Millennial Librarians: Who They are and How They are Different from the Rest of Us

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Introduction

Academic librarianship is an ever changing career field which has been punctuated in recent years by the growth of new technologies used in creating, organizing, and retrieving information. Many academic librarians are struggling to keep up to date with these technology changes. The career itself is evolving and reaching out to a new generation of student that is increasingly dependent on these recent technologies. Older librarians who are not digital natives are concerned that their professional skills will quickly be outdated as college students now have a belief that they can find whatever information they need on the Internet without the aid of a librarian. Librarians, therefore, are forced to find new ways to reach out to student populations.[1]

A new type of academic librarian is beginning to enter the workplace. They are generally under age thirty, have a more diverse background as compared to other librarians, and are more technically savvy, as compared to their older colleagues.[2,3] Though they may not all be literate in all aspects of technology, technologies have always been a major part of their life since birth and throughout their education. Therefore, they have always seamlessly integrated technology into their daily lives, both professional and personal, unlike other librarians who are not digital natives. These librarians also carry the traits of being more flexible and assertive in their workplaces than those of past generations.[4] They also refuse to fit into the traditional bookish stereotype of a librarian. They are poised to take over a graying occupation in the coming years while they are determined to revolutionize the career as they advance. These librarians, commonly called the "NextGen" or Millennial librarian, are determined to redefine academic librarianship in the twenty-first century.[5]

It is important for any organization or profession to be mindful about the different generations that make up the workforce because, "any organization that is not tolerant of the different generations making up its workforce is likely to suffer through high turnover and suboptimal performance".[6] For this reason, it is necessary for academic librarians to understand those that are younger and just starting their professional careers because they are the future of the profession and will take over as leaders in the future.

Purpose

There has been much discussion among academic librarians in recent years about the Millennial students and how they are transforming the way librarians serve students. However, Millennials are beginning to enter the workforce, and some are choosing to become academic librarians. Since Millennial students have changed libraries, Millennial librarians inevitably will bring about more change to academic libraries. Although there has been much discussion about

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"NextGen" librarians and their impact on the workforce, no academic publication has specifically studied the Millennial generation of librarians. The goal of this paper is to look at the impact Millennials can have on academic librarianship, including their cultural characteristics, how they utilize technology and the influence is has on their career choice, and what their future impact may be on the profession. This paper will focus on Millennial characteristics that directly impact academic librarianship.

The Millennial academic librarian has many reasons for becoming a librarian, but does not always fit neatly into the typical paths that other librarians took to get to their career. In the past, many librarians chose the career because it was one of the few options available to women,[7] but this image has changed over time. Many older librarians state that they entered the career after taking another unfulfilling career path.[8] Previous research studies of current librarians show a steady pattern of influences to become a librarian, including previous work in libraries, influence by a librarian, a love of reading, interest in research, and intellectual stimulation.[9–12] However, despite the plethora of conversation about the Millennial librarians, evidence as to why they entered the career has been mostly anecdotal.[13,14] In casual conversation and within the popular library press, librarians frequently discuss their observations of this new generation of librarians, but there is no scholarly research to the traits they bring to librarianship or why they chose librarianship as their initial career choice.

Examining why this new generation of librarians chose to enter the career has important implications. The first implication is to examine the factors that attracted the population studied in order to determine what is appealing about librarianship for the Millennial generation. A related implication is that studying this group of librarians will aid current library recruiting efforts to attract more Millennial librarians to the profession. Finally, studying the factors that brought these librarians to the career will help the profession see where it will go in the future as these librarians advance through the ranks of academic libraries.

There is currently no study within the scholarly library literature that deals with the Millennial generation as librarians or their possible influences on the career itself. There has been frequent discussion about how the NextGen librarians are influencing the profession and how their professional needs are different from those of previous generations.[15] There are several issues surrounding the NextGen discussion. The first issue is that no one has created a definition of a NextGen librarian. There is no timeframe in which a NextGen librarian was born or who decided upon librarianship as a career nor is there a clear cut way to define the traits of NextGen librarianship. Those that are members of and support the NextGen movement state that it is "a new way of thinking about librarianship and libraries",[16] but do not attempt to define or even critically examine the traits inherent in NextGen librarianship. This study attempts to create literature that can help define new traits in librarianship as well as attempts to define the new librarians in terms of a defined age range (the Millennials) instead of a rogue different mentality of thinking about librarianship.

