

Minority Millennials in the Workforce:
bringing new perspectives to a challenging world

“Lazy, Selfish, Entitled, Rude. We have been called all of these things and more by those who think they understand our generation”
(Cerrone 2013).

INTRODUCTION

This semester in my HTS 6743 and 7001 classes, I read several journal articles focused on females, minorities and millennials, that give conflicting information about this generations’ place in the workforce. I made the decision to focus on minority millennials for my oral history project because my experience working in a part-time job, in a retail store, with millennials does not reflect the data presented in the readings. I decided to go inside, the “black box” (to coin Latour), to go to the source of these studies to determine the veracity of the data. The group of individuals I interviewed were from a variety of backgrounds—attending college part-time and full-time, and focusing on careers in cosmetology, nursing, phlebotomy, home health care, business management, and graphic design, as well as Atlanta’s diverse music industry. They were married—with children—single with children and single. These participants had a story to tell and the following oral history project reveals their stories.

METHOD AND DISCUSSION

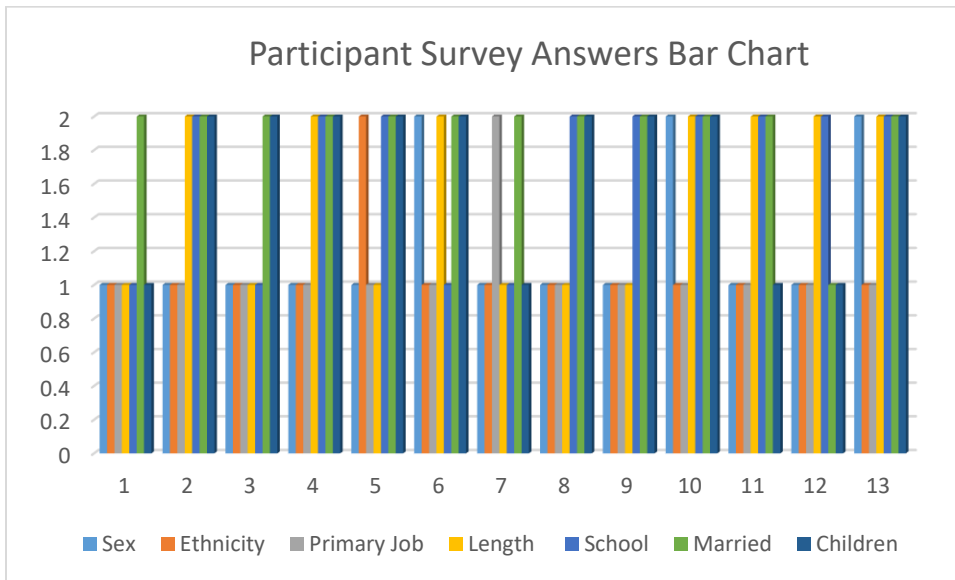
I also chose to go “outside Latour’s box,” and change the structure of Assignment 6 because I could not find enough supporting material to do the original project—it was on two minority millennial managers working in a retail store. I revised the project to focus on an assignment in which I had a plethora of primary and secondary resource material—Asperger Syndrome—but two weeks before the

final assignment was due, my participants declined because of confidentiality. A sign was revealed to me that I needed to focus on the original project, when a statistics professor presented in class about statistics and research, and I complained about my lack of supporting data. His response was, “*my subject was too broad.*” I went back and did more online research and decided to revise the project to do shorter interviews (not 45 minutes to one hour), so I could interview the people with whom I worked, part-time—in a retail store. I got permission from the manager to use the break-room for the interviews (I could not have done this project without her) and interviewed participants during their breaks and lunch hours.

This mixed-method, oral history project focuses on a group of thirteen minority millennial employees (twelve African Americans and one Guamanian), working as associate managers, coordinators and associates in a discount retail store located in mid-town Atlanta, Georgia. The oral interviews ranged from eight to twenty-two minutes, and focused on questions of leadership, mentors, diversity and their five-year plans. The Chart on the next page is extremely rough because I have not had HTS statistics. It is a chart that supports my research on minority millennials by showing that all the participants have millennial and minority status—even Guamanian is considered in the minority status—I looked it up online. There are three males and ten females.

CHART OF PARTICIPANT SURVEY ANSWERS

Participants	Sex	Ethnicity	Primary					Children
			Job	Length	School	Married		
A	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	
Ant	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	
C	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Di	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	
Jan	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	
Jo	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	
Lat	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	
Ni	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	
Ra	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	
Ri	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	
Shan	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	
Shar	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	
Ve	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	



Legend explaining Bar Chart

Sex	female = 1	Male = 2
Ethnicity	African American = 1	Guamanian = 2
Primary Job	Yes = 1	No = 2
Length	Under 12 mos. = 1	Over 12 = 2
School	Yes = 1	No = 2
Married	Yes = 1	No = 2
Children	Yes = 1	No = 2

Before beginning the interviews, I read “How to conduct a Mixed Method Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature” (Small 2011); the “*General Principles for Oral History*;” “Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies” (Weiss 1994); and ‘*New Voices’ Value Diversity* (Anonymous 2009)—I included a question on diversity in my oral history after reading this brief article.

