

# **Naïve Narcissists or Affable Altruists? A Comparison of Millennial and GenX Values**

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*Millennials have been characterized as self-indulgent and humanitarian. Critics argue the values ascribed to Millennials are simply a function of developmental rather than true differences between generational members. This cross-temporal study used age-controlled, archival data collected from working adults to assess generational differences on 10 values. Millennials scored significantly higher than members of Generation X on hedonism, altruism, affiliation, scientific, and power values. GenXers scored significantly higher only on valuing tradition. No differences were detected for security, recognition, commercial, or aesthetic values. Results support assertions that Millennials have higher leisure preferences, are more giving, and are more sociable than GenXers.*

*Keywords: millennial, generation, Generation X, values, hedonism, altruism*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Given the increasing span of individuals' work lives, members of four and five generations work side-by-side in contemporary organizations. Thus, there has been a rising interest in how members of different generations shape and interact in the workplace. Currently, the majority of employees in the workplace belong to one of two generations, Generation X or the Millennial Generation with Gen Xers and Millennials each comprising more than one-third of the workforce (Fry, 2018). The current paper uses cross-temporal data to compare the extent to which members of these two cohorts endorse 10 distinct values.

Millennials, those born between 1982 and 2002, are typically portrayed as sociable, tech-savvy narcissists who crave constant feedback and attention (Deal, Altmann & Rogelberg, 2010; Twenge, 2011; Vogels, 2019). These characteristics are also evident in the alternative names and descriptions used for the Millennial generation including "Nexters" (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 1999), "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2006 as cited in Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010) and the "everybody-gets-a-trophy" generation (Taylor & Gao, 2014). Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. workforce (Fry, 2018). The Millennial Generation is also currently the nation's largest living generation numbering 75.4 million (Fry, 2016) and are better educated and more racially- and ethnically-diverse than preceding generations (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Drake, 2014; Fry, 2018; Taylor & Gao, 2014).

Descriptions of the Millennial Generation stand in contrast to the generation that preceded it, Generation X. Generation X includes 65 million members, notably smaller than the Millennial Generation for several reasons including lower fertility rates and a narrower band of years included in the generation (Taylor & Gao, 2014). Members of Generation X experienced adolescence during a period of great upheaval on the domestic front including widespread corporate layoffs that led to a significant increase in the number of working mothers and latchkey children (Erickson, 2007). Members of Generation X are described as “savvy, skeptical, and self-reliant” individuals who are not concerned with what others think of them (Taylor & Gao, 2014, p. 6).

### **Previous Research Examining Generational Differences**

Research on differences in characteristics of members of these generations has been limited by methodological issues. While some research has demonstrated differences in characteristics including perceptions of entitlement (Allen, Allen, Karl, & White, 2015) and narcissism (see review by Twenge, 2011) between members of the Millennial generation and those of Generation X, research on Millennials has predominantly relied on data gathered from college student samples. Such reliance on college student samples has been cited as a major limitation of generational research (Deal, Altmann & Rogelberg, 2010; Roberts, Edmonds, & Grijalva, 2010; Twenge, 2013) given college students may not be representative of working adults. Additionally, some scholars (Giancola, 2006; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010) have suggested that differences in characteristics of Millennials and members of other generations may be a function of different levels of maturation rather than real differences in values, motivators, or preferences. This alternative explanation is worthy of note given that much research relies on cross-sectional studies which compare pre- or early-career Millennials to mid-career and late-career Gen Xers and Baby Boomers, respectively. Nevertheless, some research does discount the maturity explanation, such as work by Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, and Ng (2015) which found that work values for Millennials have not changed much even after transitioning from school to work life. Thus, such findings suggest Millennials may differ from other generations in terms of values such as by having higher overall levels of narcissism.

### **The Current Study**

The current study was conducted to examine whether the characteristics typically attributed to Millennials are genuinely more representative of Millennials than individuals from other generations while avoiding limitations that plagued previous research such as reliance on student samples and comparisons of generational groups at different points in the life course. The current study is unique in that it is a cross-temporal study based on a sample of working Millennials rather than university students. Using archival data from Hogan Assessment Systems’ *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory* (MVPI; Hogan & Hogan, 2010), the current study compares the endorsed values of members of the Millennial generation with those of Generation X. The MVPI assesses a total of 10 values: aesthetic, affiliation, altruism, commercial, hedonism, power, recognition, scientific, security, and tradition. Based on stereotypical descriptions of members of Generation X and the Millennial generation (Taylor & Gao, 2014), we make predictions about five of those values. Specifically, we hypothesize that members of the Millennial generation will score higher on measures of affiliation, altruism, hedonism, and recognition while members of Generation X will score higher on security.

***Hypothesis 1:*** *Members of the Millennial generation score significantly higher on affiliation than will members of Generation X.*

***Hypothesis 2:*** *Members of the Millennial generation score significantly higher on altruism than will members of Generation X.*

***Hypothesis 3:*** *Members of the Millennial generation score significantly higher on hedonism than will members of Generation X.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *Members of the Millennial generation score significantly higher on recognition than will members of Generation X.*

**Hypothesis 5:** *Members of Generation X will score significantly higher on security than will members of the Millennial generation.*

We formed these five hypotheses based on stereotypical descriptions of members of these two generations as well as extant literature regarding their differences. Because the MVPI measures 10 different values, we also examine differences between scores for members of the two generations on the remaining five values to further understanding of differences in generational values.

