Are Millennials Really an Entitled Generation? An Investigation into Generational Equity Sensitivity Differences

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The Millennial generation has been termed a generation of entitlement by the popular press, but here-to-fore this commonly made assertion has not been tested by empirical research. The research presented here tests for equity sensitivity differences in a sample of 351 Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers to see if any significant differences exist between the three generational groups. Results indicate that Millennials do indeed exhibit significantly more entitled scores on the Equity Sensitivity Instrument than Baby Boomers (p < .001) and Gen Xers (p < .02). Implications for human resource practices and managers are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Millennials, the generation born since 1982 (Howe and Strauss, 2009), are the children of the Baby Boomers and currently the second largest generational group. Demographers predict more than half of the workforce will be comprised of Millennials by 2020 (Wojcik, 2013). A recent cover issue of Time magazine (Stein, 2013) dubbed the Millennials as the "me, me, me generation" – a generation characterized by an entitlement mentality. Millennials were brought up to feel special due to a continual stream of trophies, praise and other laudatory treatment from their doting parents, teachers and coaches. Such accolades were often awarded even if they had not accomplished anything special in an apparent misguided effort to build their self-esteem (Tulgan, 2009; Twenge, 2006; Twenge and Campbell, 2009).

As this generation becomes a larger part of the workforce, they are challenging managers' ability to lead and motivate a group of workers with unrealistic expectations regarding raises, promotions and other forms of recognition (Lancaster and Stillman, 2010). This has been exacerbated due to the Great Recession and an ensuing decade of low employment and low wage growth as Millennials have struggled to find employment and the typical upward mobility experienced by prior generations. Does this

commonly made assertion that the millennial generation has a greater sense of entitlement than prior generations hold up to the light of empirical study? This is the research question we set out to explore with this study.

Generation: A Rich and Challenging Construct

The generation concept is widely recognized and discussed in the course of everyday conversation. At least dating back to marketers' prominent promotion of the "Pepsi Generation" in the 1960s, it has become part of the popular vocabulary, and it is commonplace to hear references to "The Greatest Generation," "Boomers," "Generation X," and the "Millennials."

Paralleling its place in popular culture, the concept of generations has quite a long and rich history in intellectual thought, though it has gone in and out of vogue with respect to academic attention. Recently, the concept of generations has been the focus of several thorough and exhaustive literature reviews across several business disciplines (Joshi, Dencker, Franz, and Martocchio, 2010; Joshi, Dencker, and Franz, 2011; Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Mastrola and Willits, 2013). Rather than reiterate this extensive collection of reviews, and in an effort to provide enough space to fully explore the empirical study and findings that are the focal point of this paper, our literature review will be tailored to the specific approach taken in this work, anchoring to the most relevant literature explicated in these recent reviews.

Joshi, et al. (2011) recognize literature that traces the study of the concept of generation back as far as ancient Greece (Nash, 1978). Over centuries, two primary conceptualizations have shaped the study of the generation concept. The first of these strains is rooted in anthropology and focuses on issues of *kinship* and the succession of family members over generations. The second approach is more in the sociological tradition, emphasizing that a generation is a social cohort that exhibits a distinct consciousness due to members shared location in temporal space. The modern social theorist widely viewed as providing the most comprehensive and systematic treatment of the concept from a sociological viewpoint is Karl Mannheim in his classic treatise, *The Sociological Problem of Generations* (1983). A common interpretation of the title of Mannheim's work is that it refers to the conflict often observed among various generations and how to incorporate younger generations coming of age into the fabric of existing society. However, another possible unintended meaning of Mannheim's title anticipated the problems researchers have faced tackling the concept of generation. While the richness of the generational construct explains scholars' enduring interest in it, its multidimensional nature has attracted a wide array of disciplines and research methods used to study it, often leading to paradigmatic conflicts, misunderstandings and disagreements.

The generational concept encompasses academic disciplines ranging from biology, to psychology, to history, and sociology. From a biological perspective, there are unique physiological capabilities and characteristics associated with a group of people comprising a particular generation at given point in the life cycle. For example, recent findings suggest that certain parts of the brain associated with strategic thinking are not developed until people enter their twenties, and thus a typical member of the millennial generation is impacted by this biological influence. At the other end of the spectrum, certain biological capacities such as memory and overall energy level tend to decline over the lifespan, suggesting that members of Generation X and the Boomers may be subject to these tendencies.

