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ADDRESSING INNOVATIVE IDEAS IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

A Millennial Perspective on Diversity & Multiculturalism

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Issues concerning Millennials are a major source of popular concern. The sheer number of this generation warrants attention from nearly every industry impacted by its presence. As this generation matures, sectors of life and commerce will be revolutionized in accordance with their distinct characteristics. Census data reveals that Millennials are slated to become America's largest population, with numbers surpassing those of Baby Boomers and other previous generations. Totaling 80 million, recent data bolsters this estimate to 100 million with the inclusion of immigrant populations (Orrell, 2009). Moreover, this generation wields 170 billion dollars in purchasing power (Keeter, 2010). Consequently, the advertising industry is increasingly compelled to discover insights that reveal how Millennials think, feel, behave and interact in our ever-changing society.

General Insights into Millennials

Within this contemplation, one must first understand who Millennials are. Although the exact dates of origin and conclusion tend to vary slightly, Millennials are born between 1982-2002 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Known as "Digital Natives," Millennials are the first generation in American history that have grown up totally immersed in a world of digital technology. They are generally marked by heavy usage and familiarity with communications, mass media, digital technology and emphasize this usage as the primary defining characteristic of their generation (Keeter, 2010). Millennials regard behaviors like tweeting and texting, along with social media as normal and integral components of daily life. According to a 2011 study conducted by Cisco System, Millennials view the internet as important as air, water, food, and shelter (Stricker, 2010).

Millennials' technological proclivities extend not just to multiple gadgets but have been fused within their social lives as well. Research has revealed that more than 80% of Millennials sleep with and rely on a cell phone for their communication needs. 88% use their cell phones to text. 75% have created a profile on a social networking site. 20% have posted a video of themselves online (Keeter, 2010). Moreover, the internet rivals

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television as a main news source among this generation and they are more likely than all other age groups to watch videos online, play games and frequently post messages to someone's online profile.
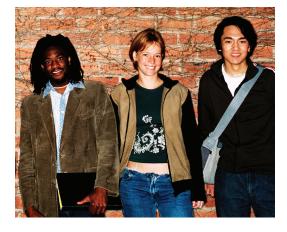
Millennials are America's most ethnically and racially diverse cohort ever. Among Millennials ages 13 to 29: 18.5% are Hispanic; 14.2% are Black; 4.3% are Asian; 3.2% are Mixed Race or Other; and 59.8%, are Caucasian (Keeter, 2010). Millennials have been noted for their high levels of tolerance and desire for self-expression and individuality.

Millennials are on course to become the most educated generation in American history. Hit the hardest by our recent economic crisis, the International Labor Organization reports that 4.5 million Millennials are unemployed (Kean, 2010). Consequently, some Millennials have opted to further their education with secondary degrees while others have decided to move back home. A poll of 2011 college graduates indicates that, approximately 85% of this year's recent graduates will be boomeranging back home (Newman, 2012). Despite harsh setbacks, Millennials remain optimistic. Research reveals that this optimism is not merely a temporary attitude of Millennials towards the economic depression, but indicative of the overall sentiment of this generation (Keeter, 2010).

Millennials are confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change. Research has revealed that Millennials tend to share seven core traits: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured and achieving (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They have a propensity towards altruism and are inclined to support social issues they care about. Additionally, Millennials value family and friends and look forward to incorporating work life balance within their careers (Keeter, 2010).They get along well with their parents and value extended family networks, particularly highly revered grandparents (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

With the dynamic nature of this group, there is a great deal of diversity and complexity. "Helicopter Parents," a term coined for parents of Millennials, have been criticized as being exceptionally protective of this generation and accused of excessive coddling and praise. Research suggests that Millennials have been consistently taught to put their own needs first and to focus on feeling good about themselves (Twenge, 2009). Moreover, research indicates that Millennials incessant use of technology has contributed to their impatience, high expectations, appetite for brevity and shortened attention spans (Hoover, 2009). Nonetheless, Millennials revel in their abilities to multi-task, covet the technology that facilitates their lifestyle and desire to always stay connected (Keeter, 2010). Moreover, research indicates that a great deal of attention has been placed upon the characteristics of the majority Millennial populations (Bonner et al., 2011). Although Millennials share numerous traits, diversity within ethnic culture, geographic location and economic background has produced variance.

