaging three times per day (Cole & Vaughn, 2008, 14) or even more—there would be effects on those who use these websites.

Some Millennials, including Joseph, suggest that social networking has had some negative impacts on human communication.

“People become very sensitive on social networking sites,” Joseph said, “if you don’t post or if you don’t communicate with them [on those sites]. Even if you see them in real life ... but the fact that you don’t acknowledge their presence on those social networking sites, people can take it very personally, which sounds ridiculous. But it happens.”

But Joseph, who is a junior at Simmons College from Canton, Massachusetts, believes that it, overall, has a positive impact on relationships. These websites have helped her connect with more people—those with whom she would never interact if it were not for websites such as Facebook. “If you never have really had a relationship with that person,” Joseph says, “you’re not weakening that friendship because it never existed in the first place.”

But she does believe that there can be a superficial element in relationships on Facebook. “Let’s say in class, you don’t acknowledge that person, but you’re friends on Facebook,” she says. “That’s weird, but acceptable. I think in the year

2000, that concept was a little hazy—sending a friend request to someone you never talk to.... But now, it’s like ‘Oh, I said hi to that person once two years ago,’ let me friend them.”

According to the 2007 study “A Place of Their Own,” this superficial element does not necessarily hinder users:

Several respondents noted that they use Facebook to connect with those who they met during a brief visit to a sporting event, church, or overseas. In these cases, the friendships are somewhat superficial and, more than likely, ephemeral, so the basic demographic information that most respondents offer on their sites and rarely update may be the only foundation for these somewhat tenuous relationships” (Clark, et al 2007, 15).

Many Millennials—and even older generation—are able to reconnect with old friends through social networking sites. Rojas had this experience with a former best friend with whom, for some reason, he simply lost touch: “Recently, I decided to post on his [Facebook] wall. I didn’t even have his cell phone number or even an email address.... I was able to reconnect with him with Facebook.”

But Facebook did not stop helping Rojas at that point either: “I was able to look through some of his photos and see what he was doing.... I was able to look and have conversation points because I hadn’t spoken to him in so long.”

Joseph, when she first used Facebook, saw that it could be used as a scrapbook, keeping highlights of her high school years: “Looking at all the memories with the teams I was a part of, all the organizations I was a part of, even just high school memories, being a senior, that was a big deal.” And now that Joseph has been removed from high school for three years, those memories are still kept on Facebook: “The fact that it’s all collected on one page is huge,” she said.

But her usage has evolved to contacting people informally, sharing interesting news stories from news websites and some goings-on in her own life.

To Joseph, it has made news travel much faster: “Let’s say it’s 11 o’clock in the morning,” Joseph said, “and I’m not watching the news and I didn’t go on a site where the news is always there. But if I just hop onto Facebook just to check out something and I just see the status updates ... that’s when I start going to the news sites about this person or this topic.... Newsworthy material is definitely spread at a much faster rate. Whereas in the beginning of the 2000s, the only way you would know is through word of mouth.”

Rojas sees that there is a hunger for instant information, like news, because of social networking sites: “Social networking allows you to connected to many people as fast as possible.”

But this can be seen with technology in general: “Today’s young adults are heavy consumers of digital products and consequently are influenced by computer technology, becoming impatient and more demanding for fast results” (Urista, *et al* 2008).

Other than communication, there have been ways that social networking has affected society.

Joseph sees that it has made people become more narcissistic: “Because when you have your page, you want people to talk about you—talk about what you did. Or comment on what’s going on in your life.... Or even if you’re commenting on other people’s lives ... you still want other people to see your comment.

“Even if they are social ‘networking’ sites, where you broaden your surroundings,” she said, “at the end of the day, it makes you feel or just think about yourself more.”

But some experts, like Twenge as discussed previously, argue that narcissism in this generation developed when Millennials were children. So perhaps social networking sites do not elicit that trait but rather offers an avenue for such attitudes about the self, even to the point of celebrating those attitudes and giving them a purpose.

Joseph does have reservations for social networking and connecting so much on the Internet:

“I think we’re going to lose our people skills,” she said. “Even though you’re with people and you’re communicating—you have that human interaction—you have that camera and you’re thinking about what you’re going to do on your computer at home. ‘Oh this is going to look so good on this site. I can’t wait to tweet about this.’”

Some would argue that this effect—not truly being present in the moment—puts more emphasis on how a moment can be presented to the rest of the network,

rather than the actual moment itself. What it allows, though, is a sense of control over the moment, even if it is a superficial control, and it has an effect.

On this topic, a recent study, titled “Misery Has More Company Than People Think,” found that people wrongfully assumed how another person’s life was (assuming more positive), and in turn, felt worse about their own lives—the phenomenon being coined “Facebook Envy” (Jordan, *et al.*, 2011).

As communication continues to be reduced to a smaller number of characters—140 characters on Twitter—it remains to be seen what impact it truly has on society. Millennials recognize how important social networking has been to the generation, since it has connected people and made things that once would spread by word of mouth now spread like fire on the Internet—“viral.”

While social networking may seem to be taking over the lives of Millennials, it is important to note that some, like Joseph and Rojas, take it at face value. People use those websites for various things, but overall, it seems that many uses are more superficial and trivial. Regardless, websites like Facebook and Twitter have become staples in the lives of Millennials around the world.

It is interesting that with the Internet, Millennials will be the last to remember a time when the Internet was not a part of everyday life, and Joseph sees her generation as a bridge between the past and the future: “People who live in the 60s, 70s and 80s are totally different from the generation following ours. Like [today’s] technology, for example, or the Internet, at some point, it was nonexistent. Now, it’s everything for the generation coming up. And we’re that middle ground. We’re that cement that’s holding [the generations] together.”

