A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND
MILLENNIALS IN A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

by

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my beloved Mom, my Angel Baby, Campbell (a.k.a. Cami), my PT^3 Children (Preston, Parker, & Pilar), and my dear husband, Benjamin. My mom spoke this moment into my life from the very beginning. She instilled in me the values to keep God first, to reach the highest height of success, and to never stop. As she made the unfortunate transition to becoming a single mother, we faced a plethora of struggles that would typically diminish one’s motivation; however, I was inspired to work harder in delivering the blessings she deserved. God poured many more blessings beyond measure by entrusting me to be the mother to four beautiful children, Campbell, Preston, Parker and Pilar. Although Campbell could not share moments with us on Earth, her existence inspired me to endure and press! My PT^3 babies spoke this moment into my life each day. They asked God for this, and they too, made sacrifices, so I dedicate this work to them as we now move forward in enjoying more joyful moments together. Lastly, and certainly not least, I dedicate this work to my dear husband, Ben, who believed in me, supported me, and loved me throughout this entire process. It was a road that could pose many challenges in any relationship, but with love and support, he allowed it to strengthen us. I thank each of you for your sacrifice, your support, and your unconditional love! I am grateful to have each of you in my life.
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This entire process would have been extremely difficult if it was not for the eclectic Cohort X!!! Ten is known as the number of responsibility, completion, and perfection, and this was the perfect cohort for me! This Cohort was the absolute best, and I am confident this process would have been a greater challenge without you. To each supporter who served as an accountability partner, I thank you for your love. There are so many to name, but I acknowledge each of you, and I extend my deepest gratitude.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEDICATION</strong> .................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</strong> .........................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIST OF TABLES</strong> ............................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABSTRACT</strong> .........................................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1. **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY** ............................................. 1
   - Background of the Study .................................................. 2
   - Millennials ................................................................. 2
   - Statement of the Problem ................................................. 5
   - Purpose of the Study ...................................................... 7
   - Research Questions ....................................................... 7
   - Theoretical Framework .................................................. 8
   - Procedures .................................................................... 9
   - Significance of the Study ............................................... 9
   - Limitations of the Study ................................................ 9
   - Definition of Terms ....................................................... 10
   - Summary and Forecast .................................................. 10

2. **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** ........................................... 12
   - Organization of the Review ............................................. 13
   - Generational Identity: Result of Historical Events or Not? .... 14
   - Baby Boomers ............................................................ 16
   - Generation X ............................................................. 18
   - Millennials ............................................................... 19
   - Change in the Workforce .............................................. 21
   - Generational Identity in the Workforce ............................ 22
   - Workforce Preparation ................................................ 24
     - Generational Differences in the Workforce .................. 25
     - Necessary Skills ...................................................... 26
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Higher Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework: Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the Emotional Intelligence Concept</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and Criticism of Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Purpose</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions Reiterated</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Research Study</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Perspective</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Method</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Strategy</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Site</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivity Statement</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESULTS</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions Reviewed</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Profiles</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Experience</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Involvement</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Relationships</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Competence</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness is a Responsibility</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to Take the Next Step</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Competence</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Results</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 71 |
| Summary of the Study | 71 |
| Summary of Major Findings | 73 |
| Discussion for Research Question 1 | 73 |
| Discussion for Research Question 2 | 75 |
| Implications | 79 |
| Limitations | 80 |
| Recommendations for Future Research | 81 |
| Final Thoughts | 82 |

REFERENCES | 85 |

APPENDICES | 97 |
| A | IRB APPROVAL | 98 |
| B | PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT | 100 |
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ranking of Basic Skills Identified by Georgia Employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Description of Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overarching Themes by Descriptive Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Goleman’s (1998) Key Areas of Emotional Intelligence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

NYTHEA CAMPBELL TOLBERT
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND MILLENNIALS IN A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE
Under the direction of PAMELA A. LARDE, Ph.D.

The increase in generational diversity in the workforce emphasizes the need for employers to note the co-existence of age and cultural phenomena that may impact work practices. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence as it relates to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace.

To address the research questions of this study, a qualitative research method utilizing interviewing was applied to gain insights of the lived experiences of recent graduates of a four-year degree program. Criterion sampling was utilized to find participants who were currently employed for a minimum of one year in a generationally diverse work setting. The lived experiences of the participants related to this phenomenon resulted in the emergence of five themes that offer recommendations in developing students’ professional skills and emotional intelligence to increase their employability and opportunities for sustaining employment.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*Our young men have grown slothful. There is not a single honorable occupation for which they will toil night and day. They sing and dance and grow effeminate and curl their hair and learn womanish tricks of speech; they are as languid as women and deck themselves out with unbecoming ornaments. Without strength, without energy, they add nothing during life to the gifts with which they were born—then they complain of their lot.*

(Seneca, 1st Century AD)

A generational cohort comprises a group of individuals born within a 20-year time span who develop an identity from significant events and societal trends (Fry, 2018; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Salahuddin, 2010). Each generation begins to develop unique perspectives of work values during childhood that later evolve into adulthood (Twenge et al., 2010). The Millennial generation is the latest cohort to make an imprint into an evolving workplace. Considering many recognize Millennials as being the most educated generation, employers anticipated they would make a profound change in the workplace (Fry, 2018). However, there have been large shifts in the past five decades in U.S. society and culture, such as the characterization of Millennials by Howe and Strauss (2000) as “special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured and conventional” (Schrum & Levin, 2009, p. 33). Additionally, the act of students seeking alternatives to traditional higher education opportunities, such as innovative programs and experiential learning encounters outside of the classroom, has
impacted the enrollment statistics of higher educational institutions (Maguad, 2018). Students’ appetites for diverse learning drives new rules for a new generation.

Background of the Study

The transformation of the racial and ethnic framework of the United States specifically reflects a spike in educational attainment among women as well as an increase of women in the labor force (Fry et al., 2018). Higher education institutions (HEIs) have traditionally focused on developing students’ hard skills, which are skills often taught in the classroom, and producing graduates who are most employable because of their perceived contributions to hiring organizations (Gerstein, 2016). However, their presence also introduces a range of stereotypes and differing perspectives that transform into conflicts and misunderstandings in the workplace (Nelson & Braekkan, 2017).

While Millennials have coined numerous terms to both negatively and positively describe themselves, this study sought to explore the collegiate experiences of Millennials and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence in a multi-generational workforce as it relates to soft skill development. Research suggests that failure to recognize the differences between generational cohorts in the workplace can yield negative organizational outcomes, such as poor working relationships, reduction in employee productivity, minimal innovation, intergenerational conflict, and miscommunication (Stewart et al., 2017)

Millennials

Researchers Strauss and Howe (1991) coined Millennials as a descriptive term for the Millennial cohort. According to Rickes (2016), Millennials “easily surpassed the
Baby Boomer generation, fueled in part by the rising immigrant population” (p. 1).

Diverse views of the age parameters of Millennials exist; however, when referencing generational cohorts in this study, Generation Y, also known as Millennials, is anyone “born between 1981 and 1996” (Fry, 2018, para. 8) as described by the Pew Research Center.

Since entering the workforce, Millennials have often been subject to negative acknowledgment and recognition. Weirich (2017) reported that many use terms such as “entitled, narcissistic, self-interested, unfocused, or lazy” (p. 137) to describe Millennials. Conversely, generational studies have faced controversy over the necessity of labeling generations. For example, a research perspective implied that all generations are labeled and viewed as being entitled as they enter early adulthood (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017). However, a poll conducted in 2004 by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed that 40% of human resources professionals received reports of generational differences as the cause of conflict among employees (Burke & Esen, 2004).

It is important that further research explores differences between generational cohorts and identifies the legitimacy of its impact on the workplace phenomenon by utilizing appropriate methods to investigate those differences and provide effective solutions.

Generational cohorts have worked together throughout history; however, for the past 10 years, increased life expectancies have resulted in daily workplace interactions of an unprecedented four or more generations of employees (Lyons et al., 2014). Although the diversity in the generational makeup of the workplace adds a beneficial component to the professional development of employees, it also poses a level of complexity among
individuals who work together but have varied work practices and beliefs. Jones (2016) maintained that each generational cohort develops characteristics shaped by various historical events experienced by persons born during the specified time-period. As individuals from a generation enter the workforce, they assume conflicts from the organizational tone in addition to the established boundaries and expectations set by the preceding generational cohorts (Culpin et al., 2015; Nelson & Braekkan, 2017; Rasmussen, 2015).

Research on Millennials and generational differences are garnering increased interest among organizations, practitioners, and academicians in recent years as the population has become more diverse. For example, the number of published doctoral dissertations on Millennials numbers more than 40 since 2010. A research study conducted by Burke and Esen (2004) for the SHRM citing generational differences as the cause of conflict among employees prompted organizations to be more proactive in acknowledging these generational differences may impact an employee’s performance and the success of an organization.

Higher education has a significant impact in the development of young professionals; it serves as a training ground in preparing the student population for the workforce. Deal et al. (2010) conducted a research study regarding Millennial in the workplace and noted, “Millennials [were] entering college in record numbers but [were] arriving with low levels of general knowledge on which to build the educational foundation they will need to be successful later in life” (p. 193). To this effect, this
research addressed the use of emotional intelligence in building professional/soft skills as factors that may better develop this foundation for Millennials in the workforce.

The contributions of institutions of higher education result in experiential services that involve the development of students’ employability, which also contributes to the institutional brand (Khanna et al., 2014). Voss and Zomerdijk (2007) defined experiential services “as services where the focus is on the experience of the customer when interacting with the organization, rather than just the functional benefits following the products and services delivered” (p. 5). Additionally, emotional intelligence, “the intelligent use of emotions” (Weisinger, 1998, p. xvi) utilizes five elements: self-awareness, self-management, empathy, motivation and social skills (Goleman, 1998), which have shown to be critical necessities in the workplace. As such, it is important for institutions of higher education to provide adequate resources such as experiential services and emotional intelligence training that will prepare students for a generationally diverse workforce.

Statement of the Problem

The increase in generational diversity in the workforce emphasizes the need for employers to note the co-existence of age and cultural phenomena that may impact work practices (Johnson, 2015; Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Savino, 2017; Soni, 2017). Institutions of higher education provide adequate resources and training for young professionals to engage in the workplace utilizing both hard and soft skills. Rainie and Anderson (2017) of the Pew research Center reported data that showed that college-educated Millennials make up more than 40% of the workforce with a bachelor’s degree.
The imminent retirement of Baby Boomer employees has created a crisis in the workforce as employers struggle to recruit and retain Millennials who seemingly possess different beliefs and expectations from preceding generations (Economist, 2009). The gap between professional skills that employers identify as essential and those that Millennials identify as nonessential is beginning to broaden. This creates a growing challenge in the marketplace, specifically for U.S. cities and states officials concerned about growing local economies and improving employment rates. This research focused on Millennials who had completed their undergraduate matriculation to determine if their higher education training adequately developed their soft skills needed for the workforce.

The premise of this research stems around a 2016 report published by the Metro Atlanta Chamber in collaboration with Accenture, a Fortune Global 500 management consulting firm that provides services in business integration and technology. The intent of this report was to develop an understanding of the gaps between education and career readiness by utilizing quantitative and qualitative data to develop recommendations to address this gap. Significantly, the data showed a 154% increase in job postings in Georgia from 2010-2015 and identified the proactive steps that can strengthen the talent pipeline through better alignment of education and career preparation programs with market demand. Notably, this report highlighted 15 skills (both hard and soft) frequently listed in job postings, and of those, nine were soft skills, which are professional, employability, and transferrable skills (see Table 1 in Chapter 2). Hard skills are mostly recognized in the workforce as abilities or skill sets taught in the classroom, while soft skills are interpersonal traits that are often subjective as they relate to how one interacts
with others. Employers still seek hard skills but also require employees to possess soft skills that make them more employable and add value to the organization (Robles, 2012). The report revealed a lack of core professional (hard skills) and soft skills often required for available positions in comparison to the reported skills of the current talent pool.

Therefore, despite their reputation of being the most educated generation, Millennials lack soft/professional skills in comparison to preceding generational cohorts. This is a concern because it reduces the chance of employability and sustained employment (Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Rainie & Anderson, 2017; Salahuddin, 2010). Therefore, institutions of higher education must implement experiential services that entail the development of emotional intelligence to address the development of soft skills that make graduates more employable for the workforce (Rainie & Anderson, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence as it relates to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace.