**Research Question:** *How do members of the Millennial generation and members of Generation X differ with respect to aesthetic, commercial, power, scientific, and tradition values?*

## **METHOD**

### **Participants and Procedure**

This study used archival data obtained from Hogan Assessment Systems to compare the values of members of Generation X to the values of members of the Millennial generation. The archival data, collected across several decades, had been gathered from young, working American adults between the ages of 23 and 29. The obtained dataset included responses from approximately 26,000 Millennials and 9,000 members of Generation X on Hogan Assessment Systems' *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory* (MVPI; Hogan & Hogan, 2010). The exact range of birth years that comprise each generation varies amongst generational researchers (Campbell, Campbell, Siedor, & Twenge, 2015), however, for the current study, individuals born between 1961 and 1981 were classified as belonging to Generation X while those born between 1982 and 2002 were classified as members of the Millennial generation.

### **Measures**

The MVPI (Hogan & Hogan, 2010) is a rationally-derived measure designed to tap aspects of lifestyle, beliefs, occupational preferences, aversions, and preferred associates for someone who represents the epitome of each of the 10 aspects assessed by the MVPI. Each MVPI scale is composed of 20 items with response options of *disagree*, *uncertain*, and *agree*. Raw scores on each MVPI scale can range from 0 to 60. Reliability values reported below are those reported in the MVPI manual (Hogan & Hogan, 2010, p. 17) and were derived from a sample of 3,015 adults, most of whom were job applicants or incumbents at the time of data collection.

#### *Aesthetic*

Individuals with aesthetic motivations value beauty and the arts. People who score highly on aesthetic seek to maintain a "lifestyle guided by questions of culture, good taste, and attractive surroundings" (Hogan & Hogan, 2010, p. 15). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported as 0.83.

#### *Affiliation*

Affiliation refers to an individual's "desire for and enjoyment of social interaction" (Hogan & Hogan, 2010, p. 15). Individuals who score highly on the affiliation scale are characterized as desiring frequent social interaction and having the tendency to be adaptable, charming, and outgoing; those low in affiliation are likely to be shy and not overly concerned with social approval. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported as 0.68.

#### *Altruism*

The construct of altruism concerns an individual's propensity to want to serve others, especially those who are less fortunate, as well as improve society and the world around them. Individuals scoring high on

the altruism scale tend to be likable, idealistic, and good-natured; conversely, those low in altruism tend to be assertive and direct. Cronbach's alpha was 0.78.

#### *Commercial*

Commercial motives revolve around interests in business and related matters including making money and wealth accumulation. People who score highly on the commercial dimension are characterized as "conservative, conforming, unimaginative, and methodical" (Hogan & Hogan, 2010, p. 13). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported as 0.68.

#### *Hedonism*

The hedonism scale is designed to assess the extent to which a person is oriented to seek fun, pleasure, and enjoyment (Hogan & Hogan, 2010). Those who score high on hedonism tend to be expressive and playful and desire dynamic environments while those low on hedonism are more self-disciplined, careful, and reserved. As indicated in the manual, Cronbach's alpha was 0.76.

#### *Power*

Those motivated by power aspire to "success, accomplishment, status, competition, and control" (Hogan & Hogan, 2010, p. 15). Individuals who score highly on the power scale want to lead others and be in charge. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported as 0.75.

#### *Recognition*

This scale assesses the extent to which individuals seek to be known and have their accomplishments publicly acknowledged. Those who score high on recognition tend to be socially self-confident but impulsive. Those low in recognition are more modest and seek to share credit with others rather than calling attention to themselves. Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.82.

#### *Scientific*

Individuals with scientific values tend to be curious, seek out new knowledge and are motivated by technological advances. Those who score high on the scientific scale tend to be logical and analytical. Cronbach's alpha was reported for the scientific scale as 0.82.

#### *Security*

The construct of security deals with a person's need for order and predictability. People who value security tend to be cautious, detail-oriented, and somewhat inhibited. Those who score low on security tend to be more outgoing, assertive, and open to taking risks. Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.78.

#### *Tradition*

Tradition motives are associated with the valuing of rituals, history, and old-fashioned virtues (Hogan & Hogan, 2019, p. 15). People who score highly on tradition are characterized as individuals who value organizational history, are dedicated to time-honored processes, and who believe in maintaining established organizational standards and structures. Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.73.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis of the data included a series of independent samples t-tests, one for each of the 10 characteristics compared. The Levene's Test for homogeneity of variance indicated significant differences in variance for the generations compared on altruism, commercial, hedonism, power, and altruism. This is likely a result of the unequal sample sizes used for comparisons. Thus, statistically corrected t-tests were used for comparisons on these values.

