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Millennials at Work: What We Know and What We Need to Do (If Anything)

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Abstract There are a lot of opinions about who Millennials are, what they think and value, and how they will behave as they grow older and gain more experience in the workforce. The relatively sparse empirical research published on Millennials is confusing at best and contradictory at worst. As noted in this article and others in this special issue, however, there are a few topics including work attitudes, long-term health outcomes, and personality factors on which we have reasonably solid data to inform us about current and likely future behavior of Millennials. We address the importance of context for understanding behavior of people in different generations, a subject often missing from the discussion of generational similarities and differences. There are implications for practitioners of what we know and for how context affects behavior. We make suggestions for how practitioners can use the data available to inform decisions they make about working with Millennials. Finally, we discuss the importance of new directions of research on generational differences to help both practitioners and the research community better understand the realities of generational similarities and differences and rely less on urban myths or stereotypes.

Keywords Millennials · Generations · Generational differences · Health · Technology · Generation gap · Leadership

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There are a lot of opinions about who Millennials are, what they think and value, and who they will become as they advance in years. If one quickly peruses blogs, articles in the popular press, and peer reviewed articles, it is immediately obvious that many of the ideas people have are contradictory. Are Millennials altruistic beings who want to save the planet more than anything else, or flashes in the pan who go with the latest trend they hear Twittered about? Do they fundamentally prefer the stability of working for one organization, or is job stability only their preference until a better offer comes along? Are they more interested in the benefits of working or in the work itself? Are they unable to focus on one task at a time or is multi-tasking a behavior common to previous generations? Just how similar and different are Millennials from previous generations?

What We Know

The relatively sparse empirical research published on Millennials is often contradictory and sometimes confusing. However, as noted in the articles in this special issue and elsewhere, there are a few topics on which we have reasonably solid data to inform the vigorous dialog about Millennials in the popular press.

Are Current Beliefs About Youth Unique to Millennials?

Perceptions and realities of generational differences are substantially different (Deal 2007). Clearly, most of the interviews published in magazines and newspapers as well as general conversations among neighbors and around workplace water coolers illustrate that older people believe

that Millennials today say different things than their elders *remember themselves* saying at the same age. There is also no question that the language has shifted such that Millennial slang today is different from Gen X slang at the same age, or Boomer slang at the same age. However, that's like saying that Microsoft Word has changed its font; it matters, but it does not necessarily indicate a change in substance or functionality. Think about it, the use of slang helps define the uniqueness of every generation. For those growing up in the 60s, words like groovy, bummer, cool, a gas, blitzed, dork, gnarly, boogie, bummed out, and cooties were regularly used. Except for "cool," those words are not often used by Millennials (they might use sweet, mega, dawg, NOT, whatever, LOL, don't even, you go girl, chill, or RAD). Beyond the use of language, older people (mostly Boomers) complain that younger people (mostly Millennials) are difficult to interact with, entitled, and overly service-focused (Hira 2007; Myers and Sadaghiani 2010). In fact, Boomers were described in remarkably similar terms when they were the same age (Rukeyser 1969; Seligman 1969). Older people today perceive younger people as using too much slang, having poor communication skills, and being difficult, entitled, and service-focused. When these now older people were the age of Millennials today, previous generations used the same descriptors to characterize them. In short, there is a growing body of research indicating that the beliefs about whichever younger generation is entering the workforce has remained remarkably stable over the past 40 years.

Do Millennials Have Different Attitudes About Work Compared with Other Generations?

Most of the research on employed adults that examines attitudes at work among generations at the same age over time finds a few small statistical differences, but the differences are few and modest at best (Kowske et al. 2010; Smola and Sutton 2002). Research has shown small differences in work centrality (such that it is lower for younger generations than for older ones; Smola and Sutton 2002; Twenge et al. 2010), but no differences have been found in altruistic work values (Twenge et al. 2010). Kowske et al. (2010) clearly show that Millennials report marginally higher job satisfaction than older generations did at the same age. (Note: these data were collected before the recession began.) Hence, clearly there are a few small differences, but what you do not see in the literature is evidence of the types of sweeping differences in attitudes, orientations, and work ethic that populate the popular press. Are there generational differences in work attitudes? Probably, but the differences are not large enough to give us any confidence that the work environment is fundamentally affected by such differences.

