

Striving for Cultural Competence While Preparing Millennials as Emerging Professionals

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Abstract

The authors explore why many of the predominant challenges in field may be best viewed from a cultural-competence perspective. This paper emphasizes the historical context, cultural trends, and common traits of the millennial generation. The term *Millennials* in this paper identifies those born between 1980 and 2004.

Keywords: millennial, Generation Y, field, cultural competence, strengths perspective

1. Introduction

The most recent cohort of social workers entering field practicums and the professional workforce belong to a generation called ‘the Millennials.’ While a definitive timeline varies within the research, the term *Millennials* denotes a general cohort of those born between 1980 and 2004; this paper also provides some emphasis on the younger cohort born after 1990. Evidence suggests that members of the millennial generation, also commonly referred to as Generation Y, are distinctly different from their predecessors, but this difference does not necessarily represent inherent difficulty in becoming a professional (Howe and Strauss, 2003; Gleeson, 2007; Elmore, 2010). The

authors, both field directors, began exploring the impact of Millennials in field settings as a response to frequent encounters with colleagues in field education who expressed frustration and demonstrated a tendency negatively to label young students who presented challenges in the field. Observing this recurring theme of frustration from educators, field instructors, and other practitioners, the authors began conducting field-instructor trainings on the cultural norms and common traits among this generation of students, based on the literature. The topic has been well received, with feedback indicating the perspective was extremely relevant to today’s struggles in preparing professionals for the workforce.

During the trainings, the authors note that each generation potentially perceives their predecessors and successors with some amount of negative, cross-generational judgment, and an exploration of their own generational culture is addressed. The basic idea of exploring one’s own history and culture first before truly understanding another’s perspective is seen throughout social work curricula when preparing emerging professionals. However, the authors propose that all social workers, including seasoned practitioners, have clear mandates to integrate the core value of *competence* and to “continually

strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice” (NASW, 2008, para. 24). The authors also acknowledge that *social justice*, another core value within the profession, may be relevant when working with younger generations, especially when considering the treatment of those who are perceived as different. The values of social justice and cultural competence should be addressed not only with clients in mind, but also with students, colleagues, and the broader society. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the historical context, cultural trends, and common strengths of millennial students and emerging professionals. The authors also identify and categorize practical strategies for addressing students when concerns arise during the placement process, in field seminar, or in supervision.

2. Millennials Defined

Millennials have been given a myriad of titles, including: *Generation Y*, for their proximity to Generation X; *The Net Generation*, for the centrality of computer technology in their lives; and *Echo-Boomers*, for their relative size, comparable to that of the Baby Boomer generation (Schawbel, 2012). While sources vary in defining the actual time period, according to most literature, individuals who have been classified as Millennials were born after 1980 and as late as 2004 (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

Those described as Millennials are a cohort characterized by their large size, their status as digital natives, because of their lifelong exposure to digital technology and innovations, and, of course, by their similarity and dissimilarity to the groups that became before them, known as the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, and Generation X (Pew Research Center, 2014). While much of the literature, first introduced by Howe and Strauss in 2000, broadly describes the millennial generation, more recently Elmore (2010) has coined the term *Generation iY* to differentiate a younger subset of Millennials born after 1990, which is the age range currently

entering most field education programs. Elmore asserts that this particular cohort has been significantly more defined by technology; hence the moniker “iY” to pay homage to their “world of the iPod, iBook, iPhone, iChat, iMovie, iPad, and iTunes” (p. 13). Additionally, there is also emerging literature referring to those born after 2004 as Generation Z and/or the Homeland Generation (Elmore, 2010).

