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Homogeneity in heterogeneous environments? An analysis of generation theory applied to college generations

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HOMOGENEITY IN HETEROGENEOUS ENVIRONMENTS?
AN ANALYSIS OF GENERATION THEORY
APPLIED TO COLLEGE GENERATIONS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

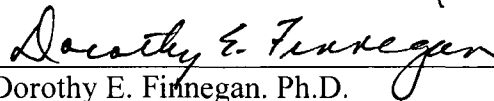
by
Donna M. Eddleman
October 2009

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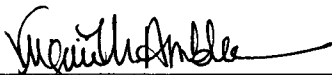
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Dedication

What a journey this has been. The completion of my doctoral program would not have been possible without the guidance, patience, encouragement and intellect of Dorothy “Dot” Finnegan. Dot is an inspiring role model and academician and I am fortunate to call her a colleague and friend.

To Maury O’Connell my mentor and friend: Thank you for convincing me to enroll in a doctoral program and for your continuing encouragement throughout the journey.

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To my friends and colleagues at Christopher Newport University and Southern Utah University: Thank you for your continuing support throughout my doctoral journey.

Finally, to my husband, Jerry L. Eddleman: Thank you for your patience, encouragement, love and support throughout this six year journey. You are still the very best thing that has ever happened to me.

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HOMOGENIETY IN HETEROGENEOUS ENVIRONMENTS? AN ANALYSIS OF
GENERATION THEORY APPLIED TO COLLEGE GENERATIONS
ABSTRACT

The prescriptive characteristics that have been assigned to the entire Millennial generation, suggest that the student population inhabiting college campuses today is neither demographically or experientially diverse. Current generation theory ignores specific environmental and regional influences, like those acknowledged in Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm and Mannheim's generation theory, and places a greater emphasis on the impact social movements and historical events have on generational development. To evaluate the accuracy of this Millennial characterization and to learn if immediate environment and region of the country influence trait development, 21 traditional aged college students from three different geographic regions of the country were interviewed. The results demonstrate that immediate environment does impact character development and that while historical and social events may create a generational consciousness, clusters of personality traits are discernible and create unique regional personas. These regional traits and the ecological paradigm in which students are raised should inform and direct Student Services on college campuses. If specialized needs based on environment and demographics can be identified, student affairs practitioners can provide more targeted and relevant services and programs thereby increasing the likelihood for student satisfaction and academic success.

Key words: Ecological paradigm, Generation, Millennial, Regionalism, Student Services

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Millennials, an American generation of traditional undergraduates, encompass our country's largest and most complex group of college students. Uncertainty over the identity of this group of more than 70 million is a continuing topic of conversation. The confusion is more pronounced than with other generations because the formative years of this generation are so splintered and because the population is so culturally, economically and socially diverse. Millennials face the same developmental challenges as previous generations, but have grown up in a fundamentally different world (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Strauss & Howe, 1991). The disparate experiences of contemporary undergraduates, coupled with a varied demographic composition, make it more difficult to predict the developmental and social needs of this student population. Despite this new generational dynamic and the associated unfamiliar environment, the prescriptive generational theory of Strauss and Howe (1991), replete with far-reaching assumptions, still serves as the predominant source to guide and inform the work of student affairs practitioners.

Strauss and Howe (1991) argue that a generation is characterized by its peer personality. They distinguish a generation as a cohesive group with its own unique biography; a caricature of a representative member. The peer personality assigned to Millennials by Strauss and Howe (2000) includes the following traits: *special; sheltered; confident; team-oriented; achieving; pressured* and *conventional*. In response to this characterization, trends have emerged in higher education that include a focus on the needs of the individual (special) student, the development of increased opportunities for

students to interact and to be part of a group (team-oriented), the increased availability of support services to help students manage stress (pressured), and more targeted services directed at parents who want to continue to protect their student despite the transition from high school to college (sheltered).

Howe and Strauss (1991) posit that these prescriptive and dominant characteristics are a result of history, social moments and the “generational diagonal” – the varied interactions that individuals have within and among generations. Missing from the discussion however, is acknowledgement of the fractured and assorted experiences and characteristics of the Millennial generation, and consideration of the impact that one’s immediate environment can have on individual character development. Oversimplified characterizations imply that ecological changes over time result in wholesale developmental changes across entire populations of individuals. Perhaps they do not.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study is to determine the suitability of current generalizations about contemporary college students as a homogenous generation characterized with specific traits in light of perceived ecological differences. An accounting of the applicability of the collective assumptions inherent in generation theory will help student affairs practitioners to better evaluate and predict the needs of prospective students and thereby develop appropriate programs and resources to serve their student population.

This study is a qualitative research project that sought to determine if the peer personality of Millennials, as defined by Strauss and Howe (2000) is an accurate reflection of student populations in three different parts of the United States. Separate

interviews were conducted with student participants randomly selected from three schools that are closely aligned based on the 2005 Carnegie Classification system, but located in three different states across the country – Utah, Texas and California.

Particular attention was paid to three traits: *special*, *team-oriented* and *pressured*. Using the anticipatory descriptions articulated by Strauss and Howe (2002) and the manifestations of these traits as defined in current literature, I considered the extent to which these traits are discernible and applied ecology theory to determine on what bases their presence or absence in the respective student populations can be attributed.

My interest in scrutinizing the population assumptions associated with the Millennial generation is the result of my own professional experience in higher education in two different states – Virginia and Utah. The contrast in student personality and student needs within these two environments made it readily apparent to me that the sweeping generalizations that had informed my decision-making within student affairs were flawed. Upon reflection, I also found the classification to be quite presumptive given the numerous ways in which society classifies regions of the country and groups of individuals. Research conducted on the geography of personality has found regional clusters of personality traits (Simon, 2008) and society regularly measures, characterizes and distributes services based on a variety of classifying standards. To develop one peer personality for a group of 70 million despite the differences that research and society regularly acknowledge seems irresponsible. To that end, my research explored the following questions:

1. Are the traits special, team-oriented and sheltered apparent across three different Millennial student populations within different institutions located in different states and regions of the country?
2. Are there other common traits that emerge in the sample groups? Do they support or dispel the current predominant peer personality?
3. Do predominant characteristics of the sample population emerge that align and are consistent with state, and to some extent, regional nuances?
4. Are there common bases attributable to the presence or absence of any or all three of the traits being explored?

Purpose

In 2004, Lowery noted “The unique characteristics of the Millennial students offer insights into the programs and services that this generation of college students will want and need” (p. 87). Using the seven key characteristics of the Millennial generation he then provides his prescription for the programs and services practitioners should consider. The wholesale adoption of suggested programs and services without a clear understanding of and accounting for the unique attributes that define a campus culture may result in a misguided and therefore, ineffective student affairs program. The demographic and experiential diversity of the student population inhabiting college campuses, justifies a level of skepticism and a narrowed evaluation of student traits. If specialized needs based on environment and demographics can be identified, more targeted and relevant services and programs can be provided thereby increasing the likelihood for student satisfaction and academic success.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was confined to three groups of students. One group is composed of students who are residents of and attend a public university in California. A second group is composed of students who are residents of, and attend a public university in Texas. The third group is made up of students who are residents of Utah and attend a public university there. For the purposes of this study and to protect the identity of the institutions and the associated student participants, the state in which each institution is located will serve as the institutions pseudonym: California University, Texas University and Utah University. This study is designed only to compare and contrast these three sample populations.

Female, full-time students (enrolled in 12 or more credits), born between 1989 and 1991, enrolled in a liberal arts program, and admitted with a high school grade point average between 2.8 and 3.2 were identified by the respective University representative and a sample were selected from that population. Geographic location was limited to three states and dictated, in part, by my relationship with the university or my connection to the area in which the university is located.

To secure participation, no less than 2 solicitation emails were sent. At Texas University, phone calls were made from the Vice President's office encouraging participation. Some members of the Utah University sample were sent letters via US mail to see if the yield might increase. At each location, incentives were also offered, a chance to win one of two \$50 gift certificates to the campus bookstore. To help legitimize the request to participate, specific names of the respective campus administrators who were assisting with the research were listed in each email, emails

were sent from my University account and not my personal email account (in one case, all emails were sent from the University vice president), business cards were enclosed with each letter sent through the U.S. Postal Service and on two of the campuses student staff were asked to encourage participation. Despite these efforts, securing participants remained difficult; therefore, purposeful sampling and the resulting sample size—21 student participants—precludes the generalizability of the results.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Given the observations and the extended commentary bestowed upon generational theory over the past two decades, the casual observer might believe that generational theory not only informs, but directs student affairs practice. The most commonly cited generational model was developed by William Strauss and Neil Howe. In their 1991 book, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* Strauss and Howe discuss their comprehensive model and provide a detailed accounting of its historical application. Their fourth book, *Millennials Rising: the Next Great Generation* (2000) is frequently referenced in the literature on today's college students (Coburn, 2006; Coomes & DeBard 2004; Bonfiglio, 2004; DeBard, 2004; Elon, Strange, 2004; Stratton & Gibson, 2007) as are the characteristics they have ascribed to the generation: special; sheltered; confident; team-oriented; achieving; pressured and conventional. Lowery (2004) speaks of the generation's implications for the design and delivery of student affairs programs and services in the context of these seven key characteristics. DeBard (2004) uses the same metric to explore the "flash points of potential conflict" between generations (p. 39). Citing the work of a number of authors, including Howe and Strauss, Strange (2004) outlines a similar list of seven characteristics to include: (1) structured rule followers, (2) protected and sheltered, (3) confident and optimistic about their future, (4) conventionally motivated and respectful, (6) pressured and accepting of authority, (7) talented achievers. More recently, Elam, Stratton and Gibson (2007) outline the implications of such characteristics for the higher education environment.

Who are Millennials?

Before considering the diversity of opinion on the current generation of college students, it is necessary to define the population we are talking about. A limited consensus exists among generation researchers with regard to the chronological boundaries for membership in the Millennial generation, as well as what to call them. Some names signify a location in the generational hierarchy, some are reflective of the times, and others reflect the propensity to highlight generational characteristics (both positive and negative). For example, Generation Y represents a natural progression following Generation X (Howe & Strauss, 2000, Moses, 2008). Echo Boomers identifies this generation as the children of Baby Boomers (Alch, 2000; Carroll, 2005). Net Generation (Carlson, 2005) reflects the role of technology in their lives while Tethered Generation (Tyler, 2007) and Generation Me (Twenge, 2006) reference two of the many behaviors attributed to the generation. Although a plethora of labels exist, the term *Millennials* generated the most interest in an online ABC News survey conducted in 1997 (Howe & Strauss, 2000) and is the term most commonly found in the literature (Coomes, 2004; DeBard, 2004; Elon, Stratton & Gibson, 2007; Lowery, 2004; Murray, 1997; O'Reilly, 2000).

Researchers concur that groups of individuals, through shared social and historical conditioning, assume and display similar characteristics, ideas, attitudes and behaviors (Esler, 1984; Mannheim, 1970; Marias, 1967; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim (1970) notes, "It is difficult to decide when this process is complete in an individual..." (footnote, p. 391). Generally it is believed that the distinguishing marks of a generation take final form during the late teens and early twenties (Esler, 1984) as

“early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world” (Mannheim, 1970, p. 389, emphasis in the original). Strauss and Howe (1991) believe generations are rooted in the cycle of social moments that occur approximately every twenty-two years. Such vague boundaries make the number of Millennials enrolled in higher education difficult to define. Birth dates in the literature range from 1977 (Alch, 2000, Armour, 2005) to 1982 (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Winograd and Hais, 2008) with a number of authors simply defining Millennials as those born after 1980 (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Aviles, Phillips, Rosenblatt & Vargas, 2005). The upper boundary also has a variable range beginning as early as 1994 (Carlson, 2005) and continuing as late as 2002 (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Oblinger, 2003; Howe & Strauss, 2000)). The Millennial generation spans a period of 17 to 25 years with current members (in 2009) ranging in age from 7 to 32 years. This variability means estimations of the size of the entire generation range from 70 million (Armour, 2005) to 80 million individuals (Alch, 2000).

Critical of defining the ages chronologically, Huizinga (1984) challenges the arbitrary nature of the assignment of generations suggesting that a generation can begin just as easily in 1701, as 1700. He also notes, “The first generation of a series of three is always also the second and the third in two other series.” (p. 73). Berger (1960) notes that while “most students of the problem of generations agree that a generation ‘lasts’ about thirty years,” that is not always the case. He highlights the common held belief that the Victorian age lasted “for some sixty years.” (p. 10). Spitzer (1973) may provide the simplest and yet most valid criticism of the arbitrary nature of generations when he notes, “There’s one born every second.” (p. 1355).

Generation Theory and the Millennials

The body of literature rooted in the work of Howe and Strauss finds its origins in the work of Karl Mannheim (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim, in his generational theory, relied on the biological rhythm of life and death and the process of dynamic destabilization, the social effects of traumatic and violent social changes (Edmunds, 2002). Mannheim believed that generations, like social class, are socially constructed and representative of nothing more than a particular kind of identity location, embracing age-related groups embedded in a historical-social process (Mannheim, 1970). Strauss and Howe (1991) agree with Mannheim's conceptualization of the "age location" of a generation; however, they align age location with historical and social events which, in combination create cohort groups who experience life events concurrently. Individual personalities and the peer personality of the numerous cohort-groups (generations) result from this interaction. They note, "There is no such thing as one universal lifecycle. To the contrary, neighboring generations can and do live very different lifecycles depending on their respective age locations in history." (p. 34)

Like Mannheim, Strauss and Howe (1991), believe that generations are defined by social change. Mannheim however, did not assume the formation of generations to be predictable or cyclical; Strauss and Howe (1991) assert both to be true. *Social moments*, they note, last about a decade during which people perceive that historic events are radically changing the social environment. A continuing cycle of secular crises and spiritual awakenings, which occur in intervals of 40 to 45 years, create interactions, modify peer personalities and clarify how one's lifecycle will emerge (p. 71). Society cycles between periods of community ascendancy and periods of individual ascendancy.

The latter is characterized by duty to self, concern with rights, present orientation, and focus on differences among people. The former is characterized by emphasis on duty to others, concern with responsibility, future orientation and focus on the commonalities people share (Levine & Cureton, 1998). The cyclical pattern results from a need to take care of oneself after spending time and energy engaged in something --war for example-- that serves the greater good (Coomes, 2004; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Strauss & Howe, 1991). This concept reflects John Locke's (1689) social contract theory wherein individuals relinquish some of their rights for the benefit of the larger community (Levine & Cureton, 1998).

The proposed cyclical nature of generations—the historical and social integration of individuals and life experiences and the belief that each rising generation—fills the social role being vacated by the departing generation (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Mannheim, 1970) and helps to explain the optimism with which Howe and Straus (2000) characterize this generation. The Millennials, the “next great generation,” are scheduled to fill the role of the declining members of the GI Generation (1901-1924) which is often referred to as “the greatest generation.” Howe and Strauss (2000) were so confident of the Millennial's impending greatness that even before the last of the generation had been born, they were praising the “dramatic changes now unfolding in the attitudes and behaviors of today's youth” (p. 4). Millennials are focused on team work, achievement, modesty and good conduct. This most protected generation is an optimistic, cohesive, and unselfish group of rule following people who are accepting of authority, and who, in mid-life will stop talking and start doing. They are more affluent, more numerous, better educated, and more ethnically diverse (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Other researchers agree.

Millennials are energetic, pragmatic and resilient (Coeyman, 1998); more sensible, charitable and community-minded and despite the spotlight being placed on them by their parents they will not be self-absorbed or spoiled (O'Reilly & Vella-Zarb, 2000).

Millennials enjoy working in groups, identify with the values of their parents, with whom they are close, and spend more time doing homework. They are well-informed, media-savvy and have a strong work ethic (Alch, 2000). Millennials have financial smarts, are goal-oriented, have high expectations of themselves and their employers, and seek out creative challenges (Armour, 2005). "History will one day look back and view Millennials as being a group that took the baton from the baby boomers and became a positive force for change in society." (Geraci, 2005, p. 5)

The most comprehensive counter-argument to the conceptualizations of Howe and Strauss is offered by Jean Twenge (2006). Using data from 1.3 million young Americans who took part in 12 studies on generational differences, Twenge evaluates, challenges and debates the commonly held beliefs about generations and their associated theories. Twenge does not believe Millennials mimic the GI Generation with a focus on duty, teamwork and civic responsibility; she contends today's students do not feel much attachment to duty or possess group cohesion because they have been taught to put their own needs first. Although Moses (2008) argues that Millennials are no more narcissistic than people of other ages, Twenge (2006) reports a 65% increase in the level of narcissism in the average college student between 1987 and 2006.