Closely related to the biological dimension is the recognition that during psychological development, experiences and circumstances realized during formative years have disproportionate impacts on personality make-up and values. In turn, this recognition invokes historical analysis into how particular events (The Great Depression, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the attacks of 9/11, etc.) indelibly impact the outlook of particular generations. And finally, from a sociocultural perspective, there is recognition that while a given set of generations may all live through a specific historic event, each generation will interpret it very differently as a result of the differing lenses through which they experience them due to their differing generational locations.

Furthermore, there is the recognition that various generations interact and impact one another in different ways. For example, for a host of reasons, directly adjacent generations may exhibit greater levels of conflict than those that are further apart.

Finally, even within the specific discipline of Sociology, competing schools of thought, possessing various philosophical orientations ranging from romanticist to positivist, have viewed the concept differently, addressed different questions, and derived conflicting insights. A related challenge is that various modes of investigation have been used to study the phenomenon, ranging from quantitative to qualitative.

Following Mannheim's approach in his seminal theory, this work recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of the generation construct but does not attempt to resolve the longstanding controversies surrounding it. Rather, in the next section, we establish the general assumptions and parameters underlying our investigation, recognizing certain limitations of this approach.

Generational Habitus

Though Mannheim recognized the interdisciplinary complexity of the generation construct, he eschewed reducing it to component parts. Rather, he saw value in treating it in a holistic and gestalt manner. To implement this view of generation, we borrow Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) notion of *habitus* and invoke the notion of generational habitus. Within the framework of Bourdieu's highly influential theory of practice, habitus is a central construct that has been widely adopted. In essence, habitus captures a particular collectivity's shared set of understandings, expectations, and embodied postures toward the world. It encompasses cognitive elements (e.g., stocks of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and tastes) social elements (e.g., modes of interaction), and behavioral/corporal elements (e.g., ways of walking and talking) that are characteristic of a particular social group. A social collectivity's habitus coalesces due to similar socio-historical conditions that shape it. This conceptualization is consistent with and partially affirms the many popular depictions of generations defined by their unique postures toward the world (e.g., Boomers vs. Gen Xers vs. Millennials). However, to fully explore such differences, qualitative observations are ideally enriched and supported by group-level statistical analysis such as that performed in this study.

A number of implications follow from adopting the idea of generational habitus. First, it suggests how the generation concept may be understood and conceptualized. Because generations were partially of interest due their potential to be revolutionary, the ontological question arose as to whether or not for a generation to be considered a real entity its members had to consciously identify themselves as being part of a particular generation. This question follows the same logic sociologists examined with respect to the validity of the concept of class. That is, for the construct of class to be valid, do people have to routinely think of themselves as being part of a particular class (e.g., blue collar, white collar, etc.)? To address this dilemma, the sociological distinction between "classes for themselves" versus "classes in themselves" is instructive (Marx and Engels, 1965). Classes-for-themselves include people who routinely self-identify and organize around the conscious identification of being in a class. Conversely, classes-in-themselves do not view themselves as being part of a class, but rather, they share a common worldview and set of practices that distinguishes them from members of another class. For example, a person may not identify as being "working class," but at the same time-share similar views, practices and propensities (e.g., a preference for manual labor occupations and hands-on leisure activities such as bowling, hunting, etc.) in common with other people from a similarly defined socioeconomic background. Bourdieu (1984) refers to these groups as "classes on paper". In this sense, the idea of class is strictly a taxonomical device, which captures patterned practices that can be discerned from a combination of ethnographic observation of micro practices and macro statistical analysis of patterned trends.