Research Questions

The principal questions guiding this study were:

1. How did Millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years?

2. How do Millennials integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?
Theoretical Framework

Because of the emphasis on knowledge development and intelligence in higher education institutions (HEIs), attention to emotional intelligence, intrapersonal competencies, and interpersonal competencies are typically not the focus. However, research indicates developing emotional intelligence in students increases their employability for the workforce (Tucker et al., 2000). Sathitsemakul (2017) defined “emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive emotions and cognitive processes such as reasoning with emotions; understanding their meaning; and assimilating and locating relationships between the emotions” (p. 12). Goleman (1995) contended that individuals recognize and manage these emotions through five competencies:

- “self-awareness,
- self-regulation,
- motivation,
- empathy, and
- social skills” (p.43).

Several researchers have provided explanations of emotional intelligence to delineate its role in expressing interpersonal and intrapersonal emotions and provide rationales for why individuals behave in a certain manner. The use of emotional intelligence among individuals in work environments has shown to be critical in the workplace as research supports that it leads to productive and successful outcomes for both the individual and the organization (Weisinger, 1998).
Procedures

To address the research questions of this study, the researcher chose the qualitative research method of interviewing to gain insights from recent graduates of a four-year degree program who were currently employed for a minimum of one year in a generationally diverse work setting. Interviews explored the first-year work experiences of Millennials in the workplace and what skills they perceived as most valuable in this setting. The interview also assessed participants’ interactions in the workplace with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues.

Significance of the Study

This study can inform researchers, employers, students, and administrators in higher education of the benefits of emotional development in ensuring a smooth transition to the workplace. Giraud (2012) reported that Cherniss and Goleman (2001) suggested that “as one accumulates more experience, emotional intelligence increases” (p. 29). Desilver of the Pew Research Center (2015) cited data that revealed Millennials hold higher rates in education attainment; however, they also hold higher rates of unemployment. Therefore, there is a need to address the needs of Millennials as well as younger generations as they transition to the workforce. Examining emotional intelligence provides insight to leaders and students regarding its importance in career advancement and development of stronger relationships with others.

Limitations of the Study

This study, like others, holds its own limitations. The first is its location, for it included a small sample of former students across the world. Second, the self-reporting
of data poses difficulty because of independent verification. Self-reported data may contain several sources of bias that include “selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration” (Ataro, 2020, p. 22). Additionally, due to the 20-year gap in generational cohorts, this study lacks validity in relation to the population of Millennials. However, it may contribute to future research since it relates to the theoretical components of attribution theory in the workplace and experiential services offered in higher education. It is the researcher’s expectation for this study to be transferable among other generations as it is recognized that generational cohorts often employ similar characteristics over time.

Definition of Terms

The following are generational cohort descriptions provided by the Pew Research Center (2015):

*The Baby Boom Generation* refers to individuals born in the years 1946 to 1964.

*Generation X* refers to individuals born in the years 1965 to 1980.

*The Millennial Generation* refers to individuals born in the years 1981 to 1997.

*The Silent Generation* refers to individuals born in the years 1928 to 1945.

Summary and Forecast

The present generational differences in the workplace have been a growing topic for the past two decades. Despite the concern and transformations among generational cohorts, this phenomenon will not dissipate; instead, it will develop into a more complex issue if not addressed. Given the research conducted thus far and curricula advancements in higher education, the consideration of integrating emotional intelligence into
undergraduate curricula may contribute to higher employability of graduates who are intellectually prepared for the workforce; however, they lack the professional or soft skills necessary for sustainable employment. This research sought to examine emotional intelligence in providing insight to higher education leaders and students, and the importance of this framework and its possible contributions to career advancement and development of stronger relationships with others in the workforce.

This chapter served as introduction to the study. It provided the background of the phenomenon, the problem addressed in the study, theoretical framework, research questions, significance of the study, and key definitions to assist the reader. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertinent to the phenomenon investigated in this study. Chapter 3 offers a description of the research design and methodology employed by the researcher to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the results, and Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in terms of the research questions, as well as implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the 1950s kids lost their innocence. They were liberated from their parents by well-paying jobs, cars, and lyrics in music that gave rise to a new term—the generation gap.

In the 1960s, kids lost their authority. It was a decade of protest---church, state, and parents were all called into question and found wanting. Their authority was rejected, yet nothing ever replaced it.

In the 1970s, kids lost their love. It was the decade of me-ism dominated by hyphenated words beginning with self. Self-image, Self-esteem, Self-assertion. It made for a lonely world. Kids learned everything there was to know about sex and forgot everything there was to know about love, and no one had the nerve to tell them there was a difference.

In the 1980s, kids lost their hope. Stripped of innocence, authority and love and plagued by the horror of a nuclear nightmare, large and growing numbers of this generation stopped believing in the future.

In the 1990s kids lost their power to reason. Less and less were they taught the very basics of language, truth, and logic and they grew up with the irrationality of a postmodern world.

In the new millennium, kids woke up and found out that somewhere in the midst of all this change, they had lost their imagination. Violence and perversion entertained them till none could talk of killing innocents since none was innocent anymore. (Zacharias, 2003, pp. 42-43)

The preceding quote documents commentary from a 20th-century spiritual leader who disclosed his thoughts on the generations discussed in this research. Academic researchers have investigated generational phenomena for many years; however, this body of knowledge has blossomed since the mid-2000s as members of the Millennial
cohort diversified the workforce, resulting in the generational differences among the varied generations cohabiting in the workforce. Unfortunately, extensive evidence is absent due to the lack of integration or empirical testing of these generations working together (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017). This study sought to fill that gap.

Organization of the Review

This review of literature provides background of three of the generations in the workforce and specifically highlights the phenomenon of Millennials’ role in the workplace and methods to effectively integrate multi-generations in the workforce. Additionally, the review provides a context of the application of emotional intelligence into higher education curricula and its significance in the employability and development of soft skills in college graduates entering the workforce in adapting to the transformation of the workforce and the world. The review begins with a short discussion of generational identity as a result of U.S. historical events. Following this are descriptions of generational characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, which are the target populations of this study. Next is a discussion of changes in the workforce of the 21st century in terms of the demographics of generational cohorts and potential issues associated with a multi-generational workforce. The subsequent section presents work-related characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. The next section discusses workforce preparation, which addresses the needs of 21st-century employers. This discussion leads to a section of the role of higher education in preparing students for competency in a multi-generational workforce. The chapter ends with a
discussion of the theoretical framework, emotional intelligence, which includes its history and implications for use in higher education and the workforce.

Generational Identity: Result of Historical Events or Not?

In the 21st century, five generations make up the workforce: members of the Silent Generation, Baby Boomer Generation, Generation X, Millennials and Post Millennials/Generation Z/Centennials. Three of these generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—represent a higher percentage of employees in the workforce and the targeted population in this research study. Each of these generations exude unique characteristics that impact work principles and professional relationships in the workplace. However, according to extensive research by Twenge and associates in 2004, 2008, and 2010, linear, rather than categorical, effects result in the separation and labeling of generational cohorts. Therefore, this research suggests the linear effects of cohort characteristics are gradual changes over time as opposed to categorical effects, which are sudden transformations at the cutoff of a cohort year. The developmental years of each generational cohort ranges between the ages of 5 and 18, which are often the documented occurrences of significant events that may contribute to differences in character traits and work values. For example, significant events for Baby Boomers were the Civil Rights Movement, The Vietnam & Cold War, and television becomes a primary media source. For GenXers, significant events included the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Rodney King Beating, onset of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and the first use of personal computers. Lastly, significant events for Millennials included the O.J.
Simpson Trial, the Columbine Massacre, the digital age movement (i.e., Internet, instant messaging, and wireless capabilities), and September 11.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) claimed that each generational cohort makes history through memorable references that link them to specific experiences. These experiences result in their personal and mental development by influencing their attitudes and behaviors. The experiences become historical memories that connect members of the cohort, providing them with relational associations over the course of their development (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). The premise is that historical events witnessed by individuals often shape their values as they develop into adulthood—values shared among members of that generational cohort. There is relatively limited research to support how an individual’s generational cohort placement impacts individual identity. However, people who are acquainted through shared experiences, beliefs, and behaviors typically bond with little effort. This familiarity results in their professed membership in that generation (Kelan, 2014).

However, researchers and experts in the field of generational cohorts cast doubts about the generational proposition. Hughes and O’Rand (2005) suggested three assumptions behind the concept of generations. Their understanding supports that historical events do not define a generational cohort’s values or influence their behaviors, and they include the following:

1. “Research supports the assumption that people are particularly impressionable early in life”
2. “Research shows that some core personality characteristics are set for life, but also that people change their beliefs and attitudes based on later life experiences”

3. “Research does not support the supposition that all persons of generational cohorts are impacted the same by life events as they are similarly impacted by gender, social class, race and ethnicity.” (Giancola, 2006, p. 33)

Although limited, some academic research has recognized intergenerational differences and its effects as popular culture rather than social science, as advocated by generational experts Strauss and Howe (1991) in their book, Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069. Strauss and Howe (1991) stated, “Triumphant in popular culture, the cohort generation has been confined by experts to the shadow world of unproven hypothesis” (as cited in Giancola, 2006, p. 33). Thus, although each generational cohort identifies with historical references that shape their identity as they proceed along their life journey and development, they respond differently to those historical events based on their life cycle and personality (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The following sections provide discussion of the characteristics of individuals known as Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials.

Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomer generation, also known as the “pig-in-the-python” (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008, p. 70), consists of persons born from 1946 to 1964 (Dimock, 2019). This time period is known as the Baby Boom as a result of the persistently high birth rate relative to prior census figures—17 million babies born after World War II (Lyons et al.,
This cohort’s population size included 78 million people, which resulted in its recognition of being the most impactful on American society and the period of which members of this cohort came of age. Many recognize the Baby Boomer period as an era of hope, ambition, progression, and opportunity when most households consisted of two parents, children received less exposure to violence in schools, and there were more active participants in job security. This era is also remembered for its post-war prosperity and a time where families witnessed the social and political chaos of their time, which included events such as the “Vietnam War, the civil rights riots, the Kennedy and King assassinations, Watergate and the sexual revolution . . . as well as Woodstock” (Tolbize, 2008, p. 2).

Baby Boomers’ period of adolescence and development occurred during a relatively stable period in history, when people freely expressed themselves and the economy prospered. In school, they learned the importance of collaboration and cooperation with their peers because the numbers were plentiful (Clark, 2017; Hendricks, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015). As a result, Baby Boomers are perceived as the generation that possesses both teamwork and relationship-building skills. As young adults, they experienced opportunities that translated into upward mobility.

Characteristics often used to describe Baby Boomers include high-achievers, independent, respectful of authority, loyal, and diligent to career and work (Jorgensen, 2003). These individuals tend to utilize their competitive nature to substantially measure success more so than do those who are members of younger generational cohorts (Meriac et al., 2010). They seek recognition for their achievements (Glass, 2007) and often feel
insulted by constant feedback (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association [NOAA] Office of Diversity, 2006). Similar to other generations, Boomers are perceived as possessing a sense of entitlement, but good at cultivating relationships, and reluctant to oppose their peers or cast judgment upon those who are not in agreement with them (Zemke et al., 1999). Some also describe Boomers as those who flourish on change as a possibility, and they have been known to fight for a cause, although they attempt to avoid conflict (NOAA Office of Diversity, 2006).

**Generation X**

The individualistic Generation X (Gen X) cohort, born between 1965 and 1980, are known as the neglected middle children and the “latchkey kids” (O’Bannon, 2001, p. 97) because it was likely that both of their parents worked, and they were frequently left home alone (Rickes, 2016). As children, they typically experienced limited supervision, since they attended daycare and their parents were likely divorced (Jorgensen, 2003). As a result, their parents were probably the stereotypical Baby Boomers—passionate about their work-life and ambitious about leadership and climbing the ladder in their careers. GenXers are considered independent, self-reliant, and informal individuals who hold strengths in multitasking and working independently.