3. Social Work Perspectives and Cultural Competence

When considering our duty to the profession, two primary perspectives are important to address in the arena of educating and supervising students today: the strengths perspective, and the person-in-environment perspective. As social workers, we pride ourselves on applying the *strengths perspective*, also identified as the strengths-based approach, when working with individuals from different races, socioeconomic statuses, genders and religions. This is of particular importance for field educators charged with preparing students for the profession. Saleebey (1996), the most credited champion of the strengths perspective, emphasized the need to balance strength with accountability. He advised that “practicing from a strengths perspective does not require social workers to ignore the real troubles that [affect] individuals and groups... , [b]ut in the lexicon of strengths, it is as wrong to deny the possible as it is to deny the problem” (p. 297). While this paper identifies the strengths of the millennial generation and seeks to empower growth and development with adherence to cultural awareness, there is no expectation that educators or field instructors succumb to the problems or personalities typically associated with field challenges. However, it is important to consider emerging professionals’ potential strengths, as outlined in this paper and from a lens of cultural competence, when addressing an issue or concern related to performance or professionalism.

Additionally, when viewing students as a part of a larger generational culture, social work educators, particularly in field, should adhere to the *person-in-environment perspective*. The Encyclopedia of Social Work defines the person-in-environment perspective as “a practice-guiding principle that highlights the importance of understanding an individual and individual behavior in light of the environmental contexts in which that person lives and acts” (Kondrat, 2008, para. 1). When viewed from this perspective, student issues in field can be more appropriately assessed within the context of culturally appropriate behaviors and trends, rather than primarily focusing on student behavior from the perspective of a preceding generation’s norms and values.

Although all six Social Work core values may apply to this discussion, an emphasis on *competence* is highlighted in this paper. The authors propose a special emphasis on *cultural competence*, which requires social workers to expand their knowledge and professional practice when working with a new culture. When considering field students as a part of a generational cohort, foundational knowledge of the cultural norms, trends, and behaviors is essential to competent supervision. For educators particularly, this may also mean, “meeting the *student* where the *student* is.” For practitioners, it is important to note that almost no social worker will be exempt from working with the millennial generation, whether as clients or as colleagues. For this reason, it is crucial for social workers to commit not only to cultural competence with regard to generational differences, but also to the continual process of self-evaluation and self-critique known as cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

4. Generational Differences

Generational cohorts have long been understood to produce certain traits and tendencies common to individuals born within specific time frames (Mannheim, 1952; Howe & Strauss, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2003). For instance,

individuals born and raised during a significant war or severe political upheaval might develop different presumptions and tendencies than those born during times of relative peace. Social workers tend to focus on these historical perspectives with international clients or veterans impacted by war, but may overlook the value of relevant social events when working with younger populations. Medical practices, major world events, and most notably technological progress will impact the opportunities, worldviews and thus the common traits assigned to members of a particular generation.

5. Millennial Core Traits: Contexts, Limitations, and Strengths

Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003) offered a list of seven core traits of Generation Y that have been echoed in more current research. Based on their research, Millennials could be best described as: special, protected, confident, team oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. For the purposes of applying these traits to social work field education, each of the seven core traits will be discussed in detail. Most importantly, however, each trait will be considered from a strengths perspective to determine how each quality can serve not only as a barrier to student learning and contribution, but also as an asset. Also, the authors emphasize the disclaimer that while identifying common traits may be helpful to some degree when describing a broad culture, it is important that as social workers, we avoid sweeping generalizations about an individual whose birth year may fall within the a particular generational cohort period. For example, one of the authors might be categorized, based on the literature, within Generation X, but was raised by grandparents identified within the Silent Generation, who more typically raised the Baby Boomer generation. Therefore, many of the author’s values and traits actually fit within the Baby Boomers’ characteristics, while others are purely Generation X. Again, utilizing the person-in-environment perspective, a student’s family

of origin, socio-economic status, geographic location, or any major life events may impact one's assessment of whether the student "fits" a generational norm.

5.1 Special

Some have humorously lamented how 'kids today' get a trophy just for showing up. Educators see this long-term impact with students expecting to get an 'A for effort' (Plunkett, 2014). At least two significant cultural contributors potentially helped to form this perception outside of and within the millennial cohort. First, media/consumer indoctrination and second, increased emphasis on individualized education.

