Millennial pedagogy: Towards understanding millennial myths and identity

Bryan Alan Lutz
Iowa State University

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Millennial pedagogy: Towards understanding millennial myths and identity

by

Bryan A. Lutz

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Program of Study Committee:
Abby M. Dubisar, Major Professor
  David R. Russell
  Geoffrey Sauer
  Richard Benjamin Crosby
  Gloria J. Betcher
  Mani Mina

The student author and the program of study committee are solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. iii

CHAPTER ONE – MILLENNIALS, METHODS, AND EMBRACING SOCIAL AND GLOBAL TURNS IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION ........................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO – MILLENNIALS, GENERATIONAL STEREOTYPES, AND MARGINALIZATION ........................................................................................................................................................................ 11

CHAPTER THREE – MILLENNIALS AS MYTH: THE ENTITLEMENT GENERATION AND THE DIGITAL NATIVE AS PART OF A MYTHOLOGY OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 45

CHAPTER FOUR – MYTH, IDENTITY, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 89

CHAPTER FIVE – ENACTING MILLENNIAL: IDENTITY, MEMES, TUMBLR, AND THEIR ROLE IN CONFRONTING MYTHS ...................................................................................................................................................... 112

CHAPTER SIX – CONFRONTING MYTHS AND ENACTING MILLENNIAL IDENTITY IN PRAXIS ........................................................................................................................................................................................................ 156

CONCLUSION .............................................................................................................................................. 181
ABSTRACT

Scholars who have embraced the social (Berlin, 1988) and the global (Hesford, 2006) turns in rhetoric and composition are seeking comparative-historical frames for understanding how communication mediates social roles within sites of conflict. Since the publication of Millennials Rising: The Next Generation, it is my observation that communication about Millennials is a significant site of conflict in the United States. While scholars in rhetoric have explored how age bias affects non-traditional students who enter college later in adulthood (Bowen, 2011; Crow, 2006; Grabill and Pigg, 2012; Swacha, 2017), I am curious about age bias against the young, where scholars and professionals are using communication to construct knowledge about their relationship to Millennials in academic and professional contexts. From this curiosity, four questions inspired my dissertation: 1) How are Millennials discussed in academic and professional contexts? 2) How does millennial function rhetorically in business contexts and in rhetoric and composition? 3) What methods can be devised to examine and compare communications about generational differences? 4) How do Millennials define themselves? In this dissertation I seek answers to these questions.

I first discuss how generations are named in the United States, and show that stereotypes exist in academic and professional contexts that marginalize Millennials. I then use the rhetorical concepts of myth and identity to examine corpora of texts in an effort to build a comparative-historical frame for understanding how millennial functions rhetorically as an intersection of age. This work is important, I argue, because while scholars have done much work examining conflict with regard to sex, gender, race, and ability, scholars have not sufficiently engaged how students’ age can marginalize the young while privileging earlier generations. I conclude by imagining how myth and identity can comprise a method for examining inter-generational conflict in the composition classroom.
CHAPTER ONE – MILLENNIALS, METHODS, AND EMBRACING SOCIAL AND GLOBAL TURNS IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

As both an activist and an instructor of composition, I frequently work with students in the millennial age group. In our casual moments, these Millennials tell me stories about how their instructors, managers, or supervisors make assumptions about them simply because they are Millennials. These assumptions, Millennials feel, stereotype them in pernicious ways that affect how successful they can be in academic and professional contexts. As an older millennial scholar of rhetoric and composition, and as a graduate student, instructor, and co-administrator of ISUComm’s learning management systems, my body exists both within and outside these conversations, and my experience corroborates Millennials’ suspicions. What I hear from fellow instructors and faculty is that their millennial students can use any technology with ease, and yet Millennials’ aptitude with technology means they are endlessly distracted by it, if not subjugated to it. Moreover, I have worked with university administrators who feel like students’ expectations from education stem from Millennials’ feelings of entitlement, where students want everything available to them easily, quickly, and without compromise. The more aware I became of the commonality of millennial stereotypes, the more curious I became to this tension between Millennials and previous generations. It is my curiosity about the rhetoric of inter-generational conflict that inspires my dissertation.

Coined by Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book *Millennials Rising*, Millennials are defined as children born between the late 1970s and early 2000s. My dissertation examines Millennials as a topic and a site of rhetorical inquiry. I aim to fill a gap in understanding because while scholars in rhetoric have explored how age bias affects non-traditional students who enter college later in adulthood (Crow, 2006; Bowen, 2011; Grabill and Pigg, 2012; Swacha, 2017), I
am curious about age bias against the young, where scholars and professionals are using communication to construct knowledge about their relationship to Millennials in academic and professional contexts. From this curiosity, four questions inspired my dissertation: 1) How are Millennials discussed in academic and professional contexts? 2) How does millennial function rhetorically in business communication and in rhetoric and composition? 3) What methods can be devised to examine and compare communications about generational differences? 4) How do Millennials define themselves? In this dissertation I seek answers to these questions.

In this dissertation, I align my work within the social and global turns in rhetoric and composition studies. The social turn, as defined by James Berlin (1988), argues that rhetoric and composition should question definitions, values, and stakes as a way to interrogate the driving ideologies behind arguments and understand how communication socially constructs knowledge (p. 488-90). The global turn, as defined by Wendy Hesford (2006), argues that rhetoric and composition should work toward a “comparative-historical frame and a broader understanding of culture, text, context, and the public sphere than what traditional rhetorical and ethnographic criticism provides” (p. 791). A comparative-historical frame is an ethical commitment to “move away from the analysis of single, discrete texts” in order to study “transformations, transnationalism, [and] communities both real and imagined” and in ways that attend to “historical, cultural, and transnational identity categories and transformations” (Hesford, 2006, p.792). Hesford and Schell (2008) later argue that “given the current national context, which includes the abandonment of many of our civil liberties, the government's increased surveillance of its citizens, and a far-reaching national militarized culture, we must also consider how democratic discourses disguise imperialist practices” (p. 469). They particularly wish to

For my project in particular, Berlin’s call creates scholarly space for investigating how generations are defined, what values inform those definitions, and what is at stake for Millennials when they are defined by previous generations. In the tradition of the social turn, my project questions shifting definitions of millennial over time and with an attention to the ideologies behind generational identities and the stakes for the millennial generation. Hesford’s call, in complement, creates scholarly space for creating a comparative-historical frame for ethically and methodically examining sites of inter-generational conflict. In the tradition of the global turn, while my project is not explicitly transnational, I engage communities both real and imagined while examining multiple texts and their transformations within digital spaces. I also use theories from postcolonial theorists, queer theorists, and postmodern and poststructural theorists, with an attention to the imperialist impulse to ascribe identities as deficient, thereby attending to how identities are defined and how definitions of millennial define the generation as deficient in academic and professional contexts. At the level of examining conflict, I understand the social and global turns in composition as an ethical commitment to comparing and scrutinizing public communication across time and across cultures, thinking critically about how communication constructs knowledge about, and too often without, due sympathy for different people, organizations, and groups.

The social and global turns are about ethics, but also about methods, as scholars working within the global turns are working to devise methods for examining communication and conflict between people and groups. In their article “Manifesting a Future for Comparative Rhetoric,” Mao et al. (2015) chronicle the writing of the Rhetoric Society of America’s 2013 Manifesto,
where the Society commits itself to searching for methods necessary for examining meanings of
the past and the present, embracing different grids of intelligibility, and discovering and/or
recovering under-represented and under-recognized cultures and their discursive practices. They
define “Comparative rhetoric” as one such method, which borrows language from Hesford’s
comparative-historical frame and which “examines communicative practices across time and
space by attending to historicity, specificity, self-reflexivity, processual predisposition, and
imagination (p. 273). Mao et al. conclude with both a question and a call to action: to adapt
comparative-historical frames to their contexts, and to perpetually ask “how should rhetoric,
composition, and communication scholars go about pursuing comparative rhetoric in ways that
are ethical, robust, and dialogic and when border-crossings of all kinds are unfolding on an
unprecedented scale?” (p. 274).

Answering this call, rhetoric and composition scholars are devising methods for
comparing and scrutinizing communication at sites of difference and conflict. Megan Schoen
(2012) cites global turns as the impetus for studying non-Western rhetoric and adapts her method
to the site of inquiry. She writes,

My methodological approach relies heavily on LuMing Mao’s application of the emic/etic
distinction from linguistics, whereby the comparative rhetoric scholar begins with an
inductive approach that attempts to examine a non-Western context first on its own terms
(emically) before turning toward comparisons with other rhetorical approaches (etically),
(Schoen, 2012, p. 286)

In practice, Schoen emically examines the ethnic and cultural significance of Botswana’s
rhetorical traditions before etically analyzing them using traditional rhetorical critique. She
concluded by arguing that her approach reveals a “deep and abundant wellspring of rhetorical
history” in Batswana “as rich as any other” (pp. 271, 286).
Timothy R Dougherty (2015) embraced global turns by foregrounding gender and transnational feminist rhetorics. He argues that transnational feminist rhetoricians in particular “have called for a territorialized and grounded sense of the transnational movement of rhetoric—one that pays attention to the ways that rhetoric must be transcoded to fit its encounter with the particular constraints imposed by national publics, discourses, and laws” (p. 364). He then devises a method for studying speeches through careful analysis of the 1866 Irish Nationalist Fenian movement, otherwise known as “the doomed rebellion” for Irish independence. Jessica Enoch (2010) embraced global turns by examining the confluence of civic engagement and online activism. She examines the site TakingITGlobal for its power to mediate social roles, and argues that examining the activists’ website afforded an the opportunity to develop heuristics for examining online activism, which “revitalizes thinking about how students might ‘go public’ in both online and offline spaces. And it troubles ideas about the traditional rhetorical practice in which an individual author composes a single document for a specific audience” (Enoch, 2010, p. 167). Within scholarship of the social and global turns, I hear an ethical commitment to respecting difference—be it ethnicity, gender, or ability—and a methodological commitment to adapting comparative-historical frames for analyzing global rhetorics.

As a scholar who embraces social and global turns in rhetoric and composition study, I have an ethical interest in conflicts past and present, and how identities intersect, complement, and conflict, particularly in regard to regard to race, gender, sexuality, ability, and age. I am interested in how these identities function within symbolic modes and media while ascribing privilege to some and marginalizing Others. In short, I am dedicated to understanding identity and its politics as a global rhetorical phenomenon. And as a teacher, scholar, and activist, when I hear Millennials express exasperation with their instructors and bosses who make assumptions
about Millennials based on their age, I am sympathetic to their experience and inspired to understand the rhetoric surrounding Millennials’ lived experience. By studying Millennials, I am grounding my scholarly orientation within a particular site of conflict. My purpose is to reorient the conversation to acknowledge age as a contested site of students’ identity. In this effort I wish to bring two key issues to the fore that have thus far received little attention. First, that the rhetorical effects of age are mediated by myths that, in Millennials’ case, compromise their success in college and beyond. Second, scholarship regarding Millennials has not engaged how the students identify themselves both in relation to and apart from older generations, enacted through the available modes and media used to consume and produce arguments.

I do not mean to suggest that Millennials have not been discussed in rhetoric and composition. But when scholars have discussed Millennials, they do so implicitly and only with regard to students’ relationship with technology. For example, the TYCA-West (2016) conference proceedings state: “As millennials, the majority of our students have grown up in a world inundated with information, where anything can be Googled at any time.” Scholars have long discussed that students of the millennial age group are vulnerable to becoming passive consumers of technology they use (Duffelmeyer, 2002; Manovich, 2001). Indeed, much scholarship in rhetoric and composition revolves around Millennials as “digital natives,” a term that scholars have conflated with Millennials as well as a number of other generational markers such as “Generation Y,” or “Generation M” (Vie, 2007). While digital natives are sometimes presumed to be inherently apt at using digital technologies, scholars have warned against embracing generalizations about student generations (Selwyn, 2009). Still it is Millennials’ relationship to technology that gets the most attention, and with no discussion of how assumptions about Millennials might affect their success in college or in the work force.
To me, the absence of discussions about Millennials is alarming because there is also a growing body of literature in professional contexts, where authors espouse that Millennials are the entitlement generation. As an entitlement generation, professionals believe that Millennials have been spoiled by being told they are “stars in their own special story” (Urban, 2013). Similarly, some academics believe that Millennials have not been significantly challenged because of economic divestments in education (Arum and Roska, 2010). Stereotypes are not something that rhetoric and composition scholars explicitly study. Methods of rhetorical criticism do not often involve experiments that evaluate bias within controlled environments. But the social and global turns in rhetoric and composition creates scholarly space to understand how texts can be used to enact biases in communication contexts. To meet this challenge of analyzing inter-generational conflict, I adapted my own methodology for interrogating generational differences, where I combined the rhetorical concepts of myth and identity to analyze texts discussing conflicts between Millennials and older scholars and professionals. Using myth and identity, I interrogate definitions, values, and assumptions, and build a comparative-historical frame for understanding Millennials within generation conflicts, thereby interrogating how arguments about Millennials have moved beyond benign sentiments like “kids these days” into a marginalizing force. Ultimately, my dissertation is an effort to orient myself within social and global turns and devise methods for examining communication about Millennials and understanding how these communications compare historically, culturally, publically, and globally. And by bringing inter-generational conflict into view, I will argue that composition instructors and students can interrogate the term *Millennial* as a myth and an identity in necessary and productive ways.
In Chapter Two, I review influential works about the naming generations and discuss common patterns between how different generations have been ascribed attributes and deficits based on epochs of social and technological change. I then borrow from social psychology to define two millennial stereotypes: the digital native and the entitlement generation. The digital native stereotypes Millennials as tech-savvy, social, imaginative, adjustable, and adept at multitasking, while the entitlement generation stereotypes Millennials as spoiled by progressive shifts in education and parenting that rewards merit for effort rather than achievement. In the vein of social and global turns in composition studies, I position myself to examine how symbolic modes and media work to ascribe privilege to older generations while marginalizing Millennials. I argue that the stereotypes of the digital native and the entitlement generation function as a way for many consulting companies, businesses, and universities to profit from stereotyping Millennials.

In Chapter Three, I use mythic criticism to analyze two corpora of texts discussing generational difference. As a method of rhetorical critique, myth moves beyond discussions of stereotypes and looks to how narratives of generational differences use stereotypes, archetypes, and heroes to justify structures and deal with crisis (Rowland, 1990, pp. 103 - 104). I use myth to analyze two corpora of texts representing academics and professionals in order to build a cannon of texts and a broader comparative-historical frame for understanding how stereotypes of generations past endure as stereotypes for Millennials in the present. I argue that the digital native and the entitlement generation are more than stereotypes; moreover, they are part of millennial myths that elevate the status of educators and professionals to the role of hero within a mythology of generational differences.
In Chapter Four, I place myth and identity into productive tension, and synthesize postmodern and poststructuralist theories of identity into a concept for analyzing online texts. While mythic criticisms can explain why older generations draw on a canon of myths to define Millennials in problematic ways, the concept of identity, conversely, can explain how Millennials understand themselves. Since I understand Millennials as a marginalized group, authors reviewed in this chapter discuss identity from marginalized perspectives, including Zan Meyer Goncalves, Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, bell hooks, Raymond Oenbring, Jonathan Alexander, Benedict Anderson. I argue that identity has three units of analysis—the strategically essentialized, the performed, and the performative—that comprise identity as a method of critique and as a strategy for building imagined communities for the purpose of combating millennial myths. I conclude by arguing for the ethics of analyzing online texts.

In Chapter Five, I argue that Tumblr is a rich site for inquiry, because it is a social networking site particularly popular with users of the millennial age group. I then align my methods with Schoen and Mao’s emic and etic approach to examining Tumblr posts. I then review the three units of analysis for using identity as a concept of rhetorical critique before organizing the corpus emically, letting patterns emerge from the data collected and appreciating the texts on their own terms, before I use identity as etic approach for analyzing millennial enactments of identity. I then theorize how Millennials enact their identity in response to myths. I argue that Millennial identity is essentialized for the way it centers knowledge in their embodied experience as they interact with previous generations within academic and professional contexts; it is a performance for the way Millennials satirize stereotypes, a strategy that helps them achieve catharsis; and it is performative for the ways Millennials both centralize and decentralize their experience, building an ethos that is self-referential and that challenges
previous generations to revise their understandings of Millennials and themselves. In this way, Millennials use their identity to (re)define the term *millennial* for them as a means to resist the mythology of generational differences.

In Chapter Six, I argue that since rhetoric and composition values the pedagogical application of theory, composition instructors can adopt *Millennial Pedagogy* as unit that can be taught in college-level composition courses. I argue that Millennial Pedagogy foregrounds the methods necessary to interrogate texts that account for when generations collide in academic and professional contexts. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that Tumblr, to paraphrase Enoch’s work with web activism, is a site “replete with perfect pedagogical practices we should replicate” (Enoch, 2010, p. 167). But I do suggest that Millennial Pedagogy can bring inter-generational conflicts into view using methods of rhetorical critique. In other words, Chapter Five is an imagining of Millennial Pedagogy where composition instructors and students can interrogate the term Millennial as a myth and an identity in necessary and productive ways.
CHAPTER TWO – MILLENNIALS, GENERATIONAL STEREOTYPES, AND MARGINALIZATION

In this chapter, I will interrogate the definitions, values, and stakes for Millennials in order to move toward a comparative-historical frame for understanding generational differences. The naming of generations is largely a 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century Western phenomenon. In the United States, generations have been named by correlating the birthrates and lifespans of its citizens with significant economic and social changes. The first generation to be named was the Silent or Greatest Generation. According to the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}, the Greatest Generation (reaching adulthood between 1933 – ’49) is defined by social changes wrought by the first two world wars and the economic changes that arose from American industrialism. The subsequent Baby Boomers (born between 1946 – ’64) were defined in socio-economic terms as a population spike that occurred after government investments in the American middle class. Later, Generation X born (born between 1965 – ’78) was likewise defined by the successes of global capitalism and progressive changes in communication and culture.

But curiously, however, comparing these dictionary definitions reveals that naming Generation X involved something more than socioeconomic changes. In addition, Generation X was defined by presumed attributes that provided characterization for that generation. Generation X was characterized as “disaffected, directionless, or irresponsible, and reluctant to participate in society” (\textit{Oxford English Dictionary}). Archived newspapers and magazines show how Generation X was at one time the subject of popular media, as authors debated how to save the Generation X “boomerang generation” who were not as economically successful as their Boomer parents had been. Later in my dissertation, I will show that Baby Boomers too were also
described with similar attributes, but here I will note that those attributes were not included in the dictionary definition.

Two important points can be gleaned from this brief history of naming generations. First, the naming of generations involves defining attributes of the generation in addition to identifying epochs of economic and social change. Second, the naming of generations emerged from conversations happening in American media that defined a social exigency. This exigency was a moral imperative where previous generations sought to save younger generations from themselves. It is my sense that these two themes are consistent within the literature regarding Millennials.

The naming of Millennials originates with Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book *Millennials Rising: The Next Generation*. At the time of publication, Howe and Strauss defined Millennials as those born after 1982 and that have experienced rapid socioeconomic changes wrought by digital technologies and global capitalism. Howe and Strauss describe Millennials as the generation with an aptitude for using technology coupled with an inherited desire to make positive socio-economic changes. They further argue that while Millennials possess positive attributes, they still need guidance to achieve their potential, a moral imperative that places educators and parents in a role where they “instill in this generation a new institutional culture and sense of belonging, beyond what those adults feel for themselves” (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 258).

Since that time, the moniker *millennial* has functioned as an umbrella term for a number of different markers used in scholarship, such as Generation Y, Generation M, Generation MySpace, the Digital Native, or the Net Generation (Vie, 2007, p. 10). While alternative names such as Gen Y and Digital Native are common, the term *Millennials* is most prominent in the
public sphere of the United States. At the time of writing of this dissertation, a Google search of the term revealed over 28 million hits, which is as much as the combined results when searching for Baby Boomers and Generation X. The prominence of Millennials as a moniker for this age group is further evidenced by the fact that while writing this dissertation, Millennials were identified as a target voting population for the 2016 presidential election.

_Millennial_ is a contested term, but a synthesis of scholarship can demarcate an age range of children born between the late 1970s and early 2000s. This range may seem too wide for some readers, and history may revise this range in the future. Indeed, Generation X was often conflated with the name “boomlet” or “boomerang generation” until discussions of the Generation X stabilized in later decades. But this operational definition—children born between the late 1970s and early 2000s—is needed to clearly define what I mean by _millennial_ in this dissertation. In addition, I define _inter-generational conflict_ as conflict between Millennials and these previous generations. I define inter-generational conflict in this way because many of the authors expressing alarm about Millennials in academic and professional contexts are of either the baby boomer generation, or Generation X.

Because Millennials are defined by social epochs such as the rise of the Internet and the increasingly availability of computers, Millennials are difficult to discern from their supposed successor _Generation Z_, which is defined as the generation raised entirely within epoch of social change wrought by the increasing availability of the Internet and mobile technologies such as phones and tablets (Margaryan et al., 2011, p. 429). Likewise, Howe and Strauss named Millennials as the generation to bring about radical social and economic change because they embrace the technological changes associated with social networking and global commerce. As I will show, a number of web articles and websites claim that Millennials are adversely affected by
a number of economic and social changes wrought by computers and the Internet, and it is the attributes of affected youth that previous generations regard as alarming.

Why examine Millennials? Stereotypes and the Business of Naming Generations
Stereotypes are a concept in social psychology that explains why humans develop generalized views about social groups (McGarty et al., 2002). Stereotypes involve having deeply held personal beliefs about the habits, motivations, and behaviors of other individuals and groups. Stereotypes are in some ways a natural cognitive process made by humans, which is to say that stereotypes are not always fictions used to cause harm (McGarty et al., 2002). But stereotypes can be harmful when those with authority make decisions and judgment based on stereotypes, or when the targeted group internalizes stereotypes as an essentialized part of their person (Yzerbyt and Rogier, 2001). Conversations in education examine the many ways in which the threat of stereotypes can inhibit students’ performance, particularly when those stereotypes are internalized as an identity that is not academic (Aronson et al., 2002; Cole et al. 2007). Internalized stereotypes also have wide-ranging implications for persons both young an old, because studies have shown how internalized stereotypes can affect physical and psychological health (Chan et al., 2012).

Of interest to me are they ways in which stereotypes function as a marginalizing force against Millennials. As I will show, there are two stereotypes about Millennials that are prominent in academic and professional contexts: Millennials as digital natives and Millennials as the entitlement generation. Consistent again with building a comparative-historical frame that interrogates definitions, stakes, and ideologies at sites of inter-generation conflict, I will trace the etymology of millennial stereotypes before suggesting how these stereotypes function as a
marginalizing force. Tracing the etymology of digital natives and the generation of entitlement will be the first step toward answering the first question of this dissertation: how have Millennials been understood in academic and professional settings?

Stereotypes and the Marginalization of Millennials
Perhaps beginning with Howe and Strauss, Millennials have become big business. Writing for The Chronicle of Higher Education, Dr. Eric Hoover (2009) accounts for a number of authors and consulting firms making substantial profits by advising universities about millennial stereotypes: “In an era when the wants of young consumers have become a fixation for colleges and businesses alike, these unlikely entrepreneurs have fed a world with a bottomless craving for labels.” In this way, stereotyping Millennials based on their needs becomes one way that professionals and academics justify their work with Millennials. They do so while sometimes embracing the naming of student generations as a way to better fulfill the needs of their students. For example, Bentley University launched its PreparedU initiative in 2014, which promised a Millennial-focused curriculum accommodating the unique needs of the millennial generation. The project launched with a Bloomberg radio special, where president of the university, Dr. Gloria Larson, stated the purpose of the discussion was to negotiate the responsibilities amongst stakeholders in industry and education. She states, “employers can do better; colleges can do a better job; Millennials themselves can do a better job of making sure they’re workplace prepared.” It is in this last clause—“Millennials themselves can do better”—that Dr. Larson adds vocal emphasis and an emphatic nod, emphasizing that millennial students have the most responsibility. So while Dr. Larson seems to embrace Millennials as a class of students with unique needs that Bentley can work to better serve, she verbally and nonverbally betrays her
view that it is Millennials who must bear the majority of the labor, suggesting that they are
deficient in ways needed to meet the expectations of academics and professionals.

The PreparedU discussion exemplifies the kind of discord that can arise when discussing
Millennials, and it deserves special attention for how millennial attributes are defined in
contradictory ways. When Dr. Larson says Millennials can do better, what I hear in Larson’s
voice is the need to define the millennial generation as substantially deficient both in ability and
in motivation as a means to justify their needing of an education by institutions like Bentley.
While Dr. Larson’s framing focused on placing responsibility for success on Millennials, the two
professionals on the panel shared the enthusiasm of Howe and Strauss. On the panel were two
CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, HubSpot CEO Brian Halligan and BNY Mellon Wealth
Management CEO Lawrence Hughes. Both CEOs describe their love (their word) for Millennials
and their belief that Millennials’ enthusiasm, social skills, and tech skills are changing the way
they do business. Halligan goes as far as to say he “leverages Millennials” as a means to
modernize his company’s marketing to meet the demands of online global commerce. Hughes
talked of a “reverse mentor program” within BNY Mellon, where Millennials teach previous
generations of employees how to do the “tech stuff” of their business. More than any single
attribute, Halligan and Hughes stressed that Millennials want a clear career path, they want ways
to add their own “personal branding to the office” space, and that Millennials feel entitled to
have their work be purposeful and ethical. He says, “[Millennials] want profit and people and
planet [...] they want it all.” What I hear from Halligan and Hughes is an appreciation for
Millennials potential contributions to industry couple with a dedication to meeting Millennials’
需求ing expectations.
This tension between enthusiasm for Millennials and the need to typify Millennials as deficient in ways that cause inter-generational conflict is a consistent theme in academic and professional contexts. Bentley’s program would sound too familiar to Millennials, as it promised to link students with leaders of industry as a way to pipeline students directly into the workforce. A marketing video for Bentley showcases self-identified Millennials as part of Bentley’s initiative toward research-based preparedness for professional contexts. Worthy of note is that while these anecdotes come from self-identified Millennials, or at least students invited by the university to speak on behalf of the millennial age group, the voices in the marketing video are questionable because they unproblematically align with the stereotypes of Millennials. In the absence of a fuller range of millennial experience, I hear an opportunity to critically engage with millennial stereotypes.

The Digital Native
The word “native” originates from the Latin word meaning “related to birth.” The simplest definition of the word denotes an individual’s relationship to a particular geographic location, while also connoting that the individual is both familiar with the location and has adapted their way of life to that location. The history of the word has roots in colonial racism, where “nativity” was used either to exoticize the indigenous population, or as a way to typify the inhabitants of non-European lands as deficient in ways that justified European imperialism and economic control. During the colonial period in the United States, for example, “native” denoted the indigenous people of the Americas as being the first inhabitants of the land. But as the Oxford English Dictionary shows, the connotation was in binary opposition to white Anglo-Saxon settlers who defined themselves as “pioneers”. Reviewing quotes of native archived within the Oxford English Dictionary reveals that many self-identified pioneers collocated the term
“native” with “wild animals,” “savages,” and people in need of “domestication.” This language provided the foundation for the American ideology of Manifest Destiny, which taught that it was the pioneers that would venture forth to “civilize and domesticate” the natives of America while teaching natives how to “properly” use their land and to conduct themselves in ways that appeased European notions of government and ethics. The dichotomy between native and pioneer constructs a relationship where the native is familiar and even skilled at navigating the terrain, but the pioneer charts the course and domesticates both the native and their terrain.

Stereotypes about natives justified Manifest Destiny and Native American genocide at the hands of English settlers, and the use of native endured as metaphor connoting the perceived deficiencies of non-white people, as the United States later became an imperialist slave nation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “In Britain and the United States during the period of colonialism and slavery, a black person of African origin or descent” would be described as “native” before being brought across the Atlantic to be sold as slaves. Nativity, then, became a metaphor for the exploited Other, a position upon which U.S. colonial powers would steal their labor and establish economic dominance.

The metaphor of digital native comes from a series of articles written by the American technologist Marc Prensky in 2001. Prensky used native as a metaphor to describe Millennials as born into a time and place where digital technologies were a naturalized part of the social landscape. Because of this naturalization, Prensky argued that Millennials think in ways fundamentally different because they are immersed in a society where digital technologies are ever available (Prensky, 2001; Selwyn, 2009, p. 365). As digital natives, Millennials are familiar with the digital landscape, which they have embraced. But with this nativity comes perceived social habits where Millennials utilize their familiarity with technology in untamed ways. This
nativity then becomes exotified attributes, where Millennials are “experiential learners, proficient in multitasking, and dependent on communications technologies for accessing information and for interacting with others” (Bennett et al., 2008, p. 766). I do not mean to suggest that Millennials are being enslaved, nor do I mean to suggest that authors are advocating millennial genocide. But the etymology of digital nativity reveals startling themes. Just as natives were described during the period of European colonials, so too have digital natives been described as both exotic and in need of domestication.

For example, Sherry Turkle (2011), a clinical psychologist and the founder of MIT’s Initiative on Technology and Self, argues that Millennials prefer life on the screens of their phones and computers, where they can make strategic choices about what to say and how to say it, thereby communicating an ideal self that can be “edited, revised, or deleted” (p. 13). Turkle further argues that Millennials use technology as a means to mediate the “presentation anxiety” associated with “face-to-face communication” (Turkle, 2011, p. 14). In her book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, she remarks also that such connectivity “is alluring when we feel overworked,” though she cautions against Millennials overusing technology at the “expense of personal interaction” (Turkle, 2011, p. 15). In short, she argues that while Millennials are native to the digital, this attribute results in a liability, where Millennials are considered deficient in the more civil arts of interpersonal communication or what she calls “face-to-face interactions.” Digital natives, in her view, need to be taught civility because while they are native to a digital landscape, they are undomesticated regarding how they conduct themselves in physical spaces. Her central thesis is that it is the responsibility of parents, educators, and professionals to recognize Millennials’ deficiencies regarding inter-personal
communication, which she sees as a moral imperative to push Millennials beyond the comfort zones of their native technologies and learn more conventional means of communication.

Comparing stereotypes is the beginning of constructing a comparative-historical frame. One the one hand, Millennials are exoticized by their digital nativity, bringing unique skills and values to academic and professional contexts. This is the view reflected by CEOs such as Halligan and Hughes, and authors such as Howe and Strauss. On the other hand, digital nativity may require social domestication, where Millennials need to be taught different habits and values so as to better adapt to previous generations’ expectations for the digital landscape. The tension between the two shows how stereotyping Millennials as natives invokes some of the language of European colonialism within the United States, and this tension is important because there is an economy building around the idea that Millennials both shape and are shaped by the increasing availability of digital technologies. Indeed, if universities are telling millennial students that they are digital natives who just need to better understanding their own nativity, then we might be seeing a generation of students being told that they must be domesticated in order to be successful. In other words, amalgamating Millennials with technology fulfills different persuasive ends, and the stakes for Millennials are whether they utilize technology in ways agreeable to previous generations. Moreover, the stakes compound when the stereotype of the digital native combines with the stereotype of the generation of entitlement. It is to the etymology of the entitlement generation that I now turn.

**The Entitlement Generation**

The word *entitlement* originates from the French word meaning “to give title to.” The word then evolved into English legalese, where legal documents such as contracts could guarantee certain rights, reparations, or compensation. While useful in legal studies, it was Social Psychologists
who first used the term *entitlement* as a way of describing personal attributes and learned behaviors. In the 1970s, entitlement theory emerged as a way to understand the non-reciprocal relationship of child rearing and its enduring effects on adult cognitive process, emotions, and memory (Kingshott et al., 2004; Lerner and Mikula, 2013). As a psychological concept, researchers theorized that since all humans begin life as dependent on their parents, these early childhood experiences could culminate into maladaptive behaviors during adulthood. Researchers deduced that adults could be conditioned to be perpetually dependent on their parents, on social welfare, or on any individual or institution that would supplement their need for care. This shift in definition changed the connotation of “entitlement” from one that denotes legally binding reciprocity to one that denotes the opposite, where adults are pathologized as retaining expectations to be cared for as if they are still children. This in turn confers a degree of magnanimity on those who supposedly demonstrate greater social independence.

In the late ‘70s, entitlement theory became the foundations of a political term, “the culture of entitlement.” Popularized by author Robert Coles (1977) in his *Children in Crisis* series, Coles used the concept to explain what he saw as children’s proclivities to feeling overly self-important. In the fifth book of the series titled *Privileged Ones*, he writes, “It is a matter of feeling ‘entitled’. A child who has been told repeatedly that all he or she needs to do is try hard does not feel inclined to allow himself or herself much skeptical self-examination” (Coles, 1977, p. 406). Coles would later argue that this inclination became the exigency for a “moral and spiritual crisis” in which entitled children were unable to cope with the responsibilities of adulthood (Coles, 1977, p. 406–412). Central to Coles’ thesis is the relationship between Baby Boomers and Generation X; he argued that Generation X’s struggles were due to be victimized by the greed and opulence of Baby Boomers. But arguably, Coles’ work set a precedent for how
entitlement became a pejorative term to describe social deficiencies bred into younger generations by entitlement culture.

An important component of entitlement culture is the belief that shifts in education and parenting resulted in children being rewarded for effort rather than true achievement. According to historical accounts, this shift in education involved educators who wanted to nurture students’ potential by recognizing their effort and their unique contributions (Cuban, 1993; Guiner, 2015). The stereotype that Millennials are entitled corresponds to the pop culture adage that “everyone gets a trophy,” a mentality that its proponents argue spoiled the young, who have never had to face failure. As a stereotype for Millennials, previous generations interpret Millennials’ discontent with school as resulting from their unreasonable expectation that effort alone is the means for being recognized and rewarded, rather than any tangible results for that effort.

This perceived shift in education also coincides with perceived shifts in parenting. In her book How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success, Stanford University Dean Julie Lythcott-Haims (2016) argues that Baby Boomers are conducting themselves as helicopter parents for Millennials, thereby taking all responsibility away from their children and insulating them from having to accept responsibility for their choices in college. Lythcott-Haims’ book resonates with university administrators who have witnessed students’ indignity at their parents controlling their academic lives. This indignity is a central thesis in Lythcott-Haims’ book, and she provides numerous strategies to help condition millennial students out of behaviors that, if not addressed during college, she warns, compromise students’ success in professional contexts.