Others question the issue of engagement. Howe (as cited in Shapiro, 2008) believes that "Millennials will be the next powerhouse political generation" even though the Center for Information and Research found Millennials ambivalent about formal

politics (2007). Sax (2003) uses descriptors like disengaged, competitive and overwhelmed to define Millennials. She also asks why, if students are committed to academic excellence, has the percentage of them who devote six or more hours to studying per week declined since 1987. Taylor (2007) finds them turning to virtual relationships and online communication and argues such conduct runs counter to the idea of teamwork. Citing postmodern influences as the culprit, Taylor (2004) assigns a number of traits to Millennials, including: consumer-oriented, value free, adaptable and pragmatic, self-interested, skeptical, cynical/distrustful, commitment reluctant and intellectually disengaged.

For those who find Millennials civically minded, Sax (2003) contends that the rate of volunteer service declines precipitously between high school and college. Putnam (2000) explores the national decline in membership among civic, religious and social organizations, including the 40% decline in bowling league membership between 1980 and 1993 despite the 10% increase in the number of bowlers (p. 112). Mean comparisons of three years of responses to the question about involvement or intended involvement in community service or volunteer work from the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* conducted among Southern Utah University peer institutions (2002 – 2006) confirm Sax's assertion. Participants are prompted to rate their involvement or intended involvement in community or volunteer service. Contrasting seniors with first-year students, the level of intended involvement declines between 2002 and 2006 from .66 to .12 and from .87 to .54, respectively.

Finally, Millennials appear to need instant gratification, are oriented toward entertainment (Coomes, 2004), are self-absorbed, disconnected, and reluctant to commit

(Twenge, 2006). They are concerned for their safety, are extroverted (Geraci, 2005) and technoliterate (Taylor, 2004). This heightened level of disengagement is discernible in the skyrocketing number of requests for single rooms in residence halls and the increased use of the term “loner” by student affairs officers to describe students on their campuses (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 100).

Generation Location

The chronological position of similarly situated individuals at any given age is their *generational location* (Mannheim, 1970). Location within a generation is both an objective fact and a passive category in that whether or not the individual member is aware of their position, its existence remains (Edmunds, 2002). This location predisposes the located individuals to a specific range of experiences, thoughts and actions (Mannheim, 1970). Some suggest that the generation into which one is born and the associated range of experiences have a greater influence on personality development than the individuals by whom one is raised (Twenge, 2006). Nyhart (1995) explored the legitimacy of Mannheim’s generation location and found that mixed age composition among nineteenth century faculty resulted in experiences, ideas and techniques taking on different meanings for different age groups. Berger (1960) proposed a similar dynamic relative to intellectuals who create “generational mentalities.” These mentalities reflect what Ortega defined as the spirit of the age or *zeitgeist* – the general thought or feeling of a particular time (as cited in Berger, 1960, p. 11).

For Mannheim (1970), the sociological *problem of generations* is that any given location excludes a large number of thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions. Conversely, a generation location includes a large number of thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions.

Mannheim's *generation location* places age-specific individuals along a continuum of time from and during which they are exposed to a range of potential experiences.

Although not all members share or participate in each experience, this important and often ignored distinction helps to explain the contradictory and varied characteristics assigned to Millennials both in terms of the recipients of the characteristics and the varied (and biased) perspectives from which traits are being assigned. Attempts to create a singular *peer personality* (Strauss & Howe, 1991) representative of an entire generation have been described as foolhardy (Moses, 2008); "obscuring the idiographic characteristics of the individual" (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 13), a model of lazy and stereotypical thinking (Haworth, 1997), and when applied to the Black undergraduate, incongruent and non-applicable ("Understanding the 'Bling-Bling Generation,'" 2008). Characterizing 70 to 80 million people in any generalized way is like trying to describe a typical American (Sax, 2003) - clearly an impossible task.

A significant historical or social event affects all generations living at the time, but how they are affected is determined by their stage in life (Mannheim, 1970; Strauss & Howe, 1991). For example, a college student's reaction to the September 11 destruction was different than that of an elder member of his family. Generations experience historical events differently depending on their chronological location. This intergenerational discontinuity (Demartini, 1985) functions as the potential for marked social change and the formation of an *actual generation*, created only when a destabilizing event creates a concrete bond (Mannheim, 1970). Although the event may align members with each other and create a generational consciousness, the bond does not presume cohesiveness; therefore, an actual generation may be stratified into a number

of *generation units* each of which assumes a persona unique to its interpretation of the event (Mannheim, 1991; Pilcher, 1994). Generation units form micro-levels of an actual generation. Individuals within any defined unit interpret a common experience in specific ways thereby making each unit distinct from its peers. Different generation units might hold very different views on historical-societal events (Ester & Vinken, 1999). Units serve as the source of intragenerational conflict (Demartini, 1985). For each generation the same concepts apply resulting in numerous interpretations of common experiences as well as the continuing manifestation of both intra- and intergenerational conflict.

Generation Units

Mannheim's concept of generation units has tended to be ignored in generational literature and yet the only true homogenous characteristic within a generation is demographic – birth date. When a group or unit is more clearly defined, the delineated population, because of greater homogeneity, will have more in common thus limiting the stratification across the group (Berger, 1960). Berger (1960) and Nyhart (1993) substantiate this idea by examining intellectuals and 19th century morphologists, respectively, as generation units. A generation is not merely a numerical clustering of birth cohorts, but rather a group, a unit of colleagues who share the same sense of belonging. This important component of Mannheim's generation theory, a sense of belonging, seems to have been lost along the way. Broad generalizations about clustered birth cohorts have supplanted consideration of smaller units despite geographic dispersion and differentiation, and an increasingly diverse population. This disparity may

force more intentional consideration of Mannheim's generation units (Berger, 1960; Edmunds & Turner, 2004).

Generation Units in a Broad Social Context

In order to measure, distribute services to and characterize like objects, society has devised a variety of convenience units. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau uses four regions and nine divisions to gather national demographic and economic data. The federal court system is divided into eleven judicial circuits. The data and associated commentary published in the annual *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (<http://chronicle.com/free/almanac/2008/>) frames policy and programs that are regionally specific and thus, unit driven. Similar evaluative data, by region, is provided in the annual *US News and World Report* ranking of U.S. colleges and universities.

Concepts such as dispersion and differentiation are employed when analyzing national politics (Dickey, 2008; Greenblatt, 2008). The colors red and blue are assigned to define the general values and beliefs of residents who reside in certain states with the associated predominant political affiliation. This Republican "red" state – Democratic "blue" state divide mimics maps of religious geography (Harvey, 2008) and hence the tendency toward conservative or liberal ideologies among respective inhabitants. Big cities are primarily Democratic, while rural areas are reliably Republican (Greenblatt, 2008). The Northeast, formerly the most solidly Republican part of the country into the 1960s, has become a Democratic stronghold characterized by liberal views and wealth (Greenblatt, 2008). Despite broader and pervasive forces that integrate, encourage, and possibly coerce a national and homogenous culture – we all watch the same evening news, the same popular sitcoms, the same reality television shows – regional influences

remain and differences persist. William R. Ferris, Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture attributes this persistence to a population anxious to acknowledge and preserve the alternatives to a “carbon-copy franchise culture” that is working to dilute regionalism (Applebome, 1999).

In the literature and in popular culture, regional characteristics are used to predict and describe the tendencies and rhetoric of our nation. Rentfrow, Gosling and Potter (2008), after analyzing the personality data of over half a million U.S residents found “robust, statewide personality differences and clear patterns of geographic variation” (p. 360). For students in David Wrobel’s history class, regions include “different cultures and ways of living;” are distinctive as a result of “history, economy, climate, and geography,” and help us identify “characteristics of business, government, and populations.” Regions also connect adjacent states “culturally, religiously, economically, and politically” (Wrobel, 2008, p. 1207).

Wright (1956), a psychological ecologist, studied the psychological development of persons in the Utah region of the United States. His aim was to answer the questions, “What age related changes occur in the behavior and psychological living conditions of Utah children?” and “What is it like to grow up in the Utah?” (p. 265). He used behavior settings to describe aspects of psychological development and defined them as a “stable part of the physical and social milieu of a community together with an attached standing pattern of human behavior” (p. 266). Using these settings as analytical units Wright (1956) examined human behavior of varying age groups substantiating progression from minimal involvement, like that of an infant, to relatively great involvement, like that of someone older in age, who is dealing with the “necessities of the world” (p. 274).

Implicit in his use of settings as a means to evaluate behavior, is the assumption that physical location and environment impact development. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) develops the same argument in the context of unique conditions or circumstances that can be found among the populace. For example, medical research attributed the low rate of heart disease and heart attacks in Roseto, Pennsylvania to community dynamics.

[Physician] Wolf and [Sociologist] Bruhn had to convince the medical establishment to think about health and heart attacks in an entirely new way: they had to get them to realize that they wouldn't be able to understand why someone was healthy if all they did was think about an individual's personal choices or actions in isolation. They had to understand the culture he or she was a part of, and who their friends and families were, and what town their families were from. They had to appreciate the idea that the values of the world we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with have a profound effect on who we are (pp. 10 - 11).

Student Affairs Administrative Response

At the time of this study, universities, by the nature of age cohorts, are being led predominantly by Baby Boomers, who attended college between the 1960s and early 1970s. As products of their time, these men and women fought for the abolition of arbitrary rules and hegemonic structures. Though inheritors of the hard won freedoms, today's students are not obsessed with the same ideologies. They are instead looking for stability, order (Willimon, 1997) and structure (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Bronner (1999) notes that as a result of societal and consumer demand, colleges are offering more

supervision over students' lives. These generalized characteristics – a result of generational theory – inform and direct student affairs practice nationwide.

The more liberal interpretation of when parents can be notified of inappropriate student conduct on campus, and the absence of the student voice to challenge this shift, aid in validating this premise. Dr. Gwendolyn Dungy, executive director of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), speaks to what has become to some an almost necessary response to the level of parental involvement. She notes that although several dozen universities had parent coordinators in the 1970s, now, more than 70% of four year colleges and universities employ them (Lum, 2006). Today's parents seem to be more involved, most often at the request and approval of their student, in their son or daughter's educational pursuits, than previous generations of parents. Their hovering nature has earned them the title "helicopter parent" (Damast, 2007; Hunt, 2007; Lewis, 2006; Lipka, 2005; Lum, 2006; Shellenbarger, 2005; Twenge, 2006; White, 2005) and the management of this phenomenon is the topic of a number of journal articles (Bronner, 1999; Coburn, 2006; Lum, 2006, Strauss, 2006).

In some parts of the United States, parental involvement and student expectation of that involvement may be commonplace; it is not however, universal across the country. As a student services administrator on a campus in Virginia (full-time enrollment of 5,000), my commitment, and that of my colleagues, to parent initiatives and concerns was substantial. An estimated 25% of our time was spent addressing the needs and distress of parents. Substantive human and fiscal resources, within and outside of the Student Services division, were allocated to response to their needs. As a student services administrator on a campus in southern Utah (full-time enrollment of 6,000), the

estimated commitment within the Student Services division to parent initiatives and concerns is less than 5%. Human and fiscal resources, within and outside of the Division, allocated specifically to address their needs do not exist.

Other disparities emerge as well. As noted earlier, research on the level of community involvement is contradictory. Although Strauss and Howe (2000) find Millennials to be service-oriented, others found service and volunteer work performed by college students had declined (Putnam 2000; Sax, 2003; Twenge, 2006; Helms & Marcelo, 2007). Helms and Marcelo (2007) note that 16-18 year olds volunteer at consistently higher rates than their college-age peers, but further note a tremendous disparity in volunteer service within that same population. For example, in 2006 volunteer participation rates were as high as 29% in the state of Utah, and as a low of 9% in the state of New York (www.civicyouth.org). To substantiate the role service plays on any given campus, one can consider the institutional and/or state's commitment to Campus Compact, a national coalition dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education (www.campuscompact.org). As a University administrator on a campus in Utah, I can attest to the commitment to service that informs and directs programs and funding on campus, as well as at the state level, via the Office of the Commission of Higher Education and the state legislature. I did not experience the same commitment to service while in an administrative role in Virginia. In fact, I was not aware of Virginia's association with Campus Compact until accessing the webpage. In other words, the commitment was not communicated through the system.

The same types of data disparity can be found when the mental health needs (in this case suicidal tendencies) of college students are evaluated. Despite the numerous

optimistic views of Millennials, the population Howe and Strauss characterize, in part, as “pressured” show increasingly greater mental health needs (Duenwald, 2004; Kitzrow, 2003; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Onge & Ellet, 2005; Spano, 2005; Trela, 2008).

According to the 2007 survey of counseling center directors conducted by Robert Gallagher at the University of Pittsburgh, the number of clients on psychiatric medication has increased more than 14% since 1994 and 87.5% of those same center directors indicate that the number of students coming to campus already on psychiatric medication has increased. Howe and Strauss (1991) acknowledge the controversy surrounding the aggressive use of medication to treat youth but also note the declining rate of suicide that began in the mid-1990’s, just as the first Millennials were reaching their teens. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2007) reported a 28.5 % decline in suicide rates between 1990 and 2003; however, in that same report they acknowledge an 8% rise in the suicide rate in 2004, the largest single increase in 15 years. These data are reported in the aggregate. For higher education practitioners, the more relevant data is region specific. For example, the CDC Division of Violence Prevention reported that between 1990 and 1994, suicide was more prevalent in the South (37%) than in the Northeast (15%). The disaggregated data more accurately informs practitioners and administrators as they work to determine the types of programs and services their student population needs.

Conclusion

Moses (2008) criticizes the oversimplification that is inherent in generations. She claims it to be “...foolhardy, perhaps even dangerous, to believe that you can fairly and accurately profile a vast cohort of people and then, based on that description, prescribe

how they should be managed” (p. C1). Bonfiglio (2008) contends that regarding generations of students as isolated cultural units with common characteristics does not enhance an educator’s ability to connect with students and ignores the opportunity to improve the teaching and learning process. He notes “...using such broad strokes does little to help us understand the needs of a very diverse – in age, race and ethnicity (not to mention class and sexual orientation) - student body” (p. 30). Borrego and Manning (2007) find theory to be “a remarkable tool”, but only when used “judiciously and not as a replacement for the truth about students’ lives.” (p. 138)

When student affairs practitioners embrace the broad and sweeping generalizations expressed about Millennials, they indiscriminately reject individuality and model lazy, stereotypical thinking rather than intentional thought (Haworth, 1997). They may also jeopardize student success, the ability to recruit and retain students, the ability to effectively align “best practices” with the needs of campus constituents, and they risk the ongoing viability of the programs and services they provide.

The collective identity of the Millennial generation is more fragmented than those of the past because their experiences have been splintered. Millennials have grown up with an assortment of options never before experienced (Shapiro, 2008). The breadth and depth of those options creates an age cohort that is not just demographically diverse, but experientially different as well. This diversity of thought, experience and perspective make Mannheim’s concept of *generation units* more applicable than ever before. “Best practice” on the East coast, may fail miserably on the West coast. Focused evaluation of the realities of smaller, more defined populations makes the application of common characteristics to a nation of college students unwarranted and unwise and enables

student affairs practitioners to better anticipate and serve their student populations.

Generational theory, assumptions of the aggregate, currently informs and directs student affairs practice; however, is such application practical and responsible, or is it more prudent for practitioners to closely evaluate potential disparities such as those commonly acknowledged in other arenas? Generations as units are worthy of consideration.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Current practice in student affairs programs reveals a reliance on generalized characteristics to describe contemporary students. The homogeneity of these characteristics appears to be the result of the wholesale adoption of the generational theory developed by Strauss and Howe (1991) that not only describes the current Millennial generation, but also anticipates the characteristics and traits of future generations. Howe and Strauss (2000) define this cohort as more ethnically diverse and larger in number than any preceding generation and assign a singular *peer personality*, comprised of broad and sweeping generalized characteristics, to the entire cohort. This collective identity does not consider the varied demographic traits that define a population of more than 70 million, nor does it account for the diversity of thought, experience and perspective from which individuals view the world.

