

GIs, Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials and Homelanders: Embracing Our Generational Differences

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“Why are these young pharmacists so different?” “Why can’t my teenaged grandson put down his cell phone and actually talk to me?” “Why does this new generation put more emphasis on home and family than on the value of hard work?” If you have ever asked these questions, then you have encountered the Millennial generation. The Millennials are young, energetic, positive minded

overachievers who are entering the workforce in droves, but not joining faith communities at the same rate as previous generations. Think the Baby Boomer generation was large? Think again – there are actually more Millennials in the US than Baby Boomers. To fully understand these new faces in the workplace, it’s important to appreciate that generational differences have occurred in a cyclic manner for hundreds of years.

Each new generation is born during an approximately 20 year period. A generation is shaped by shared experiences that occurred while coming of age, and members possess shared values and behaviors influenced by parenting, education, politics, social and cultural issues. Characteristics of generations influence the way that a generational cohort spends money, views authority, approaches professional life, and deals with matters of faith. Each generation emerges differently from the previous one, which is guaranteed to make older generations scratch their heads and wonder “why these young folks are so different from us”.

In their book, *Generations*, Strauss and Howe describe four cycles of generations that have repeated themselves in American history since the 1500s¹. These cycles are shaped by whether a generation is faced with a crisis or an awakening, and include four different archetypes of generations including artists, prophets, nomads and heroes. There are currently six generations of Americans alive today, including the GI generation, Traditionalists, Baby

Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Homelanders (Table 1).

GI Generation

The GI Generation was born between 1901 and 1924. Sixty-three million strong, this generation included fearless problem solvers and innovators.¹ The GIs were America’s first astronauts, creators of vaccines and battleships, and winners of World War II. President Roosevelt declared that this generation had a rendezvous with destiny, and Tom Brokaw proclaimed them to be “The Greatest Generation”.² During their formative years, infant mortality fell by 50%, penicillin was discovered, and the Model T made its debut¹. The GIs were children when the Boy Scouts were founded, adults when Pearl Harbor was bombed, middle-aged when the first man walked on the moon, and elders during the Reagan years. Pre-eminent members of the GI Generation included Billy Graham, Ann Landers, and President John F. Kennedy. Ninety-eight percent of pharmacists during this generation were men.³

Traditionalists

Forty-nine million Traditionalists were born between 1925 and 1942.¹ They came of age during the Great Depression and World War II, and have been described as patriotic, loyal, and good caretakers of social institutions.¹ Traditionalists value hard work and self-sacrifice and typically worked for one institution until retirement.¹ If Traditionalist men were too young to fight in World War II, they likely went to war later during

| Generation | Birthyears | Influential Members | Current Age | Generational Cycle ¹ |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GI | 1901-1924 | John F. Kennedy, Billy Graham | Very elderly | Hero |
| Traditionalists | 1925-1942 | Colin Powell | Elders | Artist |
| Baby Boomers | 1943-1965 | Bill Clinton, Rick Warren, Bill Gates | At or approaching retirement | Prophet |
| Generation X | 1965-1980 | Princess Diana | Mid-life | Nomad |
| Millennials | 1980-2000 | Mark Zuckerberg | Twenties | Hero |
| Homelanders | 2000 - present | To be determined | Children | Artist |

Table 1

the Korean War. In fact, over 50% of men in this generation are war veterans.¹ Fathers were the breadwinners, and respect for hierarchy and authority were hallmarks of the work environment. Children were expected to be “seen and not heard”, and adults embraced their responsibilities and the need to do without during difficult economic times. Pharmacists were mostly men, and it was not until decades later that women in pharmacy school approached 50%.³ This generation contributed to the increase in the helping professions including medicine, teaching, and ministry.¹ Pre-eminent Traditionalist members included Martin Luther King, Jr., Sandra Day O’Conner, and Elvis Presley.

Baby Boomers

After World War II, surviving war veterans returned home and many attended college thanks to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill). More babies were born in the US in 1946 than any previous year, heralding the beginning of the “baby boom” that lasted through approximately 1965.¹ Businesses grew, cities expanded into suburbs, and families bought new cars, stereos, and television sets. The size of this generation (79 million) increased the demand for housing, schools, and healthcare throughout the country.¹ Children

watched “The Mickey Mouse Club” on television and teenagers danced to American Bandstand.