Millennials were perhaps the first group of children who were feverishly marketed to as potential consumers, with the first offerings of kids' meals and even their own television channels in the early 1980s. With this media-generated desire for kids-sized items, from shampoo to motorized vehicles, the child consumer was born. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a consumer is "a person who uses up a commodity; a purchaser of goods or services, [or] a customer" ("Consumer," 2009). A consumer sees him- or herself as special and one to be catered to. A similar specialness may have been cultivated for this cohort through the expansion of academic initiatives, such as individualized education plans which embrace the notion that all student learners are unique and should be instructed in the specialized ways best suited to their individual learning needs (Selingo, 2013). *Specialness* can be embodied or perceived in the academic or field setting as self-absorption, entitlement, and recognition seeking (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

Though it might seem paradoxical, Millennials even more than previous generations think everyone else is special, too (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Embracing the cardinal value *Dignity and Worth of all People* may be less of an obstacle for this cohort, because they may

have been raised to believe that every person is unique, wonderful, and deserving of accolades and/or respect for his/her level of contribution. This socialization toward kindness, inclusion, and tolerance benefits the field of social work immensely, and should be acknowledged and harnessed in field education. On the other hand, it is inappropriate for field students to assume they should receive special treatment in the field setting. It is important, however, to consider the above context, if students verbalize feeling underappreciated or invisible within an agency.

5.2 Sheltered

Some educators may perceive students as fragile or naïve when entering the field. However, increased child-safety regulations, the norm of school violence, and the terrorist attacks of September 11 all play a major role in forming a generation of individuals acutely aware that the world may be more dangerous, so that they require additional protection (Williams, Beard, & Tanner, 2011). Therefore students and young professionals from Generation Y may demonstrate strong risk aversion and a high need for structure and isolation. In fact, safety in the field tends to be one of the top concerns for practicum students (Gelman & Lloyd, 2008).

Although this cohort might present as more sheltered than previous generations with regard to risk-taking, in other important ways, Millennials are less sheltered and more open to risk than their predecessors. For example, Millennials are the least sheltered generational cohort when it comes to diversity exposure (Moore, 2012). As a group they are generally more supportive of gay rights, interracial marriage, and immigrant rights than any other generational cohort, precisely because they have been more exposed to multicultural experiences than previous generations (Taylor & Keeter, 2010; Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2010). Again, viewing each person as special produces tolerance in Millennials that

may also create an inherent respect for diverse views. This generation is also not sheltered when it comes to virtual exploration and risk-taking in the world of social media. While there are obvious perils to virtual risk-taking, to the point that many field programs create social media policies to address concerns, having a field student who has some technological experience and initiative can greatly improve the potential limitations a social service agency might have in this area. This is an area where the business realm has most notably embraced the uniqueness of this generation (Williams, Beard, & Tanner, 2011).

5.3 Confident

The parenting style and self-esteem movements had become prominent and systematized by the time Millennials were born. Much of the popular parenting literature encouraged guardians to be lavish in their praise and to empower children to make some of their own decisions (Bavolek, 1999; Cline & Fay, 1990; Sears & Sears, 1993). With the influence of this paradigm shift, the parent-child relationship became more collaborative than in previous generations with a preference for an authoritative approach rather than the more commonplace authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind, 1967). These newer cultural norms of parental values and practices within the family of origin may have resulted in a group of individuals whose confidence may at times outweigh their level of competence.

Several studies (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Heyman & Dweck, 1998; Dweck, 2006) have indicated that persistent praise of one's self rather than one's work can lead to a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset with regard to self-esteem. When a student has a fixed mindset about his or her own intelligence or ability, difficulty and effort can both be interpreted as lack of intelligence rather than as an opportunity to expand and grow. With this generation receiving more positive

affirmations regarding their level of intelligence ("You're so smart") versus an importance on work ethic ("You worked so hard") than previous generations, many students may appear to devalue perseverance as a required characteristic for success. Their self-perception may be that they are either smart and can reach the goal, or they are just not smart enough to complete it. This resistance to challenge is one of the major limitations that a core trait such as *confidence* can cause in the field. Also, as discussed in the *special* section, this *confidence* can manifest as entitlement.