Many often credit the popularity of the term *Generation X* to a novel written by Douglas Copeland (1991) entitled *Generation X: Tales from an Accelerated Culture* (Jorgensen, 2003). Howe and Strauss (2000), the social historians recognized for pioneering the generational theory, identified this cohort as the 13th Generation and the Nomad Generation. As adults, many members of this cohort believe the world is against
them, and they operate as “practical skeptics and entrepreneurial free agents” (Armstrong et al., 2013, p. 219) who are consequently accused of being slackers, disloyal, and overly influenced by television or what many identified as the “idiot box” (O’Bannon, 2001, p. 97). Other historical references during this time period that may have heavily influenced Gen Xers include Music Television (MTV), onset of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, “and new technological advancements every six months” (O’Bannon, 2001, p. 98).

O’Bannon (2001) reported that Gen Xers are subject to the negative influence of “numerous environmental factors. . . such as over 40 percent are from broken families” (p. 98). This detriment to families resulted in emotional trauma faced by many Gen Xers, ranging from unstable lifestyles to limited adult supervision. Furthermore, although one positive outcome is their self-reliance, it also negatively contributes to the high instances of failed intimate relationships experienced by Gen Xers, which is complicated further by the fact that they are the generation that engaged in sexual activity earlier and most likely delay marriage more so than other generations do (O’Bannon, 2001).

**Millennials**

In the past 10 years, college campuses have predominantly educated the largest generational cohort in history (Rickes, 2016), the Millennial generation, that makes up nearly 100 million people. Born from 1981 to 1997 primarily to Baby Boomers, this population is comprised of approximately 10% of immigrants. Furthermore, it is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, since 43% are non-White (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). Both researchers and non-researchers characterize Millennials as
hardworking; team-oriented; engaged in academic, extracurricular, and service activities; generous; and practical (Elam et al., 2007). Conversely, they are described as persons who expect open communication, avoid risk-taking associated with independent thinking and decisions, have shortened attention spans, feel pressured to succeed, possess technological savviness, and desire flexible working conditions (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014; Myers & Sadaghiania, 2010). Unlike GenXers, Millennials usually had protective parents who were extremely cautious. Their parents’ overprotective nature later earned them the nickname of “helicopter parents” and “Black Hawks” (Alsop, 2008, p. 51) for more assertive parents. Therefore, Millennials are less independent and motivated by money. Compared to the generations that precede them, Millennials are more social and more confident, and “they typically enjoy experimenting and discovering new approaches and solutions to solving problems” (Clark, 2017, pp. 381-382).

Millennials were nurtured children whose Members of this generational cohort are considered “natives of the Technology Era where personal computers were omnipresent as a toaster is to preceding generations, and the cell phone is considered the third screen. In 2000, Howe and Strauss identified the following dominant characteristics of Millennials:

- *Special* is a character trait defined as the sense of entitlement, sometimes labeled the *Mister Rogers Effect* because of the special recognition of children simply for being present (Zaslow, 2007)

- *Sheltered* is a character trait that refers to a child who is highly protected. The *sheltered* child typically has strong ties to parents, family, and friends.
• **Confident and Team-Oriented** are character traits derived from active learning through study habits, socialization, and traveling, which lowers the added pressure to raise confidence levels.

• **Conventional** is a character trait that represents civic-mindedness and respect for authority.

• **Pressured and Achieving** are characteristic traits that are representative of children with busy schedules; thus, they are accustomed to having each hour of the day filled with structured activity while simultaneously focusing on earning good grades to be on track for stellar career achievements.

**Change in the Workforce**

The 21st-century workforce has experienced the greatest number of multi-generations, which include Baby Boomers, GenXers, and Millennials (Clark, 2017). Millennials entered the workforce in 2004, and until 2022, they will continue to enter the workforce in multitudes (Fry, 2018). Millennials comprised 45% of the U.S. workforce in 2015 (Keene & Handrich, 2015).

As new generational cohorts entered the workforce, awareness of the effect the incoming cohort had on workplace dynamics began to develop among organizations, human resource management practitioners, and researchers (Benson & Brown, 2011; Ferri-Reed, 2014; Queen’s University IRC, 2013). Generational experts asserted that generational gaps result in intergenerational conflict, which contributed to concern among human resource officials (Giancola, 2006). This historical first—five generations working together in the workplace—did indeed cause business leaders to anticipate
generational conflicts in the workplace. This anticipation became a reality, as evidenced by data from a 2011 poll conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), which revealed 72% of human resource professionals documented intergenerational conflict as an issue in the workplace to some extent.

According to SHRM (2011), human resource professionals devote efforts towards addressing the issues that result from these conflicts, but few employers are prepared for the significant changes in the workforce. These changes include large businesses as well as immensely diverse smaller workplaces that are less adequately skilled, globalized, virtually savvy, independent, and empowered. Unfortunately, research suggests there is no single resolution to managing multigenerational workforces (Cahill & Sedrak, 2012). However, a solution must be developed to bridge the gap between generations for organizations and businesses to be successful (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016).

Generational Identity in the Workforce

In recent years, practitioners and researchers have displayed growing interest in generational differences among organizations due to issues accompanying multi-generations working together (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). As the workplace evolves, researchers seek to discover evidence concerning the similarities of professional training and generational influences that attribute to personality traits, work values, leadership capabilities, and career patterns (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Jennifer Deal (2007), research scientist with the University of Southern California who is renowned for her work on global leadership and generational differences, stated the following:
All generations have similar values; they just express them differently. . . . How people express their values is often different by generation, just as it is often different by generation, just as it is often different by culture. For example, wearing jeans to work may be considered to be an expression of disrespect for the work site to a Silent or an Early Boomer who thinks that jeans are too informal for work, but to employees from the Early or Late Xer generations, wearing jeans at work is not necessarily an expression of disrespect—they just want to wear jeans.

This quote demonstrates how historical events and social events may shape similar characteristics and core values of a generational cohort.

As multiple generations continue to work together, Gliebe (2012) and Vandervoort (2006) asserted that employers hold the ability to unify the work environment through embracing generational differences and encouraging individuals to mutually understand and respect one another. It is essential for leaders to identify effective practices to best manage diverse generations in the workplace to attract and retain new talent and develop strategies that build progressive working conditions to yield positive behaviors among younger workers. However, due to sparse empirical evidence of generational differences (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017), exhibiting similar characteristics does not qualify individuals for a specific generational cohort. Therefore, leaders should recognize the tools to properly equip individuals for the workforce based on the needs of the employers while being sensitive to the needs of the employees. Bartley et al. (2007) stated:
Human resource departments nationwide are beginning to recognize the need for workforce learning programs to educate employees about their intergenerational counterparts and to bridge those generational gaps while increasing cohesion through understanding and awareness of the needs and desires of generationally diverse mixes of employees. (p. 28)

However, many believe workforce preparation is also essential.

Workforce Preparation

Career readiness of graduates entering the workforce has been a topic of discussion since the National Commission on Excellence in Education published the Nation at Risk Report in 1983. The report, intended to improve educational practices to develop graduates prepared to enter the workforce (Guidry, 2012) spurred a plethora of similar documents, such as The Forgotten Half (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988), the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991 & 2000), Rising Above the Gathering Storm (2005), Are They Really Ready to Work? (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006), Critical Skills Survey (AMA, 2010), and the premise of this study, Educators and Policymakers Report (2016) submitted by the Metro Atlanta Chamber. All of these reports proffered the conclusion that employees lacked adequate preparation for entering the workforce. More than a decade ago, human resource professionals highlighted the diminishing U.S. workforce and its lack of sufficiently skilled employees in the increasingly globalized market (Giancola, 2006). More importantly, they noted that lack of preparation of employers to manage such difficulties (Giancola, 2006).
Workforce preparation for college graduates began to gain significant importance in the 21st century when employers recognized a shift in skill acquisition among millennials entering the workforce. According to a Gallup article published in October 2012, only 14% of Americans selected *Strongly Agree* when asked if today’s college graduates are prepared for the workforce, and in 2013, only 11% of business leaders believed college graduates to be prepared for the workforce. Ironically, 96% of executive leaders at colleges and universities believed their institutions were *very* or *somewhat effective* at providing students with adequate support and preparation for the workforce (Gallup, 2014). This misalignment holds critical implications for business and higher education institutions. Preparation for the workforce means addressing generational differences and the provision of necessary skills.

**Generational Differences in the Workforce**

The developing concern among employers regarding the previously cited widening gap of necessary skills is complicated by the four diverse generations working together in the workforce the first time in history. Specifically, researchers of this topic have often noted the generational differences that have compounded this issue, since the workforce has experienced intergenerational conflict among Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby Boomers in the workplace (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Clark (2017) claimed that many hold millennials responsible for generational conflicts in the workplace. As cited earlier, the Millennial generation constituted 45% of the U.S. workforce in 2015, followed by Generation X (21%), and Baby Boomers (31%) (Keene & Handrich, 2015). These demographics have not represented the workforce since the Baby Boomer
generation entered the workforce in the mid-1960s. Human resource professionals have reported substantial evidence of intergenerational conflict in varied resources as well as the latest report published by the Society for Human Resource Management (2011). In this report, more than half of organizations indicate their leaders have raised concerns that include younger workers’ inappropriate wardrobe (55%); poor work ethic (54%); and general skill deficiencies (18%). The SHRM (2011) recommended implementing professional development training in the workforce and institutions of higher education to engage a culturally diverse and multigenerational workforce and bridge generational gaps.

Necessary Skills

In 2013, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) defined career readiness as the demonstration and involvement of three major skills areas:

Core academic skills and the ability to apply those skills to concrete situations in order to function in the workplace and in routine daily activities; employability skills (such as critical thinking and responsibility) that are essential in any career area; and technical, job-specific skills related to a specific career pathway. (p. 1) ACTE (2013) added that instruction in these skills need to occur as early as high school, since some students will not enter postsecondary education institutions. That way, students are “prepared for whatever their lives may bring” (ACTE, 2013, p. 2).

Other necessary skills are transferable skills, also referred as soft skills, which are irrespective of the workforce sector and developed or obtained through education, work, or other life experiences. These include verbal communication, collaborative efforts,
decision-making and problem-solving skills, planning, organization, work prioritization, and ability to obtain and process information (Gallup, 2015). The Gallup (2015) poll asked respondents to think of the definition of soft skills when answering questions regarding workplace talent in the United States in comparison to other countries. Highlights of the feedback, reported by Busteed and Stutzman of Gallup (2015), included the following:

- 87% of respondents totally agreed that “the federal government must make it a high priority to increase the talent of our nation’s workforce” (p. 1).
- 78% of respondents totally agreed that “If the U.S. fails to develop a more talented workforce, it will fall behind other countries” (p. 1).
- 89% totally agreed that “cities that commit to increasing talent among their citizens are more likely to have stronger economies, better quality of life and greater prosperity than cities that do not” (p. 2).

In a report published by the Metro Atlanta Chamber (2016), Georgia employers reported deficits of recently hired college graduates, mainly comprised of Millennials. The report illustrated the talent gap by an undersupply in the number of higher learning degrees and certifications conferred in Georgia in comparison to the corresponding occupational demands for those graduates. The importance of this finding was that popular programs of study selected by students did not align with the professional skills employers are anticipate from new hires. Employers cited the lack of soft skills as one of the greater barriers to hiring otherwise appropriately skilled employees. The report also
included the top fifteen basic job skills identified through varied job postings, as presented in Table 1 in ranking order from greatest to least importance.

Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ranking of Basic Skills Identified by Georgia Employers</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Communication Skills</td>
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<td>2. Organizational Skills</td>
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<td>3. Writing</td>
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<td>4. Customer Service</td>
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<td>5. Problem Solving</td>
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<td>6. Microsoft Excel</td>
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<td>7. Planning</td>
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<td>8. Microsoft Office</td>
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<td>9. Detail Oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Project Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Building Effective Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Computer Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Troubleshooting</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Quality Assurance and Control</td>
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</tbody>
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Note. Adapted with permission from Educators and Policymakers Report, by Metro Atlanta Chamber, p.4. Copyright 2006 by Accenture.

Of these 15 basic job skills, nine are soft skills, and five of these rank as the top skills. Both scholarly literature and popular media have painted the picture of the Millennial generation in an uncharitable light, noting their inability to exhibit these skills in the workplace. Conversely, research also attempts to embrace the differences of each generational cohort in effort to benefit from the skills and contributions each bring to the
workforce (Stewart et al., 2017). Additionally, to optimize the workforce for its advancement, the executive summary recommended support for students and jobseekers in their career decision-making through their education.