Are Millennials More Narcissistic or Assertive than Other Generations Were at the Same Age?

Much good research on personality traits shows that Millennials in college are (statistically) significantly different from previous generations (e.g., Baby Boomers and Gen Xers). Millennials, as compared with previous generations *at the same age*, have been shown to be higher on positive traits such as self-esteem and assertiveness (Twenge and Campbell 2001) as well as negative traits such as narcissism (Twenge et al. 2008). Much is made of these differences, with people commenting on how positive it is that young people now have higher self-esteem and are more assertive with others suggesting that the increase in narcissism is a real threat that is compounded by the increase in self-esteem and assertiveness (Twenge 2006). Research shows that people who score higher in narcissism are generally more aggressive toward others when they feel rejected (Twenge and Campbell 2003). However, there is some disagreement about the increase in narcissism. Trzesniewski et al. (2008) rightly point out that the increase in narcissism is based on data from college students at traditional 4-year universities which obviously does not adequately represent the full US population of Millennials. There has not to date been a study that looked at differences in narcissism, self-esteem, or assertiveness across generations with a population representative of the US. Until such a study is done, we cannot conclude definitely that traits differ substantially across generations.

Do Millennials Use Technology Differently than Do Other Generations?

Over many generations, technology has changed society in fundamental ways. Consider how technology innovations affected generations preceding Millennials (e.g., the introduction of radio, telephone, television, and Internet). Millennials use technology differently than previous generations (as does every generation *when compared with* the previous generation). A number of the articles in the special issue address the changes in technology and how that may influence how people interact with each other (e.g., Hershatter and Epstein 2010). Obviously, in recent years, there have been major innovations in software and hardware technology that have changed the way that humans can communicate. The rise in social networking platforms (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Ning) has made it easier for people to interact with each other synchronously and asynchronously, regardless of where they live in the world, and to participate in communities of similar interest and practice. While there are many benefits to greater connectivity, there is also evidence from neuroscience research that the human brain cannot effectively integrate

multiple inputs at the same time (Dux et al. 2006). Time will tell whether the Millennial generation will be more fundamentally affected by the explosion of new technology options when compared with previous generations where the rate of introduction of new technologies was not as fast.

Do Millennials Work Less than Did Previous Generations?

Stereotypes in the popular press about differences in the work ethic of different generations (as measured by number of hours worked and work patterns) are not supported by the data. The Family and Work Institute (2005) found both that workers overall are working longer hours than in the past and that there are no differences between the hours worked by Millennials and Gen Xers at the same age (18–22). They also found that in 2002 Gen Xers worked more hours than did Boomers at the same age in 1977. Similarly, Staff and Schulenberg (2010) found that generations are remarkably similar in their work patterns during high school and that Millennials do not work fewer hours than did Boomers or Xers at the same age.

One issue many researchers do not take into account when looking at work hours is the level in the organization of the generation being studied. Research has shown that level in the organization is a primary explanatory variable for hours worked (Deal 2007). Since older people typically hold higher positions in organizations and since people who are higher in organizations typically work longer hours, it would be easy to attribute generation as the causal factor in work behavior rather than the real explanatory variable—level in the organization.

Are Millennials Heavier and Less Fit than Were Previous Generations?