As an extension of entitlement culture, this belief that rewarding contributions has compromised the meritocracy to the point of meaninglessness fuels stereotypes that Millennials
have adopted maladaptive behaviors that compromise their success in professional contexts. In Chapter 9 of her book, titled “We’re Hurting Their Job Prospects,” Lythcott-Haims argues that Millennials disappoint their employers because they have not been taught how to cope with failure. It is easy to corroborate her view. To demonstrate the prominence of this feeling in professional contexts, consider the following excerpt from “Managing Up” (2016), an online training course for managers hosted on Lynda.com:

In an attempt to raise children who are confident, had high self-esteem and bright futures, boomers were actively involved in everything from parenting to school life to extracurricular activities […] They’ve been more actively involved than any previous parents in history. Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase helicopter parents? This phrase was coined for the most assertive parents who hovered and swooped in to save their kids from any level of discomfort. They did this behavior when their children were in school, and they’ve continued to be involved as millennials have entered the workforce. This has led to some challenges for millennials. Many of them have found that college and the work world did not align with their expectations from home. Rewards are fewer and farther between, and authority figures are not always interested in what they have to say. (Lynda.com, 2016, emphasis added)

The helicopter parent, then, damages rather than nurtures their students’ self-esteem and academic achievement by trying to save them from the discomforts of failure. Lythcott-Haims argues that managers describe Millennials as “orchids” who can’t survive outside the greenhouse, or “teacups” who chip easily and then are ruined, or “veal” who have been “raised in controlled environments and led, metaphorically, to slaughter” (Lythcott-Haims, 2016, p. 247). In these metaphors is the idea that Millennials have been too coddled throughout their childhood to understand the challenges of being an adult. The language is also part of two common, but non-academic terms often used interchangeably with Millennials: The Entitlement Generation, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as children born between 1979 and 1994, and the
“Snowflake Generation,” a term coined almost exclusively within conservative media outlets to describe perceptions of Millennials’ acute oversensitivity.

It is worthy of note that conservative media outlets have extrapolated many of the stereotypes of Millennials and used them to describe progressive politics as a whole. Take for example when conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh claimed that liberals would be satiated with the election of Donald Trump if Hillary Clinton would be handed a “participation trophy” (Ernst, 2016). Another example would be author Dainn Russell (2017) who, writing for her own website PatriotRetort.com, argued that the awarding the Medal of Freedom to Ellen DeGeneres and Joe Biden was tantamount to giving the two adults their own participation trophies: “Or, as it will be known from here on out: The Presidential Turd-Polishing and Participation Trophy.” This sentiment about Biden in particular was echoed by the right-wing blog Breitbart.com, as well as conservative talk show host Tammy Bruce and conservative commentator Brit Hume.

But more importantly for this project, it is impossible to ignore how the entitlement generation functions as way to express contempt for Millennials, particularly on conservative and right-leaning websites. Two egregious examples illustrate this point. Writing for Fox Business, Steve Tobak (2016) writes that “entitlement culture is far more pervasive than people realize.” He defines entitlement culture as a “50-year ballooning” of government spending on executive compensation, political campaigns, welfare and housing, crony capitalism, union benefits, supporting undocumented immigrants (he says “illegal aliens”), and the paychecks of athletes and entertainers. He writes that such a system results from anger and fear from the middle class as they see their money wasted on the excess of “elites” and that “eventually, one way or another, America will collapse under its weight” (Tobak, 2016). He goes further to argue
that Millennials are particularly enticed by these policies and thus are more likely to vote for democrats. This view that liberals pander to millennial dependency is echoed on the prolific conservative blog *RedState.com*, which contains over a hundred articles that use the phrase “entitlement culture” to pathologize a number of progressive and democratic measures, from the Dream Act and DACA, to Bernie Sanders’ campaign promise of tuition-free college, to welfare for the unemployed (all which are at times explicitly describe as a “handout” from an African American president to people of color).

Entitlement Culture, then, is conservative political frame borrowing extensively from early theories in social psychology and that functions similarly to the “nanny state,” a term of British origin used to rhetorically convey the belief that government assistance welfare stems from politicians who enact policies that are more akin to parenting than fiscally sound governance. As an extension of entitlement culture in general and the participation trophy in particular, these are significant rhetorical inventions for the way they delegitimize the young and the progressive. In this way, entitled becomes a floating signifier used to delegitimize any individual, young or otherwise, who does not identify as conservative or Republican. This sentiment is shared by a number of industry professionals who feel that Millennials exhibit characteristics akin to the lore of Generation X: lazy, disaffected, unmanageable, and self-absorbed. One viral example was an article written by Tim Urban (2013), where he argues for what he understands to be personal deficiencies of the millennial generation. He writes, “I call them Gen Y Protagonists & Special Yuppies, or GYP SYs […] who thinks they are the main character of a very special story.” In Urban’s view, Millennials feels entitled to praise and promotion because previous generations have spoiled Millennials into thinking they are unique and valuable without demanding that Millennials put forth the necessary effort to be successful.
This attitude is an attribute of the millennial generation, Urban claims, because of changes in education that placed value on students’ self-esteem more than merit.

Urban’s article is not academic scholarship, but it deserves attention here for a few reasons. First, because it is a viral article that is also an exemplar of sentiments expressed in academic and professional contexts. Second, for the way Urban’s language betrays what is economic about the generation of entitlement. While Urban argues that Millennials benefited from an unprecedented economic boom, economists have shown that the last four decades are marked by an exponential growth in income inequality and the shrinking of the American middle class (Dwyer et al., 2012). Urban also uses the term “GYPSY” to describe Millennials, which is a racial slur used against Romanians who were reduced to being vagrants once their lands were seized by European monarchies during the industrial revolution. As the legacy of colonialism that permeates the digital native, the legacy of Romani slavery emerges as a descriptor for Millennials. Taken in sum with assumptions that Millennials have maladaptive feelings of entitlement that compromise their success, these terms work as floating signifiers used by conservatives to describe any example of unearned merit from participation alone, especially where the young and progressive are concerned.

I will note here that some Romani later reclaimed “gypsy” as a marker of their ethnic identity and as a means of defining themselves to combat their marginalization. Marginalization is one of the ways in which identities come into being as a means to combat being labeled and typified as Other in ways that compromise one’s social position, and I will explore identity in response to marginalizing forces in more detail in Chapter Three and Chapter Five. Here, it bears repeating that stereotyping Millennials is big business in academic and professional contexts. The economics of stereotyping Millennials as deficient has prompted the emergence of student
advocacy groups, who argue against typifying Millennials as lazy, entitled, and coddled “snowflakes” because they feel the stigma of those attributes compromising their success. In an interview with The Washington Times, Corie Whalen, a spokesperson for the millennial advocacy group Generation Opportunity, remarked: “I hear all the time, even from people who are sympathetic to our worldview, ‘Well, Millennials are just lazy’ […] But it’s much more complicated than that. There’s a lot they’re not taking into consideration.” (Johnson, 2014). If advocacy groups like Generation Opportunity already exist to defend Millennials, then millennial stereotypes have become a site of considerable conflict, one that deserves scholarly attention, especially within a growing economy built upon correcting the perceived deficiencies of Millennials.

**Millennial Stereotypes and Marginalization**

Stereotypes could be harmless expressions, used for casual conversation and entertainment where previous generations lament about “kids these days.” But stereotypes become harmful when individuals in power use prejudice to guide their decisions. And when those decisions are in regard to millennial employment, or their academic discipline or merit, then harmless lamentations culminate into consequences for Millennials. Now the stereotype has become a form of marginalization, an economic obstacle that can compromise a student’s success in academic and professional contexts. Recall that Urban’s article went viral shortly after it was published, which shows that his argument resonated with industry professionals. But in doing so, we should also acknowledge that a video titled “Millennials: We Suck and We’re Sorry” was equally viral, which defends Millennials by citing the failures of baby boomers politicians and leaders regarding the 2008 housing bubble and the ongoing wars in the Middle East. Millennials are speaking back, and while conflict between generations is nothing new, such a bombastic
exchange should give researchers pause to think of the potential consequences for Millennials when they face both academics and industry leaders during heightened periods of economic and social inequality. Clearly, self-identified Millennials already feel the need to defend themselves from such stereotypes, and I argue that economic circumstances are as such that Millennials need to defend themselves.

The harmful effects of stereotypes involve examining bigotry and prejudice as forms of psychological harm. But addressing internalized stereotypes, bigotry, and prejudice are only part of the equation. More importantly is addressing systems, or the ways organizations and institutions enable and even encourage making decisions based on stereotypes. These decisions can work to prescribe social positions for individual or groups, positions of less power than those held by the dominant group and which serves as a marginalizing force. Marginalization is dependent upon economic factors: competition, scarcity, and the social hierarchies that arise from economic disparity. When stereotypes used for bigotry and prejudice are subsequently used to justify economic structures that privilege one individual or group at the expense of others, the result is that the marginalized group faces challenges to their agency based on rhetorically constructed characteristics that serves to prescribe one’s social position.

In *Composition Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, Robert Connors (2014) has shown that after the Baby Boom, the introduction of open enrollment and student loan programs made college accessible to new populations of students. But while it is true that the increasing availability of college loans has allowed more students to attend college than ever before, the rising costs of tuition from the 1960s to the present day, as well as widening economic disparity between the poorest and richest families in the United States, has culminated into a debt apparatus that harms Millennial success within college and beyond. In other words,
the same loan system that enables Millennials to attend college also compromises their success. In “Debt and Graduation from American Universities,” Dwyer et al. (2012) argue that while this macro-level change in financing societal functions allows more American students to attend universities than before, “educational debt beyond about $10,000 actually reduces the likelihood of college completion compared to lower levels of debt as the burden of repayment looms” (p. 1133). In this way, students are indeed able to come to college who could not attend before, as Connors identified. But students attending college today are adversely affected once debt begins to mount above a threshold of $10,000, thereby compromising their ability to complete their schooling.

It is hard to say how many of these students are affected by this $10,000 threshold. But as of 2012, the average millennial student attending college has over $22,000 in student debt (The Institute for College Access and Success). At this level, we know that the amount of debt correlates highly with college dropout rates, while the awarding of free money such as grants correlates highly with college retention (Dwyer et al., 2012, p. 1134). Furthermore, when comparing graduation rates between public and private institutions, students who come from financially disadvantaged households “will find higher loan amounts more difficult to manage, and this will reduce the likelihood of completing college” (Dwyer et al., 2012, p. 1149). So while the spirit of American universities seems to be linked to the idea of “college for all,” the debt-mounting mechanisms that make college possible for students coming from lower economic strata are also working against the likelihood that Millennials will complete their college degrees. For Dwyer et al. (2012), this means that educators generally need to regard economic support “not just as the distant affairs of policy makers and politicians, but as concerns for all of us working within the system of higher education” (p. 1153). Without assistance, debt, then,
becomes a hundred-pound hourglass that runs in reverse and that is placed firmly on the backs of millennial students; the longer it takes for a student to complete college, the more the pressure of debt mounts upon them and less likely they are to complete their studies.

Millennials in college work far more than generations past in order to afford college (Perna, 2010). Indeed, even while Dwyer et al. (2012) triangulated a number of socioeconomic factors to reach their conclusion that college loans work against college retention, they did not remark on how students currently attending college are more likely to work full-time jobs than their baby boomer parents. Instead, Millennials are working longer and harder to pay for their schooling while they attend college. Economist and author Trent Hamm (2014) assessed the price of college in terms of labor hours for the Baby Boomers compared to Millennials, and found that,

In 1970, you could work 755 hours at a minimum wage job over the course of a year to earn enough to pay for a year of schooling at a public institution – about 14 hours per week. In 2010, you would have to work 1,823 hours at a minimum wage job over the course of a year to earn enough money to pay for a year of schooling at a public institution – about 35 hours per week. (Hamm, 2014)

Worthy of note is that the numbers above do not include the rising costs of room and board for millennial students. Furthermore, Hamm’s numbers do not consider intersections of race or gender. According to the DC-based group Young Invincibles, “white young adults accumulated four times as many assets and are twice as likely to own a home as African-Americans and Latinos” (Lopez, 2017). When taken in sum, the cost of education is untenable for any millennial who does not have significant financial support either from parents, or grants, or from either subsidized or unsubsidized loans.

Within the context of rising debt as typical of the millennial experience, it is easy to imagine that Millennials’ sense of entitlement may be more akin to the legal sense of the word,
where Millennials feel they are owed assistance, support, and recognition for the effort it takes to be successful in school. Moreover, the demands of education force Millennials to make difficult choices regarding employment while attending college. While previous generations enjoyed the benefits of free education and the GI Bill, Millennials need grants, loans, and paid labor in order to attend college. This is not to say that every student works 35 hours a week to pay for college, but what is true is that students will often work to offset the cost of education and to try to attenuate their mounting debt while in college. According to a survey conducted by Citigroup, "Nearly four out of five U.S. students — including those in high school, community college, online college, or traditional college or university — work while in school […] putting in 19 hours a week during the school year" (Fottrell). Again for comparison, the baby boomer generation could feasibly pay for almost an entire year of schooling by working full-time during the summer (Mack). Millennials, by contrast, would need to work a full-time job all year, and still not have enough for books, fees, and living expenses. Couple this with the growing amount of research that shows that parents are contributing less and less to college tuition, and it becomes clear that the cost of college has shifted from parental and government support to the “tattered pockets of college students” (Belkin, 2013). In this way, the evidence suggests that Millennials are especially prone to a level of economic burden that impedes their performance.

Worthy of note is that the American Association of University Professors has compiled evidence showing that students working 10 – 15 hours per week perform better in their studies than do students who do not work at all. But above a threshold of 15 hours a week, students’ performance begins to suffer. This is significant because many Millennials work over 20 hours a week, with nearly one in ten full-time, traditional-age undergraduates “employed at least thirty-five hours per week” (Perna, 2010). Furthermore, these combined factors of debt-mounting and
working longer hours might explain why even though more students are attending college than ever before, graduation rates have stayed consistent with that of the baby boomer generation (Berman, 2016). The need to pay for college has even prompted the creation of websites such as GiftOfCollege.com, who offers holiday gift cards that students can use to pay for college.

Because of economic circumstances, Millennials feel the burden of debt-mounting before and during college, burdens that some students try to attenuate by working longer hours while completing their education. And after college, Millennials still face unemployment and underemployment. The 2014 U.S. Census showed that one in five working-age Millennials were unemployed compared to the national average of one in eight for working-age young adults in 1980. This combination of unemployment and underemployment resulted in a vast majority of college students and recent college grads living below the poverty line and relying on their parents for living (Olsen, 2015). A 2017 report compiled by the World Economic Forum argues that the “double whammy” of student loan debt combined with slow wage growth resulted in Millennials earning 43% less than Generation X when “Gen X was at a similar point in its demographic development.” Debt and underemployment also affects Millennials ability to acquire wealth such as housing and savings. A report by Wells Fargo showed that Millennials spend over 47% of their paychecks on paying back student loans, mortgage debt, and credit card debt (Ellis, 2014). Another report by Moody’s analytics showed that Millennials on average are putting -2% into their savings, prompting investment firms like LearnVest and WorkSource to offer financial planning specifically targeting the millennial age group (Lam, 2014). A 2014 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York identified that 44% of Millennials holding a bachelor’s degree have a job that does not actually require their degree. This resulted in a 16.8% under-employment rate of Millennials surveyed, which prompted conversations within the bank
about how to redefine its financing structure to accommodate Millennials whose earning power is below what has been seen in previous generations (Weissmann, 2014).

Statistics like these are important for measuring the larger economic impact upon Millennials, but numbers can make abstract the lived experiences of Millennials and the hardships they endure. Sometimes the evidence of millennial hardship comes in the form of viral messages shared on social networking. One viral example is a letter written by Talia Jane (2016), a young woman then employed as a customer service representative for Yelp. In the letter, Ms. Jane addresses the CEO of her employer and offers several accounts of her struggles to afford food and housing in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as her struggles to afford transportation to and from Yelp’s office for work. Jane’s story is clear in its relevance to her status as a Millennial. She is feeling the stress of mounting debt as her earnings are unable to keep up with paying her student loans or even basic needs such as food, housing, and transportation. She is also clear about her status as a new employee who is working hard to achieve success within her place of employment, which may be why the article was shared over three thousand times, and why the CEO of Yelp responded in a series of tweets. But most importantly, the letter is biting in its wit, as Jane ties her accounts to feelings of hopelessness and neglect. From Jane’s letter, I’ve pulled three excerpts that highlight important aspects of Millennial experience and how those same experiences can be interpreted by previous generations.

When I was a kid, back in the 90s when Spice Girls and owning a pager were #goals, I dreamed of having a car and a credit card and my own apartment. I told my 8-year old self, ‘This is what it means to be an adult.’ Now, seventeen years later, I have those things. But boy did I not anticipate a decade and a half ago that a car and a credit card and an apartment would all be symbols of stress, not success.

Speaking of that whole training thing, do you know what the average retention rate of your lowest employees (like myself) are? Because I haven’t been here very long, but it seems like every week the faces change.
I gave out over $600 to customers for a variety of issues. Now, since getting more training, I’ve given out about $15 in the past three months because I’ve been able to de-escalate messed up situations using just my customer service skills [...] You know what I could do with $600 extra a month? For starters, I probably wouldn’t have to take money from Marcus at CVS just to get to work.

I chose these three statements for their propensity to elicit very different reactions. A sympathetic ear will hear Jane’s frustrations with trying to maintain a minimum standard of living typical of adulthood, hear her anxiety about the instability of her workplace cohort, and hear her working hard to be good at her job to be a better employee so that the minimum standard of living is both attainable and sustainable for her. But to others, Jane’s account can be heard as mix of naiveté and entitlement. This tension is likely what made the message viral, as others name Jane a Millennial in order to berate her experience:

Talia sounds the classic Millennial whine: Why isn’t the world helping me more? (Though the world does more for her than it does for most: She set up a GoFundMe account that has brought in over $1,800.) Talia’s problems have nothing to do with Yelp and everything to do with Talia [...] You obviously should never have left campus if you’re determined to be treated forever like a delicate little bunny in a padded cage. – Kyle Smith, New York Post.

[T]hat’s the trouble with not just your outlook, but the outlook of so many people your age. You think it is somehow more impressive to ask strangers for money by writing some “witty” open letter than it is to put on your big girl pants and take a job you might be embarrassed by in order to make ends meet. Stefanie Williams, Business Insider.com

You know why they have that policy? Because people with useless degrees like hers are a dime a dozen. If she had any marketable skill, then they’d promote her far quicker. – Blogger, SooperMexican.com

Late last night I read Talia's medium contribution and want to acknowledge her point that the cost of living in SF is far too high. - Jeremy Stoppelman, CEO of Yelp via Twitter

Maybe we conclude that she is a ‘typical millennial’ and really is as disillusioned as she seems. Or maybe she knew how to get our attention. –Paul Harvey, PhD, International Business Times
Dr. Harvey is right that Jane’s letter attracted significant attention. This could be because her references to unemployment, underemployment, and debt resonate with a millennial audience. Jane is also clear on her desire for her work to count for something and to rise within the ranks of her employment because of verifiable improvements in her performance. The responses are a mix of empathy and disdain, with some acknowledging the economic hardships (as a way to absolve responsibility) and others ascribing Jane’s failures as the stereotypical naïveté of the millennial generation.

The viral exchange between Jane, her employer, and the copia of sympathizers and denouncers exemplifies inter-generational conflict. Those who claim the wisdom of age and experience dismiss Jane’s plight as being the product of poor choices and her failures as a person and professional. This happens in a context where Millennials face unemployment, underemployment, rising tuition and education costs, loan debt, and widening economic disparity. In this context, Millennials are truncated into an education system where college is necessary to lead a successful life, but where college far from guarantees any such success. And in the responses to Jane’s account, I hear an economic shift that coincides with the increasing prejudices against the young, where each new generation can be typified in ways that blame them for their own economic circumstances, thereby absolving institutional authorities from responsibility. While ageism is not only about personal prejudice, it is about the systems that encourage prejudice and enable the enactment of oppression and privilege.

Stereotypes of entitlement are particularly prevalent in conservative media as a means to dismiss forms of protest. Black Lives Matter has been described as entitled because they expect special treatment from police. Feminists are entitled because they feel being women means they should expect certain privileges. Gay marriage was characterized as an entitlement because
same-sex relationships wanted the benefits of marriage without the responsibilities. In Britain and the U.S., welfare programs were characterized as entitlements because they were giving means and sustenance without it being “earned.” The question of power, the confluence between affordance and will, the economic systems that benefit some while disadvantaging Others, the ability to dismiss reactions to hardship as feelings of entitlement, all of these factors culminates in marginalization generally and millennial marginalization specifically. And indeed, there are numerous publications that discuss notions such as the “nanny state” and “entitlement culture” as a way to deny financial interventions for groups of various kinds.

TOWARD MILLENNIAL ARCHETYPES

In my conversations with fellow Millennials, we share similar stories recounting our experiences growing up as one where parents, teachers, and administrators promised education was the path to our dreams. Viewed in the abstract, education was a pipeline beginning in pre-school or kindergarten and ending with a college degree. Their dreams were defined entirely by vocation: be an astronaut? A teacher? A firefighter? Be a CEO? Or a doctor? Education will guarantee this path if the student follows every one of their teachers’ lesson plans with diligence and discipline. This combination of education as a pipeline to a vocation became the social contract, and the institution of primary school adapted its inner workings to inspire students’ faith in that contract. The hallways of primary school were adorned with hopeful words of inspiration: “you can do anything you put your mind to;” “your imagination is the only limit to where you can go.” With these platitudes, there was no overt discussion about the myth of the meritocracy or how a person's race or gender might impede a student’s path to their “dream” of a career that would validate their worth as a citizen and a person. In place of this nuance, there were the pictures of (re)claimed historical idols who seemingly beat all odds: Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther
King, Jr., and Amelia Earhart. The complicated life stories of these individuals were too often whitewashed so that their civil disobedience (or neurosis, in Gandhi’s case) was elided in favor of their education level and perseverance in spite of opposition. This individualistic notion of personal fulfillment rendered personal and institutional opposition to their agency moot, thus foregrounding only the liberatory potential of the promise of education. This promise—a combination of pipeline education, platitudes, and whitewashed idolatry—was the social contract that entitled Millennials to the dream of a vocation of their choice. All along, that vocation was the goal and primary school, the means, so long as students also made it to college.

It is not hard to imagine the threat to a student’s identity each time the promise of education and employment goes unfulfilled. Did they not work hard enough? Were they not educated enough? And conversely, every story of a Millennial who succeeds elides any systemic advantage conferred by their whiteness, or maleness. Secondary school—to the degree that the liberal arts tradition still exists in the academe—affords students opportunities to engage the myth of meritocracy for the first time. But ultimately there is the unfulfilled promise for many Millennials that college study will result in success. This unfulfilled promise is the exigency for “the entitled” to speak back to the earlier generations who would circumscribe every institutional failure as a personal one resting solely on the shoulders of Millennials who do not achieve their dream.

These consequences compound upon other forms of minoritizing, which disadvantage the target group and rationalize the economic dominance of Baby Boomers and Generation X. In some ways this is a progressive, perhaps liberal argument insofar as the Democratic Party has been the one most willing to engage the realities of growing economic disparity in the United States and viewing an investment in Millennials as a potential solution to right the inequities.
Conservatives in the Republican party, by contrast, have done the opposite, preferring to invest solely in established industry and serving as a megaphone for those who believe that Millennials are a new age of dupes and government dependents. As will be shown in Chapter Two, myths about Millennials are similar to the mythology of generational differences, and yet different for the way Millennial myths resonate with other forms of marginalization like racism or sexism.

Conversely, there are rewards for embracing the identities that appease the hegemony. The heroes of the millennial generation often are social media entrepreneurs who abandoned their education to find individual success. Take the Digital Native for example and consider the success of Millennials that have embraced their role as trailblazers of technology. Mark Zuckerberg is the billionaire founder of Facebook, which is a product used by 20% of the world’s population as of 2016. Kevin Systrom is the billionaire founder of Instagram, whose photo sharing social network has over 600 million active users as of June, 2016. Aaron Hillel Swartz was the millionaire co-founder of Reddit before committing suicide to avoid federal prosecution for releasing a database of copyright-protected scholarship to the public. Indeed, some of the most popular online social networks—Tumblr, Pinterest, 4chan—were founded by Millennial entrepreneurs attending Ivy-league universities like Stanford and Harvard. Social media technologies like YouTube have created millennial celebrities. Justin Bieber for example is a millennial entertainer whose success is often attributed to his early beginnings as a YouTube star (Shearlow, 2016). Brazilian fútbol star Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior is famous for his presence on Instagram and Pinterest as well as his prowess on the field.

At the intersections of gender, the patriarchal dominance of men in Silicon Valley advantages millennial men, who are assumed to be successful technologists both because they are men, and because they are Millennials. Because of this sexism, and according to the 2016
“BNP Paribas Global Entrepreneur Report,” representations of successful millennial women tend to be outside of the realm of technology: consulting, accounting, law, and fashion (Petrilla, 2016). While sexism discourages millennial women’s success, there are numerous successful millennial women on social media (see Loizos, 2015). Entertainers like Beyoncé Knowles and Lady Gaga are millennial women who are two of the most successful entertainers in the world, both having strong YouTube followings. Alex Depledge is the millionaire co-founder of Hassle.com, a site that networks local cleaning services with potential customers. Valerie R. Wagoner is the founder of Zipdial, and she became a millionaire when she sold the site to Twitter. Angie Nwandu is the founder of The Shade Room, a celebrity news aggregator and gossip site inspired by Nwandu’s activities on Instagram. Carly Zakin and Danielle Weisberg founded the theSkimm, a news aggregator that promises users easy-to-read articles that summarize the daily news cycle. Their About Us page tells a personal story as a means to contextualize their project: “For two girls who grew up more ‘Morning Glory’ than ‘The Social Network,’ [sic] it took a lot of guts, and white wine, for us to make theSkimm a reality.” Zakin and Weisburg’s site earned Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement in 2014. So while men are advantaged technological fields, digital nativity is a behavior encouraged and expected from Millennials of all genders, resulting in a number of millennial entrepreneurs being successful in contexts that embrace Internet media and Web 2.0 technologies.

**Studying Millennials**
If generations are believed to embody attributes that are part and parcel of epochs of economic and social change; if stereotyping the Millennial generation has become big business and a goal for American universities seeking to better serve students; and if arguments espousing stereotypes of Millennials have virility on the World Wide Web, then there is a productive site
for rhetorical inquiry, one that will be the focus of this dissertation. Previous generations enjoy a considerable degree of privilege. When the first Millennials were born, Baby Boomers were living much better than their parents. They were the first generation of teenagers to have their own buying power and the first to enjoy a much higher standard of living than their parents (Macunovich, 2002). They were the first working classes to make money off having money, which was a degree of wealth previously enjoyed only by the upper classes. As such, Baby Boomers were a target for investment firms eager to help Boomers create an investment portfolio (Vartan, 1981). Here, I hear familiar themes of members of a dominant class defining the “Other” as inferior, thus constructing the moral imperative of teaching discipline to wayward youths. In this way, the language of racism and ageism harmonize within inter-generational conflict, thus provoking an ethical as well as academic curiosity.

Stereotypes are not something that rhetoric and composition scholars explicitly study. Our methods do not involve experiments that evaluate bias within controlled environments. But rhetoric and composition can employ methods for understanding how texts can be used to enact biases in communication contexts. In this dissertation, Chapter Three puts the rhetorical concepts of myth and identity in productive tension. As rhetorical concepts, myth and identity complement each other in how they both explore stereotypes and archetypes that function to label people and convey social status. This is particularly true when myths are used to establish community amongst individuals. In rhetorical theory, concepts are abstract models that are used to either explore, or explain observations regarding how people communicate reality to one another (Kuypers, 2009). In their simplest form, concepts offer explanatory power for why individuals choose one symbol, or one medium of communication over another. Concepts are the building blocks of theory. When assessing an artifact of communication, the rhetorical theorist
will apply pre-established concepts to deduce why the artifact was successful (or not) within context. If the pre-established concept cannot explain the observation, then the rhetorical theorist will combine concepts, or invent an entirely new concept in order to make sense of the effects of communication (Jasinski, 2001). When such etic and emic approaches work in harmony, scholars in rhetoric and compositions can make sense of the rhetorical construction of generations in an increasingly complex economic context.

Studying identity is difficult because definitions of identities are muddled and contradictory. Studying identity involves critical engagement with how identities function as floating signifiers, which are signifiers that can be conveniently wedded to whatever Other that a speaker wishes to marginalize. When identities are wedded to stereotypes, the result is the essentializing of attributes that assess the worth of bodies using inconsistent criteria and, by proxy, the arguments those bodies make through various modes and media. This inconsistency in criteria is why charting the full scope of such identity politics is like mapping the waves of the ocean: every time a peak or bevel is captured and represented, it is gone as the context shifts and changes. Hence, the volatility of identity politics works to the advantage of the white, cisgender male of a prime age, because they can control the criteria, which is to say that any attribute possessed by the advantage class is arbitrarily defined by that class as an asset, while the same attribute can defined as a detriment to the marginalized Other.

Another key point is that while identity politics are volatile in ways that make them difficult to map, identity politics are always economic, and those economic impacts can be more easily counted for the ways the result in marginalization. In part, scholars can gauge who is dominant, and who is marginalized by counting the representation of each group within positions of power and authority. Growing economic inequality is one such measure of who has power and
authority; another is seeing how Millennials are so greatly represented in the tech industry. Furthermore, the confluence of economics and identity can be mapped, if only provisionally, for the way hegemonic groups justify marginalization of Others in moments of scarcity. This marginalization relies on obvious visual markers that function to homogenize, devalue, and delegitimize. As Kenneth Burke (1969) has shown, the paradox of identity is that it unifies as it also divides. The ongoing arbitration of identities between Millennials and previous generations is a discursive act that always reaches for unity and consensus while simultaneously making it impossible to do so.

Stereotypes are not necessarily harmful, but they can be harmful when they are used to justify marginalization. If every Millennial is pigeonholed as native to technology, then every Millennial who does not fit the stereotypes is seen as deficient. And even when digital nativity is seen as an asset, it can also be defined as a liability by previous generations if the liability advantages previous generations in some way. Within the context of growing economic inequality and an education system that requires students to work more and harder than generations past, any presumed deficiencies justify denying Millennials access to the means of economic and social wellbeing. This can result in incredible disappointment. As one Millennial, Mattan Griffel, co-founder of Y-Combinator-backed start-up One Month put it, “Our parents had told us our entire lives, you want to get a job as an accountant or a doctor, and then we realize there’s not necessarily that certainty out there” (qtd. in French, 2015).

To understand how to prepare students for the shifting context of university and professional writing, composition theorists have espoused a socially conscious curriculum that focuses on the social construction of knowledge (Berlin, 1988). In this chapter, I aligned my work within the social and global turns in composition studies, where scholars have positioned
themselves to examine understand how symbolic modes and media work to ascribe privilege to some while marginalizing Others. In this tradition, I have shown how generations have been named in the United States with attention to how millennial functions as a stereotype that marginalizes the millennial age group, thereby constraining their agency in academic and professional contexts. I have argued that there are two prominent millennial stereotypes: the digital native and the entitlement generation. The digital native stereotypes Millennials as tech-savvy, social, imaginative, adjustable, and adept at multitasking, while the entitlement generation stereotypes Millennials as spoiled by progressive shifts in education and parenting that award merit for effort rather than achievement. Both stereotypes function as a marginalizing force, or a way for many consulting companies, businesses, and universities to profit from stereotyping Millennials in ways that compromise their success in academic and professional contexts.

Stereotype is a useful concept for explaining how previous generations generalize about Millennials in either neutral, or negative ways. Moreover, stereotypes explain both conscious and subconscious biases that justify millennial marginalization in academic and professional contexts. But stereotypes do not necessarily explain how or why definitions of Millennial came to be. Moreover, discussing stereotypes alone will not have enduring relevance because the millennial generation is by definition limited to a short span in history. Thus, a broader conceptual framework is needed to understand how Millennials are distinct from, but also part of a broader rhetorical phenomenon of conflict between generations. In the next chapter, I will use Rowland’s definition of myth as a concept of rhetorical critique. I will then apply the four units of analysis for mythic criticism—problems, stereotypes, archetypes, and heroes—and analyze two corpora of texts discussing generational differences. Myth is a useful method for critiquing inter-generational conflict because it moves beyond discussions of stereotypes and establishes a
canon of narratives about generational differences. These narratives are comprised of stereotypes, archetypes, and heroes to justify structures and deal with crisis (Rowland, 1990, pp. 103 - 104), the crisis in this case being conflict between Millennials and previous generations.
CHAPTER THREE – MILLENNIALS AS MYTH: THE ENTITLEMENT GENERATION AND THE DIGITAL NATIVE AS PART OF A MYTHOLOGY OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I discussed how the millennial generation faces pernicious stereotypes in academic and professional contexts. I defined two such stereotypes, the digital native and the generation of entitlement, as two interrelated monikers for the millennial generation, monikers that economically advantage previous generations and that threaten to compromise Millennials’ success. While stereotype is a useful concept for explaining how Millennials are marginalized in academic and professional contexts, stereotypes do not necessarily explain how or why definitions of Millennial came to be. Moreover, discussing stereotypes alone will not have enduring relevance because the millennial generation is by definition limited to a short span in history. Thus, a broader conceptual framework is needed to understand how Millennials are distinct from, but also part of a broader rhetorical phenomenon of conflict between generations.