As noted by Pushpa Gopalan, Senior Vice President of Strategic Planning at Leo Burnett USA, "We (Advertisers) assumed we would know a lot if we knew a person's age, ethnicity and income, and I can make a few as-

sumptions about them, which just does not bear true." Although she believes the complexities of Millennials makes advertisers' jobs harder, she contends that it's much more interesting to figure them out. Zandile Blay, Harvard University Fellow, bolsters that sentiment by pointing out that, "There's such a huge opportunity to really fall in love and build a relationship with Millennials." She contends, "To ignore that (opportunity…) by doing what's already been done over and over again, is to not just miss money, but to really miss an opportunity to build and talk with amazing people."

White Paper Framework

In an effort to build relationships, which will largely contribute to the advertising industry's agenda for years to come, The American Advertising Federation provided an opportunity to explore critical issues through its Thought Leadership Forum. The remainder of this paper discusses key insights attained through the American Advertising Federation's, "A Millennial Perspective on Diversity and Multiculturalism."

The following summarizes key insights from the panels in the five cities that participated in the Thought Leadership Forum (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Minneapolis and Washington, DC). It's important to note when reading and applying the insights, that the students and professionals are all affiliated with the American Advertising Federation and do not represent all Millennials and all marketing and advertising executives. The insights section is divided into two major categories: (1) to give greater understanding as to how advertisers can better reach Millennials in their campaigns and (2) to give greater understanding to perceptions of diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion and how those concepts effect the advertising workforce.

Marketing to Millennials

Connecting with Millennials is crucial to a brands success. Even with their young generational status, Millennials constitute nearly one third of the American population and have 11% more buying power than previous generations at comparable ages (Lafayette, 2011). Moreover, Millennials are the first of generations to come that have been significantly impacted by technology and diversity. Discovering fresh insights regarding Millennials may hold the keys to the future and longevity for the advertising industry. "A Millennial Perspective on Diversity and Multiculturalism" generated four areas of interest for brands. Each will be discussed respectively.

Content is King

"Brands need to find that intersection between what their authentic brand is and what their consumer is looking for."
—Industry Panelist, New York

Overwhelmingly, Millennials and leading advertising professionals agreed that content is one of the most critical factors in engaging Millennial consumers. Furthermore, Millennials are making the majority of their choices based on content not gender or ethnic representation. Minnesota Millennial panelist Brian Few states, "…It's more about just connecting on the level of interest than the color thing. I know of only one channel that is for me and that's BET but I know I won't just watch BET for that fact. I don't really watch BET except for the BET Awards. I watch ESPN because I enjoy sports."

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Personal lifestyle and interests trump other dimensions of diversity and have a greater impact on purchasing behavior, brand interests, friendship, influencers, etc. Intelligence panelist Harjot Singh, Executive Strategy Partner at McCann New York, emphasized that brands and advertisers have to look at media channels and vehicles as more than a channel of delivery. Singh asserts that it is content that draws people to a channel. Consequently, individuals of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities convene through points of intersection based on similar content interests. Pivot points are changing the industry and the concept of multi-culturalism has evolved and now extends far beyond racial identifiers creating a convergence of cross culturalism. Los Angeles Millennial panelist Kevin Reevers states, "…If you look at the biggest artists now, Rihanna and Adele are so different but they are dominating the charts. We go for content and what we like to see not people like us. I'd say pop culture now days is cross connecting and bringing people together."

Concurrently, Millennials do not want to be seen as targeted audiences, but rather perceived as communities that can be reached through similar interests. Although content is a driving force, it is important to Millennials' that their culture be appreciated, respected and celebrated with integrity.

"Being half Filipino, I'm very proud of that but I also realize my mother is a farm girl from Minnesota. I see how important it is for me to hold on to my father's heritage and how important it is for everyone of any culture, whether you are Caucasian, African American or Hispanic, or Asian, it is important for you to hold on to that culture because that's what makes each of us unique and that what makes us who we are. Even if it's just contributing to the little things that we do like the food that we eat. Something about it makes us special and makes us individuals. If we lived in a color-blind society—it would be a shame to homogenize people in such a way," says an audience member in Los Angeles.

Millennial panelists identified themselves as tolerant and accepting but not naïve. Millennials contended that culture is complex and deeply interwoven into lifestyle. Millennial panelists are not forgiving of brands that misrepresent culture through cliché adaptations of life. They want brands to be authentic. Latter sections will offer further insights as to how brands can best reach the Millennial audience through content.