As for the future, some Millennials believe that online communities will continue to grow, but purposes will be more defined. People will no longer have the limitless expectations that they once had for social networking websites, and this will affect how many people use them and for what purpose.

Joseph is worried though, that instead of Millennials controlling online communication, it will end up becoming an obsession, specifically socially: "I don't want [social networking] to overtake us."

Chapter Six: Obama's Election

Jesse Francois remembers Election Day in 2008, when he and his sophomore college friends were gathered around a television in his dormitory hall: "I was with a bunch of my friends and we were all watching [election results].... Other than [this election], there would never be an instance where we would all be sitting there watching a president getting elected" (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Once it was announced that Obama had won, he and his friends, among many other Millennials on the Boston College campus, celebrated the victory: "Everybody was running out, jumping outside... screaming," Francois said. "It was just something that had never been done before."

Many Millennials felt that the election was special for various reasons. One of the reasons includes achieving a new degree of racial equality, since Barack Obama became the first African-American President of the United States.

For Francois, who is from Dorchester, Massachusetts, and is Black, he saw this as hope for a more equal political system and society, in general: "I remember the next weekend [after Election Day]—I went home. I was driving in the car with my dad and he said something to me that was very interesting: 'Now, young black youth have somebody to look up to.'"

Francois felt that this brought a new understanding of life and politics to his community: "The area where I came from, not a lot of people would have aspirations to be President, let alone go to college. It was very motivating." He saw that people in his area finally felt they had a stake in politics: "They were wearing [Obama]

shirts. It seemed like they were getting more involved.... During the election ... you can see all the people voting. It was something completely different. Completely new.”

But it also motivated Francois to participate in politics as well: “Because of [Obama’s] election, I look into [politics] now,” he said. “Because, to tell you the truth, politics is hard to follow when nobody involved really looks like me—that’s just the truth.”

But the election of Obama as the 44th President was about much more than simply race—it was a pivotal moment in the history of the Millennial Generation. Howe and Strauss predicted that the full effect of the Millennial Generation would be felt towards the middle of the Millennial Decade, and they were proven correct—at least for the time being. This event demonstrated not only some of the ideals of this generation, but also what it is capable of doing.

Aisha Geerings, a junior at Bowdoin College in Maine from North Carolina, felt that the election of Obama was what defined this generation: “It was an election that pulled people of many different backgrounds together under one cause. The entire world watched to see what America was going to do” (personal communication, September 29, 2010).

In the survey conducted for this thesis, out of 100 respondents, 71 stated that Obama being elected President was one of the five most significant events of the Millennial Decade. Five others stated that the 2008 Presidential Election in general was significant, and one person noted that the Obama campaign itself was significant.

Obama's campaign successfully engaged young voters by utilizing social media and grassroots organization. While this proved unsuccessful for Howard Dean in the 2004 presidential election, many young voters worked for Obama's campaign and voted in the 2008 election.

According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), in 2008, there were approximately 41 million 18-29 year-old U.S. citizens who were eligible to vote. This age bracket overwhelmingly voted for Obama over John McCain—66% to 32%. In modern history, Obama's 66% of the youth vote is the highest of any candidate, with Ronald Reagan and John Kerry placing second and third far behind (Godsay & Kriby 2010).

For the younger people in the Millennial Generation, specifically those who are currently in college and participated in this project, the 2008 Election was the first one time many were able to vote for President.

Francois felt that it was not only a civic duty to vote, but also a privilege to stand up for something one believes in: "Growing up, I knew I had to vote eventually. I thought it was more of something I thought I just had to do. But this time, I actually thought I was making a difference.... I felt like my voice was heard, and I had people standing behind me, and we wanted something to happen, so we went out and made it happen."

The election of Obama also showed the ideals of the Millennial Generation. While it may not be surprising that young voters lean left, Obama's messages that spoke to the Millennial Generation were not always able to be categorized as "right" or "left"—it was to be a different kind of leadership and view on politics.

“[Obama’s] platform was based on change,” Francois said. “Our generation wanted to see a change.... The image that the United States had all over the world—we were ready for that to change, so that’s why so many young people all over decided to vote for him.... It opened the doors for probably more people—not just Black.... Anyone who feels they can do a good job with the Presidency.”

Ergy Jean-Baptiste, a senior in college from Boston, Massachusetts, had the same thoughts: “From what I did observe ... when Obama started running, it was something amazing, to say the least. He was really young. He was Black. He had one word: Change. The fact that he was Black and he was articulate, a lot of people were like, ‘Oh my goodness, we’re going to vote, we’re going to do this, we’re going to do that.’ But everyone was like, ‘He’s amazing, he’s awesome, he’s intelligent, and he had a good message.’ So everywhere I went, people were talking about Obama, whether or not they could vote. A lot of people aren’t American citizens, but everyone was like ‘Everything is going to get better for us... Life is going to be better in America. They are going to change the Bush administration...’ I saw it everywhere.”

Jean-Baptiste, who works at a community center during the summer, saw his community transform: “Some students I noticed were slacking, but they just like ‘Yeah, he’s my role model.’”

He has seen remarkable changes in the youth who go there in the past few years. “I’ve seen a lot of students picking themselves up.... I saw students who were just slacking around.... I saw a couple of students change over the summer. They’re more active, they’re pushing. They’re actually teaching the younger kids.”

Jean-Baptiste attributes all these changes to Obama's election. "In education, in general. How people view their kids. I see a lot more applicants in my summer job than I ever had before... Since [Obama] was running ... it definitely increased morale educationally."

With such a tangible outcome resulting from youth muscle and civic engagement, it would be plausible to predict a surge in civic empowerment among Millennials: "I think it showed that our generation has made a lot of strides from previous [ones] in that race ... is still an issue, but it's not as significant as it used to be," Maddy Walsh said. "It also got youth back into politics.... It redefined our political system to some degree" (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

Francois also believes that Obama brought youth back into politics: "Conversations with my friends would actually involve politics ... and it would never have been like that before," he said.