Using mythic criticism as a method, this chapter asks: How does millennial function rhetorically in business contexts and in rhetoric and composition? Here I will theorize a comparative-historical frame for how and why inter-generational conflict is complicated by the mythology of generational differences. The purpose of this study is to develop a taxonomy of millennial myths in academic and professional contexts, and use that taxonomy to define millennial myths as new rhetorical phenomenon that functions both as an extension of the mythology of generational differences and also as a marginalizing force.
Mythic Criticism

In his influential work entitled “On Mythic Criticism,” Robert C. Rowland (1990) takes a structural and functional approach to rhetorical analysis in an effort to narrow the scope of mythic criticism to an applicable concept for critique. By Rowland’s definition, myths are stories that symbolically solve problems, justify structures, and deal with crisis, while also relying on archetypal characters that connote a stereotype or trope (Rowland, 1990, pp. 103 - 104). Myths are structural in the sense that they provide a narrative understanding for conflicts between people and institutions in the present, and provide a persuasive understanding of the enduring relevance of institutions. Myths are functional in the sense that they provide narrative coherence to contemporary struggles, and provide solutions to problems based upon similar narratives accounting for conflicts that have been resolved in the past. As a rhetorical strategy, myths rely on texts that provide past accounts of people, places, and struggles and draw upon those stories to build cogent stories explaining the present (Rowland, 1990, pp. 102 - 103). The outcome of the narrative, usually one of perseverance, is then repurposed as a means of determining solutions to a current problem. The purpose of myth, then, in contrast to more general narratives, is to inspire real-world action (Rowland, 1990, p. 107). Myths are not fictitious, but instead rationalizations rooted in the legacy of an enduring mythology. It is the potential of texts both past and present to inspire real-world action that necessitates mythic criticism as a method for analyzing non-fictional texts (Rowland, 1990, p. 112).

As a method of rhetorical critique, myth affords three units of analysis for analyzing texts: problems, archetypes, and heroes. For the purposes of this study, the units of analysis for mythic criticism are defined as follows.

1. **Problems** - statements regarding conflicts between generations and the roles of institutions such as colleges or businesses are coded using this unit of analysis. This
involves looking for conflicts within artifacts that parallel conflicts of the past. Problems are circumstances that are harmful, shameful, or otherwise less than ideal. Problems can be any disharmony or discord between two or more people, institutions, or nature. Within mythology, problems are what motivate the characters to action, particularly the heroes of the tale. Worthy of note is that ultimately the actions of the hero justify structures that enable the characters to resolve crises, thereby reinforcing a status quo.

2. **Archetypes** - statements characterizing generations as atypical are coded using this unit of analysis. This involves looking for characterizations of people, organizations, or groups and analyzing those specific characters based upon how they reach an ideal that is related to, but distinguished from pre-established stereotypes or tropes. The archetype, then, embodies qualities that are exceptional to the norm, which is often more complicated and nuanced than what might be considered a stereotypical form of the character. The archetypical character also transcends tropes, which are the repeated forms of a character or circumstance.

3. **Heroes** – statements characterizing people, organizations, or groups as saviors while characterizing others as the beneficiaries of their heroic efforts are coded using this unit of analysis. An extension of archetype, this involves looking for how atypical people, organizations, or groups are characterized as problem solvers or ushers of future action. This is to say that heroes are archetypical characters, but not all archetypical characters are heroes because heroes are exceptional characters that are directly involved in solving problems.

Myth is a concept suited for engaging discussions about generational differences because of the way the concept looks beyond stereotypes in a particular time and place to establish a historical
canon of how certain generalizations about different generations endure over time. For this project, this allowed me to theorize how millennial stereotypes harken back to stereotypes of the past in an effort to understand how these stereotypes endure and change. In Millennials’ case, the stereotypes have evolved to compromise their agency in the present and the future.

When applying the units of analysis for mythic criticism, it will be necessary to establish a canon of stereotypes and tropes within a mythology of generational conflict. As Rowland argues, myths require references to specific texts or to well-known societal mythologies in order to qualify as myths (Rowland, 1990, p. 113). Stereotypes of the millennial generation have been chronicled in Chapter One, including landmark books discussing Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. I supplement the earlier cited works with a corpus of artifacts that tell a story of inter-generational conflict that parallels how Millennials were discussed in Chapter One. This corpus is comprised of influential books, articles, and essays that discuss conflict between The Greatest Generation and both Baby Boomers and Generation X. The purpose of this corpus is to establish how previous generations have discussed younger generations in the past, with a special attention to how each generation is defined in relationship to technology and entitlements.

In complement to the mythology of generational differences, I collected two corpora of artifacts to establish how Millennials are discussed in academic and professional contexts. In general, these artifacts were chosen for the way they provide written accounts of Millennials and the related stereotypes of the digital native and the entitlement generation. I gave priority to artifacts authored by business professionals and scholars working in education and in rhetoric and composition. To represent the views of professionals, I collected a corpus of news articles from business magazines such as Forbes and BusinessWeek, and newspapers such as The New York Times. These sources were chosen both because their databases allowed for easy retrieval
of sources regarding keywords such as “Millennials,” “digital natives,” and “entitlement,” and because they are leading authorities regarding common issues and trends in the workplace.

To represent the views of educators and instructors in rhetoric and composition, I examined the journal *Computers and Composition*, which is a leading journal in the field of rhetoric and composition and especially with regard to using technology for pedagogy. To represent the views of educators writ large, I collected prolific books from the *New York Times*’ Best Sellers lists and online publications that were high on Google’s page rankings. I then analyzed all three corpora using mythic criticism as a method. The ultimate goal of analyzing these corpora is to do what Wendy Hesford and others have called for by partaking in a recovery, recognition, revisionary project, where rhetoricians construct alternative histories that complicate the rhetorical canon and make it “better,” “fuller,” “truer,” “more nuanced,” “more transparent,” and even “more objective” (Skinnell, 2015, p. 117), The purpose is to work toward a comparative-historical frame for understanding millennial marginalization and how *millennial* is an intersection of identity created within sites of inter-generational conflict.

**Millennials: The Digital Natives**

In the 1940s and 50s, the United States reached an epoch when toasters, microwaves, vacuums, refrigerators, and other technological advances became widely available. The resulting conveniences shifted American culture from a purely industrial society to a consumer-oriented one, which radically changed the lifestyle of the American Middle Class (Pfister, 2010). As an epoch of social and technological change, these advances were presumed to influence the needs and expectations of Baby Boomers, who were the first generation to be raised with modern conveniences. Landon Jones, in his book *Great Expectations: America & the Baby Boom Generation* (1980), is credited as the first who coined the term “Baby Boomer” to describe a
generation of high hopes and expectations, as well as abilities shaped by their superior education and upbringing within an age of technology. He writes, “[Baby Boomers are the] first generation to be trained in modern, post-war technology, they embraced it like no other generation since” (Jones, 1980, p. 26). He argued that since Baby Boomers were raised with modern conveniences, they were more experienced with technology, which culminated into expectations of access to careers that would maintain those standards of living wrought by technological change. This view was echoed in an op-ed for the New York Times, as Baby Boomers were thought to expect a continuance of “long-term trends toward individualism, mobility and technological mastery in American society” (Gabriel).

The idea that technology has a substantial impact on the young continued with the subsequent generation, Generation X. Coined by Robert Capa in his photo essay entitled “Generation X,” the term was used to frame the portraits of the children of Baby Boomers, many of which were caught in moments of candor while experiencing the economic boom wrought by The New Deal. While Robert Capa may have been the first to coin the moniker of Generation X, Douglas Coupland (1991) was the first to explicitly define the modern Generation X in his book Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture. Coupland argued that Generation X only tacitly embraced the daily comforts afforded by technology, because they held more cynical beliefs about the dominance of consumer culture (pp. 171 - 172). Still, it was presumed that because of technological advances in communication, Generation X was more capable with such advancements as a natural and naturalized facet of their lives. As one author writing for News Week put it, Generation X was “raised with the highest standard of living in the history of the world [...] indulged with every toy, game and electronic device available (“The Whiny Generation”). Later, Generation X become a topic of interest to scholars in media studies who
theorized that attitudes about life would be different for Generation X, because they watched mimeographs become copiers and letters become faxes and email (Leiss et al., 2013. pp. 496–497).

The resulting stereotypes in all these cases are of a younger generation whose social habits and abilities progressed in tandem with advances in technology. As an archetype, each generation improved their quality of life by embracing technology to improve their lives. The examples above establish historical precedents for defining generations and their attributes in relationship to technology. Beyond stereotypes of any generation in particular, there is a narrative canon that typifies each generation in direct relationship to technological progress. As a mythology of generational differences, these stories express themes of appliances increasing home conveniences, medical breakthroughs bringing longer life spans, and communication technologies that either facilitate commerce over vast distances, or keep loved ones globally connected. In this way, each generation is celebrated as embodying progress, a theme that continues with Millennials as digital natives.

Coined by sociologist Marc Prensky (2001) while writing for the education journal One the Horizon, Prensky argued that Millennials think in ways fundamentally different because of the technologies that have always been available to them. This new thinking enabled Millennials to multitask and balance their professional and social lives (Prensky qtd. in Selwyn, 2009, p. 365). According to Prensky, Millennials are particularly apt at using technology because they have known it all their lives, and this aptitude gives them an advantage in the growing digital age. As a conflation of digital native and millennial, Millennials are presumed to be avid consumers of digital content as well as naturalized users of digital media. This idea is also central to Howe and Strauss’ Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. Howe and Strauss
coined the term *Millennial Generation*, and argued that Millennials are a hero generation (their words) that will bring about radical social and economic change because they embrace the technological changes associated with new media and global commerce. In Howe and Strauss’ case, this defines Millennials as heroes who intrepidly solve the problems of global commerce through their advanced skills with technology. This view is present in professional contexts. As the marketing firm Digital Marketing Resource Center (2016) put it, Millennials are “well-educated, tech-savvy, and idealistic when it comes to pursuing passions and incorporating a ‘do good’ ethic into the workplace.” As an archetype of the millennial age group, the generation embodies technological progress and thus becomes the impetus for social changes. In this way, the myth of the digital native and the Millennial is one of technological determinism, which argues that technological advances almost dictate changes in society and culture.

The archetype that Millennials are more apt at technology is really a case of perceived aptitudes with particular kinds of technology. In Millennials’ case, this means using the Internet, computers, and social media, because they were born and raised in the era where these technologies have been widely available. As an archetype, Millennials are thought to be more proficient with particular kinds of technology and the behaviors associated with its use. The Barkley consulting firm, for example, argues that “Millennials have come of age in the time of crowdsourcing, where large groups of people are entrusted to provide solutions more effectively than could an individual, so it feels natural to them to gather as much information as possible before making decisions” (Fromm et al., 2011, p. 23). As a conflation of *digital native* and *millennial*, Millennials are presumed to be avid consumers of digital content as well as naturalized users of digital media. The archetype seems to be a sentiment embraced by self-identified Millennials who embrace their hero status, as Howe and Strauss called it, through their
nativity with digital technologies. One viral example is the article “I Am Millennial,” where a young author proudly exclaimed, “We have, and will continue to find, alternate and perhaps more effective ways to make ourselves heard…more quickly and perhaps overtly than ever before given the transparency prompted by the Internet” (Lew, 2013). This aptitude with technology in general and communication technology in particular is the defining characteristic of Millennials as future professionals and heroes of the working world.

In contrast to the positive connotations of the archetype, the digital native/millennial can still functions as a stereotype when the speed and ease of such technologies results in inculcating unreasonable expectations regarding work and interpersonal relationships within the millennial psyche. As part of the mythology of generational differences, technological determinism is a force that works much like Newton’s third law, where any actions achieved through technology will bring an equal and opposite reaction. The resulting trope is that technology also has negative effects on the young in exchange for positive effects. This trope was a key point of Jones’ book on Baby Boomers, where he argued that Baby Boomers where spoiled by their upbringing during the boom of technological advancement. This boom of technological convenience led to inculcating within Boomers a number of unreasonable expectations from personal relationships (contributing to rising divorce rates) to employment (contributing to a demand for higher wages and more stable work life balances).

As a trope for understanding the relationship between people and technology, technology is both an enabling and constraining force (Stormer, 2004). This trope can be traced to antiquity. In The Phaedrus, Plato feared that if writing was taught to students alongside oratory, then the over-reliance on writing technologies would compromise a student’s memory. This amalgamation of younger generation with technology and social change becomes part stereotype
that constructs younger generations as part of a problem to be solved. So, the problem of technological determinism becomes one where technology both constrains as it enables, which provides the exigency for previous generations to save younger generations from eventual disability. In the words of one employment consultant,

Armed with the capabilities of their ever-more sophisticated iThings, replete with social networking enabling close, immediate exchange of thoughts and experiences with countless “friends” […] Financial transactions, purchases, games, movies […] all rendering travel to banks, stores, sports events or theaters redundant. [Millennials] stands at the forefront of the next chapter in mankind’s evolution: experiencing everything while going nowhere. (Lutz, 2012)

Here we see the trope of technology as both an enabling and constraining force. Recall how Turkle (2011) felt that Millennials’ aptitudes with using technology enabled them to mediate their presentation anxiety, but at the cost of losing the capability to conduct conversations without a technological medium. As a stereotype, professionals remark upon Millennials’ proclivity to use digital tools as a means of social interaction to explain a number of perceived oddities, such as Millennials aversion to looking people in the eye during business interactions (Makovsky, 2012), or perhaps lie about their whereabouts and getting caught because they senselessly posted their lie on social media (Widdicombe, 2016). In this myth, the millennial embodies both the positive and negative effects of technology, the latter of which results in expectations that can be a detriment to students entering the workforce.

With technological determinism redefined as a problem that corrupts youth, the archetype of the Millennial devolves into a stereotype of disadvantage, where antisocial habits are inculcated within youth as they use technology. Millennials’ antisocial habits are then described as generational deficiencies, deficiencies that construct Millennials as a problem that previous generations need to solve. It is in opposition to this stereotype of Millennials, and the need to solve the problem of technological determinism, that the archetypal Baby Boomer or Generation
X professional-as-hero emerges. This narratives shift stands in direct contrast to the hero archetype of Millennials as better at communication because of their familiarity with technologies. Instead, a different hero archetype constructs the previous generation as the heroes of the young by teaching them to resist the technologies that separate Millennials from each other, thereby impairing them from fostering meaningful and productive professional relationships. With the younger generation characterized as deficient in this way, any history of perceived deficiencies of previous generations are either ignored, or elided. By omitting any discussion of how previous generations were typified using similar tropes, the previous generation becomes emboldened as the wiser generation with responsibility to teach the young more traditional (read valuable) means of communication.

But whether changes are resisted or embraced, technological change brings social change, and these changes are credited as impetuses that shape the habits and abilities of younger generations. If this mythology functions to explain the lived experiences of previous generations while affording them power and purpose to guide the young in professional contexts, then does it endure in academic contexts as well? To answer this question, I turn to conversations in the journal *Computers and Composition*. Conversations that explicitly address Millennials extend back to 2007, when Ellen Evans and Jeanne Po argue that “the millennial generation is one that experiences a life mediated by technology” (Evans and Po 58). Beginning with this Evans and Po’s article, the digital native becomes prominent in articles published within the journal. Worthy of note is while the term Millennial is not often used, however, the scholarship does speak of “today’s students,” or students documented through the various studies published in the journal, all of which would be in the age range for Millennials (again, those born between the late 1970s and early 2000s).
The Digital Native in Computers and Composition

*Computers and Composition* is one of the most prestigious journals in the field of rhetoric and composition. The journal publishes research regarding how technology and Internet media influence both students and composition practices in academic contexts. It is because of the journal’s focus on the relationship between students and technology that *Computers and Composition* is an ideal site to look for evidence of rhetoric and composition may discuss digital natives. Between 2008 and 2015, the term *digital native* is explicitly referenced in 18 articles and book reviews.

The first reference is in Michelle Smith’s 2008 book review of Linda W. Braun’s *Teens, Technology, and Literacy*. In Smith’s review, she lauds Braun’s book for the way it challenges teachers and librarians to integrate new technologies and networks into the classroom. Central to Braun’s thesis, or as Smith accounts for it, is the idea that digital natives are already using technology to build social networks and that instructors need to teach millennial students how to write better within digital environments. Smith’s criticism is that Braun may “cling too much to print literacies” at the expense of students’ literacy and composition studies’ turn toward multimodality (Smith, 2008, p. 456). In the same year, Stephanie Vie’s (2007) “Digital Divide 2.0: ‘Generation M’ and Online Social Networking Sites in the Composition Classroom” foregrounds the digital native as the subject disposition of composition students. Vie does this by explicitly linking the digital native to Millennials (whom she calls “Generation M”), and argues that because students are native to online environments, instructors of composition must teach themselves about what it means to compose in online spaces. Notably, Vie cites Sherry Turkle as evidence for her claim (pp. 21), and argues that the coming of Millennials presents a divide between instructors unfamiliar with social networking technologies and the students who have known these technologies for the majority of their lives (Vie, 2007, pp. 10 - 12).
In both cases, the archetype of Millennials-as-digital natives describes students as naturally adept at social media and Internet technologies. For Smith, as an extension of Braun’s argument, students’ nativity to technology “helps students master print-based literacies” as the instructor focuses their attention toward improving their writing within the familiar terrain of social networking and the Internet (Smith, 2008, p. 456). Moreover, since digital natives use these technologies to socialize, the archetype of Millennials is that they must be more social. This nativity, hence, constructs the millennial archetype as ideal for composition instruction, because students are more adaptable to the social nature of technology and thus the social nature composition and composition instruction. In complement to this view, Vie (2007) explicitly defines this problem as “Digital Divide 2.0—where students are often more technologically adept than their instructors” (Vie, 2007, p. 10). In this way, the archetype of the Millennials is that of a guide to the instructor who must learn unfamiliar digital terrain. Worthy of note, however, is Vie’s skepticism that Millennial students are aware of the potential dangers afforded by the increased public visibility of the web, a move that stereotypes Millennials as adept, but naïve about using the social media and Internet technologies they are native to. The responsibility of the ideal instructor, then, is to pay close attention to Millennials’ more unfettered communication habits, a problem that instructors solve through their pedagogy. The archetype of the instructor and scholar of rhetoric and composition is co-constructs the instructor as hero to the digital native, bringing critical thinking about technology into the discussion as an important consideration for teaching composition.

productive tension with the term *digital immigrant*, which describes previous graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) who must learn about the technologies available, and the pedagogy to engage issues presented by using technology in the classroom. Since graduate student TAs and faculty are born before the digital age, they argue, both must immigrate into the digital frontier that their students are already native to, and then teach critical thinking and rhetorical effectiveness as a means to deconstruct the technologies for producing arguments.

In the second article “Digital Underlife in the Networked Writing Classroom,” Derek N. Mueller (2009) argues that composition should acknowledge that students already participate in a “digital underlife,” and that time spent in online spaces affords opportunities for rich interactions that extend composition beyond the confines of the classroom. In this article, previous generations of teachers are not involved in digital spaces, at least to the same degree as their younger students. Mueller further argues that instructors must challenge their assumptions about social networking in order to help students better understand the online spaces they are occupying. In the third article “Hacking Spaces: Place as Interface,” Douglas M. Walls, Scott Schopieray, and Danielle Nicole DeVoss (2009) argue that digital natives are part of the exigency for synthesizing “complex rationales—both transparent to us and, at times, made visible—underneath the instructional spaces in which we work and teach” (Walls et al., 2009, p. 269). Defined as a review article of important scholarship to date, the authors synthesize how the field of composition understands students’ digital literacy and the future of technology in the composition classroom while simultaneously making a strong appeal for what they see as the direction of future scholarship.

In all three cases, the archetype of the millennial student is the sum of embodied sets of practices shaped by social forces wrought by evolving technologies, and the capabilities (and
culpability) of this context became the exigency compelling their scholarship. The problem is generally defined as a need for instructors to develop their own technological literacy in order to be able to keep pace with the native literacy of millennial students. This construction harkens to a legacy of technological determinism that is also student determinism, where the student is as much as a motivator for change as the technologies themselves. The archetypical student is the one who brings their nativity to technology to the classroom, which is questioned, shaped, and redirected in partnership with the archetypical instructor that embraces the change. With the problem and archetypes defined, two tropes emerge. First, the trope of the teacher-student relationship reinforces the idea that the instructor has something to teach; second, the trope of technology as a simultaneously enabling and disabling force helps define both archetypes. Based this simple but common tropes, the heroes of the tale, then, are researchers and pedagogues who challenge each other to meet this demand of advancing technologies that are simultaneously advancing their students.

In volume 27 issue three of *Computers and Composition* published a year later, two articles take different positions regarding Millennials as digital natives. First, Jennifer Lee Sano-Franchini embraces digital natives in her article “Intellectual Property and the Cultures of BitTorrent Communities.” There, Sano-Franchini borrows from Marc Prensky’s work and foregrounds how technology brings about cultural changes, changes that have implications for understanding students of the day and of subsequent generations: “If we think about [Prensky’s] argument in specifically temporal terms, we can understand it as being a statement about how cultural knowledge and logics progress over time and across generations” (p. 204). In contrast, Abby Dubisar and Jason Palmeri’s (2010) “Palin/Pathos/Peter Griffin: Political Video Remix and Composition Pedagogy” elides discussions of digital natives, because their case study better
serves as a nuanced example of how parody and popular culture influence activist rhetoric. In this way, Dubisar and Palmeri examine individual cases of activism rather than supporting “broad claims about the entire generation of ‘digital natives’” (Dubisar and Palmeri, 2010, p. 79, quotations in the original).

While both articles address the implications of teaching digital composition, the former article embraces the archetype while the latter dismisses the archetype as not useful for the kinds of work their study accomplishes. In this way, Dubisar and Palemeri are notable for how they resist the digital native as a useful term for scholarship. Also notable here is that stereotypes about Millennials as constrained by technology are so far absent in scholarship. Still, the archetype of Millennials-as-digital natives is taken as a given in two subsequent publications later that year, both in Frost’s “Why Teachers Must Learn: Student Innovation as a Driving Factor in the Future of the Web” and Walker et al.’s “Computers and Composition 20/20: A Conversation Piece, or What Some Very Smart People Have to Say about the Future.”

It is in later publications that the archetype of Millennials-as-digital natives is used with a degree of skepticism, if not dismissed outright. In 2012, Kory L. Ching and Cynthia C. Ching’s “Past is prologue: Teachers composing narratives about digital literacy,” the authors stress a dichotomy between digital natives as naturally skilled producers of digital content and, more likely, uncritical consumers of online media. They argue that digital natives “still experience gaps in their awareness of, and critical reflection on, the media that surround them, so we cannot assume they will learn how to contribute, either successfully or ethically, to a new production-oriented culture on their own” (Ching and Ching, 2012, p. 205). Their argument marks a more explicit shift in the archetype of digital natives from natives-as-naturalized users of technology to a stereotype of passive recipients of digital culture. Their article is also an early invocation of the
trope that technological change has both positive and negative effects within the journal. The confluence of these stereotypes, archetypes, tropes, and heroes would later dominate published research within the journal henceforth.

Later that year, Soomin Jwa’s (2012) “Modeling L2 Writer Voice: Discoursal Positioning in Fanfiction Writing Original Research Article” shows that it is dangerous to assume that students “come with a new mindset geared toward thriving within the intersections of dispersed information online” (Jwa, 2012, p. 339). Instead, she argues that students need to be guided through processes of critical inquiry regarding how they might understand, retrieve, and repurpose online content. Again, Jwa’s work exemplifies a shift in meaning, where the digital native is defined less the naturalized expert regarding technology, and one of a more naturalized susceptibility to technology as a ubiquitous, totalizing, and often misleading force. With this confluence between trope and stereotype comes a corresponding change in how the archetypical composition researcher should view themselves and the problem of teaching millennial students in a digital age. The problem, now, is that Millennials’ nativity to technology, which is now their vulnerability, while previous generations of researchers—no longer defining themselves as the digital immigrants and critical outsiders of digital culture—are informed and engaged practitioners whose responsibility is to teach Millennial students about the practicalities and pitfalls of Internet media and the technologies for producing multimodal composition. In this way, scholars seem to have answered Vie’s early call now argue from a more informed and practiced position. But the new stereotype of Millennials-as-vulnerable-consumers of technology and media positions students as almost wholly dependent on hero instructors to show them how to better cultivate the digital landscape.
It is this new problem of nativity versus expertise which orients instructors to the role of hero for students, depending on how the millennial student is defined. One the one hand, the stereotyped Millennial is described as vulnerable consumers of technology. On the other hand, the archetypical Millennial is the naturalized expert of technology. Whether Millennials are described in archetypical or stereotypical ways depends upon how the instructors orient themselves in relationship to the student. If instructors are experts on technology and Internet media, then foregrounding the need to teach Millennial students to be critical consumers of Internet media becomes the problem to be solved. The hero instructor then develops the pedagogy best suited to teach Millennial students a process that includes critical engagement and thoughtful production of digital media and multimodal texts (Baepler and Reynolds 122; Charlton 35).

The tension between stereotypical Millennial and archetypical Millennial is most obvious in Michael-John DePalma and Kara Poe Alexander’s (2015) article “A Bag Full of Snakes: Negotiating the Challenges of Multimodal Composition.” They write:

Another layer of the discussion shaping much of the discourse surrounding multimodal composition pedagogy is the assumption that students—as “digital natives” who have been immersed in technology since their early years—have a high-level of facility with and knowledge of digital composing practices. Though it is likely true that students’ extensive exposure to new media technologies has allowed them to develop particular capacities for navigating new technologies, the extent to which these literacies have prepared students to produce rhetorically sophisticated texts is a different question altogether (DePalma and Alexander, 2015, p. 183).

Though the earlier archetype of the digital native has not been abandoned—a point acknowledged by DePalma and Alexander when they acknowledge students’ capacities for using technology—the digital native is defined here as at once inclined to use technology, but mostly vulnerable to technology. The problem is that new and rapid technological advancements produce new challenges, a problem dependent on the trope of young students as enabled and
constrained by technology, but ultimately unable to cope with the rapidly shifting terrain they are native too. The job for the instructor, then, becomes figuring out where individual students are positioned in a constantly shifting landscape.

Rather than generalize about stereotypical are archetypical Millennials, subsequent publications align Millennials on a fluid spectrum between the archetype of digital native-as-skilled producer and the stereotype of digital native-as-passive consumer. Elizabeth C. Tomlinson’s (2013) “The Role of Invention in Digital Dating Site Profile Composition” foregrounds the digital natives inclinations toward using technology, and argues “[w]hile many students are “digital natives,” it remains helpful to demonstrate to them the significance invested into appropriate use of impression management strategies in online locations [...] our students need to be taught to carefully consider their digital self-representation” (Tomlinson, 2013, pp. 126 - 127). For Tomlinson, the trope of technology as a simultaneously enabling and disabling force sets a precedent for aligning millennial students more towards “a discoursal identity she or he wished to construct” by assessing how they will be perceived in digital spaces (p. 119) This reach toward more archetypical representations is later echoed in Kelly S. Bradbury’s (2014) “Teaching Writing in the Context of a National Digital Literacy Narrative,” where Bradbury uses the tensions between students-as-digital natives and students-as-digital immigrants to describe their various inclinations and proficiencies with technology (Bradbury, 2014, p. 60). Notable in Bradbury’s work is how the Millennial is described as potentially both a digital native and a digital immigrant, depending on how the students either embrace or resist digital literacy. Thomas Sura (2015) in his article “Infrastructure and Wiki Pedagogy: A Multi-Case Study,” likewise argues against assuming that students have a personal investment in new technologies: “If you’re going to incorporate a wiki for a wiki’s sake or simply to introduce a technology, then
you might want to be prepared for it to flop” (Sura, 2015, p. 24). His work notably consolidates the digital native and digital immigrant as two possible subjectivities expressing themselves in response to different classroom contexts.

At the time of writing this chapter, the most recent work referring to digital natives is Joy Bancroft’s (2016) article titled “Multiliteracy Centers Spanning the Digital Divide: Providing a Full Spectrum of Support.” In it, Bancroft dismisses the digital native as a fiction, what she refers to as a “myth.” She does not use mythic criticism as defined here in this chapter. Instead she means myth in its more colloquial definition, arguing that when working with students at her small community college in Florida, the digital native is a misnomer that obscures the realities of those students who were not raised with access to technology because of their socio-economic positions. Having dismissed both the stereotypical and archetypical digital native outright, Bancroft defines the problem for her writing center as a question of engaging students’ multiple literacies, where teachers “must be willing to offer meaningful support across the spectrum of digital literacy needs” (Bancroft, 2016, p. 1). Here attention is placed on securing necessary infrastructure to make the composition classroom a place to engage the potential uses of technology. In doing so, she distinguishes between non-traditional students as a distinct group from more stereotypical affluent students documented in previous studies, students who had access to technology. Bancroft further argues that the archetypical role of the instructor is to consider non-traditional students as a group in need of considerable investment. So while many of the students in Bancroft’s class qualify as Millennials in terms of their age, the intersections of race and class makes digital native useless in her work.

In these subsequent publications, digital nativity changes fluidly between stereotype and archetype depending on how each scholar understands the trope of technology as a
simultaneously disabling force. In general, the mythology of generational differences endures for the way it typifies the instructor, student relationship and functions as a caveat for uncritically embracing technology. The warning for all, regardless of generation, is that each technological affordance comes with a hindrance, as bodies become reliant on new technologies to accomplish what they could once do unaided; however, it is the wisdom of age that affords awareness of the disabling problem of technology. This problem then orients previous generations to a hero role that justifies the work of scholars and professionals who define themselves as the ones with experience and expertise to impart on younger generations. Scholars are certainly more nuanced in their role as “heroes,” who more often describe themselves as guides for the young as they work to enable Millennials’ aptitudes while develop a keen awareness of human beings’ relationship with technology. Still, this position relies on the fluid stereotypes and archetypes, where millennial students are transformed from indigenous users of technology to indigenous consumers of it. I do not argue that these perceptions are fictitious—they are certainly rooted in evidence—but I do foreground how these rationalizations are rooted in the legacy of an enduring mythology, which defines Millennials in problematic, often contradictory ways: native and immigrant, enabled and constrained, and active producer and passive consumer.

As seen in Computers and Composition, the myth of the digital native is in contentious use, sometimes the interactions between instructor and student, or between student and technology, and describing millennial students as both naturally apt with technology and vulnerable to its affordances. The next section identifies how this mythology is further complicated by how the myth of the entitlement generation, which works to describe Millennial students’ expectations in professional and academic contexts.
Millennials: The Entitlement Generation

Much like the digital native connotes Millennials as having particular aptitudes with technology, the entitlement generation connotes a set of learned or inherited behaviors that typify the millennial generation based upon their relationship to social and technological change. The Entitlement Generation is a stereotype that defines Millennials as having been spoiled by progressive shifts in parenting and education. But unlike the digital native, the entitlement generation does not ascribe any advantages to Millennials. Instead, the term defines a series of deficiencies that disadvantage Millennials in academic and professional contexts while vexing the Baby Boomers and Generation-X’ers that work with them. As will be shown in this chapter, numerous generations have been described as “entitled” in some way, and here I will show there is a significant canon of texts describing generations as entitled in varying ways.

The stereotype of the entitled generation is at least as old as the narratives written by the Greatest Generation describing Baby Boomers. Landon Jones (1980), identified earlier as the author who coined the term “Baby Boomer generation,” borrows from entitlement theory and uses the stereotype of entitled adults to theorize how Baby Boomers encounter difficulties in entering the workforce. Jones argued that Baby Boomers were spoiled by a new standard of living marked by modern technological conveniences, and this perception was published as conventional wisdom for understanding Baby Boomers as a generation. Other prominent writers saw this stereotype as a viable explanation for workplace conflict. For example, the three-time Pulitzer prize winning Thomas L. Friedman reported in a 1982 article that Baby Boomers often clashed with the expectations of their older peers because they were a generation raised “with the greatest affluence and expectations of any generation in American history.” Baby Boomers in particular were stereotyped to have inherited certain characteristics because of their advantaged upbringing that made them lazy, selfish, and unmotivated compared to previous generations. As
described in one Op-Ed for the *New York Times* in 1980, “our present *yuppies*, had no role models, and besides, when a 25-year-old can come out of law or business school and command a salary his grandparents never dreamed of earning, what incentive is there?” (Freund, 1986, emphasis added). Moreover, Baby Boomers were thought to expect a continuance of “long-term trends toward individualism, mobility and technological mastery in American society” (Gabriel, 1995), and that professionals needed to honor those trends or risk falling into obscurity (S. Jones, 1991). In the articles above, the archetype was that of previous generations of professionals who felt they needed only teach Baby Boomers about their unreasonable expectations in order to motivate and mediate their experiences.

There is certainly evidence that Baby Boomers were quantitatively much better off than previous generations, such as being the first generation with home conveniences, the first generation to generally experience true capitalism by making money off having money (Vartan, 1981), and the first generation to be able to comfortably live off single incomes (S. Jones, 1991). But the case that Boomers were entitled because they expected their careers to support a comfortable lifestyle similar to, or greater than how they were raised sounds much like the stereotypes later placed upon Generation X. Recall that according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Generation X is defined as “lazy, disaffected, unmanageable, and self-absorbed.” For Generation X, the term “slacker” also became a popular stereotype, describing why Generation X acted like “boomerangs” when they went to college for an education, but immediately returned home and became idle rather than seeking a career. Douglas Coupland, again, an author credited to have coined the name “Generation X,” argued that Generation X was a “subgroup that believes the myth of a *yuppie* life-style being both satisfying and viable [they] tend to be highly in debt, involved in some form of substance abuse, and show a willingness to talk about
Armageddon after three drinks” (Coupland, 1991, p. 91, emphasis added). Noteworthy is that Coupland is being self-critical in his critique, seeing the yuppie lifestyle as a characteristic of his generation. But generally speaking, the yuppie lifestyle was said to have spoiled Generation X into disappointment with work and with life.

If Baby Boomers expected an easy job to pay for lavish conditions, then Generation X expected to be provided the same by Baby Boomers for their whole lives. It is in this way that generations were stereotyped as having feelings of entitlement. The stereotype becomes a trope when as it becomes wedded to different generations regardless of circumstance, as each generation is defined as spoiled by technological and social change. As one author for Newsweek put it, “Generation X is a generation of whiners [...] raised with the highest standard of living in the history of the world (“The Whiny Generation.”). The trope of personal and interpersonal failings of the younger generation also helps to construct the archetypical hero, who must save the young from themselves. Within the myth of the entitlement generation, the archetypical young person transcends feelings of entitlement that compromise their capacity to work with previous generations. The entitlement generation, then, can be understood as myth, because the trope of technology and convenience as both a sign of progress and a social force that spoils each generation to the point of maladaptivity elevates the status of older generations as stewards of the young, always. This problematic relationship explains many inter-generational conflicts published at their respective times.