Deconstruct Your Brand

"The life you are living is the life I am living and that is the allure of it."

—Intelligence Panelist Zandile Blay, Harvard University Fellow/Essence.com

Perhaps the most striking take-away for brands from "A Millennial Perspective on Diversity and Multiculturalism," was the idea of brand deconstruction. Experts agreed that the brands that have been able to penetrate

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markets, gain traction and achieve growth have been those that have been deconstructed and humanized. Millennial Minnesota panelist Brian Few says, "Another big thing is to make yourself [brand] more human instead of just a flat ad that's against the wall. Cause I'm just going to say that's a pretty picture and keep walking. If you can take your brand and make it more human and relate it to me... as far as a celebrity going out and buying something that I could never purchase, that doesn't relate to me and I'm not going to say ok I want that."

As reiterated by expert Zandile Blay and Intelligence panelists, when it comes to the brands that are supported and loved, it is really about those brands that feel more like the audiences' friend or buddy. Theresa Lopez, a Chicago Millennial panelist, recalls, "Jet Blue actually had a flash sale from Chicago to Boston and different areas of the country. So I was really excited and right away I bought a ticket. And so I got a connecting flight to New York. Cause I've never been to New York City and that's my dream. So I Tweeted and I was like oh thanks Jet Blue, I'm so happy for making my dreams come true. And then, Jet Blue tweeted back that they hope that I have a great trip. So, I was so happy and it like made me want to cry... They connected with me... They are getting on my level and talking with me...That makes me want to be an ambassador for the brand. Instead of going to Kyak.com I am right on Jet Blue and I'm like ok guys what do you have for me today... Because they talked to me. And I feel like we are friends now."

It is also highly suggested that brands deconstruct themselves in a manner that strokes Millennials' egos. Singh stresses this point via highlighting what was aspirational to previous generations is not necessarily aspirational to Millennials. Singh points out the growing level of cynicism among Millennials regarding brands. Millennials value authenticity. Consequently, brands must become that much more authentic in order to connect with Millennials. Lacey Meece, a Millennial from Chicago, emphasizes this point, "...I think that authenticity is the number one biggest thing... I hate it when I go on Facebook or Twitter and I see brands that do a Facebook promotion or have a Twitter just to have a Facebook promotion or Twitter. ...Use your common sense and use your research to your advantage. Don't just get a Twitter just to get a Twitter...I think that's worthless. Why spend your ad dollars that way... Advertisers have all this great money and this great stuff at their fingertips. Use it wisely."

Millennials asserted that they want brands to be interesting, trustworthy, authentic, engaging, interactive, humorous, and entertaining. Essentially, Millennials want brands to embody all the qualities of a great friend and someone with whom they would enjoy having a conversation. They expect brands to engage in an authentic interactive conversation with them both online and offline and expect to be a part of, and engaged in decision making with brands. Moreover, the nature of Millennials to seek information compels their desire to learn about the brand and its story. Millennials respond to mission statements, well crafted narratives and brand heritage that they identify with and revealed that they would support brands that empower them, make their lives easier and demonstrate a shared desire to support causes they believe in. Millennials repeatedly emphasized a desire to use their consumerism to contribute to positive change that appeals to their interests. Brands that have executed this desire have scored big among Millennials.

"The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty was wonderful. You see real people that look like me," notes Marlena Jordan-Childress, a Minneapolis Millennial panelist. "Sure, I love my celebrities but I want to see people who look like me. Not necessarily a Black girl but real women. I like that and I love that they are exposing that not

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everyone is a size two, blonde and blue eyes. I love that about Dove and I will only buy Dove. And I love that when you buy their products they donate to things that inspire young women."

Social Media

"Free time?! What free time?!" —Millennial Panelists

Millennials absolutely revere social media and firmly assert that their schedules are jam-packed with so much to accomplish. Millennials identify themselves as multi-taskers that are always online and social media facilitates connectivity within their busy and hectic schedules. Social media, particularly Facebook, was highlighted for its convenient ability to allow Millennials to remain in touch with family and friends.