As compared with previous generations, Millennials have much higher rates of obesity and less overall fitness than did Boomers or Xers at the same age (Wang et al. 2008). To compound the issue, young people are less likely now to identify themselves as overweight in comparison with a decade ago when people in the same age range were significantly less overweight (Burke and Heiland 2009). This means that there is less social pressure to expend effort to maintain an ideal (i.e., healthy) body weight. If this pattern continues, the quality of life for Millennials and their ability to function as highly productive employees will be compromised, whether or not health care reform occurs. While there are multiple causes underlying the obesity epidemic, one key factor is unhealthy behavior such as a sedentary lifestyle and poor food choices (US Department of Health and Human Services 2008). Unless the current trajectory changes, it is estimated that more than 30% of children born in 2000 (part of the Millennial generation) will go on to have significant medical issues related to obesity that will likely compromise their participation in the workforce and result in greater medical expenses both for employers and the government (Barkin et al. 2010).

Are Millennials More Knowledgeable than Were Previous Generations?

In 2009, about 3,328,000 high school students were predicted to have graduated. This number surpasses the number of Baby Boomers who graduated in 1977 (3,152,000; http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/). At the same time, college attendance was projected to be 18.2 million in 2008, and is expected to continue to increase by 10% by 2017. The traditional college-age population (18–24 years old) rose 16% between 1997 and 2007, which was reflected in an increase of 26% in college enrollment. Between 1997 and 2007, the number of full-time students increased by 34% compared to a 15% increase in part-time students (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/). Even with these increases in numbers, only about one-third of Millennials will obtain a college degree (Levinson 2010). As these numbers illustrate, levels of formal education have increased in the past few decades (Levinson 2010). People talk about how technology has allowed Millennials to expand their horizons and have the opportunity to learn more than previous generations did, but the reality runs counter to that (Bauerlein 2008). Assessments by the US Department of Education shows that Millennials at the end of high school do not know substantially more than previous generations did at the same age (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006a, b, c). For example, with regard to "Civics," only 32% of students graduating from 12th grade were shown to be proficient (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006a). In the topic area of "US History," only 14% were shown to be proficient (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006b). With regard to "Reading" and "Mathematics," only 40% were shown to be proficient in reading (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006c), and only 25% were shown to be proficient in mathematics (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006c).

Therefore, Millennials are entering college in record numbers but are arriving with low levels of general knowledge on which to build the educational foundation they will need to be successful later in life. While there are decades of data linking education to a variety of positive outcomes, education alone is not sufficient to improve quality of life.

Are Millennials Affected by Cultural Shifts?

As noted by Levinson (2010), the family structure of Millennials is somewhat different than previous generations (e.g., fewer two parent families, more dual income households, more women in the workforce, and delayed childbearing). However, most of these changes occurred gradually over time rather than suddenly and thus their effects might appear to be more a function of societal shifts that affect people of all generations rather than just affecting one generation or another. Beyond immediate family structure, over the same period of time there has been an increase in immigration, from 9.6 million in 1970 (4.7% of population), to 14.3 million in 1980 (6.2% of population), to 19.8 million in 1990 (7.9% of population), to 28.4 million in 2000 (10.4% of population; Camarota 2000). In fact, immigration accounts for almost all of the increase in public school enrollment nationally since 1980. Since 1980, a substantially larger number of these immigrants have come from Mexico and South East Asia than had done so historically (Camarota 2000). At the same time there has been an increase in racial diversity in the US, with only two-thirds of the total population being non-Hispanic whites.

Conclusion: What We Know

Clearly, the short summary above of what we know based on solid evidence omits a number of topics that are part of the current debate. Some of those topics will be addressed in more detail in papers in this special issue. Others are not discussed because there is a dearth of good, solid, research on which to base conclusions (e.g., lack of respect shown by young people, resistance to learning by older people, unwillingness to "pay dues" among young people). When there is not adequate data, it is an empirical question that bears investigation.