But while the mythology of entitlement has a history, many professionals and scholars regard it as a new phenomenon describing unique characteristics of the millennial generation. One of the earliest works defining Millennials as the entitlement generation was psychologist Jean M. Twenge’s (2006) book Generation Me, where she argues that Millennials have been
shaped by a culture of increasing materialism and concerns for fame and recognition. Speaking to Millennials, she writes, “You feel entitled to get the best of life: the best clothes, the best house, the best car. You’re special; you deserve special things” (100). In this quote, I hear the trope of the yuppie: young and spoiled professional whose upbringing taught them to expect no less than comfort and affluence, which has disadvantaged Millennials when facing the challenges of the workplace. Twenge’s thesis is perhaps alarmingly influential. Her work with Millennials has been published in numerous journals in psychology, most notably the Journal of Research in Personality and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

The stereotype that Millennials are entitled permeates professional and academic circles. This comes as little surprise as the stereotype affords explanatory power for inter-generational conflict, particularly in the workplace. There, the stereotype of Millennials as entitled denotes them as deficient in terms of their expectations of others and their capacities to interact with previous generations and the rest of the world. One viral example is an article written by business consultant Tim Urban, who labeled Millennials as *yuppies* and “GYPSYS”, who were brought up on feelings of entitlement, which he argues explains why many members of the millennial age group are underemployed and unsuccessful after graduating college. According to Urban, Millennials need to be told, “you're not special. You're another completely inexperienced young person who does not have all that much to offer yet. You can become special by working really hard for a long time” (Urban).

Much like Baby Boomers and especially like Generation X, here again we see the trope of the young and naïve professional whose expectations from their work environment have been corrupted by their comforts of their upbringing. In the case of Urban, and as an extension of Twenge’s thesis, Millennials are stereotyped as frustrated with employment not because of any
legitimized grievances about pay or advancement, but because they do not reap immediate rewards for relatively little effort. The archetypical manager, then, is positioned as the hero who must teach Millennials that is it their attitudes about work that need to be changed, not any problem with the business itself. It is in this way that these authors will justify the practices of institutions by stereotyping Millennials as maladapted to working environments. As part of the mythology of generational differences, this idea inspired countless articles that articulate how Millennials should be taught to refine their expectations.

To emphasize the prevalence of the entitlement myth in professional contexts, the business magazine *Forbes* has over 6,500 web articles published concerning Millennials. Of those articles, 246 discuss Millennials as the entitlement generation as of 2016 (with some these articles authored by self-identified Millennials). So common is this perception of Millennials that the web resource *Dictionary.com* provides a definition that defines the entitlement generation as those born on the older end of the spectrum for Millennials, or between 1979 and 1994. In response the proliferation of such articles, self-identified Millennial Eric Bailey designed a browser application that automatically changes “millennial” to “snake people” within Google’s search results. In my research, I found numerous memes of young people within the millennial age group using this application to satirize the prevalence of Millennial in their RSS feeds.

The stereotype that Millennials possess inherent feelings of entitlement also permeates academic conversations, particularly in how educators may have unwittingly cultivated an entitlement generation by not appropriately challenging their students. In their acclaimed book *Academically Adrift*, Richard Arum and Josipa Roska (2011) argue that Millennials are a student body that spends far less time on academic pursuits than generations before them, a problem that Arum and Roska believe has two dimensions: first, that Millennials have been raised in a culture
where academic pursuits are secondary to socializing and consuming massive amounts of media; and second, that certain socio-economic hardships have resulted in overworked university faculty with little time to provide instruction that prepares students for college and beyond. This highly regarded and comprehensive study does much to understand the college experience of Millennials. But it is my observation that Arum and Roska do not present data regarding the degree of work assigned to previous generations. Without such comparison, it is problematic to argue with such confidence that Millennials are working less than previous generations. Instead, it is my observation that Arum and Roska use problematic tropes to describe Millennials’ work habits. What is also curious is how they contextualize the work of university faculty and administrators within social forces of economic divestment while simultaneously assuming that students are largely immune to those same forces, apart from a few pages discussing students’ financial challenges (Arum and Roska, 2011, p. 85–89).

As an extension of Arum and Roska’s work, the stereotype describes Millennials as lacking the appropriate degree of challenge at all levels of education. For example, one viral article in *Time Magazine* speaks of how Millennials demand constant praise and affirmation regardless of the work that they do, a byproduct of the “everyone gets a trophy” mentality that some feel is so pernicious in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education (Buckingham and Buckingham, 2012). The problem defined within millennial mythology, then, is that students are being held to lower standards than generations past, a belief which leads industry professionals to think that Millennials are not as equipped to deal with contemporary challenges in college and beyond. Writing for the magazine *Business Insider*, Susan Goldstein (2012) writes, “In REAL life you don’t get a trophy for losing [...] For an entire generation of young adults this is a very difficult reality to face.” In this view, Millennials feel entitled to praise and
promotion while putting forth only minimal effort, an attitude they argue has been cultivated by a failing education system that does hold students accountable for their learning.

The problem of Millennials’ temperament then orients academics to a hero role that is one part educator, one part parent, and one part manager, where they need to simultaneously educate, guide, and train their Millennial students to interact with a world no one prepared them for. The archetypical member of the previous generation, then, is one who has the wisdom of experience and who has not been spoiled by shifts in parenting and education. It may not be the author’s intent to be purposely deceptive; nevertheless, when mythology is used to rationalize the available data, the effect is that millennial students are not seen as active members in a dialogue about difference. Instead, they are a generation in need of rescue when faculty, administrators, and parents unite to overcome economic hardships and somehow force Millennials into more diligent academic habits. In this way, Millennials are “adrift” as well as entitled, and it is up to previous generations to free Millennials from the entitlement mentality that compromises their success.

The Entitlement Generation in Computers and Composition

When examining publications in *Computers and Composition*, the evidence suggests that the myth of the entitlement generation has not been overtly embraced. Nowhere in the journal are there explicit references to “everyone gets a trophy,” for example, or helicopter parents that have spoiled millennial students. But there is trace evidence of the myth of entitlement present in how the authors interpret their research. For example, Arum and Roska’s work is explicitly referenced in Santos and Leahy’s 2014 article “Postpedagogy and Web Writing.” Since Arum and Roska argue that millennial students are not being assigned enough reading and writing while in college, Santos and Leahy use the book to establish context and to partially justify their work in
their article. They warn that print literacy is already on the decline, citing Arum and Roska’s work as evidence:

We find particularly compelling Brooke’s warning that our disciplinary insistence upon the printed page, if it persists unchecked, will slowly bring us out of step with our students, our institutions, and the broader culture of which we are a part [...] The failures documented in Academically Adrift (2011) suggest to us, in our darker moments, that Brooke’s warning might already have come to pass.

(Santos and Leahy, 2014, pp. 84 - 85)

In this way, Santos and Leahy justify their article’s and the journal’s orientations toward modes and literacies beyond print media, both as an answer to, and as a necessary counter for, Arum and Roska’s claims that instructors are not adequately invested in Millennial students’ literacy. Santos and Leahy (2014) argue that composition instructors can focus on web writing as a means to embrace the technological changes of the digital age, and afford students the opportunity to write for audiences outside the classroom, a practice they regard as familiar to Millennials. Implicit here is the trope of technological determinism, where students feel entitled to be taught familiar technologies. The problem, then, becomes one of previous generations navigating the expectations of younger generations while also adapting to declines in print literacy that are documented in Arum and Roska’s book. Thus the solution is redefined not as renewed emphasis on writing, but writing of a particular kind, if instructors orient themselves toward embracing technological literacy cultivated within web spaces that are already familiar to Millennials.

Consequently, the archetypical instructor orients toward meeting Millennials’ demand by teaching literacies relevant to Millennials and to the demands of the 21st century.

While not entitled in terms of being “lazy” or for expecting reward for minimal effort, this stereotype characterizes students as having expectations that instructors must meet, expectation that are part and parcel to their being raised in a digital culture. We remember aspects of this archetype from the digital native debate, where students are assumed to be native
to such technologies, but reframed as a way to challenge the previous generations to be duty-bound to teach Millennials students the potential dangers of technology as a potential distraction from academic pursuits. The earliest case of this archetype appears in Derek N. Mueller’s 2010 article “Digital Underlife,” which challenges the view that online social practices are a potential distraction for millennial students. He instead argues that students’ online practices are a rich site for critical engagement. Mueller also argues that students online practices are what necessitates this shift in thinking, “we are faced with unavoidable challenges compounded by the coupling of always-on social possibilities enabled by technological apparatuses with our valuing of student agency and power over their discursive spaces and activities” (246 - 247). His sentiment is echoed in Erin A. Frost’s 2011 article “Why Teachers Must Learn,” where she argues that instructors must familiarize themselves with social media because students’ fascination with these technologies culminates in an expectation, if not a necessity, for engaging social media in the classroom. Frost argues that, “this shift in the locations of classroom control also gives instructors the chance to observe digital natives as users and to develop pedagogies that might better reflect the implications of the Web for those users’ futures” (Frost 274 - 275). The instructor, then, is the hero that recognizes the dangers inherent in Millennials’ fascination with social networking technology while overcoming hardships instructors face in order to engage students’ subject relations to technology and their expectations that technology will be part of their instruction. In this way, previous generations of instructors teach students to control their focus while utilizing the communicative affordances of technology.

Lindsay Sabatino (2014) both embraces and challenges the millennial stereotype of entitlement. In her article “Improving Writing Literacies through Digital Gaming Literacies,” she accounts for her analysis of collected survey data from her own students. Sabatino argues that
while media and video games in particular “are frequently blamed for the decline in literacy, intellectual life, even civic engagement,” such technologies have utility if the instructor orients themselves to “reach these younger generations by building on their digital literacies through gaming while still teaching them the writing processes” (Sabatino, 2014, p. 50). Again the trope of Millennials as susceptible to technology as a distraction is used as a classroom exigency, where the instructor teaches critical engagement in partnership with formal instruction with the technologies students enjoy. Warren Mark Liew’s 2010 article entitled “Digital Hidden Transcripts” complements this view by arguing that students already participate in online cultures that, while they appear to be distractions, are actually rhetorically rich spaces for interactive argumentation. He argues that, “to develop a techno-culturally sensitive pedagogy is to engage critically and caringly in the kinds of reasoning, feeling, and valuing that students of the Millennial Generation have learned to exercise outside the “safety zones” of the formal classroom” (Liew, 2010, p. 312).

In Liew’s article, millennial students are presumed to already appreciate the advantages of web writing over print literacy and expect instruction in such spaces. Also central to this view is how the technologies themselves cultivate a degree of distraction (rather than just laziness). With the stereotype in place, the archetypical Millennial and teacher will instead move beyond technologies as distractions by enacting critical pedagogy within online spaces. What is particularly interesting is Liew’s argument that participating in online culture is a way to push students beyond the comfort zones of their experiences in typical classrooms, which implies that students are coddled by participating in more traditional instruction when placed in largely simulated pedagogical environments. In this way, instructors of composition embrace students’ sense of entitlement in perhaps a legal sense, where students deserve classroom instruction that is
relevant to them and their day-to-day practices. Liew in particular argues that by working within students’ familiar online spaces creates pedagogical space to challenge students to strive for unfamiliar or unconventional uses of technology in the classroom.

James Purdy embraces this archetype of Millennials adventuring beyond their expectations, but foregrounds the technology itself as the enabling force rather than presuming students abilities at using technology. Purdy argues that technologies “heighten students’ sense that the best texts are those that are quickly accessible and always available—two clicks away on an iPhone, downloadable on a Kindle” (Walker et al., p. 336). Purdy goes on to reject the entitlement stereotype and argues that students’ expectations to use technology are “not (primarily) because students are lazy but rather because they are used to (somewhat) open access” (Walker et al., p. 336). The problem, then, is also the solution: As new technologies afford conveniences that shape audiences’ expectations regarding communication, so to does the culture shift to one that benefits from greater speed and access. He writes, “Ease of use, for example, will continue to be valued, particularly by students dubbed Millennials and digital natives.” Purdy’s statement succinctly reframes entitlement as obligation to engage Millennials’ expectations of technology coupled with the power of technology’s affordances (Walker et al., p. 336). Kelly S. Bradbury’s (2014) article “Teaching Writing in the Context of a National Digital Literacy Narrative” extends Purdy’s claim, and more overtly refutes tropes of entitlement as a byproduct of the ease of use and convenience of technology: “some, however, did not think digital literacy needed to be taught because it takes away from other learning, because technology makes young people sloppy and lazy, and because they will learn it on their own” (Bradbury, 2014, p. 61). In response to this view, however, she foregrounds the affordances of technology and the need to guide students through a process of learning to responsibly use
technology. She writes, “young people need to be taught how to use it safely, and students could benefit from these skills if taught how to use them properly” (Bradbury, 2014, p. 61).

It is curious that these scholars foreground the liabilities of technology while also being cautious not to make presumptions about the bodies that use them and, by extension, the generation raised around them. It is in this way that much of the scholarship of Computers and Composition avoids stereotypes about generations and instead embraces the affordances of technology as a means to foreground what individuals regardless of age can accomplish, if they know the capabilities of technology for persuasive communication. Recent scholarship has rejected the stereotypes of Millennials as entitled, or made lazy by their interactions with technology. Instead, the teacher as the archetypical hero argues for the smart selection of ethical technologies as the best solution to the problem of technology as an enabling and constraining force. This construction implies that many of the attributes previously assumed to be inherent of digital natives could actually be achieved by anyone who understands rhetoric and technology, but with a nod to the archetype that younger generations will be more open and enthusiastic about this idea because they expect to work with technology.

**Functions of Millennial Myths in Academic and Professional Contexts**

This study is designed to answer the question: How does millennial function rhetorically in business contexts and in rhetoric and composition? Using mythic criticism, I analyzed how Millennials are discussed in academic and professional contexts. The goal was to build a taxonomy of millennial myths, and understand how those myths function within an extension of the mythology of generational differences. This taxonomy is as follows:
Digital Native

1. Archetypal Millennial: is native to digital technologies and their uses for communication and production; is proficient with those technologies and superior at communicating through channels afforded by technology; transcends their struggles with writing or composition by transferring skills of traditional composition within digital spaces; teaches their instructors or managers how technology works.

2. Stereotypical Millennial: is native to digital technologies but naïve about their use; their in-person communication skills have been compromised by their constant immersion in digital spaces.

3. Archetypal, Hero Manager: utilizes Millennials aptitudes with technology; partners Millennials with previous employees so that they may mentor them on the uses of technology; is cautious to not let Millennials become too distracted by technology as a source of entertainment and consumption.

4. Archetypal, Hero Instructor: learns technology from Millennials; accepts that Millennials embody technological progress; shares their knowledge of more traditional communication with Millennials and challenges them to bring that knowledge into digital spaces; avoids stereotypes about generations and foregrounds the uses of technology for anyone.

5. Problem: Millennials are far more proficient with technology than their older peers; or, Millennials are passive users and more conditioned consumers of digital technology, and thus more susceptible to its influences.
6. Trope: Every technology is simultaneously enabling and disabling. The instructor/manager assumes the role of mentor or co-explorer of technological change with Millennials; or, the instructor/manager possesses wisdom of resisting technological change.

*Entitlement Generation*

1. Stereotypical Millennial: expects pedagogy to be relevant to them and their online practices; is spoiled by technological conveniences and affordances; is unwilling to communicate in ways no facilitated by technology; Both their in-person communication skills and written communication skills have been irreconcilably compromised by their constant immersion in digital spaces.

2. Archetypal, Hero Manager: knows the importance of more traditional modes of communication; has wisdom about how long it takes to be successful; knows technology but is more adept with traditional and congenial methods of communication.

3. Archetypal, Hero Instructor: acquiesces to the demands of technological change and for the ways Millennial embody that change for good or ill.

4. Problem: Millennials are spoiled by the conveniences of technology and by progressive shifts in parenting and education; Millennials will resist because they have been conditioned to unreasonable expectations. Millennials need guidance on the technologies they uncritically use everyday.

5. Trope: the instructor/manager must teach the Millennial to have more reasonable expectations regarding school and work; the Millennial must be taught how to be a better student and professional.
The above taxonomy shows the stereotypes, archetypes, problems, and heroes that comprise the myth of the digital native and the myth of the generation of entitlement. The stereotypes and archetypes listed here are not discreet categories, as each of the written accounts in this corpus contained variations between the different stereotypes and archetypes. But even as imperfect categories, this taxonomy functions as part of a millennial mythology, which can advantage and, primarily, marginalize Millennials. Myths function to justify the marginalization of Millennials by centering on the experiences of previous generations and the institutions they serve. This is to say that within these narratives, the primacy of previous generations and institutions in affirmed, and millennial myths justify structures, namely, academic and professional contexts, and their role in helping to guide Millennials to overcome their deficiencies. As a rhetorical strategy, millennial myths work as a marginalizing force that justifies the roles of instructors, mentors, or managers and the contexts in which they are part. As an extension of the mythology of generational differences, millennial myths shows how previous generations explain the problems of generational conflict by borrowing from pre-established stereotypes and tropes that write generations as embodying social and technological epochs. This mythology justifies the structures that maintain the authority of previous generations, as they define themselves as necessary guides for the millennial generation within academic and professional contexts.

One common thread in these narratives is how authors account for professionals and educators struggling to understand the prevalence of technology in Millennials’ lives. In Millennial myths, technological and social changes are impetuses that shape the habits, demeanor, and expectations of younger generations, which in turn shape the problems that previous generations seek to solve. In professional contexts, this can involve revising workplace cultures to be more inclusive of Millennials’ unique attributes or, conversely, inculcating better
expectations within the minds of millennial employees. In both contexts, previous generation assesses Millennials’ aptitudes and expectations in relationship to their own knowledge and expertise.

Beyond simple stereotypes, millennial stereotypes typify millennial students in problematic ways. As might be expected, scholarship in *Computers and Composition* both embraces and resists the digital native as a descriptor for the millennial generation. Much like industry professionals, scholars use the term to describe students as different from generations past in that they are raised in an epoch of social change wrought by the increasing availability of the Internet. The term has been embraced for a number of reasons. Some have embraced the digital native as part of a context that challenges instructors to learn the multimodal affordances of Internet technologies. As Cynthia Selfe argues, “as teachers of rhetoric and composition, our responsibility is to teach students effective, rhetorically based strategies for taking advantage of all available means of communicating effectively and productively as literate citizens” (644). Selfe’s arguments set a precedent for examining the way Millennials are immersed in an environment where digital media is omnipresent, and foregrounds the role of rhetoric and compositions in helping Millennials make choices in how they might embody multimodal communication.

But others have resisted the idea that digital natives are the impetus for multimodal pedagogy, arguing instead that “decisions surrounding the use of technologies for learning should not only be based around students’ preferences and current practices, even if properly evidenced, but on a deep understanding of what the educational value of these technologies” (Margaryan et al., 2011, p. 439). Furthermore, some question whether digital native is a useful term at all. The tension between these competing views is much alive in scholarship. And as the
mythology of generational difference permeates the discussion, inter-generational conflict is likely to endure as each subsequent generation arises. These competing attempts to define a generation are what build generational myths: defining stereotypes, archetypes, and problems, and orienting previous generations as a hero in the tale, as they are responsible for determining enduring legacies and future actions.

In professional contexts, the myth of the entitlement generation is alarmingly common. The myth borrows stereotypes and tropes from the myth of the digital native as a means to construct Millennials as deficient of skills necessary to be successful in the workforce. As an extension of the mythology of generational differences, where previous generations work toward better futures for the young, these progressions eventually inculcate unreasonable (or to some, unconscionable) expectations within the minds of younger generations. As part of the Millennials mythology, the entitlement generation, then, stereotypes the young as spoiled by progress. And just as before, technology and its capacity to usher social changes is the catalyst for feelings of entitlement. The problem is defined as an “inflated sense of self that leads to unrealistic expectations and, ultimately, chronic disappointment” (Moore, 2010). For example, some professionals argue that social networking sites condition Millennials to be self-absorbed because the technology require personal profiles prompting all kinds of personal information. As such, Millennials’ perceived attributes and deficits with technology are shaped by millennial myths.

I will acknowledge that hero is problematic as a unit of analysis for analyzing the roles of academics and professionals. Regardless of vocation, both academics and scholars embody the practices that they feel will advance their disciplines while simultaneously ingratiating the young into the same pursuit. In this way, being a “hero” is perhaps unavoidable, as institutions must
continually defend their relevance to the public (and the public good). Indeed, many businesses rely on effective training, and many disciplines defend their relevance by rooting their work in teaching. But in nearly every case, the archetype of the instructor or manager is defined in relationship to the Millennial. If the archetypical Millennial is perceived to be more apt at technology than the instructor or manager, then it is because they are perceived natives that explains the disparity. If the stereotypical Millennial is perceived to be a passive consumer of technology, or had their communication skills compromised by its use, then the archetypical instructor or manager takes on a hero role to save the Millennial from the technology they are native too. In every case, however, the role of the instructor or manager also justifies their role within academic and professional contexts.

This study suggests when previous generations are writing the script, younger generations are written as embodying social and technological change. Millennial myths comprise archetypes and stereotypes that define the perceived attributes and deficits of each new generation in relationship to technology. Within Millennial myths, Millennials are at the periphery as part of a problem that needs to be solved, while previous generations are centered as the hero/instructor/manager who will solve the millennial problem. In academic contexts, the centering of the instructor is not so pernicious, and much of the scholarship takes a nuanced position acknowledging the relationship on more even keel. But in business contexts, there is a substantial body of works whose definitions of millennial are neither as sympathetic, nor as nuanced as academics. Imagine Millennials trying to find employment when their employer are informed by, say, what sociologist Kate S. Rourke (2011) has argued, “It is integral to this process that parents, businesses, and government entities work together to restructure the mentality of young people in America and breed a new generation of the once ever-present work
spirit that was America’s fame once again into the social fabric of our country” (Rourke, 2011). As a call to action for professionals, this frame of inter-generational conflict dismisses any hope for dialogic consensus between previous generations and Millennials.

Further Discussion

There is disagreement between scholars regarding how mythic criticism can be applied to texts. While some have embraced this definition of mythic criticism for the way it allows scholars to deconstruct master narratives and explore tensions between the religious and the secular (Grant, 2000, pp. 49; 71), critics of Rowland’s view have argued that his definition is too confining. For example, David Sutton (1997) argues that mythic criticism should include legends and folktales, both of which are not to be regarded as true in any sense, but nonetheless function as a means of ongoing human activity that offers comfort and guidance in times of uncertainty (Sutton, 1997, p. 213). For Sutton, myths are part of “mythos,” and perform a cultural function much like folklore and legends.

There is an important distinction to be made between myths as imaginative interpretations and pure fictions such as folklore. This distinction is important because it demarcates myth as a suitable concept to use for analyzing the mythology surrounding Millennials. For example, narratives like the popular Harry Potter series or Star Wars may indeed contain stereotypes and tropes of previous and younger generations, but these stories would not be suitable artifacts for mythic critique because they are works intended to be read as fictions (Rowland 109). By contrast, myths are surrealities that draw upon “widely shared cultural stories” or themes that are immediately recognizable and believable to the audience. Myths are believable because they reach to the past and explain contemporary circumstances, particularly when deliberating future action. In this way, myths should not be understood as a
primitive form of rationalization, but as “key aspect of all human culture” (Rowland 102), where rhetors use conventional wisdom that is rooted in history, and argue for how circumstances can be resolved. Myths endure not only because they are valued purely as entertainment or moral lessons, but because the have a transcendent function, where narratives are used to argue a sense of time that is “true” in the sense that it provides a rationalization for events and people both past and present. The archetypes and tropes associated with generational differences function as historic parallels for contemporary events, people, or cultures, and they communicate a truth that empowers people to deliberate on contemporary issues. If fictional stories are art imitating life, then myths are more life that imitates art.

While an expanded definition of myths may be useful for analyzing certain kinds of artifacts, this chapter does not engage fictional accounts of Millennials or other generations. Instead, this study looks for problems, archetypes, and heroes that appear in non-fiction works, and that have a lineage of stereotypes and tropes that can be traced. Rowland’s definition of myth provides a more useful framework for analyzing how myth functions in communications that are intended to offer explanations for real problems in the world, and how these myths at times conflict with individual identity. For example, Rowland and Frank’s (2011) article titled “Mythic Rhetoric and Rectification in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” rejects Sutton’s claim by arguing that folklore and legends do not provoke action in the real world the way that myths do (p. 42). Carol David’s (2001) work with myth complements this view for the way she analyzed myths about women leaders which “elicit generalizations that reinforce our cultural beliefs and confirm what we already know” (David, 2001, p. 8). In other words, myths can provide explanations of people or circumstances that are similar to points in the past, but that may serve the interests of those in power. In David’s work, myths functioned to portray women in
portraiture in ways that appeased the gender inequities of early 20th century. What is significant about David’s work is the obscuring power of myth creates a problem for individual identity. Rowland and Frank (2011) acknowledge that the myths also obscure reality when myths work only to confirm subconscious biases.

I find that myth is a concept suited for engaging discussions about generational differences because of the way the concept looks beyond stereotypes in a particular time and place. For this project, I have aligned mythic criticism with social and global turns in composition because I am using this method to question definitions and stakes while theorizing how millennial stereotypes harken back to stereotypes and tropes of the past. I argue that certain stereotypes and tropes endure throughout history by stereotyping younger generations in particular ways, a phenomenon that mediates how previous generations understand Millennials and their relationships with them. Moreover, mythic criticism examines how particular occasions provide the context for narratives of conflict and triumph. For this project, mythic criticism affords explanatory power for how and why previous generations have typified the young at specific sites where they are mentors, teachers, or managers. As part of a comparative-historical frame, mythic criticism works to explain how generational myths may compromise students’ agency in the present and the future.

In order to qualify as myths, the digital native and the entitlement generation must harken back to a history of common stereotypes, tropes, and archetypes. On the whole, stereotypes, archetypes, and tropes embrace varying degrees of technological determinism and technological affordance while working as a marginalizing force for Millennials. As a form of determinism, technology is a powerful structure affecting the temperament of all generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—and conditioning them toward particular temperaments,
temperaments that create generational conflict and which constrain a generations’ capacity to be successful in academic and professional contexts. In this mythology about generational differences, technology also determines the expectations of younger generations, who may expect certain expediencies and conveniences. These recurring tropes become central to the mythology of generational conflict. Technology becomes part of an axiom that technological change brings social change. This is explained by acknowledging certain epochs of change, which are used to rationalize how those contextual changes influence the bodies and minds of the young. In other words, those changes afflict the younger generations with particular aptitudes and temperaments that must be mediated by previous generations of teachers and professionals.

When understood as components of mythology, these tropes explain how previous generations both identify and misidentify Millennials as previous generations struggle to teach, mentor, or manage Millennials. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that these myths conflict with the lived experience of Millennials and how Millennials identify themselves, an argument that will be elaborated on in Chapter Four of this dissertation. And since narratives discussing Millennials are often rooted in the experience of previous generations, mythic criticism affords explanatory power for the rhetoric involved in discussing generational differences. The mythology of generational differences is likely to be of enduring relevance. These myths work to establish context by rhetorically constructing people involved, time and place, and affirming preconceived views that elevate the status of one group at the expense of Others. For example, in their book *Academically Adrift*, Arum and Roska argued that each generation is threatened by academic divestment. The result, according to Arum and Roska, is that students have no source other than colleges and universities to prepare them to enter the workforce. This functions as a call to action for administrators and teachers to save Millennials from themselves. This sentiment
has been echoed by a number of industry professionals who describe Millennials as the self-interested “yuppies” that are unwilling to work hard to achieve success in their careers. Using the concept of myth creates space to interrogate these assumptions and posit that those social constructions culminate into problematic ideologies that could compromise students’ success.

While Rowland and Frank (2011) argue that “myths are central to identity” for the way they function to define a people’s connection to the land and to their cultural heritage—defining themselves from an Other that, in the case of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, served to delegitimize Palestinian identity as contrary to the “truth” of Zionism (2011, p. 41, pp. 49 - 50)—myths can be an anathema to identity when the language describes the lived experiences of individuals as a cultural problem. The trope of the degenerate, for example, is nothing new, but the trope of the dandy had real consequences for effeminate men and the women that dandies were described as “devolving” into. The stereotypes placed on Millennials could be pernicious when these stereotypes define Millennials as inherently deficient. But while myth foregrounds the surreal, identity foregrounds the lived experience and authenticity of an individual’s communications and their expressions of their selves. As an invocation of identity, *millennial* can be (re)defined and used to resist stereotypes, tropes, and archetypes, and orient Millennials toward challenge a social position that is dependent upon previous generations. It is the tension between myth and identity as rhetorical concepts that will be explored in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER FOUR – MYTH, IDENTITY, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

In Chapters One and Two, I argued that Millennials face stereotypes that compromise their success in academic and professional contexts, and that these stereotypes are an extension of the mythology of generational differences. As a marginalizing force, myths elevate the status of previous generations who define themselves as heroes who save the young from unreasonable expectations and their deficits wrought by technological conveniences. Examining inter-generational conflict is an ethical commitment aligned with social and global turns in rhetoric and composition, where scholars are concerned with thinking critically about how communication constructs knowledge about, and too often without, due sympathy for different people, organizations, and groups. The social and global turns are about ethics, but they are also about methods, as scholars working within the social and global turns are working to devise methods for examining communication and conflict between people and groups. Since I understand millennial stereotypes and mythology as a marginalizing force, this chapter extrapolates the concept of identity from the works of scholars writing from marginalized perspectives. Authors reviewed in this chapter include Zan Meyer Goncalves, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, Raymond Oenbring, Jonathan Alexander, Benedict Anderson, Paul Smith, Stephanie Vie and others in order to define identity as a concept of rhetorical critique and a method for analyzing identity online. My goal in this chapter is to synthesize postmodern and poststructuralist theories regarding identity and distil theories of identity into a concept for rhetorical critique.

As theoretical concepts, there is considerable overlap in how myth and identity can be applied to texts. Both examine the historical roots of marginalization within institutions that impart power and privilege. In this way, myth and identity complement each other in how they
both provide a conceptual lens for analyzing the effects of stereotypes. Likewise, myth and identity complement each other in ways that offer much explanatory power for understanding inter-generational conflict through a comparative-historical frame. By examining artifacts with both concepts of rhetorical critique, the discussion can be honed to account for Millennials complementary and competing subjectivities, which communicate past, present, and future at sites of inter-generational conflict.

While there is overlap between myth and identity as theoretical concepts, there are also clear distinctions between them as concepts of rhetorical critique. While the concept of myth explains why previous generations define Millennials in problematic ways, the concept of identity, conversely, can explain how Millennials understand themselves. These understandings posit a sense of self that factures the mythological narratives by foregrounding and appreciating Millennials’ understanding of their own subjectivity. As a concept and a method of critique, identity affords explanatory power for how Millennials define themselves in response to the marginalizing forces of stereotypes and, by extension, millennial myths by recognizing identity as a rhetorical strategy that resists the narrative coherence of myths by fracturing those narratives with Millennials’ sense of self. In other words, identity is a strategy that uses subjectivity to resist the marginalizing forces.

Identity: Essentialized, Performed, and Performative

As a form of persuasive communication, identity has several mutually reinforcing facets. The first facet begins with using “I am” as symbolic means to understand one’s self. “I am” as a supposition posits one’s body in the modernist sense, a whole and unified subject whose body is its primary means of knowing. This is an extension of the Cartesian supposition “I think, therefore I am,” where an immortal “soul” both exists within and transcends the body, and
rationalizes itself and the world through intuition, engagement, and reflection, and by asserting lived experience as a valid and valued way of knowing. This rhetorical act makes the self both the subject and agent in understanding what it means to be. As a subject, it centralizes the self as a living being with an embodied sense of the world and whose lived experience expresses the truth of the self as a feeling subject immersed in the world. The self collects sensory experience and rationalizes a coherent narrative about what it means to exist.

As an agent, the self can be someone’s essentialized nature, where suppositions about the body’s natural state affords the individual a subjective position suitable for participation in human culture. Such invocations are common, for example, when assuring access to women’s healthcare and reproductive rights (Baumgardner and Richards, 2001, p. 279), or with LGBT advocacy group’s embracing sexual identity as “born this way.” The essentialized identity views the self as subject and agent, a naturalized state where an author simply must describe their state of being as a totalizing truth. However, in Discerning the Subject, Paul Smith (1988) argues that there is no agent when viewing the subject and the individual as the same, because it poses a monolithic identity wholly determined by ideology. Instead, Smith argues that resistance is the site where the agent comes into being: “as a place from which resistance to the ideological is produced or played out, and thus is not equivalent to either the ‘subject’ or the ‘individual…a form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for” (Smith, 1988, p. xxxv). This subject/agent as the tension of competing subjectivities becomes the reason and the means for resistance, cultural critique, and social activism, where the self as a subject and agent happens at sites of resistance.
Postcolonial theorists, queer theorists, and feminist theorists have also been critical of the Cartesian self and of any political advocacy that embraces Cartesian or essentialized notions that identities are whole, unified, and biologically rooted. Their thesis is that by embracing these notions, rhetors obscure the stronger effects of nurture and choice, while further marginalizing those who do not fit naturalized logics about the self. The potential for violence is stark for those who, for example, do not fit gender or sexual binaries (Lovass, Elia, and Yep, 2006, p. 6; Hines, 2006, p. 607), or for whose race has been circumscribed as biologically inferior to that of a dominant group (Duong, 2012). Indeed, essentialism seems foundational to the existence for sexism and racism, where certain qualities of the body are deemed inherent and inferior to presumably “naturalized” white, heterosexual, cisgendered male. In this way, essentialism is a necessary component of what bell hooks calls the “white supremacist capitalist-patriarchy,” where institutional structures praise, reinforce, and authenticate certain identities as “true” while excluding and delegitimizing others. A resistance to essentialism marked both an ethical and methodological turn towards social constructionism in philosophy and rhetoric, where postmodern critique worked to fiercely challenge essentialism, particularly in postcolonial critique, feminist criticism, and queer theory.