The second issue is that the original NextGen librarians are now mature in their career. The idea of the next generation librarian originated in a 1999 article by Rachel Singer Gordon.[17] Since 2006, there has been nothing substantive or new published about NextGen librarianship. Librarians who initially defined themselves as NextGen are now five to ten years into their career, are assimilated into librarianship, and do not need the same mentoring or career guidance that they needed several years ago. Now that NextGen librarianship has matured, a new generation of Millennials is starting to become librarians, who are the Millennials. No scholarly studies in the library literature have yet to critically examine the traits of the Millennials, how to recruit and retain them to the profession, and the traits they are bringing to librarianship.

Academic librarians have discussed the Millennial generation as students for several years now. However, the same students are now choosing careers and some are choosing academic librarianship. Now is the time to stop looking at the Millennials as students and start seeing them as career entrants to librarianship. The library profession needs to start looking at how its culture can accept and grow new librarians who are members of the Millennial generation and stop looking at them only as students using library services and resources.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the characteristics of the Millennial generation and to look at these characteristics in parallel with early career librarians of the same age group. Understanding the Millennials as a generation will help librarians comprehend a new generation of librarian with a very different background compared to previous generations of li-

brarians. Throughout this paper, the generation will be referred to as "Millennial" instead of Generation Y or any other name and will be defined by Strauss & Howe as being born between 1982 and 2003.[18]

General Characteristics of the Millennials

The Millennials are perhaps the most researched generation in the history of the United States. Defining them as a unit is difficult, as there is no set definition of when they were born, what to call them, or exactly how many they are, but American members of this generation tend to share some common characteristics. It is important to recognize the Millennials because "just as history produces generations, so too do generations produce history".[19] Millennials may number as many as the Baby Boomers, with a total population of 72.9 million, comprising nearly a third of the population of the United States.[20]

Strauss and Howe categorized the various generations throughout American history in cycles in order to disseminate patterns.[21] Using research dating back as far as to the sixteenth century, Strauss and Howe viewed the Millennial generation as a part of the Millennial cycle, which includes all generations alive in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. The authors then grouped the generations into a pattern that they believe roughly corresponds to periods of every four generations throughout American history. They then grouped these individual generations into the traits of idealist, reactive, civic, or adaptive according to events occurring during the lifespan of the respective generation. Strauss and Howe view the Millennial generation as being civic in their beliefs and nearly parallel to the beliefs of the "G.I." generation that came of age during World War II. The Civic cycle in America, according to Strauss and Howe, has traits that are similar to those of the Millennials, including a strong adherence to government, conformism, and teamwork.[22] In turn, this makes the sense of being a part of a community and serving within it by volunteering very important values for Millennials.[23,24]

Many important events and cultural attitudes in both America and the rest of the world history help to shape the Millennial generation and have "helped [to] forge a sensibility that will last a lifetime in shaping expectations and entitlement, in determining what one will give to and take from society, work, one's community, etc.".[25] Events such as the Columbine shootings, 9/11, the impeachment of President Clinton, and the

dotcom bust are examples of events that had profound impact in shaping the characteristics and values of the Millennials.[26] Events that are considered formative experiences are important because they mold a generation's preferences and beliefs.[27] Overall, Millennials tend to be more conservative and conventional than their parents, and support social issues such as school prayer, federal aid to faith based charities, the War on Terror, and are against abortion.[28,29]

One of the foremost changes that affected the Millennials as a generation was a societal change to appreciate and nurture children more than occurred throughout Generation X.[30] Generation X was a relatively small generation because their parents often did not want children, instead catering to their own needs. They were born during the age after the creation of the birth control pill, which allowed women to suppress pregnancy and not have as many children. During this era, children were often ignored as a barrier to adult fulfillment and enjoyment and were often left to their own accord, defining the term "latchkey child".[31] However, during the 1980s, society realized that children deserved to be wanted and needed. The February 22, 1982 cover of *Time* magazine depicted an article about how Baby Boomer mothers were finally starting to have children after waiting until they were much older than previous generations for motherhood.[32] Several other events, including the 1982 crime of cyanide tainted Tylenol that led to fears that Halloween candy could also be tainted as well as prominent cases of child sexual abuse had the effect of causing societal outrage about how children were not being protected. This led to a series of books and media reports about how children could be saved from the scourge of a violent American society and what parents and schools could do to protect children.[33] These changes worked to put children at the highest place that American society could give to them; suddenly child safety, child friendly legislation, and family values became the buzzwords.[34]