The Importance of Context

It is likely that part of the reason, there is not sufficient empirical evidence for generational differences is because the generation a person is a part of is not the only factor affecting their behavior. When thinking about generational differences, it is important to remember that individual behavior is a result of an interaction between an individual's predispositions and what behavior the environment encourages and discourages. Researchers and informed consumers of generational research will pay special attention to these contextual factors as they evaluate how much weight to give the results of a particular study. Often, not adequately understanding the context may result in the application of results that are not relevant to the new context. For example, 2006 data on what young people wanted in a first job may be largely irrelevant in 2009 due to the global economic recession, and may be equally irrelevant in 2010 because of the extended recession. No one would suggest that Millennials graduating from college in 2009 were inherently significantly different from Millennials who graduated in 2006, yet their expectations of a first job and the early trajectory of their career may have changed (De Hauw and De Vos 2010). Why? Because of the economic context. The global economy was much better in 2006 than it was in 2009 and everyone—regardless of generation—expected more than they do now in a depressed economy.

Obviously, the global economic recession of 2008–2010 affects all generations. Boomers are wondering whether they will be able to retire as planned. Gen Xers are troubled by declining salaries and benefits in their prime earning years. Millennials are having trouble finding work at all (e.g., the unemployment rate for college educated people age 20–24 was 10.6% in the third quarter of 2009, the highest since 1983), and their expectations of work have changed (De Hauw and De Vos 2010). Those who do find work are facing a more difficult path than did some previous generations who did not enter the workforce during a severe recession. There are data showing that entering the work force during a recession has a long-term impact on earnings (Kahn 2009).

Though all generations are affected by the global economic downturn that began in 2008, the high youth unemployment rate is likely to have a material effect on the attitudes and lives of young people that may result in generational differences. Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2009) found that cohorts that experience a recession during their impressionable years (18–25 years of age) are more likely to believe that individual success is a result of luck more than hard work and subsequently have less confidence in the efficacy of government. The result is an underlying belief (somewhat contradictory) that the government should intervene more to support people who are disadvantaged but at the same time believing that the government is not competent to do the job well.

Another aspect of the context we need to pay close attention to is culture, whether the culture is a result of industry (e.g., Real et al. 2010) or country (Ng et al. 2010). Cultures differ some in how they approach age issues although most cultures expect younger people to defer to older people more than the reverse. In addition to how age is thought about in different cultures, generations in countries around the world are often named differently than they are in North America because the meaning of the name of the generation is context-specific. For example, the name *Millennials* does not have any functional meaning

for people who use Chinese, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Sakka, or Kolla Varsham calendars. How generations are determined also differs around the world. Not only are birth rates different in different countries and regions of the world, but also the cultural touchstones are different in different countries. For example, in Israel people typically identify generations by wars (and therefore the generations span fewer years), while in the US generations are typically described based on birth rates and large events (like World War II and the Millennium).

If you accept the evidence above about what we know with some certainty about Millennials and differences among the generations, and that we know we need to pay close attention to context even when there is empirical evidence for generational differences, what are the implications for the practitioners on the front lines of organizations?

For the Practitioner: Implications of What We Know

The primary strategic question for practitioners is whether Millennials are going to be substantively different from Boomers or Xers when they reach their 30s, 40s, and 50s, and substantively different in such a way that organizations have to change the way they do business. The short answer is that no one can possibly know for sure, although there is some evidence that suggests that certain substantive differences are more likely to come to pass than others.

One shift that is clear based on current evidence is the likely health of Millennials when they reach middle age. If current health-related behaviors do not improve, it is realistic to expect that Millennials will have substantially worse health as a result of obesity than did older cohorts at the same age. As obesity settles in at epidemic levels, employers will experience an increase in illness-related absenteeism, increasing health costs from an increasingly unhealthy workforce, and a decrease in productivity that goes along with an ill workforce. Thus, beginning now, and for the foreseeable future, practitioners will need to pay close attention to the impact of increasing obesity in the population. As discussed by Barkin et al. (2010), the effects of increasing ill health among the population have consequences for employers as well as for the individuals themselves. Practitioners would do well to start implementing health behavior change programs that help people modify lifestyle behaviors. It is imperative that employers start the initiatives immediately because there has been a social shift in what is perceived as being overweight such that heavier people are perceived as less overweight than they were a decade ago (Burke and Heiland 2009). This means that there is less social pressure to expend effort to achieve a healthy body weight and an active lifestyle. This shift in reference points for obesity along with the lowered social pressure to lose weight is likely to result in it taking longer for weight loss and health programs to take hold. Many of these programs will cost money in the short-term, but the long-term strategic consequences for employers of not assisting their employees to deal with the issue are substantially greater than the short-term financial implications of investing in health promotion initiatives. Organizations have the opportunity to help reverse this growing epidemic with innovative HR policies/practices that modify the environmental conditions of the workplace and provide incentives/disincentives for particular health behaviors.