Working within postcolonial literature and rhetoric, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1989) has shown that essentialized notions of identity reify social hierarchies and marginalize South Asian men and women, whom she calls subalterns. But while Spivak acknowledges the dangers of accepting the essentialized notion of identity as whole and unified, she shows how marginalized identities will often make choices to appease colonial institutions by tacitly embracing essentialism. Spivak calls this rhetorical strategy “strategic essentialism,” where the subaltern embraces essentialism in moments when they defines themselves in relation to, and
inherently distinct from hegemonic groups. Strategic essentialism functions as both a strategy and a method of rhetorical critique. For example, Raymond Oenbring (2010) grounds Spivak’s notion within heterosexist and racist discourse, and uses the concept to examine the strategies of writer, activist, and first East African PhD Wangari Maathai, whose communication choices were specifically formulated to persuade Western audiences using essentialized definitions of East African women. By Oenbring’s account, Maathai used strategic essentialism by speaking about how the women of Africa are natural nurturers and the daughters of great agriculturalists, a move that convinced a myriad of female volunteers who had no access to agricultural training to trust in themselves and help the trees grow, leading to “astounding innovations” (Oenbring 298). But this strategy was at least in part a fiction, as it went against Maathai’s postmodern understandings of identity and even against Maathai’s own scholarship in biology. As a result, Maathai drew much criticism, but ultimately her efforts within her own organization “The Green Belt Movement” were successful, even earning her Nobel Laureate status. This serves as an example of how subalterns can use strategic essentialism as a powerful persuasive force, though they do so by eliding the social construction of identity and exaggerating the role of biology as a determiner of self and the relationship between the self and institutions.

Strategic essentialism as a unit of analysis can be used to analyze cases where the self is posited as unified, biologically rooted, and hence authentic. It foregrounds the subject/agent by identifying the oppressive forces that threaten one’s being and motivates them to define themselves as “truer” than how another group may define them. To claim one’s authenticity in this way is to centralize the self as a feeling and thinking subject that does not represent the totality of a subject position, but that tacitly accepts other (and Other) representations or
presumptions about what another’s self is supposed to be, while still claiming authority where it had not previously existed.

As the first facet of identity, particularly in Western academic culture, “I am” is to assert one’s authority as having the wisdom of experience and expertise, a thinking subject capable of rationalization and committed to problem solving and action. Apart from heterosexist and racist discourse, strategic essentialism is possible within ageist discourse as well. The mythology of Millennials as apt with technology, for example, begins with the assertion “I am _____” as a way to rhetorically assert the self as a subject and means of knowing about technology, usually by asserting the feeling and thinking self simultaneously as a mode of claiming agency as a technological expert, and interacting with others and the world as the such. Correspondingly, the subject position is self-evident in that the body exists in relation to others and as the individual claims it to be for themselves while, subsequently, this facet of identity is a way of credibly communicating a sense of self to an Other. As a rhetorical tent, someone’s authority is their ethos, or the combination of the reputation of a speaker and the truth and honesty in their words. As a distinct tenant from logos or pathos, ethos foregrounds the speaker or writer as a credible body making a credible argument, and it is this definition of ethos that corresponds with the concept of identity in rhetoric and composition studies.

Paramount in the work of exploring identity and ethos is Zan Meyer Goncalves (2005), who explores the complications of ethos as performative identity in her book *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos*. In her book, Goncalves merges theories of ethos with postmodern performance theory as posited in queer theory and feminist criticism. In her view, a queer sense of ethos rejects the “Cartesian notion that identity is essential, fixed, and unitary” and instead looks at ethos as an identity that “is performed and constructed, in flux and multiple, created for
particular local contexts to be created anew for still other contexts” (p. 23). Goncalves’ thesis comes from her work with The Speaker’s Bureau, a LGBT student outreach program “designed to address homophobia and heterosexism on campus and in the community” (p. 1). As part of the Speaker’s Bureau and their efforts toward educating campus communities, student members of the Bureau would reflect upon their lived experiences as LGBTQ-identified youth and theorize points of convergence between their multiple identities and the identities of their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts.

By Goncalves’ account, students wrote extensively, reflecting on their lived experiences, and empathized with their heterosexual and cisgender classmates. In practice, the Bureau would acknowledge points of convergence where the students shared common experience: a first kiss, the failure of an exam, participation in sports, etc. With common experiences established, the students could then engage with variations where their subjectivities diverge. Goncalves argues that this shift comes from a “new discourse of specificity,” which decentralizes the self as a means to foreground the systemic structures of oppression in ways that are self-referential. This discourse of specificity, she writes, “allows speakers on the Bureau to begin the work of disarticulating a hierarchy that stigmatizes some differences while valorizing others [...] an important step in using ethos to invite/make allies who recognize and are willing to address injustice” (Goncalves, 2005, p. 19). In other words, instead of establishing credibility by only appeasing normalized modes of discourse, student members of the Speaker’s Bureau would create room for variation by acknowledging both common and competing subjectivities, thereby creating space for alternative ways of being. This composite strategy of difference and commonality established credibility and empathy between speaker and audience. These stories often focus on ‘coming out’ or realizing their sexual or gender identity, but as Goncalves asserts,
this is not solipsistic confessional writing (Goncalves, 2005, p. 131).

Goncalves interprets the success of the Speaker’s Bureau as being grounded in Judith Butler’s (1990) social constructionist view of identity as both performance and performatively. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes about her observations of drag culture, which satirizes identity categories of gender and class. She meditates on the social constructionist view of identity and its focus on arbitrary choice, and concludes that identity can be a performance when it is used as a useful fiction for cultural critique. Butler then borrows from Foucault and argues that since queer subjectivities are often rendered incoherent by established “grids of unintelligibility,” where sex and gender are conflated and reduced to essentialized notions of male/female and hetero/homo binaries, performativity acknowledges that identity is neither biologically determined (essentialized) nor entirely arbitrary, but reified through the repeated and performatively gendered practices that are at once within and beyond the conscious choice of the individual. Jonathan Alexander (2008) makes succinct the difference between performance and performativity in his book *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*. He writes, “My intent is not to mistake ‘performance’ for *chosen* identity…rather, I firmly believe with Butler that performativity consists in a reiteration of norms which recede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot by taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ of ‘choice’ (2008, p. 120). Alexander criticized scholars that take a purely social constructivist view of performance by stating clearly that “the reduction or performativity to performance would be a mistake” (2008, p. 120).

The performed identity, then, is a second unit of analysis which foregrounds the will of choice, disembodied from the agent/subject, fleeting in its moment of resisting and, the case of drag performance, satirizing culture. Performed identity is the adoption of wholly arbitrary
norms within fleeting moments of subject agency. It is the purely social constructionist view, where identity is an arbitrary and fictional performance and where an individual can take on any type of persona they wish.

Butler shows that there is always tension between performed and performative identity, where the “choice” of following one’s biological inclinations is really a choice of whether the individual wants to face the repercussions for enacting their most authentic sense of self. Neither biologically rooted nor socially determined, identity is the complex interplay of bodies in space adopting, resisting, and innovating to construct a self that is both intelligible and not, and wholly unique to the individual. This move creates space again for essentialized notions of identity, but in constant negotiation with the social constructions of identity as fluid and multiple. As such, the tension between performance and performativity in the Speaker’s Bureau activism, for example, serves as a successful model for composition studies because “[i]dentity performance theory can help us as teachers of writing to understand the limited usefulness of the notion that identity as fixed and unitary and can help us to introduce instead identity as a contingent performance shaped by context as much as by agency of any on rhetor” (Goncalves, 2005, p. 9).

Particularly pertinent for studying identity is how the performative identity functions as a unit of analysis. Performative identity looks for how subject/agents can disrupt grids of intelligibility, which threatens to prescribe individual’s subjectivity using historically established forms. For example, Butler (1990) has argued that increasing the visibility of queer people disrupts grids of intelligibility because it positions the hegemonic to ignore the presence of embodied Others, and this notion has been embraced by many LGBT organizations. Performative identity foregrounds times when identity is used to establish credibility by finding common ground before disrupting grids of intelligibility to asserting subject difference. It is
possible that through continued yet ever changing performances of Millennials’ identity may empower others to find community with each other while simultaneously challenge how *millennial* is define by previous generations. As performance and the performative, these identities are meant neither as prescription, nor as a resignation of defining one’s self as a consistent, coherent identity. Instead, through visible performances, these bodies demonstrate that identities are “a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (Butler, 1998, p. 531). Indeed, Millennials face potential discrimination when facing Baby Boomers or Generation X. And while, Butler warns that visibility alone does not mean liberation, as visibility can easily attract the attention of policing mechanisms that employ violent means against bodies that deviate from the norm, the emergence of solidarity and community can offer the strength of numbers. When enough people embrace enacting identities for all their complexity, the violence of policing forces loses the necessary numbers to maintain dominance. How can such numbers be acquired? It is possible that technology can play a role given the prevalence of Web 2.0 and social networking technologies in Millennials’ lives, with a careful acknowledgment of the mythology of generational differences as an oppositional force.

**Online Identity and Imagined Communities**

The three aforementioned facets of identity—strategic essentialism, performance, and performativity—are further enriched by the study of social networking sites (SNSs) and other forms of Web 2.0 technologies. In the context of studies in new media and psychology, scholars have used postmodern conceptualizations of identity to understand how identities are enacted within online spaces. Sherry Turkle, while problematic as an author within the canon of millennial mythology, has spent significant attention to how young people understand
themselves and the technologies they use. In her book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Turkle (1998) foregrounds how text-based, online gaming enable identity play in ways that are fluid, multiple, and interconnected, as the kinds of identities created and expressed in the virtual reality of online spaces mirrors the kinds of understandings of the self offline. She writes, “In sum, MUDs blur the boundaries between self and game, self and role, self and simulation […] you are what you pretend to be” (Turkle, 1998, p. 192). Her thesis can be read as decidedly postmodern for the way she echoes the Derridean notion that “To pretend, I actually do the thing: I have therefore only pretended to pretend,” a view that also amalgamates performance and performativity as mutually reinforcing facets of identity. Viewed in this way, identities are both real and imagined, or “useful fictions,” as Daniel Dennett called them, but constructed within virtual space for the purpose of continually representing and reinventing the self.

Scholars have noted similar convergences and divergences between digital and corporeal representations of identity. In their book *Born Digital*, authors John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2010) discuss the legal implications of online identity and the potential consequences when young people especially represent their lives in online spaces. To build their argument, Palfrey and Gasser acknowledge that young people choose multiple platforms to represent their many selves in ways visible at all times to a global audience: "Instead of thinking of their digital identity and their real-space identity as separate things, they just have an identity (Palfrey and Gasser, 2010, p. 3).” Still, it is useful to view the correspondences and conflicts between identities and edentities, defined by Stephanie Vie as (2011) “an electronic identity composed of the digital traces left behind as we participate in virtual worlds” (p. 1). In his article “‘What *South Park* Character Are You?’: Popular Culture, Literacy, and Online Performances of
Identity,” Bronwyn Williams observed the same while surveying his students’ identities on social networking sites MySpace and Facebook. But he foregrounds the participatory (and intertextual) nature of using popular media to construct online identities: “The construction of these pages illustrates how popular culture practices that predate online technologies have been adopted and have flourished with new technologies that allow content to flow across media as well as increase the ease of audience participation.” (24). Williams observed how his students would choose popular music, TV shows, and photos of media personalities as ways to express their sense of self online. The synergy between those online identities and the bodies that enact those identities in corporeal spaces is not always clear, but what was clear was how each choice was intended to communicate Millennials’ identity amongst themselves and for a global audience.

Though not always clear, the synergy between participation in both online and corporeal spaces can be astounding, particularly regarding sites where young people participate in pop culture. For example, people of the Millennials age group organize and participate at conventions celebrating popular media: A Con of Ice and Fire (for Game of Thrones), Comic Con (for fans of comics), and Harry Potter Con. They then adopt identities for these events, actively cosplaying their own personas as part of their participation in the event. These performed identities will exists not only on the floors of the conventions, but as an identity on their personal websites, on their Facebook and Tumblr pages, and on a convention communities’ website. The performances are fleeting, but they are remembered and repeated through traces across digital media. These performances of characters in media will also be curated and contextualized to account for Millennials’ feelings about the conventions and their actions as participants amongst other members of the fandom. In this context, the difference between what is performative and what is
performance becomes an important one, because certainly Millennials do not believe they have become their favorite characters from film, T.V., and streaming media..

Indeed, edentity becomes less performative and more performance when detached from participation in corporeal spaces, a position which enables identity play that can be purely imaginary when there is not a physical presence to embody the edentity. Amber Buck’s (2012) case study of a university student in “Life, Learning, and Literacy on the Social Network: Digital Participatory Culture” demonstrates this point. She surveyed a student named Ronnie, whose online presence was fluid and multiple, but firmly enveloped in his day-to-day activities as a college student. She writes, “Ronnie’s use of Facebook and Twitter demonstrated how he negotiated flattened audience structures to share information with and represent himself to both groups […] through his musical alter ego, Ronnie conceived of a particular audience and created a specific persona in response” (Buck, 2012, p. 25). The student would Tweet when he got up in the morning and about his day-to-day movements through the campus, so his followers knew that his social media presence as fully expressive of his activity on the campus. But when the student created a fake girlfriend named Alison as a prank, the lack of a person to embody that identity made the ruse impossible to maintain. The lesson is that without a physical presence, the performance was untenable. Buck shows how Ronnie demonstrated the necessary moves and audience considerations to validate that the person was “real” in the online community, which gave Ronnie the opportunity to inhabit a virtual subjectivity that was not his own. She writes, “Creating an avatar perhaps of a different age, a different gender, a different temperament is a way to explore the self […] Part of Ronnie’s inability to keep up the fake profile, then, lay in ‘Alison’s’ inability to participate in all of the forums, online and offline, that she plausibly
should have.” (Buck, 2012, p. 30). Buck’s study confirms that edentity can be pure performance, but it is no substitute for the performative identity enacted by the embodied self.

But the distinction can blur within the context of this digital-corporeal culture, because the performative and the performance are consubstantial through active celebration of fictional media in communities both on- and offline. While performances are fiction, the performative is the preponderance of performances across varying contexts, where the embodied self both embraces and resists semiotic modes of representation in order to present their most authentic selves as a continued participant of the community. While the postcolonial and queer scholars take this decidedly postmodern view of identity, Benedict Anderson (1991) takes a poststructuralist approach to identity and community in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Complementary to the postmodern attention to semiotic modes and dis/embodiment, Anderson argues that identity is what brings cohesion to what he calls “imagined communities,” a term which by the end of the book he uses interchangeably with *nations*. In defining his theory he writes that imagined communities are…

*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion […] it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible. (Anderson, 1991, pp. 7 - 8)

Though Anderson does not write specifically about edentity, his work is useful because of his attention to the acts and structures of communication as a way create identity through participation in a community; corporeal, yes, but less about the (dis)embodied and more about the textual and structural systems that co-create and galvanize the kinds of interactions that make identity possible.
To summarize Anderson’s thesis, language (particularly a mother-tongue), literacy (texts that are popular), ceremony (daily habits), and the printing press (the means to widely share all of the above), as well as history and place are essential for understanding how identity builds community. For Anderson, group cohesion is achieved through the means to produce and circulate texts that can be curated by physical communities, through newspapers, libraries, and museums. Community is iterative in how participants share media while corresponding through daily habits and rituals accepted by the community. What is curated becomes a process of remembering and forgetting, where people who share a location collect fractured, contradictory, or opposing narratives, and creates a sense of fraternity and estrangement that fosters a “conception of personhood, which, because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 115 - 116). The form and function of the narrative is what Anderson calls its “style,” or how identities make community through textual inclusions and exclusions from public memory, and through the validation of the community stories that account for sacred people, places, and texts, or a construction of nationalist identity as being coherent and agreed upon, even though many members of that community will never know each other.

To paraphrase Anderson, online identities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 1991, pp. 7). To apply Anderson’s thesis to enacting identities is to acknowledge how users of social media will share language conventions such as words, phrases, emojis, or lulspeak; to acknowledge the importance of literacy as a means to build fraternity through appreciation of popular media; to acknowledge ceremony and ritual as a means to map the habits associated with community participation (such as sharing, liking, or commenting); and to acknowledge the tools used to create and curate these texts. Online spaces are simultaneously the space and the means for
exhibition as texts are created, curated, distributed, and utilized. Ultimately, belonging to the online community involves how well the individual can enact all of the above, where the strategically essentialized, the performance, and the performative coalesce in the harmony between physical and corporeal spaces, and how the individual will both include or exclude Others when composing narratives of the community.

Methodology – Visibility, Consent, and Labor
The relationship between identity, community, and technological affordance is important for understanding identity and its representations in online spaces, but equally important are ethical questions. The social and global turns in composition ask for a consideration of ethics as well as methods, and the analysis of identity in online spaces is ultimately a question of how to respect individuals’ visibility within public and private spaces. Scholarship in rhetoric and composition addressed the private/public divide and scholars’ early fears about the consequences when educators enact their identities using social media. One influential work on this is Gina Maranto and Matt Barton’s 2010 article, “Paradox and Promise: MySpace, Facebook, and the Sociopolitics of Social Networking in the Writing Classroom.” There, Maranto and Barton summarize a corpus of journalist’s think pieces regarding how many educators in Ohio and across the country have either lost their jobs, or potentially undermine their classroom ethos by posting their politic opinions and other aspects of their lives on MySpace and Facebook. They argue that rather than being “new and revolutionary,” social networking sites such as “Facebook and MySpace are remediating previous high school traditions […] and these rituals have always blurred the line between the public and private (p. 39).

By “rituals” Maranto and Barton foreground communication occasions and practices that historically happened through print media but have now shifted to online; thus social networking
sites, while distinct, are in many ways more of the same. They argue that romantic relationships, for example, have nearly always been the topic of gossip within close-knit communities, and that the potential for bullying are facets of growing up in the U.S. In addition, the kinds of data-gathering afforded by social networking is also a ritual common to print forms of media. For example, magazines and newspapers have historically sold their subscribers’ personal information to marketers, and people have assumed fake identities for the purpose of distributing or collecting information and goods. The private/public dichotomy and the rituals involved with distributing texts reveal a common anxiety regarding identity: while it renders the self as visible in ways that can be validating, this visibility also serves to expose the subjectivity for public scrutiny. Muranto and Barton account for how identities on social networks embrace both the private and the public, as users make choices about what information to divulge and what to keep to closer circles of friends. These identities largely correspond with predetermined social categories such as political affiliation, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender, but also include what they term as “biographical factoids,” or personal affinities for media such as movies, book, or bands (Muranto and Barton, 2010, p. 43). Their concern is that rather than disrupting hegemonic definitions of identity, social networks tend to place emphasis on categories and aspects of popular culture that can be easily commoditized.

This visibility afforded by online communication raises important ethical questions for researchers. Is it ethical to collect texts without the authors’ knowledge? Is it ethical to analyze or scrutinize their work without their knowledge or consent? Should researchers acknowledge or compensate them for their labor? These questions are new because traditional rhetorical criticism in particular is accustomed to analyzing texts without the author’s consent, since the authors were either deceased, or had received monetary compensation whenever they would speak or
write. In online spaces, however, anyone can publish anything so long as it respects the licensing and user agreements respective to the online platform, and rarely is any compensation offered apart from the affordance of being public and fostering imagined communities.

Questions of labor, compensation, and consent are particularly important for understanding the complicated relationship between people and the social networking sites they use. Most social networking sites are “free” in the sense that users do not have to pay for a subscription in order to use them. However, the operational cost for developing and maintaining SNSs comes from advertising and/or from collecting data from users and selling it to advertisers. As part of a legal agreement signed when setting up a profile, users consent to having data about their online habits acquired and sold so long as users have the capacity to adjust their profile settings to keep some of their personal information private: addresses, email addresses, phone numbers and so on. Some scholars have noted that users generally do not understand the full extent of having their habits catalogued and sold online, and thus scholars have discouraged the uses of SNSs in the classroom. But for this study, the more pertinent question is what compensation is offered to users for putting forth the labor of creating their own sites within the SNS, and whether the presence of content created wholly by the user can be used without being exploited. To use exploitation as a concept of critique is to foreground “questions of power and control,” and to question how and for whom labor is validated (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 279). These questions complicate any methodology employed for researching the uses of SNSs for enacting identity.

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have typically relied on survey and ethnographic methods as a means to collect information about students’ online identities (Buck, 2012; Tryon, 2006). Certainly these researchers commit considerable amounts of effort designing studies and
gaining either approval from an institutional review board (IRB), to say nothing of securing institutional support for their research. The strength of these approaches is when obtaining data from the target population, the data is collected with the target population’s awareness and consent. In some cases, researchers will also incorporate the population’s voice in how researchers interpret the findings, thereby awarding the target population a say in how they are represented (Buck, 2012; Tryon). The drawback to this approach is the demand for labor it places on it subjects, who must fill out surveys, be present for interviews, or be accommodating to the researchers’ presence in their spaces. Only in rare instances can researchers offer monetary compensation in exchange for participants’ labor in generating the content to be collected by the researcher. The act of taking surveys and doing interviews requires the participants to put forth effort to educate the researcher about their subjectivities, a problem that to me poses an additional ethical quandary. My experience working with marginalized groups is that they are too often frustrated when having to teach dominant groups about their subjectivity. Jackie Regales (2008) corroborates my experience, and argues that dominant groups often avoid responsibility of self-education while expecting the Other to subject their lived experience to scrutiny. She writes, “Just as people of color often speak with anger of having to represent all people of color or answer ridiculous questions from well-meaning white people,” queer youth struggle with cisgender peoples’ lack of self-education (Regales, 2008, p. 95). This often leads privileged identities as the unexamined baseline from which all others are judged, a process which leaves the marginalized perpetually Othered while reinforcing the dominant or hegemonic culture. The resulting fatigue stems from the fact that the Other must learn all about the subject positions of dominant groups, through emersion and formal education—without the Other’s consent—and just to be able to function in everyday life. Unless a monetary or non-monetary
reward is offered in compensation to the examined participants, the researcher benefits directly from the labor of Others.

The study of online texts can account for questions of labor and fatigue by engaging the subjectivities of vulnerable populations without requiring the participants to spend additional labor assisting the researcher. When a researcher collects a corpus of texts on SNSs, they are recognizing that users have already put forth considerable intellectual labor through their creative expressions or persuasive arguments on SNSs. As a medium, social media creates an imagined community of like-minded people—who share an identity—who appreciate, share, discuss, distort, or resist other forms of media as they define themselves in relation to each other and to the world. This imagined community, while not easily demarcated by geography or proximity as can be expected with survey or ethnographic study, then becomes the target population for research. In some ways the target population has already consented to having their online presence viewed by anyone in the world. SNSs such as Facebook and Tumblr afford users the capability to hide whatever information they choose and restrict their content to target audiences. Assuming that young people know the consequences of visibility (both Gustafson, 2009 and Sheridan et al., 2009 have shown that it is important to hedge when saying people are aware of the consequences of visibility on the Web), by choosing not to restrict their social media presence from the World Wide Web, the represent themselves with the hope of being understood, respected, and validated. Collecting the texts for research recognizes that the authors of these texts have already consented to an appreciation of their media.

Appreciation is key because while users may consent to their texts being visible, there is nothing about increased visibility or participation in an online community that says they consent to have their work scrutinized. Thus it is not for the researcher to collect these texts and seek to
delegitimize the subjectivities expressed; instead, the researcher could appreciate them for what the users are trying to communicate. As an ethic of rhetorical methodology, this appreciation is akin to the kinds of rhetorical listening and eavesdropping strategies argued by Krista Ratcliffé (2010). In her book *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, listening becomes a strategy and an ethic that promotes understanding between self and the Other, a location of commonality and difference, and a means of assessing cultural logics and how they function (Ratcliffé, 2010, p. 26). Ratcliffé posits this ethic as an answer for the problem of how dominant groups have historically chosen to ignore the voices of Others or empathizing with the subjectivities. This analysis is not purposed to scrutinize authenticity, but instead to listen, to hear, and to appreciate.

**Toward Identity**

While the concept of myth explains why previous generations draw on a canon of myths to define Millennials in problematic ways, the concept of identity, conversely, can explain how Millennials understand themselves. To put precision on identity as both a rhetorical strategy and a concept of critique, this chapter engages complementary definitions of identity as it has been defined in rhetoric and composition, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, women and gender studies, and queer theory. I draw from this scholarship because the authors have done much work addressing identity politics and the ways that identity works to advantage some while disadvantaging others. The challenge of defining identity in this way, however, is that since scholars in rhetoric and composition have not previously discussed generational monikers as a marginalized identity, I had to borrow extensively from poststructuralism, queer theory and postcolonial theory, and abstract those ideas beyond discussion of nationality, gender, and race in order to define method suitable for analyzing Millennial identity.
In this chapter, I synthesized postmodern and poststructuralist theories regarding marginalized identities into a concept for analyzing online texts. I argue that there are three units of analysis—the strategically essentialized, the performed, and the performative—that comprise identity as a method of critique. In the next chapter, I will show that the social networking site Tumblr is a rich site for inquiry, because it is a social networking site that is particularly popular with users of the millennial age group. I then use identity as an etic method for analyzing texts authored by self-identified Millennials and shared on the social media site Tumblr. I will also analyze the corpus emically, letting patterns emerge from the data collected. I then theorize a comparative-historical frame for how Millennials enact their identity in response to myths. I suggest that myth and identity work well in productive tension as a comparative-historical frame and a method for understanding why previous generations may define Millennials in problematic ways. The concept of identity in particular can work well as a method for analyzing how Millennials understand themselves.

Furthermore, the discord between myth and identity provides a rich comparative-historical frame for understanding why Millennials adopt particular strategies and media for expressing themselves. So while myth foregrounds how previous generations use stereotypes and archetypes symbolically function to solve problems, justify structures, and deal with crisis, identity as a concept foregrounds how the young use markers of identifications to convey stakes, establish their expertise, build their communities and a general sense of being. Methodologically speaking, if millennial mythology foregrounds how stereotypes and tropes create conflicts between Millennials and previous generations in academic and professional contexts, as argued in chapters One and Two, Chapter Five will show how Millennials enact their identity in online
contexts as a symbolic means to understand and communicate their selves both in relation to, and distinct from the mythology of Millennials.

As scholars within the global turn have shown, methods should be adapted to the site of exploration and the purpose of the study. For this project, it is the application identity as a concept of critique that will determine the concepts explanatory power for understanding millennial subjectivity. In Chapter Four, I will explore how Millennials define themselves textually within an imagined community of Millennials. I hope to show how millennial identity is best understood by appreciating how Millennials define themselves. Appreciation means foregrounding Millennials’ choices to either abide by, or resist the myths placed upon them. In this way, identity is performative: fluid, multiple, fractured by discord, yet necessary for expressing, validating, and rationalizing one’s sense of the self and world. Millennial identity, like all identities, is complex, contingent, and culturally situated both within, and in resistance to, dominant cultural logics—or myths—and their grids of intelligibility. These complexities in sum are the exigencies that necessitate millennial identity. In addition, I argue that the social networking site *Tumblr* is a rich site for exploring millennial identity, because it is a social networking site that is particularly popular with users of the millennial age group. Again in the vein of social and global turns, I analyze a corpus of *Tumblr* posts emically, letting patterns emerge from the data collected, before etically applying the units of analysis for identity. I then theorize how Millennials enact their identity in response to myths.
CHAPTER FIVE – ENACTING MILLENNIAL: IDENTITY, MEMES, TUMBLR, AND THEIR ROLE IN CONFRONTING MYTHS

In Chapter Two, I defined millennial myths as an extension of both millennial stereotypes and of a broader mythology of generational differences. I argued that these myths function as a marginalizing force that limits Millennials’ success and justifies established structures in academic and professional contexts. Two myths comprise millennial mythology, the digital native and the entitlement generation. Millennial myths pose a significant challenge for Millennials within the context of rising income inequality and a debt-mounting educational apparatus, as each stereotype and archetype can enable or constrain Millennials’ choices in school and work. In response to this exigency, I this chapter I explore arguments authored by self-identified Millennials who both embrace and challenge the stereotypes and archetypes that make up millennial mythology. This work is important for two reasons. First, while scholars have done much work understanding identity with regard to race, gender, and sexuality, age is rarely discussed apart from how age bias affects non-traditional students who enter college later in adulthood (Bowen, 2011; Crow, 2006; Grabill and Pigg, 2012; Swacha, 2017). Second, it is important to understand how Millennials see themselves and understand their own identity, because the capability to define one’s identity is a substantial act of resistance in response to marginalizing forces.

This study is aligned with the social and global turns in composition, which have set a precedent for engaging the social consequences of communication on a global scale. My methodological approach in this chapter borrows from Schoen and Mao, where I first appreciate millennial identity on its own terms (emically) before applying identity as a concept of critique (etically). Moreover, I am examining multiple texts and their potential transformations as they
move across digital spaces. While I am not analyzing non-Western or explicitly transnational rhetorics, the millennial community examined in this chapter is imagined in the sense that it is not bound to any nationality or physical location. The global turn in composition examines communities both real and imagined; and in this chapter, I will show that Millennials use online platforms to build imagined communities (Anderson, 1991), where they curate and cultivate an online culture that binds them in a common millennial identity regardless of their physical location. By examining an imagined community of Millennials, I wish to fill a gap in scholarship by analyzing how self-identified Millennials resist myths by enacting their identity.

In Chapter Three, I discussed how myth and identity are rhetorical concepts that work well in productive tension as a means to analyze generational differences, particularly in regard to how Millennials define themselves as distinct from other generations. This chapter asks: How do Millennials understand themselves? For this chapter, I define millennial identity as an online enactment; a term that originates in phenomenology and cognitive psychology and that has received considerable attention in rhetoric and composition. According to Marilyn Cooper (2011), enactment is a “process through which organisms create meanings through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived consequences of their actions” (p. 426). Moreover, enactment foregrounds how social roles are assigned, maintained, or transcended not only through embodied acts, but also through different genres of communication (Bawarshi, 2013, p. 338). For the purposes of this study, I define identity as an enactment that involves embodied acts of composing and circulating multimodal texts in online spaces, with attention to the consequences Millennials face when representing themselves online.

Understanding identity as enactment embraces both postmodern and poststructuralist scholarship, where identities are formed in a process where individuals define themselves in
relation to, and distinct from other identities, their physical surroundings, and in response to the social exigencies. One of the challenges of this project is to define identity as both an enactment and a method of rhetorical critique in order to distill identity to an applicable concept. In Chapter Three I defined three units of analysis for using identity as a concept of rhetorical critique: the essentialized, the performance, and the performative. I use these three units of analysis etically as I apply them to a corpus of texts authored by self-identified Millennials and shared on the social media site Tumblr. By understanding identity theory of analyzing and producing online compositions, I posit a method for engaging how self-identified Millennials enact their identity in online spaces in response to millennial myths. I do this with the intention of appreciating the works of Millennials in an effort to understand how Millennials challenge the mythology of generational differences as a marginalizing force.

**Tumblr and Millennial Identity**

I chose the social networking site Tumblr for this study because it is a social networking site that is particularly popular with millennial-aged users. According the research conducted by Pew in 2015, the majority of users are typically between 18 and 29 years old, which places the majority of users within the age range of the Millennial generation as defined by Howe and Strauss, Prensky, Turkle, and other authors within the canon of Millennial mythology. Tumblr has also been called “strong in terms of engagement among Millennials and to some extent Generation Y” by journalists who write about technology and tech culture (Solis, 2013). While a representative population of Millennials would be as difficult to define as it would be to isolate, Tumblr offers a site to begin thinking about how Millennials enact their identity.

*Tumblr* is a microblogging and social networking website founded in 2007 by a young entrepreneur named David Karp. Karp is an interesting figure because his personal biography
carries many of the themes found in millennial mythology. He has been described as naturally gifted with technological expertise and a fascination with social networking and digital media. He also struggled financially during the early years development, when he was living in his mother’s apartment while also working various unpaid internships. But his technical expertise and passion led to considerable commercial success. This lead to "Tumblr" being purchased by the corporation Yahoo!™ for over a billion dollars. At closing of the deal, Karp, then 27 years old, was characterized as embracing the deal with youthful abandon, “Chief Executive Officer David Karp, a 26-year-old who started the company in 2007, signed a note announcing Yahoo! Inc.’s $1.1 billion acquisition with the closing, “F--- yeah.”” (Frier and MacMillan, 2013). Other stories account for Karp’s youthful enthusiasm regarding the running of "Tumblr" as a corporation, and Karp has been lauded as one of the world’s most successful millennial entrepreneurs.

According to a survey by Search Engine Journal, "Tumblr" is particularly popular with people at the younger end of the millennial spectrum, being more popular with 13 - 25 year olds than Facebook, with roughly three quarters of its users being college-aged. It is important to note that "Tumblr" does not profess to target a millennial audience. Instead, the homepage of the site outlines both its motto and the affordances of the site. Their motto is “Follow the world’s creators,” which foregrounds how users will ideally use the site to compose as well as “effortlessly share anything. Post text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos from your browser, phone, desktop, email or wherever you happen to be.” The site also enables significant customization of each blog, including avatars, banners, and custom HTML inputs for changing the look and feel of the site. As of 2014, the top 10 categories of posts shared by users were LOL, Fashion, Vintage, Art, GIF, Makeup, Animals, Landscape, Film and Nail Art (Costill, 2014). Perhaps because of these affordances, the site is popular across different age groups. As
of 21 of June 2016, *Tumblr* hosts 301 million blogs with 135.6 billion posts as users generate and share content through their blogs. For the purposes of this study, *Tumblr* serves as a fruitful site for analyzing how Millennials enact their identity, since the site is founded by a Millennial and whose users are of the millennial age group.