Overall, members of the Millennial generation admire and respect their parents[35], with Verhaagen reporting that three quarters of them state they get along well with their parents and only 3% do not get along with them.[36] They are also very close to their parents both geographically and emotionally[37,38] and usually share similar values and beliefs.[39] Frequently, they move back in with their parents after college, as they want to regain the sense of closeness to their families.[40]

They often refer to their families "as a sanctuary against the difficulties of life".[41] In the past, "quality time" with children was stressed, but the Millennials grew up under the belief that quality time is not enough and they need to have their parents' unconditional.[42] However, some do not view this relationship as vital in the workplace, stating, "Only your parents love you unconditionally, everyone else expects you to perform".[43]

As an aspect of being emotionally close to their parents, Millennials have always been coddled by somewhat overprotecting parents who have always given them their own way.[44] Their parents, the majority being from the Baby Boom generation, also have a history of getting whatever they want, and are passing this trait on to their children.[45] As a result, Millennials want information and products to be customized[46] to suit their "own tastes and whims".[47] Millennials are frequently given an equal role in making family decisions such as large purchases and vacation destinations.[48] They are used to information being handed to them on a level that has already been processed by their elders and they expect this tailored information to continue throughout adulthood.[49]

Millennials have been told since childhood by their parents that they are capable of accomplishing anything they put their mind to, which has led to an unbounded amount of enthusiasm to do anything.[50,51] Although they have generally been protected by their parents, the Millennials overall are very self reliant and are eager to take responsibility for their own successes, independent of others' responsibilities towards a project.[52] Millennials have very high self esteem, with scores of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory among teenagers in the mid 1990s at their highest levels since the creation of the test in the 1970s. They also do not see a need to conform to societal norms as that previous generations embraced, as Twenge observed in her examination of the Marlowe-Crowne-Social Desirability Scale studies over time.[53] However, Twenge believes that society should interpret the Millennial feelings of self esteem, the ability to do anything, and a lack of societal norms as dangerous to society as a whole as it may lead to "training an army of little narcissists instead of raising kids' self esteem."[54] Twenge goes on to argue that these traits are leading to a rise in depression among Millennials. However, Neil and Strauss argue that these problems are, while recognized, increasingly solved with antidepressant medication and therapy, which the Millennial generation is increasingly utilizing.[55]

Technology and the Millennial Generation

Perhaps the biggest trait that defines the Millennials is their lifetime attachment to technology.[56–58] They understand technology better than any previous generation, even if their parents invented most of the current technologies.[59] Technology has also allowed the Millennials to be a more "curious generation."[60] The majority grew up in homes with computers already there and learned about them from birth, not adopting them later in life as did previous generations.[61] To them, technology is an "assimilation, as for everyone else it is an accommodation".[62]

Technology is so ubiquitous to the generation that they are able to move from one type of technology to another, such as watching television while surfing the Internet, and often consume several types of media simultaneously.[63] Multitasking is "second nature to them".[64] There is even a new word coined to describe this phenomenon, "connexity."[65] This is the ability to do many things at once. This may be a detriment, as Millennials may develop a short attention span and an inability to focus on one task or item for any notable length of time.[66] An example of this connexity is Weiss' study stating that Millennials were able to consume 31 hours of media through multitasking in one 24 hour period.[67]

To Millennials, technology is a part of their popular culture and brings forth a center of the new digital lifestyle they are creating for themselves.[68] They are embracing this technology because they can control it; it is something that is not controlled by adults and Millennials can use it to construct their own forms of expression, personalities and identities online. They can even have multiple personas in the online world. Additionally, technology has been shown to raise the self esteem of Millennials as they can reach out to find people world wide who share similar traits to themselves, such as a physical limitation or an interesting hobby.[69]

