The Coming Out Process for the Millennial Generation

The Generational Perspective

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My Thanks

- My primary sources for background and statistics for this presentation are:
  - *Generation Me* by Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D
  - *Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression in Social Work Practice: Working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender People* by Deana F. Morrow & Lori Messinger
  - *Changes in the Coming Out Process Over Time* by Andy Dunlap, PhD

- Additional thanks to: Rob Beam, Head Volleyball Coach, Oakland University
Who am I and what do I know about this topic:

- Social work educator with 20 years experience.
- Therapist with 15 years experience working with LGBTQ youth.
- An out lesbian with “none of your business” how much experience I have.
In addition to coincidence of birth, a generation is also defined by common tastes, attitudes, and experience…Those times encompass a myriad of circumstances – economic, social, sociological, and, of course, demographic.” - Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak

In 2009, there were 45.8 million Millennials (ages 18-28). That is approximately 25% of the American workforce and by 2014 they are predicted to by 47%.
The Generations

- Traditionalist (Born 1900-1945):
  - Patriotism, doing more with less, rules of conduct

- Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964): (Grandparents)
  - Redefinition of traditional values, wealth, privilege

- Generation Xers (Born 1965-1980): (Parents)
  - Individualistic, technically adept, flexible, work to live.

- Millennial (Born 1980-2000): 32 to 12 years old:
  - What we will spend the next 30 minutes discussing.
The Role of the Baby Boomers
The M’s Grandparents

- In the 1970’s Baby Boomers began to focus on meaning and self-fulfillment.
- Tom Wolfe described the “new dream” as “remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one’s self…and observing, studying, and doting on it.”
- For Baby Boomers, almost everything happened in groups, e.g. Vietnam protests, marches for feminism, and self-help seminars.
- In the years after 1980, Baby Boomers initiated a pervasive, society-wide effort to increase children’s self-esteem.
- A 1977 manual for teachers stated its central philosophy, “I am a self and you are a self and I don’t want to be made to feel guilty if I am not like you nor should you be made to feel guilty if you are unlike me.”
Generation X: Self-Esteem Statistics
The M’s Parents

- In 2004, 48% of college freshmen reported earning an A average in high school, compared to only 18% in 1968.
- In 2006, a Google search for “elementary school mission statement self-esteem” yielded 308,000 webpages.
- In the early 1950’s only 12% of teens aged 14-16 agreed with the statement, “I am an important person.” By the late 1980’s, an incredible 80% claimed they were important.
Parents want to love and guide their children as a trusted friend.
Children play a much larger role in family decisions
In 1924, when mothers were asked which traits they wanted their children to have, they named strict obedience, loyalty to church, and good manners. In 1988, few mothers named these traits; instead they chose independence and tolerance.
Parents often advocate for their children, even when they are in the wrong, in the classroom, on sports teams, and with other families
Mother’s in 1998 actually spent more time one-on-one with their kids than mothers did in 1965 and 1975, and they spend twice as much time teaching and playing with them...
40% of teens see their opinion as “very important” in making family decisions.
For Millennials clothing is a medium of self-expression
Individual wants and needs supersede duty and responsibility
Little, if anything, is off limits in terms of self-disclosure
The rules of etiquette do not apply in a culture that emphasizes the individual
Formal speech and written communication has become passé
Millennials are twice as likely to agree with the statement than Boomers in 1973, “There is no single right way to live.”
Social Viewpoints & Trends Across Generations

- The number of firm cultural rules and/or norms have decreased
- Acceptance of differing viewpoints is encouraged
- In speech and dress our society is much more informal than compared to previous generations
- Dating and marriage outside of your race and religion is increasingly common - In 2000, 41% of high school seniors said they had dated someone of another race.
- In 2002, the median age for a first marriage, 26.9 years old, had increased by nearly five years since 1980
- Memberships in community groups have declined by more than one-fourth since the 1970’s.
- In regard to religion, only 23% of young people are “conservative believers”; the remaining 77% were agnostic, deist, or liberal believers.
- Only 1-2% of Americans born before 1915 experienced a major depressive episode during their lifetimes...Today the lifetime rate...is 15-20%
- More than four times as many Americans describe themselves as lonely now than in 1957.
- 59% of 18 year-olds support gay marriage
Teacher education courses emphasize that creating a positive atmosphere is more important than correcting mistakes.

Classrooms are increasingly structured for teachers to be “facilitators” rather than authority figures.

Lecturing is frowned on and collaborative learning is in – class presentations and group projects are common.

Grade inflation is at an all-time high – In 2004, 48% of American college freshman reported earning an A average in high school, compared to only 18% in 1968.