In addition to the highly coveted connectivity, Millennials feel that social media provides several indispensable functions. Millennials feel that social media plays a major role in society through its ability to break down barriers and dispel stereotypes. Millennials contend that this is greatly achieved through sharing humor and entertainment within their diverse networks. Additionally, Millennials expressed a strong desire to engage in interactive and stimulating information sharing. They contend that unique and diverse contributions make conversation more interesting and desirable which bolsters reverence for social media. Killian Allgood, a Millennial panelist in Chicago affirms, "In order to be educated about this world and what it entails, you must have friends from multiple backgrounds in order to make yourself a well rounded person... I have many friends from all around, different places. I would not know about the majority of things around the world had I not been friends with these people... Had I not seen their Facebook posts... It's very important to have multi-cultural friends. To live your life in a bleached out non-colorful way. Uggghhhh. That's an issue for me."

Moreover, social media contributes to Millennials diverse circles through online relationships that originate in either virtual or real life scenarios. One Chicago Millennial asserts that social media has facilitated cultural intermingling that has created a state of normalcy instead of views of the other. Millennials feel that social media provide a platform for topics, interests, brands and conversation that are not a part of the mainstream. Through social media, brands can discover insights regarding Millennial behavior and what they deem important.

In addition to Facebook, blogs and discussion forums, Millennials mentioned Twitter as a valuable asset of social media. Jason Crain, Account Manager at Google, Inc. urges that brands utilize Twitter to create conversations and engagement among Millennials. Crain states that when brands actually take the time to speak to communities, they are responding. Minneapolis Millennial panelist, Brian Few agrees, "A couple weeks ago,

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a brand called Entree (Andre), a clothing line, tweeted that they wanted you to put on their clothes and take a picture of yourself and then send it to them on Twitter. They were making a collage. I thought it was pretty cool that I could be apart of their brand, a part of their community and that people could come together. They made me a part of their culture."

Crain goes on to state that brands should not just respond to tweets by tweeting back, but rather by responding visually through posting videos on YouTube. Millennial panelists affirm this charge through emphasizing that they love to tweet with brands on Twitter, namely the brands who engage in authentic dialogue and respond to tweets utilizing customized features, names, videos etc.

Millennials Enjoy Ritual Forms of Communication

"Stop putting messages out there… you now have to start conversations."

—Intelligence Panelist Harjot Singh, McCann New York

Millennial behavior indicates a proclivity towards a "ritual form of communication." Ritual forms of communication draws persons together in fellowship and commonality. It is not directed towards the extension of messages, but the maintenance of society. Ritual communication emphasizes the representation of shared beliefs, not the act of imparting information. "Transmission communication," which is the most common form of communication in American culture, is defined by imparting or giving information to others (Carey, 1989). This notion is affirmed by Singh's demand that brands stop sending messages and start creating conversations. In parallel is the desire of Millennials to not be seen as a target audience but rather as communities. As noted by Singh, a target audience connotes an inactive consumer that will receive brand messaging. Millennials are just the opposite. Brands must create conversations in order to allow their brand to create communities and achieve success.

There are several ways that brands can emphasize ritual forms of communication to engage Millennials and create communities. Social media is one of those ways and is vital to a brand's success. Social media affords Millennials the ability to share and commune while creating a sense of togetherness that appeals to their uniqueness. Millennials have noted their strong desire to share information and learn new things. Panelists placed emphasis on sharing food, language and gaining new knowledge regarding travel, events and restaurants of interest.

The implementation of interactivity is also critical to success. Again, Millennials expect to be engaged by brands in both real life and virtual scenarios. Millennials want brands to win their loyalty and Millennials enjoy playing games and participating in events surrounding their passion points.

"I think that the passion points really hits it on the head. Music, fashion, movies, entertainment is everything that we spend our lives thinking about. It's all rolled up into this…You know, who we are…Passion points are more important than anything else…," says Lacey Allgood, a Chicago Millennial panelist.

Millennials place a tremendous value on family and friends and are challenged with attaining balance in their busy lives. Events and interactivity that are user friendly, convenient and make Millennials lives easier are

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highly revered. Millennials affirmed their love for free items, savvy apps, new engaging information and stimulating conversation and are inclined to participate in events that appeal to their altruism and contribute to positive change. The use of narratives also has tremendous value for brands. Chicago Millennial panelist Mariza Baeza says, "I feel like marketers are really confused especially with how to target to Latinos and second generation and so on…. I hate Telemundo. I've never watched Univision. I don't read Latino magazines. Nothing of that nature. But I am obsessed with 'How To Make it in America' because it is an authentic Latino story."

