Generational Diversity

Characteristics and Values of Millennials in the United States and Wisconsin

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
Generational Diversity

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Generational Diversity Report
Summary of Findings

DEMOGRAPHICS

Size of the Generation
The Millennial Generation is the largest generation in U.S. history (Pew Research Center, 2010e). There are 85,405,383 Millennials nationally. In Wisconsin they comprise a slightly smaller percentage of the population, with 1,534,035 Millennials residing in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010e).

Ethnicity
Racial diversity is on the rise not only in the United States (Associated Press, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2010d) but also in Wisconsin, with some Wisconsin counties experiencing a greater than 500% increase in minorities from 1990 to 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, 2010f). This makes Millennials the most racially diverse generation.

Socioeconomic Status
The majority of employed Millennials earn annual incomes between $10,000 and $30,000 (Hiltonsmith, Ruetschlin, Smith, Mishory, & O'Sullivan, 2011), and the unemployment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds is nearly double the unemployment rate for the nation as a whole (Hiltonsmith et al., 2011).

Education
Nationally, Millennials are on their way to becoming the most educated generation (Pew Research Center, 2010d, 2010e). Wisconsin Millennials are following this trend, with more students choosing college over employment or the military (WINSS, 2010).

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Progressive Era
Millennials are the first generation to grow up with a biracial president; see the legalization of same-sex marriage in a number of states, and see women serve as Cabinet members.

Increasing Economic Stratification
Millennials grew up in an economic environment that included a wealth and income gap unseen in the United States since the 1920s (Furchtgott-Roth, 2011; Lubin, 2010; Yen, 2011).

September 11th
The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks impacted Millennial perspectives about national security and global cooperation (Singer, Messera, & Orino, 2011; Towns, 2011).

2008-2012 Economic
The Great Recession of 2008 affected Millennials' current and future finances.
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Challenges
Employment of young adults ages 18-24 hit its lowest point (54%) since 1948 (Pew Research Center, 2012c). In addition, they face long-term effects of early negative economic circumstances on lifetime earnings (Fulham, 2011).

VALUES AND PRIORITIES

Connected via Technology
Nationally, Millennials have had unprecedented access to technological devices. They are attached to these devices in a way that generations before them were not (Pew Research Center, 2010e).

Tolerant of Individual Differences
Both nationally and in Wisconsin, Millennials show the most tolerance of any generation toward gay marriage, diversity, and so on (Pew Research Center, 2010e; University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2003, 2006).

Cooperative
Millennials have high rates of volunteering in the United States (Leiphon, 2008) and in Wisconsin. Due to increased Millennial volunteer participation, Wisconsin can boast that more than one third of its citizens engage in volunteer activity, ranking eighth in the nation in volunteer participation (Johnson & Held, 2011).

Optimistic
Nationally, a majority of the Millennial Generation (88%) believe that they will have enough money to live on in the future, a significantly higher rate of confidence than older adults (Pew Research Center, 2012c). In Wisconsin, Millennials demonstrate a similarly optimistic attitude in terms of their satisfaction with the direction of “the way things are going” (University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2010).

Expectations for Government Responsibility
Nationally, Millennials tend to trust the institution of the national government more than other generations (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Keeter & Taylor, 2009).

Individual Fulfillment
At work, Millennials value flextime and customizable schedules, and feel constrained by an 8-to-5 workday (Raines, 2002). Having a flexible job, which supports a healthy work-life balance, is highly valued (Notter, 2002).

Executive Summary
The generation known as Millennials, born between 1982 and 2000, is the largest generation in American history (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). The size and potential of Millennials alone has already inspired a wide range of professionals to wonder what they are like demographically, what has impacted them, and, perhaps most of all, what they value. As more and more Millennials become influential and active members of the economy and political system, the more important it will be to understand them. The purpose of this report is to look mainly at national data—but also at Wisconsin data when available—about Millennials to provide insight into the general characteristics of this generation that can be utilized by a wide range of professionals. The report is divided into three descriptive sections about Millennials: Demographics, Formative Experiences,
and Values and Priorities.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The data here comment on the racial diversity, social economic status, educational attainment, religious affiliation, and family structures of the Millennial Generation. This section describes Millennials “by the numbers.”

Ethnicity

Ethnic diversity is on the rise in the United States (Associated Press, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2010d) and in Wisconsin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010f). This makes Millennials the most racially diverse of any generation. Table 2 displays the breakdown of ethnic diversity by generation.

Table 2. Four Generations at the Age of 18-30: Ethnic Diversity in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boom</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center, 2010d

Education

Nationally, Millennials are on their way to becoming the most educated generation in history (Pew Research Center, 2010d, 2010e). Wisconsin Millennials, like the national group, are more likely than past generations to pursue higher education as they become old enough to do so (see Table 7) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010j).

Table 7. Highest Educational Attainment of Wisconsin Residents by Age Cohort in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18-24 years old</th>
<th>25-34 years old</th>
<th>35-44 years old</th>
<th>45-64 years old</th>
<th>Over 65 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College 4 or 4+ Years</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010j
FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Each generation faces defining moments that shape its nature. This section aims to give readers a glimpse of what Millennials were molded by. In general, we describe two types of formative experiences. One type is long-term social trends, such as the social movement toward tolerance of individual differences, changes in technology, and the effects of intensive parenting practices. Also included among social trends are the effects of increasing economic stratification, the effects of immediate awareness of and connection to global communities, and changes in political practice that comprise the entire political experience of this generation. In the second part of this section, we discuss two specific events that have had specific effects on Millennials that may differ from the effects on other generations: the attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent wars, and the economic downturn that began in 2008.