Significant social changes occurred in the 1960s as Baby Boomers were coming of age. Martin Luther King, Jr., shared his vision for social change, and women were encouraged to enter the workplace and to find professional fulfillment outside of the home. Church attendance increased by almost 30%.¹ Other influences included the death of President Kennedy, development of President Johnson’s Great Society, proliferation of rock groups including the Beatles and the Doors, the Vietnam War, Woodstock and hippie culture.

Due to significant changes in family dynamics, social upheaval, and political changes, the Baby Boomers emerged differently from their more conservative parents. Boomers questioned social norms and rules, were more tolerant of diversity, and had less respect for authority than previous generations. The value placed on wealth, materialism, and youth increased. The number of female pharmacists increased during the late 1960s as pharmacy was considered a “respectable” and “lucrative” career, and the pharmacy degree advanced to a five year Bachelor of Science degree. Both President Obama and President Clinton are Baby Boomers, along with Steve Jobs and Donald Trump.

Generation X

Generation Xers were born between approximately 1965 and 1980. Generation X was smaller in size compared to other generations and rang in with 46,000 million members.¹ As Baby Boomer mothers entered the workplace, Generation Xers were typically alone after school at home and learned the important skills of independence and problem solving as “latchkey” children.⁵ Considered the “MTV Generation”, Xers grew up watching music videos and a young, Republican Michael J. Fox on the popular TV show, “Family Ties.” Generation X was originally stereotyped as a slacker generation, but many Xers evolved into entrepreneurs and innovators.⁵ The Generation X work ethic has been described as ambitious, self-reliant, skeptical, financially savvy, diverse, and less respectful of authority than previous generations.⁵ The Xers were the first computer generation, as video games, handheld calculators, cell phones, and home computers became commonplace. Xers watched their parents suffer through downsizing, divorces, and layoffs, and wondered why their parents were working so hard.⁵ Consequently, this generation sought jobs that paid well and enabled them to leave work behind at the end of the workday to focus on

their personal and family lives. Gen Xers were the first generation to value work life balance.⁵ Political and social influences included the US hostage crisis in Iran, long lines at the gas pumps, the explosion of the *Challenger*, the marriage of Princess Diana and Prince Charles, and the Persian Gulf War. The clinical pharmacy movement began in earnest, and Hepler and Strand published their pivotal paper describing opportunities in pharmaceutical care.⁶

Millennials

The Millennials are considered the largest generation in United States history to date. Born from approximately 1980 to 2000, they were dubbed the “Millennials” because they came of age at the beginning of a new millennium.⁷ Millennials are considered upbeat, team-oriented, close to their parents, and confident about their future.⁸ Parents of Millennials were heavily involved in their children’s upbringing, and have been criticized for “helicopter parenting”.

The first to grow up with mobile digital technology and the internet, Millennials have high expectations for speed, efficiency and convenience in their personal and professional lives.⁹ Millennials are the most diverse generation, as over 30% are minorities. They communicate readily through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They are more highly educated than previous generations. Millennials who reached adulthood during the economic downturn of the late 2000’s were challenged by un- or underemployment. Many carry significant debt and have moved home with their parents simply to survive. Religious Millennials favor church traditions and community building over personal spirituality.^{8,10} Millennials prefer to work in teams,

and appreciate consistent feedback, clearly defined expectations, and mentoring.⁸ In childhood athletic events, every child received a trophy regardless of achievement, leading to the premise that Millennials are “high maintenance” employees and expect reward without the effort.¹⁰ Millennial children were often overscheduled with multiple social, academic, athletic, and arts events. Events that shaped them included the Columbine shootings, the impeachment of President Clinton, and the Oklahoma City bombings.¹¹ According to the generational cycle outlined by Neil Howe and William Strauss, Millennials assume the archetype of Hero (as did the GI Generation), and are expected to be the next generation to solve significant social and political problems in America.^{1,12} During this era, the Bachelor of Science degree transitioned to the Doctor of Pharmacy curriculum and postgraduate residency programs flourished. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, is an influential Millennial.

