

CULTURE Q

2012:  
**Millennial  
Misconceptions**

August 2012



**Millennials.** According to Howe and Strauss' generational archetype theory, Millennials were predestined to be the next Hero generation. Nurtured and protected by self-absorbed, values- fixated Baby Boomers - the Prophet archetype - Millennials were raised to be an upbeat, group-oriented, conservative generation that would challenge and reshape existing institutions. It's no surprise, therefore, that the narrative about Millennials is filled with misconceptions and contradictions.

“The biggest misconception is that we are very different from other generations at this age. I think that overall, like all young people, we have hopes and dreams, and all it is about is tapping into those.”

To decipher the anecdote about Gen Y from the wisdom, we went to Millennials themselves, asked them what they thought were the most common misconceptions about their generation, then synthesised their comments with our other learning from CultureQ (our monitor of sentiment and cultural shifts), and identified five common misconceptions.



# MISCONCEPTION 1: TECHNOLOGY DEFINES MILLENNIALS

“Our generation likes to think that maybe we define technology, not the other way around.”



A generational cohort is characterized by the coming of age events that shift social values and designate that group. Much has been said about technology being the essential element that defines Millennials. But technological developments in and of themselves have not been life changing events for those born between 1980 and 1995. Rapid technological advancement has been a constant in their lives. They've never known the world to be otherwise. In fact, many early adopter Millennials believe they define how technology is evolving and being used, rather than the other way around.

A number who consider themselves to be trendsetters are not interested in always having the most advanced technology, and several we spoke with state that they even prefer their BlackBerry to an iPhone. Even though all Millennials are digital natives, not all have in-depth knowledge about the technology they use, nor are all as tech savvy as they are portrayed to be.

“I dislike smart phones very passionately because they are a nuisance and are distracting.”

“I personally love my BlackBerry and find it hard to imagine my life ... with a terrible touchscreen.”



# MISCONCEPTION 2: BOOMER PARENTS HAVE SET MILLENNIALS UP FOR SUCCESS

In many ways Millennials define themselves through their accomplishments more so than their likes and dislikes or even their values. From early on, their parents and society pressured them to do the right thing and choose the right things to do. They filled their free time with activity after activity.

Unlike the media, which sometimes paints the generation as over-pampered and thereby lazy, many Millennials we've spoken to, especially those between the ages of 19 and 30, feel they're a generation of neurotic overachievers who have a hard time enjoying anything, because everything must serve a goal.

“We're simply programmed to expect success and achievement, without necessarily experiencing the things that would motivate us to succeed.”

Many Millennials who have graduated college since 2008 further feel their parents unknowingly set them up for failure, especially in this down economy. Raised with unrealistic expectations and an inherent belief in their individual specialness, which technology further fostered, their parents created an overly supportive and structured environment that simultaneously promoted hard work and complacency. Many Millennials have a difficult time independently cultivating their own success and reckoning things on their own.

“We all think we are very special and have great ideas, though this is more a function of us having platforms to express those things on than actually being special.”



## MISCONCEPTION 3: MILLENNIALS KNOW WHO THEY ARE & WHAT THEY WANT

“We have no idea who we are, who we’re supposed to be, or what the world wants us to be.”

For all their focus on achievement, a large number of Millennials feel unfulfilled. Even before the crash, many of the oldest had discovered their outside-in notion of success was elusive. In 2007, many told us they were fearful of missing out on any opportunity, obsessed over the next step, and never stepped back to see the big picture for their lives.

“We’re the fulfillment of our parents’ hopes; not our own.”

Frustrated by the resume building treadmill they’ve been on since a young age and having no idea what they really want, a number of older Millennials between the ages of 24 and 26 seek time out to discover who they are. Their delayed “commitment to responsibility stems from [a newfound] appreciation for the impact that the choices we make now will have upon the rest of our lives” and from being “fiercely protective of and frightened to lose life’s greatest gift - freedom.”

A large number of younger Millennials, those 16-18 years old who have mostly come of age since the Sub-Prime Mortgage crisis, do not believe they have the luxury to explore who they are. They strongly echo their parents’ economic fears and are readjusting their expectations for the future.

“I’m afraid the people of this country will lose faith in our system and everyone’s spirits will break; we’ll be like other countries where young people don’t have reasons to believe that through education or training they can get where they want.”

## MISCONCEPTION 4: MILLENNIALS ARE FREE-SPIRITED & SPONTANEOUS

“I consider myself a spontaneous person...I’m living in a new city and I need to feel comfortable to be spontaneous.”

Having grown up with schedules, league tables and little free time, Millennials function best with a game plan: prescriptive coursework, top 10 lists and objectives for hobbies. Without these and a full diary, they move out of their comfort zone and become frustrated, even more so than bored. Although many say they want to be more spontaneous, their adventures tend to take place within defined boundaries involving the real or virtual support of their friends.

“We can’t enjoy anything, because everything is done for a goal.”

Much of day-to-day life appears spontaneous to Millennials care of technology. The Internet, mobile phones and social media all allow them to move from moment to moment, realtime. Planning is not needed. Yet, spontaneity and free-spiritedness is all about living in the moment, and a large number of Millennials feel that they are never truly present in a moment because they live in a 24/7 world of connectedness and interruption.

“Spontaneity is something I focus on. I have to be aware of it and practice it intentionally.”

Further, technology has made the entire world accessible to Millennials; there’s nothing that can’t be researched online. And, when you spend time living in a virtual world, it seems as though there’s less to discover in the physical world. As a result many Millennials don’t seek out entirely new or different experiences. More so, they are looking for variations on themes - for more excitement and energy from things they know. Extreme activity may be the new spontaneity.



## MISCONCEPTION 5:

# MILLENNIALS ARE WILLING TO SACRIFICE TO BE PART OF A GREATER WHOLE

As the greatest multi-ethnic generation living, Gen Y has an idealist's desire to right injustices and help those in need. Despite their civic mindedness and earnest desire to positively change society, they are also products of a market economy morphing into a market society.

Millennials define the boundaries of relationships to suit their needs, and will not readily compromise what they want for the group. Someone else must do this: a company, a figurehead, government or another institution. Millennials, especially those 19-30, tend to put their own needs first and many see friends, a large number of whom are easily replaced, as fulfilling purposeful roles.

The statistics on Millennials and attitudes to volunteerism are inconsistent. Our research has shown that with infinite time Millennials would better themselves and society through volunteer work. In the absence of this, Millennials appear to seek volunteer activities more to boost their skills and polish their resume in their quest to get accepted by the right university.

"The fact that everything is instant makes us unappreciative of things and more selfish. It's you and your machine. You're less considerate of others' needs because you can get everything you want now."

"It's ok to have different friends for different reasons; the best friends serve more than one purpose."

"I'm going to Cambodia in November to get a better outlook on life...I'll appreciate what I have more and it will probably get on my transcripts."

Onesixtyfourth is a trend-based, brand and communications strategy consultancy. For more information on our work monitoring culture and trends, brand and communications strategy development, or innovation, please visit us at [www.onesixtyfourth.com](http://www.onesixtyfourth.com), email us on [info@onesixtyfourth.com](mailto:info@onesixtyfourth.com) or call +1 917 704 7515 or +44 7811 364 301

©ONESIXTYFOURTH - All rights reserved

All photos are licensed under Creative Commons

Credits:

Cover by Wonderlane/Flickr

Page 1 by Mo Riza/Flickr

Page 2 by 55Laney69/Flickr

Page 3 by Jack Batchelor

Page 5 by Chang Liu