*Tumblr* functions as an imagined community that establishes fraternity through rituals of composing, “liking,” sharing, and commenting. As an embedded practice within an online system, Millennials decide what inclusions (and exclusions) are constitutive of themselves and their narrative, which is thereby validated by others in the community by liking, sharing, or complementing the content of others in the community. What is curated becomes a process of remembering and forgetting, where people who share a location collect fractured, contradictory, or opposing narratives, and create a sense of fraternity that fosters a “conception of personhood, which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 115 - 116). The complements between different Millennial selves brings cohesion within an imagined community by sharing a language (hastags, lulspeak, and slang), a literacy (knowledge about pop culture and media), and a means of producing and circulating texts amongst individuals who otherwise do not share a physical location. Participation in online communities achieves a narrative of shared experience, an act of remembrance where different modes and media are used to signify and establish synergy between the digital and the corporeal—or—as a means to discern what is performance and what is performative. Identity is enacted by through preference for language and media, where what does not garner “likes” and shares is lost in the cacophony, and where *Tumblr* is utilized as the means to remember texts that encompass those preferences. When regarded as enactment, posts establish a synergy between the identity represented in physical spaces and the edentity represented within *Tumblr*. The millennial self is then
understood as visible, validated, and participatory in an online community, achieved as Millennials curate their own space and their own experience.

**Methods**

As defined in Chapter Four of this dissertation, a synthesis of postmodern and postructuralist understandings of identity grants the following units of analysis:

1. *Strategic essentialism* – a strategy that centers one’s body and sensory experience as a Cartesian or holistic truth are coded using this unit of analysis. Strategic essentialism invokes the socially constructed “I am” as an inherited, holistic, and biologically predisposed disposition, an embodied experience and an expression of subjectivity that tacitly embraces the deficits of social stereotypes or tropes as a means of redefining those deficits as archetypes. The purpose of the strategically essentialized identity is advantaging the author at sites where they are typically marginalized.

2. *Performance* – a strategy where the author uses expressions of identity that are either exaggerated or purely imaginary are coded using this unit of analysis. Performed identities are useful fictions, or arbitrary performances where an individual can take on any type of persona they wish. The purpose of identity performance is to satirize, challenge, and ultimately disrupt millennial myths.

3. *Performative* – a strategy where an author recognizes the self as fractured, multiple, and complex, and where the author foregrounds aspects of self and their lived experience as at once unique to the individual and consubstantial with that of the audience are coded using this unit of analysis. Performativity is a means of creating empathy and rapport between the self and community or self and Other through common experience. When combined with ethos, this shared experience is a way of establishing credibility. The
purpose of performative identity is to establish credibility and create space for discord that disrupts and fractures hegemonic grids of intelligibility.

Analyzing online identity involves mining blogs and social networking sites for evidence of authorial identity, which involves building a corpus of user-generated content that can be analyzed (Lutz, Bryan, 2012; Warnick, 2010). In the vein of Global Justice Rhetoric, I chose to collect texts only from self-identified Millennials so I could obtain data from the target population without overwriting each author’s identity. This was done by using Tumblr’s search engine to search for the hashtags #millennials and #generation-y and for the keywords “Millennials” and “Generation Y” to find bloggers that identified themselves as Millennials either within the titles of their blogs, or within the profiles associated with their blogs. I then used my own Tumblr account (Millennials Argue Back) to follow these blogs so that each day, my dashboard was filled with posts from the target population. I chose the title “Millennials Argue Back” to make clear that I was following each blog author because they identify as Millennials and because I was there to appreciate what they had to say.

Posting on social networking platforms is a way for users to “write themselves and their community into being” (boyd, 2007, p. 2). In my study I looked at posts on Tumblr that were composed using a wide array of visual and verbal means to make meaning. They are visual in the way that Millennials make choices about what bodies they show, what they wear, what they do, and what contexts are depicted through visual means; they are verbal in the ways they address certain topics, use certain language, and express emotions as a way to construct meaning through language and to make arguments. While applying these units of analysis, I will be looking for how Millennials enact identity by creating, revising, curating a shared language, a literacy, and a means of producing and circulating texts amongst individuals who otherwise do not share a
physical location. I am looking for textual and visual evidence of when Millennials negotiate community by enacting within digital spaces with an attention to how online texts are acts that have the desired consequence of validating shared experience within the communities they imagine. Analyzing these visual and verbal posts affords an understanding of how Millennials enact their own identity.

The aggregate total of posts each day was immense. Since this is a qualitative study, it became clear that I could not possibly analyze every post that appeared in my feed. So in order to distill the aggregate total into a useful corpus, I collected a random sample from the target population by visiting Tumblr each day for one hour to take screenshots of every third post appearing in the aggregate total of blogs I followed as a Tumblr user. This was done between 27 April, 2016 and 26 June, 2016. Since it is variable when users would make and share content, data collection was sometimes done in the mornings and sometimes in the evenings as a means to obtain a diverse collection of posts from multiple users. I then saved these posts into a folder with a corresponding collection date. In total, 93 blogs were surveyed for a total of 535 entries collected into the corpus.

After the posts were aggregated and collected into a corpus, I sifted through the data looking for patterns in how Millennials enact their identity online. As an emic approach, this allowed me to infer general patterns from the data that could be later analyzed using identity as a concept of critique. Since Apple's OS system affords the capability to add metadata tags to files and folders, I used metadata tags to catalogue the content based on those patterns. This way the data could be catalogued, quantified, and searched based on the tags. This emic approach to the corpus revealed a number of patterns, which seemed to fall into two categories suitable for analyzing millennial identity: topics and emotives. Topics and emotives were used as a starting
point for organizing my study by common patterns before analyzing the corpus using identity as a rhetorical concept. For the purpose of this study, emotives are the combined emotional and ethical appeals that reflect the lived experience of Millennials and their feelings about themselves and the world around them. These emotives account for Millennials’ experience and their rationalizations involving the world around them. Topics, by contrast, are the social and contextual forces that resonate with Millennials and that motivate millennial commentary. These topics reflect choices Millennials have made about what matters within their respective contexts. Since identity as a rhetorical force enables and constrains the choices of bodies, topics also include times when Millennials represented bodies using various media. These media are the available means afforded by *Tumblr* as a social media site, which includes text, images, GIFs, hyperlinks, and video.

Both topics and emotives occur often as acts of appreciation or resistance, and invite enacting millennial identity for the purpose of interacting with others through likes and shares on *Tumblr*. For the purpose of analysis, the data can be separated into three tiers. These tiers are organized based on the frequency of topics and emotives so that it can be ascertained which emotives, which topics, and which combinations thereof are commonly used by Millennials as they define and enact their identity on *Tumblr*. In order to determine which topics and emotives are most frequent, I searched the directories containing the corpus and used the corresponding metadata tag to search for posts. I then counted the number of posts that were assigned the tag (see Figure 1).
Figure 1 – Memes coded with the tag “politics.”

The process was repeated to determine the frequency of instances where topics correspond with emotives, and vice versa. This process allowed me to ascertain the emotions and logics associated with particular topics so that I could understand the data as a coalescence of identifications between Millennials and an Other.

Figure 2 – Memes coded with the topical tag “bodies” and the emotive tag “affection.”

From this process of coding and counting, I created a tier system in terms of the frequency of occurrences of each tag. This was done so that I could pay special attention to the most common enactments of identity found on Tumblr. Tier one includes topics that appear over 70 times in the
corpus (70+ out of 535 posts); Tier two includes topics and emotives that appear 40 - 69 times; Tier three includes topics and emotives that appear under 40 times in the corpus (0 - 39 instances). In the tables below, the total of the numerators does not add up to 535. This is because some posts in the corpus are categorized twice or thrice, because the arguments expressed could be described by more than one tag. Tables 1 and 2 below show the three tiers:

*Table 1 - Topics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Tags</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
<th>Tag Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>politics</td>
<td>89/535: Tier One</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that explicitly mention political parties, candidates, or campaigns. At times this tag functions as a catch-all for whenever posts regard news reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bodies</td>
<td>86/535: Tier One</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that depict bodies through primarily visual means. These could be photos of the authors or of people (often celebrities and models).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stereotypes</td>
<td>72/535: Tier One</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that use, acknowledge, or challenge generalizations or oversimplifications regarding markers of identity (race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, citizen status, or vocation).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 - Topics (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier One 70+</th>
<th>Tier Two 40-69</th>
<th>Tier Three 0-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Tags</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
<th>Tag Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender/queer</td>
<td>50/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that either invoke, appreciate, or criticize markers of gender or sexual identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art</td>
<td>46/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that rely primarily on visual means to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissident views</td>
<td>44/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that seem to argue back against an opposing viewpoint. This tag could include commentary on current events as well as potential straw man arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picturesque</td>
<td>38/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that either visually or verbally convey places or landscapes with an attention to their aesthetic brilliance or quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data</td>
<td>34/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that cite studies, present factoids, or display specific facets of people or institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>race/ethnicity</td>
<td>15/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that either invoke, or criticize markers of racial or ethnic identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 - Topics (cont’d)

| Tier One 70+ |
| Tier Two 40-69 |
| Tier Three 0-39 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Tags</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
<th>Tag Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>authority</td>
<td>10/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that makes a succinct statement or offer a quote from a person of authority. These statements are often the length of a tweet, and read like an axiom, truism, adage, or proverb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>8/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that regard industry or business contexts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 - Emotives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier One 70+</th>
<th>Tier Two 40-69</th>
<th>Tier Three 0-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 2 Tags</strong></td>
<td><strong>Frequency of Occurrence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tag Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hyperbole</td>
<td>60/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes intentional exaggerations or overstatements that convey a sense of humor, urgency, or self-deprecation. This could also denote enthusiasm about a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affection</td>
<td>50/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes feelings of love, endearment, reverence, or respect for topics in the present and future. This tag is the categorical opposite of irreverence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcasm</td>
<td>48/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that mock or use irony to generally scorn a person, an institution, or authority. This is different from irreverence in the sense that the meme may be misunderstood if read as a literal statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irreverence</td>
<td>46/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that demonstrate a lack of respect or blatant disrespect for a statement, a person, an institution, or other authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 – Emotives (cont’d)

| Tier One 70+ | Tier Two 40-69 | Tier Three 0-39 |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Tags</th>
<th>Frequency of Occurrence</th>
<th>Tag Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>action</td>
<td>42/535: Tier Two</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that are motivational, inspirational, polemical, or trenchant. This tag is in contrast to the inspirational tag, because these posts account for actions taken in addition to hopeful sentiments regarding the outcomes of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anguish</td>
<td>24/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that convey literal feelings of pain and despair about a circumstance or topic. Since being literal is part of this tag, this tag omits times time when there are figurative meanings expressed in a post, such as hyperbole. Ex. “I cry everyday” is anguish while “I die every day” is hyperbole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspiration</td>
<td>15/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>This tag describes posts that convey sentiments that are hopeful, motivational, creative, or imaginative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nostalgia</td>
<td>7/535: Tier Three</td>
<td>In some ways, a subset of affection (above), this tag describes posts that show a respect and a longing for topics or circumstances from the past.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topics and emotives in the first and second tiers will be discussed in detail in the analysis below, as they were the most prominent in the corpus. Tier three topics and emotives will at times be supplementary to the first two tiers.

**Analysis**

The analysis section is organized based on the most common topics and emotives found within the corpus. In the analysis section, I will also apply the units of analysis for identity to different topic/emotive combinations. When examples were pulled for the analysis, all personal information was obscured to protect the personal identity of the user except in cases where the user is an organization or group. As an aggregate of emotives and topics in the corpus, this heuristic reveals how Millennials enact their identity online. This combination of emic and etic approaches reveal much in understanding Millennials enact their identity.

*Tier one topics.* The topic of bodies occurs most frequently in this corpus, appearing at a rate of 17%. There are two potential reasons for bodies to occur frequently in the corpus. First, since the bodies depicting in posts could be of the authors themselves, the prevalence of Millennial bodies in the corpus suggests that Millennials value their bodies as a means of expressing themselves and establishing a shared identity with their imagined community. Second, if the stereotype of the entitlement generation has explanatory power for describing why Millennials appear to be self-absorbed, then we might expect to see Millennials demonstrate a preoccupation with their own bodies. There are 14 instances where the topic of bodies occurred with the emotive of affection. In these instances, the affection expressed could be regarding either a user’s appreciation of their own body, or their appreciation for another body, or both. As an enactment, Millennials hope that their bodies mean something to others, and that the
connection between their bodies and their participation in the online community will be rewarded with likes and shares.

For example, in Figure 3, the millennial author posts photographs of themself—“selfies”—while sitting in their car. The author provides, through accompany commentary and through hashtags like #actuallybeautiful and a long hashtag denoting how they frequently posts selfies as a way to garner likes and shares, a sentiment of appreciation for their own face. The author centers their face within each image; they are smiling and relaxing in bright sunlight. As an essentialized expression of self, the millennial author celebrates their inherited features as a

![Figure 3 -- Millennial Selfie Series](image-url)
part of their identity—young, relaxed, and illuminated by the sun. As a performative expression of self, the author has chosen casual forms of dress and hairstyle, accenting the Millennial’s essentialized youth with carefree clothing. This suggests that the millennial author values depictions of their body in action as an expression of self. I coded this statement using the emotives of affection and irreverence, because the blog author expresses that they care for their face and invites others in the imagined community to appreciate it in the same way, almost to community’s chagrin. When taken as constitutive of a strategically essentialized identity, this data suggests that posts like these can function as an unapologetic embrace of the stereotype of Millennials as self-absorbed, thereby making the subject of their face an agent that rejects the shame of appreciating Millennial identity.

Second, since bodies depicted could be of significant people, celebrities, or models, the prevalence of such bodies suggests that Millennials are curating representations of people they value intellectually, culturally, or spiritually. In Figure 4, the image on the left depicts an advertisement for GQ Magazine. The millennial author expresses affection for the models depicted in the image by using the hashtags #Debonair and #LookingDapper. While the millennial author uses these hashtags to express their appreciation for men in the image, they also use the hashtags #WellDressedMen, #BlackMen, and #GlobalStyle. There is identity
performance here, as these are actors performing a professional identity on behalf of GQ. I do not mean to suggest that being a model is not a profession, but what I do mean is that these models are performing the identity of an executive, which the millennial author has embraced. The GQ model’s image is a means to celebrates the confluence of Millennial identity and black identity as successful in workplace contexts. As a performative identity, the models in the image have made choices to appease tropes of respectability signified in formal dress, and participate in actions that would be expected of workplace culture. In this way, the millennial author posits representations as affirmation of both Millennials and black men in workplace contexts.

While the first two examples reveal interesting tensions between the essentialized, the performance, and the performative aspects of identity, the third example (see the right-hand image in Figure 4) is an illustration of a couple sharing a nude embrace. This post melds the essentialized with the performance in ways that foregrounds strategically essentialized identity. Near absent are performative markers of identity such as dress or other symbolic markers of black of identity. But stylized drawing functions as an archetypical representation, or a
performance of essentialized Millennial and black identity. The strategically essentialized identity is most apparent in the black woman’s hair, which is depicted in a natural state and blending into the water colors that envelope the couple as a background. It is significant to remark on how these figures are both vulnerable and invulnerable in this pose, vulnerable in that their sex characteristics are exposed, but invulnerable in that they do not adopt any markers of gender identity to guide the viewer’s interpretation. Also notable here is that this illustration is presented without the aid of textual cues to guide the viewer’s reading. This absence of text or other cues foregrounds the bodies of the figures and the affection between the presumed lovers shown in an intimate embrace. The love between them is the site of resistance, where the subject of black bodies becomes an agent to resist depreciations of Millennial, black bodies.

Politics was the second most frequent topic in the corpus, occurring almost as often as bodies at a rate of 16%. Posts discussing politics did not frequently occur with any particular emotive prevalent in this corpus, positive or negative. This could be a vulnerability with the methodology of this study, because the politics tag was used was a catch-all to code whenever millennial authors would share new items with or without commentary. Still, with such a wide range of emotives present in the overall corpus, it is curious that Millennials seemed to let the headlines for news items speak for themselves rather than write additional commentary to express their reactions to the news. Still, in the absence of overt emotive markers, the presence of news items suggests that Millennials are curating a shared history of events and controversies that matter to them and their imagined community.

While no particular emotive frequently occurred with posts discussing politics, the news items themselves imply emotive reactions within the headline or tagline. When I examined the posts in this way, the topic of politics most often occurred with the emotive of action, which is
significant because Millennials in this study seemed most interested with news items chronicling solutions to problems more so than identifying the problems themselves (though the authors do often discuss problems as violence against bodies). Examples of action are an article talking about an ocean garbage collector being successfully piloted in the Atlantic and used to combat dead zones in the region, or an article celebrating Gay Pride Month with photograph of a man reading “MOURN THE DEAD FIGHT LIKE HELL FOR THE LIVING.” In the former example, the action is documented and deliberate, as a new technology is employed to combat pollution; in the latter example, the word “fight” is used as a blanket term to describe potential action in the wake of the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, where “fight like hell” is an all-encompassing term for activism defending the lives of LGBT citizens. As a performative identity, posts like these demonstrate an awareness of social problems and a need to take action on issues of social justice and the environment. By sharing these reports generally without commentary, Millennials assume a more objective ethos that appears simultaneously detached in the way of presenting information, but engaged in sharing the sentiments of others as motivation for action.

The third most common topic coded in the corpus was stereotypes, which occurred in just over 13% of the posts collected in the corpus. Since the stereotype tag denotes when an author uses, acknowledges, or challenges prevailing ideas or oversimplifications regarding markers of identity, the commonality of stereotypes in the corpus suggests that Millennials are conscious of stereotypes and their effects as a mitigating force that enables and constrains Millennials’ agency. As noted in Chapter One, stereotypes are not always bad, and in Chapter Three I showed how archetypes can work to some Millennials’ advantage. Interestingly in the corpus, stereotypes occurred with the emotive of affection at a frequency of 3/72 or around 4% of posts coded with
the stereotype tag. This finding suggests that stereotypes are not entirely rejected by Millennials, and in some cases are embraced. In Figure 5, the millennial author tentatively embrace stereotypes of Millennials as having unreasonable expectations regarding the work and effort required to live as adults. In the video, the millennial author accounts for how many of their immature habits do “not so much fly in the real-world,” and how they feel that other Millennials should realize “we’re adults now, so here is what we’ll have to do to suck it up.” It is not entirely clear to what extent the millennial author actually believes what they are saying, but their tone of voice sounds sarcastic, as if they are conveying information that should not have to be said.

Figure 5 – “Adulting is Hard” by the Millennial Initiative
Also in this example (Figure 5), the noun “adult” is changed to the verb form “#adulting” as a satiric way of talking about adult responsibilities. The hashtag is used as metadata for cataloging the post, but it is also spoken in the video, which suggests that saying #adulting transcends the embedded practice of cataloguing posts. Using sarcasm and hashtags as a verbal expression, the millennial author is satirizing millennial stereotypes while also embracing them, thereby performing a millennial identity that provides catharsis for other Millennials who may be having trouble acclimating to adult life. The combination of satire and embracing stereotypes associated with the entitlement generation becomes a performance of millennial identity.

While some millennial authors embrace stereotypes for the purpose of satire and catharsis, the majority of posts coded as stereotypes were also coded with dissident views, occurring at a rate of 17/535 or around 3%. I coded stereotypes and dissident views together because most Millennials seemed to challenge stereotypes as an opposing viewpoint. Of the dissident/stereotype posts, nearly all the authors challenged stereotypes based on age, gender, sexuality, or race, and use those stereotypes. The need to challenge stereotypes seems to be the exigency for enacting an identity counter to those stereotypes. In addition to dissident views, the topic of stereotypes similarly occurred with nearly the full list of emotives at an average rate of 4/72 instances or about 3% - 4%, with the emotives hyperbole, anguish, and irreverence being slightly more frequent at an average rate of 5%. The one exception is sarcasm, which occurred with stereotypes at a frequency of 17/72 instances or around 24%. The much higher frequency of sarcasm and stereotypes occurring together suggests that Millennials generally mock or deride stereotypes.

In ten of the cases where Millennials mock stereotypes, the authors explicitly argue against elements of millennial mythology. While ten posts is a small number in terms of the
overall corpus, posts discussing millennial myths were more frequent than any other posts coded as both stereotypes and dissident views. This finding suggests that when Millennials do address stereotypes, they enact a persona that resists or disregards generational stereotypes rather than asserts or affirms them. In the post titled “Boomers v Generation Y” (Figure 6), the millennial author specifically mentions many of the stereotypes associated with the entitlement generation, stated here as “selfish, superficial, disloyal, and lazy.” But rather than accept any of these stereotypes as part of their own identity, the Millennial author assumes an essentialized identity that redefines the entitlement generation as an imposed position. The millennial author agrees that their identity as a Millennial is a subject position wrought by shifts in culture and economics that, in their mind, were championed by Baby Boomers. But they resist the idea that discussing people is a means to solve the problem. This position does not subvert the mythology of generational differences, but it does acquiesce to narratives of millennial victimhood to the power of Baby Boomers as a means to solicit sympathy and cooperation from Baby Boomers.
In post titled “My generation is better than your generation” (Figure 6), the author provides a narrative account of interacting with their family. In it the author goes point by point refuting many of the ideas associated with millennial stereotypes, stated here as “lazy/stupid/unsocial/impatient/selfish/tech dependent.” As a distinct post resisting millennial stereotypes, the emotive focuses on the physical and emotional consequences resulting from these stereotypes. But instead of reacting in either stereotypical ways or acquiescing to narratives of millennial victimhood, the author actively adopts a performative identity, challenging stereotypes through data-driven logics and enthymemes as a way of questioning the unstated assumptions driving the arguments. There are moments of strategic essentialism, where the author states that “there is nothing wrong” with social networking and Internet technologies and “nothing wrong with being better at socializing via technology.” But the millennial author also challenges an uncritical embrace of the trope of the digital native as a naturalized user of technology, and instead posits a shared experience between their Millennial identity and their parents as both have to “either move with the times or we get left behind.” When dissident views and stereotypes occur in the corpus, I often coded such posts with the emotive of anguish when the millennial authors expressed sentiments that stereotypes or dissident views caused them pain. In short, the authors frequently expressed literal feelings of pain and despair at sites of generational conflict.

In this corpus, the emotives of anguish, hyperbole, and irreverence occurred most commonly at a rate of 3/44 times or around 7% of posts addressing dissident views. This suggests that when dissident views are expressed, they are argued against, and Millennials do so with particular fervor and with an attention to the emotional consequences. In Figure 7, the millennial author claims they know more about economic hardships like student debt and
unemployment then previous generations. The author also argues that economic hardships are the reason why Millennials appear to be whiny because they “notice more problems.” The author misquotes Jean M. Twenge’s (2006) book Generation Me, which I coded as both irreverence and hyperbole because nowhere in my reading of the book does Twenge argue that Millennials “are too busy having their head up their butt to see real world problems and how to grow up and manage life.” This combination of hyperbole and irreverence works as a means to demean previous generations for espousing millennial myths. The millennial author uses strategic essentialism to defend this position by describing Millennials as inheriting attributes of learned skepticism from their parents, which they argue makes them naturally distrusting of institutional authorities.

Figure 7 – Post Arguing Against Jean M. Twenge’s Book
In Figures 6 and Figure 7, inter-generational conflict is the exigency of millennial enactments of identity. Where posts use sarcasm with regard to stereotypes suggests that stereotypes are generally felt by Millennials, but usually dismissed, mocked, and derided by Millennials as a flawed form of cultural logic, particularly in regard to Millennials uses of technology as an everyday facet of their lives. For example, one posts shows a group of Millennials sharing a selfie while on an outing as a means to affirm the relationship between recreation and the use of mobile technologies. Another example is an article where a Millennial uses technology to improve their violin playing. Both these two instances demonstrate how the stereotype of Millennials as avid technology users can be empowering, where the stereotype is embraced to accomplish something meaningful for the blog authors and expressive of their identity as Millennials. This “double strategy,” as described by Paul Smith (1988, p. 135), allows Millennials to exploit the differences between their subjectivities and resist the social prescriptions that would mark Millennials as indivisible from technology. If the prevailing cultural logic essentializes Millennials as adept users of technology, then Millennials seem willing to strategically embrace the stereotype when it affords Millennials a validation of their selves and their subjectivity.

Tier two topics. Dissident views are a tier-two topic coded in this corpus. But as dissident views have already been discussed in detail with relation to stereotypes, the topic of picturesque will be discussed here. Posts coded as picturesque dealt largely with visual posts that were often shared without commentary. Because of this, and much like the topic of politics, sharing a place or landscape with an attention to its aesthetic communicates a subtle endorsement even in the absence of more obvious commentary. Within the imagined community of Millennials on Tumblr, these posts seem to cultivate and sense of shared space, where Millennials curate a
collection of locations that seem to resonate with their identity. A common pattern amongst posts coded as picturesque were scenes where graffiti had been painted on manufactured structures. In these picturesque posts, the most common emotive to frequently occur was action, where the combination of topic and emotive communicated a need for social action. In Figure 8, both posts follow a similar formula, where a succinct message is written in graffiti on an abandoned railway car. The aesthetic quality of these posts mimics the work of Jenny Holzer, a neo-conceptual artist who is famous for creating social commentary through art by projecting short narratives onto public landmarks. Much like Holzer’s work, the text works to contextualize the scene through the power of exhortation, or adage, or a short prose statement conveying a sentiment branded onto a scene. A single wall alone would not convey anything about Lesbian identity, nor would an old railway car convey anything about overcoming fear. But the combination of message and scene makes the space consubstantial with the millennial author.

![Figure 6 – Posts Showing Graffiti in Public Spaces](image)

Scenes like the above constitute as social space (Anderson, 1991, pp. 18), where perspectives are written upon physical spaces as a means to frame how the imagined community should reinterpret each scene. Implicit in this space are modes of social critique expressed textually through the adage and visually through the choice of scene. While only in rare
examples are there additional textual cues such as hashtags like #GoodAdvice, the scenes implicitly convey feeling of empowerment and resistance without the need for additional commentary. Combining modes creates an idealized space unbound from the original physical space, as the scenes become reconstituted as a mosaic within the digital space. The users in the digital space likely have no idea where this graffiti exists on earth and it does not seem to matter, because the visual and the textual have been curated into the digital space that works to create an aesthetic of resistance within the scene. These scenes enact millennial identity for the way they communicate an ideal scene as backdrop for the ideal self, a native scene for which the character of millennial finds a home and a community.

As a performative identity, the scene functions to support an ethos of resistance and social critique, a unifying sentiment for Millennials to resist forms of oppression. The first example celebrates the confluence of Millennial and lesbian identity. In the second example, the almost ominous sounding “fear will lose” seems to be in response to perceptions of fear-charged rhetoric happening in the summer of 2016. Whether this is in response to the shooting that occurred at the Orlando Pulse Nightclub, or the recent deaths of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, or the rhetoric of the Presidential Election is unclear. Since there are only three instances of posts of this kind in this sample, worthy of note is that all three posts have different authors who shared the image from yet another author, which is to say that all three images came from separate sources or six authors in total. Given this, it’s feasible to think this trend would be stronger in a larger corpus.

*Tier two emotives.* Of all emotives, 11% or 60/535 of posts coded as hyperbole. As a rhetorical strategy, hyperbole serves to punctuate, accent, or intensify verbal and visual statements for a wide variety of purposes. One purpose is to convey an intensity about
Millennials’ desires for things that visually or verbally represent their interests or hobbies. The post titled “Walking Around a Bookstore With No Money” (Figure 9). a cartoon depicts a character staring longingly and reaching out to a bookshelf while browsing books at a bookstore. The character’s dialogue in the cartoon invokes the trope of a dramatized scene where two lovers must part, but the illustration of a bookstore and the title of the cartoon re-contextualizes the scene as a single individual who does not currently have the means to purchase books from the shelves.

In this way, the image conveys an exaggerated desire for books akin to romantic love, and with the implicit suggestion that the book and character will be reunited should the character acquire the means to purchase them. This dramatized performance of millennial identity conveys that books and reading are an important part of this millennial author’s identity, and one seemingly at odds with the means to possesses what they desire.

In the post “I don’t remember designing a t-shirt but obviously I did” (Figure 9), a millennial author shares a selfie of herself while finding a shirt at a store. The accompanying
commentary conveys feelings that the shirt so resonates with their personal identity that they feel they designed the shirt themselves. In this way, the post conveys a similar desire for a shirt by directly identifying with the image printed on the textile. As an expression of performative identity in the second example, hyperbole is used to express excitement over an image that is also hyperbolic in its camp, as a kitten rides a unicorn in front of an alien scene and a rainbow. In both posts, bodies are depicted as internally driven to embrace these items as expressions of themselves, and this sentiment is conveyed through intentionally hyperbolic means. Hyperbole serves a wide range of persuasive purposes. In the cases above, the millennial authors use hyperbole to convey excitement and longing for items that resonated with their identity.

In the corpus there is a strong correlation between hyperbole and other emotives expressed in the corpus. For example, hyperbole and sarcasm occur in 13/60 or about 21% of posts coded as hyperbole. The use of hyperbole and sarcasm seemed to be a significant strategy for expressing millennial identity in opposition to institutional authority. Exemplifying the correlation between hyperbole and sarcasm is a post that shared a video titled Millennials: We Suck and We’re Sorry, where Millennials feign emphatic agreement with the stereotypes of the digital native and the entitlement generation. In the video, one Millennial simultaneously plays a Sony PlayStation while typing on his phone and talking into the camera about how Millennial “are on our phones a lot.” As a performance of millennial identity, the millennial authors exaggerate their uses of digital technology as a way to satirize the stereotype of Millennial as embodying digital practices that keep them disconnected from the real world. I code this as a performance rather than a performative identity, because I cannot tell from the video if the Millennial is actually playing a video game, texting on their phone, and speaking to the camera simultaneously. It seems more likely to me that they are not.
Likewise, hyperbole occurs with irreverence in 12/60 posts or in around 20% instances coded as hyperbole. In these instances, hyperbole and irreverence are generally used to feign affection for a person, an institution, or another authority. For example, one post chastised Facebook for rejecting a video that demonstrated how women could check themselves for lumps in the breast that could be cancerous. In response, the millennial author acknowledged that men are vulnerable to breast cancer as well, and created (or shared) a string of Tumblr posts conducting the same examination, but with a man’s breasts instead. The procedure is done in an exaggerated way as a means to satirize the view that showing a breast exam is somehow “sexy.” This performative Millennial identity concedes to not show a woman as a means to find common ground with the authority of Facebook, even as they simultaneously challenge the sexism of Facebook’s censor. The do so while still retaining the ethos of public service by retaining the original audience and purpose for the message.

Still another use of hyperbole is to argue for Millennials to achieve catharsis regarding their economic dispositions. Take for example the Millennial Initiative, a Tumblr group “dedicated to empowering our fellow Millennials to become educated and confident about finances and investing.” The group authored a meme (Figure 10) with a white background behind the red text reading, “Does running out of money count as exercise?” The message is a pun, where the author exploits the colloquialism of running out of money as sounding similar to running as an athletic activity. The post satirizes when Millennials are not able to maintain the financial means to support themselves, a move that performs millennial identity as an embodied act of resistance while using exaggeration for comedic effect. This suggests that when Millennials use hyperbole, it is to comfort other Millennials within the imagined community by enacting an identity acknowledges the challenges posed by participating within institutions. In
the case above, it is curious to think about whether such a message is an outright rejection of business as an institutional authority, or simply way to achieve catharsis.

![Figure 10 – Meme Composed by the Millennial Initiative](image)

It is significant to note what Millennials are most likely to be hyperbolic about, and not. While hyperbole is a tier two emotive in the data set, the emotive rarely occurs with any of the tier one topics analyzed in this study. Least of all in this corpus, Millennials were rarely hyperbolic about bodies, with this emotive and topic coded only in one instance within the corpus. At a more consistent rate, hyperbole occurs three times with the topic of politics and four times with the topic of stereotypes, which calls to mind popular satirical news shows such as *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight*, and *Full Frontal*. These shows use satire to achieve catharsis about perceived injustices committed by institutional authorities, and they have proven to be most popular with the millennial age group (Nededog, 2016; Mikula, 2016). This finding suggests that hyperbole occurs often as a dramatic performance of millennial identity.
Discussion

In this chapter, I argue that the social networking site *Tumblr* is a rich site for rhetorical inquiry because it is a social networking site that is particularly popular with the millennial age group. On *Tumblr* I was able to find 100 users who self-identify as Millennials. I then collected their posts into a corpus, and I used three units of analysis for using identity as a concept of rhetorical critique—the essentialized, the performance, and the performative. I argue that thinking of identity as an enactment by communicating through different online modes and media affords an etic approach to analyzing online texts. I also analyze the corpus emically, letting patterns emerge from the data collected. I have demonstrated the utility of this approach by looking at the different motives and topics expressed across a corpus of *Tumblr* posts and looking for patterns of expression and argument in response to the social exigency of generational conflict. I then theorize how Millennials enact their identity in response to myths.

I argue that there are lessons that can be learned from this study regarding how composition students and future professionals can enact their identities to challenge the mythology of generational differences. Using the units of analysis for identity as a concept of critique, the following is a heuristic of enacting millennial identity.

*Millennial identity as strategic essentialism*: there are moments when Millennials invoke Cartesian notions of identity by centering their embodied sense as the knower of their millennial subject position. This move essentializes Millennials’ subjectivity as a means to make it authentic and real. The strategy relies on previous grids of intelligibility, but these grids are reinterpreted through the lens of Millennials’ embodied experience. The body is posited as the rubric of reality and stereotypes of Millennials are either reinterpreted as strength, or as a position of victimhood. In most cases, strategically essentialized millennial identities redefine stereotypes as archetypes or assets.
Millennial identity as performance: Millennials often adorn fictional performances as expressions of millennial identity. Sometimes, these performances overtly challenge stereotypes by using models are cartoon figures. At other times, Millennials feign being naïve, self-absorbed, and addicted to technology. Any idea of what is “real” is elided in favor for what makes the most convenient, or perhaps entertaining, argument. The purpose of performance is to feel catharsis for their social and socioeconomic circumstances, as each millennial performance ridicules the idea of stereotypes altogether; in this way, Millennials also use performance to demonstrate irreverence for authority and institutional structures that espouse inter-generational myths and stereotypes.