In 1991, the U.S. Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin appointed the Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to best understand examine the challenges experienced in the workplace and to determine the essential skills provided to youth to be successful in the workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). SCANS also served as a resource to the Secretary in gaining a better understanding of what skills were beneficial to gainful employment for individuals partly because there was concern that students were not fully prepared or equipped with the tools to meet the demands of businesses. The fundamental purpose of the commission was to influence an economy strengthened by established professional skills and increased earnings in wages (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The report, published by the Commission in response to discussions with business leaders in the workforce, included the demands of adaptability and the ability to work in teams. To yield results from this initiative, Lynn Martin asked the Commission to “define the skills needed for employment, propose acceptable levels of proficiency, suggest effective ways to assess proficiency, and develop a dissemination strategy for the nation’s schools, businesses, and homes” (Sornson, 2016, p. 23). The commission made recommendations for action by parents, high school personnel, and the business leaders. Although it is essential for employers to address their employees’ occupational stress (Fernandez-Berrocal et al., 2006), job performance (Lopez et al., 2005), leadership, team effectiveness (Jordan et al., 2002), conflict management (Jordan & Troth, 2002), and
organizational commitment (Abraham, 2005; Carmeli, 2003; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001) in the workplace, it is important to recognize the base of the issue and how to best resolve it. While efforts to encourage varied solutions to solve this problem are important, they are not enough. Therefore, it is key to link the role of higher education to the outcomes that employers continue to face. Millennials and successive generations’ ability to compete for employment in the rapidly changing workforce will face challenges if the gap between higher education and workforce preparation goes unchecked (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Wirth, 1992). Therefore, it is important for higher education officials and employers to partner in order to thrive in this changing workforce, for if the two entities continue disconnected paths, a vast number of institutions of higher education and businesses may suffer as the workforce continues to change.

The Role of Higher Education

A variety of historical influences have shaped higher education in the United States. The interaction of two essential elements, Western European patterns and traditions and Native American conditions make up an exclusive system of higher education in the United States of America (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017). The interactions of these two elements have resulted in the growth of democracy and a unique higher education system.

The primary intent for students attending college is to secure employment. Historically, students received internships and cooperative programs to provide students opportunities to learn applicable aptitudes through service learning to make them more employable (Gilbert, 2017). However, higher education has faced numerous challenges
in preparing graduates for a rapidly changing workforce. The job market that exists today is not reflective of the market a few years ago (Stack & Fede, 2017). Globalization and an increase in diversity of the economy require higher education officials to reevaluate their offerings as they relate to developing skills to prepare students for success in an emerging and evolving workforce. Research shows that the early methods of teaching are no longer suitable to new generational cohort students’ learning needs nor the needs of employers who seek specific skills of their new hires entering the workforce (Mazer & Hess, 2017). Graduates lack professional (soft) skills considered valuable to employers, such as “communication, critical thinking, leadership and teamwork” (Cochran & Ferrari, 2009, p. 11). The report published by the Metro Atlanta Chamber (2016) corroborates this position, for among its suggestions was that Georgia’s institutions of higher education, local agencies, and nonprofit organizations incorporate soft skills training and development into their programs. Therefore, it is important for higher education to adjust and align to today’s market. Higher education administrators face the challenging task of adequately providing students with the resources and skills essential for the rapidly changing workforce and providing its students with the skills employers seek in entry level hires (Agarwal & Ahuja, 2014; White, 2015; Zhang, 2012). Preparation methods in higher education should focus attention towards equipping students with the tools to be competitive in the workforce.

There are constant debates around the value of higher education provided to its consumers. However, the results from the 2015 Gallup poll revealed respondents have a keen interest and high level of support (85% totally agreed) for “redesigning the nation’s
higher education system to better meet students’ needs would increase the overall level of
talent in the U.S. workforce” (Busteed & Stutzman, p. 2). To meet employer needs,
institutions of higher education are beginning to focus great attention to redesigning
curricula and creating initiatives to develop students both personally and professionally.
Higher education can develop new curricula with effective methods that include
emotional intelligence, which has shown to be a valuable strategy in developing a variety
of positive personal, social, and societal outcomes and benefits (Gliebe, 2012;
Vandervoort, 2006) and correlate with effective leadership (Yorke & Knight, 2004).

Theoretical Framework: Emotional Intelligence

This study employed Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a framework to explore its influence on the workplace interactions between Millennials and preceding generational cohorts in the workforce. Carter (n.d.) explained the popularity and the rationale for developing emotional intelligence in the workforce:

The reason that EI has fired such intense public interest is that, unlike traditional ideas of intelligence which posit that intelligence remains relatively static, EI techniques can be learned. It is not based on a measure of innate ability, socioeconomic status or cultural factors. While researchers and practitioners have primarily focused on the development of EI in children to promote future success, it would seem that adult learners could also benefit by learning the components of EI, particularly those involving motivation and social skills. (para. 3)

Goleman (1995) defined EI as “being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods
and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope” (p. 34).

Other explanations of emotional intelligence often include descriptions of the ability to manage one’s own emotions, understanding the emotion of others, being empathetic, adapting, and interpersonally recognizing and expressing emotions (Goleman, 1995).


1. **Self-awareness**: The ability to read and understand one's emotions, strengths, weakness, drives, values and goals, and recognize their impact on others. By implication such understanding or awareness of self is used to guide decisions made using gut feeling.

2. **Self-management**: Is also in a sense seen as self-regulation or the ability to control and redirect disruptive emotions and impulses, as well as adaptability to changing circumstances. The hallmarks for this construct are trustworthiness, integrity, conscientiousness, adaptability, self-control, achievement drive, initiative and comfort with ambiguity and change.

3. **Social awareness**: this subsumes empathy which is an ability to put into consideration, other’s feelings, especially when making decisions. It also implies treating people according to their emotional reactions. Social
awareness also entails being service centered and having the organisation at the forefront.

4. Relationship management: Is an ability to manage relationships by inspiring, influencing, developing and building-up others in the desired direction in order to achieve set objectives. Here there is a need for effective communication, building bonds, team work or collaboration and ability to manage conflict with inspirational leadership. (Igbinovia, 2016, p. 4)

History of the Emotional Intelligence Concept

The impetus of social and emotional intelligence dates back to 1920 when Thorndike projected social intelligence (SI) and intelligence quotient (IQ) theories. Gardner’s theory of personal intelligence (1983) evolved Thorndike’s work. Gardner’s and Thorndike’s theories overlap in their definition of interpersonal intelligence as “the ability to determine the feelings of others and behave appropriately” (Giraud, 2012, p. 25)

Walter Payne (1985) often receives credit for the term emotional intelligence due to his research conducted in his dissertation study of the development of emotional intelligence. However, prior to this publication, the term appeared in Leuner’s (1966), Emotional Intelligence and Emancipation. Stanley Greenspan (1989) also published an emotional intelligence model. Scholars Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990) popularized the term emotional intelligence and defined it as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 189). They later modified the term:
[Emotional intelligence] involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 23).

Research relevant to emotional intelligence assessments flourished in the late 1990s, and later became known as the emotionally intelligent decade (Carson et al., 2000). Weisinger (1998) explained the key to emotional intelligence is being intentional on making “emotions work by using them to help guide your behavior and thinking in ways that enhance your results” (p. xvi). This framework has gained interest among researchers over the years and appears to regain momentum with the generational shift in the workforce.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) impacts how individuals interpret matters both professionally and personally, and it is also an influential factor in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. Behavioral scientists have attempted to comprehend the functionality and behaviors of individuals in varied settings. General descriptors have been representative of the footing for individual theories established by various scholars (Goleman, 1995).

Research has recognized emotional intelligence as an important characteristic of one’s ability to gain employment and sustain employment (Beukes, 2009). Researchers Young et al. (1997) claimed that emotions are closely related to individuals’ career goals, plans, and needs. Zimmermann (1995) recognized more than 20 years ago that “higher
education is concerned with cultural diversity issues, both to enhance students’ experiences on campus and to prepare them to function in their careers and in the larger society” (p. 321). These emotions activate achievement and provide meaning to the construction of a career path for individuals.

Support and Criticism of Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has significantly developed since its conception in 1990 and after gaining popularity outside of academia in 1995 following Daniel Goleman’s influential book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Following this publication, numerous assessments developed from other research studies to place context to the role of EI in work settings. Spielberger (2004) clarified three assessments of emotional intelligence recognized and discussed in the work published by researchers, Mayer et al. (1999), Goleman (1998), and Bar-On (2006). Widely used in current research related to emotional and social intelligence, these assessments include Mayer Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 1999), the Emotional Competence Inventory (Goleman, 1998) and the Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 2006).

Although research and scholars support the work of Mayer et al. (1999), Goleman (1998), and Bar-On (2006), Roberts et al. (2001) also critiqued the work and argued that emotional intelligence lacks validity and reliability. However, Mayer et al. (1999) maintained there is evidence of validity and reliable measures of emotional intelligence. In more than 20 studies, researchers have examined the link between emotional-social intelligence and “physical health, mental health, educational success, social engagement,
work performance and self-actualization” (Bar-On et al., 2005). Bar-On et al explained in their research study that it is possible to teach and improve emotional and social intelligence (SI) in both children and adults. Former research studies on EI and SI started with children due to a concern of the results when children transition to higher education or the workplace upon graduation (Behera et al., 2017). The results of these studies provided understanding of the performance of persons in the workplace, as well as persons engaging in social environments.

Weisinger’s (1998) model of emotional-social intelligence is one that supports the joining EI and SI because of their similarities. It holds these components as the source for using EI and SI for assessing the emotional and social skills in Millennials. The subscales of the interpersonal (social) scale include self-awareness, managing emotions, and self-motivation; the subscales of the intrapersonal (emotional) scale includes relating well to others and emotional mentorship. According to Mayer et al. (1999), EI levels increase with age because of accumulated life experiences. In addition to this ideology, researchers Boyatzis and Saaticioglu (2008) examined EI as a responsibility of the department of career services at their respective universities in which they were faculty members. This longitudinal study found that it is possible to develop social competency in students, but a “tumultuous organizational climate” (p. 92) or failure to reflect and continuously adjust programs undermined the implementation of EI and SI curriculum with the students. Research suggests the importance of emotional and social learning, but limited application is present in academia (Machera & Machera, 2017).
Goleman (1995) argued that emotional competencies of EI could predict success in life, and more importantly, play an integral role in the workplace. The initial introduction of emotional intelligence was as a trait; later research studies presented it as an ability. On page 318 of Working with Emotional Intelligence, Goleman (1998) explained the competencies and skills that drive leadership performance:

Self-Awareness: Knowing one’s emotions, strengths, weakness, drives, values and goals and recognize their impact on others while utilizing intuition for decision-making

Self-Regulation: Managing and redirecting negative emotions and instincts while adapting to changing environments

Social Skills: Managing emotions of others to move people in a desirable direction

Empathy: Recognizing, understanding, and considering other people’s feelings when involved in the decision-making process

Motivation: The ability to inspire oneself to succeed for the sake of achievement

An individual’s work environment contains a wide array of emotions and personalities influenced by social environments, family dynamics, and social and historical events. Emotions provide information of how individuals think and experience in given situations, and they reveal the coping mechanisms alongside the demands of work and stress attributed to the work environment. Goleman (1998) suggested that traditional intelligence is a quality associated with leadership success; however, it is insufficient without a substantial level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence,
widely recognized as a valuable skill, is one that researchers believe can be improved with training and practice (Kotsou et al., 2011).

Summary

With the global marketplace and economic growth, employers express growing concern about how to face the challenge of the increasing gap between the acquired skills of jobseekers and those essential to their professional success. The overall feedback of respondents in a Gallup poll conducted in 2015 indicated that Americans find it increasingly important to invest in the professional training, development, and education in the U.S. workforce, as well as the federal government and local communities.