As shown in Table 1, results of the t-tests revealed significant differences between the generations on aesthetic, affiliation, altruism, hedonism, power, scientific, and tradition values. GenXers scored slightly

but significantly higher than Millennials on tradition only. For the other six values that demonstrated significant differences in mean scores by generation, Millennials scored slightly but significantly higher than members of Generation X. No significant differences were noted for commercial, recognition, or security. Thus, results support Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Millennials are more sociable and giving than members of Generation X, but also more hedonistic. Hypothesis 4 was not supported; no significant difference was found between the generations on the value of security. Partial eta squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ) effect size coefficients show while the differences found are statistically significant, they are small in magnitude.

**TABLE 1**  
**COMPARISON OF MVPI SCORES BY GENERATION**

<b>MVPI Factor</b>		<b>Gen X</b>	<b>Millennial</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>	<b>Observed power</b>
Aesthetic	Mean (SD)	34.73 (7.83)	35.54 (7.95)	34967	-8.42***	.002	1.0
Affiliation	Mean (SD)	51.20 (4.69)	51.67 (4.68)	34971	-8.16***	.002	1.0
Altruism	Mean (SD)	50.62 (6.18)	51.63 (6.05)	15473.89 <sup>a</sup>	-13.46***	.005	1.0
Commercial	Mean (SD)	46.31 (5.97)	46.44 (6.12)	16087.68	-1.72	.000	.397
Hedonism	Mean (SD)	40.81 (6.82)	41.28 (6.61)	15345.74 <sup>a</sup>	-5.67***	.001	1.0
Power	Mean (SD)	49.19 (5.88)	49.82 (5.81)	15586.07	-8.87***	.002	1.0
Recognition	Mean (SD)	42.62 (7.71)	42.50 (7.67)	34970	1.27	.000	.247
Scientific	Mean (SD)	42.00 (8.15)	43.20 (8.04)	15556.39	-12.06***	.004	1.0
Security	Mean (SD)	41.80 (7.10)	41.88 (7.00)	34970	-0.99	.000	.168
Tradition	Mean (SD)	46.79 (6.22)	45.33 (6.02)	15301.30	19.43***	.011	1.0

<sup>a</sup>df value corrected due to significant heterogeneity of variance; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . N for Gen X was 9033; N for Millennial varied slightly based on analyses and varied from 25938 and 25940.

## DISCUSSION

Results of the current study suggest that the typical portrait of Millennial generation members in terms of their motives, values, and preferences may be different from the typical portrait for members of other generations. Specifically, the results of this study indicate that, as hypothesized, Millennials may be more motivated by enjoyment and variety (hedonism) as well as social interaction (affiliation) than GenXers. Results suggest Millennials also value beauty and the arts as well as science more than members of Generation X. Additionally, members of the Millennial generation may also be more

motivated by both social justice issues (altruistic) and power than members of Generation X. While the differences found are small, they can have a substantial impact given the size of the generations. For example, Millennials are slightly more altruistic than GenXers; if such differences translate into even small differences in behavior such as the amount of time or money Millennials donate as compared to GenXers, these generational differences can profoundly influence society. Organizations are not immune from these effects. Results support anecdotal accounts (see Dudley, 2018; Dunnigan, 2018) of Millennials expecting to attain positions of authority (power) early in their careers while also working for organizations that are socially conscious (altruism), adopt new technologies (scientific), and provide employees sufficient leisure time (hedonism).

Results of the current study support the assertion by Campbell and colleagues (2015) that “Generations do exist. They are fuzzy social constructs like many others in the social sciences, but they are as real as race and ethnicity” (p. 6). Nevertheless, our findings conflict with previous research which suggested that younger generations are motivated more by external motivators and less so by intrinsic motivators such as affiliation (Twenge, 2013; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

### **Limitations**

The current study has several limitations. First, because the it is based on archival data, causal conclusions are not warranted. Second, because the data was collected over several decades, the differences noted between respondents from different generations may be reflective of subtle response bias due to changes in societal values rather than real interpersonal differences. This is consistent with assertions by Campbell and colleagues (2015) that differences between generations arise as a function of both time period and cohort. Third, differences in sample size necessitated the use of statistical corrections in the analysis to address violations of assumptions of the t-tests used for analyses. Fourth, due to use of multiple t-tests in the current study, the familywise error rate is elevated. Finally, the generality of conclusions is limited to individuals in the U.S. workforce and who are 23 to 29 years of age.

### **Future Research**

The current study addresses some limitations of the extant literature regarding differences in values of members of Generation X and the Millennial Generation. Nevertheless, further research is needed. Specifically, longitudinal research is needed to assess preferences and tendencies of members of different generations in light of societal, economic, governmental, and environmental differences they experience. Additionally, future research should continue to investigate empirical differences in values among generations, especially among comparable samples (i.e., working adults) to replicate or refute the current findings and extend our understanding of generational differences.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Results of the current study suggest that there are real and significant differences in the motive, values, and preference profiles of different generations. These findings suggest that those seeking to recruit, motivate and retain members of different generations should be cognizant of such trends when designing and implementing organizational policies and practices.

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