Millennial identity as performative: Millennials centralize and decentralize their own experience, and describe both similarities and differences between themselves and other subjectivities as a means to establish authority through shared experience and common ground. They are at once the product (or subject) of their immediate context as well as the force to change context (or agent) for the inclusiveness of all. Performative identity is more intersectional than essentialized or performed identities, as Millennials acknowledge points of convergence as well as divergence, similarity and difference, as tensions that can be respected, if not reconciled.

The evidence suggests that Millennials have embraced Millennial as their generational marker and as a distinct identity enacted within online spaces. Common in these posts are Millennials appreciation of themselves and their bodies as simultaneously essentialized, performed, and performative. In some ways, Millennials appease the stereotype that they are a self-absorbed generation who has difficulty seeing beyond themselves. But in other ways, Millennials
demonstrate that their bodies are both the subject and the means of resisting marginalization. Akin to Ta-Nehisi Coates’ (2014) sentiment about black identity, where he argues when talking about race-based identity politics that “our bodies are our selves, that my soul is the voltage conducted through neurons and nerves, and that my spirit is my flesh” (79), Millennials are aware that their identities are both object and subject as they communicate through Tumblr. But ultimately Millennials assert sovereignty over their bodies and embrace the freedom to enact their authentic selves regardless of how other generations may feel. If it is acknowledged stereotypes can have consequences for a population with less power, embracing the right to enact identity can be an act of empowerment that liberates the body.

In this corpus, challenging stereotypes seems to be an important part of millennial identity. Millennials resist being stereotyped as being lazy, disaffected, and unengaged with politics and with work. In this corpus a significant number of posts discussed action in regard to politics. Millennials in this study seemed most interested with news items where direct action through engagement technology worked to solve problems such as climate change, income inequality, and sexism and racism. But this does not mean that all Millennials dismiss stereotypes entirely. When stereotypes co-occur with affection, the blog authors seemed to tentatively embrace stereotypes of Millennials as a form of empowerment. The strategically essentialized identity embraces Millennials’ relationship with technology and social change. There are moments where the performance of millennial identity is self-deprecating, where Millennials tacitly embrace the Millennials myths as a means to critique themselves and hopefully transcend deficiencies to become more of an archetypical young adult. Such performances of “#adulting” are perhaps typical of youth growing into adulthood, as Jackie Regales observed (2008), “If self-representation in some form is a creative aspect of leaving
childhood behind and becoming an adult, then studying how young people represent themselves seems an obviously fruitful field for those looking to understand who young people are, who they want to become, and how they plan to accomplish such a transition.” (Regales, 2008, p. 87).

Combining myth and identity to interrogate millennial enactments affords a careful examination of how Millennials are coming of age while responding to marginalizing forces. In response to the exigencies posed by the mythology of generational differences, embracing such performances become acts of catharsis and resistance achieved through enactments of millennial identity within imagined communities.

The most frequent emotive to occur was action, where the combination of topic and emotive communicated a need to social action. The emotives of anguish, hyperboles, and irreverence occurred 3/44 times or around 7%. When dissident views and anguish occur, it frequently happened at the site of generational conflict identified in Chapter Two. Some are purposefully gender bending as an expression of who they are, others are appreciating their gender, racial, or sexual identity. In rare cases, Millennials are celebrating themselves as representative of their generation. Within the imagined community of Tumblr, millennial authors demonstrate their awareness and engagement by curating examples where others have taken action to combat problems that matter to other Millennials. This performative identity supports the arguments made by Howe and Strauss about the millennial generation, while simultaneously countering some of myths of the entitlement generation as lazy and disengaged. This does not mean that all Millennials embrace stereotypes, as stereotypes are generally regarded by Millennials as pernicious. To resist, Millennials adopt a performance of identity that uses hyperbole, irreverence, and sarcasm, to deride, mock, and dismiss stereotypes as a flawed form
of cultural logic unsuitable for millennial expressions of identity. In this way, Millennials enact identity as a form of political resistance and action

I argue that the purpose of enacting millennial identity is to build an imagined community that serves as a space of validation. Since imagined communities can be created through shared media, there is evidence that self-identified Millennials use Tumblr to curate and propagate a shared history, literacy, and language. Many of the posts collected in the corpus account for resisting stereotypes generally and millennial mythology in particular on Tumblr. Millennials cultivate arguments against millennial mythology by telling a narrative history of and circumstances that, they feel, led to the conflict. They will also use the hashtags #Millennial and #Generation Y as a means to categorize their posts as a means to catalogue and curate that history and that literacy of texts about context. Identity can be enacted by adopting particular kinds of language, which shares similarities with other languages that may “always be due to convergence rather than borrowing or imitation” (Haynes, 2007, p. 179). Hashtags functioned as such a language. Beyond curating a history and literacy, hashtags were used in ways beyond their function to categorize posts and establish a conversation on particular topics. While it can be argued that hashtags are an embedded activity within Tumblr, some hashtags were instead used as a vernacular to convey complex sentiments.

One of the primary lessons of postmodernism and poststructuralism are the dangers when identity markers are constructed exclusively by the hegemony. Such constructions are the key components of racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism, where the “Other” is named as deficient of characteristics necessary for them to function within society, and with the not coincidental byproduct of further elevating the hegemony by marginalizing the Other (see Butler, 1990; Spivak, 1989). Chapter Three acknowledged millennial mythology as prevalent in academic and
professional contexts, namely, the Millennials are spoiled by technology, native to technological change, and conditioned to want maximum reward with minimum effort, and how that mythology served to elevate older generations to the status of hero. These myths leave Millennials voices unheard. Millennials resistance happens when they view themselves as both a subject and an agent, “a place from which resistance to the ideological is produced or played out, and thus is not equivalent to either the ‘subject’ or the ‘individual…a form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for” (Smith, 1988, p. xxxv). This subject/agent as the tension of competing subjectivities becomes the reason and the means for resistance and cultural critique; the community provides the validation and the courage for social activism against millennial mythology.

I argue that Millennial identity is essentialized for the way it centers knowledge in Millennials’ embodied experience as they interact with older generations within academic and professional contexts; it is a performance for the way Millennials satirize stereotypes using hyperbole, a strategy that helps them achieve catharsis; and it is performative for the ways Millennials both centralize and decentralize their experience, building an ethos that challenges older generations to revise their understandings of Millennials and themselves. In this way, Millennials use their identity to (re)define *millenial* for themselves as a means to resist the mythology of generational differences. Identities are often enacted for building community and reclaiming agency in the face of marginalizing forces. Just as *Negro* and *black* were regravements of black identity against racism, and just as *queer* and *LGBT* were regravements against sexism and homophobia, millennial enactments of identity happen explicitly at sites of economic hardship and conflicts between generations. In many instances, this is where Millennials build
camaraderie with other Millennials as they like and share arguments that resist millennial stereotypes. In other instances, there are narrative accounts of discord between Millennials and older generations. These examples prove particularly productive for understanding how Millennials challenge their othering by Baby Boomers. At other times, these enactments happen as open challenges between self-identified Millennials and other subject positions. In this way, studying millennial marginalization and identity intersects with the study of other age groups at sites of inter-generational conflict.

To ensure that everyone is heard within an increasingly globalized culture, Jason Del Gandio argues for the ethics of Global Justice Rhetoric, which has one simple tenant: that members of any named group “must be allowed to represent themselves” (190). Thus within a Global Justice framework, the identity of Millennials only has saliency when the members of that generation have a say in what it means to identify as “Millennials.” I have conceptualized enactments as a way of being heard, and argued that the posts analyzed here are enactments of Millennial identity by millennial authors on Tumblr, not as a static state, but as a participant on social media within an imagined community and, perhaps, in a state of transition between who they feel they are as a collective generation of individuals who must defend themselves against hostilities coming from older generations.

Worthy of note is that Tumblr has more minoritized populations than other social networking sites, with about 29% of its users identify as African American or Hispanic (Costill, 2014). A more diverse user base suggests that Tumblr is a rich site to find artifacts created, shared, and curated by users whose millennial identity intersects with other marginalized identities. Indeed, the millennial identities enacted on Tumblr often occur as active resistance to hegemonic conceptions of beauty based on racism (beauty as fair or white) and sexism (beauty
as thin and heteronormative). Such resistance often has strategic value for the way it both appeases and challenges grids of intelligibility. For example, sexuality is not hidden as a private affair, but embraced as a state of being and authentic representation of the self. This move challenges the logics of sexual shame that are so pervasive in patriarchal, heteronormative politics. Posts were part of enacting a performative millennial identity crossing a broad spectrum of gender and sexuality. These expressions were at times hyperbolic, especially in regard to spending habits and the acquiring of goods. But these sentiments were conveyed through intentionally dramatic means almost as if they were performed in drag.

There are limitations to this study. First, this is one online community with almost 100 members, which is a very small sample of the target population of Millennials as a whole. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Millennials are numbering 80 million strong, and even a random sample of posts on Tumblr is still only a sample of Millennials that use Tumblr. Furthermore, looking for Millennials in online spaces does assume that aspects of the digital native are true and that Millennials can be found in online communities. Despite these shortcomings, the posts examined in this study are from self-identified Millennials, many of which borrow substantially from sources outside of Tumblr, which suggests that the imagined community of millennial Tumblr users is connected to broader communities of Millennials.

Second, by looking at identity as a function of self-identification, other intersecting identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability are put at the periphery. This study is not able to examine these intersections in detail since the only demographic data obtained from users is whether they self-identify as Millennials. That said, a number of Millennials seemed to embrace intersections of race, gender, and sexuality as intersections with their identities as Millennials. The presence of intersecting identity could be because performed identities based on
race and gender serves a function that has not yet been explored in this study. It is curious to think about how Millennials may be aware of their multiple subject positions across intersections with other identities.

Third, it is possible that posts coded as politics were frequent because the tag was devised as a catch-all for coding posts that discussed political leaders and current events during a Presidential campaign year. Moreover, since over a third of the corpus was collected during June, 2016, which is LGBT pride month as well as the month where one of the largest mass shootings in history occurred at a LatinX night at a gay club, that politics would see an abundance of posts concerning gender and queer issues. It is also possible that race and ethnicity were discussed because June was the month of a number of extrajudicial killings of unarmed black men were committed by police, as well as the controversial vote where the United Kingdom (or at least Britain) voted to leave the E.U., a move attributed to xenophobic fervor in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Because of the prevalence of identity politics in all three of these events, topics such as stereotyping and emotives such as anguish are likely to be more common in this corpus. A longer study would reveal more complexity and test the consistency of these patterns.

Fourth, it is difficult to assess what qualifies as composition and what is simply sharing another post on Tumblr, if such a distinction should be made. Since I cannot verify if the authors actively combined text, image, and visuals to invent wholly unique compositions rather than simply reacted and shared works of other authors, I viewed all posts as enactments, where users interacted and remixed media of various kinds with the expectation of interacting with others both within and apart from the community. Millennial authors are aware that what they share has
consequences by way of soliciting likes, shares, and commentary, and where they identify with others users’ posts that resonate with them on a personal level.

Despite these shortcomings, I have devised a scheme for analyzing how humans impose static labels on bodies to advantage some and disadvantage Others. It is difficult to do this work within systems that convey power and privilege, as identities themselves become “a dance partner designed to trip you up” (Smooth, 2011; Kemp, 2016), employed by oppressor and oppressed to impose or disrupt stability within institutions and governments. I am most interested in how these concepts can explain how dominant groups can marginalize, delegitimize, or estrange Others. In this way, identity is in constant flux and under constant contention. Identity and myth, used in productive tension, can interrogate how rhetoric is used to enact prejudice by labeling individuals and groups as not trustworthy, good enough, smart enough, wise enough, physically or mentally able enough, or possessing the right genitalia to be worthy of access to institutions and protections from government while living as their most authentic selves. It appears that within online communities, millennial already functions as just such an identity. The term is often used by Baby Boomers and Generation X in the public and private spheres to describe perceived deficits amongst these students, Millennial identity can be (re)defined and embraced by students as a means to challenge those who would dismiss their subject positions based on, but counter to myths. And it is possible that this mythology will endure and change as subsequent generations are born.

Analyzing the potential for communication to make meaning and mediate social roles is a practice aligned social and global turns in rhetoric and composition. In this tradition, this chapter explored how Millennials contest, complicate, and ultimately embrace their Millennial identity and enact their subject position as Millennial students and future professionals. As identities
coalesce within individuals, they resist being simplified or typified in ways necessary to function as mythology. Instead, identities are forged within sites of discourse and discord, and functions to build alliances while also asserting distinctions that are at times irreconcilable. Moreover, while the stereotypes and archetypes in mythologies are relatively fixed tropes, identities can be fluid or static, unified or fragmented, complex, intersectional, and multiple, which makes identity a rhetorical technique suitable for resistance to commonly held perceptions and histories that threaten Millennials with dominance and erasure. Identities have histories and histories are written, or at the very least symbolically represented through the modes of communication. On SNSs, histories are collected, shared, curated, preserved, and reciprocally become communities when they are acted upon and changed. This curating is done through hashtags (like #BlackLivesMatter or #StraightButNotNarrow). The identities are then validated by the community through the creation and propagation of such online texts and for the purpose of building an imagined community. This makes the study of such spaces and texts worthwhile.

Within the comparative-historical frame of generational myths and identity, instructors have a potential path for critically engaging inter-generational conflict in rhetoric and composition courses. Since rhetoric and composition values the pedagogical application of theory, composition instructors can adopt Millennial Pedagogy as a unit that can be taught in college-level composition courses. I imagine that Millennial Pedagogy foregrounds the methods necessary to interrogate texts that account for when generations collide in academic and professional contexts. By bringing these conflicts into view with methods of rhetorical critique, in Chapter Five I conclude this dissertation by imagining that composition instructors and students can interrogate the term Millennial as a myth and an identity in necessary and productive ways, and I offer the beginnings of such a unit.
CHAPTER SIX – CONFRONTING MYTHS AND ENACTING MILLENNIAL IDENTITY IN PRAxis

Chapter Three discussed the mythology of generational differences and how millennial myths obscure the ways academics and professionals conceptualize the subject positions of young students and employees while also justifying millennial marginalization. In Chapter Five, I discussed Millennial as an enactment of online identity, where Millennials use the affordances of *Tumblr* to build an imagined community from which they challenge myths and negotiate inter-generational conflict. The productive tension between millennial myth and millennial identity provides a comparative-historical frame for explaining inter-generational conflict. Using this comparative-historical frame, this chapter imagines how to critically engage inter-generational conflict in the classroom, an effort that will henceforth be called “Millennial Pedagogy.”

The first goal of Millennial Pedagogy is foreground how technological determinism, with its trope that each generation embodies technological and social changes, will continue to define future generations just as it has for Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Indeed, at the time of writing this dissertation, the next generation of students and professionals is on the horizon (Horovitz, 2012; Levitz, 2015), and that generation will likely need to define themselves while facing inter-generation conflict and the persistence of generational myths. Mythic criticism is a suitable method for exposing generational myths and explaining how any generation can be marginalized by the narrative logics of the mythology of generational differences. To support the goal of exposing myths, the prompts presented in this chapter use mythic criticism in ways that are intentionally open-ended, so that instructor and student to perpetually explore the mythology of generational differences in order to cultivate a literacy about how generational myths function as a marginalizing force in academic and professional contexts. In so doing, I have positioned
rhetoric and composition to consider that each generation may need pedagogy that perpetually challenges generational myths.

The second goal for Millennial Pedagogy is to engage inter-generational conflict by treating Millennials as simultaneously the topic of research, the exigency for rhetorical action, and the potential means for challenging the marginalizing force of generational myths. To be clear, I do not claim that Millennial Pedagogy is a millennial-focused curriculum satiating the unique needs of the millennial generation, perhaps like Bentley University and other millennial-focused initiatives have tried to do. Instead, what makes Millennial Pedagogy *millennial* is that the digital native and the entitlement generation are two specific myths that provide the exigency for critical engagement with texts representing Millennials in academic and professional contexts. Focusing on millennial myths grounds the comparative historical frame with the particular instance of millennial marginalization, thereby providing a starting point for what will be the perpetually exploration of generational myths past, present, and in the future. For students who either self-identify as Millennials, or who are labeled as Millennials by members of previous generations, exposing millennial myths will be especially helpful because this exposition names the marginalizing forces that they are likely to encounter in college and beyond.

The third goal is to teach identity as means to resist the marginalizing force of generational myths. Toward this goal, Millennial Pedagogy conceptualizes identity as both a method for analyzing how people enact their own self-defined subjectivity, and as a strategy for challenging the marginalizing force of myths in academic and professional contexts. To ground identity theory within community practices, Millennial Pedagogy examines enactments of millennial identity in particular. In this way, Millennial Pedagogy challenge students to analyze
particular enactments of generational identity as a means to theorize how they can enact an identity that mediates how their communication habits may be interpreted in academic and professional contexts. Both myth and identity deal with stereotypes and archetypes, but in the tradition of the rhetoric of marginalized communities and global justice rhetorics, identities are a rhetorical means of inventing a sense of self and communicating that sense to the world. Identities are complex—sometimes strategically essentialized, or performed, or performative—but ultimately they are the means of claiming a person’s right to write their own story.

Millennial Pedagogy is itself a form of advocacy because it positions instructors to work side by side with students to confront myths and use rhetorical methods to examine the role of media and its potential affects on Millennials’ lives. Scholars in rhetoric and composition have suggested that a composition class that focuses on advocacy empowers students to affect their immediate contexts and make change (Wysocki and Lynch, 2013, p. 8). With advocacy in mind, online technologies are a component because the affordances of technology enable instructor and student to explore conflict in real-time while also deliberating on potential solutions to contemporary problems. As Michael Salvo (2006) argues, technology has made it possible for students to become “agents of social change” capable of “meaningful action [and] political change, learning that the world has been made and can thus be remade to serve more justly in the interests of a democratic society” (p. 220). In this chapter, I suggest that Millennial Pedagogy provides a productive site for exploring the kinds of advocacy that can empower students to better represent themselves in academic and professional contexts.

The Form and Praxis of Millennial Pedagogy

In *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), pedagogue Paulo Freire argued that on the most superficial level, education is about using communication to give form to ideas while helping students develop a
critical consciousness (p. 97). What gives form to Millennial Pedagogy is the tension between generational myths and generational identity at sites of inter-generational conflict. Within Millennial Pedagogy, mythic criticism and identity orient instructor and teacher alike toward a comparative-historical frame for understanding inter-generational conflict. Millennial Pedagogy in praxis should cultivate a critical consciousness about inter-generational conflict so that the marginalizing force of myths is perpetually challenged. For Freire, a critical consciousness involves teaching a process of rhetorical inquiry, production, and reflection. I argue that Millennial Pedagogy teaches inquiry by establishing myth and identity as concepts that explain the hows, whys, and potential effects of communication choices. In complement to inquiry, students practice to use identity as a means to produce arguments suitable for combatting millennial marginalization. Lastly, reflection means thinking about the process as a whole and assessing the successes and failures of each attempt. On a basic level, Millennial Pedagogy teaches rhetorical inquiry, production, and reflection, where students analyze persuasive arguments while using the available modes and media to make persuasive arguments of their own, arguments that will constitute the enactment of their own self-defined identity.

This section provides an imagining for how Millennial Pedagogy could look within the rhetoric and composition classroom. Presented are several prompts guiding students through a process of researching about Millennials in academic and professional contexts and using the rhetorical concepts of myth and identity to analyze and produce multimodal arguments. Arguments examined by students are of the same genres as those examined in the previous chapters: news articles, web articles, and memes shared on Tumblr. What students will produce are short rhetorical analyses of artifacts with an attention to the mythology of generational differences and by using myth and identity as concepts of rhetorical critique. Millennial
pedagogy also foregrounds how multimodal arguments can be thought of as enactments of student identity, where students challenge myths that compromise their success in college and beyond. As a scaffolded unit for course, Millennial Pedagogy has the following components:

*Teach the mythology of generational differences:* this means teaching mythic criticism as a concept for rhetorical analysis with an attention to the taxonomy of millennial myths: the digital native and the entitlement generation. As a process, this unit challenges students to understand how to use mythic criticism to analyze artifacts and rationalize how inter-generational conflicts are marred by millennial mythology and the mythology of generational differences. The goal is to guide students through a process where students and instructors examine how myths are comprised of stereotypes, archetypes, problems, and heroes that may compromise students’ success in college and beyond.

*Teach identity as the means of knowing and the means of challenging myths:* this means putting theories of identity into productive tension with myths. As a process, students are tasked with analyzing essentialized, performed, and performative identities as a method for understanding how different enactments of identity can resist myths. The goal is to guide students through a process of analyzing how millennial authors enact identity before theorizing how they can make informed choices regarding how to communicate between themselves and previous generations.

Millennial Pedagogy could be either a single unit for composition students, or a topic-based course administered in a quarter or semester. As a course or unit teaching rhetorical analysis and production, Millennial Pedagogy teaches myth and identity as rhetorical concepts that enable students to analyze arguments and produce persuasive arguments of their own. In this way, the concepts of myth and identity are abstract frameworks made concrete by engaging written, oral,
visual, or electronic arguments where authors deliberate over Millennials as students and professionals. Since Millennial Pedagogy requires engaging millennial myths and the ways that Millennials enact their identity in response to myths, this pedagogy intends to teach students about how identities are created, negotiated, accepted, or challenged through rhetorical means. As such, Chapter Six imagines Millennial Pedagogy as a single unit within the composition classroom.

Teach the Mythology of Generational Differences in Praxis

There are two common myths about Millennials: First, the digital native defines Millennials by their familiarity and proficiency with digital technologies. The myth describes Millennials’ constant access and utilization of computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones as a force that shapes their behavior for good or ill. As an archetype, the digital native means that younger generations are defined by technology, as their familiarity with technologies makes them apt for certain kinds of instruction or employment. As a stereotype, the myth disadvantages them by prescribing behaviors and values that previous generations understand as negligent of more traditional forms of communication, especially in circumstances where technology and its expediency are not a previous generations’ preferred means of communicating. The digital native stereotype and archetype are present in many online arguments where professionals have discussed Millennials in the workforce. These professionals believe that since digital technologies afford the capability to transmit information quickly and easily, speed and ease become embodied in all Millennials’ habits and practices. Previous generations may act on this belief and prescribe Millennials’ position in the workforce as necessarily related to IT. Furthermore, there are moments when previous generations blend the myth of the digital native with the myth of the entitlement generation, thinking that Millennials expect to use technology.
In contrast to professional contexts, understandings of the digital native are generally more nuanced in academic journals, where millennial students are sometimes characterized as both enabled and constrained by technology, but ultimately expect to be taught technology. Instructors and students can be more conscious about these myths before orienting themselves toward critical uses of technology while also interrogating their expectations of technology and its affordances.

The second myth is the entitlement generation, where Millennials are understood as a spoiled, lazy and fragile generation that has been spoiled by epochs of technological and social change. As a stereotype, this means that being raised around the conveniences of technology has compromised Millennials’ capability to perform well in the absence of such technologies. It is important that students interrogate this myth for the ways previous generations may limit the agency of students based upon their presumed relationship with technology. In addition, Millennials are stereotyped as spoiled not only by technology, but also by shifts in education that reward minimal effort rather than by being appropriately challenged during their early years of education. Using this myth, previous generations rationalize any perceived disengagement by Millennials as an unreasonable expectation for reward, exacerbated by their embodied expectations and habits where an inflated sense of self leads to unrealistic expectations. Millennials are mocked for believing they are their own special “snowflake,” which belittles Millennials’ aspirations for distinction and individuality in academic and professional contexts. In exchange, Millennials are expected to accept whatever subject position previous generations would place upon them. As part of millennial myths, the myth of the entitlement generation defines Millennials as a problem that must be overcome by previous generations, who define themselves as the archetypical hero who must save wayward youth from themselves. So unlike
the sometime advantages of the digital native, the entitlement generation speaks wholly of deficiencies that disadvantage Millennials, deficiencies that justify their marginalization while privileging previous generations or instructors and professionals. Of substantial note is that the myth of the entitlement generation is much more common in business contexts than in academic contexts, at least insofar as rhetoric and composition scholarship is concerned.

Millennial myths can be taught as an etic approach to rhetorical analysis, where these general concepts are used to analyze online texts. Millennial myths set a precedent for how previous generations can typify the young, which culminate in problematic narratives that compromise students’ success. In the classroom, instructors can use the myth of the digital native as a framework to more generally interrogate generational differences and inter-generational conflict. The prompt in Figure 11 asks the students to look for the presence of

We read Bob Lutz’s “Generation Y Going Nowhere, And They're Fine With That,” and discussed the stereotypes Lutz used to characterize young people as he offered advice to professionals. For homework, choose one of the prompts below and write a response. This low-stakes exercise is an ideal place to experiment with concepts discussed in the readings and in class. Your homework should be between 200-300 words. Keywords: Millennials, distraction, twerps, social networking, technology

**Prompt 1**: Have you ever been stereotyped as being susceptible to the influences of technology? Are these stereotypes accurately describe you, or not (or both)? Have you been told you use electronic devices too much, or not enough? Have you been criticized for using technology? Did an authority tell you they would teach you otherwise? Provide detailed descriptions of the circumstances.

**Prompt 2**: Find an online example of where an author of a previous generation has stereotyped the young based on their presumed relationship technology (similar to Bob Lutz). What are the stereotypes and what are the archetypes define in the article? Is the young’s relationship to technology described as either an asset or a liability? Who is the “hero” of the tale? Provide a hyperlink or citation to your chosen artifact.

**Figure 7 – Prompt One, Analyzing Digital Nativity I**

stereotypes common to the millennial myth of the digital native. With the concept of myth, students can apply different units of analysis to understand how the myth of the digital native
complicates their relationships with potential mentors. Students can look for the elements of myth—apt with technology, but passive consumers of it—and use mythic criticism as a method to reexamine personal experience from their past where they failed to communicate with a parent, or a teacher, or an employer. If the topic is not relatable to the student, either because they have not encountered age bias or do not self-identify with a generation, then students could also apply mythic criticism to different artifacts of Internet media so as to examine the ways other authors make arguments for the whys and hows of inter-generational conflict.

Most importantly, prompts can be connected to the potential consequences of these myths like those present in the myth of the entitlement generation. Consider Prompts Two and Three (Figures 12 and 13) below:

**Prompt 1:** Have you ever been stereotyped as unprepared for school or work? If so, please provide a detailed description of the circumstances. Were you described as a passive consumer of media, or a producer? Were you told that your expectations for reward were unreasonable? Or that you expected a trophy without working hard? What is at stake if your teachers or managers believe this?

**Prompt 2:** Find an online example of where an author of a previous generation has stereotyped the young as being spoiled or somehow disadvantaged because of their relationship to technology. Your chosen artifact can be a short article, video, or other such work. Please also provide a hyperlink or citation for your artifact.

In Prompts Two and Three (Figures 12 and 13), students are challenged to apply different units of analysis to understand how the myth of the entitlement generation complicates how professionals understand their academic and professional performance, or how they may communicate their expectations for merit and promotion on the job. Students can discuss how
the advice of professionals fails to capture their understanding of themselves, and threatens to limit their own personal goals in professional contexts.

We read Tim Urban’s “Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy” and discussed Urban’s advice for motivating millennial employees. For homework, choose one of the prompts below and write a response. This low-stakes exercise is an ideal place to experiment with concepts discussed in the readings and in class. Your homework should be between 200-300 words. Keywords: unrealistic, snowflake, tea cup, yuppie, entitled, spoiled, narcissistic, lazy,

**Prompt 1:** Have you ever been stereotyped as being entitled? Have you ever been told that your expectations were unreasonable, and the product of your upbringing? If so, please provide a detailed description of the circumstances.

**Prompt 2:** Find an online example of where an author of a previous generation has stereotyped the young as spoiled into having unreasonable expectations. Provide a hyperlink or citation for your artifact. What are the stereotypes and what are the archetypes? Is the young’s relationship to family or school described as either an asset or a liability? Who is the “hero” of the tale?

**Figure 13 – Prompt Three, Analyzing Entitlement II**

Empowered by the knowledge that certain stereotypes endure throughout history by typifying younger generations as entitled, a phenomenon which mediates how previous generations understand Millennials and their relationships with them, students can examine how these ideas may marginalize them from the spaces and positions they may wish to inhabit.

Students can do this while recognizing that being the “hero” is perhaps an unavoidable position to be assumed by academics and professionals, as both have the responsibility of preparing students for the challenges they will face. Yet, students can still question how “hero” can be a problematic position when previous generations believe Millennials are ever-dependent on their authority, and when every Millennial’s complaint can be framed as an unreasonable expectation. Students can think about how to challenge this myth and assert themselves as partners with a set of embodied experiences that can reframe the problem in ways that correspond with the students’ understanding of themselves.
As an etic approach to rhetorical analysis, the taxonomy of millennial myths like the digital native and the entitlement generation can provide a starting point for understanding how generational differences change over time and within context. Indeed, millennial myths will at some point become a thing of history, and a new generation will be named with its own perceived assets and deficiencies. Myth affords explanatory power for how generational stereotypes and archetypes endure overtime and as such, mythic criticism can be used as a concept for critique where particulars are rationalized as perhaps having general applicability to

We read Thomas Freidman’s “THE BABY BOOM COMES OF AGE” and Alex Williams “Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z.” Choose one of the prompts below and write a response. A low-stakes exercise like this is an ideal place to experiment with concepts discussed in the readings and in class. Your homework should be between 200-300 words. Keywords: helicopter parenting, merit, voice, being heard, problem, Generation Z.

**Prompt 1:** Does it surprise you that Freidman describes Baby Boomers the way he does? If so, what is your reaction? Are there patterns between the attributes and behaviors used by Freidman to describe Baby Boomers and what Williams uses to describe Generation Z?

**Prompt 2:** Find an online example of where an author has stereotyped the young as being distracted by or feeling entitled to the conveniences of technology. How does the author describe young people? Are there patterns between the attributes and behaviors used to describe the young and other generations we have discussed in class? Please also provide a hyperlink or citation for your artifact.

**Figure 14 – Prompt Four, Analyzing the Mythology of Generational Differences I**

other arguments. As a concept, students can look for archetypal language that tells a story of struggle and perseverance, where younger generations have to resist some aspect of their upbringing. Prompt Four (Figure 14) guides students through a process looking for myths in news and web articles and theorizing how and why myths endure. If myths indeed endure because they provide a narrative logic that makes sense of inter-generational conflict, there will be evidence of generational myths in future texts. This etic process uses the units of analysis for
myth criticism (stereotype, archetype, problem, and hero) to explore how generational myths endure across time. Assuming that professionals will use the Internet to explain intergenerational conflict within structures such as businesses, or colleges, or public offices, students will find evidence of the mythology and theorize how it functions as a marginalizing force. If the mythology endures, it will be the previous generations that are characterized as the problem solvers and the ushers of future action. The explanatory power of mythic criticism provides the means to understand how the young can acknowledge and challenge the power dynamics that are justified through myths.

As an emic approach, students can juxtapose Millennial myths with their own experience or their findings regarding myths of generational differences. The goal is to theorize how myths may change over time and within different contexts, thereby meeting the challenge of new threats to young’s people’s identity. As a rhetorical skill, this allows students a productive space for invention, to expand upon millennial mythology and to account for which stereotypes and archetypes change over time. If students struggle looking for patterns in communication unaided by rhetorical concepts, instructors can also consider asking students to look for the exonym, the ancient Greek term for when a speaker describes another group that the speaker does not belong to; as well as places (toponym); ethnic groups (ethnonym); languages (glossonym); or individuals, as a means to analyze authors’ works without the taxonomy of millennial myths. Consider also that students can look also for what may be forgotten, thus foregrounding how myths cling to patterns of behavior that typify young and old across time and across contexts. Mythic criticism can elucidate particular circumstances in an effort that looks for answers while raising additional questions relevant to the each student and their own experience. Thus the identities involved can be demystified as explanations for what can be described as odd and
peculiar behavior, and with an understanding of the power dynamics that convolute any representation of self to Other.

**Teach Identity as a Means of Knowing and a Means of Challenging Myths in Praxis**

This section imagines how to teach millennial identity in praxis. Provided here are examples and prompts that can be used to guide students through analyzing representations of Millennials’ online. Myth and identity complement each other in how they provide a comparative-historical frame for analyzing how stereotypes and archetypes mediate students’ relationships with their older peers and thus their attainable social positions in academic and professional contexts. The concept of myth explains why previous generations may define Millennials in problematic ways, ways that threaten to compromise their success. Conversely, the concept of identity can explain how Millennials understand themselves and (re)claim the moniker of “millennial” as an enacted and embodied set of expectations, experiences, and communication practices. This reclaiming of the moniker of “Millennial” as an empowering force is a move often made by marginalized groups as a means to retain agency when institutions threaten to limit the scope of what they can say and do, thereby marginalizing them into prescribed social positions.

As a rhetorical concept, identity functions as a method of rhetorical critique. The instructor provides students with models where other Millennials have enacted their identity in online spaces. As a concept, identity also affords both a way of thinking about arguments produced using the available means of communication and a way of analyzing texts in an effort to theorize how identity functions as a means to persuade. In theorizing the effects, it is important to foreground how identities are often the product of Othering, where a normalized or
dominant group places a marker upon a target population for the purpose of marginalization. Dominant groups rely on stereotypes as a means to mark the marginalized group, thereby both essentializing any differences as inherent to the marginalized group while also characterizing those differences as inferior or degenerate when compared to the dominant group.

![Cartoon](https://www.theodysseyonline.com/millennial-but)

**Figure 15 – Cartoon Tumblr Post, “At my desk!” (Original source: [https://www.theodysseyonline.com/millennial-but](https://www.theodysseyonline.com/millennial-but))**

Cartoons like Figure 15 reflect the opinions of many managers and consultants working in industry (as shown in Chapter One). Students and instructors can question how the cartoon embraces stereotypes that Millennials are self-absorbed or lacking initiative, preferring instead to simply act the part of working while taking pictures of themselves on their cell phone. A prompt might ask if the cartoon essentializes or infantilizes Millennials in some way? And if so, does it argue for stereotypes of Millennials in ways the class has seen before in the mythology of generational differences? In addition, students can question the potential consequences of their instructors or bosses believing the myth. Since marginalization becomes an “ism” (ie. racism,
sexism, ageism, or ableism) when there is systemic support that privileges the dominant group at the expense of the Other. Images like Figure 15 are a good starting point for guiding students to look for similar arguments that challenge their subject positions as Millennials. In other words, students could examine the image and question how academics and professionals might interpret seeing Millennials being on their phones at work. If professionals, for example, are the gatekeepers for Millennials’ advancement in their careers, then such behaviors might compromise Millennials’ ethos regarding such advancement. Within the context of Millennial Pedagogy, this means naming millennial myths and identifying the stereotypes and tropes that inhibit Millennials’ success.