With a growing concern of the state of the multigenerational workforce and the Millennials’ limitations of attaining professional skills and being employable, it is important to recognize the work of Cherniss and Goleman (2001), who claimed, “As one accumulates more experience, emotional intelligence increases” (p. 29). As such, practices in institutions of higher education may be impactful in the development of skilled and prepared graduates who seek to enter the workforce. This study sought to explore the work experiences of Millennial college graduates and their perceptions of the soft skills they gained in preparation for the workforce and descriptions of their interactions with their Baby Boomer and Generation X colleagues. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach to this examination.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Expansions in higher education have highlighted an importance of the employability and soft skill sets of college graduates in the workforce. Various surveys conducted with businesses regarding the abilities and employability of graduates have driven this agenda. Higher education holds a significant role in the development of young professionals; it serves as a training ground in preparing the student population for the workforce. There is an emerging concern regarding the development of professional skills in college graduates and the lack of capabilities valued and expected from employers (Holt et al., 2010). The increase in generational diversity in the workforce (Johnson, 2015; Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Savino, 2017; Soni, 2017) emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural phenomena that may influence work practices and the need for young professionals to receive adequate resources and training in higher education institutions to so they can engage in the workplace utilizing both hard and soft skills.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence as it relates to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace.
Research Questions Reiterated

The researcher utilized the methods delineated in this chapter to answer the following research questions:

1. How did Millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years?

2. How do millennial students integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?

Rationale for Research Study

To address the research questions, the researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to assess college graduates’ soft skills achieved through higher education training while utilizing an intersection of emotional intelligence and soft skill acquisition to assess interactions between Millennials and their colleagues, Baby Boomers and GenXers. These are explained through a phenomenological study (Stake, 1995), where the researcher directed attention towards the concern of Millennials’ lack of soft skills in the workplace relative to preceding generational cohorts, Baby Boomers and GenXers (Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Rainie & Anderson, 2017; Salahuddin, 2010). This study is important in understanding how higher education can better prepare students for a generationally diverse workforce.

Research Design

Crotty (1998) delineated four elements of qualitative research design: epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and research methods. The
epistemology informs the theoretical perspective. In turn, theoretical perspective informs the methodology, which informs the method used to collect data (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology

For more than a century, the epistemology of behaviorism served as the framework essential to the curriculum and instruction for career preparation. However, constructionist principles of instruction have both philosophical and psychological origins where the vast amount of knowledge gained for learners is from their personal experiences (Fosnot, 1996; Steffe & Gale, 1995). Constructionism may have implications for career preparation and emotional intelligence for undergraduate students. Increased generational diversity in the workplace highlights the need for graduates of higher education institutions to hold tools valued by employers and comprised of both hard and soft skills. Therefore, the researcher’s epistemology for this study is constructionism. The identified epistemology recognizes the learner’s role in attaining knowledge and the importance of both individual and social experiences. Additionally, it also recognizes that the knowledge gained will be representative of reality based upon its level of validity. As such, the researcher adopted interpretivism as the theoretical perspective for this study. Crotty (1998) explained this perspective is concerned with understanding, and the researcher found this important for the nature of this study.

Theoretical Perspective

This study implemented the framework of emotional intelligence to find evidence of individuals’ ability to recognize and consider their actions when interacting with others (Goleman, 1995). Additionally, it explained the “cognitive, emotional and social
dimensions of behavior” (Gibb, 2014, p. 564), which references characteristics in relation to professional development and performance. This theoretical framework, also referred to as Emotional quotient (EQ), holds the power to recognize, understand, and manage emotions and interactions with colleagues in the workplace. Many also believe EQ is related to stress management, conflict, and overall performance in the workplace. Research suggests that emotionally charged interactions often hinder effective collaborations, but a higher EQ can yield positive outcomes and the ability to avoid conflict (Thompson & Miller, 2018).

Methodology

A phenomenological study is the most appropriate for this study because it served as an empirical inquiry that allowed the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in the context of real-life. Phenomenology is the research method, as explained by Creswell (2013), that describes the concept of a phenomenon and provides commonalities of the lived experiences of persons who experience this phenomenon. Because the confines between the phenomenon and context lacked clarity, a phenomenological study had the potential to provide in-depth understanding through the relating of participants’ experience with the phenomenon through interviews.

The researcher utilized the five steps as described in Moustakas’s (1994) systematic method for conducting phenomenological research. First, the researcher determined the phenomenological approach was the best methodology to examine the research problem. Second, the researcher identified a phenomenon of interest to study. For the current study, the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon of Millennials
in the workforce and the workplace dynamics of working with two to three generational cohorts. Third, the researcher identified the broad theoretical norms of phenomenology to bracket out her own experiences. Fourth, the researcher prepared to collect data from individuals who had experienced the phenomenon. This involved obtaining permission from the Mercer University Internal Review Board (IRB), developing the sample criteria, and recruiting participants from various social media platforms who were experiencing the phenomenon. Since Creswell (2013) recognized interviewing as the most typical method to utilize for phenomenological studies, the researcher created an open-ended interview protocol and sent invitations to participants to schedule interviews. Each of the participants received informed consent letters that provided details of the study, ensured confidentiality, and related how the researcher would use the data. After selecting the sample and receiving signed informed consent forms, the researcher forwarded a confirmation letter, developed interview questions, and scheduled interviews. Fifth, the researcher conducted interviews via video conferencing to ask general questions relevant to the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon.

Research Method

The researcher developed interview questions to obtain information about the experiences of the population who were experiencing the phenomenon, the skills they found most valuable at their place of employment, and their interpretation of their experiences in the workplace with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues. Additionally, the researcher utilized the study’s theoretical framework to design a series of open-ended questions. Ultimately, the researcher sought to gain understanding of the
participants’ lived experiences to answer the research questions and understand the phenomenon under investigation.

Sampling Strategy

The researcher used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) to develop the sample. Creswell (2013) posited three considerations when utilizing a purposeful sampling approach: (a) decide who will participate in the study; (b) the sampling strategy; and (c) determine the sampling size. For this study, the researcher searched for at least 10 participants through a request on social media platforms. Criteria for participation were as follows: (a) born between 1981 and 1997; (b) graduated from a four-year college or university within the past five years; (c) worked for a minimum of one year at current place of employment; (d) employed in a business of generational diversity that included Millennials, Baby Boomers, and GenXers. As such, the sample included Millennials who had graduated from a four-year institution within the past five years and worked for at least one year with the same employer and individuals representing multi-generations. Specifically, the sample had to have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

The researcher applied for approval to conduct the study from the Mercer University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After obtaining approval (see Appendix A), the researcher began the process of soliciting potential participants for the study. The researcher contacted the study site to make inquiries regarding the appropriate procedures for accessing data from their employees while conducting research on their site. The researcher contacted potential participants utilizing email communication. This invitation
included the purpose of the study and details of the criteria set by the researcher for participation. Ten volunteers met the criteria for participating, but only nine actually participated after signing informed consent forms (see Appendix B).

Research Site

The researcher recruited persons employed with various employers utilizing various social media platforms. However, the researcher provided thorough descriptions of participants’ respective work sites. Upon final selections of study participants, the researcher utilized film to conduct interviews as this served as the best method of communication and proved convenient for the participants and the researcher.

Validation

To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher incorporated strategies of qualitative research validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria for trustworthiness to incorporate such strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility entails the confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings; transferability reveals the findings have applicability in other contexts; dependability explains that the findings are consistent and could be repeated; and, confirmability serves as a degree of neutrality and mitigates research bias, motivation, or interest.

Additionally, to mitigate bias, the researcher used member checking and bracketing (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) declared that member checking is the most important component of establishing data credibility. Member checking
allowed participants to verify the researcher’s interpretation of the data and enhanced the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Subjectivity Statement

Due to the qualitative design of this study, the researcher was aware of the possibility of biases that might affect the outcome of this study. The researcher understood that her prior role as a faculty member and career advisor to master’s students at a local medical institution might influence those biases. As such, to mitigate bias, the researcher employed epoche, which is a bracketing procedure used by researchers to rescind personal experiences and take a “fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2014, p. 80).

Data Collection

The researcher sought to understand the experiences of Millennials and their interactions with Baby Boomers and GenXers in the workplace while gaining an in-depth understanding of how this generational cohort perceived their skills and what they found most valuable in the workplace compared to what older generations value. The data collection process involved the technique of interviewing to generate data applicable to the research questions. The researcher conducted individual interviews with nine participants. As mentioned earlier, interviews occurred through video conferencing, a venue that promoted convenience for participants and researcher, as well as served as record for the researcher to review repeatedly. Table 2 displays the interview questions designed by the researcher to facilitate this understanding.
**Table 2**

*Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Define the Millennial generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Define the Baby Boomer generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Define Generation X.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which of these cohorts do you identify?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How do you define professional/soft skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How do you apply these skills in your environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What skills did you learn from your undergraduate training?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How did these skills prepare you for your job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How do you use Self-Awareness in the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How did your undergraduate institution help you become more self-aware?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Describe your self-management skills in the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Explain how your undergraduate training prepared you with your self-management skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How socially aware are you in your work environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What experiences in undergrad helped you become more socially aware?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How did this training equip you with this skill for the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How would you describe your social skills at your job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How do you utilize your social skills in the workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How would you define emotional intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In what ways did your undergraduate institution provide you with elements of emotional intelligence?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The researcher employed the steps generally used in a phenomenological data analysis. The researcher’s role, when utilizing this design, is to identify themes noting that qualitative analyses may be subjective and contain bias. As an extension from the research questions, the research highlighted the *significant statements* from participants’ interviews that provided an understanding of their lived experiences of the phenomenon.
(Creswell, 2014). The researcher utilized these statements to develop themes and write a description of the participants’ experiences, which are textural descriptions. In addition, the researcher included descriptions to provide context around the setting that may have influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon, which are structural descriptions. Employing both textural and structural descriptions, the researcher composed a thorough depiction of the participants’ experiences that presented the invariant structure known as the essence (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

This chapter presented the four elements of qualitative research design as described by Crotty (1998) in terms of this study’s epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and research methods. Specifically, the researcher used these design elements to explore the phenomenon of Millennials’ soft skill acquisition from higher education, the utilization and valuation of these skills by Millennials in the workforce, and their interactions with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to identify and recruit a sample of Millennials to participate in individual interviews. Chapter 4 presents the findings in terms of themes and textural and structural descriptions.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected through interviews of nine Millennials who entered the workforce at full-time status upon graduating from a four-year undergraduate institution. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the work experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates, describe their interactions with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues in the workplace, and identify the skills they valued in the workforce. The nine participants met the following sampling criteria set by the researcher: graduated from a four-year institution of higher education in the past five years; identified as a Millennial according the standards of the Pew Research Center (born between 1981 and 1997), and worked for their current employer for a minimum of one year with a generationally diverse population. This chapter begins with a review of the research questions of the study, followed by profiles of the participants and the findings in terms of themes.

Research Questions Reviewed

1. How did Millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years?

2. How do millennial students integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?
The intent of the research questions was to gain insight into the experiences of recent Millennial graduates and their acquisition and utilization of soft skills in the workplace. Of further interest were the Millennials’ experiences with working with individuals from other generations. Through this research, institutions of higher education may gain an understanding of methods to best equip students in being more employable by developing soft skills.

The workforce is consistently changing because of increased global partnerships and technology advancements, which positions research to increase its attention to soft skills in the workplace. These skills, also known as essential skills, are often recognized as the interpersonal skills, which are often linked to emotional intelligence (Ritter et al., 2018). This research employed emotional intelligence as a framework to explore its influence on soft skills acquisition of college students and their transition into the workforce.

