Millennials: Hard to Pin Down, Yet Ripe for Conversion

By Jonathan E. Monroe

As Millennials become more prominent in the workforce, companies are spending small fortunes researching their interests, from specific jobs to new products. The results of this research provide conflicting answers that typically are reducible to one conclusion: We don't know.

Social science studies, however, have achieved more conclusive results regarding Millennials' views on family, marriage, and religion. Tragically, these studies reveal that the Millennial generation is drifting away from traditional family values towards acceptance of all views as equally intrinsically valuable. Even so, the strong sense of justice that most Millennials possess provides a glimmer of hope.

Who are the Millennials?

The children of Generation X, Millennials are most commonly defined as the generation born between the 1980s and the early 2000s and presently are the largest living generation in the United States. They characterize themselves as unique due to the extent of their technology usage, their music/pop culture, and their fashion choices, but they also cite moves towards liberalism and tolerance, feeling that they are smarter than previous generations.[1] By contrast, although past generations felt they were uniquely "smarter" than preceding generations, most cited a work ethic and morals as being defining factors of their generation; these factors are absent in the Millennial generation's definition of itself.[2]

The racial composition of the Millennial generation is primarily white, but has greater numbers of Hispanics and African-Americans than previous generations.[3] In fact, Millennials are described as being the most racially-diverse generation in the history of the United States.

Millennials are also the most highly-educated of all previous generations. Twenty-one percent of all men and 27 percent of all women are completing at least a bachelor's degree, compared to past generations, of which less than 20 percent completed a bachelor's degree.[4] Studies show that 63 percent of all Millennials plan to graduate from college or already have graduated from college.[5] Many Millennials today are also full-time or part-time students. In fact, 19 percent of all Millennials are full or part-time students compared to only 2 percent of those over 35.[6]

In the workplace, however, fewer Millennials are employed than any other generation in history. Roughly 10 percent of Millennials are unemployed, compared to 4 percent

unemployment in those over 35.[7] Only 63 percent of all Millennials are currently employed in a full-time job. Additionally, Millennials are more likely to be working part-time jobs, with 24 percent presently employed in this status.

Perhaps what has been most well-documented about Millennials is their use of technology. Recent advances in technology allow people to store vast amounts of information and communicate rapidly across great distances. Millennials tend to be on the leading edge of using these advances in technology, asserting, more so than other generations, that technology makes life easier.[8] They are more likely to believe that technology enables people to be closer to friends and family, rather than isolating them, and facilitates more efficient use of their time.[9] Not surprisingly, Millennials are also more prone to spend large spans of time utilizing digital media.[10]

In regard to social media presence, Millennials are far more likely to maintain one or more social media accounts, making Millennials more inclined to post daily life events on social media and to communicate through texting than any other generation. This penchant for social media communication has earned Millennials the nickname, the "Net Generation."

Without a doubt, Millennials are diverse, technologically-savvy, and well-educated, but these are not the most significant factors which define the Millennial generation. These characteristics neglect the heart of what defines any generation: how they treat and understand the family unit. Because the family is the foundation of society, how a generation treats the family and what they believe it to be will determine the health of that generation, and by extension, future generations. To truly understand Millennials, we must consider their views on marriage, the family, religion, and societal values.

Marriage and Family

Seventy percent of all Millennials say they are interested in getting married, with only 5 percent indicating no desire to marry.[11] Based on this statistic, it seems reasonable to assume that most Millennials are pursuing marriage, or are already married, but this assumption would be incorrect. Today, only 21 percent of all Millennials are married.[12] Compared to their parents at the same age, Millennials are only half as likely to be married.[13] The marriage rate has dropped from 59 percent to just 20 percent over the past 50 years. One study reveals that 7 in 10 Millennials have never been married.[14]

Part of the reason for this downward trend in marriage can be traced to the focus of the Millennial generation on parenting rather than marital status. Fifty-two percent of Millennials state they believe that being a good parent is one of the most important things in their lives, while only 30 percent categorize having a successful marriage as being highly important. Conversely, those belonging to Generation X, while also placing being a good parent (42 percent) above having a successful marriage (35 percent), did so at a far lower rate than Millennials.[15]

When Millennials do get married, they generally do so at a much later date than all previous generations. In 2014, the average age at which Millennials married was 27 years old for women

and 29 years old for men, compared to 1963 when women typically married at 21, men at 23.[16] Millennials claim that this delay is due to economic hardships or personal preference, asserting that they are waiting to secure careers and economic stability before marrying. Ironically, when asked to rank their reasons for marriage by importance, 88 percent cite love and 76 percent say a lifelong commitment, but only 27 percent rate financial security as a very important reason for marrying.[17]

While Millennials claim they want to be married, they possess a growing belief that the institution is becoming obsolete. According to a Pew Research Center study, 44 percent of Millennials view marriage as obsolete, marking a significant increase in this perception of marriage over previous generations.[18] Although some studies indicate that only 25 percent of Millennials believe marriage is obsolete, this statistic is at odds with the actual statistical trends in marriage rates and Millennial views regarding the family.[19]