Author John Wilson would agree with Walsh and Francois's analyses. In his book *Barack Obama: This Improbable Quest*, Wilson discussed how Obama gave a new generation exactly what it needed in politics: "Many students entering college have never been alive when someone other than a Bush or a Clinton has been president. For them, Ronald Reagan is a distant memory from the history books. It would be too extreme to suggest that today's students are rebelling against their parents, seeking a unifying figure who can avoid the political and social schisms that have echoed since the 1960s. But Obama does represent a new kind of politics that seems perfectly tailored for this new generation" (Wilson, 2).

The 2008 election also proved favorably for the reputation of Millennials. Young people are usually known as apathetic and unconcerned with what is going on, but clearly, it was not the case for Millennials, who not only campaigned for Obama, but also voted for him. “[The election] showed that we do care about the future of our country,” Walsh said.

Kristoffer Munden, a senior in college, who is an active Democrat, does not believe that Obama’s political stances helped him get youth support: “Honestly, I don’t think that it played that much of a factor, as long as it’s a Democrat. People have a general understanding of what Democrats stand for, and historically, we’ve seen young people vote Democrat. So I don’t think there was anything special about Obama in particular policy-wise” (personal communication, April 7, 2011).

Munden believes that this generation became fascinated with Obama because of less important things: “Obama was cool—plain and simple. He portrayed himself as a superstar. He has a gorgeous family. He’s young. He walked along beaches in Hawaii with his shirt off. Hollywood endorsed him—they had that ‘Yes, We Can’ music video. He had campaign rallies of hundreds of thousands of people. He was cool. He was hip. He was Barack Obama.”

Munden clarifies that he does not mean this negatively—he just believes that our generation did not participate because of his policies, but rather an image that was created of him: “He was the glamour candidate. When the Republicans accused him of being a celebrity—totally true.”

Andrew Slade, a sophomore at Boston College from Abington, Pennsylvania had similar thoughts on why Obama was so popular: “While I supported him in the

general election, I don't think he won the primaries because of his experience or because he was able to present policy provisions that were reasonable or were better than Hillary Clinton or his other challengers. I think he was really good at marketing himself, and taking advantage of new media and social networking. He was able to ... mobilize people who were never involved in politics—people who never voted or paid any attention. And it's always good to see more people involved" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

But Slade does see that Obama had differences that he could offer as President of the United States: "People really wanted to see a change—a little less arrogance on the part of the federal government—more openness. And his diverse background better allowed him to spread that message.... When you're dealing with past presidents like George Bush who came from old money, they live in Texas, they might not have the great level of involvement in foreign policy. ... From just having lived in another country and his role as a senator... contribute to his greater capacity to understand the intricacies of our relationships with other countries and how to retain good ones, as I don't think it's something that seems to have been a salient concern to Obama's predecessor."

There were other factors, too, including the "Yes, We Can" music video, that spread his message to younger voters, according to Munden: "The 'Yes, We Can' music video came out after [Obama's] defeat in the New Hampshire primary. That was when I was still a very staunch Hillary [Clinton] supporter, and because she had won the New Hampshire primary, I thought that we could win it. But I saw that 'Yes,

We Can' music video and thought, 'Hmm, this Obama isn't so bad after all, and it almost made me switch over to Team Obama.'

Of course, Obama's policies would not be able to make every Millennial happy, but they seem to understand: "I feel like he's been trying to live up to what he said that he would do," Francois said. "But he's still a politician—he'll not always do what he says he'll do.... The position [Obama] was put in at the beginning of his presidency was such a bad one that he had to work hard to get out of it—he's still not out of it, and it won't be for a while."

Jean-Baptiste believes that Obama is doing a great job interacting with this generation because he is using tools Millennials are using: "He's on YouTube. The White House website was completely plain HTML, ugly 1996-looking website. Now it's actually interactive, it's nice, it has vibrant colors, it's Web 2.0. He's using Twitter, I believe. He's on Facebook ... He's able to connect with people the way they're communicating now and not just like on TV... He's communicating with us day to day, just like we're communicating with our families."

As for the future of young people and politics, the effects are still uncertain. While Munden is positive about his generation bringing change overall, he still believes that the youth of his generation will not continue to be as active in politics: "It was clear during the [2010] midterm elections, young people weren't that active. So what this says is that Obama had more of a momentary effect and not a permanent one."

Francois is optimistic, though, because he sees the change within himself: “I never really liked politics at all.... Now I really have to read more and be more politically savvy. It’s something I’m working on.”

Both Munden and Francois are optimistic that this generation can tackle big political issues. While some may not think Obama was as revolutionary as he was portrayed to be in the beginning, he still got young people thinking and invested into politics to varying degrees. The 2008 election proved what young voters are capable of doing, should they choose to participate.

Chapter Seven: Apple, Inc., the iPod & the iPhone

Kristoffer Munden got his first Apple product, a silver iPod Mini in 8th grade. The reason why he wanted it was because of a fellow classmate: “There was a girl in my school—or in my year at least—and she was the first person to have the original iPod... It was cool because at that time, you had hundreds of songs in your hand and you were able to carry it around.”

At this point, Munden was deciding between an iPod or an MP3-Compact Disk player. “But I ultimately decided to get the iPod,” he said, “because I kind of had the sense that it was going to be something really, really big. It was going to be the wave of the future.”