Following this distinction, our work conceives of generations as groups on paper. As such, whether or not participants in the study self-identify as being part of a generation is considered irrelevant for the purposes of this study. What is relevant is whether patterns of differing perspectives and practices among generations can be discerned. Furthermore, adopting the idea of "generations on paper" circumvents the longstanding question of how a particular generation is precisely demarcated with respect to an exact range of birth years. "Generations on paper" have fuzzy boundaries and prominent theorists have viewed generations as more akin to one wave overlapping another wave rather than clearly discreet real entities easily delimited by succinct age ranges (Wolff, 1971). As such, while there are slightly varying age

ranges used to define generations throughout the literature, we adopt the age framework proposed in the work of Howe and Strauss (2009) given its prominence and popular acceptance, recognizing that slightly different ranges could be used. More specifically, they define the Baby Boom generation as having been born in the 1943-1960 timeframe, Generation X born in the years 1961-1981, and Millennials as those born in 1982 or later. Furthermore, the idea of generational habitus does not imply that all members of a generation are homogeneous, or that members of another generation have discreetly different understandings, attitudes, and actions. Rather, it suggests that a certain habitus is more typical of one particular generation as compared to that of another generation.

Socio-Historical Conditions Shaping the Millennial Habitus

As alluded to in the introduction of this article, our empirical work will introduce findings that show the millennial generation differs in terms of equity sensitivity, evidencing a generational habitus that can be considered as more entitled. In his development of the concept of habitus, Bourdieu emphasizes that habitus is the product of socio-historical conditioning. Furthermore, and consistent with Mannheim's original work, Bourdieu stresses that socio-historical conditions taking place at early stages of development have a predominant impact on development of the habitus, which in turn inordinately shapes future experiences. Mannheim (1983) captures this developmental idea using the term "fresh contact". This insight highlights the fact that while contemporaneous generations are subject to similar objective socio-historical conditions at any given moment, each generation subjectively experiences these same conditions differently because of their differing habitus rooted and formed under circumstances unique to their period of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.

Given this emphasis on socialization during early development, it is not surprising that many of the social conditions that have been highlighted in explaining Millennials' sense of entitlement have focused on parenting techniques of the original "Me Generation," the Baby Boomers (Twenge, 2006). The Baby Boomers were singled out as a special generation, and they have instilled this same sense of self in their children, offering continuous self-reinforcement, emphasizing the special and unique status of their children and focusing on the importance of building self-esteem. One evocative description of the Millennial habitus invokes the label of "trophy kids," capturing the tendency of Boomer parents to bolster their children's self-esteem by emphasizing that everybody is a special winner, thereby creating an unusual sense of entitlement (Alsop, 2008).

While Boomer parenting practices are important to note and widely recognized, they combine with other fundamental socio-historical shifts occurring during Millennials' period of early development that are less often associated with this sense of entitlement (Twenge, 2010). As outlined by Mannheim (1983), the pace and robustness of the formation of a generation correlates with the pace of social change during its formative years. The historical moment of Millennials' early development closely parallels what some consider as the most significant period of social change in history stemming from the digital/technical revolution (Castells, 1996; 1997; 1998), or what some reference as the Third Industrial Revolution (Rifkin, 2011).

The Millennials can also be considered the "networked generation" (Coleman, 2011), and this dramatic period of social change undoubtedly relates to the entitled dimension of the Millennial habitus. Levine's (2012) emphasis on helicopter parents using cellphones to remain tethered to their children hints at the role of the digital revolution in shaping Millennial habitus, but the impact extends far beyond this obvious link. As a result of the digital revolution, Millennials have come of age in a world with unprecedented access to people as well as nearly instant acquisition of information and goods. Access to people is an email or text away. Finding answers to questions only requires typing in a search word. Goods are not only readily available, but many (music, movies, etc.) are "free" in new exchange relationships where "sharing" no longer entails any element of self-sacrifice, but merely the transmission of a copied digital file. Horizontal networks of communication have replaced hierarchical and authoritative relationships whereby any individual is empowered by influential tools of communication (e.g., blogs, Wikipedia, Yelp) to express opinions and provide critiques, leveling the playing field and undermining the status of experts and authorities. Finally, many of these digital communications

technologies (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) encourage narcissistic self-presentation in conjunction with nearly continuous invidious comparisons to others.

While an exhaustive and nuanced socio-historical analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, there is ample prima facie support for widespread popular and anecdotal descriptions of a millennial habitus possessing a strong strain of entitlement. This is not to say that older generations are not being subjected to similar conditionings; however, their generational habitus has not been fundamentally shaped by these revolutionary conditions of the digital age.