Perhaps most astoundingly, literature is now indicating that some students are experiencing what is being referred to as 'quarter-life-crises,' having not achieved what they expected of themselves due to inflated self-perceptions and constant opportunities for comparison with peers and celebrities via social media outlets (Robbins & Wilner, 2001; Robbins, 2004). This emphasis on over-achieving and posting only the perfect status, pictures, and successes on social media sites can cause great anxiety and low self-esteem for this generation. This may lead some to contend that most of the limitations discussed for this trait have been a product not of true confidence but of a sort of pseudo-confidence that is quite fragile.

However, many Millennials have developed a more authentic confidence, which can be a tremendous asset for a practicum student. Confidence is the foundation that produces one of the most sought after qualities in an emerging professional: initiative. Millennials may present as more confident in requesting and negotiating their needs towards maintaining a healthy work-life balance. According to Taylor and Keeter (2010), this is one of the most strongly held values for this group. This value may be misperceived as laziness, but the profession's emphasis on 'the whole person' and 'self-care' should welcome individuals who are confident and capable enough to set appropriate boundaries for themselves, that will likely lead to better service and less

burn-out. While students may not always verbalize this understanding specifically, they are more likely to have been raised by or around parents who are self-confessed ‘workaholics,’ trying to ‘keep up with the Joneses,’ managing divorced/blended families, and/or experiencing significant financial conflict (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Millennials, more than previous generations, want to control their work schedule and expect flexibility to counteract the turmoil they may have experienced in their own households (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

5.4 Team-oriented

For previous generations in education, the practice of group work may have been viewed as tedious and at times frustrating. However, the millennial generation is more adept and comfortable when contributing to groups. In the past two decades, significant progress has been made to include activities and philosophies in educational settings that promote collaboration. Millennials have had the opportunity to practice collaboration from an early age via group work within primary schools, through extra-curricular activities, and more recently through social networking. Field students today welcome collaboration and value relationships with their colleagues more strongly than many of their predecessors, who may have been more suspicious of authority, or bound by hierarchical work systems which may have kept individuals in more competitive rather than cooperative roles (Taylor & Keeter, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2014).

The ability to be a ‘team player’ is often noted as one of the most important qualities sought by employers. However, there may need to be some clarification for students that being a ‘team player’ does not always equate to being viewed as equal to paid staff. Field educators may find themselves frequently consulting with students on why an intern may not always be valued as a full team member within a field agency. Some may attribute this characteristic as a level of entitlement (Moore, 2012). However, this concept can be

difficult for students, who were highly valued as decision makers and contributors in their families of origin and in classroom and university settings, but then perceive that they may be disregarded in their practicum experiences.

Also, there may be a common misunderstanding about how best to define a team-oriented student. Some field instructors might assume that isolation and conflict resolution issues might be non-existent for a group so practiced at collaboration. However, the increasing popularity of virtual relationships can at times impede face-to-face team interactions. The cultural norm of communicating electronically, primarily through texting and social media, may inhibit learning experiences required for competent interpersonal and conflict resolution skills (Kelly et al., 2012; Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer, & Khoury-Kassabri, 2012; Tao, 2014).

5.5 Conventional

Due to reduced stigma around outward expressions such as tattoos and piercings along with more progressive voting tendencies, Millennials might be thought to be somewhat edgy or even rebellious as a group. So perhaps the most curious of Howe and Strauss’s core traits is the notion that Millennials are actually *conventional*. Conventional, in their research, is described as having a general trust in rules, systems, and the opinions of one’s own parents (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Millennials describe the narrowest ‘generation gap’ between themselves and their parents or guardians. This is perhaps a result of the many years of being told how special they are, being empowered to be a part of the family decision-making process, and being furiously sheltered from the dangerous world around them. Today’s students may be more conventional in their personal and moral beliefs based on family of origin, but they are more tolerant of others differing in social views and opinions. ‘To each his/her own’ may be much more acceptable to Millennials than previous generations.