Munden, now a senior at Boston College, even remembers how he felt when he first got his iPod. “I had saved up for a long time to be able to buy it. And I was in the Phillipines at the time, so the iPod Mini was just getting ready to be released. I was ready to buy one of the first iPod Mini’s to be released in the Phillipines. So I went to the store and bought my iPod Mini. I was just feeling like a million bucks when I was walking out.” The importance Munden placed on this event to remember it years later demonstrates how much the product influenced him.

In the thesis survey, 16 people out of 100 noted that the release of the iPod was one of the five major events of the Millennial Decade. Eight people said the popularity of Apple products, in general, during that decade was one of the most influential. Six Millennials said the iPhone has revolutionized the times. Clearly, Apple and its products have been able to capture Millennials’ fascination with

regard to technology. And this fascination undoubtedly reveals some things about the Millennial Generation.

Munden believes that Apple was a part of this generation, mainly because it grew with the Millennials: “If you just look at the timing of release of major Apple products, a lot of it does coincide with our youth,” Munden said. “If you go back to the original iBook, they had the first neon colored ones when we were just becoming technologically aware in elementary school. Then once we get into middle school, it’s the iPod, and then MacBooks coming out. So it’s, more or less, grown along with us in a way.”

Apple, a company that started out in computers before Millennials were even born, branched out to other products, most notably the iPod in October 2001 (Alvarez). Steve Jobs, the current Chief Executive Officer of Apple, Inc., is credited for the expansion of Apple into various industries, especially with the iPhone and iPad tablet.

But other than its just products, Apple was able to sell its brand image, one that spoke to Millennials. Munden thinks his generation is attracted to Apple products because [Apple] targeted its advertising to them: “Apple made a conscious effort to reach out to people our age. One of the most successful things that Apple did was their ‘I’m a Mac’ campaign. There was a Mac guy—really young, informally dressed, really cool—compared to the ‘PC,’ who was in a suit, older, not as exciting. So people sensed that Apple’s the brand for the cool and hip types, and the PC is for grandpas using it at work to do his spreadsheets.”

This “coolness” factor in Apple’s commercials definitely helped it enter the youth market. The marketing campaign for the iPod with had silhouettes dancing, listening to earbud headphones, and that built the “cool,” “hip” image for Millennials, according to Munden.

According to a January 2005 article in the *New York Times*, “Their shimmying and shaking have firmly established the iPod as the icon of the dawning digital lifestyle and sped 10 million units out the door.”

The article spoke about how Steve Jobs, the Chief Executive Officer of Apple, Inc., offered a product that “combined cool with inexpensive, truly personal computing that fits in a pocket,” and these traits are perfect for the Millennial who is young and on the go (Stross 2005).

Stross wrote about how Apple’s competitors, Microsoft and Google, had near-monopolies in many areas that Apple was in. “But Apple has an absolute monopoly on the asset that is the most difficult for competitors to copy: cool” (Stross). And it is this factor that is hardest to produce: “All of the billions in its corporate treasury, all of the personal billions of the co-founders Bill Gates and Paul Allen, all of the money in the world, cannot buy the ability to fathom the metaphysical mystery of cool” (Stross).

Ergy Jean-Baptiste, a senior at Boston College, believes that Apple, through advertising, helped bring technology to the mainstream, even though some products had already existed: “Steve Jobs and Apple used what was there before that wasn’t that popular and put it in white.... For the iPod, for example, there were really good MP3 players before that. There were really good companies, like Creative Zen... that

played MP3s—that played all sorts of formats.... And Apple said, ‘Well, I like this. This looks cool.’ They just put in a small screen and a click wheel.”

“They just pretty much used what other companies were doing,” Jean-Baptiste said, “but ‘We’re going to make it look pretty and give it to people.’... They took something that was there, but it really wasn’t out there [to the general public].”

While MP3 players existed prior to the release of the iPod, the iPod truly cemented the idea of a portable digital music device. By the end of the decade, over 200 million units were sold (Alvarez 2010).

The iPod, particularly, spoke to Millennials, garnering 16 people to say that it made one of the biggest impacts on their generation during the Millennial Decade. Leander Kahney even wrote a book titled “The Cult of iPod” in 2005, where he discussed how revolutionary the iPod was: “The iPod is to the 21st century what the big band was to the ‘20s, the radio to the ‘40s, or the jukebox to the ‘50s—the signature technology that defines the musical culture of the era.... Inside Apple’s little white box is magic, pure magic, in the guise of music” (Kahney).

“The iPod is changing the music industry—not just how music is played and enjoyed, but how it is distributed and, maybe soon, how it is made. The iPod has usurped the album as the key product of the music industry, replacing it with the playlist” (Kahney). And since music is an important aspect of youth culture, it has undoubtedly changed young people’s relationship to the music they listen to.

One of the ways that Jean-Baptiste sees the iPod as affecting Millennials is how listening to music can preoccupy time that otherwise would be idle: “On the train [people] just sit there. They look ahead. They don’t really make eye contact.

They're not really communicating with anyone else. But having headphones on and enjoying music or listening to an audio book ... at least you're not feeling bored."

But he also sees iPods as barriers between people, whether they want the device to be or not. Jean-Baptiste would put on the headphones, even though he would not be listening to music to not be bothered. "It does make people more isolated," he said.

Not only was the iPod on Millennials' minds, but also was the iPhone. Apple made the smart phone accessible to the everyday person: "So many people my age have iPhones or some sort of smart phone device," Munden said. "Because in the past, smart phones were really just limited to business people. So it was really Apple pushing ... the iPhone to a more mainstream, young demographic."

With the iPhone, many tools are in a person's hands, including various applications and the Internet. While this has helped with constant communication, the smart phone has made it harder to differentiate work time from leisure time, according to Gabrielle Chwazik-Gee, a senior at Boston College: "These forms of communication do allow us to accomplish more in a short amount of time than has previously been possible. This has resulted in increased busyness, multi-tasking and stress."