The underlying premise that guided this study is that although such generational images may emphasize emerging trends, they do not describe universal or even majority behavior and should not be used to inform best practice within student affairs. Disregard for the splintered and diverse experiences and characteristics of this current generation, not to mention the omitted consideration of immediate environment and its associated impact on development, results in an oversimplification of an entire generation of students. Generalized characterizations insinuate that environmental changes across time result in indiscriminate developmental changes across entire populations of individuals whose only common feature is a randomly applied chronological boundary. In this study, I introduce and utilize an ecological conceptual lens to explore the effects more

immediate environments have on predominant student characteristics. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological paradigm, a system of relationships within a complex and layered environment, is used to examine the applicability of the prevalent generation theory on the current cohort of college students. Using three geographically dispersed college campuses and the conceptual frame inherent in Bronfenbrenner's (1995) work, I minimize the value of these generalized characterizations and legitimize a focused evaluation of campus student populations to determine how to best serve campus constituents.

Conceptual Framework

The Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989) examines child development within a system of relationships that form the child's unique environment. The associated *ecological paradigm* advanced by Bronfenbrenner (1993) serves as his attempt to "move toward a unifying theory of cognitive development" (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner's nested systems, a context reflective of current Millennial student environments and interactions, serve as the conceptual foundation for my research.

Beginning at the abstract level, Bronfenbrenner (1989) presents the following formal definition of his general paradigm:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing, highly complex biophysical organism – characterized by a distinctive complex of evolving interrelated, dynamic capacities for thought, feeling, and action – and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person

lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 7).

Development within this ecological paradigm is an evolving function of person-environment interaction. This interaction takes place within a system of nested, interdependent networks—an individual's ecology—that evolve over time as a function of constancy and change (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 1993). The immediate setting in which this development occurs is the *microsystem*. Bronfenbrenner (1993) defines this first nested network as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment” (p. 15). Microsystems within a university setting include a student's residential community, athletic team, student organization or class section. More generally, microsystems include one's family, school or neighborhood.

The *mesosystem* is comprised of “linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. “Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.22). College students have interactive mesosystems of academic, social, family and work life, each of which has developmental consequences. The effects within and across systems either fortify one another or weaken one another. Growth and development result when the student chooses to confront discrepancies between processes (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

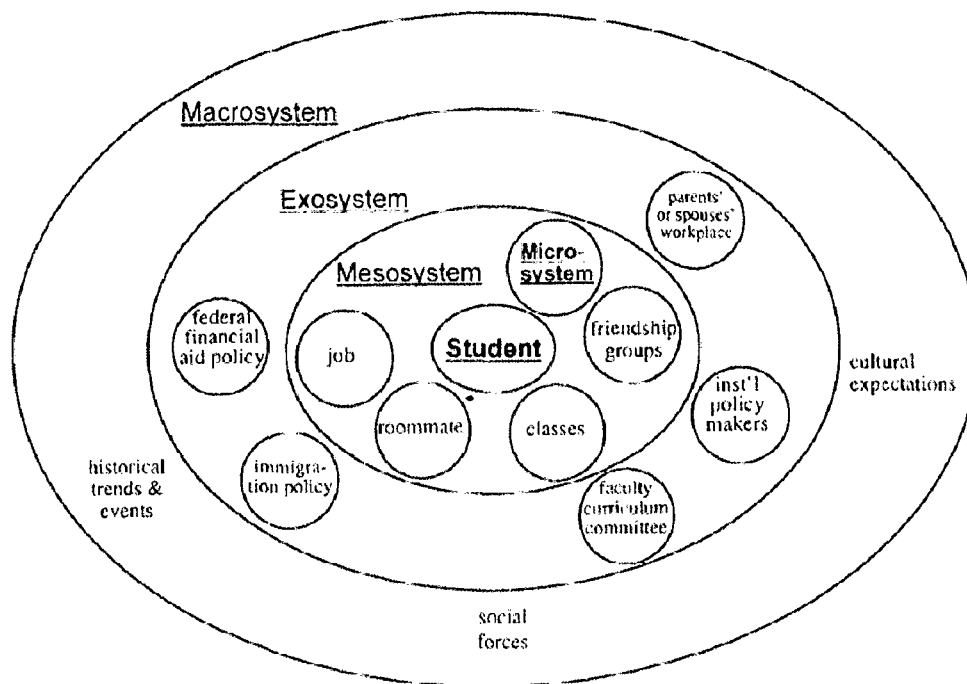
Beyond the micro- and meso- systems lay the *exosystem* and the *macrosystem*.

The exosystem is comprised of two or more settings that exert influence on the individual; however, because individuals do not have membership in all settings that affect their development, the influence is indirect (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). For example, college students who rely on their parents for financial support are affected by the companies that employ them. The federal government is another exosystem exerting indirect influence on college students. Federal laws related to financial aid, free speech, and privacy rights impact the student experience, despite the fact that the student is not a member of the system of influence.

The macrosystem represents the most distant level of environmental influence. It consists of an “overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25). Macrosystem influences include social forces, cultural expectations and historical trends and events (Renn & Arnold, 2003). By the nature of this definition, developmental processes will differ significantly from one macrosystem to the next. In the United States for example, the value placed on democracy and capitalism, as well as the methods by which parents raise and protect their children are embedded in its macrosystem. The same cannot be said for China or North Korea. Cultural understandings of race, gender, class, and age also emanate from the macrosystem and impact all other systems. For example, the evolution of the treatment of women and other minority populations in the United States is the

result of social forces, cultural expectations and historical trends. The Clery Act, a federal statute requiring colleges and universities who receive federal financial assistance to keep and disclose campus crime information, was also the result of social forces, primarily a heightened concern for student safety on the part of parents and legislators. The macrosystem “provides the structure and content of the inner systems and is specific to a given culture at a given point in history” (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 272). These four systems describe the nested networks of interaction that create an individual’s ecology. Renn and Arnold (2003) applied Bronfenbrenner’s model to the postsecondary environment and constructed the following diagram:

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Model as Applied to a Postsecondary Model (p. 268)



In his later research, Bronfenbrenner (1995b) began to explore “time and timing as they relate to features of the environment” (p. 641) and concluded that “historical events can alter the course of human development, in either direction, not only for

individuals, but for large segments of the population” (p. 643). Historical events therefore, have the ability to inhibit human development or to prompt further maturation. This added “life course perspective” or *chronosystem* presumed the following basic sociological tenets:

Principle 1. The individual’s own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives.

Principle 2. A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the *timing* of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring through the life course.

Principle 3. The lives of all family members are interdependent. Hence, how each family member reacts to a particular historical event or role transition affects the development course of the other family members, both within and across generations (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b, pp. 641-642).

There is a corresponding relationship between principles 1 and 2 and the concept of “social moments,” an important and defining piece of the Howe and Strauss model. Specific to the first principle, social moments are defined by Howe and Strauss (1991) as, “an era, typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historic events are radically altering their social environment” (p. 71). Howe and Strauss also believe timing, a feature of Bronfenbrenner’s second principle, impacts the type of “moment” during which a generation develops, as well as the role and expectations assigned to generation members. Social moments typically occur in time intervals roughly separated by two

phases of life or forty-four years, and alternate in type. They are either a secular crisis, “when society focuses on reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior;” or a spiritual awakening, “when society focuses on changing the inner world of values and private behavior” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 71).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1995b) third principle above and the concept of a “generational diagonal,” developed by Howe and Strauss (1991), both acknowledge the interdependency of generations. Strauss and Howe (1991) visually define the generational diagonal using age, which rises, as time moves forward; movement through and interaction within the diagonal results in change. How that change occurs is governed by the following:

1. Each rising generation breaks with the young-adult generation whose style no longer functions well in a new era.
2. Each rising generation corrects for what it perceives as excesses of the current midlife generation—their parents and leaders—sometimes as a protest.
3. Each rising generation fills the social role being vacated by the departing elder generation (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 9).

Missing from the Howe and Strauss model is the uniqueness of the changes and development that can occur within and among the individuals who comprise a generation. Bronfenbrenner’s sociological model incorporates person-process-context and time thereby recognizing that the construction of reality, by the nature of individually distinct contextual frames, is an independent endeavor. This model led me to challenge the idea that broad and sweeping generalizations can be applied to numerous generations, including the Millennials, and the resulting inaccurate portrayals of very diverse

populations. Strauss and Howe (1991) situate generations along a chronological timeline and use significant historical and social events (similar to Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem) to explain, as well as predict, the defining characteristics of entire cohorts. Their error lies in the assumption that despite the individual developmental path each member of the generation travels, significant historical and social events will yield the same results in the form of character traits and consequently, result in the same programmatic needs, as they relate to higher education, for an entire generation of students. The ecology model takes into account the specificity of individual life history as well as the larger societal and historical context of development.

Unit of Study

Mannheim's *actual generations* include all those who experience the same historical or social event. It is the actual generation's resulting collective mentality (Esler, 1984; Howe & Strauss 1991) that has served to characterize the entire generation. Generations, when differentiated into subgroups, form what Mannheim (1970) refers to as *generation units*—naturally occurring subsets that are the result of varied personal analysis and interpretation. Unit members share a common consciousness because they interpret a common experience in similar ways. Their collection of ideas and experiences as well as their integrative attitudes and beliefs define them as a group.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm and Mannheim's generation units form a credible basis from which to argue the value of evaluating members of generations within much smaller and discrete categories. If one presumes that environmental conditions will produce different developmental consequences depending on the personal characteristics of individuals living within that environment (the *interactive effects* as defined by

Bronfenbrenner, 1989), then it seems logical for student affairs practitioners to use a more focused pool of Millennial students to inform practice.

For the purpose of this study, Mannheim's *naturally occurring subsets* were groups of Millennial students who inhabited similar environments; that is, they attended the same university. Controls for personal/individual characteristics included gender, age, earned high school grade point average, and the state in which they were raised. In addition, a general presumption was that "like" students attend universities "like" them. This assumption is supported, in part, by the transition of the college recruitment process from an *admission* function to an *enrollment management* function. Hossler (1986) defined enrollment management as "a process of activity that influences size, shape and characteristics of a student body by directing institutional efforts in marketing, recruitment, and admissions as well as pricing and financial aid" (in Allen, 2004, p. 20).

This transition was first acknowledged by Krachenberg (1972), a marketing professor, who claimed that recruiting was really a euphemism for marketing (Kirp, 2003). He further reasoned that there was value in "having an institution with some distinctiveness" because traits of distinction could be communicated to an audience of interest (Krachenberg, 1972, p. 378). Although he did not use the specific terminology, Krachenberg (1972) was advocating for more targeted marketing in higher education. Examining the transition to enrollment management, Kirp (2003) talks of the *customer base* and the "task of matching students and colleges" (p. 14). When presenting ways to improve college retention, Nemko (2008) advocates the use of an ethnographic researcher or journalist to interview college seniors who should answer the question: What made this college such a good fit for you and a good college, in general? The institution should

then, “revise [its] prospective-student marketing efforts in light of the interview data.”

Finally, Anctil (2008) speaks of “the strange kind of economics that colleges and universities must negotiate as they seek to refine and promote their identity, advance their own prestige, and *attract like-minded students* [italics added for emphasis]” (p. 18).

The predictive definitions of special, team-oriented and pressured, ascribed by Howe and Strauss in 2000, as well as the manifestations of these traits, in the form of behaviors and perceptions, found in recent literature, served as the foundation for the types of questions posed during each participant interview. The specific behaviors and perceptions examined can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Behaviors and Perceptions that Guided the Interview Questions

Special	Team-oriented	Pressured
Parent role in college selection	Request a double or single room	Programmed or un-programmed existence
Parent role during a crisis		
Parent level of financial aid	Extra-curricular involvement	Commitments beyond academic life
Parent involvement in college selection	Investment in: Community Service Civic Engagement (election)	Perceptions of pressure
Level and rate of communication		Medication
Higher education – right or privilege	Learning style preference	Counseling
Material possessions (entitlement)		Level of optimism

The questions I asked served two purposes:

- 1.) To discover if the trait, as evidenced in the literature, is a part of the participant’s reality.

- 2.) To discover cause and effect relationships between the presence or absence of the trait(s) and the participant's ecology.

For example, the intruding role of parents in the lives of students permeates student affairs literature. To evaluate the extent of parental intrusion, participants were asked about parental involvement in the college selection process and college finances, as well as the frequency with which they communicated with their parents. The goal was to determine if the characteristics—special, team-oriented and pressured—were similarly predominant among three groups of students who attend three universities, in three different regions of the country and to learn what components of individual environments seem to most significantly influence trait development.

Methods

Qualitative scholars have differing perspectives about the characteristics of qualitative design. “Scholars have a long history of disagreeing and challenging one another about how to ensure the quality of qualitative work and even how to catalog and categorize the various kinds of qualitative research” (Freeman, deMarraid, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 25). I used Merriam's (1998) six characteristics of qualitative design to guide my methodology; therefore, my research focused on process more than on outcomes; explored understanding and meaning in how people make sense of their lives; is the result of my work as the primary data collector to include the shaping of the research that is the result of my biases and personal experience; is the result of fieldwork and travel to the respective sites; and is descriptive in nature.

A qualitative research design was appropriate for a number of reasons. First, the research was exploratory. There appears to have been little if any investigation of this

phenomenon. Second, my research describes what is naturally occurring among Millennials in three parts of the country. And third, the phenomenon studied is current and applicable to contemporary issues in higher education (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Qualitative methods facilitate the study of issues in depth and detail (Patton, 2002). As a researcher, I have analyzed words to describe the views of my informants (Creswell, 1998). By conducting interviews with current students on three different campuses, I have used a multiple case, descriptive approach. This approach allowed for the exploration of the degree to which specific characteristics emerged within three similar, but differently located populations. The current oversimplification of such a diverse group in the context of the ecological paradigm supports this more focused research on the complexities inherent in these populations. My focus was on evidence of the defined characteristics as well as the foundations from which they developed; my focus was not on outcomes.

Site Selection

Site selection was based in part on economics. Identifying locations where I could secure inexpensive accommodations during my fieldwork was the point from which I started my site search. Using the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education classification system, I initially identified two institutions, in different regions of the country that inhabit the same or similar categories within four of the classifications the Commission evaluates. Both schools have high undergraduate populations, grant Master's degrees, are medium in size, and are primarily non-residential; however, after two site visits yielded minimal participation, (14 student participants), I added a third university that was selected primarily because of its location—the state in which I reside,

Utah, and because it served as a complement to the two other institutions, one of which was in Texas the other, California. Despite the absence of intentionality when choosing the third school, all three institutions are similar in three of the six Carnegie classifications:

Table 2. Carnegie Classification and Corresponding Common Descriptions

CLASSIFICATION	DESCRIPTIONS
Enrollment Profile	High undergraduate
Size and Setting	Medium four-year, primarily non-residential
Undergraduate Profile	60-79% undergraduates enrolled full-time

The three remaining classifications were of less significance in terms of controlling for homogeneity of the population interviewed. For example, although recruiting standards at these three institutions are different (one is selective and two are inclusive) this dichotomy was controlled during participant selection by using earned grade point average at the point of enrollment as a selection criterion. Though only two of the schools are classified as Master's granting institutions (the other grants primarily Bachelor's degrees), this categorization did not prohibit me from isolating similar students.

Permission and Participant Selection

With the assistance of the respective University Registrar, I secured samples from which to draw my participants. To control for disparity among participants, the following criteria were used to secure a semi-homogenous sample.