Participant Profiles

Ten Millennials employed full-time for a minimum of one year in a multi-generational workplace and graduated from a four-year undergraduate institution within the last five years, volunteered their time to interview for this study. Nine respondents actually participated in the interview. To maintain anonymity, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the participants, their undergraduate institutions, and their employers. Table 3 provides a brief description of each participant: Nyla, Patrice, Hal, Tim, Lisa, Darlene, Ava, Justin, Lori. The subsequent narrative introduces the participants,
Table 3

*Description of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>25-year old female; employed for two years with a large business consulting firm in Ontario, Canada; graduate from a four-year public research university in Ontario, Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>24-year-old male; employed for a year and a half with a major pharmaceutical firm in New York City; graduate from a military, four-year undergraduate institution in the southeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>30-year old female; employed as a store manager for a large fashion retailer; graduate from a four-year undergraduate state institution in the southern region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>28-year old male employed as a consultant for three years with a large business consulting firm in the northeast region of the United States; graduate from a four-year undergraduate state university in the northeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrice</td>
<td>25-year old female, employed as a consultant for 18 months with a large business consulting firm in Ontario, Canada; graduate from a public research, four-year undergraduate institution in Ontario, Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>26-year old female employed as a graduate assistant for one year with and a graduate from a private, women’s four-year undergraduate institution in the southeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>24-year old female employed as a senior administrative assistant for one year with and a graduate from a private, women’s four-year undergraduate institution in the southeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyla</td>
<td>31-year old female employed as a program manager for three-and-a-half years for a private, male four-year undergraduate institution in the southeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>26-year old male employed for a large banking firm in the southeastern region of the United States; graduate from a four-year state university in the northeast region of the United States.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

This section reports the researcher’s findings regarding the experiences of nine Millennial recent graduates who had been employed for a minimum of one year with their current employer in a multi-generational workplace. Also reported are the Millennials’ feelings and thoughts related to how they best developed their soft skills and how they utilized these skills in the workplace. By examining the interview transcripts and gaining an understanding of the themes through the significant statements made in the interviews, the researcher employed the less-structured approach developed by van Manen (2016) of reflecting on the vital meaning of the experiences of the participants. As suggested by van Manen (1990), the researcher utilized a “holistic reading approach” (p. 320) and later analyzed the data for themes to provide meaning to the lived experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher identified common threads that emerged from the data and organized them into two descriptive categories and eight themes that reflect the studied phenomenon. Table 4 illustrates the categories formed and the eight major themes that emerged from the analysis.
Table 4

Overarching Themes by Descriptive Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>• Life Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Campus Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interpersonal Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>• Self-Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Development of Emotional Intelligence

The first theme discovered was *Development of Emotional Intelligence*. Sathitsemakul (2017) defined emotional intelligence as “the ability to perceive emotions and cognitive processes such as reasoning with emotions, understanding their meaning, assimilating and locating relationship between emotions” (p. 12). Three categories comprised this theme: life experience, campus involvement, and interpersonal relationships. The following sections provide discussions of these categories.

Life experience. In this study, valuable skills are the soft or professional talents employees exhibit in the workplace, which also translate into having a high emotional intelligence (EQ) level. Business professionals in the workforce describe and recognize these skills as the interpersonal qualities, personality attributes, and the intangible traits attained by individuals (Matteson et al., 2016; Robles, 2012). When asked to define professional/soft skills, participants reported soft skills as their “interaction with people”, “networking skills”, “discipline”, “organizational skills”, “interpersonal communication”,...
“listening”, “time management”, and “leadership”. However, when asked what skills they learned from their undergraduate training, many of the participants attributed their acquisition of soft skills or EQ to “life experiences”, which resulted in its label as an emergent theme.

For example, Ava reported that she “gained soft skills from extracurricular and different events rather than college classes. I just grew up with emotional intelligence. My undergraduate institution did not help me develop that.”

Similarly, Patrice stated,

I started with a co-op where I worked for two years for a professional company and I would rotate between jobs within the company. This allowed me to learn the role of everyone there. In school, I would collaborate with others, share ideas and present data to the class. I was a Chemistry major, so most of what I do is analytical. I guess this is how I learned my soft skills.

Ava plainly stated, “I understand everything now that I am in the workforce.”

Darlene stated, “Personal experience with a professor about my hair and other personal experiences helped me develop my emotional intelligence and other skills.”

Campus involvement. Some participants spoke specifically about their campus involvement nurturing their soft skill acquisition and development of emotional intelligence. This type of involvement can range from coursework to social interactions. Students across the world have different experiences related to their personal and professional development during matriculation; however, institutions can share similar curricula that provide students with exposure that offer the tools to success for life after
graduation. An example of similar exposure occurred with Nyla and Lori, who both attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU). They noted how it served an essential role in their development of soft skills and emotional intelligence. Nyla mentioned her institution was “huge on image and how [students] portrayed [themselves]. Classes had a dress code; we had to introduce ourselves when we met people. My school made it an easy transition to practice my skills in the workplace.” Nyla also stated,

My institution prepared me for my current job. It helped me keep my cool at work. I learned when I was frustrated, how not to blow up. I know how maintain the good image. I also have school pride and representing myself and my family. Psychology courses, seminar events and my University 101 class also helped me build emotional intelligence.

Conversely, Lori, who attended a women’s HBCU, noted the varied layers of her acquisition of soft skills from institution were not elaborate enough. She also described the Board of Trustees as being too formal, but the importance of this statement is there was a relationship or knowledge of the board. Lori also stated that communication delivery should be more refined. The second layer entails how as a music major she sought leadership from a professor but found herself in a position where she had to take the lead. Lori made inferences that her organizational skills developed from a poor experience with another professor. The final layer included her psychology course, which offered her the understanding of knowing the backgrounds of other people and how they feel. She stated this course taught her to understand “how people tick and how
the brain works with circumstances and belonging.” Lastly, Lori mentioned her experience at an HBCU provided her the following experience.

At my school, we have a wide spectrum of women—different shades, shapes and different walks of life. I actually met a rich girl in school. If you embrace the differences, then you will be fine. Agree to disagree. If we thought the same, it would be boring.

Tim acknowledged his institution did not teach him the skills to prepare him for the workforce. However, he also stated, “People go to a four-year school and not being home and making a living—that’s when you get to know your emotional intelligence. It’s all through your college experience.”

Hal’s undergraduate experience was similar to that of Lori’s in the sense of being one that was single gender setting. Hal held his alma mater with high regard and school loyalty. He noted that it provided him a wealth of knowledge in building his soft skills. He stated the following:

I learned a lot of leadership skills at my school. I was in ROTC in each class each semester—it was a requirement. Students at my school are required to take a leadership and business class in the senior year if not going to the military. I was bestowed emotional intelligence from my school by being placed in an unfamiliar environment with unfamiliar people and having to be in a stressful environment. With this, you have to pick up on the social cues faster and pay more attention to them because otherwise, you will be behind in day to day tasks.
Interpersonal relationships. Participants expressed their feelings that interpersonal relationships contributed to their soft skills development and emotional intelligence. They referenced “interactions with other people”, “interpersonal communication”, “intangible”, and “being relatable” in response to how they developed soft skills and emotional intelligence. Thus, the emerging theme was “interpersonal relationships”. Patrice, whose line of work involved daily communication and relationship-building with clients, shared that “soft skills are not dependent on another tool. They are not hard-based skills. It’s all about communication and more focused on your industry.”

Patrice also shared her understanding of emotional intelligence as knowing how to operate under different circumstances. When asked if her institution was responsible for developing her emotional intelligence, she responded with “my social interactions through group work helped develop my emotional intelligence”. Thus, collaborative work shaped her EQ.

Hal reflected on the relationship between soft skills and emotional intelligence by noting they were the same, and they ultimately involve knowing people are communicating with you. It is simply being human, according to Hal. He also shared his college experience by stating, “My school taught me a lot about soft skills and how to deal with people.” He continued, “I have to interact with people all day through phone calls and being personal with my customers. I am relatable and a good person, and emotional intelligence is the ability to relate to people on a personal level.”
Application of Emotional Intelligence

The management of emotional intelligence takes place through the following five competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skills and empathy. In Goleman’s (1998) *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, he posited that when emotional intelligence is applied in the workplace, the employee is skilled in two key areas: *personal competence*, which is personal management of our actions, and *social competence*, which is management of our relationships. Table 5 displays the competencies structured under each key area delineated by Goleman (1998).

Table 5

*Goleman’s (1998) Key Areas of Emotional Intelligence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Competence Category</th>
<th>Social Competence Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness (of internal states, preferences, resources and intuitions)</td>
<td>Empathy (awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation (of internal states, impulses, and resources)</td>
<td>Social Skills (adept at inducing desirable responses in others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation (tendencies that facilitate reaching goals)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher identified the five competencies as the five themes that describe participants’ application of emotional intelligence in the workplace—*self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills*. These emergent themes address the second research question: “How do Millennial students integrate the five
competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?”

**Personal Competence**

As illustrated in Table 5, the five domains of emotional intelligence consist of two key areas: personal competence and social competence Goleman (1998). Personal competence is comprised of the domains that highlight self-awareness, self-management of one’s emotions, and personal motivation. The following sections offer discussions of the participants’ experiences with, and feelings about, these competencies, which are related as themes.

Self-Awareness is a responsibility. According to Goleman (2000), self-awareness is an element of emotional intelligence recognized as knowing what one is feeling at any given time and understanding the impact those moods have upon others. As such, in this study, the participants described their ideology of self-awareness as “acknowledgment”. They expressed how they recognized when they were beginning to feel frustration in the workplace, and how they handled it. Each participant in this spoke about self-awareness as something they all applied in their work environments through understanding their colleagues and their feelings, helping in the office, and acting responsibly. For example, Darlene simply stated that self-awareness to her is “being aware of your external environment”, and when she was in the workplace, she recognized that her technique of barking orders was ineffective. Once she became more aware of her environment and those she managed, she “schooled [herself] on how to be a good manager”. She also
stated, “I don’t want to treat others the way I don’t want to be treated. I make sure I am fair to everyone in the workplace.”

As Goleman (1998) suggested in his model, self-awareness is categorized as a personal competence in which self-awareness is recognized as intuition which is evident in Darlene’s observation with her employees. Darlene’s staff did not express their discontent with her “barking orders” method of management, but over time and through professional development training, she became more aware of the best methods to manager her team, which she perceived to be successful.

Lisa, an active employee, attempted to recognize others’ emotions in the workplace. She stated the she used self-awareness to “be mindful of how [I] say something because ‘how’ is very important”. Lisa attributed her acquisition of self-awareness and other elements of emotional intelligence to being raised in a two-generation household, which included a Baby Boomer and a GenXer. She also attributed her success with emotional intelligence to being an only child, where there was no peer guidance and solely parental guidance. Lisa noted her HBCU contributed to her being more self-aware:

Physical appearance was key in undergrad. We were taught that we must make a great first impression. Being that I am mostly natural, and I attended a predominantly White high school, I understood and learned how to appreciate myself and others.
Lori identified self-awareness is a responsibility. She, too, attended an HBCU, to which she attributed much of her success in applying more self-awareness in the workplace. She explained her perception of self-awareness:

Self-awareness goes hand-in-hand with responsibility. I am a helper, and I try to give assistance even when I don’t understand. Even when I didn’t do something the way it needed to be, I just learned to not let certain things get to me.

When Lori recognized that life happens after college, she recognized that by trial-and-error, she would have figure out how to succeed on her own because she is responsible for learning the proper way of being an employee and adhering to the expectations of her leadership.

Hal’s response to how he applied self-awareness in the workplace provides another example. He attributed much of his knowledge of being more self-aware to his educational training at his alma mater, in the form of presentation and leadership opportunities in his courses. He stated, “Prior to college, I did not have a lot of knowledge of self-awareness at all. I was thrown into all. Self-awareness picked up when I became confident in my skills.” These examples reveal the emergence of the theme, *Self-awareness is a responsibility* from this inquiry.

Self-Regulation as a controlling tool. When participants responded with their awareness and application of self-regulation in the workplace, most related this to control of their emotions and how they respond. Goleman (1998) identified this element as one that assists in redirecting one’s emotion rather than acting on impulse. As such, three of the nine participants felt somewhat comfortable in saying they applied self-regulation in
their work relationships, whereas, the remaining six participants admitted self-regulation as a work in progress with many failed attempts.

Ava, who struggled with stress, stated “I focus my attention on physical activity when I am stressed. I do Thai outside of work, and that helps me feel much better.”

Hal shared, “I rely on the chains of communication and cascading through other people. Self-regulation helps me to be more efficient in the office.”

Also feeling successful at utilizing self-regulation as a tool in the workplace, Darlene recalled her academic struggles in undergrad strengthening her ability to self-regulate. She explained, “College moved too fast and I struggled initially. I made two Fs, and that’s when I realized I needed to get more organized. To this day, I prioritize everything that I do. I prepare today for tomorrow.

The other participants felt that self-regulation was a struggle for them, so most noted that their response in difficult situations was to be silent. Lori stated, “I am still learning this. I naturally go silent when I experience a negative situation. I tend to hide my negative emotions.”

Concurrently, Lisa felt that same as Lori and attributed a few explanations behind this struggle.

I still need work in this area as it’s three-fold. I lived in a two-generation, Black family, and only-child household. I believe that when speaking with someone of the older generation, you should not disrespect them. So, I tend to keep quiet if I am in a situation that’s beyond my control.
Nyla shared, “I try not to be confrontational. I am okay as long as I walk away. I want control when I am in the moment, so speaking lowly is key to think about the delivery of the message.”