While Apple may be simply another company, the fact that it has grabbed the attention of Millennials with such a firm grip does say some things, both negative and positive about the Generation.

"I think it's made our generation a bit simple—simple-minded," Jean-Baptiste said. "People don't really look for, 'Does this do this and that?' They say, 'Alright,

this does this,' and they go for it. They don't really do the research anymore. They just stick to one company or one thing and they say, 'I'll just go with Apple because they're probably going the best way with that.'"

Jean-Baptiste also spoke about the Apple fanboys who unquestioningly support Apple products, and people who go to Apple for a product usually will not go to other companies' products.: "I wish it weren't that way. But I can understand because they made things pretty much just simple. They made things look nice... and everybody who's not a techie [can use the various products easily]."

"But there are still people out there who look for other things," he said. "Research and say, 'Okay, maybe Apple is not the best,' and find other companies."

Jean-Baptiste said that many in this generation choose form over function, and that is why Apple has become a standard for many consumers. But he does believe that Apple produces a solid product for the everyday person, including Jesse Francois.

Francois became an Apple user later and was sold: "I had a Windows [computer] and an MP3 player—both of them are gone. Then I got an Apple and an iPod and suddenly my electronic life got so much better because I'm so horrible with computers. But Mac makes it so that everything is so easy to use."

To Francois, this has some lasting effects: "What it does to our generation is that, one: everything is so simple to use.... We're always on the move—fast paced. We don't like anything that's going to keep us struggling for too long to use it.

"Two: [Apple] is just going to keep on making us want to buy more and more things. If you notice that Apple keeps putting out new products ever so often, so

that if you bought the old product, you need to be hip and get the new one now. A lot the products are very useful, but at the same time, it makes our generation a bit more materialistic.”

Munden and Jean-Baptiste also believe that Apple has either made their generation materialistic or is utilizing that trait well, especially because they release a new version of their products almost every year: “Right now, they’re pretty much pushing out the same product every year,” Jean-Baptiste said, “and they’re still making [money] just because people want the latest Apple product.”

People also seem hungry for new Apple products: “From time to time, I follow the technology blogs,” Munden said, “and people are always wondering what Apple is going to come up with next. And obviously, everyone wants Apple’s next big thing.”

Another trait Munden can see about his generation through Apple and its products is the desire to belong to a group: “It definitely shows that we want to conform,” Munden said. “Because aside from the fact that everyone wants something new and shiny, we also want something that everybody else has. For me, for example, what first prompted me to look into the iPod was the fact that my friend had the iPod. Then after I bought the iPod, a lot of my other friends wanted to get the iPod, as well. So it definitely is very conformist in that sense.” Which is counterintuitive to some people, since this younger generation wants what everyone else has, rather than try to go against the mainstream.

Munden sees a bigger picture of what Apple reveals about Millennials, which is in line with the other ways this generation operates: “I think it goes along with the

great sense of democratization that has been going along with society that we've been seeing, especially with our generation," he said. "By making these products for the mass public and targeting the mass public ... it really emphasizes the fact that our generation is interested in greater democratization."

Apple products have really evolved during the Millennial Decade and beyond, and it is affecting the habits of Millennials, according to Munden. If it can continue to evolve, then Apple will be hard to compete with in the future.

Chapter Eight: Economic Crisis

Mary Brinkopf from St. Louis, Missouri, spent sleepless nights, worrying about obtaining a job for after graduation. But since the recession started around 2007, Brinkopf had to deal with its consequences even before looking for a job:

“It started even last year,” Brinkopf said, who is now a senior at Boston College. “I probably sent out 30-40 applications to get an internship, and it was very surprising just to see how many companies had the cut back, not in a hiring position, and just how competitive the field was” (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Even in 2011, an event that occurred during the Millennial Decade still had lingering effects with an end that is not clearly defined yet. For the Millennial Generation, many recently started out in the real world or are terrified to enter it during a time of uncertainty.

The severity of the situation continued to surprise Brinkopf when she started looking for a job: “I’m a believer that the unemployment rate is actually higher than typically we’re told. But even going in and looking for a job this past semester and even this semester, I’m just astounded by how few places are hiring.”

Those Millennials who are looking for jobs in this economic climate have the recession in the back of their minds. Twenty-nine of the respondents of the survey noted that the Economic Crisis was one of the five most significant events during the Millennial Decade for this generation.

Ergy Jean-Baptiste, who will graduate from Boston College in December 2011, says that he is worried about his job prospects, even years after the recession

officially hit: “I’m still scared. Just the fact that I don’t want to get out of college and stay at my house, not being about to do anything for six months... With a four-year degree—a Bachelors—the thought that it [could be] meaningless is kind of scary” (personal communication, April 4, 2011).

Andrew Slade also believes that the recession impacted Millennials: “I think it’s had a obvious financial impact on our generation. People are unable to maintain lifestyles to which they have become accustomed. A lot of people have lost their jobs, have lost their homes, have been unable to go to college or do things that they expected just a few years ago” (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

But Slade thinks that not only has the recession affected lifestyle, it has also affected morale and the way his generation views education: “I think that it’s discouraging for a lot of people. We fear being unable to find jobs when we graduate. We feel like we need to stay in school longer—that we need advanced degrees if we want to compete, even as graduates of top-tier schools ... that we’re not going to be competitive in the job market. Companies just aren’t hiring. Many of us will be burdened with debt beyond graduation that we won’t be able to pay off. There’s a dichotomy between people who feel like they need to stay in school longer if they hope to make money and people who feel that school is, itself, out of reach because of financial constraints and that it’s not worth it—the long-run benefits won’t outweigh the short-run costs of education.”