1. Gender: Female
2. Year of birth: 1989 or 1990 or 1991
3. Country of Origin: United States
4. Hometown of Record: Within the state in which the school resides
5. Enrollment: Full-time (12 or more credits)
6. High School GPA: 2.8 – 3.4 on a 4.0 scale
7. Major: Liberal Arts

I established these criteria to control for factors that might influence my findings. For example, if a student attended a school in the west but was born in the northeast, my findings might have been minimized because of ecological disparity. By establishing a range for high school grade point average (GPA) I controlled for some of the assumptions that exist about high achieving and low achieving students. Generation theory does not account for cultural differences that exist for men and women. Delimiting by gender allowed me to more closely consider the legitimacy of universal generational characteristics by focusing specifically on female students. Controlling for field of study further standardized the type of student I interviewed. In all cases, the criterion helped to minimize the degree of variability within Bronfenbrenner's systems, as well as the associated influences. For example, controlling for gender and major means the microsystems in which the students exist while not identical, are more similar than they would be if the subjects were selected without this delimiting criterion. At the exosystem level controls are in place relative to federal policy—participants must be U.S. citizens—which again aids in minimizing subject diversity.

Contact with each University Registrar was made only after I had received Human Subjects Committee approval, and only after requesting permission from the appropriate Vice President to seek support from the Registrar (see Appendix A). The Registrar at Texas University was reluctant to provide me with the names and contact information for the 93 participants she identified. Despite gentle advice to the Vice President with regard to FERPA exceptions for research purposes and the classifying of “public information,” I was unable to obtain a list of participants. A *Request for Participation*, authored by me but sent from the Vice President’s email account (with a letter of support from him) was mailed on April, 6, 14 and 19, 2009 (see Appendix B). In addition, a student worker in the Office of the Vice President called all of the students on the list and urged their participation. Eight interviews were conducted on-site over a period of three days.

On April 14, 23 and 27, 2009 *Request for Participation* emails were sent to the 87 students whose names were provided to me by the Registrar at California University. In addition, I enlisted the help of the residence life staff to encourage participation by residential students who were on the list. Eight interviews were scheduled. Six interviews were conducted over a period of 3 days as two participants “no-showed.”

On June 13 and July 2, 2009, *Request for Participation* emails were sent to 143 Utah University students. On June 23, 2009 letters were sent via the U.S Postal Service to 20 of the participants to see if the yield might improve. These letters did not appear to have an impact. I received 12 initial inquiries of interest. Seven participants took part in an interview; six were on-site and one was by telephone.

At each site, in an effort to encourage participation, incentives were offered in the form of gift certificates to the campus bookstore. Two were offered at each campus. Despite the incentives and the varied efforts to encourage participation, the response was minimal. At the conclusion of several interviews, I asked the participant why they thought more students had not responded to my request. The two most common responses were: security and an unwillingness to take the time.

Prior to the start of each interview a Consent Form was provided, reviewed and signed (Appendix C). The “signature” for the telephone interview was through an email of consent via the account from which I had first made contact with the student. Participants were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used in subsequent reports and also had the option to drop out of the process at any time. No student requested a pseudonym be used and no student refused to answer a question or asked that the interview be stopped.

Data Collection

In-depth interviewing is a data collection method used extensively in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Patton (2003) categorizes interviews into three general types: informal conversational interview, general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. I used the general interview guide approach which involves “...outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins” (p. 342). The guide served as a basic checklist to make sure that I covered all relevant topics. Using the guide allowed the interviews to be conversational and the data collection to be somewhat systematic and uniform (see Appendix D).

My questions focused on three of the seven distinguishing traits Howe and Strauss believe define the Millennial persona: special, team-oriented and pressured. My interview guide contained general topics and questions reflective of how each trait is defined and characterized within the current literature. The following brief synopses of the scholarship on each trait directed the content of the Interview Guide.

Special. In 2000, Howe and Strauss noted, “From precious-baby movies of the early ‘80s to the effusive rhetoric surrounding the high school Class of 2000, older generations have inculcated in Millennials the sense that they are, collectively, vital to the nation and to their parents’ sense of purpose” (p. 43). More recently, a manifestation of this special population has been the relationship that many students enjoy with their parents. O’Briant (2003) found that many Millennials considered their parents to be one of their role models whose involvement in their lives they embraced (as cited in Lowery, 2004, p. 87). Today’s parents are arguably more involved in their students’ educational pursuits than any other generation of parents. This includes the college application process which is viewed by many parents and students as a co-purchasing activity (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Their hovering nature has earned them the title “helicopter parent” (Damast, 2007; Hunt, 2007; Lewis, 2006; Lipka, 2005; Lum, 2006; Shellenbarger, 2005; Twenge, 2006; White, 2005). In March 2006 a survey conducted by the group College Parents of America found that 74% of the parents surveyed communicated with their student two to three times per week. One third of those surveyed reported communicating with their student on a daily basis. Others have suggested the average contact between parents and students exceeds three times per day (Tyler, 2007). These parents, who treat

cell phones like umbilical cords, have a propensity to hover and then swoop in and land at the first sign of trouble.

Twenge (2006) considers special from a different perspective. “Materialism is the most obvious outcome of a straightforward, practical focus on the self: you want more things for yourself. You feel entitled to get the best in life: the best clothes, the best house, the best car. You’re special; you deserve special things” (p. 100). Special also equates to comfort and enjoyment in the form of one’s own bedroom, designer label accessories and all the latest technology (Twenge, 2006).

Team-oriented. In 2000, Howe and Strauss described team-oriented as “From Barney and soccer to school uniforms and a new classroom emphasis on group learning, Millennials are developing strong team [attitudes] and tight peer bonds” (p. 43). Millennials seem most content operating in group settings (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004; Oblinger, 2003). A corollary of this orientation is a strong inclination for structured activities (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004). Collaborative learning, class presentations and group projects have become more common and preferred, whereas the class lecture by the passive “talking head” is considered outmoded (Barr & Tagg, 1995). This team-orientation may serve as a partial explanation for the Millennials involvement in community service (Lowery, 2004). Millennials are “banding together, in their own clubs and classes, on-line, and (especially) in national uniformed service organizations, eager for community activities (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 215). Sax (2003) reports students feel empowered to make a difference in their communities through service activities sponsored by their school, religious group or other organizations. These predominant images will guide my inquiry.

Pressured. Howe and Strauss described the pressured Millennial as one who is “Pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them, Millennials feel a ‘trophy kid’ pressure to excel (p. 44). Millennials spend their days in “programmed” mode. In high school they lived highly scheduled lives and the pressure was apparent. O’Reilly and Vella-Zarb (2000) noted: “The overwhelming perception gotten from talking to these kids is that they are under severe stress, often from boomer parents desperate to raise trophy kids with perfect grades, drop-dead resumes, and early admission to Harvard... The kids are exhausted” (p. 145). In college the stress continues as they move from one commitment – work, academics, extracurricular activities, family - to the next with minimal time to decompress. Increased levels of stress and anxiety result in greater incidents of stress-related disorders, including headaches, digestive problems, hypertension, and depression. As a result, student demand for campus mental-health services has reached unprecedented levels (Newton, 2003, p. 10).

Twenge (2006) believes the pressure is a result of heightened expectations of what is both necessary and possible. “In the world of individualist and consumer longing, we’ve been taught to expect more. Perhaps because of media exposure, we want to be millionaires, we want to be famous, to live in a large house and drive fancy cars” (p. 129). While this longing can be motivational, it can also exert great pressure and result in bitter disappointment when success does not come as easily as one had hoped.

Systems Matrix

For the purposes of my study, I identified three levels of inquiry—individual, parents and school/community—from which Bronfenbrenner’s systems were evaluated.

The intersecting points (between level of inquiry and system) of the following matrix contain factors that were considered in the context of the special, pressured and team-oriented characterizations outlined above. For example, the possibility exists that a pressured Millennial results from microsystem nuances at both the individual and community level to include organization membership, family dynamics, and the location of the institution. The same can be said for a special Millennial whose predominant influences appear to be at the macrosystem/parent level, to include family heritage and traditions.

Table 3. Intersecting Relationships between Bronfenbrenner's Systems and Levels of Inquiry

Systems	Level of Inquiry		
	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>School/Community</i>
<i>Micro</i>	family, school, neighborhood (residential community), athletic team, student organization	occupations, involvement in student's life	type of school, curriculum (culture: religion, secular), location/setting
<i>Meso</i>	connection to school, teachers, church, neighborhood, community (orgs), employer, classes,	relationship to student's involvement	relationship to families, to church, community
<i>Exo</i>	financial eligibility, parent employment,	socio-economic status, economy	enrollment criteria government influence leadership
<i>Macro</i>	ethnicity, affinity group	ethnicity, heritage, traditions	demographics, campus traditions, heritage

This matrix, along with my Interview Guide, served as the framework for the types of questions I asked as well as the sequence of the questions. I then sought to identify themes – differences and similarities – that validated or nullified the predominant assumptions inherent in generation theory and the associated literature.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of “bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111); it is the transformation of data into findings (Patton, 2002). From the literature I extrapolated behaviors that support the literary portrayal of special, team-oriented and pressured Millennials, imbedded them in my ecological matrix and devised a corresponding interview guide. Deductive data analysis began after the verbatim transcriptions of each individual participant interview were completed.

A special Millennial is one who welcomes and enjoys a high level of parental involvement in the student experience (Lowery, 2004). In analyzing the data I looked for patterns of parental involvement and a theme of student satisfaction with this involvement. The integration of parents into the matrix as a level of inquiry reinforces the deductive nature of my analysis. Special has become synonymous with materialism and entitlement (Twenge, 2006); therefore, I looked for these themes in participant responses. A team-oriented Millennial is one who prefers to operate in group settings (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004; Oblinger, 2003) and favors structured activities (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004). A pressured Millennial is one who is over-programmed and in need of mental health counseling and medication (Newton, 2003). These patterns of behavior and characterizations guided my analysis of the responses from each individual participant.

Commentary that supported, refuted or correlated common assumptions found in the literature about any one of the three traits was extrapolated from each transcript and coded appropriately; “SP” for special, “TO” for team-oriented and “PD” for pressured. I

then analyzed the discrete data in two ways: by characteristic across all 21 participants and then as institutionally delineated, characteristic specific data. By exploring the characteristics in this way I was able to not only develop conclusions about this particular group of Millennials, I was also able to ascertain differences, similarities, subtle shifts and relationships within and between geographic locations.

After evaluating the presence and strength of the characteristics special, team-oriented and pressured, I examined the data from an ecological frame. I wanted to see how broad the circle of influence was for each participant relative to the traits I was examining. I did this by looking at the traits in the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological premise of influential immediate environment and the foundation of generation theory, the conceptually larger historical events.

Table 4. Coding used to Identify Immediate Environments and Social Moments

<i>Systems</i>	<i>Level of Inquiry</i>		
	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>School/Community</i>
<i>Micro</i>	MIC-I	MIC-P	MIC-SC
<i>Meso</i>	MES-I	MES-P	MES-SC
<i>Macro</i>	MAC-I	MAC-P	MAC-SC

Table 4 shows three of Bronfenbrenner's systems (as outlined in Table 3), the associated levels of inquiry and the codes I used when evaluating the data. Mannheim, Strauss and Howe, and Bronfenbrenner all acknowledge a common consciousness among those who share membership within a generation. However, Mannheim's generation units and Bronfenbrenner's ecology model both concede that subsets within generations

experience life differently. Understanding these differences allows us to better serve various populations. For this study, that population is the undergraduate student. By evaluating whether the characteristics ascribed to Millennials manifest themselves in the same or similar ways across groups of students in different parts of the country, and by better understanding ecological influences – whether immediate or distant – conclusions can be drawn and students can be better served. My analysis, as a result of this study, follows in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

The Brush Strokes on the Millennial Portrait

This study was conducted to determine the suitability of current generalizations about contemporary college students as a homogenous generation characterized with specific traits in light of perceived ecological differences. The specific traits assigned to Millennials and often used as a basis for discussion in the literature include: special; sheltered; confident; team-oriented; achieving; pressured and conventional (Strauss and Howe, 2000). The traits special, team-oriented and pressured are the focus of my research. To assure ecological differences among study participants, I sought the participation of college students attending universities in three different states in the country: Texas, Utah, and California.

As the response was limited to my invitation to participate, I was able only to interview a small sample of participants on each of the three campuses. The 21 students are all female, were born between 1989 and 1992, had high school GPAs between 2.8 and 3.2, are in-state students, and are enrolled on a full-time basis. Sixteen of the 21 participants resided in a residence hall during their first year of college. The five non-residential students all attend Utah University; three live with their parents, one with her grandparents, and one with her significant other. Twelve of the participants are first-generation students, with half of these students attending Texas University. In addition, 10 participants—three at Texas, three at California and four at Utah University—were employed part-time during their first academic year.

This chapter presents the analysis of the data from the interviews and is presented in three major sections that correspond to the three characteristics studied. Each major

section is further delineated into the themes and elements that emerged from within those three major characteristics.

Special Millennials

My exploration of the attributed characteristic of special among the Millennials was motivated by the assumptions expressed by Howe and Strauss (2000) and commonly referenced by higher education scholars (Coburn, 2006; Coomes & DeBard 2004; DeBard, 2004; Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007; Lowery, 2004). In describing their “next great generation” attribute, Howe and Strauss noted “...adults subject the typical kid’s day to ever more structure and supervision, making it a nonstop round of parents, relatives, teachers, coaches, baby-sitters, counselors, chaperones, minivans, surveillance cameras, and curfews” (2000, p. 9). They further describe this generation as “special since birth” and having “been more obsessed over” than any proceeding generation (2000, p. 13); this need for structure, supervision, and protection is believed to continue, in significant and intrusive ways, even after the student steps foot on campus. Millennials are close to their reportedly over-supportive parents (Lowery, 2004; Oblinger, 2003) and the ability of these so-called “helicopter parents” (Damast, 2007; Hunt, 2007; Lewis, 2006; Lipka, 2005; Lum, 2006; Shellenbarger, 2005; Twenge, 2006; White, 2005) to hover is often associated with the increasing use and availability of technology that allows students and parents to stay connected (Carlson, 2005; Carroll, 2005; Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007; Shellenbarger, 2005). As a result, students supposedly maintain close relationships with their parents who invest significantly in the college selection process and who communicate frequently and regularly with their children.

As noted earlier, Dr. Gwendolyn Dungy, executive director of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) reports that more than 70% of four-year colleges and universities now employ parent coordinators (Lum, 2006). These coordinators are hired to manage everything from parent orientation, a parents' distaste for course content, and a roommate conflict that parents demand be resolved. Today's parents are arguably more involved in their students' educational pursuits than any other generation of parents. This pervasive assessment of the intrusive role parents have assumed in higher education prompted my exploration of the special Millennial, the student afforded great protection and much investment on the part of parents, and the unique relationship that seems to exist between parents and students.

In March 2006 a survey conducted by the group College Parents of America found that 74% of the parents surveyed communicated with their student two to three times per week. One third of those surveyed reported communicating with their student on a daily basis. Others have suggested the average contact between parents and students exceeds three times per day (Tyler, 2007). Across the three universities in this study, daily communication with parents, according to my participants, occurs more often than the March 2006 suggests. Two-thirds, or 14 of the students I interviewed, communicate with at least one of their parents every day, with the great majority of the calls being initiated by the student.¹ As expected, the three students who live at home communicate with their parents daily. Eleven, or 61% of the remaining students, a much greater percentage than the 33% reported in the March 2006 survey data, communicate with their parents every day. One-third of the total sample communicates with their parents less

¹ Daily communication for 13 of the students is via telephone; for one student, daily communication is via email with phone calls occurring at least once or twice per week.

frequently. Emily of California University noted, “[Mom and I] talk everyday and if I miss a day, she always calls me.” Taylor, also of California, noted, “...I talk with both my parents every day, and every Thursday night my mom cooks me and my roommates dinner so they are really involved with everything.” Despite this apparent tether of a weekly meal at home, Taylor’s parents reportedly are making an effort to promote her independence, “[My parents] thought I needed to live in the dorms for at least my first semester. Then, if I absolutely hated it, they would figure something else out; but they pretty much kicked me out.” Even Crystal, another California student, who did not bring anyone to orientation and claimed her parents “didn’t care” where she went to school, talks to her parents, “...every day, every single day.”