Homelanders

The Homelanders are currently the youngest generation and were born in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11. The Homelander years are loosely defined as beginning in 2000, and should continue through approximately 2020. Homelanders have experienced childhood during a period of economic decline and are the first generation to grow up with an African American President. The parenting style of Homelanders has been highly protective and, at times, suffocating.⁸ Also called the “Plurals,” members of this newest generation are expected to be the most ethnically diverse generation, and are the first generation where Caucasians are not expected to be the racial majority.¹³

Homelanders are being influenced by technology and social media, and are often raised in non-traditional families. In the generational cycle proposed by Howe and Strauss, Homelanders assume the archetype of Artist born during crisis, and are expected to be characteristically similar to the Traditionalist generation.¹

Today’s Homelander students are often educated in small groups and teams using classroom technology including iPads, and like the Millennials before them are typically involved in multiple curricular activities. Educational techniques of the day include flipped classrooms, a style of education that incorporates pre-class preparation with videos or readings followed by problem solving and concept application in the classroom.¹⁴ This use of active learning styles in education makes it unlikely that future Homelander pharmacists will embrace passive learning styles in their professional training or in continuing education programs.

Instead of going to war as their Traditionalist grandparents or great grandparents did, Homelander children are highly engaged in video games that depict battles while wirelessly connecting with their friends in other locations who fight along with them. Homelander predecessors practiced fire drills in schools, whereas this youngest generation now practices lockdown drills in preparation of potential school shootings. Because this generation includes current teenagers as well as future offspring of Millennials, much about them has yet to be determined. However, they have recently been described as hopeful and proud, and girls in this age group have the expectation that they will go to college.¹³

Implications of Generational Differences Healthcare

The future of healthcare is uncertain. The Accountable Care Act (ACA) and the movement towards team-based care in patient centered medical homes and accountable care organizations creates significant opportunities for innovative pharmacy practice models to advance. Population health registries document quality and electronic health records facilitate communication across patient transitions, and are important components of healthcare reform. Millennials are well-suited to tackle current issues in health care because they are technologically savvy and desire to work in teams. These young pharmacists, along with mid-life Generation Xers and retiring Baby Boomers, will be responsible for ensuring that the profession of pharmacy is ready for ACA and that practice evolves along with the changing healthcare environment to meet the needs of an aging population.

Women in the Workplace

Over the past 100 years, the profession has become one that is made up primarily of women. The book by Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In*,¹⁵ notes that there is a disproportionate number of women serving in leadership roles.

Moreover, the profession of pharmacy is faced with a shortage of leaders for the profession. As Baby Boomers retire, it will be important for Generation X and Millennial women to step into leadership roles. Generation X and Baby Boomer professional women frequently struggle with achieving work life balance and often feel guilty about childrearing whether they are at home or at work. Millennial women not only seek work life balance but expect it, and are called to become the generation of women in pharmacy who define the boundaries of work life integration successfully.

Religion

Many have expressed concern that Millennials are not joining churches as previous generations did. A 2012 Gallup poll noted that 77% of Americans identify themselves as “Christian”,¹⁶ yet only 40% of Americans attend church regularly or say that religion is important to them in their daily lives.¹⁷ Americans are considered least religious at age 23, and most religious at age 80.¹⁷ In the book *God is Alive and Well*, author Frank Newport suggests that Baby Boomers will become more religious as they age, which could have a trickle-down effect on younger generations.¹⁸ Ra-

chel Held Evans, author of *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, suggests that churches are missing the mark as they seek to engage Millennials in communities of faith.¹⁰ Millennial worshippers perceive the church to be too political, exclusive, old-fashioned and unconcerned with social justice. She recommends that churches worry less about offering lattes and hip music to draw in younger parishioners, and should instead focus on what the church stands for and not what it is against.¹⁰

Conclusion

The popular group 4Him sings that “I must be a light for future generations”. Each of us as a pharmacist of faith must seek to embrace our generational differences in the workplace, and serve as a light for Christ as we care for patients and lead our organizations. Each generation comes to the workplace with different life experiences and expectations. It’s important to realize that no generation should be considered superior to another, for as the Psalm 139 tells us, “we are {all} fearfully and wonderfully made”. Still wondering who this different generation is? They are really just like you were – new pharmacists starting out who are trying to find their place in this world.

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