Other studies reveal that Millennials are increasingly abandoning the traditional notion of the family. While Millennials rightfully have continued to reject bad marriage policies, such as those opposed to interracial marriage, their views on other issues essential to the family demonstrate a lack of respect for the institution.[20] Forty-six percent believe that broadening the definition of the family structure is a good thing, a 10 percent increase from Generation X.[21] While 75 percent of the Silent Generation believed that children needed a mother and a father to grow up to be emotionally healthy adults, only 53 percent of Millennials agree.[22] When questioned about their views on gay marriage, 65 percent of all Millennials believe that this parental structure is either a good arrangement for children, or that it makes no difference in the rearing of children.[23] Significantly, 70 percent of all Millennials also strongly favor gay marriage, a pronounced increase from previous generations.[24]

Millennials also indicate that they are more likely to choose cohabitation or to opt to live with their parents. Only 22 percent of Millennials believe that living together without being married is a negative factor for society, while 63 percent state that it makes no difference.[25] Compared to past generations, this is a marked increase. When asked about the importance of marriage, Millennials state that they are more likely to live with someone without getting married.[26] In fact, 48 percent of women responded that they had cohabitated with their partner.[27]

These views on marriage have impacted the birth of children, as well. Fifty-one percent of all births to Millennials are to single mothers.[28] Millennials are twice as likely to have children out of wedlock and to live as single parents compared to the Boomer Generation. Of even greater concern is the fact that only 20 percent of Millennials are likely to live in the same household as their children, compared to 30 percent of Boomers.[29]

In regard to their own families, Millennials' views are rather inconsistent. One report from the White House stated that Millennials assert that being close to their friends and family is of higher importance than it was to previous generations.[30] This same report cites a Gallup survey which states that 9 in 10 Millennials reported high levels of closeness to their parents. Another report from LifeWay Research affirmed this statistic and reported that 61 percent of Millennials place family at the top of their priority list.[31] Yet none of these studies report why Millennials

relate well to their parents, nor do they give reasons why they like their families. There are a plethora of reasons why Millennials might like their families, but given that these conflicting studies do not elaborate on these reasons, absent further documented research and analysis, it is difficult to draw a conclusion regarding Millennials' feelings toward their families.

Millennials' views on the family are not unique to their generation; rather, they are the outgrowth of the views of previous generations. The snowball effect of previous generations' dissatisfaction with the family has shaped the Millennials' views which continue to negatively affect the family.

Religion

The religious views of today's Millennials have also deviated from those of previous generations. Today, only 43 percent of all Millennials are likely to say that a religious life is important to them, compared with 53 percent of Generation X, 59 percent of Boomers, and 68 percent of the Silent Generation.[32] In fact, Millennials were more likely than Boomers to say that religious life is less important than a financially rewarding career.[33] Other studies show that Millennials rank the importance of religion below family, friends, education, career, and a spouse.[34]

When it comes to religious affiliation, 11 percent of Millennials were raised in homes which identified as religiously unaffiliated and 25 percent of all Millennials claim no religious affiliation.[35] Only 56 to 57 percent of all Millennials self-identify as Christian in any manner and 36 percent identify as religiously unaffiliated. Compared to previous generations, this marks a 13 percent decrease from Generation X, 21 percent decrease from Boomers, and a 28 percent drop from the Silent Generation.[36]

Oddly, Millennials still claim to pray in statistically similar numbers to previous generations.[37] Religious attendance of Millennials, however, is far lower than previous generations, with a 20 percent difference between them and the Silent Generation. Only two in 10 Millennials believe that church attendance is important. Thirty-five percent take an active anti-church stance. Millennials are less likely than other age groups to attend church. However, the more significant statistic is that 59 percent of Millennials have dropped out of the church.[38] Although Millennials espouse similar views regarding religion as older generations have (with the exception of the Silent Generation), they are rejecting the religious traditions of previous generations to a greater degree than they are abandoning the institution of the traditional family.[39]

Values

Millennials' views on marriage and religion have shaped their values on social issues. From abortion to same-sex marriage, Millennials' views vary greatly from their parents and grandparents.

Millennials tend to support abortion as socially acceptable. Fifty-five percent of all Millennials say that abortion should be legal in all or most cases.[40] However, when asked about the

morality of abortion, only 21 percent stated that it was morally acceptable, while 35 percent stated that it was morally wrong. The majority of Millennials (39 percent) believed that the morality of an abortion depended on the circumstances.[41]

On same-sex marriage and homosexuality, the statistics are even more drastic. The Millennial generation predominately states that homosexuality should be accepted by society (63 percent).[42] This is in contrast to previous generations which have a far lower level of support, differing by at least 12 percent.[43] Only 36 percent of all Millennials oppose same-sex marriage, compared to the 50 percent who believe that same-sex marriage should be supported.[44] Millennials are far more likely than those who are 30 or older to support same-sex marriage if they know someone who identifies as homosexual.[45]

When questioned regarding pornography, most Millennials state that they do not believe that pornography should be restricted for people of all ages. In fact, only 21 percent of Millennials say that pornography should be restricted for all ages.[46] It is interesting to note that past generations' opposition to pornography tended to increase as they aged; however, there has not been enough time to determine whether or not this trend will be seen in Millennials.