Understanding this core trait is necessary for those supervising Millennials, because young professionals today hold supervisors in very high regard, just as they do most authority figures in their lives. This can be problematic, because high expectations are often closely followed by disappointment. Boundary issues can arise if students expect supervisors to serve in a parental role, especially when they were raised to be inquisitive and naturally contribute to family decisions, and in some cases this role confusion can be viewed as questioning the supervisor's authority or capability.

On the other hand, the fact that Millennials report a strong desire for a personal relationship with their professional managers may mean that students enter supervision with eager expectations to listen and to collaborate with their supervisor (Moore, 2012). This is especially important during the beginning of the field practicum experience, in which engaging the student in assisting to define the relationship and professional expectations may lead to better communication and less frustration about unwritten social rules in the workplace. If clear boundaries and expectations are role-modeled explicitly in the beginning, the new generation of social workers may navigate the professional workplace with less frustration and confusion.

5.6 Pressured

Research indicates that students today overwhelmingly experience a greater degree of pressure to succeed in academia than previous generations report (Pryor et al., 2010). The emphasis on standardized testing, the overscheduling of abundant extracurricular activities, and the more competitive market in higher education, paired with an unstable economy, all contribute to Millennials' increased sense of pressure to excel. Include the expectation that funding for public education has been directly tied to measurable outcomes, and students today are intuitively aware that how they perform in the classroom can have a great impact on the

bigger picture. Therefore, they may have been conditioned, in many ways, to expect consistent feedback on their abilities to achieve and how their contribution affects the greater good.

For some, a lifetime of fast-forward living from activity to activity and exacting standards has led to an 'efficiency at all costs' mentality that can be at odds with integrity. Recent research suggests that millennial students have a different definition of cheating/plagiarism than their predecessors (Gross, 2011). Resourcefulness and efficiency may have been more valued than the creative process or the reflective and moral aspect of learning. Years of group collaboration and too many activities crammed into too little time may contribute to neglectful practices. In the field setting, real or perceived pressure can manifest through 'cutting corners,' multi-tasking, and difficulty requesting or receiving help from the supervisor.

Although it may appear unlikely, there are benefits to having this particular trait manifest in the field setting. Students may be more likely to make deadlines if given clear expectations. They may also understand the concepts of the evidence-based process or evidence-informed practices better than previous generations. Utilizing these strengths in the field, particularly in the area of benchmarking and program evaluation, are integral to the student contributing to the greater good within the agency. Millennials tend to understand naturally the macro level of social work practice, since they are rather seasoned in exposure of ideas from a global perspective. Additionally, this generation, which is accustomed to service learning as part of many school and extracurricular activities, volunteers and participates in consumer activism similar to previous generations (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). This may lead to a cohort that enters into a field placement with some level of client interaction and non-profit agency experience.

5.7 Achieving

In many ways, pressured and achieving are similar core traits. However, for the purposes of describing this generational cohort, achievement

tends to be emphasized in areas such as math and science, while over the past decade specifically, the liberal arts, the core of higher education, have been devalued to a degree, especially in the primary educational setting (Selingo, 2013). Creative and imaginative activities tend to be viewed as less important in this highly competitive and global marketplace. There appears to be a social norm that any creativity should be garnered in the technology, health care, and engineering fields, leaving less understood the creativity and flexibility needed to work in the grey areas required in most helping professions. These new cultural beliefs may lead today's field student to value tangible success in measurable ways and exhibit impatience with processing core social work practice skills like self-awareness and being comfortable with the unknown. In fact, staying so busy in an effort to achieve, many students may become frustrated and easily distracted if they cannot master a concept or skill within a short self-imposed timeframe. In a culture where delayed gratification is becoming less and less valued, students' expectation to change or learn quickly can affect their anxiety or self-esteem in the field setting. The concept of an evidence-based critique may be helpful to consider when discussing concerns or issues related to a field student's performance. This structured method for feedback 1) allows the field educator a way to describe issues in an observable behavior, and 2) allows the student to focus on a specific method for change rather than a vague description.