One example of this is of Brinkopf’s friends who graduated last year. She was expecting to have a starting salary of about \$65 thousand, which would slowly help

her pay off the debt of going to a private university. But the first job that she was able to get, after three months of unemployment, was around \$35-\$40 thousand.

But not only does the debt seem insurmountable, to Brinkopf, this also affects the power shifting from employees to employers: “I think that shows me just how the recession has impacted [us]. Employers think that they can drop the amount of money they are paying to entry-level positions.”

From her friends’ experiences, Brinkopf believes that people who graduate during a recession tend to have lower starting salaries and that a trend may develop where their earning potential will be much less than those who graduate during economically stable or booming times.

“It just shows that our generation will have to work a bit harder to make up that difference that’s now occurred,” she said. “It’s going to take a lot for our generation to get out of this recession.”

There is yet to be a consensus of when exactly this generation ends, so Slade believes that the older people in this generation see this recession differently: “I think that a lot of people born in the early 80s are seeing it through a different lens, seeing that they’re no longer, presumably, reliant on their parents for support—they’re independent, hopefully graduated and employed. Whereas for the younger members of this generation, there’s a lot more uncertainty—things beyond their control. They don’t know what to expect. They’ve never had or looked for a real job. They’ve been made subject to the circumstances around their parents finances.”

While some might think that the older Millennials are more fortunate, Brinkopf sees that this issue spans across this whole generation: “We’re all in the

same boat together.... Obviously, they finished college by the point we entered and already had a job. But one thing to not forget about is that when this recession hit, a lot of companies eliminated positions. And the people who got eliminated were usually the ones who just entered.

“A lot of my friends were telling me, when in 2008—people who had gotten jobs—their companies had actually paid them and told them that they wanted to defer at least a year or two before hiring them on.... I think this is very much affecting all [Millennials] from 1981 to our year and maybe even two years past us. I think we’re all suffering in some way.”

But with every defining moment, there are lessons that can be taken away from the experience: “I think it’s making us very independent,” Brinkopf said, with regard to their relationship to their employers. “People in our parents’ generation are expected to hold three jobs [throughout their lifetime]. Our generation is expected to hold around eight to nine. That shows me that people in our generation simply do not have that much confidence in the companies they work for. They understand that when economic times get hard, they’re going to be the first people laid off.... We have to be independent. We have to be ambitious. The company is not going to take care of us.”

Brinkopf also sees how this recession shed light on how society operates: “I think it definitely exposed that spending had gone out of control and our generation, I hope, will be a little bit more frugal, more cognizant,” she said. “My dad has a great saying about how the market is always driven by greed. And really when it busts, it’s really an exposure of that greed and how much we’ve let things go.

“So I hope our generation will take that away and say, ‘Look, this is what happens when everybody’s in a boom and we start cutting corners. We need to be fiscally responsible.... We’re going to have another boom, but we’re also going to have another recession because we get sloppy. But I hope that the depth of the recession that we have will be less severe than the one we have right now,” Brinkopf said.

But Jean-Baptiste believes that this generation will not take away many lessons from this recession: “It won’t have as much of an effect [as the Great Depression]. Even though a recession happened ... it wasn’t as bad as when people were tons of people living in the streets.... It just seemed like, ‘Yeah, the market crashed.’ Yes, people were losing their jobs. They were losing their houses, they were still fighting, but it’s not going to have as much of an effect on somebody’s personality—to toughen up or something like that. People are still ... just running around with their iPods in their ears. We’re so materialistic that we don’t even notice anymore. It’s not going to be inspiring. It’s not going to change us in any way.”

Munden feels the same way about this generation with regard to the lessons Millennials will take away from the recession: “I think it’s a temporary effect.... It might’ve made us more cynical about big business in general, especially now that we see no one was prosecuted for their conduct.... So far we haven’t done anything about it. And I don’t know what our generation will do once we’re the decision makers.... I think it shows that our generation is still very much stuck in its own world... We’re really geared toward instant feedback that’s geared towards us. So

as long as we turn out fine, it'll work out fine. Therefore, someone else will take care of it for us" (personal communication, April 7, 2011).

Slade thinks that this generation has learned a few lessons, including about greed: "The biggest thing to take from all this is the danger of greed. It's not just one group that's guilty of this." Slade mentions those who bought homes beyond their means and banks that lent the money to those who were riskier, hoping to collect higher interest rates. He also mentions financial institutions that were involved in subprime mortgage lending and dealt with derivatives that were not stable, causing people to lose their jobs and savings.... If you look at any industry, I think you can find examples of [greed]."

But Slade is unsure of whom and for how long this lesson will stick: "In general, people are pretty short sighted. In a few years, assuming that there is no serious double dip—that things don't digress in the near future—I'd be surprised if concerns about the recession or lessons taken from it remain salient. But I guess it depends on the people and how they were impacted individually."

Brinkopf, though, is cautiously optimistic about the future in general: "Going through the process like I did back in the fall [of 2010], it's just terrible anxiety. But I think it makes you grow as a person. So we'll be able to learn from the recession and be able to come out ahead, actually."

"I want to have faith [in the Millennial Generation].... I think that greed is a very powerful weapon and that it will consume people and people will cut corners because of it.... I'd like to say that we can learn from this."

But even if a lesson is learned, the recession may have already changed the a Millennials path in life, perhaps opting for something with more security, according to Talal Rojas: “I think it’s overwhelming because you hear so much about the media saying how unemployment is 9.8% and you hear all these stories of people who don’t have jobs. And you start to think, ‘Well, I’m going to graduate right out of school. What’s going to happen to me. Am I going to find one against people who already have experience and already had a job that they couldn’t hold. So you start to get cautious. And I definitely was cautious at one point. But you start to think about some other alternatives. Maybe if your first choice in business is not hiring people, then you look to other things” (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

This sentiment is also echoed by Slade: “I think the biggest reaction I’ve seen from my peers has been fear—people taking more interest in the economy, making decisions in their academic lives that they hope will protect them from future economic harm... People aren’t as idealistic. They might have grand ideas. Maybe it’s risky. They are probably much less willing to do that now or to take that risk now than a few years ago.”