Millennials' values are diverging from the values of their parents and past generations. Where there used to be a strong societal opposition to certain issues and trends, such as unwed motherhood and same-sex marriage, Millennials are becoming more accepting of non-traditional lifestyles which they feel don't pertain to or directly affect them.

Speaking Truth to the Millennial Heart

Millennials' view of religion, morality, and the family deviates from the traditional view. Instead of supporting the intact married family, Millennials have become apathetic and indifferent toward it. When it comes to issues such as cohabitation or children being raised by same-sex couples, it isn't that Millennials believe such arrangements are good—they simply don't believe there is a difference between alternative family structures and the traditional family.

Their views of marriage present a quandary, given that they simultaneously have the highest number of births to single mothers, while at the same time believe that single, unwed motherhood is bad for society. Just as contradictory is the fact that the majority of Millennials state that they want to be married, yet many also hold the view that marriage is obsolete.

Where their parents attended church in large numbers, Millennials have walked away from the church. Yet, Millennials claim to practice high levels of prayer.

While some Millennials might assert that there are absolute standards of right and wrong, their refusal to act in any way that might impede individual choice, regarding issues which harm society, conflicts with their words. Although most Millennials say they are morally opposed to abortion, few believe that it should be restricted in all cases, choosing instead to allow people to do as they will rather than imposing their beliefs on others.

Millennials are the generation of contradiction. They claim one position and yet live by another. They believe that their liberty stops at someone else's nose and they refuse to act on their stated values if they believe they might offend another person's values. Millennials are more accepting of alternative forms of the family because they see such lifestyle choices as matters of personal choice, rather than as moral issues of right and wrong. They are leaving the church because they don't want to have other's views pushed on them. They are willing to oppose abortion for themselves personally, but refuse to end the practice for society as a whole.

If we are to have any hope of changing the mindset of the Millennial generation, we must transform their view concerning the value of life. As long as Millennials see life only through the lens of self-interest, they will continue to reject measures to protect the family and will oppose measures that restrict the actions of others. The first step in recovering the Millennial value of marriage, the family, and religion is to make them care.

Interestingly, Millennials have a strong sense of justice and oppose human trafficking and other forms of human rights abuse around the world. In order to change Millennials' views, we must appeal to this sense of justice as it applies to family, religious liberty, and human dignity within the womb. Recovering the Millennial mindset regarding the value of the family will require helping them to understand that transforming the family unit and the institution of marriage harms them, as well as society, and abuses future generations. Millennials must understand that abortion kills a baby, and that cutting a child apart and trafficking in its parts is evil. They need to understand that there are no "victimless" crimes and that pornography negatively impacts the rights of all members of society.

If the church is to connect with the Millennial generation, it must change how it acts toward them. This does not mean that moral truth should be compromised, and it certainly does not mean that the church must cater to Millennials' every whim. The church has always been one of the strongest forces of cultural transformation, yet today, it has become so focused on being "palatable and relevant" that the church in America has become "distasteful and irrelevant."[47] In an effort to not offend people, churches have, with good intentions and lack of a broader Biblical worldview, watered down the power of the Gospel and created an impotent god. The modern church's means of showing "love" by obscuring the truth through pleasant, easily palatable presentations does not, and cannot, show true love, which is to will the good of another. Ultimately, this is not God's love, because God's love rescues sinners from destructive lives through the light of Christ; it does not leave people lost in the darkness of this world. To effectively reach Millennials, the church must faithfully present the truth and speak honestly on relevant issues and let God do His work in changing lives through the truth of His Word.

This straightforward discussion of biblical truths means the church will advance a biblical view of sexuality, not treat it as a taboo discussion or an issue that is whispered only in shadowy corners. The church needs to challenge the modern idea of autonomy and demonstrate that true freedom is found only in Christ. Truth, the truth that changes lives eternally, comes from Scripture, not from human feelings. The purpose of the church is to be a light that illuminates the world, not to conceal that light with lampshades of tolerance or judgmental attitudes, nor to obscure that light with apathy or fear. Millennials may be young, but they are not stupid. They know when they are not being given the truth, when their longing for real answers is not being met. The church must speak the truth that satisfies the cravings of the Millennial heart, and not

succumb to the temptation to substitute the pabulum of political correctness disguised as church outreach.

If current trends continue, future generations will substantially abandon the concept of the traditional family as a relic of the past. The real danger is not a specific generation, but the increasing loss of understanding and valuing of the family as a foundation for society. We must transform how Millennials think if we hope to preserve truth for future generations and promote strong, intact marriages and families to create a society that is stable, secure, and strong.

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