The primary contact point is, more often than not, the students’ mother. Regional trends did not emerge from the interviews but ecological factors do have an impact on who students talk to and why. Shani, at California University, has no contact with her father but speaks everyday with her mother and her grandmother, both of whom live in the same home. Brandy, from Texas University, talks with her father everyday; since he works the third shift, they talk as he is driving to work. Catherine, of California, talks with her mother everyday and with her brother, who “has basically taken the place of my [estranged] dad,” twice a week. As proposed by Bronfenbrenner, and discussed in chapter three, micro- and macro-level nuances within the student’s ecological system—the absence of a father and the hours during which a parent works, as examples—impact with whom these special students communicate.

Elise from California University and Tara from Utah University talk with their parents less frequently than most: “once every week or every two weeks” and “maybe

once a week, sometimes,” respectively, and yet they are two of only three women who rely solely on their parents for financial support of their educational costs. Elise notes, “My parents actually pay for every cent that is my education.” Amanda of California is the third student funded solely by her parents. She talks with them “usually a few times per week.” To the contrary, Alex from California, Haddie from Utah and Amber from Texas, as well as five others, receive no financial support from their parents for the cost of education and yet each of them calls home every day. These variations suggest an inverse relationship between the frequency of communication and the degree of financial commitment, as it appears that students who receive less financial support from their parents communicate with them more often.

Socio-economic status was not explored with enough depth to lead to conclusions about its impact on the parent/student relationship. Amanda, Tara and Elise are the only three of 12 first generation students who do not rely on financial aid. These three women communicate with their families with the least amount of regularity and yet they rely on them the most, financially. Eighteen of 21 students depend, at least in part, on grants, scholarships or loans to help fund their education. Nine of these 18 students are employed part-time.² Seven of these nine who are employed are part of a group of eight students who indicate that the financing of their education is solely their responsibility. These data support the reasonable and logical relationship between a self-financed education and employment. Emerging from this group of eight who are solely responsible for the financing of their education, is a disproportionate representation of Utah University. Five

² Tara, who is not a member of the 18 women who rely on financial aid, also maintains a part-time job.

of the eight are enrolled there. To what extent does ecology play a part in this distinction?

In Utah, the predominant religion is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as the Mormon Church). In 2004, the church reported that 62.4% of Utah's population was Mormon (Canham, 2006). Five of the seven Utah University students interviewed indicated they are Mormon. On the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) website, an entire web link is devoted to *Family Finances* (www.lds.org). On this page, Elder Marvin J. Ashton exhorts to fellow Mormons:

We should avoid debt. There is nothing that will cause greater tensions in life than grinding debt, which will make the debtor a slave to creditors. A specific goal, careful planning, and determined self-discipline are required to accomplish this....

With the exception of buying a home, paying for education, or making other vital investments, avoid debt and the resulting finance charges.

The *Doctrines and Covenants Student Manual* (www.institute.lds.org) notes that

“Consumer credit is attractive but Latter-day Saints should avoid debt as they would a plague” (p. 256).

One's family and one's faith interact with and influence each other. Who a person chooses to marry; how they choose to spend the Sabbath, and whether or not one tithes, all of these decisions, are rooted in faith, and do impact ecology. In the context of Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, the synergy between LDS church doctrine and the family, as well as the macrosystem, the interactive effects of social forces and the family, may explain the disproportionate number of Utah University students who are responsible for paying for their own education.

This regional difference is also reflective of economic characteristics. In the 2007 U. S. Census Bureau ranking of *Average Annual Pay*, California ranked fifth, Texas ranked tenth and Utah ranked thirty-fourth. In the *Personal Income Per Capita* rankings California, Texas and Utah were ranked 7th, 21st and 45th, respectively (www.factfinder.census.gov). Utah University is located in Utah, a less affluent state, and its in-state students are more likely than not, members of a faith that is focused, in part, on fiscal responsibility. The combination of economics and faith has developmental consequences.

The students talk with their parents about a variety of topics including finances, “a bad day at work,” employment, academics, living accommodations, hometown gossip, and roommates. Only two students, one at California and one at Texas, suggested that they impose parameters around subject matter; both noted that areas of their personal life on campus are off-limits to their parents. Neither student elaborated on their respective statements.

Although conversations with parents appear broad in content, some regional nuances surface relative to misdeeds or challenges. Students at C appear to have a greater sense of responsibility and independence in the face of problems, with three of the six indicating that they would try to resolve the conflict prior to making their parents aware of the situation. Elise, using the example of a conflict with someone in her residence hall explained, “My parents wouldn’t need to have any contact whatsoever with it. If it’s not their problem, then it’s not their problem.” Shani, although not willing to forego the opportunity to notify her mother of a challenge, also speaks of her attitude

toward accountability: “Well, I’m her kid. I’m my own responsibility but you still have to tell her.”

Students attending Texas and Utah did not articulate that same level of responsibility. Instead they indicated a greater reliance on their parents to resolve the issue. Sara, from Texas hesitated at first and began with a qualified response, “I don’t share everything with [my mom], [but] my dad yeah, probably I would [share the misdeed].” Eventually however, she acquiesced noting, “Yeah, I definitely would talk to them about it.” Crystal, also from Texas, indicated that the only reason she wouldn’t want to tell her parents if she got in trouble for alcohol possession would be “...because I wouldn’t want them to be upset by the decisions that I make.” However, prior to making that statement she said, “...but I probably should [tell my parents] because they are the only ones that could get me out of it.” Ashley from Utah said, “[My parents] will most likely try really hard to make sure that everything is resolved. They wouldn’t put it down....They just have to make sure it’s done.” Texas and Utah students acknowledged a greater level of reliance on their parents in resolving problems.

Ecological factors at Bronfenbrenner’s micro-level create unique situations for two of the participants. Utah University employs Haddie’s grandmother as a faculty member, so she believes she would need to inform her mom and her grandmother immediately to prevent them from finding out from an alternative source. Jasmine, of California University, was guarded with her comments; an ongoing strained relationship with her father limits her willingness to share information with her mother or grandmother. When asked about sharing misdeeds or trouble with them she quickly

responded, “Probably not, unless it was something serious.” During the interview when she was asked what information she shared with her parents, she responded:

I can tell you what they don't know. They don't know what classes I'm taking. They don't know my major. They don't know who I hang out with. They do know I go to school... [but] they don't know the details. They know I dated a guy that went to Davis. They know I broke up with him. They don't know that I party. I go dancing every weekend. They don't know a lot of the details. I kind of mention it here and there but I don't say I did this today.

This unique dynamic does not, however, prevent Jasmine from talking with her mom every day. She observed, “So I call her every day which is weird because when I was home, we really didn't talk.” Their conversations aren't long, “...we talk for two minutes....” but Jasmine does have a need, like so many other students, to remain connected.

How parents approach their role as disciplinarian could attribute to this need to stay connected. Special Millennials have parents who “employ isolation-style punishments...that don't require a parent to pull rank but which do compel a child to change attitude as well as behavior” (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 138-139). Special Millennials are not spanked, threatened or intimidated. Instead, more passive techniques like negotiation, reflection and dialogue are used to resolve conflict. The result might create more mature, but reliant, relationships; parents become friends and confidants as a result of the level of engagement, thus they are asked continually for advice. This more developmental approach to discipline and accountability appears to blur the lines of authority. Emily, of California, observed:

Well, she's definitely the mom. She's the authority. Both her and my dad, their word goes. But they are very open to talking to me about stuff and letting me put my opinion in where it's needed. Sometimes we negotiate on certain issues or stuff like that so they are very open. We have a very good relationship. We're very—I definitely obey their rules because they are my parents and they are setting them for my well being but they are open for negotiation.

The word "friend" or the term "best friend" is used by six different students to describe the parent/student relationship and the associated ability to talk openly about a variety of topics. Though Sara from Texas University does not share everything with her mother because she might get upset, her dad is "...more like [a] best friend than anything else..." and therefore she shares a lot more with him. Allie, of Texas, used the term "best friend" as part of a qualifying statement about the lines of communication: "We're not best friends or anything, but I know I can go to them and tell them what I need to talk to them about but I just tend to keep certain things to myself." Jillene of Utah University, when asked if she had an open relationship with her parents responded, "I do. I do. And I enjoy it...being able to communicate with them and having a strong, open relationship with them makes things a lot easier."

Ostensibly, communication maintains and fosters the student-parent relationship for some, but that communication is managed by other students so as to begin the process of establishing an adult identity. For example, Emily's mom went so far as to register on Facebook "...so that she can check on everything I do." Emily, lamented, "I don't always like it because sometimes I just don't want her to know certain things but I have another account on a different social website that she knows nothings about." Sara, in her

second semester at Texas noted, “Yes, [my mom] is finding it kind of hard to let me go still.... She needs someone to talk to and I know I feel bad but you know there’s not always time. I mean, I have to go do something and I’m sorry mom but I just – that’s kind of where we are right now.” Within their own micro-systems students struggle to strike a balance between interdependence and autonomy which is reflective of Chickering’s (1993) theory of student development. The third vector in his theory is *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*. A component of this vector is *instrumental independence* which has two major components:

the ability to organize activities and to solve problems in a self-directed way, and the ability to be mobile. It means developing that volitional part of the self that can think critically and independently and that can translate ideas into focused action. It also involves learning to get from one place to another without having to be taken by the hand or given detailed directions, and to find the information or resources required to fulfill personal needs and desires (p. 47).

Given their propensity to problem solve prior to involving their parents, the students at California University appear to be further along in this developmental sequence than students at Utah or Texas, although both Sara and Emily suggest they are trying to advance through this stage despite resistance from their mothers.

Though parent coordinators have been hired on campuses throughout the country, to manage parent inquiries and requests, parent involvement begins long before the student enrolls. College selection has become a co-purchasing proposition between student and parent arguably because parents want to assure that their special Millennial gets into the school that is best for them. Commentary about the level of parental

involvement in the college selection varies. At times I heard parental indifference, “Most of the choices were my own. They really didn’t play a part in it [college selection], and they were just there, just physically there.” Other times, I heard parental encouragement, “...just go where you want to go.” or parental influence, “[California] was not my choice. It was my mom’s.” and “My parents were very involved.”

Although no clear regional patterns emerged in terms of the extent of parental involvement in college selection, all six California University participants acknowledged a parental expectation of college attendance. Elise noted, “It was always expected I would go to college because growing up when you are young, your parents always tell you get your education, get your education.” And Catherine, a first generation college student stated, “My parents have always pushed us to go to school. My dad has always said you need a paper, like a degree, to get a good job and so they have always encouraged my older brother and my older sister to go to college.” Consistency of expectation was not as clearly articulated among the other participants, with some parents being portrayed as indifferent to their college attendance decision. Only two of the six California students (33%) are first-generation college students, whereas four of the seven Utah students (57%) and six of the eight Texas students (75%), are the first in their family to attend college. These differences may be regional, but without access to demographic data by academic institution or by region it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. The disparity may also be environmental in that, unless exposed to or experienced in higher education, a parent does not necessarily have a frame of reference from which to establish expectations or to guide the next generation.

Special Millennials as Entitled Millennials

Twenge (2006) considers special from a different perspective. “Materialism is the most obvious outcome of a straightforward, practical focus on the self: you want more things for yourself. You feel entitled to get the best in life: the best clothes, the best house, the best car. You’re special; you deserve special things” (p. 100). Special also equates to comfort and enjoyment in the form of one’s own bedroom, designer label accessories, and all the latest technology (Twenge, 2006).

Sixteen of the 21 participants lived on-campus during their first academic year. During their first year, all eight Texas University participants resided in campus residence halls with common bathrooms and without air conditioning. Six of these eight requested a double room at the time of application, including Amanda whose parents are paying for all of her schooling. When Allie was asked whether she had the option to choose a single room she replied, “I never really thought about it. I never looked into it.” Crystal requested a double because “I’m a very social person and I hate being by myself.” Emily noted, “I could have [requested a single] but I kind of wanted a roommate just for that first college experience.” For some, a double was requested to minimize costs. These reasons suggest the greater interest was the minimization of expense and/or the willingness to share space in order to meet other people. In total, only four of the 16 participants who lived on campus during their first year requested a single room; two of those requests were granted. Jasmine, at California, who was not assigned a single room, hoped for one because, “I shared my room for my whole life and so I thought it would be cool to finally get some privacy.” Brandy’s request was the result of fear: “I didn’t know anybody and I didn’t want to be stuck with somebody that was going to be terrible. So I

figured come the first year, stay in a single, [and] find somebody to room with. And I did.”

If Allie never really thought about requesting a single room, her ecological perspective is not grounded in a sense of entitlement. Crystals’ perspective is not grounded there either. She noted, “...I could have got the single because I need my space but in terms of it, I didn’t even want a single. It would be so boring.” Their view is of opportunity in a new environment versus that of conflict prevention and comfort personified. To add to this literary contradiction, not one student, when faced with the question of a single versus a double room, used a parent to help influence their room assignment. In addition, at Texas University where first-year students are required to live on campus, it is commonly known that all a student needs to do is file an appeal to be granted permission to live off-campus. Not one Texas student interviewed filed an appeal.

If Millennials are indeed special, and if special implies entitlement, then when participants are asked to identify their prized possession, one would assume their answers would identify tangible items of monetary significance; however, that is not the case. Two California students identified intrinsic characteristics: personal values and the ability to make decisions and form the future. Three students identified “my books” as their most prized possession; a fourth also identified her books and integrated them into the larger context of her education. Four chose their families and those remaining selected a variety of tangible items to include, “Bronte, a little stuffed dinosaur,” a baby blanket, pictures, their iPod, their computer, a camera and a horse. While the last four items may appear materialistic, Allie chose her camera because, “...that’s my dream and

my passion. I want to be a photographer. That's how I want to make a living..." and Amanda began saving money for her horse when she was 12 and had to take riding lessons for three years before her parents would make the purchase. This particular group of students does not support the *entitled* Millennial characterizations found in the literature.

A similar theme was found when participants were asked if, in the context of students as consumers, they viewed higher education as a right or a privilege. My interest was not in their answer to the specific question about "right" or "privilege," which more often than not was filled with great consternation and indecision, my interest was in the qualifying statements associated with their answers. Twelve of the 17 students who answered the question in the context of a consumer spoke of the educational process, in part, as a financial investment. They recognize the value of earning a degree and clearly articulate an awareness of the give-and-take that must occur and the advantages in that exchange. None of them viewed the exchange of tuition dollars for a degree as a *quid pro quo* relationship. Amber of Texas noted, "Even though you are paying, it's your responsibility to go to classes and to make the grades to earn the degree." Jillene of Utah said, "Paying for it, I think, does not necessarily say you earn a good grade...there's some sort of payment for anything you do whether it be with money or time, action, anything but there's a payment and I think that payment includes how much you put in mentally, and physically as well." Jasmine, of California, had a similar response, but concluded by qualifying her statement:

I'm not going to pay you and then expect to get a certificate because I paid you. I paid tuition and I really didn't show up to classes and I didn't do my best but I

deserve a degree. I think for me, that [my view] has a lot to do with the way I was raised. I was never given anything and then not expected to – so I think it has kind of flipped because we are the ones paying to be here but at the same time I think paying those fees and actually having to earn the money to pay for that and having to figure out where I'm going to get the money, I think I am going to make the most of my fees and make the most of the fact that I'm paying. *And I'm sure it changes for people from different socioeconomic backgrounds* [italics added for emphasis].

Although I gathered insufficient socio-economic data to allow for further evaluation of Jasmine's observation, her own perception aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory; components of one's ecology can impact the synergy between elements. In this case, Jasmine suggests her ecological environment influences her perception of tuition dollars and educational attainment in ways that are distinct from those living in a different environment.

Ecology also lends itself to the alternative perspective shared by two frustrated students at California University. One noted: "...the budget cuts [a result of an economic downturn]; it's affecting us because we are paying more fees and some of us even with financial aid can't afford it. ...They get kicked out before they actually get a degree. I think it's wrong." A second student noted, "I think everyone should have the chance to go.... There are all these fees going up, like student fees.... I think school should be free or it shouldn't be that expensive." California is located in California. On March 11, 2009, six weeks prior to my campus visit, California was rated as one of the top three foreclosure states in the nation (Fulmer, 2009), the result of a significant

national economic downturn. Clearly the corresponding exosystems—settings that exert influence on one’s ecology despite the absence of membership in that setting (for example, laws or policies imposed by the federal government)—are impacting the student experience.