Millennials are using technology to create new ways of doing things, such as creating a term project as a digital video, playing video games instead of traditional board games, and connecting with friends and extended family worldwide through email, instant messaging, and social networking.[70] They are using technology to create new social and familial networks with friends based upon the music they listen to, the books they read, the pictures they take, and the products they consume.[71] Technology has become a group and shared experience through not only social

networking, but sites to share links, photos, or other media and information with online users.[72] With technology at their fingertips on a nearly constant basis, Millennials have gained an expectation of instant gratification for all of their wants and needs. Through technology and video games, they are able to advance their motor, spatial, and strategy skills in ways never before thought possible.[73] They believe that their relationship with technology will change the way society views and relates to technology.[74] With technology at their fingertips on a nearly constant basis, Millennials have gained an expectation of instant gratification for all of their wants and needs.[75]

Millennials believe that technology is not a passive experience as it was for previous generations.[76] To them, technology is active and an experience by which they live their lives within.[77] They have grown up with reality television, which means that anyone can have their fifteen minutes of fame. In turn, this means that getting heard, having your say, and becoming famous online are all natural experiences that can be shared by anyone.[78,79] The idea that they can create their own customized media and make media consumption an interactive, as opposed to a passive and hierarchical, experience means that everyone's opinion counts and deserves to be heard.[80]

Millennials shape and create new forms of media. In turn, the media helps redefine the culture to be centered on Millennials and how they view the world.[81] This is nearly always done online, which is the means of delivering self made content to the wider world, and can make individual content a shared group experience though social networking components of the Internet.[82] Examples of the new active and participatory media that Millennials are creating include the collaboratory nature of Wikipedia, online blogging, sharing videos though YouTube, and expressing opinions online with sites such as epinions. Online content is also increasingly peer reviewed, so that other users can state and/or edit whether the information provided by someone else is useful, relevant, and accurate.[83] An increasing amount of the technology used by Millennials is mobile (Clausing et al., 2003).[84] While previous generations use cell phones as a tool, most Millennials seamlessly integrate the phones into their social lives, using them for not only voice calls, but for sending text messages and accessing the Internet. They also want traditionally analog forms of media, such as movies and music, to be digitized and

available in any medium on a constant basis, whether through their iPods, cell phones, or streaming through the Internet.[85] This is causing Millennials to rebel on their own terms against traditional purveyors of media and it appears they will not settle until they get what they want.[86]

Technology is also influencing the careers that Millennials want to pursue.[87] A full 95% of them believe that their generation will have a life long ability to improve technology.[88] As stated by Verhaagen, half of millennial teens surveyed in 2003 stated they are interested in pursuing a technology related career. Thanks to technology, the workforce is changing from one that is skills based to knowledge based industries in which employees work with their minds rather than their hands.[89] As of 1998, nearly 60% of the American workforce was considered to be knowledge based and 8 in 10 new jobs are in information intensive sectors, a percentage which is expected to grow in the future.[90]

Information Processing

Millennials new generation processes information very differently than previous generations. A 2002 survey found that media consumption in the form of television and radio is very similar between Millennials and other generations. However, the Millennial ways of behavior online and how they respond to media offline are drastically different from previous generations. Older Americans are more likely to passively surf websites for information, whereas Millennials are much more interactive in their web habits. To Millennials, information is streamed at them interactively in a near constant state (Eisner, 2005). This generation is able to process large amounts of information in parallel with other information or while conducting other tasks.[91] Millennials like the "intersection of information and entertainment"[92] and are much more likely to conduct generation specific activities such as play games, instant message, and download media while online.

Due to their abilities to multitask in many different environments, the Millennial thought process involves a mosaic of different points that get integrated into a coherent pattern in order to draw a conclusion on a topic. This thought process allows for a greater absorption of information and sets them apart from previous generations who tend to think and process information in a more linear fashion. These differences in information processing can cause conflict between generations both in the workforce and so-

cially.[93]

Technology has also played a role in giving young people instant access to information. It is a part of the daily lives of Millennials, while for everyone else it is a more difficult learning process.[94] They also share information as never before as online influence can come from sharing, rather than hoarding information.[95] For the most part, Millennials believe information available to them is accurate and believe that they are good judges of determining what information is not trustworthy or needs further verification. Millennials have an attitude that the more they use an online service, the more they are able to trust its authenticity.[96] Millennials also want their information customized to their way of doing things and will either manipulate information to their needs or demand it from service providers.[97]