Another likely shift is in the centrality of work in people's lives. Research has shown that past generations identified work as being more central to their lives than younger people in the US do today (Families and Work Institute 2005). Whether that shift is a result of generational differences or of general societal changes that affect people of all ages is not clear. Either way, it has substantial practical implications for the workplace. As work becomes less central to people's lives, they invest in it less. For example, recently there has been a decline in the percentage of people who say they want to move into positions of greater authority (Families and Work Institute 2005). This complicates succession planning efforts because there would be fewer applicants to choose among in comparison to the past.

Part of the reason for this shift is likely a result of an increase in work hours as much as it is a general change in attitude toward work. Though people today may say that work is less central in their lives than it was to people 20 years ago, people today are working more hours than people did 20 years ago (Families and Work Institute 2005). Hence, perhaps it is not so much that work is less central; perhaps it is that people are less willing to accept positions of greater responsibility because they already believe that they are working too many hours and they do not want to work even more.

Technology is implicated in the relationship between working more hours and not wanting more responsibility. Mobile technologies, often provided by the employer ostensibly to improve efficiency, frequently result in employees feeling as if they are never off the clock. While 10 or 20 years ago an employee might work long hours, they were not as able to work at home as they are today. As the wireless world increasingly allows employees to work any time in any place, it may also cause these same employees to feel increasingly imposed upon by work, and to resist further encroachments in the only way they can—by refusing positions of greater authority.

With regard to work attitudes, despite evidence of increased narcissism among younger people, it is not clear that shifts seen in college persist in working age populations, or that the shifts affect workplace behavior in any tangible way. Though it is not clear that the increase in narcissism is affecting the workplace, there is ample evidence that the lack of basic work skills is (The Conference Board 2006). The discrepancy between the level of general knowledge with which students are exiting high school and what employers expect suggests that good on-boarding processes are going to be invaluable to organizations that want to help their employees contribute up to their potential (Laurano 2009). Practitioners would be advised in the short-term to look carefully at on-boarding and lower level training efforts to make sure that needs are met so employees can do the job the organization needs done. There are likely to be young employees with strong potential coming into organizations who simply lack the basic knowledge and work skills to be successful. Employers will benefit if they can provide the training that is lacking through on-boarding, early career development, and mentoring (Laurano 2009).

Practitioners will also want to pay attention to the effects of the economy on both older and younger participants in the workforce. Millennials are being affected by the recession differently from older generations, and research shows that these effects may hang on for a decade or more (Kahn 2009). At the same time, Boomers want to retire but may have difficulty because the decrease in housing prices and the decline in worldwide stock markets combine to reduce retirement portfolios. In between these two mammoth generations, Gen Xers desire more opportunities, and may become increasingly disenchanted with their current employers as they find they cannot move because the Boomers would not move on and the economy is not expanding.

Some organizations have talked about the possibility of treating their employee populations differently based on their generation by offering different training options, different communication choices, and different benefits. We would caution against this approach since there is scant evidence that different approaches would improve employee relations and organizations that have strong policies and procedures around inclusiveness are better served than those that chase generational differences. The approach that appears to be the most practical and have the greatest potential benefit for the organization as a whole (across all generations) is to treat all employees well. If you provide employees with an interesting job, good compensation, opportunities to learn and advance, colleagues they like to work with, a boss they trust, and leaders who are competent, employees of all generations will respond positively (Deal 2007).