Despite her frustration Catherine, one of the two California students concerned with budget cuts explained, “Well, I do not believe in buying an education.” The two common themes that resonate throughout the responses are responsibility and commitment. Janelle, of Utah, explained,

I think if you are someone who has worked for it...you will get a degree. But the people who just kind of were like my old roommates and kind of partied all of the time and didn’t really care about it, you know, you don’t deserve it. You don’t. So I think it depends on the person.”

Elise, from California, explained commitment to and responsibility for higher education this way:

Say you give me a product like a toy and if I just sit there and look at it, it’s not going to amuse me but if I sit down and touch it and play with it, then obviously it will amuse me. So, if a student goes in a classroom and he just sits there and plays with his iPod or plays with his phone, he may not get anything out of it and it’s not his right to blame the school for that. It’s his own fault because he didn’t put forth the effort in— the motivation to do all he could do to get a good grade in class.

What was not apparent in the students’ answers, even in the minority voice of frustration, is a sense of entitlement, an unreasonable expectation because a commitment

had been made or a bill had been paid. An entitled viewpoint would suggest grades are given, not earned, that education is a privilege, not an opportunity, and that payment justifies the degree, not hard work. To the contrary, the general theme that resonated at each location was that of investment in, and sacrifices for, an opportunity to better one's self.

Team-oriented Millennials

Scholars describe team-oriented Millennials as most content operating in group settings (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lowery, 2004; Oblinger, 2003), as well as civically minded and therefore engaged in community service (Lowery, 2004; O'Reilly & Vella-Zarb 2000). Howe and Strauss (2000) believe that "A new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds" (p. 216). Others, however, find membership in civic, religious and social organizations on the decline and investment in community service projects, sporadic and inconsistent across the population (Putnam, 2000; Sax, 2003; Twenge, 2006; Helms & Marcelo, 2007). To substantiate or refute the team-oriented characterizations found in the literature, I posed questions about community service, the recent 2009 presidential election, campus involvement in clubs and organizations and preferred learning styles.

Team-oriented Millennials and Community Service

"I love to do community service... [with] the Catholic Student Center. Whenever they have a project, I try to get involved in that, if I can. I usually do." Sara's declaration represents not merely a minority voice, but rather a lone voice among the students interviewed. Although a few have seemingly experimented with volunteering, no other

student participates in community service on a regular basis. Amber, also from Texas, served the Humane Society for four hours to complete an academic requirement "...and then two other times just because I wanted to." Tara of Utah, who is in a Service Club, noted "I haven't done a lot with them but I know we went to Tuacahn [a local outdoor theater] and cleaned the stage..." When asked how many hours of service she has performed she replied, "Probably between 10 and 20, something like that." When asked about her level of service, Kristen, also of Utah (which is located in a county with a population of approximately 91,000), responded, "I'm interested in community service but I haven't really come across a program that I am able to join." Catherine, of California, has not "really taken the time to go volunteer, but I'd like to though." Ashley, of Utah University is just not interested in service. Her response to the question about community service was simple and direct: "Only when it's required."

Our country prides itself on service, and it would be difficult to think that this group of individuals has not been exposed to an expectation or an understanding of the perceived value of service. Whether it is Colin Powell's "America's Promise" service program, President Barack Obama's "Renew America" service program, the Peace Corp, our armed forces or a local soup kitchen, at some level these students have been exposed to the concept of service. Utah University and Texas University are both affiliated with *Campus Compact*, a national coalition dedicated to promoting community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education (www.compact.org); however, despite the varied and numerous options for service and the messages being sent about the value of service, it is apparent that community, civic or service engagement and the associated value of working with others, is not a core activity for these Millennials. More

generally, the value of coming together for a common cause does not seem to resonate with this group.

Team-oriented Millennials and Campus Involvement

A busy schedule was a frequent excuse when I asked about involvement in clubs or organizations on campus. Emily is a member of Chi Omega sorority but she noted, “I haven’t been able to be involved a lot this semester just because [my] theatre schedule has been so busy....” Crystal who does not like to be by herself, likes to meet new people, make friends, and talk a lot, “didn’t have time” to try out for tennis or track nor did her schedule that does not include employment, allow her to become involved in any organizations on campus, except for her required membership in CAMP (College Assisted Migrant Program), a scholarship program. Allie noted, “I guess it’s just hard to find the time in college.... I was real [involved] in high school but it’s a whole different game in college.” Catherine indicated she is “...wanting to join the [local] Gay and Lesbian Center.” It is a cause she is interested in and she has participated in protests at the state capital. She began the academic year attending the campus PRIDE Club meetings; however, she no longer attends them because she does not have time. Despite the fact that she is not active in any other on-campus organization, is not currently employed, rarely attends residence hall events, never attends residence hall meetings and describes her weekends as “never planned,” she no longer participates in non-academic activities.

Two students from Texas suggested their involvement would come, but has not materialized yet. Settling into the rhythm of college is foremost. “I haven’t been involved that much because it’s a new thing for me. I came from home and I’m trying to settle in

here and so definitely next semester.” Another student explained that “I’m just kind of getting used to everything.” One should keep in mind however, that the interviews were conducted in the months of April and May, which means all participants had been “trying to settle in” and “get use to everything” for no less than eight months. Skeptics might surmise that the likelihood of involvement for these two individuals, and probably most others, will not increase as their academic life progresses. All but one student reported a decline in their level of involvement in programs, causes, and service as compared to high school. One student believes her participation in college compared to high school has remained constant. She characterized her involvement as follows: “I would consider learning the piano extracurricular activities even though it wasn’t part of school or anything so that is the only thing I ever did [in high school].” While the team-oriented characteristic would suggest that engagement in and with various groups would be a priority, the data I gathered do not substantiate this characterization in any way. No variation of this disinterested posture surfaces by region.

Team Oriented Millennials and Civic Engagement

Though casting a vote for president is a singular and personal activity, its impact is exponential in that it becomes part of a larger collaborative outcome. Most of the students interviewed voiced an interest in the political process. That interest however has regional nuances and appears not to be rooted in an articulated sense of the greater good. Thirteen of the 21 women voted in the 2009 presidential election. Kristen, of Utah was the only student not old enough to vote by a mere 22 days, but she managed to participate in an unusual way: “I was so mad [that I could not vote] because I am huge into politics.... I was so mad so my mom actually voted for me. She’s voted twice in her life.

It's not her thing so she went and registered to vote [for my choice]...." Shani explained her enthusiasm with voting for the first time: "It was awesome. It was great. My mom took a picture. It was embarrassing. We have a black President. That's the first black President. It's really cool. You can do anything. If he can do it, you can too."

When the seven eligible, but non-voters were asked why they did not participate in the recent presidential election, they provided a number of excuses. One "forgot" and two were not registered. Three non-voters expressed apathy, one noting "I just didn't feel like it." One voter was stalled by indecision, "I followed it and everything and I just couldn't decide." Five of these non-participants attend Texas University, and the remaining two are enrolled at Utah University.

As noted in chapter two, research conducted on the geography of personality has found regional clusters of personality traits (Simon, 2008). The fact that all six of the California students participated in the election reflects this regional clustering and insinuates a relationship between ecology, in this case the student's exosystem, and student development. The state of California is inextricably linked with political activism including civil rights events of the 1960s, immigration reform, and recent discussions on gay marriage. Texas and Utah do not, however, have that same regional persona. Physical location and environment have an impact on development (Wrobel, 2008). The self-reported voting behavior of the students interviewed supports this premise. However, given the small number of interviews conducted, it might also simply define the disposition of a campus student body; therefore, no strong conclusions about regional nuances should be drawn.

Team-oriented Millennials and Learning Styles

To further investigate the breadth of team-orientation among participants, I asked them to discuss their preferred learning style, asking specifically about lecture-style learning, experiential learning, and learning through group assignments. Again, I focused not on their answer but on their evaluative comments. Taylor, of Texas University, indicated, “I don’t prefer working alone or working as a team. It’s just whatever it happens to be for that day. I can go either way.” Aside from Taylor, the rest of the participants had a preferred learning style. The commentary of the six women who prefer to work independently is imbued with self-interest. A certain amount of skepticism about the commitment of other group participants also surfaces:

I’m usually the one stuck doing all the work and so it just gets kind of frustrating because everyone’s grade tends to hang on me. It just makes me mad so I just like to do my own work because I know my work will reflect what I do (Amanda of Texas University).

I like [group assignments] too, but you have to be working together to do it. You can’t have one person doing all the work and then people just standing around doing nothing. It’s a whole team; work together (Lara of California University).

Although some students suggested that working in groups could be beneficial, only three of the women indicated it was their preferred learning style. Of the three, two answered the question without any qualifying statements like that of Emily, of Texas, who tempered her preference by adding, “...if the group is willing to participate.” The two women who did not qualify their preference spoke of the opportunities for friendship and leadership that such an environment creates. Crystal, also of Texas, feels group work

is a chance to meet new people and make new friends. Shani, of California, sees it as a “...opportunity to step up and take leadership and just kind of work together to get [results].” Both women focus on the potential that group work creates and not the frustrations inherent in group dynamics. Chickering notes, “Interdependence means respecting the autonomy of others and looking for ways to give and take with an ever-expanding circle of friends” (pp.47-48). Although Crystal and Shani may have egocentric motives for preferring group work, developmentally, they may be at a point where they see it as an opportunity to give and take via talents and resources. This more mature and constructive point of view, if truly the motive, was the minority voice among the 21 women interviewed.

Although Brandy, Texas, indicates she did not have a preference between lecture and experiential, 11 of the students who were asked their preferred learning style indicated they favor experiential learning over lecture or group work. Five of the women prefer learning via lecture. Of the 11 who prefer hands-on learning, seven attend Utah University and four attend Texas University. The fact that all Utah students articulated the same preference may suggest some regional influences; however, no conclusions can be drawn because of the small sample and because of the wide variety of factors that may influence such a decision.

This particular group of Millennials does not exemplify, in word, or in deed the team-orientation that Howe and Strauss (2000) and others have represented. Rather, overall the students appear more internally focused and not yet willing to consider the value of collaboration. Chickering’s (1993) third vector, *moving from autonomy toward interdependence*, may help to explain the contradiction, in that *team-orientation* may be

more suited for individuals who are further along developmentally. These students do not articulate a sense of “duty unfulfilled” when acknowledging they are not involved in community service; instead their responses reflect the personal challenge of “not enough time,” which may really represent an unwillingness to make time. Academic group assignments are not viewed as opportunities to learn other viewpoints or to share experiences, they are more often perceived as a possibility for the unfair distribution of work. Civic engagement was intimated as a point of interest for participants, with 13 of 20 eligible students voting in the 2009 presidential election, but this involvement is regionally skewed and does not appear to extend into local communities.

Pressured Millennials

“To feel ‘pressure,’ youths must perceive that everything they want in life is critically dependent upon their own performance.... Pressure is what keeps them constantly in motion—moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 184). It is not clear if the constant motion that Howe and Strauss describe is indeed a reality for the students interviewed. Daily routines are dictated by academic and employment obligations and the students do live a programmed existence in the context of those commitments. Brandy (Texas), who does not use a planner but instead writes things down “twice” to remember them, said “[I am] probably more programmed throughout the day [when I have class] and then the night, it can swing.” Ashley (Utah), who only uses a planner to note when papers are due, commented, “I really don’t do anything besides homework and work and going to classes, so the only structured thing is the time my classes start and the time my classes end and then, whatever happens from then on is whatever comes, I guess.” Catherine

(California) who does not use her planner much and who does not have time for community service or activities appears to react to serendipity. When asked about her daily schedule responded, “Yes, flexibility. When someone tells me ‘oh, do you want to go to the movies?’ I’ll [say] ‘ok, whatever.’ So, my weekends are never planned, I’ll just do anything.”

No clear regional patterns emerge and no common themes, beyond the universal commitment to academic endeavors, are apparent. In fact, the “trophy kid” that Howe and Strauss (2000, p. 44) speak of, the Millennial under severe stress to excel, with one exception, did not surface. Four students indicated their daily routine has no structure. Katie laughed when she commented, “No structure whatsoever.” The remaining 17 students acknowledge their life has some structure, with six admitting to having less structure now than they did in high school. Tara, who has less structure in her college routine, welcomes the change, “[In high school] it was always this set thing I had to do...and now it’s like I can kind of relax more.” Seven of these 17 women provide commentary about structure, in the context of responsibility. Sara noted, “I like to make sure I know what’s going on, if I need to be there, what time I need to do stuff.” Crystal similarly acknowledges “...now you need to be responsible for your deadlines or whatever you have to do.”

With one exception, students did not appear to be overwhelmed by their daily routine. Taylor’s self-described pace of life in high school personifies the image often used in the literature to describe the pressured Millennial. While in high school she was the starting pitcher for the varsity softball team, served on Student Council, and had memberships in the Drug Free Youth Organization, the Leo Club and the Art Club. Since

arriving at Texas University she has not become involved in activities, not even intramural softball. When asked if her motivation for involvement in high school was “focused on the possibilities related to college” she replied,

That’s definitely what it was. And I wanted to do things that a bunch of my friends did so I signed up for the same things and also my mom taught at the high school that I went to...so that sometimes I would get volunteered for things and just end up having to do them because she worked there.

Taylor’s environment, her microsystem, was such that there were two sources of expectation and pressure: her mom and her friends. Despite the new environment in which she finds herself, those pressures remain. When asked what commitments beyond her academic life she now has, she replied “I guess just family time, family and friends.” While her immediate environment has changed, she indicates her life remains “completely programmed” (presumably because of academics, family and friends) and rates the stress she feels, on a scale of one to ten, an 11.5.

Jasmine, of California, worked full-time while in high school, took four advanced placement classes, and served as the president of three organizations; however, Jasmine’s environment, her microsystem, was very different than Taylor’s. Jasmine was intent on doing well in high school so that she would be the first generation in her family to graduate from high school and be accepted to college. Her parents and friends were not sources of motivation to accomplish her goals; they articulated no expectation that she would attend college, nor did they exert pressure on her to succeed. Of her father Jasmine observed, “If we graduate or don’t graduate [from high school], it wouldn’t matter.” Her mom, who was solely focused on high school graduation, did not

understand why Jasmine would be distracted from that goal by serving in school organizations or completing college applications under the guidance of her high school counselor. Since enrolling at California, Jasmine, like Taylor, has not joined any clubs or organizations. When asked about her daily routine she notes, “There is really no structure. I obviously have to go to class...but for the most part, I don’t have structure. ...I’m less programmed now just because I have less things to do.... Now I’m just kind of like, I’m here. What do I want to do today?” On a scale of one to ten, Jasmine rates her current stress level a two.

It is difficult, when comparing and contrasting the current and past experiences of these two women, not to attribute some of the nuances to environment. Though not attending the same university, they are both in their first year and they both live in a residence hall. Though not on the same academic track—Taylor wants to be a graphic designer and Jasmine, an attorney—they are both currently completing general education courses. Though no conclusions can be drawn, the different microsystems in which these women were raised appear to have continuing effects on each of them. Jasmine’s family was not invested in her pursuit of higher education while she was in high school and that pattern continues, thus mitigating the pressure she feels from elements within her microsystem. Taylor, while in high school, responded to pressure and fulfilled expectations from her friends and her mom. Although her environment, like that of Jasmine’s, has changed since she began college, Taylor still articulates high expectations and a pressure to succeed:

I want to be a perfectionist so when it comes to my art projects and stuff, even if I have it planned to where I’m going to be done a week before the

project's due, I end up work on it the night before and always staying up late.

That on top of work, on top of—I actually took 18 hours this semester because I signed up for a spring break art trip. We went to the Czech Republic so I basically didn't have a spring break because we were running all over Europe and so that added to it because I was anticipating that would be like a break but it really—we went to school over there in Europe so it really wasn't—I mean it was a trip and it was fun, but it really wasn't a break and I don't know—I'm always stressed. I've always been since probably my freshman year in high school.