Six of the nine participants felt they needed improvement in the area of self-regulation of their emotion while at work. They felt that confronting an issue would be interpreted as disrespectful to colleagues of older generations, or it would simply be in poor professional taste. However, three participants found their response of silence, diversion to other activities, or simply a professional response were signs of having control of any situation in the workplace which, to them, constituted self-regulation. As such, *Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool* emerged as an overarching theme.

Motivation to take the next step. Motivation is the final element of emotional intelligence that falls under the category of personal competence (Goleman, 1998). This element describes the emotional factors that one utilizes to achieve goals and the enjoyment of the learning process, while persevering when faced with obstacles. When asked about participants’ motivation in the workplace three of the nine participants expressed that their levels of motivation had diminished over time. For example, Ava shared her experience with a reduction in motivation in the workplace.

I started off more motivated, but I feel like I’ve lost a lot of motivation because I don’t feel like I’m getting enough fulfillment from the job that I do right now because it doesn’t exactly align with my values. I started off with a lot of motivation, dedication, and everything, but over time, as I interacted with more
people, and I understood my work a bit more, I found that it wasn’t something that I could put my hundred percent and all my heart into.

Similar to Ava, both Nyla and Justin expressed their low motivation levels in the workplace. Nyla stated “My motivation levels are very low. I’m trying to find something to enhance that, but I continue to get up in the morning, and I’m still not excited to be there.”

Justin mentioned, “I am not intrinsically motivated. I like teams—I feed off the energy of others.”

Given that Lori worked at her alma mater, she shared her school pride and how she was both academically and professionally trained. She explained,

I love my undergraduate institution and what it does to help African American women to take the next step in life. I love its mission and the existence of this school and what it stands for. Despite the issues, certain things, you can’t buy or trade.

The question around levels of motivation in the workplace to achieve one’s goals yielded only three responses from the nine participants. Of those three, two noted their contempt of their office environment, and one embraced the culture of her work environment despite the issues. They mostly spoke of their motivation as it related to their feelings and experiences surrounding the achievement of their goals in their current position and what kept them successful. Ultimately, the theme Motivation to Take the Next Step emerged for this segment.
Social Competence

Social competence is comprised of the domains that highlight social awareness and management of relationships. This section offers a discussion of the elements of social competence of emotional intelligence. Also included are the details captured from the participants’ response to questions related to the two remaining domains, empathy and social skills, of the model, which are related as themes.

Empathy as a blessing and a curse. Empathy is the ability to sense the emotions of others. The participants’ account of empathy in the workplace consisted of their knowledge and application with colleagues. Specifically, participants recounted events related to how caring and thoughtful they were when colleagues were in need of support. Some felt that it was a positive quality, but they expressed others might interpret it as a sign of weakness. For example, given her prior experience as a woman in a male-dominated environment, Ava expressed apprehension towards empathy in the workplace:

I’ve heard from my friends that I am empathetic, and I find that it’s a good quality to have when people share. You then learn that other people care about you, too. When it’s just one-sided or one time, then it’s—for a lack of a better term—dangerous. In this industry, if you show too much empathy or care too much, or being too nice, people will take advantage of that.

Lori recounted a previous childhood experience that strengthened her ability to be more empathetic in the workplace. She explained, “I was bullied as a child, so I can empathize better. Being Black, a woman and Muslim, my empathy levels are high.” Lori also recognized her youth lent her an opportunity as an administrative assistant to
not only learn more in her role, but to provide support to older colleagues. She shared, “No training is available at my job, so I help other admins as they helped me.”

Similar to Ava, Lisa specifically noted her feelings apprehension about empathy. She explained, “It’s a blessing and a curse. I can pick up on emotions if I am not wrapped in myself. I can take on too much and it can be overwhelming.”

Conversely, as the youngest in the office, Nyla felt that she could work towards being more empathetic. She explained, “I am not strong as an empath because I feel I, too, have problems which are more important. I am overwhelmed and underpaid.”

The participants shared their understanding of empathy and revealed if they felt they embodied this quality. Of the nine participants, eight provided a response explaining their understanding; however, a majority of them felt reluctant to allow themselves to show empathy out of fear of others taking advantage of their kindness.

Given dual perception of this domain in emotional intelligence, Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse emerged as a theme to describe the participants’ appraisal of their application.

Social skills to move in the right direction. As a component of emotional intelligence, social skills are the ways people manage relationships to induce the desired responses from them. The researcher asked participants how socially aware they were in their work environment, and how they managed the social aspect of their relationships. The nine participants seemed to have a decent social relationship with colleagues; however, some noted the generational differences impacted the development of those
relationships. Lori highlighted both her social skills with both family and colleagues by sharing her experiences with both. She stated,

I am very social . . . and can be more quiet because I am the youngest in the family. I have more to say now that I am older. I can get along with different generations because my mom taught me how to be cordial. I began to do professional shows at a very young age. I began to develop an ego, and my mom corrected me and informed me someone is always better. This humbled me. At work, I know that I must be kind to others because it makes me feel good.

Other participants’ accounts of social skills exhibited in the workplace included their methods to balance both professionalism and social skills with their colleagues. Darlene spoke of her role as manager and building her relationships with her employees utilizing her social skills:

I am a people person and I love to learn new things. For conflict, I make them talk it out, and I examine the situations and allow a resolution to develop. I am careful with how social I am with my associates. I maintain appropriateness and professionalism.

The participants’ appraisal of social skills and their application included how they valued others’ opinions and how they desired to move in their desired directions to have better relationships with younger and older colleagues. Unlike Hal who found social skills to represent “being too willing to work”, many of the participants shared similar perceptions of how social skills could help them break any present professional barriers to lead to having more personal relationships with people at work. Ultimately, they
seemed to be most concerned with delineating the boundary between social and professional, which could cause conflict in the workplace. Nonetheless, learning of the various accounts of social skills and the movement of relationships presented the emergence of Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction.

Summary of Results

The researcher sought to understand the experiences of Millennials who had recently graduated from college and worked with their current employer for a minimum of one year along with colleagues of older generational cohorts. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher employed a qualitative method to explore this phenomenon. This chapter presented the findings of data collected through interviews. Data addressed the following questions:

1. How did millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years?
2. How do Millennials integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?

The researcher identified eight themes, divided into two categories: Development of Emotional Intelligence and Application of Emotional Intelligence. The category, Development of Emotional Intelligence consisted of the following three themes: Life Experience, Campus Involvement, and Interpersonal Relationships. The second category, Application of Emotional Intelligence, consisted of five themes, which entailed the five domains of the Emotional Intelligence Model (Goleman, 1998) with an inclusion of excerpts from the interviews. These themes were also divided into two sub-categories,
personal competence and social competence, as described by Goleman (1998). The five themes included: *Self-Awareness is a Responsibility, Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool, Motivation to take the Next Step, Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse, and Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction*. Overall, the participants provided insight of their knowledge of emotional intelligence and how they felt it developed throughout their college experiences. Furthermore, they offered insight into how they applied the same skills in their intergenerational work environments.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study on Millennial recent college graduates who have been employed for at least one year with their current employer to explore their acquisition, if applicable, of emotional intelligence and the utilization of those skills in the workplace. This chapter consists of a summation of the study and provides a discussion of the findings as they relate to the two research questions.

Presented first is a summary of the study, followed by a summary of the major findings. Next is a discussion of the relationship between the findings and the theoretical framework. The chapter ends with acknowledgment of limitations, recommendations for future research, and final thoughts of the researcher.

Summary of the Study

As related earlier, Cherniss and Goleman (2001) claimed, “As one accumulates more experience, emotional intelligence increases” (p. 29). Emotional intelligence is gaining popularity at this time as an option to assist in the struggle faced by employers to sustain strong connections with a generationally diverse workforce. Millennials, recognized as the largest generation to emerge since the Baby Boomer generation, comprise more than 35% of the total population in the United States (Fry, 2018) and almost half of those employed in the United States (Keene & Handrich, 2015). Kosterlitz and Lewis (2017) predicted Millennials’ participation in the workforce will
continue to expand to and add to the diversity in the generational makeup of the workplace, currently made up of the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, GenXers, and Generation Z (5%).

In the last decade, an unprecedented four or more generations of employees are working together in the United States, which poses a complex issue among individuals who have differing work practices and beliefs. Each generational cohort develops unique characteristics impacted by experiences during that specified time period in which they are born (Jones, 2016; Twenge et al., 2010). Desilver (2015) highlighted the need to address Millennials’ needs as they enter the workforce due to the fact that, despite holding educational attainment advantages over other generations, Millennials also experience higher instances of unemployment.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence as it relates to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace. The researcher utilized the theory of emotional intelligence in this study to provide insight into its usefulness in increasing individuals’ soft skills and employability, as well as abilities to develop stronger relationships with others in the workplace. The findings of this study may inform higher education leaders of the benefits of developing and integrating emotional intelligence (EI) models into the curriculum. An additional benefit of this study is that higher education learners and graduates may gain an understanding of the advantage of utilizing the EI model in developing the skills necessary to attain and sustain employment while advancing in their field of work.
Summary of Major Findings

To explore this phenomenon, the researcher employed a qualitative research method conducting one-on-one interviews to address the following research questions:

1. How did millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years?
2. How do Millennials integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?

Data revealed eight themes, divided into two categories: development of emotional intelligence and application of emotional intelligence. Themes categorized under development of emotional intelligence address the first research question and include Life Experiences, Campus Involvement, and Interpersonal Relationships. The themes categorized under application of emotional intelligence, divided into the two sub-categories of personal competence and social competence, address the second research question. Themes categorized under personal competence included Self-Awareness is a Responsibility, Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool, and Motivation to Take the Next Step. Remaining themes categorized under social competence are Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse, and Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction.

Discussion for Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was: How did Millennial students develop in the area of emotional intelligence during their undergraduate years? The themes that provide a response to this question are Life Experiences, Campus Involvement, and Interpersonal Relationships. Participants’ responses provided insight of their collegiate
experiences and involvement on campus related to their skill development and acquisition of emotional intelligence. Literature shows that job-related success and other positive life outcomes are often the result of higher levels of emotional intelligence (Lea et al., 2019). Based on the participants’ responses, it was evident that most institutions of higher education do not directly integrate emotional intelligence in their curricula. However, extra-curricular activities beyond coursework, relationships with peers, and experiential learning opportunities (i.e., internships or group projects) contributed to the participants’ soft skill development or acquisition of elements of emotional intelligence. Although a relationship to higher emotional intelligence levels and positive life outcomes was evident, the link between the two remain unanswered.

In contrast, participants who attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU), seemed to have collegiate experiences that integrated cultural history and highlighted the accomplishments of notable African Americans and alumni from their respective institutions. This type of knowledge may have contributed to the cultural pride of students who were also educated on their role as minorities in society and how to professionally integrate in varied work environments. Furthermore, given these institutions are considerably smaller than other institutions, students have closer interactions with faculty and staff and even one-on-one attention at times. The training provided at these institutions, which mimic mentor-mentee relationships to students, also seem to promote higher levels of emotional intelligence.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) highlighted a popular cliché quoted by author of Bridging the Soft Skills Gap, Bruce Tulgan (2015): People are
hired for hard skills and fired for soft skills. Research highlights various challenges and conflicts between employers and employees who mostly constitute the largest workforce population, Millennials. Literature also emphasizes the concern of the workforce regarding Millennials’ lack of soft skills in comparison to preceding generational cohorts. Despite the recognition of Millennials as the most educated, employers feel their lack of soft skills results in their lack of employability and sustained employment (Queen’s University IRC, 2013; Rainie & Anderson, 2017; Salahuddin, 2010). Nonetheless, the Pew Research Center recommended that provosts of institutions of higher education implement experiential services that will develop students’ emotional intelligence, which later increases their soft skills and makes them more employable (Rainie & Anderson, 2017).