Strengths in this area can greatly benefit field educators and field agencies. With students naturally goal-oriented, they may help agencies to conceptualize and plan strategically for goal setting within short time frames. On the micro level, students do well goal setting with clients in measurable ways and in short time frames.

6. Strategies for Addressing Core Traits

As an educator or supervisor it can be tempting to focus on the negative aspects of these core traits, rather than the positive aspects.

At times all students need to be challenged to work outside of their natural comfort zones, regardless of the context and circumstances that have created certain tendencies. In Figure 1.1, the authors suggest simple strategies to use with students exhibiting behaviors associated with each of these seven core traits of Millennials. While some may question the authors' strategies in the chart provided, as an excuse to continue the perceived over-parenting and indulge the entitled nature of this generation, it is important to note the following: 1) the original purpose of this paper is to emphasize the cultural competence needed to work with a specific generational cohort, 2) these strategies take the strengths perspective and person-in-environment perspective into account; 3) acknowledgment of the core traits, as well as the foundational knowledge of the historical context, cultural norms, and common behaviors may assist supervisors in addressing much of the anxiety students experience in field practicum, and 4) these traits and corresponding behaviors may exhibit in field regardless; an educator's perception and understanding of how to practice with this generation, however, can greatly affect how well these emerging professionals will make lasting change in the future of the social work profession. Employing such strategies can help educators and supervisors to remain intentional and clear when addressing student behavior or resolving conflict. Refer to Figure 1.1 to identify strategies in addressing students in field. Note also that this list is merely meant to give brief examples of strengths-based strategies to use in response to potential challenges encountered in field settings with millennial learners. It is neither meant to be exhaustive nor to impose judgments or assumptions about a particular generational culture. Many individuals within this culture present differently based on a multitude of factors, including but not limited to: family of origin, significant life events, socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion.

Figure: 1.1: Examples of Millennial Core Traits Expressed in Field Education and Culturally Competent Responses

Core Trait	Commonly Presents As	Strategies for Success	Addressing the Learning Need/Embracing the Strengths
Special	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demanding • Recognition Seeking/Self Absorbed • Consumeristic <p>But also...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerant • Inclusive • Respectful of diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give immediate and positive feedback each step of the way • Recognize, acknowledge, and use student strengths 	<p>Example: Two months into his internship at a nursing home, Spencer tells his supervisor that next week he will not be able to come to field for five days because he is going on a road-trip with his intra-mural soccer team at school. He explains that their team is so good that they have been invited to play in a tournament, and they will almost certainly win. This puts the field supervisor in an awkward position, because this is a busy time of year, and she is used to an intern helping to ease the load. Spencer gets along with the clients very well regardless of age, gender or race, so there are certain clients that she prefers him to work with even more than some of the nurses and aides.</p> <p>Strategy: The supervisor thanks Spencer for letting her know ahead of time (immediate, positive feedback) and admits that this is bad timing because around the holidays many families come to visit, and have lots of questions about their loved ones' well-being. She explains that she believes Spencer might do a better job communicating clearly with the families than some of the other staff who are not as comfortable with families as he is (acknowledging strength). She also tells him that in the working world, it would be inappropriate to ask for a week off with such short notice, and asks him to consider if there is any alternative to him missing a full week at such a busy time of year.</p>
Sheltered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding risks or the unknown • Seeking concrete concepts (difficulty with ambiguity) • Self-Isolating <p>But also less sheltered in some ways such as...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to virtual exploration and risk-taking • Comfort with a diverse range of people • Commitment to social justice issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structure to create a sense of security • Safely expose students to new environments and activities 	<p>Example: Shawna finds a way to get out of going on every home visit at her agency. Each time a visit is imminent Shawna disappears or says that she is not feeling well, has too much office work to complete or simply that she "isn't ready".</p> <p>Strategy: The supervisor notes that since home visits are often scheduled last minute, she decides to address Shawna's hesitance and intentionally schedules a few home visits early so that Shawna will feel more prepared. She then creates a 3-step process for intern home visiting. First observe 3 home visits, second co-lead 2 home visits, and finally, conduct a home visit on their own.</p> <p>The supervisor also notices that Shawna loves social media and puts her in charge of creating and managing a Twitter page for the agency to send out alerts about resources, opportunities, etc. She has wanted to start a social media presence for a long time, but no members of her social work team have had the time to take it on.</p>