Privacy Concerns

Privacy does not appear to be as much of a concern with Millennials as it is with older generations. Millennials are redefining privacy issues on their terms and are not settling on other's thoughts of privacy by applying traditional definitions of privacy into their increasingly digital world.[98] There are several examples of this change in privacy concerns. In today's online world, more and more products and services are customized to fit individual wants and needs. Commonly, users must give up at least some personal information in order to obtain this type of customization.[99] Part of the reason Millennials are driven towards virtual communities is because there is an element of trust involved with all participants. Millennials tend to believe that others online are being their true authentic selves (whether or not this differs from their actual selves) and there is s sense of trust that information will be kept private (Tapscott, 1998).[100] Millennials also tend to be very comfortable sharing their true personalities online rather than be more comfortable sharing them in person.[101]

However, Paul takes an alternate view from the above writers with the example by stating that the celebrity scandals that Millennials grew up with may, in the long run, create a more heightened awareness about privacy.[102] Having grown up seeing celebrities' private lives in the mainstream, youth today may become more conscious about their own privacy and protection of personal information. Paul cited a poll in which four out of ten youth were "extremely or very concerned about the safety and security of transmitting personal information online; only 8% were not at all concerned"[103] about celebrity scandals.

Data in a 2007 report on privacy by DeRosa et al. show that 23% of Internet users aged 14 to 21 believed that their online data is more private than it was two years before, which is a very different percent compared to users aged 50 or more, of whom 35% believe their online information became less private during the same time period (p. 3-3).[104] Similar percentages (24% and 31%, respectively) occur when asked about how people think their data were secured online. However, when asked to rate the privacy of various activities such as banking, reading email, and using a phone, users aged 14 to 21 believed that those activities were less private than did older users. Concerning trust, the study showed that users aged 14 to 21 were generally more trusting toward people they meet online through both social networking and social media websites as compared to the rest of the population. Data also showed that those aged 14 to 21 were initially willing to provide less personal information to register for a website than do older users, but are more likely to provide more information in order to receive personal services or free goods or services.[105]

Technology and Ethics

Freestone and Mitchell, two business researchers in the United Kingdom, noted that Millennials who grew up with the Internet have very different social and consumer traits as compared with older generations. While looking at research related to Millennials' consumer habits online as well as their social habits, the authors noted that because the Internet "transcends physical barriers like no other interactive medium before it, aberrant behaviours (sic) are multinational" (p. 121-122).[106] Further noting that "the Internet offers the 'advantages' of anonymity"[107] in that there is a reduced chance of being detected due to the difficulty of obtaining tangible evidence, the convenience, and the ability to remain faceless lead to inappropriate behavior online. Freestone and Mitchell found that there are notable differences between the online behavior of older generations as compared to the Millennials, who generally engaged in what the authors deemed "unethical online behavior".[108] The authors noted that some activities generally considered illegal, such as impersonating someone else online, hacking, downloading copyrighted music and movie

files, software piracy, and gambling were considered to be less wrong by Millennials than did members of older generations.[109] This is in stark contrast to other authors' beliefs that the Millennials are more morally conscious and more conservative than are previous generations.[110]

The authors Freestone and Mitchell conclude that the Internet "represents a new environment for unethical behaviour (sic), and should perhaps be treated as distinct to the physical world in terms of understanding of ethical issues."[111] They also believe that Millennials see "that cyberspace exists as a separate realm to the physical world, and may have developed an ethical culture of its own" and that "crime within I[nformation] T[echnology] is looked upon in a less serious manner, both from an ethical and legal perspective, than other crimes."[112] The Freestone and Mitchell study highlights the profound differences to how Millennials look at technology and its ethical implications in an entirely different way compared to previous generations that did not grow up with technology. This study is important because it not only highlights these differences, but also indicates the differing attitudes technology brings to the typical characteristics of the Millennial employee.

Conclusion

The Millennial generation has some parallels to previous generations, but new technologies and media are shaping the Millennials into a very different generation compared to generations before it. These generational changes have many impacts on society in general, which means that there are profound changes occurring in the job market. Within librarianship, Millennials are causing a dramatic change in how librarians deal with new technologies, which will have a future profound effect on the profession and will change how libraries reflect societal needs for information in the future. Millennial academic librarians are a new demographic that needs to be further studied in order to understand how librarianship as a career will continue to evolve and adapt to new generations of library users.

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