Theoretical Roots of Entitlement

Extending Adam's (1963) original equity theory, Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles (1987) developed the construct of entitlement as part of their equity sensitivity theory. Huseman, et al. (1987) posited that people can be categorized as either (1) benevolent, (2) equity sensitive or (3) entitled in their orientation based on their attitudes towards how much they prefer to give versus receive in an organizational setting. Those who expect to receive more than others for doing essentially the same work were defined as entitled.

Although there has been an outpouring of popular press articles and books decrying the Millennials as a generation significantly more entitled than its predecessors, to date empirical research has not been undertaken to investigate whether these assertions hold up to the light of academic study. A recent review of the literature by Mastrolia and Willits (2013) concluded that, while the popular press is voluminous when it comes to avowed generational differences between Millennials and their predecessors, there is a paucity of peer-reviewed, empirical work in this area and that such differences have yet to be substantiated. Conversely, another recent review of the generational academic literature by Lyons and Kuron (2014) concluded that generational differences manifest themselves in a variety of other work related psychological variables, but they did not report any research regarding generational entitlement differences. The objective of our current research is to fill this void in the generational research by testing for potential differences regarding equity sensitivity.

As noted earlier, entitlement has its academic roots in equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965). This theory proposes that employees compare themselves with other people doing similar work with regards to the outcomes they receive such as pay, benefits and promotions while also considering the inputs they incur such as the time and effort that they must exert to obtain these outcomes. Equity theory proposes that if employees perceive their ratio of outcomes/inputs is not in balance with the ratio of their comparison other the subject will experience cognitive dissonance. Employees in this unbalanced state become inclined to reduce this dissonance by doing something to get their ratio back into the state of balance known as "equity".

Equity theory has been supported by subsequent research; especially with regards to how workers respond when they perceive they are in an under-reward situation (Greenberg, 1982, 1987, 1990; Mowday, 1991). Employees who experience under-reward may take a variety of either behavioral or cognitive actions in order to reduce their dissonance and move towards a state of equity. For example, they may respond to an under-reward situation with an overt behavioral response to reduce their feelings of inequity by doing such things such as reducing their work inputs (e.g., put in less effort) or by possibly attempting to increase their outcomes (e.g., ask for a raise). In some situations an under-rewarded employee may actually attempt to alter the outcomes or inputs of their comparison other to help "even the score" by doing things such as not cooperating with co-workers (thus increasing their referent's inputs) or they may even attempt to do something that could ultimately reduce their referent's outcomes. Conversely, under-rewarded employees might select a more cognitive approach in an attempt to reduce their feelings of inequity by selecting another person or group they feel is more appropriate to compare themselves with in an attempt to mentally justify their under-reward condition. Employees who cannot get their equity ratio into a state of balance with their comparison other may eventually decide to transfer to another part of the organization or even find a job elsewhere which they hope to find a more equitable situation.

Equity sensitivity (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1985, 1987; King, Miles and Day, 1993; Miles, Hatfield and Huseman, 1989, 1994; Patrick and Jackson, 1991) refined original equity theory to account for individual differences in equity preferences. This extension of equity theory introduced the concept of entitlement and benevolence into the theory and subsequent research stream. Equity sensitivity proposed that while many people fit the propositions of the original theory and gravitate towards a state of equity, that there may indeed be two other groups of individuals at the opposite ends of the equity sensitivity spectrum that don't necessarily prefer their equity ratio to be in a state of balance with their comparison other.

These other two groups do not fit with the propositions of the original equity theory. A group identified as being more tolerant of an under-reward situation was labeled as "benevolent". While benevolent people do not necessarily seek to be under-rewarded, these types of people are more willing to tolerate such an unbalanced condition. Conversely, at the opposite side of the equity sensitivity spectrum is a group who actually expects to be over rewarded. This group was defined as "entitled". They were found to only be content when their outcome/input ratio is greater than that of their comparison others. In other words, this entitled group actually expects to be rewarded more for doing the same work as their referents. A subsequent stream of research has lent support for the view that entitled types of individuals do exist and they that they can be differentiated from more benevolent people with respect to their equity preferences and job-related attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Allen and White, 2002; Allen, Evans, and White, 2011; Akan, Allen, and White, 2009; Blakely, Andrews, and Moorman, 2005; Fok, Hartman, Patti and Razek, 2000; O'Neil and Mone, 1998; Restubog, Bordia, and Bordia, 2009).