Core Trait	Commonly Presents As	Strategies for Success	Addressing the Learning Need/Embracing the Strengths
Confident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entitled • Overextended <p>But also...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to self-care (work/life balance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> for each expectation • Give gentle, firm and evidence based critique 	<p>Example: Connor comes into his field placement at an elementary school, and immediately begins telling the kids he is one of the new school counselors. Several kids ask him to start a group for them, and he agrees before consulting the field supervisor.</p> <p>Strategy: The supervisor uses supervision to address these issues. She lets Connor know that he should refer to himself as a social work intern rather than a counselor (<i>how</i>), because it is unethical according to the Code of Ethics to refer to oneself with a title that does not match credentials earned (<i>why</i>). She also lets him know that she appreciates his enthusiasm for working with students (strength), but that group work requires a lot of planning and follows a certain process at this school. First students are referred, a team of staff then determines groups, and schedules are coordinated according to student schedules and room availability. She asks Connor to go back to the students to clear up the confusion about his role, and about how groups are decided. She then asks him to research evidence-based practices for creating and planning groups in the school setting, to be discussed in supervision in two weeks.</p>
Team-Oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Isolating • Avoidant • Conflict management issues <p>But also...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly • Naturally collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give role play activities before working with clients/colleagues • Give joint assignments with other interns or employees 	<p>Example: Tia and Tameka both intern at a youth center. They have worked together on many projects throughout their first semester as interns. They have to share a desk and most supplies, but they seem to share the space well together. However, despite their hard work and good attitudes, the field instructor notices that at times Tameka “gives in” to Tia who has a somewhat more assertive personality. Tameka has good ideas but when she tries to share them, Tia sometimes fails to listen thoroughly, and treats Tameka more like an assistant than a teammate.</p> <p>Strategy: The supervisor brings this up with Tameka in individual supervision, and has her role-play using I-language with Tia. The supervisor also brings her observations to Tia in individual supervision and gives her an assignment to participate as a supportive team player rather than the leader of the next youth camp.</p>

Core Trait	Commonly Presents As	Strategies for Success	Addressing the Learning Need/Embracing the Strengths
Conventional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Questioning authority” • Overreliance on systems to intervene <p>But also...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for a personal relationship with managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in an authoritative relationship by respecting what the student has to offer • Encourage individual action/accountability 	<p>Example: Connie interns at an office called Disability Services. She has a daily task supervisor who is different from her actual social work field instructor. Connie describes her task supervisor as cold, disorganized and “nit-picky” in supervision. She also mentions that her task supervisor always wants her to do more work than necessary. For example, she expects Connie to make insurance calls for clients, rather than just giving them the number to call for themselves.</p> <p>Strategy: The field instructor quickly realized that Connie’s perception of her task supervisor might improve if the supervisor spent more time building rapport with her. The field instructor called the task supervisor to suggest taking one 10-minute coffee break each week with the student, and joining them occasionally during supervision meetings to gain insight from the student’s perspective. The field instructor encouraged Connie to advocate for herself, to negotiate field responsibilities by discussing her learning contract with the task supervisor, and to focus on the importance of demonstrating social work practice behaviors through measurable objectives.</p>