Although Millennials noted that they are always online, television, smart phones and multiple mobile devices were mentioned as popular forms of media. As stated previously, narratives serve as a unique and efficient method for creating conversations and sharing brand information through Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). Adam Fox, an Industry panelist from Los Angeles, agrees, "There is a whole space of transcendent media that is creating a narrative or a purpose or story around a product or a brand and its playing out in all kinds of different mediums. But it's the narrative that takes on a much larger life than any of its one branches whether it be YouTube stuff or other. There is a bigger story that seems to resonate really well."

Several professional panelists noted that the ability to tell a great story would always be a coveted skill within the advertising industry.

"I like the Sam Adams commercials where they talk about the history of making their beer. I like to see that more than just a pitcher of a beer looks good," says Los Angeles Millennial panelist Garrett McColl. "And they aren't just necessarily talking about what they are doing in the community but talking about what they've done as they've risen up as a family, as a culture that has made this beer. And just creates that feel of oh, that's an actual person that I'm buying the beer from. They have a back story behind them and not just a fake marketer trying to get another penny from me."

Narratives enrich brand identity and assist in garnering clout among Millennials. Moreover, the use of narratives was highlighted as a way to reinvigorate struggling media forms, namely radio, to help bolster brands and strengthen campaign memorability.

Millennials And Workforce Development

In order for advertisers to be truly effective in reaching Millennials, they should learn from Millennials within their workforce. Additionally, they should embrace those interested in entering the advertising industry. Organizations should recognize that Millennials view diversity and multiculturalism uniquely, desire inclusive work environments and can contribute to the discussion bringing their diverse backgrounds and experiences to bear. Therefore, it is paramount to the industry's success that, diverse, particularly under-represented groups of individuals including Millennials, have a seat at the table where important marketing decisions are made.

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Intergenerational Diversity Conversations

Overwhelmingly, Millennials' definition of diversity is broad, viewing diversity as much more than race, gender and ethnicity and incorporating all the differences that exist within people from religion, language, geography, nationality, sexual orientation and interests. Millennial panelists all took a nuanced approach to understand multiculturalism and race, focusing on other elements of diversity, culture and subcultures. Most panelists say they were trained not to look at race when looking out into the world.

"Being at Howard University (an historically Black college), there are people from so many countries and cities and they bring a piece of that culture with them," says Treesia Herbert, a Washington, DC Millennial and Howard University student who is African-American and Latina.

Many Millennial panelists expressed self-awareness of the complexity of their identities and how they are shaped by different experiences. "[Diversity] is about your lifestyle, what you do on a daily basis. The journey that you have taken throughout your life; it's the decisions that you make," says Jennifer Wong, a New York Millennial panelist and graduating senior from Pace University.

While Millennials understand the role that race and ethnicity have played and continue to play in American society, they recognize that the traditional definition of race may need to be re-examined to include class. Notes Theresa Lopez, a Chicago Millennial panelist, "Race is still important but we're moving into a more class-based society."

Having frank conversations across generations may assist the industry in developing more unified meanings regarding diversity terminology. Although the terms diversity and multiculturalism are often used interchangeably or as code words to mean racial and ethnic minority groups, Millennials reject such notions. Los Angeles Insdustry panelist Jane Nakagawa, from Intertrend Communications, says, "I think the blurring of the lines between the idea of racial segmentation and cultural segmentation. Sometimes it is a little confusing….there's almost like five or six different segments within this giant lump called Asian. There is in our mind a big difference between race and culture but it seemed like the topic of race [within the discussion about Millennials] always became a topic of culture."

Deana Cater, a New York Millennial panelist who is an African-American and raised in North Carolina, explains that until she went to college, she looked at races in three categories—Black/African American, White and Latino. Her college experiences assisted her in rethinking her own avowed identity as an African American because she was exposed to Africans who were born in America that had little to nothing in common with her.

"The [older] professionals are still looking at [multiculturalism] in that old school way: 'Multicultural, it's separate.' And the reality is that the segment formerly known as the general market, which is the Anglo segment—it's the biggest segment, it's the most important segment, it has the most money—however, to Millennials it's actually not even the majority anymore," says Andrew Orcí, President of Orci Advertising and a Los Angeles Industry panelist. "Now it's a minority majority country, literally today in that age group and people under 30. I think there needs to be a re-definition of what the general market is, of what the mainstream is. This is not a multicultural effort; this is a mainstream effort. There will always be niches."