Generational Differences and Related Psychological Variables

As previously mentioned, while the popular business press has proclaimed the Millennials to be the entitled generation, no prior academic research has been conducted on this topic. In fact, recent reviews of the generational literature, including academic reviews (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, and Gade, 2012; Hershatter and Epstein, 2010; Joshi, et al., 2010; Joshi, et al., 2011; Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Mastrolia and Willits, 2013; Parry and Urwin, 2011; Twenge, 2010), and the practitioner popular press (Howe and Strauss, 2009; Tulgan, 2009; Twenge, 2006) do not reveal prior research regarding generational differences regarding equity sensitivity, and more precisely entitlement. Likewise, a recent search of the ABI Inform database did not reveal any empirical studies examining generational differences in equity sensitivity and entitlement. Obviously a gap exists between the popular business press and the empirical literature.

While not directly studying generational differences, some prior studies have explored a potential relationship between age and equity sensitivity. Adams, Treadway and Stepina (2008) and Kickul and Lester (2001) found older workers to be more benevolent. Similarly, Roehling, Roehling and Boswell (2010) reported a significant positive relationship between age and benevolence while controlling for organizational tenure and work experience. Conversely, other studies have not found age to be a significant factor with regards to equity sensitivity (King and Miles, 1994; Mueller and Clark, 1998). Thus, there is no clear consensus from prior research that age is a factor in equity sensitivity differences. In fact, none of these prior studies specifically considered the potential for generational, rather than purely age related differences with regards to equity sensitivity.

While generational entitlement differences have yet to be specifically studied, other related personality variables including narcissism and self-esteem have been explored (Gentile, Twenge and Campbell, 2010; Twenge and Campbell, 2001; Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Entitlement is considered one of the primary components of narcissism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Waugaman, 2010). Narcissists hold an extremely positive view of themselves that is manifested in high levels of self-esteem. Narcissists actually believe they are special or unique and deserve special treatment from others while owing little or nothing in return.

Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell and Bushman (2008) compared college aged students' scores who took the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) from the 1980's to the 2000's. Their results indicated that narcissism and self-esteem are clearly higher in the current generation as compared with

prior generations of college students. One potential weakness with regards to workplace attitudes of this research was that it only examined narcissism and self-esteem of college age students. Their samples did not include experienced working adults whose attitudes may have changed once they got a taste of the real world of work.

Narcissism has also been linked with entitlement in the classroom (Bergman, Westerman and Daly, 2010). Narcissistic students have a strong sense of entitlement with regards to grades and special treatment from their teachers (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen and Farruggia, 2008). Apparently, this tendency carries over into students' career expectations as business students higher in narcissism expect to have an easier time finding a job, as well as higher salary and promotion expectations than other majors (Westerman, Bergman, Bergman and Daly, 2012). However, as they point out, research linking narcissism and entitlement has yet to be undertaken and they call for future research to be conducted on potential generational differences regarding entitlement.

Prior research has also found Millennials to be significantly higher on other personality variables such as self-confidence and self-rated drive to achieve (Twenge, Campbell and Gentile, 2012). Millennials also have been found to be significantly less able to show empathy or to take the perspective of others (Konrath, O'Brien and Hsing, 2011). Based on this growing body of research, Lyons and Kuron (2014) conclude that there indeed has been a generationally based shift in prominent personality characteristics such that the millennial generation obviously regards themselves in a more positive manner than prior generations. Based on this, we suspect that these generational differences may also manifest themselves in higher levels of entitlement with regards to their equity sensitivity preferences.

Hypotheses

The current work force is predominantly comprised of three main generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Based on the generational sociological and psychological literature reviewed above, we would expect the millennial generation to exhibit a higher level of entitlement than either of the other two generations. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses.