It was difficult to find primary academic sources through the GA Tech library system, so I went on-line, and searched studies related to minority millennials in the workforce. The first primary resource I found was a Nielson Report (Cheryl Grace and Saul Rosenberg 2016). The Report showed data underscoring the innovation of minority millennials and their ability to adapt to a variety of situations related to economic, political and social challenges.

The second primary resource was a study on “*Black Millennials in America: Documenting the experiences, voices and political future of young Black Americans*” (Rogowski and Cohen 2015), from a black youth project. On the one hand, it presented 2015 data that was discouraging, like unemployment rates showing they were higher for blacks (16.6%) and Latinos (10.3%), than whites (8.5%), between the ages of 20-24; young Black women reported discrimination in the workplace was higher for Blacks than whites (35.6% as opposed to 13.9%); in 2013, 32% of Black youths 18-24 years of age lived below the poverty line, and gun-related homicides, in recent years, were 17 times higher than in previous years. On the other hand, the report cited data that showed, in 2013, 71.4% of young Black youths were covered by healthcare, Black millennials were politically engaged; are also accepting of

diversity, support LGBT's and believe, for the most part, in marriage between same sex couples.

A book by David Burstein, "*Fast future: How the millennial generation is shaping our world,*" (Burstein 2013), presented data showing that millennials believe that they have the power to change attitudes and behaviors towards environmental, political and social issues. It is this generations' belief that they can shape all facets of their lives "*now,*" because of the "*pragmatic idealism*" they developed through experiences with the rapid growth in technology, the internet, witnessing a President's impeachment, 9/11 and the collapse of the economy.

I based my decision to give the participants a detailed outline of the research project, a copy of the survey form and several articles, before asking them to participate in the research project because of studies Mary Frank Fox (Fox 2005, 2011, 2017) did on this age group, that underscored the importance of disseminating detailed information explaining the scope of a research project. I also gleaned from interactions with millennials in my part-time job at the retail store, that they like to partition their resources (mental and physical), to expend the least amount of energy on unnecessary tasks. I had twenty minority millennials agree to do the study, but because of work schedules and my own limitation on time, I only completed thirteen oral history interviews. The field notes, taped interviews and excel outlines of answers to the survey and oral questions have been uploaded to T-square.

The surveys ask six questions that confirmed their status as millennials, job status, marital status, children and whether they were in school. The interviews were done in the employee breakroom during fifteen-minute employee breaks and forty-

five-minute employee lunches. That information is in the taped interviews, in the field notes, and typed translation of interviews (there are four translations uploaded to T-square).

CONCLUSION

My purpose for doing this mix-method oral history project was to discover how close the data in the studies and books I read this semester, that focused on minority millennials in the workforce, mirrored reality. Some of the data mirrored the stories from participants about the challenges minority millennials face in the workforce. One millennial talked about depression and suicides in the millennial generation because often they feel that no one will allow them to make mistakes. Some millennials cannot talk to their parents and older adults, because when they try, they are often told they are self-absorbed and need to face reality. That reality is student loans, pressure to succeed, a loneliness that comes from not having someone understand how difficult it is to live in a world full of technology that may one day eliminate their very existence, because nations are unable to work out their differences.

But, the data also underscored the power and agency minority millennials have in making decisions about the roles they play in society. I must admit that spending time with this remarkable group of young people gave me hope for the future of this country.

Many of the answers to the leadership questions were related to Black leaders who have paved the way for this generation to believe that they do have the power to change political and social policies that affect their lives. For example: “*The first*

person is my pastor in Church. He knows how to do leadership he knew how to delegate and motivate everyone. The second person would be like General Chappy James. He was the first black general in the Air Force.” Another individual spoke of civil rights leaders: *My first choice is Marcus Garvey, I don’t know if you know about him, but he was a very prominent figure in the Atlanta area, he was a part of the civil rights movement, Steve Biko. He was more into social equality for people of different backgrounds...the way he stepped towards the reform...he was really aggressive in how he communicated, but he was never really violent.”* Other leaders were President Barak Obama, Michelle Obama, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Paul Dejouria, Hayley Williams, Steve Harvey, Steve Biko, Rosa Parks, and Alexander the Great.

Everyone I interviewed had five-year, career plans, for example, one young person stated: *“I am attending Piedmont College to become an LPN and have worked here at this store for nine months. I am going to become a mom,”* another individual who was focusing on paying off student loans before focusing on a career said: *“Financially, I am always thinking about the future, and what I am going to do with my life. I plan my money for years. I have my 2018 income down and how much I will be spending already.”* These were just a couple of the types of careers these minority millennials had planned.

What did I learn from doing this oral history project? What I learned is that you cannot put this minority, millennial generation in a “black box” and define who they are or who they will become. Academia needs to do more studies on this group of people because there is a lot that we, the other generations, can learn from these dynamic young people who will succeed in life, if we just get out of their way.

RESOURCES

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