Taylor describes herself as “over organized” and yet, the narrative above contradicts her self-assessment. When asked if the pressure she feels is exerted by others or self-imposed, Taylor takes full responsibility for it, “My own, definitely.” Even though Taylor is not the only one to attribute stress and pressure to themselves and not to others, she is one of a pair who does not mention that others, particularly parents, have expectations of them. Twelve of the 21 students spoke of the influence parents have on them to succeed, but only six of the 12 readily acknowledged the added pressure. For example, while Emily noted, “My parents don't really put a lot of pressure on me because they know how much I put on myself.... They are my encouragement.” Her next statement qualified this observation: “They want me to do well and they're very ‘you need to work hard, you need to try your best’ and that is probably the most [pressure] they or anybody else puts on me.” Crystal responds similarly: “It was my own [pressure]. My parents never really put pressure on me. The only thing that they want is for us to be self-sufficient and get our degree....that's [my father's] thing. He wants us to get a college education and be independent women.” Shani admits that her father exerted

a lot of pressure on her in high school but now, with him no longer in her life, her mom “is just supportive; she’s supportive all the time.” However, she continues, “But at the same time, that is pressure because you want to prove to her that I’ll do good. Yes, to an extent there is pressure when I think about it.” Allie “...puts a lot of pressure on [her] self just because [she is] a perfectionist.... I have little pressures here and there but I think I magnify them myself and put even more pressure on myself.” Allie also acknowledges the role her environment plays in her need to succeed. She comes from a small town and in that context noted, “...I always felt like I had to live up to certain expectations just because people thought that’s what I was supposed to be doing.”

The greatest source of pressure appears to be that which is self-imposed; 13 of the women indicate they are their own greatest source of pressure. The elements within the microsystem that the individual inhabits do influence the source and perception of pressure felt. Katie, who lives with her boyfriend in the absence of her divorced parents, defines pressure in the context of the bills she has to pay. The pressure Allie feels, as noted above, is in part because the residents of her small town expect that she will succeed in college. Haddie does not want to embarrass her grandmother who works at Utah University, and that is a source of pressure for her. Parents also exert external pressure, although students appear willing to minimize the pressure associated with parental expectations.

Pressured Millennials and their Degree of Optimism

As noted in chapter three, there is much disparity in the data evaluating the mental health needs of this generation of college students. While Strange (2004) and Howe and Strauss (2000) use the word “optimistic” to describe the Millennial generation, the

average college student in the 1990s was more anxious than 85% of the students in the 1950s (Twenge, 2006); in 1996, 40% more students said they felt an impending breakdown than students in 1957 (Twenge, 2006); in 2001, one out of three college freshmen reported feeling “frequently overwhelmed” (Twenge, 2006). Despite these data and anecdotes of increased mental health services for college-aged Millennials, only one of the students interviewed is taking prescription medication and three have been in counseling in the past for family or personal issues, although none are currently seeing a therapist.

In 2000, Howe and Strauss asked and answered their own question: “Are they pessimists? No. They’re optimists.” (p. 7). This characterization of Millennials proves accurate among participants. I asked all but one participant³ to rank their level of optimism on a scale of 1 to 10, relative to their future. The average of all 20 responses is 9.35. What emerges in the dialogue associated with their answers is a feeling of responsibility for and a confidence in what lies ahead. Jasmine, for example, said:

It’s just this thing. I don’t even know how to explain it. I know that I am going to do good. Like I know that I am going to have a good job when I graduate. It’s just something, I’m wired that way. When I know I want something, I know it is going to happen. There isn’t room for failure....

Alex, whose self-defined level of optimism is a 9.5 explained, “I always like to stay really positive about things. It’s really easy to focus on the negative things in life but it takes a lot more work to focus on the positive things. I’m definitely up for that challenge.” Lara, of California, chose to evaluate her optimism on a micro-level, “Well,

³ I neglected to ask one student this question.

personally, I'm pretty optimistic.....so for my future, I see good things," and on an exo-level, although her response is less than definitive:

Wow, with Obama as president, hopefully he'll make some good changes. I don't know. Our country is really messed up I feel. In ten years? Hopefully in ten years the economy will be good. So, for right now, for the future, I think I'm optimistic, especially with Obama. Everybody loves Obama; change, hope and all that. But is it really going to change? And hopefully, there won't be any ways going on, but who knows. I feel good about the future.

Only two other students evaluate their optimism at the exo-level (using a national framework). Emily, of Texas University notes, "... the economy is not so good" and then adds "[if] we look back at the Great Depression and the economy got better and you know, life got better." Jasmine, of California, although she does not point to specific current or historical indices, acknowledges "Things look really bad right now but I think the future is good," and attributes her optimism to a faith "in our generation."

Two of the students align their future with their faith in God. Emily, who was raised a Christian, explains "...I'm pretty optimistic that God will lead us on the right path." Sara, who was raised in the Catholic tradition believes, "What's going to happen is what's going to happen.... I just believe God will do what he needs to do." All remaining evaluations of optimism were in the context of the individual's immediate environment. For example, although Brandy ranked her level of optimism a ten, prior to her ranking, she spoke anxiously and at length about her future in music, physics and astronomy. Shani attributed her level of optimism to "The things that have happened to me," and Katie associated her optimism with, "...anything I put my mind to, I will do. It

might take me a little bit longer than most, but I'll do it." Though Millennials in all three of the states do experience both internal and external pressures, those pressures do not appear to restrict their ability to see great promise in the future.

Conclusion

Students do communicate with their parents regularly and often. However, regional clusters of personality traits do emerge in the data. California University students appear more independent than those interviewed at Texas and Utah University. They articulate a greater level of maturity and independence when faced with a challenge, as the immediate response is not to call their parents when confronting a troubled situation, but to attempt to handle the situation on their own.

The Utah students I interviewed appear more financially self-reliant than those interviewed in Texas or California. The teachings of the state's predominant faith as well as a less vibrant economy may contribute to this dynamic. If that is the case than regionalism (Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem), coupled with more immediate environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner's microsystem), influence the characterization of subgroups within a generation.⁴ The same can be said for the degree of civic engagement among participants. The California University students are more civically minded; all of them participated in the 2009 presidential election. As noted earlier, the state of California is defined in part by its political activism; the Millennial unit that inhabits California may be inclined to exhibit characteristics that personify that identity. That same characteristic cannot and should not be universally applied to the students in Utah or Texas.

⁴ Mannheim (1970) referred to these subgroups as "generation units."

The characterizations applied to the Boomer generation (those who attended college in the 1960s and early 1970s) can help put this into context. Tom Brokaw, in his book, Boom! (2007) describes the sixties as a period of political shocks, war, assassinations, urban riots, constant assaults on authority, trips on acid and space exploration. How the farmer's son in Iowa, the bookkeeper's son in New York, or the lawyer's daughter in California experienced that period in their lives was undoubtedly impacted by the confluence of environment—that which was direct and immediate and that which was more nuanced and subtle. Although this research has evaluated only a miniscule section of the Millennial population, it does indicate that a singular portrait of a generation is not an accurate portrait. The complexities associated with each individual ecological paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) should limit one's willingness to consolidate the experiences of an entire generation into a universal caricature.

Chapter 5

Contextual Interpretation

Despite the work of generation theorists, an entire generation cannot be accurately portrayed by one caricature or one peer personality. After all, the only true homogeneous characteristic within a generation is birth date, an arbitrarily assigned demographic delineation.

Although researchers agree that groups of individuals, through social and historical conditioning, share similar characteristics, ideas, attitudes and behaviors (Esler, 1984; Mannheim, 1970; Marias, 1967; Strauss & Howe, 1991), the ecological paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) that the group inhabits, also has an impact. For example, the Boomer generation lived through the Vietnam War; however, the geographic location in which individual members experienced that war, whether on the battlefield, on a college campus, or in an undisclosed location in Canada, influenced the trait development of the individual member. Every member of the Millennial generation experienced the September 11, 2001 acts of terrorism against the United States; yet, the experience and the subsequent impact of the tragedy on individuals was different depending on geographical location, spiritual foundations, and media accessibility, for example.

Bronfenbrenner (1995b), Strauss and Howe (1991) and Mannheim (1970) all acknowledge that significant social and historical moments affect development. Bronfenbrenner (1995b) believes that historic events either inhibit human development or prompt further maturation; timing plays a key role in the effect. Mannheim believes these moments create a generational consciousness, an actual generation, which is then stratified into generation units, unique personas that result from an interpretation of the

event. This concept of units or group personas aligns with the research that has found regional clusters of personality traits (Simon, 2008).

To the contrary, the generation research of Strauss and Howe (1991) is rooted in the significance and timing of social and historical moments with little if any consideration for milieu, the immediate environments in which generation members experience the “moment.” Their so-called “perspective on human affairs” (p. 7) is designed so that “[we] may understand better how the great events of American history, from wars to religious upheavals, have affected the lifecycles of real people, famous and common, in high political offices and in ordinary families” (p. 8). Though their perspective acknowledges that location does impact perception, their theory focuses on generational development and ignores individual human development. Chronological location relative to significant historical and social events is the cornerstone of their work with little consideration for the more impressionable immediate environment one inhabits throughout their life course.

For the Millennials in my sample, these more immediate environments have the greatest impact. When coding my data, microsystem references were identified most frequently. Responses that warranted a macrosystem designation, responses that spoke to an historic event, were limited and usually aligned with regional characteristics. For example, only Taylor from Texas, a state adjacent to Louisiana, mentioned Hurricane Katrina and its impact on residents of New Orleans. Civil rights, defined to include same sex marriage, were mentioned by Catherine, who resides in the politically active state of California. Emily alone spoke of her conservative views and her support of the Bush administration. Former President Bush and Emily are both from Texas.

Although historical events may influence the course of human development, their impact is peripheral, geographical and certainly not substantive in the lives of college-aged Millennials; therefore, regional clusters are arguably the manifestation of the generation units Mannheim describes. Location, whether chronological, geographical, sociological or developmental predisposes each of us to experience certain things, hold certain beliefs, act in certain ways, and make certain decisions. My research suggests that environment—Bronfenbrenner’s ecological paradigm—impacts interpretation and interpretation impacts development.

The Geography of Personality

The concept of *ecological paradigm*, a system of complex and layered relationships, helps us to understand the sociological elements behind the development of unique personalities. It also illustrates why a uni-dimensional portrait of an entire generation is too broad. Person-environment and person-to-person interactions within a variety of systems, that is Bronfenbrenner’s *micro, meso, exo, macro* and *chrono* systems, all have a profound impact on development; for the purposes of this research, specifically on *student* development. These unique interactions mean that no two people share the same developmental journey or the exact same resulting characteristics; however, certain themes and nuances, based on the ebb and flow of individual and public interest, can be identified within and among groups of individuals. These groups are more appropriately defined using environmental components instead of chronological age. For example, though all of the students interviewed are between the ages of 18 and 20, not all of them rely on their parents to the same degree or in the same way. These differences appear to be rooted in the characteristics and the dynamics of the systems in which the

individual inhabits. Furthermore, each student has, of course, traveled a distinctive life path directly influenced by their immediate and more distant environments.

Environment does matters and in the case of the seven character traits Howe and Strauss have assigned to Millennials, semantics does too. Special means a number of things. Sara, of Texas, during our conversation commented, “I feel everybody is special in some sort of way.” Emily, also of Texas, when talking about “feeling special” answered the question contextually:

I think I’m special in the sense that I have a great gift that God gave me and He gave me it to glorify Him and I think in that sense I’m special. I’m not special in the sense that I need extra help with school work or getting around campus or living on my own.

When using these prescriptive traits, their meanings cannot be assumed, they must be clearly defined. A parent who views their student as exceptional, distinctive or elite (all synonyms for special) may, as a result of their perception or possibly their ecological paradigm, act in a protective manner or be overpowering or anxious; they may want to solve problems for their student, be in constant contact, and ensure that whatever trouble may arise is resolved. To the contrary, another parent with the same high opinion of their Millennial child may instead advocate autonomy and a hands-off approach when trouble arises because of the confidence they have in their student’s ability to resolve complex issues. This reasoning can be applied to the six other character traits defined by Howe and Strauss, therefore, if a campus wants to accurately employ the work of Howe and Strauss, they must first reach agreement on the trait’s definition, presumably in the context of their student population.

Regional portraits emerged in my research relative to the degree students rely on their parents and the reasons for the reliance. It appears that communication between students and parents is on the rise, with 61% of the students in this study communicating with their parents daily as compared to 33% in 2006 (College Parents of America, 2006). The frequency of communication supports the anecdotal depictions of the “helicopter parent,” but the portrait has regional nuances and is not universal in scope. California students appear to rely less on parental support than those in Utah or Texas. This attribute, when applied to Chickering’s developmental theory, insinuates that California students, or at least some California students, may be more developmentally advanced with regard to independence than students in other parts of the country. The generational consciousness of those interviewed in California includes a commitment to civic engagement, whereas Utah students revealed a greater degree of self-reliance when it comes to financial matters.

In my experience, viewing a roommate assignment as an opportunity to make a new friend is not universal across Millennials. The sense of entitlement that I heard from both parents and students while working at a master’s university in the state of Virginia was, at times, deafening. The majority voice in this research, however, applied mature logic to the developmental opportunity that living with someone presents. This point of view is refreshing, encouraging and contradicting of much of the literature. It also suggests, anecdotally, that a sense of entitlement may more aptly define groups of students on the east coast (or at least within the population attracted to certain institutions) than in other parts of the country. Although character traits are not defined by degrees, nuanced differences emerge when examining groups of students and, in this

case, their hovering parents, in different regions of the country. In other words, environment matters.

The Howe and Strauss portrait of Millennials is rooted in their defined and limited historical and social landscape and not in the more immediate and influential systems that Millennials inhabit. Skimming the pages of their book *Millennials rising: The next great generation*, the reader is reminded of the national trends that have helped define the Millennial generation's experiences. Graphs and charts illustrate national numbers for suicide among teens, average family income, living arrangements of children not in two family households (1940 – 1998), middle school curriculum, and the average time students spend on homework, to name just a few. What is missing from the discussion, however, is the more immediate impact these factors have on individual students or groups of students. Howe and Strauss simply generalize a generational consciousness. They speak to national trends but not to the tendencies or the experiences of Mannheim's generation unit or Simon's regional clusters. Clearly, regionalism, the clustering of character traits, is at play. Although my sample was small, the legitimacy of regionalism and its influence on the Millennial portrait did begin to emerge. No regional differences appear relative to community service; the so-called team-oriented Millennials I interviewed, whether living in Utah, California or Texas, are not engaged in their communities. Team-oriented however, also includes civic engagement, in this case, casting a vote in the 2009 presidential election. Civic engagement appears to be valued by some students, mainly those living in California, as they invested time and agency in civic participation. The Millennials I interviewed in California are civically engaged. The Millennials I interviewed in Utah and Texas are not. Team-oriented Millennials in

Utah, California and Texas generally want the opportunity to live with others. Again, environment matters.

Special Millennials in California communicate with their parents regularly, although they do not rely on them to resolve conflict. Special Millennials in Utah and Texas not only communicate with their parents frequently, they rely on them to help resolve conflict. Special for all three units means parents talk with them regularly, but it does not universally mean that, because of their “specialness,” students expect their parents to resolve conflicts for them. The special student may talk with their parents daily, but unlike the literature suggests, the special Millennials I interviewed did not articulate a sense of entitlement. They articulate an understanding of their responsibility relative to the learning process; they do not expect grades in exchange for financial payment. They also did not identify expensive and material items when asked about prized possessions. These possessions were, in many cases, items with intrinsic value versus extrinsic value.

The pressured Millennial, as defined in the literature, receives counseling, is taking prescription medication and is burdened by anxiety and a need to succeed. This depiction does not represent the Millennials I interviewed; they do feel pressure that is primarily self-imposed, although not repressive. None are in counseling and only one is on medication. These behaviors may be reflective trends in other regions of the country, but they did not surface during my interviews.