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However, across the board Millennial panelists state that they do not discuss diversity and multiculturalism with peers; instead they live it. Professional panelists agree that more advertising professionals should take this approach of internalizing multiculturalism. "Multiculturalism is a mindset; you can be the whitest girl in the whitest neighborhood, but surround yourself with multiculturalism and have your mind open to other cultures and seek those things out," says Lacey Meece, a master's advertising student at University of Illinois and a Chicago Millennial panelist.

However, having discussions about multiculturalism is not common among Millennials. "When you meet someone you don't say, 'Oh hi, I'm Zoe and I'm part Native American and Jewish.' I don't say that when I meet people but that's the America we're talking about now. And that is why marketers are having such a hard time grasping that. Because we are getting more and more kaleidoscopic with each generation," says Zoe Levin, a Minneapolis Millennial panelist.

Post-Racial Society

Despite media reports stating that Millennials live in a post-racial society, across the board, Millennial panelists reject the notion that America has become a post-racial society. "We are the first generation where [race is] not that big of a deal. Obviously it's still going to matter to some people and it always will. We are the first that we don't see color so much," says Lindsey Moss, a University of Minnesota senior and Millennial panelist, whose friends were shocked when they learned she was Jewish.

Millennials of racial, religious and ethnic minority groups cite a multitude of personal examples as to why America is not a post-racial society. They attribute their perspective to pervasive stereotypes in advertising, the racial historical context of America and their personal experiences with racism. For example Mark Kazmec, a New York Millennial panelist who grew up in Ft. Lauderdale, FL with a large population of Latinos and other diverse ethnicities, experienced racism when he relocated to a predominately Caucasian community in Cleveland, Ohio to attend high school. "I faced some racism being Cuban and Jewish," Kazmec says. "It was not the best experience. I slowly realized that [my classmates] were doing this because they thought this could hurt me. Once I realized this, I slowly became less vulnerable, and the comments became less."

Randall Sawyer, a Chicago-based Millennial panelist, says that in a post-racial society greater harmony would exist, but currently that color-blind factor is not existent. "[Color] still matters and there is still a need for that label. Post-racial means that we fixed the problems that existed. The problems may be defined differently. We're not colorblind. People are in such a hurry to get to that point. The concept is off."

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While other panelists also rejected the concept of post-racial as a positive aspiration, an outspoken audience member in Los Angeles disagreed with some level of frustration. In her opinion, "Whites" are frequently left out of discussions regarding race and diversity and the contradictions in treatment. "For the most part we are living in a post-racial society. We keep talking about the obvious races—Asian, Hispanic, African American, yet we keep saying color shouldn't matter. I'm German. … I'm white—it's still another race, another ethnicity. I'm blond haired, blue eyed. That doesn't necessarily make me Caucasian; it makes me German. And I'm accepted, but I can also be the epitome of a blonde joke. So when we talk about race, we should really open it up to all ethnicities and cultures, not just the three basic ones that are really obvious," she says.

Intergenerational conversations with Millennials are necessary to dispel some of the misconceptions that people have about Millennials' work ethic, knowledge and abilities. Due to their heavy usage of social media, professional panels revealed that Millennials are often perceived as social media gurus. However, it has become apparent that Millennials are heavy users and that does not always translate to the ability to apply professional strategies to social media and other emergent technologies. Millennial panelists working in the ad industry affirmed that they struggle with this misconception in the workplace.

Likewise, several Millennial professionals express their discontent about being erroneously viewed as lazy or disengaged. Many of the Millennial professionals attest that they are extremely hard workers and desire to bring their whole selves to work. Treesia Herbert, Washington Millennial panelist and Howard University student, further refutes the perception of lack of engagement by stating: "We multitask. There are so many different things we're doing at once."

Inclusion

"Inclusion is…Integration Beyond Acceptance." —Intelligence Panelist Jason Crain, Google, Inc.

Millennial panelists overwhelmingly say that inclusion is of critical importance to both them and the industry. Advertising professionals agree that addressing inclusion is a business imperative for everyone in the advertising industry and that companies must create and sustain inclusive work cultures.

Millennials share the perspective that inclusion means accepting people for who they are—similarities and unique qualities—and being open to them unconditionally. "Until you can find that uniqueness in people and leverage those things to create something better than you could have created by yourself, then you are not truly being inclusive," says Jerrod Harris, a Chicago Millennial panelist whose father is a diversity consultant.

