A Psychological Profile of the New Millenium College Student

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The description of millennial students to follow are drawn from the work of Richard Sweeney, University Librarian at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

His own children sparked his interest in the subject. Among other things, he has conducted over 35 focus groups in more than a dozen colleges in the presence of live audiences.
Millennials, a.k.a. NextGen, GenY, Echo Boomers, C Generation

Millennials’ birth years span
- 1979 through 1983 are in the work force
- 1984 through 1994 are in college now or will be by 2012
“The Natives are Restless”

- Natives of our digital, consumer driven, flat, networked, instant satisfaction world; yet they still clearly want and expect expert teachers in a face-to-face environment.

- Immigrants - adaptive older generations will never be as competent, resourceful or “natural” as the “natives.”
Common Millennial Behaviors and Characteristics

- The following behaviors distinguish millennials in degree or kind from previous generations at the same age.
More Choices; More Selectivity

- Grew up with unlimited array of services and products
- Expect the same array in every service, including their college or university
- Unhappy with fewer choices
Experiential and Exploratory Learners

- Prefer learning by doing and interacting
- Multiplayer gaming, computer simulations, and social networks
- Almost never read the directions
- Bored by lectures
Flexibility / Convenience

- Keep time and commitments flexible longer in order to take advantage of better options
- Expect other people and institutions to give them more flexibility
Personalization and Customization

- Expect products and services to have as much personalization and customization features as possible to meet their changing needs, interests, and tastes.
Impatient, practical and results oriented

- No tolerance for delays
- Want to learn what they have to learn quickly and move on
- Expect instant processes and services that work continuously, and reliably and speed their interactions
- Require almost constant feedback to know how they are progressing
Multitaskers

- Excel at juggling several tasks at once since this is an efficient, practical use of their time.
- Multitasking can enable them to accelerate their learning by permitting them to accomplish more than one task at the same time.
Gamers

- Constant interactivity, full motion multimedia, colorful graphics, the ability to learn and progress to higher levels
- Ability to collaborate with friends in their learning and competitions
- Thrills, competition, engagement and a rich array of emotional stimuli that also enhance learning
Nomadic Communication Style

- Communicate with their many friends frequently using IM, text, and cell phones as well as more traditional communication channels
- Prolific communicators
- Love and expect communication mobility
- Remain in constant touch wherever and whenever
- Firm desire to do whatever they need to do, obtain any services independent of their geography or distance.
Collaboration & Intelligence

- History of collaborating at schools, day care, soccer teams, orchestras, peer-to-peer networks, games, and other programmed activities
- Know how and when to work with other people effectively
- Even those who do not prefer collaboration typically do so, if they think it gives them a practical advantage
- Respect intelligence and education
Balanced Lives

- Don’t want to work 80 hours a week and sacrifice their health and leisure time, even for considerably higher salaries
- Expect to earn incomes exceeding their parents
Less Reading

- Reading is down for most age groups but the decline has been greatest among the youngest adult population.
- Game more often than read a book.
- Disturbing because reading is a very efficient means of communicating knowledge.
- Likely to cause a decline in student writing skills.
Other Characteristics

- Direct, often to the point of appearing rude.
- Believe that they are all “above average”
- Very confident; Boomer parents constantly told them that they would succeed at whatever they did
- Typically led more structured lives than Boomers
Other Characteristics cont’d.

- More aligned with their parents than those of previous generations, although most Boomers and Gen Xers do not believe this is so.
- More likely to have a close friend of a different ethnicity than themselves and therefore have more tolerance for cultural differences.
- More traveled.
Different Personalities

- Not only do typical Millennial behaviors differ in some significant ways from Generation X and Baby Boomers, but some evidence indicates that their personalities may be different in some significantly measurable ways.
Personality research

- Millennials at Northeastern Ohio College of Medicine showed significant differences when compared with Generation X students on 10 of 16 personality factors on a standard personality test.

Compared with Gen X

Millennials were more

- *Warm and outgoing* (Warmth)
- *Abstract than concrete* (Reasoning)
- *Adaptive and mature* (Emotional Stability)
- *dutiful* (Rule Consciousness)
- *Socially bold and adventuresome* (Social Boldness)
Personality traits cont’d.

- Sensitive and sentimental (Sensitivity)
- Self-doubting and worried (Apprehension)
- Open to change and experimenting (Openness to Change)
- Organized and self disciplined (Perfectionism)
- But they were also found to be less solitary and individualistic (Self Reliance)
Additional Sweeney Reference

- Sweeney’s article, “Millennial Behaviors & Demographics” covers the characteristics described above, and an additional section on each characteristic’s “impact on academe.” Sweeney includes a bibliography as well.

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