The assigned traits, special, team-oriented and pressured, as well as the four others, are elusive and vague adjectives. Any trend, any behavioral tendency, any nuance, can align with one of the traits. This ambiguity leads one to question if the Millennial

generation is as engaged in community service, as medicated, or as reliant on their parents as the literature suggests. My sample is too small to reach specific conclusions, but the discovery is such that the answer to these questions should be explored. In addition to ambiguity, the indiscriminate framework from which the concept has advanced may warrant the disregard of prescriptive traits and the implementation, if it is not already happening, of an unassuming and unbiased practice of discovering the uniqueness of each new student population. Howe and Strauss describe the past, define the present, and predict the future solely in the context of historical trends. Unlike Bronfenbrenner and Mannheim, they do not consider immediate environments. This criticism is not to suggest that timing and chronology do not play a part in human development. Bronfenbrenner, in his later work, established the chronosystem recognizing that development is shaped, in part, by the timing of historical events. Mannheim also acknowledged the role of history in the formation of what he called the actual generation, but focused more specifically on generation units.

Implications for Practitioners in Higher Education

The properties of a supportive campus environment are situated in a complex network of cultural assumptions, beliefs, values, norms and perceptions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, et al. 2005, p. 242). In the context of this complex network student affairs practitioners make decisions relative to policy and to practice. If perceptions and assumptions are rooted in what we read and not what we know, our credibility may suffer.

Regional gradations across the country are used to anticipate election and public opinion poll results, to determine market share on consumer goods and to guide the

distribution of federal dollars associated with government programs. The opinions, feelings, beliefs and experiences of groups of people create a varied, yet predictable landscape across the country. These regional identities, in combination, create a summative and diverse national landscape similar to a generation's peer personality—a reflection of a generation's consciousness, the inclination of an entire group of individuals who share the same chronological location. A national peer personality however, cannot accurately portray individual members or groups of members who inhabit varied environments in different regions of the country. Even though the seven prescribed character traits used to define the Millennial generation can inform practitioners, regional nuances and campus culture must guide policy development. What do we know and what do we need to know about our own student population?

Acknowledging the uniqueness of student populations is not new, although it may not be employed as often as it should be. It is applied during the recruitment process. Kirp (2003) views campus marketing as a way of matching students and colleges. Anctil (2008) promotes the idea of attracting like-minded students. Campuses have unique cultures, and each culture, like each region in the country, influences and attracts those who believe the institution to be a good fit for them. Understanding the type of student who enrolls can help practitioners develop programs with intentionality, not simply because they exist on other campuses. This heightened sensitivity to the defined and subsequently served population can create deliberate and valuable outcomes.

When *Millennials rising: The next great generation* was published in 2000, I was a student affairs practitioner at a public university on the east coast. The national dialogue among colleagues and at conferences included the application and implication

of the prescribed traits and a lamenting about the latest group of coeds inhabiting college campus. The special and sheltered Millennial was alive and well. Parents were very intrusive and student needs had grown exponentially greater, as had their daily expectations, compared to years past. Simultaneously, a philosophical shift in the student services landscape occurred in response to the Howe and Strauss characterization. The national dialogue did not seem to question the characterization; student affairs professionals simply legitimized it by employing coordinators to manage parent inquiries and on many campuses, by shifting residence hall design from a proactive and anticipatory perspective to a reactive and commercial investment. Although I cannot prove that *Millennials Rising* caused this shift, anecdotally, I believe it had a significant impact on the profession.

The national dialogue about the Millennial student has lulled, but the potential remains for practitioners to rely on that which is not reflective of their student population. Practitioners cannot depend on research rooted in a national social and historical framework to guide regional or local practice. When I arrived in Utah, I was surprised to learn there was neither a process on campus nor an individual designated to manage parent inquiries. What I came to understand was that the predominant faith and the associated missionary work at age 18 for men of the faith, as well as the young age at which Mormon students marry, meant a majority of the students on campus were developmentally more autonomous than those I had been working with on the east coast. A parent coordinator was not a priority, neither was a comprehensive judicial system of accountability. The ecclesiastical structure and associated teachings of the predominant faith were used to address inappropriate conduct, both on campus and off campus.

However, what was a priority, as a result of the young age at which many members of the Mormon faith marry, was the Center for Women and Families, a service that did not exist on my east coast campus. Different regions of the country produce different types of students who have different and unique needs. And those specific and unique needs need to be identified by campus and region.

Campuses do respond to the needs of their constituents and different ecological paradigms do influence practice. Multicultural Centers, Centers for Women and Families, remedial course offerings, child care services, and TRiO grant programs (targeted to low income and first generation students) are sometimes part of a campus culture. These services respond to defined needs. However, the adoption of programs and services as a response to social and historical trends may result in well-intentioned programs that serve very few students in the absence of services that are needed by a larger percentage of the campus population. For example, the special student has been defined as an entitled student. It has been my experience that residence life programs have responded to this portrayal by building private rooms with private baths and a variety of amenities. Recently however, practitioners, like those on my campus and those at the University of Arizona have reversed the tide, returning to the traditional residence hall model—double rooms and shared baths—in response to the more important developmental needs of students. Campuses need to do all they can to prevent higher education from becoming a “carbon-copy franchise culture” (Applebome, 1999) and they cannot lose sight of the role they play in student development.

Divisions of Student Services cannot and should not be cookie-cutter images of each other; one size does not fit all. Instead they should with great intentionality

determine apposite services essential for the populations they serve. As practitioners we do not serve ourselves or our students well when we apply articulated “best practices” without contextual consideration. Campuses are different, as are the students who inhabit them. If we know our students we can understand their needs, deliver them intentionally and contribute to their development and their success.

Implications for Future Research

Ambiguity minimizes applicability. If the work of Howe and Strauss is going to continue to have significant influence within the field of higher education, specific definitions that include relevant behaviors of the seven character traits should be established so that practitioners and researchers have a common understanding of their meaning. This research begins to raise the possibility that concrete or shared definitions are limited due to regionalism. However the discussion and the process of trying to establish common meaning may advance the conversation about the relationship between people and their environment.

Research within student affairs acknowledges that development is dependent on environment and clearly is not prescriptive. As the research has progressed, analyses have rejected the normative one size fits all definition of undergraduates and has been expanded to include the many distinct student groups that inhabit our campuses. For example, identity development theories have evolved that individually examine African-American students, gay and lesbian students, and women (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998). This scholarship acknowledges the unique developmental journey of these specific populations. To ignore the distinctive traits, experiences and journeys of marginalized groups means that in the context of generation theory they remain

marginalized because the defined peer personality ignores and silences them. Targeted evaluation should be done by region of the country, within the context of the associated environment and with an awareness of the type(s) of students being evaluated and served. The application of current theory to groups of students delineated by demographic and environmental traits, as well as geographic region, although only regionally applicable, results in more informed practitioners who can provide services, advocate on behalf of and anticipate the unique needs of specific student populations.

My research suggests that environment impacts how students evaluate and qualify their optimism. Examining optimism from a socio-economic framework might reveal some interesting and valuable trends. Jasmine, who, in the absence of her father, resides in a low socio-economic environment, articulated a high level of optimism about the future, whereas Taylor, who as a member of a two-parent household resides in a more financially stable economic environment, articulated a low level of optimism about the future. Why does this difference exist?

The parent/student relationship can also be explored in the context of financial support of educational endeavors. Though conclusions cannot be drawn, an inverse relationship between frequency of communication and level of parental financial support emerges in my research. Though my research did not focus on features of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, like the economy and the availability of financial aid, participants articulated frustration and concern about these systems that exert influence on their ability, and that of others, to be successful. These types of component parts of individual environments would be worthy of study.

The predominant faith appears to have an impact on the needs of students in Utah. Further exploration of this regional phenomenon would be a fascinating study. How are Utah students within the faith and outside of the faith similar, as well as different? How does faith influence student development within Utah and outside of Utah? What are the nuances between and among LDS and non-LDS students?

The contradiction between the literature and the frequency of and commitment to community service is worthy of closer examination. As noted earlier, the messages about the value and expectation of service are frequent and varied; however, despite daily routines that would not prevent participation, the students interviewed, with just one exception, do not participate in community service. Why commitment to service is so low, despite the frequent messages and the appearance of time available to provide service, would be an interesting and valuable study. In fact, to what extent is commitment to service regional or institutional?

Student Affairs practitioners need to get back to their roots. Early in my career, programmatic decisions were rooted in student development theory. We utilized person-environment interactions to guide practice. Though we may not have known the researcher by name, the work of Mannheim, Bronfenbrenner, and a variety of student development theorists helped to guide the decisions that we made. These ideas, either forgotten or ignored, appear not to be a part of the Millennial generation discussion, yet remain relevant as frameworks from which practitioners should be informed and challenged in the work that they do. The more practitioners understand the student development journey, in the context of the immediate student environment, the more effective they can be in responding to a very diverse student body.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE E-mail – VP Request for Support

Good Morning Dr. XXXX,

Despite our common affiliation with NASPA, I don't know that you and I have ever crossed paths. My name is Donna Eddleman and I currently serve as the Vice President for Student Services at Southern Utah University in Cedar City where I have been since July of 2007. Prior to SUU, I served as the Dean of Students at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia where I worked for ten years.

I am also a current doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary in the midst of writing my dissertation proposal. My research is on the Millennial generation. More specifically, and as noted in Chapter 3 of my proposal:

Current practice in student affairs programs reveals a reliance on generalized characteristics to describe contemporary students. The homogeneity of these characteristics appears to be the result of the wholesale adoption of the generational theory developed by Strauss and Howe (1991) that not only describes the current Millennial generation, but also anticipates the characteristics and traits of future generations. Howe and Strauss (2000) define this cohort as more ethnically diverse and larger in number than any preceding generation and assign a singular peer personality, comprised of broad and sweeping generalized characteristics, to the entire cohort. This collective identity does not consider the varied demographic traits that define a population of more than 70 million, nor does it account for the diversity of thought, experience and perspective from which individuals view the world.

The underlying premise that will guide this study is that although such generational images may emphasize emerging trends, they do not describe universal or even majority behavior and should not be used to inform best practice within student affairs.

Disregard for the splintered and diverse experiences and characteristics of this current generation, not to mention the omitted consideration of immediate environment and its associated impact on development, results in an oversimplification of an entire generation of students. Generalized characterizations insinuate that environmental changes across time result in indiscriminate development changes across entire populations of individuals whose only common feature is a randomly applied chronological boundary. In this study, I will introduce and utilize an ecological conceptual lens to explore the effects more immediate environments have on predominant student characteristics. This conceptual framework will consider the applicability of the predominant generation theory to the work of Bronfenbrenner (1989), whose ecological paradigm considers the system of relationships individuals form, within the context of a complex and layered environment and its impact on character development. Using individual states within the U.S. to define a cohort's immediate environment, and the conceptual frame inherent in Bronfenbrenner's (1995) work, I intend to legitimize a more

focused evaluation of one's student population as a way of determining how best to serve a given student population.

My goal is to meet with my committee in mid- to late February to defend my proposal and to submit applications to appropriate Human Subjects Committees shortly thereafter.

My hope would be to visit the XXXXX campus for several days and with your support to interview a cohort of your students. I will also visit a campus in California that aligns with your institution according to the Carnegie Classifications, conduct similar interviews and then compare common trends, themes and patterns as they relate to Howe and Strauss, as well as Bronfenbrenner.

Why Texas, truthfully, relationships and economics. My husband was born and raised in the XXXX and his grandmother, cousins, aunt and uncle all live in XXXX. His cousin is a student of yours. Having family in XXXX means I have a place to stay while I do my research. My needs would be minimal, some assistance from your Registrar to obtain a sample of 15 students and a room for a day or two to conduct interviews.

I know ultimately it is up to your Human Subjects Committee to grant permission for my research but I thought it wise, before moving forward, to seek your support. When complete, I would certainly share with you the results of my research.

I would sincerely appreciate your support and appreciate your consideration.

Make it a good day,
Donna

Donna M. Eddleman

Vice President for Student Services
Southern Utah University
435-586-7710

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE – *Request for Participation Email*

Dear XXXX Student,

I write to you to request your participation in a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. No, there is no survey I need you to complete. What I hope is that you will be willing to spend about an hour of your time talking with me when I visit your campus in mid-April.

You see, despite the fact that much of the current literature suggest that all Millennial students (those born between 1982 and 2002) possess the same character traits, I don't believe that to be true. To prove or disprove that Millennial students are all the same, I am interviewing students in California and Texas to see what similarities and differences do exist.

If you are willing to participate, you and I would meet on your campus on April 20, 21, 22 or 23 to talk about you, your student experience and how you ended up at XXX. Although our conversation would be recorded and then transcribed, your identity would be protected. All I am really interested in is pulling out common themes and not-so-common themes that surface after talking with students from Texas and California. My intended research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at your school and I am conducting this research with the help and support of your Vice President for Student Services, XXXX.

Now, let me share with you a little about me. I am actually a New York native who has had the great fortune of working in higher education for 22 years. I have worked in New York, Michigan, Colorado, Virginia, and currently serve as the Vice President for Student Services at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, Utah. My goal is to complete and defend my doctoral dissertation at the College of William and Mary (in Williamsburg, VA) in July of this year. I chose WTAMU in part because my husband of 18 years, whom I met in Colorado, is a native of the Texas panhandle (Stinnett, TX to be exact). His aunt, uncle, cousin and grandmother all live in Canyon. In fact, his cousin is enrolled at WT.

I hope you will consider visiting with me while I am in town. If you are available for about an hour on any of the dates I have listed above and if you would be willing to meet with me please email me at Eddleman@suu.edu and we'll schedule a time that is convenient for you.

I thank you for considering my request and assure you that if the interview begins and you decide you don't want to visit with me or don't want to answer a question that I ask, you will not be compelled to do so. My interest is simply in learning all I can about the similarities and differences with and among students from different regions of the country.

I look forward to hearing from you (even if it is to tell me you are not interested).

Sincerely,

Donna M. Eddleman

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: Homogeneity in Heterogeneous Environments?
An Analysis of Generation Theory Applied to College Generations

Age and Physical Condition: I state that I am eighteen years of age or older and wish to participate in an interview with Donna Eddleman, a doctoral candidate at the College of William and Mary.

Purpose: The purpose of the research is to learn about the characteristics that define the current generation of college students and to understand the basis for the formation of these characteristics.

Experimental Procedure: I will take part in a one-on-one, phone or face-to-face interview with Donna during which time I will be asked questions about myself, my family and my student experience at XXXXX.

Risks and/or Discomforts: Some of the questions posed will be personal in nature. I understand that if any of the questions posed make me feel uncomfortable, or if there is a question that I do not want to answer, I have the option of not responding.

Benefits: I understand that the experiment is not designed to benefit me personally, but that the investigator hopes to gain an understanding of the characteristics and traits that define students at XXXXX.

Opportunity to ask Questions or to Withdraw: I understand that I am free to ask questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality: I understand that the information I share will be transcribed and coded and that while generally data will be reported in the aggregate some of my statements may be quoted in the final report. I also understand that in the final report my University will be identified via a pseudonym to further protect my identity.

If my statements are used, I request the following (initial one)

Only my first name should be used: _____

The following pseudonym should be used: _____

Name, Address and Phone Number of Principal Investigator:

Donna M. Eddleman
Southern Utah University
PO Box 9145
Cedar City, UT 84720
Phone: 435.592.5949
Email: eddeleman@suu.edu

You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

Signature Date

Please print your name

Appendix D

Interview Guide

What role do parents play in participant's lives? Bases of extent and type of involvement?

- Input during college selection process – role family tradition/expectation played
- Daily involvement
- Level of communication and method of communication
- Role of parent during “crisis”
- Financial support received from parents
- Parameters for sharing information with parents (introduce FERPA)
- Meaning given to parents by students (role model?)
-

What is the extent of the participant's engagement on campus and in the community?
Bases?

- Residential living – by choice, shared/private, relationships within community
- Extra-curricular involvement
- Extent of engagement in community service/politics (past and present)
- Employed – on or off campus?
- Collaborative learning v. lecture (preference?)

Does there exist a sense of entitlement? Bases?

- Explore ownership – iPod, Cell Phone, Vehicle
- View of higher education – right or privilege?
- Personal contribution to higher education

What is the extent of pressure/stress in the lives of participants? Bases for feelings?

- Programmed or un-programmed existence (preference?)
- Commitments beyond their academic life – family, church, employer
- Significant events having an impact on their existence
- Rate their daily level of stress
- Stress factors
- Stress symptoms
- Management of stress
- Sense of optimism

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