As a result, the marginalized group must fight to (re)define themselves in ways that challenge stereotypes and the structures that social structures that enable marginalization. Identity performance can be useful as a pedagogical strategy for achieving empathy towards groups to which students do not belong. For example, Jonathan Alexander created the website StraightBoys4NSync, and asked his male students to assume a subject position where they would defend their fandom for the popular boy band. This site, Alexander argues, opened space where students could think critically about the way their identity positions them in society. He argues that this strategy serves an important function in the classroom because too often students of marginalized groups are asked to profess their many selves in front of white, cisgendered audiences, thereby tokenizing their educational experience for the sake of other students (Alexander, 2005, p.102). Alexander’s point is an important one because, it creates a space where students can experiment with identities that they do not immediately adopt for themselves as a means to either gain empathy for others, or discover a new subjectivity that students may not have immediately thought of as possible.
Students can perform an identity that challenges these stereotypes and archetypes by foregrounding their lived experiences as Millennials and networking Millennials together in an online community. To enact identity as performance is to use previous grids of intelligibility as a wardrobe to be used at will, thereby rejecting any inherent or naturalized state and instead foregrounding the social construction of identity. Performance posits identity categories as primarily entertainment within an imagined community, a means to achieve catharsis and understanding amongst others who share the identity. In this way, the performance of identity is meant to build solidarity amongst Millennials by establishing a shared irreverence for their

![Image](image.png)

Figure 16 – *Tumblr* Post Titled, “*OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD, MOMMY.*”
subject position, a move that satirizes identity categories as fictions that still communicate an understanding of Millennials subjectivity.

Figure 16 is one example of performed millennial identity. The post is intended to be comical. It satirizes millennial identity by using the image of a very young girl to foreground stereotypes of youth as unprepared for adulthood. The young girl is not the body the millennial author inhabits; rather it is the body of a child used to poke fun of the idea of Millennials as infantile. As a performance of the identity of youth, it plays with the real through the artifice of an appropriated photo. In this way, millennial identity is a useful fiction for conveying sentiment and achieving catharsis within the imagined community. Messages like these carry a comedic ethos by satirizing the idea of identity categories as deterministic or relevant. This comedic performance is the part that resonates with Millennials’ experience, and its cynicism and satire are personified in the actions of young girl. (When Millennials use humor to achieve catharsis about their economic dispositions, it might call to mind Langston Hughes famous line: “Humor is laughing at what you haven't got when you ought to have it.”) Instructors and students can question the ways in which they might feel conflicted by it, or affirmed by it, or both.

In contrast to performance, students can theorize how to strategically invoke Cartesian or essentialized identity by centering the Millennial as the most credible knower of their own subject position. In a post titled “How it feels to being a Millennial” (Figure 17), the author strategically essentializes Millennials’ subjectivity as a means to make it authentic and real. The strategy relies on previous grids of intelligibility, which may typify Millennials as lazy and inexperienced, and yet the message is reinterpreted through the lens of Millennials’ embodied experience as a real and valid struggle. In the post, the millennial author borrows from popular media (in this case, Grey’s Anatomy) to account for the lived experience of Millennials as hard
working and often exhausted by their participation in school and work. Instructor and student can question the choice of *Grey’s Anatomy*, and whether it is important that the show (in its early seasons) chronicled the lives of young medical students who endured rigorous amounts of testing coupled with residencies and practice in order to become doctors. Students can also question how the post builds common experience amongst Millennials as hard-working and exhausted from their investments in success, a truth enforced by the embodied experience of exhaustion.

figure 17 – Posts titled “How it feels being a Millennial”

Strategic essentialism is a rhetorical strategy that embraces stereotypes and redefines them as archetypes. Within millennial mythology, strategic essentialism is a means to ultimately challenge millennial marginalization and the perceptions of previous generations who enact such prejudice. Consider Figure 18 as an example. In this post, the millennial author chronicles a conversation with their mother who is of the baby boomer generation. Authors that enact a strategically essentialized identity place self and Other into the argument in ways that redefine
their relationship to each other, each with its own unique and inherited subject positions dispositions. In this specific example, the millennial author claims a subject position that is especially attuned to “notice more problems” because of their status as a young person. The millennial author posits that their youth, though regarded as a liability by Baby Boomers, is actually an asset inherent to their subject positions. Such enactments are where Millennials redefine the perceived deficiencies of character or culture and transform them into assets that position them as authorities. (For those familiar with feminist critique, this may call to mind the Combahee River Collective Statement, where a group of black lesbians make a similar claim that their marginalized position in society makes them best positioned to critique society as a whole.) In this way, the millennial author redefines the boundaries of what has been deemed typical and atypical of their generation, operating within the confines of what has been deemed typical in order to enact an identity that positions one as uniquely qualified and particularly credible to assess the given circumstance.

Figure 18 – Millennial Essay Post Titled “Generation Y”
Of course Cartesian identity and strategic essentialism can obscure the effects of nurture and choice by foregrounding the shared and naturalized experience working hard to obtain social standing. But the wisdom of first-hand experience affirmed by other Millennials who share the experience cannot be dismissed out of hand because age is indeed a position over which subjects have no control. In other words, Millennials have no choice regarding their age, and sometimes little choice regarding their economic hardships. And though youth is a characteristic often idolized in popular media, it is a liability in circumstances where an individual wishes to be recognized as an authority.

Where the concepts of performance and strategic essentialism coalesce is to consider identity as performative. To look for the performative aspects of identity is to acknowledge where identities are fluid, multiple, fractured by discord and saturated by global commerce. To say it is fractured is to acknowledge where essentialized identities lose coherence at sites of diaspora or where systems of power and privilege incentivize, often through economic systems, the embracing of one identity over another. To say it is fluid is to acknowledge that identities are not caused by some innate qualities; instead, they are they effects that congeal as they are repeated over time. Identity as performative is a blending of the two theoretical concepts of essentialism and performance, because identity is neither biologically determined nor is it artificial or arbitrary (Brenner, 2011, p. 189). It is multiple in the sense that personal experience is continually at odds with the symbols that comprise hegemonic grids of intelligibility, a tension between forms and functions and subjectivities which ultimately works to transform identity categories over time. It is the choice to confirm, confer, and strategically deny the self. In short, performative identity both accepts and challenges the grids of intelligibility as means to find social legitimacy. As such, performative identities are the necessary means for expressing,
validating, and rationalizing one’s sense of the self and world. Performative identity acknowledges that every symbolic act is part real and part artifice, revealed and obscured by symbolic means.

Figure 19 – Millennial essay post “My generation is better than your generation”

No single example can capture the full range of performativity. But students can look for moments when Millennials use performative identity to establish credibility. As Gonzales has argued, ethos is performative, a choice to foreground aspects of fractured identities that are redefined as one choice in a set of repeated choices, and which to foreground the aspects of identity in relation to and from Others. In a post titled “My generation is better than your generation” (Figure 19), the millennial author concedes to some of the stereotypes and archetypes placed upon them by Baby Boomers, such as a desire to use technology for communication rather than meeting in person. But instead of conceding the point that technology
has inculcated within them a set of deficiencies, the millennial author aligns technology with themes of change and progress, and orients Millennials’ own set of embodied practices as those best adapted to the evolving context. The millennial author also finds common experience with previous generations (represented here as a conversation with their parents). They argue that both must carefully negotiate an ever-changing world that challenges both to adapt to economic and technological progress. Performative identity conveys the stakes for Millennials and other alike, thereby establishing their expertise, building a narrative of shared experience, and establish a general sense of being that is both alike and different in relation to the Other. The exigency of performative identity is to counteract how contemporary grids of intelligibility threaten the legitimacy of their experience. Key is building both empathy amongst group members and the strength of numbers to acquire power in the form of institutional support.

For many Millennials, solidarity and community are fostered within imagined communities and within online spaces. The necessity for space is key because it affords both a landscape and a canvas for building an imagined community amongst Millennials who otherwise do not share a time and place. Figure 20 shows several examples where Millennials have used the digital space of Tumblr create a millennial aesthetic. Tumblr, and other SNSs, provides a space where millennial identity is curated, preserved, and shared amongst other Millennials. This space then galvanizes a millennial movement in opposition to previous generations and the myths placed upon them. This participation is not a “real” community because none of its inhabitants know each other and do not share a physical location. Instead, the digital space serves as a surrogate by affording a space for curating the community in ethereal spaces rather than physical ones. The community of Millennials is imagined by the users of the site, a process that is afforded by the social networking site as a piece of composition software. These
representations can carry over to physical spaces, where Millennials congregate to celebrate their many selves and their community.

Figure 20 – Posts Collected from *Tumblr* Demonstrating Various Millennial Enactments
Students can be tasked with analyzing the role of online media in enacting millennial identity. The goal is to task students to explore how identities build group cohesion, specifically through exploring how Millennials participate on social networking sites to build online communities. Consider Prompt 5 (Figure 21) below, which foregrounds how online sites are worthy of exploration because they enable a space for using various modes and media to represent the self by offering bits of stories that contribute to a process of remembering and forgetting, a location that aggregates fractured, contradictory, and opposing narratives.

In class, we looked at examples of memes shared on the social media site Tumblr, where Millennials enact their identities. We also spoke of imagined communities that Millennials create for themselves (and their many ‘selves) online. Choose one of the prompts below and write a response. A low-stakes exercise like this is an ideal place to experiment with concepts discussed in the readings and in class. Your homework should be between 200-300 words.

**Prompt 1:** Think about your day-to-day interactions with your peers. Are there words, phrases, acronyms, or pronunciations that you use only with your peers? Can you think of moments or events that seem significant to you, but that are unknown or little known to previous generations? Do you post this language online? Or moments you experience within physical space? Keywords: language, media, history, spaces.

**Prompt 2:** Find an online example of where an author your age has used popular media to make an argument. Please also provide a hyperlink or citation for your artifact. Keywords: media, Generation Y, Generation Z, Millennial.

**Figure 21 – Prompt Five, Imagined Communities I**

The prompt also provides a framework for how students can re-rationalize their personal experience or explore the cacophony of modes and media that they find in online spaces, defining a relationship to those arguments contained therein. The instructor and student can question how the online space functions in relationship to the digital space by thinking about how the identities enacting online are consubstantial with identities enacted offline. Instructors might expect them to find words and phrases popular amongst the younger generations, emojis,
or lulspeak to be popular in both spaces, or perhaps not. Instructors might also expect them to find popular media from TV and movies, or perhaps not.

There are caveats for teaching technology and composition in the ways outlined in this chapter. First, it cannot be assumed that technology is enabling without, as Selwyn (2009) argues, “enhancing our understandings of the realities of technology use in contemporary society” (p. 375). Second, this kind of enactment also cannot be activism confined to the Internet without active engagement in physical spaces (Gladwell, 2010). Third, as Scott Wright (2010) has shown, scholars cannot assume too readily that the power of technologies lie in “some innate quality that forces human beings to behave in a particular way” (p. 246). Instead, technology works as an exponent to corporal social action by utilizing technological affordances to coordinate, solve problems, and argue for change in response to particular exigencies. Fourth, again, I do not mean to suggest that students should replicate enactments of identity on SNSs. To paraphrase Enoch, I do not mean to suggest that Tumblr or any SNS is “replete with perfect pedagogical practices we should replicate” (Enoch, 2010, p. 167). But I do suggest that Millennial Pedagogy can bring inter-generational conflicts into view with methods of rhetorical critique. Students should view their identities as an ongoing development constructed through embodied acts, where online spaces an exponent of that potential.
CONCLUSION

Chapter Six defined millennial pedagogy as a unit for first- and second-year composition courses. It outlines how millennial myths can be put in productive tension with millennial identity, and posits how students can question, analyze, reflect, and ultimately resist marginalization by making arguments that are enactments of their own identities, be that Millennial or something new. As a process of rhetorical inquiry and critical praxis, theory and practice inform each other and afford the means to examine how marginalization is socially constructed position and, as such, can be deconstructed. While various kinds of composition pedagogy embrace praxis, Millennial pedagogy is defined here as particular sites of inquiry (academic and professional contexts), as concepts for analysis and exposition (myth and identity), and as a process that challenges students to engage inter-generational conflict on the students’ own terms based upon how they understand their own identities (through enactment and reflection). Thus Millennial Pedagogy teaches rhetorical concepts that exposit how myths enable and constrain students’ communication choices, and how millennial identity can be enacted to challenge myths. Millennial Pedagogy ultimately challenges students to enact an identity of their own, perhaps Millennial or perhaps not, in response to myths, and in ways that could empower students in their academic and professional pursuits by affording them the means to navigate the myths that may compromise their success.

The coalescence of mythic criticism and identity embraces the social and global turns in composition, and fills a gap in understanding by placing inter-generation conflict within a comparative-historical frame. I argue that the comparative-historical frame of myth and identity offers explanatory power for inter-generational conflicts of the past, present, and future, with an attention to how deficit models have been combined with generational stereotypes to create a
substantial marginalizing force working against Millennials’ success. Indeed, while age-bias against previous generations has received attention in rhetoric and composition (Bowen, 2011; Swacha, 2017), there has been little discussion about how identifying students as Millennials has both unintended and intended consequences that compromise Millennials’ future success within academic and professional contexts. In other words, while the mythology of generational differences will endure, what is different about millennial myths are their potential to function as a marginalizing force during a time of growing economic disparities and debt-mounting systems have estranged Millennials from ingratiating themselves within education and within industry.

Rhetoric and composition should acknowledge millennial marginalization and work to attenuate the burdens that compromise Millennials’ success in college. Schawbel (2012) wrote for *Time Magazine*, “[Millennials are] in a bind. This group of 18- to 29-year-olds has been told they must go to college in order to find a decent job. Yet upon graduating, few jobs are available to young people — and those that are open often don’t require a college degree” (Schawbel, 2012). There is mounting evidence that Millennial strongly believes that going to college is the path to success in their careers, but this path to success has been stymied by previous generations who are working longer before retirement (Donegan, 2013). An instructor should also hedge their claims regarding guarantees that academic success will equal professional success, and engage how generational myths saturate inter-generational conflict in school and work. This hedge would recognize the realities that Millennials can be both qualified and experienced, as the socio-economic context demands them to be, but this, at best, will only weigh the career-hunting die in the favor, which is not a guarantee when assumptions about Millennials’ habits are so pervasive in academic and professional contexts. I argue that instructor’s can engage this phenomenon in composition courses using the comparative-historical frame outlined in this
dissertation, which affords the form for a unit focused on inter-generational conflict. Moreover, I argued for using mythic criticism and identity as a means to explore how students may conscious communication choices within the context of inter-generational conflict.

While researching for my dissertation, I have seen traces where past composition instructors have come to the defense of students. Shortly before finishing my research, I came upon a passage quoted on Tumblr. While the quote had no citation, I traced the quote to composition scholar Linda Brodkey (1995) who, while speaking against composition instructors who felt students were too lazy and disaffected to learn to write, argued that “[w]riters take stands. In standing for writing pedagogy, I have also taken a stand against what I see as gratuitous and cynical representations of composition students as unruly children who lack discipline. In part that means standing with others in the field who have also expressed reservations about the institutional arrangements under which writing is taught as composition” (Brodkey, 1996 pp. 230, 235). Brodkey’s sentiment seems to echo my purpose for this dissertation, albeit with more zeal. I am taking a sympathetic position toward an age group of students who have been cynically described in as lacking discipline, and I am arguing that the intersection of age is a significant marginalizing force that coincides with other, more powerful forms of oppression: sexism, racism, homophobia, and ableism. Foregrounding age should neither eclipse these other marginalizing forces. Indeed, with the emergence of Millennial myths and the corresponding identity, the battle for legitimacy will be most stark for a queer womXn of color in the millennial generation.

Moreover, I do not claim to that Millennial Pedagogy will save Millennials from themselves or anyone else. What I hope I have accomplished is composing a comparative-historical frame for understanding how age is an intersecting identity that works to marginalize
the young and within that frame, I have theorized a rhetorical approach for engaging critically with how Millennials and subsequent generations can challenge the mythology of generational differences and its potential as a marginalizing force. In order to determine the suitable action, students should be able to make informed decisions about their purpose for communicating and what kinds of action they may take. As Fredrick Douglass (1857) has argued, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will" (*The Frederick Douglass Papers, 1985*). As embodied acts suitable for challenging Millennial myths, these arguments are enactments of Millennial identity, where self-identified Millennials act in ways that are either problem-posing, or in ways the reconcile with institutions by searching for solutions to conflict in partnership with previous generations.

In arguing for millennial pedagogy, I have also made an implicit call for engaging the affordances of each mode of communication and how the modes of communication are created, maintained, and distributed through media technologies. This means instructor and student are engaging the available means and media used to produce argument and enact identity for the purpose of advocacy. Private organizations apart from universities have demonstrated a similar investment in developing design practices purposed for advocacy. Organizations like the American Institute of Graphic Arts have dedicated their website to offering tools and resources for “design policy advocacy,” where they argue that design is an “integral part of national legislative reform initiatives, including election reform, Social Security reform, Medicare reform, immigration reform, tax reform, the census and e-government” (*Aiga.org*). *GraphicAdvocacy.org* believes that digital posters can be “telling indication of a graphic designer's commitment to society when non-commissioned posters are created as vehicles to raise money to support political and humanitarian causes” (Resnick, 2013). All of these stakeholder practice design
advocacy across multiple genres ranging from paintings to Content Management Systems, and all of these organizations have a broad definition of designing for advocacy.

Instructors can also be more cautious about the costs of education. There are ways in which a students and instructors could work to attenuate the financial burdens that compromise Millennials’ success in college, thereby increasing students’ chances of success in their composition classes. One way doing this would be to suggest that students engage book publishers as a way to attenuate the financial burdens of college. Instructors know that one way of doing this is to create custom readers that are available at a lower cost to students. This is a viable option so long as two conditions are met. First, the custom reader contains content that is customized for the institutional context and that is not available for free online, and second, that the custom reader can be sold back to university bookstores after the course is completed. Another way of attenuating the cost of composition courses is to incorporate readings that are freely available on the web in place of custom readers, thereby lessening the amount of course materials that students would have to purchase. In addition, instructors can engage with the sphere of student affairs. There, they can inquire about resources that are available to make college more affordable for students, and perhaps make those centers a place for students to engage their place as university students. Instructors have already engaged student affairs in regard to accessibility of course instruction. Given that Millennial is indeed part of the social and cultural context that complicates the work of instructors, college affordability has now become a necessary part of that conversation.

Lastly, if it is true that Millennials, due to the economic hardships that come with the debt-for-a-degree system, struggle more than previous generations to perform academically because they must work while attending school, then instructors must be careful in how they
adjust deadlines and assigned work when so much of a student’s schedule lies outside of the instructor’s view. In other words, just as writing program administrators have advocated for adjunct and contingent faculty because these forms of labor are often exploited by denying them fair pay, benefits, and paths to professional participation and development, instructors can make connections between the burdens felt by faculty and graduate students and the adversity faced by millennial students, who faces similar challenges supporting themselves while balancing work and school. This could build a necessary kinship between instructor and student that ensures that instructors within the composition program make informed decisions regarding how they direct the workflow of students.

The industrialization of the American university and the growing need for validation and oversight has complicated the work of the lives of composition faculty, who must adapt to socio-economic forces that constrains their budgets, exhausts their resources, and challenges them to appease ever growing numbers of academic and professional stakeholders. And yet, all this worthwhile work has not engaged how Millennial is both affected by and part of those same socio-economic forces. Indeed, many composition instructors will lament their growing workloads and the constant pressures to be more efficient, while in the same breath chastising students for a perceived lack of diligence and academic commitment as students struggle to meet mounting pressures of their own. It is as if scholars and students live in different worlds, which of course could not be further from the case. Rhetoric and composition could make the seismic-level shift from a savings culture to a culture of debt a major topic in the composition course. The context of America’s debt culture has already lead to calls from some scholars to improve both transfer and financial aid policies in order to bring student completion rates above where they have been for four decades (Bowen et al., 2009). I have argued that Millennials in many
ways embody this problem, and I have argued for a comparative-historical frame economic circumstances exacerbate inter-generational conflict. In my imagining of Millennial Pedagogy, I argue that composition instructors and students can interrogate the term *millennial* as a myth and an identity in necessary and productive ways.
Notes

1) During the process of writing this dissertation, there were a number of threads and trails of evidence that I could not follow in the time I had to finish this project. As James Berlin argues, no one person can capture the whole of reality. This dissertation is my effort toward devising a comparative-historical frame for understanding intergenerational conflict.

2) A quote from an article titled "The entitlement culture of elite HS hoops" caught my attention. The author extends “entitlement culture” to describe the actions of basketball players. They write, "Having covered recruiting since 1997, I’ve witnessed a gradual decline in the attitudes of the [millennial] players, the priorities of their parents and the overall state of the game. If saying so makes me a “hater,” then so be it. It’s the truth—and any college coach not worried about his standing with recruits will echo the same sentiment." < http://insider.espn.go.com/blog/dave-telep/post/_/id/3494/the-entitlement-culture-of-elite-hs-hoops >

3) This RedState.com blog post (http://www.redstate.com/tomjeffersonsghost/2012/09/20/americas-entitlement-culture-the-age-of-expectation/) is the most egregious example I’ve found of right-wing framing entitlement culture to mean all Others who are not male, white, and Republican. Curiously, the author is of the millennial age group. We might call them a “House Millennial.” The write, "Illegal immigrants are of the mind that they’re entitled to opportunities in America regardless of the laws which state they cannot enter the country illegally. Young people believe their [sic] entitled to free tuition just because they’re going to college. African Americans believe they’re entitled to special treatment from President Obama just because he shares the same skin color.” Another author on
TheFoxHole.com (https://sfcmac.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/obamanomics-90-million-americans-out-of-work/) claims that: "A large part of the population is composed of an able-bodied but lazy segment of society that siphons off the public dole. Every developed country has them. It’s a perpetual welfare class that does not work because they don’t have to," in response to a story where a Howard University student commented at the Rand Paul town hall: "I want a government that is going to help me. I want a government that is going to help me fund my college education. I want a government that won’t define me by my FAFSA or by my family’s income."

4) The Reason-Rupe national telephone poll, executed by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, conducted live interviews with 1000 adults on cell phones (500) and landlines (500) August 6-10, 2014. The poll was purposed to gather evidence about perceptions of Millennials in the work force. The poll’s margin of error is +/-3.7%. See the results. <http://reason.com/poll/2014/08/19/august-2014-reason-rupe-national-survey>

5) President Obama was described as getting “participation trophies” when he received the Nobel Prize and Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service. While right-wing news organizations like Breitbart.com erroneously claimed that Obama awarded himself the Medal of Public Service (it’s the Defense Department that awards the medal, as it had for both President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush), Obama has admitted he has no idea why he was awarded the Peace Prize.

6) Scholars in other disciplines have taken on this task, such as Neil Selwyn (2009) writing for the Journal of Information Management, “We should first examine in closer detail the broad body of work that can be said to constitute the digital native literature, particularly
in terms of how the conditions, capabilities and consequences of young people’s technology use are portrayed” (Selwyn, p. 366).

7) For more information about theSkimm, visit their website. <http://www.theskimm.com/about>

8) Fromm et al.’s (2011) study reveals some interesting findings: “Millennials stand out when it comes to producing and uploading online content, including photos, videos, wiki entries, blog posts, microblog posts and product/service reviews. Sixty percent of them participate in this activity, compared to 29% of non-Millennials [...] It turns out that Millennials and non-Millennials actually spend about the same amount of time per week online: 11-20 hours, not including email handling. It’s what they do with that time that makes the difference” (Fromm et al., 2011, p. 16). “Our research shows that Millennials are 2.5 times more likely to be an early adopter of technology than older Generations” (Fromm et al., 2011, p. 13). “For Millennials, being an early technology adopter is not tied to life stage” (Fromm et al., 2011, p. 14).

9) In contemporary English usage, the word entitlement denotes the titling of compositions such books, paintings, or films. Titles of compositions serve a number of rhetorical functions. Primarily, naming one’s composition distinguishes that work from the work of others, or allude to overarching theme or thesis of a work. But titles can also establish intertextuality with other works. For example, Tim Wise’s book White Like Me alludes not only to the overarching theme of the book, but also to establishes continuity with John Howard Griffin’s earlier work Black Like Me. Wise chose this title because both authors write as white men with embodied experience regarding race relations in the U.S., but from two different positions: Griffin who dyed his skin in order to experience persecution as an African American, and Wise who has experienced the privileges conferred upon him by being white in a racist culture. So while Wise puts his experiences
in conversation with James Baldwin and other black authors, he entitles the work in a way that foregrounds his own experience as someone who, like Griffin before him, realized the scope of American racism from his position as a white male. To entitle, then, is to distinguish one’s subject position while also establishing an intertextual canon, a conversation about experience and racism where texts are both the product of their authors’ agency while also functioning as agents on their own. To entitle, then, opens the rhetorical possibility of reciprocity and interaction amongst authors who share experience even though they do not share the same time, place, or location.

10) The word “entitlement” originates from the French word meaning “to give title to.” The word then evolved into American legalese, where legal documents such as contracts could guarantee certain rights, reparations, or compensation. Contracts work within the American justice system to mediate agreements between two or more parties. The confer legal protections to all parties signed within the agreement, with the recipients of such rights denoted as “the entitled.” The American justice system recognizes the contract as legally binding, and uses it to confirm that the entitled has both expressed and implied rights safeguarded by legal process. Expressed rights have the most power in legal litigation because they denote expectations that are tangible or quantifiable, and thus confirmable by their presence (or absence) in the hands of the entitled. It is in this way that the justice system as an institution confers authority to the entitled to have their expectations met in accordance with the expressed rights of the agreement. In practice, however, entitlements are not always guaranteed. Social Scientists Ronald Dworkin, Richard Bellamy, Richard Nozick have written about how ensuring reciprocity through contracts is a liberal ideal not always honored by institutions (Michie, 2014, p. 948). But without such institutions and texts, the “entitled” has no protections apart from what an individual can guarantee by their own means.
11) In their book *Born Digital*, authors John Palfrey and Urs Gasser elide conversations about Millennials and Generation Y in order to define digital natives as a generation all their own, both after 1980 and raised around technologies that demand that they divulge every aspect of themselves through Internet media. To build their argument, Palfrey and Gasser acknowledge that young people choose multiple platforms to represent their identity online: "Instead of thinking of their digital identity and their real-space identity as separate things, they just have an identity" (p. 3).

12) Absent from this essay are the intersections of gender and race that further complicates Millennials success in college. Writing for the Atlanta Black Star, one journalist wrote, “Millennials have long been praised as one of the most racially progressive generations in America’s history, but a closer look at data about the young generation’s views and overall racial bias suggests that white Millennials aren’t actually as progressive as many previously thought. Millennials are the generation that caused #CrimingWhileWhite to trend nationally on Twitter, helped elect the nation’s first Black president, caused a spike in the support of interracial relationships and organized rallies for slain unarmed Black men that generated massive and extremely diverse crowds of protesters.”

<http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/01/26/studies-reveal-called-racially-progressive-white-millennials-different-racist-generations-came/>

13) Some WPA scholarship has written of the benefits of white middle-class students encountering more diversity.

14) Myth foregrounds the fantastic, the imaginative, the surreal elements, as older generations deliberate over future action, and this poses complications for education especially. Relevant to assessment, Arum and Roska have argued that faculty has lowered
their expectations because they are too exhausted to argue with the entitlement generation they must teach. At the heart of these conversations are discussions of grade inflation, which is indeed a problem worthy of address, but which is beyond the scope of this work. What I find interesting, however, is that little has been done to assess how much work students have been asked to do by their instructors when compared to generations past. Instead, if Millennials are “lazier” than generations past, there must be data about the workloads of older generations in academic and professional contexts.

15) Scholarship in education is discussing Millennials financial situations and how they compromise students’ success: “Educational, federal, state, and institutional policies are lagging behind the many developments […] As a result Millennial college students are positioned to fend for themselves and actively work to support and serve as resources to one another” (Patton el al 185).

16) According to Smiley (2016), Yelp raised their wages after Talia Jane’s letter went viral on the web. Sara Morrison (2016) argues that Jane’s letter was pure performance, as some investigative reporters have suggested that Jane fabricated much of her story. Jane’s fabrication, she argues, still borrowed from stories of other Millennials facing similar hardships. Dr. Harvey (2016) Points out that this performance did no help Jane, who was still fired from her job for writing the letter.

17) Working within media studies, Vittadini et al. (2009) argue for a redefinition of generations beyond correlating their birth rates with epochs of social and technological change, as physical age of each generation becomes less a defining characteristic than “media repertoires, media habits, and uses of media as status symbols” (Vittadini et al 75).
18) The rising cost of tuition is of increasing concern, and the narrative propagated by the news is one-sided toward the administrators, who have seen their own wages increase drastically: "College is where money and merit meet; where the privileged learn that they are not only smarter than everyone else but that they are more virtuous, too. They are better people with better test scores, better taste, better politics. College itself is the biggest lesson of them all, the thing that teaches us where we stand in a world that is very rapidly coming apart."

<http://www.salon.com/2014/06/08/colleges_are_full_of_it_behind_the_three_decade_scheme_to_raise_tuition_bankrupt_generations_and_hypnotize_the_media/>

19) Sherry Turkle is critical of how interactions online enabled Millennials to defer potential consequences associated with “face-to-face communication.” The contrast is useful: online interactions happen in queue, where instead of having to negotiate some of the instant demands of interpersonal, spoken communication—such as negotiating whose turn it is to speak, or facing the consequences for the immediate and perhaps ill-thought response—young people in particular can instead defer interactions and communicate with each other at their own pace. The advantage is that opportunity to carefully consider how users can utilize the asynchronously afforded by SNSs if they feel the need to. In doing so, young people can make premeditated and strategic choices about what to say and how to say, thereby communicating an ideal self that can be “edited, revised, or deleted,” and one that can be employed as a means to mediate the “presentation anxiety” associated with “face-to-face communication.” She remarks also that such connectivity “is alluring when we feel overworked,” though she cautions against its overuse at the expense of personal interaction (Turkle, 2011, p. 15).
20) Speaking on NPR’s *Fresh Air*, Turkle argues that Millennials feel a compulsion to always chat with their friend via their phones. She worries that if "[Millennials] don't have a capacity for solitude, [they] will always be lonely." This was also the title of her Ted Talk titled “Along Together.”


21) Millennial identity seems to be enacted as a means to resist Cartesian notions of identity, as Millennials argue back and construct identities for themselves as Millennials. The identities enacted are not prompted in the classroom, nor are they happening in carefully contained within the site of a classroom. Instead, they happen in an online environment frequented by Millennials. These enactments are both subject and means, where millennial authors self-identify as Millennials in the titles of their blogs, and refer to that subjectivity as both their authority and their authenticity as the acquiesce and resist to the stereotypes placed upon them, while enacting an identity that is unique to them within complex grids of intelligibility.

22) According to Zebrowitz et al., "As the proportion of the world’s population in old age increases, analysis of the content, accuracy, and biases of age personality perceptions becomes more important socially as well as scientifically" (p. 1064).

23) The quote from Benjamin Disraeli is an excerpt from a speech he gave to the British House of Commons on January 24th, 1860. The British politician’s speech harshly criticized then house conservatives for opposing every legislative measure proposed by house progressives. Disraeli did not dismiss their criticisms, but felt that they their critique was used to justify inaction against the pressing issues facing the British government. His charge to the conservative party was that they were assuming an easy
rhetorical position by pointing out the potential failure of legislation without offering an alternative of their own.

24) Below is a working draft of larger, high-stakes assignment for Millennial Pedagogy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pick a problem: this is the exigency for your communication, or the circumstances that demand your communication.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pick a purpose: does the problem need to be (re)define. What is the goal of your communication: Is there a legislative end? Is their a redefinition of the problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick the context: academic or professional? Some blending of the two?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick a social media site, provide a rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick the audience: are you communicating within or amongst the community, or as an accomplice? Or are you an ally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are you, the rhetor: How do you identify yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick your persona: would you describe yourself as a member of the community, or outside it? What are they was you accept the stereotype, or reject it? Will you argue from personal experience? Does your experience harmonize with the experiences of others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember, the mode, media, and argument will depend on your goals for the communication and your identity as a scholar and future professional.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_**all available means** of communicating effectively and productively as literate citizens_

25) The topic of gender/queer occurs with the emotive affection most, with 7/50 instances or a proportion of 14%. This finding could support research that has shown the Millennials are much more comfortable and supportive of gender fluidity and sexual diversity than older generations (Spangler, 2015; Weber Shandwick, 2016). But perhaps more significant is that the topic corresponds frequently with the emotive hyperbole, which occurs at a proportion of 12% or 6/50 instances. In posts coded as hyperbolic, the posts engaged queer issues by glamourizing those who performativity bend categories of
gender and sexuality. With these posts, identity is enacted as the innovative affair described by Butler, where Millennials of different sexes actively play with gender as a means to not only communicate themselves, but also accentuate their choices in how the performativity enact identity.

26) The Graduate College and I used Iowa State University Library’s Fair Use resource (http://www.lib.iastate.edu/help-services/teaching-class/copyright-info) to affirm that the Tumblr posts cited here fall under Fair Use guidelines. The images cited in this dissertation are used entirely for scholarship and research purposes. I do not profit from any of these images and they were collected from non-restricted sources that are publically available on the Internet. My analysis of the posts contained therein is factual to the best of my ability, and I afforded credit in cases where Tumblr users borrowed images from other media. I also hid the personal information and other identifying markers in cases where I could neither ascertain their age, nor obtain their consent.
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