So while this generation may remain idealistic in other ways, many are looking for security with their occupation. A hard lesson is learned when big dreams are given up in order to, hopefully, secure basic needs. But this also makes Millennials wiser about the choices they make in their lives, witnessing the repercussions of letting greed run rampant.

Chapter 9: New Remedies

With the oldest of the Millennial Generation only in their early 30s and the youngest still in elementary school, many believe that it is still too early to determine what this generation is about. In fact, currently, people disagree about when the generation ends, making it currently considered one of the longer generations. And with this large difference in age, it is hard to see trends.

Many say what defines a generation is how they come together to face a challenge, and the years between 2000 and 2009 definitely gave Millennials enough challenges to do so. While Millennials were still too young then to make concrete political policy changes or major economic decisions, their voices were very much present throughout the decade.

When September 11th occurred, this generation, like much of the United States, began opening its eyes to the rest of the world. But it was with a view open to other cultures—not xenophobic. This openness to the unfamiliar is one of the traits that Millennials seem proud of and are hoping that the trends will continue, even if Maddy Walsh does not believe this generation is definable yet.

“Our generation is becoming more accepting towards differences in minority,” Walsh said. “It’s not an ideal place still, but there have been strides in gay marriage and minorities in higher positions in our political system—we elected an African-American president... Latinos are becoming more involved [in the political system]. So there has been a lot of improvements of breaking down the stereotypes and accepting more people” (personal communication, March 14, 2011).

And Kristoffer Munden wants his generation to further this: “I think and I hope that this generation can affect some sort of change that is going to lead to a fairer and more tolerant society. Some of the economic policies instituted by the generation previous to us might have made it more difficult to have a fair and more equal democratic society. So we’re definitely going to affect those changes because looking at our generation’s views on issues like gay marriage, health care, education—things like that” (personal communication, April 7, 2011).

While many things that occurred during the Millennial Decade could have made this generation more fearful about others and unfamiliar cultures, it seems as though Millennials realize that this world is only becoming a smaller place and the need to learn about and embrace differences is key to the continued success of human kind.

Perhaps the reason why Millennials seem bolder to explore differences is the proliferation of media—anyone can learn about almost anything on the Internet. And it is this new tool that has revolutionized this generation’s development. Every generation is defined in part by the tools at its disposal, and this generation is no different. But the shift that the Internet sparked was no ordinary advancement, affecting almost every industry and part of society. While most new technologies are no more than modern conveniences, the Internet and existing in the cloud turned many core establishments into outdated relics.

The Internet also changed communication, for better and for worse, as many Millennials admit. The way people interact was totally changed for this generation, especially the younger members who do not remember many years without a

cellular phone with texting or without a Facebook account. This generation is both the most connected and the least connected, communicating a lot at an often superficial level.

Ergy Jean-Baptiste also believes that this shallowness is affected in part by technology: “With all the electronics and the texting, it could become very impersonal. It’s really what I worry about... As a generation, as a community, we have to remember not to lose touch with each other. We’re all humans. With all these new technologies, it’s easy to lose personal relationships. Nothing’s like a conversation with a person face to face. Not a text, not even through a phone or a computer screen. It’s just something to look out for. And technology is only going to get better” (personal communication, April 4, 2011).

Juliana Joseph believes the same thing: “I don’t want us to lose control. I’ll use technology as an example. I don’t want it to consume us as much as it might in the future” (personal communication, March 24, 2011).

Joseph says that this generation will be the last generation to remember how it was like before the Internet became a fixture in life, and she is afraid that it may consume future generations.

But constant connection to others, especially through email and cellular phones, has allowed Millennials to have an excellent—if not obsessive—work ethic. David Brooks noted this scheduling phenomenon in his article, and the Millennials interviewed also admit to scheduling every part of their day and to having a dependency on scheduling tools such as their smart phones and Google calendars.

It is because of tools at the tips of their fingers, and the information on the Internet, that Millennials are able to take the initiative and create their own organizations, as mentioned by Howe and Strauss. With the exception of the election of Barack Obama, perhaps society has been feeling the effects of Millennials on a more hyper-local scale than ever before. Past generations found success in banding together and protesting for a cause. This generation, however, is focused on hands-on volunteering and, dissatisfied with organizations already established, is creating its own service projects, among other things.

This drive to fight harder speaks wonders about the Millennial Generation's idealism, even after a decade that could have ended hopes of things getting better: "There's an interesting dichotomy between the cynicism and the idealism," Andrew Slade said. "This decade has been host to a number of terrible events and I think that it definitely probably hurts the spirit of our generation. But I think out of that for many comes the idea that they can make things better—that there will be progress. That the economy will recover. That our standing in the world will improve. That the wars will end. Things will generally be better in the future" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

But of course, the problems Millennials face are complex and will take a lot of work to fix, according to Slade: "I think there are a lot of complex systemic challenges that America faces that we aren't necessarily seeing the full ramifications of them now. But there are things that we're going to be forced to deal with when we get older, when our kids are older. Economic issues, the federal budget and state budget deficits, the national debt. They are legitimate concerns. Social security and

Medicare—entitlement programs—are unsustainable in their present forms. Education, obviously we're falling behind globally. Environmentally, we need to care to find new sources of energy that are cleaner—to take real steps to address global warming, pollution, to preserve land. There are a lot of problems that I hope we're able to solve in my lifetime."