> *Hypothesis 1: Millennials will exhibit a higher level of entitlement than Baby Boomers.*
> *Hypothesis 2: Millennials will exhibit a higher level of entitlement than Gen Xers.*

As discussed earlier in the literature review, some researchers (Adams, et al., 2008; Kickul and Lester, 2001; and Roehling, et al., 2010) have found entitlement to be correlated with age such that older workers may actually be more benevolent and younger workers more entitled. Conversely, other studies have not found age to be a significant factor with regards to equity sensitivity (King and Miles, 1994; Mueller and Clark, 1998). We note that none of these prior studies specifically considered the potential for generational, rather than purely age related differences, which could be responsible for their conflicting findings. Because these studies did not group subjects into their respective generational cohorts in their analyses one cannot determine whether age or generation was primarily responsible for the entitlement differences or lack thereof.

If indeed purely age rather than generation is primarily responsible for entitlement differences, logically we would also expect to find support for the younger Gen Xers being more entitled than the more senior Baby Boomer generational group. Therefore we decided to test the following hypothesis to test the assumption of age versus generational cohort based differences.

> *Hypothesis 3: Gen Xers will exhibit a higher level of entitlement than Baby Boomers.*

Conversely, if this hypothesis is not supported and both hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported then logically it can be concluded that the entitlement differences found between the three groups were more a function of generational cohort rather than strictly age based.

METHODS

A survey was given to a convenience sample of graduate business students at an urban public university. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire themselves and then to find two other subjects willing to complete the questionnaire. Students were instructed that each of the three questionnaires returned (their personal questionnaire and two others) must each come from a person of different generations; that is, the three questionnaires returned must be from a Millennial, a Baby Boomer, and a Gen Xer respectively. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was promised.

The final sample was comprised of 352 returned questionnaires. The sample consisted of a relatively even split of males (46%) and females (54%). The data was also analyzed for any differences in equity sensitivity scores based on gender. There were no significant differences between males and females.

Ages of the respondents ranged from 16 to 70 with an average age of 41 (standard deviation = 14.4 years) and a median age of 35 years. Using the Howe and Strauss (2009) year of birth definitions for Baby Boomer (1943-1960), Gen Xer (1961-1981) and Millennial (1982 or later), our sample was comprised of 106 Baby Boomers (30.2%), 117 Gen Xer's (33.2%), and 129 Millennials (36.6%).

Educational levels for the sample ranged from high school to doctoral degrees such that 31.2% of the sample had less than a college degree (only one subject did not complete high school), 54.4% had a college degree, 11.2% had a master's degree, and 3.2% reported holding an earned doctorate or equivalent.

Measures

The Equity Sensitivity Instrument (ESI) was included in the questionnaire to measure the subjects' relative levels of entitlement. The ESI originally developed by Huseman, et al. (1985) has been used in nearly all subsequent equity sensitivity research. King and Miles' (1994) research supports the validity of this instrument. The ESI consists of five statements in which respondents allocate points to opposing questions regarding each statement. The lower the ESI subject's score the more entitled the individual is considered to be. The subjects' ESI scores ranged from 10 to 50 with a mean of 30.05 and a standard deviation of 7.08. The Cronbach's alpha for the ESI scale was .842.

Results

Mean ESI scores for the sample are reported in Table 1 along with standard deviations. The table indicates that Millennials had the lowest ESI scores (most entitled) and Baby Boomers had the highest ESI scores (most benevolent). An analysis of variance was conducted comparing the mean ESI scores of Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. The ANOVA found a highly significant difference in mean scores between groups ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 2).

A Scheffe Post Hoc test was also conducted to determine if the generational groups were significantly different from each other. The test determined that Millennials were significantly more entitled than both the Gen Xers ($p < 0.02$) as well as the Baby Boomers ($p < 0.001$). Thus both hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

While there was a significant correlation between age and equity sensitivity ($R = 0.230$, $p < 0.001$), the Scheffe Post Hoc test did not detect a significant difference in mean ESI scores between Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Thus hypothesis 3 was not supported. The Gen X group was not significantly more entitled than the Baby Boomer group.

DISCUSSION

Based on the strong support found for hypotheses 1 and 2, it appears that Millennials are indeed more entitled than both the Baby Boomer and Generation X groups. Furthermore, since there was not support for hypothesis 3 (no significant difference was found between the ESI scores of the Baby Boomer and Generation X groups), it appears that the equity sensitivity differences observed were driven primarily by the generational differences of the Millennial group. Thus our findings add empirical support for the

popular press assertions that the Millennials do indeed have a stronger sense of entitlement than the other generational groups currently in the workforce.