Generational Difference or Other Factors?

Practitioners need to remember that despite the fact that generational differences exist (as discussed at various points in this article and in depth in the articles in this special issue), the differences are often modest at best. Moreover, the lack of prospective (longitudinal) generational studies and the overreliance on cross-sectional designs in which causation cannot be determined limits our ability to disentangle generational effects from those of age or life stage. That a few differences exist among cohorts should not be surprising given the changing contexts (some would say cultures) in which different generations grow up and live. However, attributing differences in individual behavior to generational differences in every instance belies the reality that factors other than generational cohort account for many of the differences on which people comment. If practitioners take into account these other factors, they would likely implement different policies and practices than if they attributed all of the changes to differences among generations.

For example, many people attribute greater interest in work-life balance to Millennials and Gen Xers than to older generations like Baby Boomers. The reality is that focus on life outside of work is more a life stage and individual difference issue than it is one of generation. When an individual has small children at home, or when they have to care for an elderly parent, they are more likely to be focused on life outside of work because of such circumstances. From a practical perspective, what that means is that someone who is 24 and someone who is 44 who each has a young child are likely to have more similar needs for work-life balance than they are with age-peers who do not have young children. In this scenario, the issue is not a generational one. Rather, it's a life stage issue. Practitioners are likely to get more traction out of their policies if they focus work-life initiatives on life stages (which can come at any age) rather than on generations.

Some of the differences between Millennials and other generations, while statistically significant, are not of a size that indicates they have relevant practical implications. There is an argument to be made that very small shifts in the larger population translate into more individuals being found in the tails of the distribution, and that those slightly larger numbers can result in people experiencing the generations as different (Twenge 2010). It is a sound argument (and is likely accurate), but a few more people in the tails of a distribution do not necessitate multi-million dollar organization-wide strategic initiatives to address the "generation problem." Savvy organizations will be able to figure out when generational shifts are large enough to warrant changes in policies and practices for employees of all generations and which ones they should be aware of but

not put resources toward addressing. Misjudgments in spending too much energy and too many resources on generational issues can backfire in terms of employee productivity, morale, and retention.

Future Research

The only way to really determine whether what we think are generational differences actually are is by doing large-scale prospective studies over decades, making sure that the studies include large and diverse generational samples that accurately reflect the birth cohort from which they come. Data will need to be gathered intermittently over decades so that we can determine whether shifts in behavior, expectations, and attitudes are a result of generation, age, life stage, maturation level, or environment. As one example, the Study of Adult Development (also known as the Grant and Glueck Studies) at Harvard University shows how informative research conducted on the same group of people over decades can be. Given how embedded technology is, utilizing technology to periodically assess participants would allow for a larger and more diverse sample that would be more representative of each generation. There are numerous examples of large-scale prospective epidemiological studies that have been instrumental in helping us disentangle causation from association. Such study designs are much needed in research on generational similarities and differences.

Since results from such prospective studies would not be available for decades anyway, we need to start now to work on adequately disentangling age from generation from life stage from all of the other possible environmental factors that affect people's behavior. To do that, researchers would do well to focus a larger portion of their research time on gathering data within organizations that believe they are experiencing generational issues, and being sure to ask questions that do not simply reify the assumption that the issues are in fact generations. Practitioners need to help researchers gain access to the necessary samples, for only through solid research will practitioners learn where their scarce resources can be best applied. Both research and practice will improve if there is an increased focus on more evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence.

Another issue which is rarely mentioned but which is addressed in this special issue (see Meriac et al. 2010) is whether or not there is measurement equivalence of items across generations. Many studies show that there are small differences among the generations, but few of them demonstrate whether there is measurement equivalence of items for all of the generations studied. If fundamental differences in generations are a form of cultural differences, it would behoove researchers to pay attention to measurement equivalence among generations in much the same way they do respondents from different countries or cultures. To assume, for example, that survey items mean the same thing to all respondents without demonstrating measurement equivalence can result in faulty conclusions.

