Chapter 6

Lonely Typers at Midnight:
Investigating the Quandaries of Millennial Illness Through Digital Ethnography of Reddit

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ABSTRACT

Also known as Generation Y, Millennials—an American construct to classify those born from the early 1980 to mid-1990s—have been targeted by mainstream media as narcissistic, and internet obsessed. But as Diesing (2011) organizes, gross generalizations of the American cohort’s vanity may only contain nuggets of truth. If millennials are in fact narcissistic and technologically oriented, this research attempts to understand whether this psychological assessment is innate, or deterministic. Contemporary online platforms allow users to voice their opinions and insight regarding predominant frames constructed by once exclusive media domains. Analysis of Reddit discussions through digital ethnography has worked to better understand modes of agency, or lack thereof, as this demographic navigates health problems in a technologically mediated society; providing insight for practitioners, patients, and family members in how to properly conceptualize illness to best help them, and the social order.
INTRODUCTION

Millennials encompass, roughly, people born from the early 1980s to mid-1990s. Numerous mainstream media sources have framed the cohort negatively (Donatone, 2014; Duam, 2015; Faw, 2012; Ghose, 2013; McGrew, 2013; Smith & Aaker, 2013). In his May 2013 article, Stein classifies millennials as the “Me Me Me” generation. He uses statistics such as “40% believe they should be promoted every two years, regardless of performance,” and selective findings from a 2002 study showing that only 60% of people under twenty-three want more responsibility at work, to support his claim that millennials are innately lazy and entitled.

Stein perceives millennials suffering from a constant anxiety of missing out on something better, as they interact all day almost entirely through screen. He further presents millennials as apathetic wherein “because millennials don’t respect authority, they also don’t resent it.”; that millennials aren’t rebelling against their hardships, nor are they even sullen.

Loeb (2015) identifies millennials’ relationship with consumer technology—which proliferated during their formative years— is what defines them. Their primary form of activism, rather than protests, civil disobedience or sit ins, is the Facebook campaign. Loeb further categorizes millennials as black and white minded in issues of business and society, and having already reshaped public advocacy in dramatic and influential terms, they “expect far more from the institutions that govern our society”.

But it is too provincial, with insidious repercussions, to dismiss or generalize an entire age group in such a tumultuous, and complicated society. As one, if not the most consequential facet in civilization that exists beyond social construction, this research analyzes how millennials navigate their health issues in the sociological field (Bourdieu, 1980) that has been set up for them.

The specific objective of this chapter is to investigate millennials from the perspective of healthcare. Analysis of reddit discourses through six months of digital ethnography provides individual and collective insight into an “entitled” generation as online platforms offer a chance for citizens to deliberate, and contemplate frames—both mainstream, and academic.

BACKGROUND

This literature review covers six predominant points of reference for the research sample (online millennial discourses regarding healthcare): General Thoughts on Millennials, Wondering How or Why Millennials use the Internet, Millennials
Global Telemedicine and eHealth: Advances for Future Healthcare – Using a Systems Approach to Integrate Healthcare Functions
S. A. Davis (2013). *Telehealth Networks for Hospital Services: New Methodologies* (pp. 15-32).
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