Discussion for Research Question 2

The second research question asked: “How did Millennials integrate the five competencies of emotional intelligence into their intergenerational workplace interactions with colleagues?” The literature has primarily focused on emotional intelligence as a resource that could potentially contribute to the success of students acquiring the necessary skills for gainful and sustained employment for a changing workforce. The National Soft Skills Association (2015) noted emotional intelligence as a set of skills that are formed from a base of elements upon which all soft skills are constructed. However, research has not yet been conducted to reflect results of the integration of emotional intelligence into higher education curricula that has also resulted in employability rates of their graduates in the workforce.
The participants in this study related their experiences of utilizing emotional intelligence in the workplace with their intergenerational colleagues through the five competencies of Goleman’s (1998) model: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The intersection of these competencies and themes that emerged in this study were *Self-Awareness is a Responsibility, Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool, Motivation to take the Next Step, Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse,* and *Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction.*

The theme of *Self-Awareness is a Responsibility* emerged in answer to the second research question. As it relates to emotional intelligence, self-awareness is knowing how you feel and understanding why, as well as understanding who you truly are. When the researcher asked participants to describe how they utilized self-awareness in the workplace, they mostly provided a favorable understanding of being aware of themselves. They also felt that self-awareness was their own responsibility and not that of someone else to teach them. In contrast, the students who attended an HBCU felt their institutions contributed to their self-awareness and understanding of how they felt and who they were. This also translated to their feelings in the workforce as they noted physical appearance and how others think of them in their initial interactions with colleagues.

*Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool* is another theme that emerged in response to the second research question. Self-regulation is an element of emotional intelligence that relates to how one controls his or her response, both verbally and nonverbally, to others. In this study, participants mentioned control as a tool to best develop this
competency in the workplace. Most respondents felt they could improve in the area of self-regulation. Most credited personal experiences in college and in the workforce as helping them develop this skill. Specifically, those who attended an HBCU or the military institution felt their institution equipped them with the tools in developing this skill.

A third emerging theme was Motivation to Take the Next Step, which, in the model of emotional intelligence, is the expended energy needed to move in a specific direction. The participants in this study considered this to be the “right” direction for their career. Specifically, the respondents felt they were highly motivated to take the next steps in their career in the beginning but have since experienced a decline in levels of motivation due to varied experiences. Unsurprisingly, only two participants felt comfortable providing a response to the question related to this competency, which mainly addressed a lack of motivation and a lack of understanding of how to regain it unless they took the next step to achieve it. Notably, one participant who attended an HBCU attributed a famous quote learned from her Freshman Orientation course as a daily motivational reminder: “Good, better, best. Never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best”.

As it relates to the social competence sub-categories, the first theme to emerge was Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse. Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of others. Participants expressed that empathy was a good trait to possess but noted it as a sign of weakness, since others might interpret this level of kindness as a weakness. Hence, the theme Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse emerged in this form
because participants identified empathy as a skill that should be practiced more, but most participants felt they could improve in their development of this skill.

Some challenges faced in college attributed to the participants’ development of this element of emotional intelligence. Others felt empathy was a strong point for them, but if not reciprocated, they would limit their level of empathy towards others in the workplace. Respondents also noted their empathy levels had increased since graduating from college and becoming employed.

The final theme that emerged was *Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction*. As it relates to emotional intelligence, the element of social skills combines effective communication, listening capabilities, teachability, and appropriate assertiveness. However, based on the responses of the participants, they defined social skills as their ability to simply get along with others in the workplace. Here, some highlighted challenges they faced in the workplace with social engagement with intergenerational colleagues. For example, responses focused on women in a male-dominated workforce of limited respect. Another respondent highlighted lack of trust among older colleagues and consistent criticism of the work of their Millennial employees, which prohibited progress and opportunities for innovation.

In summary, it was evident that the coursework of higher education institutions did not directly focus on elements of emotional intelligence. Most respondents noted their collegiate experiences with peers, extra-curricular activities, and other interactions promoted their development of soft skills and elements of emotional intelligence. Participants recognized a disconnect in the workplace with their intergenerational
colleagues, which also aligned with their frustration of feeling stagnant in their careers and lacking motivation to move forward in the same positions. As it related to their utilization of the soft skills and emotional intelligence, participants could use more opportunities to develop these skills, since their knowledge of emotional intelligence was evident. However, appropriately applying the skills and having a full understanding of this application could be refined.

Implications

As presented in Chapter 2, numerous researchers have provided justifications of the need of emotional intelligence in developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and explaining why individuals behave in a certain manner. The practice of emotional intelligence among individuals in work environments has shown to be critical in the workplace, for research supports that it leads to productive and successful outcomes for both the individual and the organization (Weisinger, 1998). Preparing college students for the workforce has gained significant importance in the 21st century because employers have recognized the shift in skill acquisition among Millennials, who now constitute the majority of the workforce population. Demarcation of Millennials’ lack of soft/professional skills by employers has resulted in a demand for institutions of higher education to provide students with the resources and the skills essential for the rapidly changing workforce (Agarwal & Ahuja, 2014; White, 2015; Zhang, 2012). As result of these developing concerns among employers, this study sought to explore the experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of
emotional intelligence as it relates to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace.

This study’s findings add to the body of research associated with students’ collegiate training and preparation for the workforce with a consideration of integrating emotional intelligence into the curriculum. The findings illuminate the importance of experiential learning opportunities while matriculating in college to develop the skills of college students. The goal of this study was to inform researchers, employers, students, and administrators in higher education of the benefits of emotional intelligence to ensure a successful transition to the workplace. The findings of this study suggest favorable outcomes of experience contributing to the professional development of students as they prepare for their career journey.

Limitations

Due to the rapid evolution of this phenomenon, this study experienced a few limitations necessary to consider in future research. Various factors, such as annual progression in age and historical events, may impact each generational cohort, which should also be a consideration in this type of research, since findings and experiences, development, and maturity may also evolve. Additionally, the self-reporting of data makes it difficult to independently verify responses (Ataro, 2010). As such, various tools are available to measure generational placement to best understand participants’ percentage level in a generational cohort considering the near 20-year gap applied in generational identification. Lastly, utilizing a virtual platform to conduct interviews limited the personal interaction with participants who opted out of the video capability.
Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study revealed the acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence among Millennial four-year college graduates in an intergenerational workforce. This study explored emotional intelligence as the framework that contributes to the development of soft skills based on the relationship of both elements noted by former research. This study revealed the skills or elements of emotional intelligence participants felt they acquired over time. Additionally, this study also revealed how participants utilized these skills in their current work environment alongside their intergenerational colleagues.

Most of the participants stated their acquisition of soft skills or emotional intelligence was not from college coursework or material. However, they attributed the acquisition of these skills from personal experiences while in college. These included group activities in and out of class, experiential learning opportunities from activities such as internships or co-ops, and interpersonal relationships developed during their college years. Conversely, participants who attended a historically Black college or university experienced a significant level of training and credited their acquisition of soft skills and elements of emotional intelligence to their college curriculum and some coursework.

Given these findings, the following recommendations for future research are as follows:

- Future researchers could employ a case study design to explore the learned experiences of students from minority serving institutions (MSIs) versus
predominately White institutions (PWIs) and assess their progress after graduation.

- Future researchers could conduct a mixed methods study that examines the curriculum of higher education institutions and its impact on students’ employability and development of soft skills and emotional intelligence. Utilizing an evaluation tool that measures soft skill acquisition would add more data. Additionally, a quantitative design would allow for generalizability of findings.

- Future researchers could conduct a study that assesses the experiences of the employers and other generations in the workplace of members of the younger generations. This would provide a diverse perspective of the highlighted challenges experienced in the workforce and expand the study sample.

- As generations are consistently evolving, it is important to note that the newest cohort to the workforce will include Generation Z, born from 1997 to the present, according to Dimock (2019) of the Pew Research Center, and much of this data will change. Hence, new methods for workforce preparation may emerge.

Final Thoughts

This phenomenological study described the acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence among nine Millennial four-year college graduates who had been employed with their current employer in an intergenerational work environment for a minimum of one year. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of
Millennial four-year college graduates and their acquisition and utilization of emotional intelligence as it related to their success with soft skill development in a generationally diverse workplace. This chapter provided a summary of the study; discussion of the findings with regards to the research questions; implications for higher education leaders, students, and employers; and recommendations for future research. The researcher identified eight themes divided into two categories, of which one category consisted of two sub-categories based on the model of emotional intelligence (Daniel Goleman, 1998). The identified eight themes included: Life Experience, Campus Involvement, and Interpersonal Relationships, Self-Awareness is a Responsibility, Self-Regulation as a Controlling Tool, Motivation to Take the Next Step, Empathy as a Blessing and a Curse and Social Skills to Move in the Right Direction.

The theory of emotional intelligence, originally proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and followed by various revisions, guided this study. Specifically, this study applied Goleman’s (1995, 1998) body of work on emotional intelligence as the primary source in determining Millennials’ level of preparation for an intergenerational workforce. The findings of this study contribute to the body of literature in not only identifying the challenges faced by employers in hiring employable college graduates, but also how higher education institutions may benefit students prior to graduation by equipping them with the tools that include elements of emotional intelligence to be most employable. Institutional leaders of higher education may access the findings of this study to help guide their efforts in developing a curriculum with elements drawn from the practices in other institutions of higher learning that have proved successful in producing
employable graduates. Furthermore, higher education administrators should consider the feedback from employers on their needs to hire employable graduates who hold both the necessary soft and hard skills for sustainable and gainful employment.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
Tuesday, January 8, 2019

Ms. Mythea Campbell-Tolbert
3001 Mercer University Drive
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Addressing Gaps Between Higher Education and Preparation for a Generationally Diverse Workforce [M18122507]

Dear Ms. Tolbert:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 10-Dec-2018 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) 06, 07 per SS FR 60964.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 08-Jan-2019. The protocol expires on 07-Jan-2020. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:

New application for a Phenomenological research study using interviews to explore the work experiences of Millennium four-year college graduates, to describe their interactions they experience with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues, and to describe the skills they value in the workforce.

NOTE: You MUST report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and all accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our Service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM
Director of Research Compliance
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the international conference on harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
NyThea Campbell Tolbert, MPH
Mercer University, Educational Leadership
3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30341,
Faculty Advisor: Pamela Larde, PhD
Mercer University, Department of Educational Leadership, 3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30341, Phone: 678-547-6559.
This research study is designed to explore the work experiences of Millennial four-year college graduates, to describe their interactions they experience with their Generation X and Baby Boomer colleagues; and to describe the skills they value in the workforce. The data from this research will be used to inform researchers, employers, students, and institutions of higher education of the tools that may help in ensuring employability and a smooth transition to the workplace from undergraduate educational training.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will complete a one-on-one interview sharing your experiences in the workplace with your colleagues and tools that prepared you to enter the workforce.
Your participation will take approximately 30-60 minutes in one day session with potential for a brief follow-up meeting for clarity on your responses if necessary.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Participants will reflect and share experiences in the workplace and may experience emotional tension or social discomfort while completing this interview. The tension will not cause any harm. If at any time your participation becomes overwhelming, you may discontinue participation either temporarily or permanently.

Potential Benefits of the Research
Participation in this study may help you to better understand your colleagues in your work environment and provide insight on how to build your professional skills that may result in better engagement in the office. Your participation may also help persons who
work with other generational cohorts who may not have a clear understanding of the professional skills necessary to successfully engage in the workplace and to be effective with your employer.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
To protect your confidentiality, participants will be assigned unique identifiers other than their personal names. Recordings of the discussion will only be viewed by the principal investigators and her advisor/methodologist, Dr. Pamela Larde. Your email address will be kept during the data collection phase for tracking purposes and to provide you with the transcript of your interview for review. The recordings will be stored on a SD card. Following Mercer University’s policy, the recording will be maintained for 3 years and then destroyed.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact the primary investigator, NyThea Tolbert at nythea.p.campbell@live.mercer.edu at any time.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with NyThea Tolbert or forward an email to nythea.p.campbell@live.mercer.edu or Dr. Pamela Larde at

[In Case of Injury]
It is unlikely that participation in this project will result in harm to subjects. If an injury to a subject does occur, he or she may be seen at a local or regional medical facility. All expenses associated with care will be the responsibility of the participant and his/her insurance

[Incentives to Participate]
Participants will be recruited through social media announcements. As an incentive to participate, each participant will receive a gift card not to exceed $25.00 for participating in the interview.

[Audio or Video Taping]
By signing this consent, you are agreeing to participate in a research study and giving consent for the principal investigators to record your responses.

[Reasons for Exclusion from this Study]
This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.
You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

Research Participant Name (Print)  Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

Research Participant Signature  Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date  Date