Conclusion: On Tattoos, Technology, and Temperance

Behavior is more likely to be affected as a result of maturation, life stage, the economy, or other environmental factors than it is some fundamental shift in generational attitudes or behaviors. We see three primary areas as likely to be the most enduring of the generational differences studied by researchers: technology, tattoos, and temperance.

Technology

It is abundantly obvious why the use of technology is a fundamental generational difference. Like learning a language, people who start using technology at an earlier age generally have greater facility with the new language (technology) than do people who began using it later in their life. It is not that the older people cannot learn how to use technology (clearly they do) or that they do not embrace it (the fact that the fastest growing demographic group on Facebook in 2009 was women 55–65 years of age indicates otherwise; Smith 2009). Instead, it is that on average, technology use and comfort with a technology is partially a result of age of exposure, which means it is essentially a function of generation rather than age or maturation level. On average, Boomers are more proficient with technology than are Silents, Gen X'ers are more proficient than Boomers, Millennials are more proficient than Gen Xers, and the cohort after Millennials will likely be more proficient than Millennials. Hence, shifts in proficiency with technology are expected to be a generational difference that will continue to play out in the workplace.

Tatoos

On average, younger people object less to tattoos than older people do, especially to women with tatoos. It is characteristic that Millennials dislike tattoos less than their elders do, just as wearing an earring was to Gen Xers, and wearing bell bottom jeans was to Boomers. This is likely to be a particularly enduring trait of Millennials because it is just that—physically enduring. What it means for practitioners is that policies about acceptable workplace attire need to include information about tattoos for both men and women. Some employers have found themselves in court because of differences in policies for tattoos on female and

male employees because they required female employees to cover tattoos but did not require the same of male employees. This caused a problem because it seemed like discrimination to the younger people who do not object to a woman having a tattoo any more than they do to a man having a tattoo.

Temperance

Temperance is the characteristic of Millennials we think is likely to be the most alterable by the environment. We use the word temperance to refer to temperance in behavior, which is clearly lacking in Millennials as is shown by their level of obesity and the amount of time they spend looking at computer or PDA screens to the exclusion of other developmental activities. Young people since time immemorial have been criticized by their elders for lack of temperance. Consider some of the World War II generation who criticized the Boomers for similar sins during Woodstock, during the "free love" period and during the time when women were granted more societal rights. Consider the Boomers who now complain about how "lazy" the Millennials are when it comes to workplace productivity. In the case of unhealthy behaviors among the Millennials, there is clear evidence that the behaviors which are in need of temperance will lead (if unaltered) to severe negative consequences for the individuals themselves and society in general. If younger people do not temper their eating behavior and increase their physical activity they will likely end up as obese as current predictions are estimating. If younger people do not temper their screen time with other non-screen activities (e.g., cultural, physical, and intellectual), they miss out on a great deal that would make them more effective employees, partners, parents, and citizens of the world.

As a final thought, we find it strange that stereotypes of people of different generations are so commonly accepted when stereotypes based on other demographic categories (e.g., race, sex, and religion) are so much less acceptable. Just because stereotypes are currently socially acceptable does not mean that they are accurate. It is important for everyone to remember that stereotypes of generations are just that—stereotypes—and as such are as accurate and applicable as any stereotype. It behooves researchers to be *very* sure of the accuracy of their results when they provide evidence that supports a stereotype, even on a subject as seemingly benign as a generation. It is important for researchers and practitioners to respond assertively to the misinformed promulgation of unsubstantiated information about generational differences. While we may see generational differences crop up from time to time, there is more variability within a generation than there is between generations. Thus, assuming that everyone in a generation is similar is a crucial mistake that practitioners can make. Tension among generations is primarily a result of a combination of a lack of data and an over-reliance on opinion rather than empirical results. If we collectively did a better job of shining a light on data rather than simply relying on ill-informed opinion, generational conflict and misunderstanding that exists in the workplace would diminish. If that happened, we would all be beneficiaries.

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