In addition, a challenge the advertising industry must aggressively address is the notion that some advertising professionals feel forced to disassociate themselves from part of their culture or identity to work in the advertising industry. Marcus Jimenez, a partner at Humanitas and an Intelligence panelist, says that often minorities, particularly those who speak a different language at home with their family, must live in two worlds, one professional and one personal. However, having this two-world approach could lessen the value that diversity offers organizations.

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Instead, Millennials desire work environments and brands that authentically embrace diversity and inclusion in the same way they do within their friendship circles and other networks. Reasons for having diversity within their networks include becoming well rounded, overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions, staying abreast of a wide range of national and international events and information, understanding people better, and shaping their own beliefs and values systems.

Diana Cui, a New York Millennial panelist who is Asian, plays on two predominately Caucasian collegiate athletic teams and says that her teammates who come from different heritages, including Irish, Greek, and Native American, have influenced her personal identity through their different lifestyles and values. "We realize those values in times of challenge, and it opens me to different perspectives on life and how they approach different situations, and I take it all in not just to learn but to shape me," she says.

Likewise, Jerrod, a Chicago Millennial panelist, says, "America was based on the premise that all men were created equal not necessarily that all men were created the same. … We shouldn't be striving for a post-racial society, but an inclusive society, where people have equal opportunity and equal seat at the table when decisions are made."

Similarly, Millennials desire environments accepting of varying work styles and environments that have organizational structures that support Millennials' interests such as the use of social media. According to a Cisco Systems' survey, 64% of Millennials indicated that social media usage policies are an important topic of discussion during a job interview, and 33% of respondents stated they would take a job that offered social media freedom over salary (Stricker, 2011). For instance, New York professional panelist Mash Flinders, who is a freelance filmmaker and works on many advertising productions, says that agencies, particularly considering the economy, need to investigate opportunities for Millennials to freelance and work from home, recognizing that they may thrive and be more productive without micromanagement and traditional settings.

A Seat at the Table

"We need more and more people from different perspectives."
—Washington, DC Industry Panelist

Advertising industry professionals expressed a sincere interest in diversifying the industry at executive levels. Diversified leadership creates a greater potential for more voices to be heard. Mesh Flinders, a New York Millennial advertising professional and freelancer, agrees saying, "The notion of leadership…A lot of the decisions that get made for brands get made in these rooms with a dozen or two dozen people or so. And depending on the leadership in that room, and that's usually one or two people, different voices get heard and different voices get expressed."

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Carol Watson of Tangerine-Watson, Inc., an advertising and marketing talent sourcing for cross-cultural professionals, emphasizes this point by reiterating that ideas are often perceived in accordance with cultural nuances. Watson states that ideas can be interpreted as better or worse depending upon who is perceived as smarter and whose ideas are considered better. Advertisers must make sure they are consciously ensuring that everyone in the room is heard. Watson further elaborates that leadership and inclusionary efforts are also of significance because they directly impact messaging that could be construed as irresponsible and insensitive. Watson warns, "It's not about that common insight that may have been correct…If the execution is coming across as insensitive… that's what we need to talk about…We need people at the table."

Moreover, diversified leadership will contribute to people of diverse cultures being able to bring their entire selves to work. Advertising professionals contend that diversified leadership will facilitate a work environment in which individuals feel comfortable to be exactly who they are at all times. Watson adds, "You need people at the table that will feel comfortable…You can't leave that part of yourself at home because you feel uncomfortable in the office. You can't filter it down. You can't water it down for business reasons. The industry is missing out on your insights and your perspectives if you water down who you are and what your culture is."

The freedom to express their individuality will promote the ability of advertising professionals to produce insights that will allow them to create solutions that will generate impactful campaigns.

While this white paper provides some insights into Millennials, further exploration on these topics discussed is important. Millennial, Intelligence and professional panelists emphasize the need to continue the discussion. The American Advertising Federation opened the door and provided an opportunity to explore these important issues through its Thought Leadership Forum: "A Millennial Perspective on Diversity and Multiculturalism." Advertising professional Rodney Williams, Washington Professional Panelist, sums it up, "Thank you for having this. This is very… very valuable. This is a strange business. It's going to change and it's changing as we sit here…I ask people where they want to be ten years from now. Cause, where you want to be, won't be there. That's how fast the industry is changing. It's really moving… Be aware of this. Keep your mind open. It is important to listen, ask questions and meet people. Your experience is who you really are… We have to go to forums like this… It's very important."

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