Studying is at a low – In 2003, only 33% of American college freshman reported studying six or more hours a week during their last year of high school. That is compared to 47% in 1987.

The number of high school students who took Advanced Placement exams in 2004 was 1.1 million, twice as many as 1994 and six times as many as in 1984.

Today’s young people are the most highly educated generation ever – more than 30% of people between the ages of 25 and 39 have a college degree.
Millennials grew up with hearing about business practices such as “downsizing” and “outsourcing” being commonplace. They have grown up looking for a “calling” that is a reflection of their identity and not just a job. Over the last 25 years, the share of the wealth held by the very richest Americans (the top one-thousandth) has doubled, whereas the lower 90% has lost income and wealth. The income of men ages 24-35 with full-time jobs dropped 17% from 1971 to 2002. Fixed costs like housing health insurance, and child care have doubled for the average family since the 1970’s, while discretionary income has gone down.
Millennial Media Environment

- Since the inception of the 24 news cycle the world seems fraught with danger
- Media reports often make us afraid of things that are very unlikely to occur, e.g. shark attacks
- Media sources create more an unrealistic expectations of beauty and material success
- Reality television programs make unattainable wealth and idealized romantic relationships seem realistic
The Undeniable Message to Millennial

- You are special
- You can be anything you want
- Just be yourself
- Always follow your dreams
- Who cares what other people think of you
“Their focus on the individual is not necessarily self-absorbed or isolationist; instead it is a way of moving through the world beholden to few social rules and with the unshakable belief that you’re important.”

- Millennials are the first generation raised to believe that everyone should have high self-esteem.
- They are the first generation that accepts that feeling good about yourself is more important than performance.
- Girls and women have gained in assertiveness which is an important trait for professional success.
- The rapid development, adoption, and inclusion in academic programs of technology have made Millennials exceptionally tech savvy.
- The world that Millennials have grown up in is open, interactive, connected, diverse, and accepting.
The average person is much more aware of all of the things she can’t have
Many observers feel Millennial are thin skinned and can’t take criticism
Millennials have strong feelings of externality (the feeling that the outside world is beyond their control)
The onset of adulthood has been delayed by returning home to live with parents after college graduation
They have high, and frequently unrealistic, expectations for salary, job flexibility, lifestyle, technology, and the future
64% of 18-24 year olds said that most people are “just looking out for themselves.”
The Coming Out Process

- Assumed heterosexuality
- Identity: An organized set of characteristics
- Multiple Models
- Cass Model has the most empirical research
- Disclosure is an essential component of developing a LGBTQ identity
- Most LGBTQ individuals develop a public and private identity
The Coming Out Process
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Characteristics of the coming out process for the millennial generation

- More difficulty in coming out
- Coming out is now an adolescent process
- They are socially liberal
- Organized religion is less important
- Significantly higher levels of initial support from primary caregiver
- Lower levels of current support from primary caregiver
- Overall move through the coming out process in a supportive environment
- Come out in more accepting families but struggled more
- Experience a greater degree of internalized homophobia
Themes in coming out process

- Figured it out in their heads vs. figured it out in their hearts
- Labels are restrictive
- Problems encountered: mental health, identity confusion, cultural violence (physical, verbal or psychological attack), loss of connection (shunning or disconnection from family or significant others)
- Facilitate the coming out process: professional help, education, entering community
- Benefits of working through the coming out process: enhanced personal development (greater self awareness and the development of strengths) and greater empathy (understanding of the experiences of others and appreciation of diversity)
- Cited that the environment was more accepting but that it was still a lonely and isolating experience
Changes in Coming Out Process

- Average age when they are aware of same sex attraction: 9/14 - 12
- Concluded that they were not straight: 27/19 - 14
- Age that aware of positive non-heterosexual role models: 32/27-15
- Age met someone who identifies as other that heterosexual: 22/16- 13
- Age that they attended a social event for sexual minorities: 33/27 - 17
- Age that they told someone they were gay (outside family): 31/27 - 17
- Age that you told a family member: 36/35 - 15
- Age of first same sex sexual encounter: 27/17 - 16
- Age of first romantic relationship: 28/26 - 17
- Average coming out age: 28/24 - 15
So what does this mean?

- Coming out is now an adolescent process.
- There were no differences between men and women on any of these indicators.
- Move through the coming out process quicker.
- Coming out is still difficult.
- Dealing with these stigma/relationships when they are not emotionally ready.
- An intellectual/relational approach to these issues.
- Other implications? Parents...Grandparents?
Thank You for Your Attention & Interest