But Jesse Francois believes that this generation more a part of a long-term struggle that has been fought for a long time: "I feel like the hopes of our generation has been the same as it's been for a long time for many other generations. All the 'isms,' basically," referring to subjects such as racism and sexism. Francois also mentioned the environment: "It's in to be green now, but how long will that last?"

Francois is overall positive about this generation, though: "I don't lose sleep over it, so I must be feeling okay [about my generation]."

This general hopefulness is not unique to Francois, as the Millennials interviewed all felt that their generation will be able to fix the problems of the past, even with all their flaws. The election of Obama definitely proved that the youth voice is formidable, and if Millennials choose to use it, they can have a huge influence. In fact, two other topics in this thesis were also hugely shaped by the Millennial Generation—social networking and Apple. Communication that they are gravitating toward is where the world is moving, and the brands they identify with, such as Apple—cool and conforming—are doing well. Only two of the events they identified as the five major occurrences of the Millennial Decade—September 11th and the recession—were not influence this generation, and it seems they are adapting well to the circumstances brought on by these two tragic events.

Many older generations criticize Millennials for being too self-possessed, and many would agree to a certain degree. But because they realize they have a lot at their disposal, Millennials also feel the weight of the world on their shoulders, according to Munden: “We know we’ve been given a lot, and I feel like many in my generation feel compelled to tackle a lot of the big issues because of it.”

While some may try to take on the larger problems, Slade sees many in this generation escaping from these problems: “The negative events that had transpired within the last 10 years or so have motivated a lot of people to find ways to cope that aren’t—I’m not sure if they are solutions but rather band-aids. I think that social media, networking to an extent plays a part in that. You can see interactions manifested in text on your computer screen. You can spend hours and hours obsessing over the lives of people, many of whom you don’t really know or care about. But it’s a way to distract yourself. Things like reality television ... teen targeted literature, movies and TV shows, like Twilight and Harry Potter, as much as I enjoyed that series. The fantasy world that young people are drawn to.”

But others would argue that escapism is another form of creativity, and Munden hopes that it is creativity—the ability to look at what is there and see other solutions—that will define this generation: “I think contrary what people might say, despite the conformity, I still think we’re very innovative. It’s a very creative generation. We’re trying to think of new ways to solve old problems.”

Overall, the Millennials interviewed are positive about the future, despite having lived through the “Decade from Hell.” And while cynics may dismiss this as youthful ignorance, it also seems as though those in this generation who are ready

to tackle the big issues also have an understanding of what the issues are. As one of the most cared for generations as children, it seems they know many are looking at them to figure out the solutions to large issues. Of course, the pressure to make the world and society a better place is essential for any upcoming generation to feel invested in their community. But instead of shying away or becoming disillusioned and paralyzed, this generation seems ready to take on these challenges.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis found the Millennial Generation is very introspective, able to see both the positives and the negatives of their generation. They are also able to pinpoint some of the effects of the Millennial Decade, which presented many challenges to their generation.

While the Millennial Decade was deemed as the “Decade from Hell” by Newsweek, the Millennials are not disillusioned or putting the blame on another generation and waiting for the world to change. They are idealistic and are getting their hands dirty with these issues—they are truly taking a stake in the fate of the world.

The occurrences they highlighted—September 11th, the explosion of social networking, the election of Barack Obama, the rise of Apple, and the Economic Crisis—paint a picture of a generation that, while has witnessed traumatic events with widespread repercussions, is clearly steering what is going to be next. They understand the significance of events that people can underestimate.

With September 11th, the event caused Millennials to be reactive—it was a challenge that Millennials needed to rise to face. This generation, instead of isolating itself, realized how small the world is becoming and how people need to learn about other cultures. This shows that Millennials are open and not afraid of the unknown.

Social networking and Facebook prove how this generation is capable of creating its own tools and evolve them to fit future needs. This may also highlight

how some can be superficial and self-important, depending how a Millennial chooses to use social networking. But the fact that some realize these traits also indicates that they are also careful to let social networking overtake human social connection.

The election of Obama was one of the first events that Millennials took charge and elected someone they felt were in line with their ideals. They campaigned and they voted, totally dispelling what others have said about this generation, such as being apathetic.

The rise of Apple says a few things about this generation, both negative and positive—and Millennials see those. Negatives include conformity and form over function at times. But it also shows the spending power of this generation— whoever can get Millennials to buy will be a dominant company.

The Economic Crisis is another tragedy that has forced Millennials to react. However, this generation continues to prove how resilient it is, holding to its ideals in the face of a monumental challenge. After something like this, it would be reasonable to be disillusioned. But Millennials are, once again, rising up to the challenge.

Politics, consumer preferences, and the evolution of communication have already been affected by this generation at an early age, meaning that this generation will not go down in history as a quiet one. Obviously, priorities change as generations grow older. However, the trailblazing personality of Millennials will not, as this generation is open to new ideas and new ideals. They are not afraid of the unknown, and will find creative ways to solve issues.

Of course, there are characteristics of this generation that would be deemed “negative,” such as its tendency to conform and to flock to what is cool, making it shallow. But for many, conformity is not totally a part of life, as Millennials have been creative, solving multiple issues utilizing new tools. Shallowness for some things does not mean for all, as demonstrated by all the service projects Howe and Strauss note in their book. Often overscheduled, Millennials still know what is important for society and take the time to make a difference.

Especially for Americans, the world today is unknown, as the United States’ role in the world is evolving at a rapid pace. But American Millennials seem ready to tackle the challenge, instead of cowering, and figure out a better way for society, despite past hardships.

Overall, Howe and Strauss’ analysis seem to be holding true. As the first generation to grow up with technology such as the Internet, Millennials will pave the way for the future. Even if it seems as though it is a daunting task, they seem ready.

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