This finding certainly has significant implications for managers who are currently attempting to supervise the burgeoning number of Millennials and the human resource practices of their organizations. In fact, prior equity theory research (Allen and White, 2002) has shown that entitled individuals are more likely to react negatively to situations in which they are rewarded less for doing the same work as their comparison others. Entitled people are significantly more likely to take overt behavioral actions as opposed to cognitive actions in order to reduce their feelings of inequity. These include taking such actions as transferring, quitting, reducing their effort, attempting to make the other person work harder or doing something in an attempt to reduce their referent's pay. Entitleds have also been shown to be less likely to exhibit organizational citizenship types of behavior when working in a group setting (Allen, Evans and White, 2011; Akan, Allen and White, 2009).

These proclivities have the potential of creating a negative impact on an organization's productivity, culture, turnover costs, and ultimately profitability. Human resource departments and managers of Millennials must be extra cautious about allowing under-reward situations to develop in their organizations. Productivity can be adversely affected if these workers perceive they are under-rewarded since entitled workers are more likely to "slack off" on the job in an attempt to get their equity ratio back into balance with their more highly paid referents. This tendency may have deleterious effects on an organization's culture as organizational citizenship behaviors are withheld by entitled employees. This may ultimately lead to increased generational conflicts within organizations. Entitled workers who are unable to reduce their feelings of inequity in an organization are more likely to attempt to transfer or quit their job in search of a better deal at another organization, which could greatly increase a company's turnover and replacement costs. Ultimately these combined negative effects would certainly have a negative effect on company profits.

Our findings may help to explain the recent situation faced by many young workers as these well-educated, often over-qualified Millennial workers have attempted to enter a labor market with significantly fewer opportunities for advancement and salary growth due to the lingering effects of the Great Recession and the reluctance of many Baby Boomers to retire. Entitled Millennials, many strapped with high student loan debt and finding themselves being paid less for doing the same work as their more senior Gen X and Baby Boomer co-workers, may rightfully be more likely to become entitled employees as they attempt to deal with their feelings of not "getting a fair deal". Many have been motivated to opt out of traditional corporate environments in favor of starting their own entrepreneurial ventures. This situation has become more critical in corporations since Millennials currently make up the bulk of new workers entering the workforce. Eventually as the older generations either retire or die, the long-term viability of many of these organizations will be contingent on their ability to successfully integrate, motivate and retain the millennial generation into their workforce.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

As noted by Lyons and Kuron (2014), most of the literature on generational differences is limited by the "age–period–cohort confound," whereby any generational differences discovered may also be explained by age-related effects (i.e., maturation), cohort effects (i.e., formative context) or the conditions of the historical period in which data are gathered (Ryder, 1965; Laufer and Bengtson, 1974). Since the survey was administered during the same historical period, the later issue would be unlikely to be experienced in the present study. Thus, age or cohort issues are left as potential confounds regarding the current study. Considering that both hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported (Millennials were significantly more entitled than either Baby Boomers or Gen Xers), taken together with a lack of support for hypothesis 3 (Gen Xers were not found to be more entitled than Baby Boomers), it appears the entitlement differences in our sample were more a function of generational cohort rather than purely age related differences. Longitudinal research data which tracks respondents of two or more successive cohorts over time is needed to further mitigate these potential confounds and should be considered for future research.

It appears that the assertions of the popular press and anecdotal information from current managers of Millennials are accurate. Indeed Millennials do appear to be more entitled than the other two generational groups currently comprising the workforce. Future research should be conducted in how to best reduce this generation's feelings of inequity and keep them motivated to perform in modern organizations. The future success of many businesses may depend on successfully meeting this challenge.

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TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EQUITY SENSITIVITY BY GENERATION

Generation	n	Mean	SD
Baby Boomer	105	31.68	7.64
Generation X	117	30.66	7.44
Millennials	129	28.19	5.80
Total	351	30.05	7.08

TABLE 2
ANOVA RESULTS FOR EQUITY SENSITIVITY BY GENERATION

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	769.12	2	384.561	7.967	.000
Within Groups	16796.85	348	48.267		
Total	17565.97	350			