Increasing Economic Stratification

The Millennial Generation has come of age in a time of historically high and increasing economic stratification (Stiglitz, 2012). The current U.S. economic system includes a wealth and income gap unseen in the United States since the 1920s (Furchtgott-Roth, 2011; Lubin, 2010; Yen, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile of U.S. population</th>
<th>Percentage of Income</th>
<th>Percentage of Net Worth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 90%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 10%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 1%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wolff, 2010

Changes in Political Practices

The political environment that Millennials have experienced thus far is one in which “compromise has become a dirty word” (Pereira, 2011). The early years of the 21st century have been marked by increasing deterioration of bipartisanship in U.S. politics (Galston, 2011).

Partisanship in political discourse has been visible in Wisconsin politics as well, where both parties have shifted away from bipartisan dialogue, and have moved away from party leaders who are seen as too conciliatory with the other side. As a result, the leadership in both parties has become more partisan (Greenblatt, 2009).

September 11th

9/11 and the implications of 9/11 were historical events in the lives of Millennials. According to a recent report by the Brookings Institution, 85% of Millennials think terrorism will always be a factor for the United States (Singer et al., 2011). Millennials’ views on war and diplomacy were also formed: “While Millennials consider themselves patriotic, according to 2007 polling, almost 70% say they would be unwilling to join the U.S. military. In fact, in general, Millennials are more likely to reject the primacy of military force in fighting terrorism or
Keeping America safe. Millennials share a more progressive stance on international affairs, oriented toward a multilateral and cooperative foreign policy" (Towns, 2011).

VALUES AND PRIORITIES

In this section we review public polling data and qualitative examples of Millennials’ values and priorities, focusing on ways in which this generation differs from its predecessors. We provide an overview of four clusters of attitudes. The first two of these, Millennial identity and attitudes toward government, are fairly straightforward. The third set of attitudes, which we call “process orientation,” is somewhat more abstract and is supported largely by qualitative observations rather than by polling data. The final section deals with Millennials’ goals for the future, in hope of answering the question “What do Millennials want?”

Tolerant of Individual Differences

Millennials’ source of ethical guidance, when it comes to how to treat others, is less likely to be based in formal religion than was the case for previous generations. Fewer Millennials endorse the idea that religious belief is required for morality than do older Americans. And fewer Millennials—although still nearly half of the generation—believe that religion is very important in a general sense (see Table 13) (Horowitz, Poushter, & Barket, 2011).

Table 13. Religious Opinions by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>% Agreeing That It Is Necessary to Believe in God to Be Moral</th>
<th>% Agreeing That Religion Is Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Horowitz et al., 2011

Wisconsin Millennials mirror the national trends for beliefs and behaviors related to tolerance. The acceptance of nontraditional families is higher among Millennials than any other generation (see Table 17) (University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2003, 2006).

Table 17. Wisconsin Approval Ratings on Civil Unions and Same-Sex Marriage, 2003-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Approval of Civil Unions</th>
<th>Approval of Gay Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2003, 2006
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Expectations for Government Responsibility

Millennials tend to favor government involvement in solving problems as opposed to relying on businesses and individuals to solve them (Pew Research Center, 2010e). They think government should have a hand in creating jobs and improving education (Borsuk, 2009).

In a Wisconsin Badger Poll conducted in 2009 (see Table 20), a significant majority of Wisconsin Millennials favored a government-run health care program versus a system of only private insurance plans (University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2009).

Table 20. Wisconsin Feelings on Health Care
Response to “Do you favor or oppose a federal government-run health insurance plan to compete with private health insurance plans?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Favor Gov’t Plan</th>
<th>Neither Favor nor Oppose</th>
<th>Opposed to Gov’t Plan</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-59</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 2009

Current Voting Patterns

More than half of the Millennial population is of voting age (Sweeney, 2006). Millennials were a notable force in the 2008 presidential election (Rock the Vote, 2008) and are expected to play a significant role in the 2012 presidential election (Baker, 2011).

In Wisconsin, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) estimates that there will be 866,000 18- to 29-year-old eligible voters in 2012. In the 2008 presidential election, an estimated 58% of voters in this age bracket voted, a high rate by historical standards but still below the rate of those over 30 years old. Among voters over the age of 30, 76% of registered voters voted in the 2008 election (CIRCLE, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In the next decade, the Millennial Generation will take its place as a major force in the electorate, and their views on social, economic, and political issues will hold considerable sway. They will continue to change, individually and as a group, in response to life events they have yet to experience, and in the way current social and economic conditions play out in the coming years. They recognize the challenges they are facing, and remain optimistic that they will manage to overcome difficulties. They trust that government institutions are important and useful in dealing with difficult problems. They are beginning their participation in American society as a diverse, tolerant, cooperative, expressive, technologically sophisticated generation, and those attributes are unlikely to disappear completely in the coming years. In understanding some of these commonly shared Millennial traits, it may be possible for members of other generations to work more effectively with this important group of individuals.