Core Trait	Commonly Presents As	Strategies for Success	Addressing the Learning Need/Embracing the Strengths
Pressured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity issues • Seeking constant feedback <p>But also...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of Evidence Based Educational Measures/tools • Desire to give back through volunteer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage self-care • Give time management and prioritization guidance (breaking down objectives into smaller tasks) 	<p>Example: Paul is an intern at a local community center that offers case management services. Each intern is supposed to meet with 10 clients per week, but recently the field liaison has come to understand that Paul has had other interns at his agency complete up to five of his required weekly visits. The field liaison also teaches the field seminar that Paul attends, and she has noticed that some of his assignments lack creativity and seem to be bordering on plagiarism at times. When she asks Paul about sending other interns to do his work, Paul states that he is taking three courses in addition to field, is an officer in a service club at school, started a part-time job to help with his cost of living expenses, and has been out of town frequently to visit graduate programs, because his parents want to make sure he is admitted as soon as possible.</p> <p>Strategy: The field liaison asks Paul to come in for a meeting with her. In the meeting she applauds Paul’s willingness to serve and to challenge himself, because both are attributes of a good social worker (recognizing service). She lets him know that he seems to be stretched too thin and advises him to speak with his parents and club sponsor to determine which <i>extra-curricular</i> activities can be limited or delayed in order for him to have enough energy and time to complete the work <i>required</i> of him with integrity (encouraging self-care and time management).</p>

Core Trait	Commonly Presents As	Strategies for Success	Addressing the Learning Need/Embracing the Strengths
Achieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatience with process and beginning level of competency <p>But also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High value on education • Goal-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model reflection and intentionality • Give the <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> for each expectation • Give gentle, firm and evidence based critique 	<p>Example: Ali is an intern at a domestic violence shelter. She is asked to co-lead a group in which the women in the group are able to share their feelings and experiences. When Ali’s supervisor watches her interact with the women in the group she notices that she often responds to sentiments with solutions rather than empathic listening. She regularly brings brochures to the group for the women about college programs and job openings all across the state.</p> <p>Strategy: The field instructor has already implemented a good strategy in this situation by having a student co-lead a group with a professional who can model empathic listening and reflection. However when modeling alone is insufficient, the supervisor shares her concern with Ali in a very straight-forward non-judgmental tone, “Ali, I notice that you are so eager to help our clients that sometimes in group you neglect to listen to them fully before making suggestions. Next time you lead, I challenge you to listen and reflect without offering any resources (<i>how</i>), so that you can meet your interpersonal skills goal on your learning contract (<i>why</i>, connected to goal), and to research best practices in empathic listening.” She then gives a clear deadline and confirms they will revisit the topic in supervision in two weeks to discuss findings and methods Ali can apply, based on what she has since learned in the literature and observed about her role in group.</p>

7. Conclusion

Millennial students entering field practicum and the workforce today may be more similar to their predecessors in two important ways: first, they are often misunderstood and mislabeled by members from other generational cohorts; and second, they have been deeply influenced as a group by their cultural and circumstantial contexts. These contexts seem to have produced a general set of core traits, some of which are likely to be expressed during the field education process. Like those before them, the traits that define this generation can pose challenges, while concurrently serving as assets to professional growth as emerging social workers. It is our duty as ethical

practitioners and as effective and relevant educators to learn more about the culture of students today.

While there is significant literature on the millennial generation’s impact in other professional disciplines, little has been addressed in social work field education. Future research should attempt to explore Millennials’ unique mental health concerns in field settings with particular emphasis on the role of anxiety, effective supervision models with Millennials, Millennials’ outstanding contributions to the field of social work, and finally, student, client and supervisor perceptions of Millennials’ strengths and limitations in service delivery across various areas of social work practice.

Even as research continues to emerge, it remains the duty of field educators to familiarize themselves with the cultural and circumstantial norms associated with this generational cohort in an attempt to practice cultural competence while simultaneously acknowledging each individual student as a unique and whole person requiring holistic and comprehensive instruction. Additionally, field educators will be able to employ the strategies necessary to educate students for success through strengths-based support balanced with growth-producing accountability. With these goals in mind, a new generation of social workers will thrive.

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