

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

In search of the millennial. Is there a distinctive millennial identity and what might this mean for our understanding of identity in organisations?
A study of emerging identities in Mexican young adults.

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by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, my brother and Emma.

To my companions Molly, Scotty and Beto.

Mis amigos y alumnos en Guadalajara y el Tec de Monterrey.

I thank Dr. Patrick Reedy for his unwavering support during my doctoral studies.

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Abstract

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Ideas of selfhood in contemporary society are increasingly understood in terms of generational membership (Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Popular discourses of generational identity offer individuals alternatives for self-definition in ways akin to traditional social identities (Gilleard, 2004). The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) is portrayed as particularly transformative, differentiated from its predecessors through a series of *millennial roles* and a distinctive portrayal of leadership (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2009).

Contemporary organisations are also conceptualised as spaces for self-definition (Brown, 2015). Individuals are theorised as “*identity workers*” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622, italics in original) who craft an *organisational self* subject to identity regulation and control (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016). Leader identity has received particular attention from scholars (Sinclair, 2011) and is especially relevant to the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation.

This qualitative research finds only weak support for claims of a distinctive millennial identity. Further, the participants’ narratives suggest only partial support for a distinctive millennial understanding of leadership. These findings suggest discourses of generational identity overestimate the power of change, and underestimate that of continuity and stability, in self-definition. Data was collected through open-ended interviews with twenty-four young adult Mexicans.

This research theorises the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' accounts as attributable to the popular discourse's over-reliance on a 'digital native' portrayal (Prensky, 2001), one not supported by academic research. Secondly, it conceptualises the participants' emerging leader identity in terms of *micro* and *macro* processes of identity construction and not solely in terms of dominant leader discourses. It recognises the participants undertaking identity work to adapt and mould dominant discourses into more nuanced leader portrayals. Thirdly, it theorises an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adulthood characterised by information search (Berzonsky, 1989) and the continual refinement of ideas of selfhood.

Chapter One: Introduction

Context of this research

There is a problem in the workplace - a problem of values, ambitions, views, mind sets, demographics, and generations in conflict. The workplace we inhabit today is awash with the conflicting voices and views of the most age- and value- diverse workforce the world has known since our great-great-grandparents abandoned the field and farm for factory and office. At no time in our history have so many and such different generations with such diversity been asked to work together shoulder to shoulder, side by side, cubicle to cubicle (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p. 9-10).

The above extract from Zemke, Raines and Filipczak's (2000) *Generations at work: Managing the clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in your workplace* illustrates several "immensely popular" (Lyons, Urick, Kuron & Schweitzer, 2015, p. 346) ideas with respect to how organisations and their members are conceptualised and understood in contemporary society. Becton, Walker and Jones-Farmer (2014) refer to "commonly held generational stereotypes" and acknowledge that "much attention has focused on the fact that the workforce is largely comprised of three generations" (Becton, Walker & Jones-Farmer, 2014, p. 175). Joshi et al. (2010) claim that some of the most complex challenges facing contemporary organisations are "rooted in these generational phenomena" and emphasise "the critical importance of understanding generations and generational differences in organisations" (Joshi et al., 2010, p. 392-393). These references illustrate the growing importance afforded the concept of *generational identity* to ideas of selfhood. Further, they allude to the interplay of generational identity and *organisationally-based identity*, two contemporary discourses of identity that appear intertwined, each drawing upon the other. Indeed, Rudolph, Rauvola and Zacher (2018) state

In the popular leadership and management literature, the notion that there are demonstrable generational differences in work attitudes, motivation, and behavior is so ubiquitous that it borders upon axiomatic (Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018, p. 44).

This research addresses a number of questions raised by ideas of *intergenerational difference*, the alleged distinctiveness of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) and the supposed relationship between generational and organisationally-based identities. Before I discuss its specific objectives, I first define the concepts that are central to its thesis.

Ideas of generations, generally understood as those born within a specific date range, are conceptualised in terms of universal portrayals, or *generational identities*, that differentiate members of one generation from another. de Wall, Peters and Broekhuizen (2016) state

A generation is defined as a group of people born within a specified birth year range who grew up in the same historical and socio-cultural context, and shared formative life experiences, such as pop culture, economic conditions, world events, natural disasters, technology, and as a result developed core values that are different from those of other generations (de Wall, Peters & Broekhuizen, 2016, p. 86).

It is commonly theorised that generational identities form when individuals experience certain events in the same stage of their life cycle, particularly adolescence and young adulthood (Madden, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2010; Tapscott, 2008). Ryder (1965) claims each generation, “has a distinctive composition and character reflecting the circumstance of its unique origination and history” (Ryder, 1965, p.845). Indeed, Alwin and McCammon (2007) allege generational identities are “powerful explanations in and of themselves for distinctive patterns and attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours” (Alwin & McCammon, 2007, p. 232). Generational identity articulates how

a certain generation understands and responds to a wide range of related phenomena such as values, ethics, relationships, technology, organisation and economy. In particular, they appear to prescribe a generation's legacy (i.e., how it will transform or change society) and its distinctive role within the organisation (i.e., how the generation will understand and perform a particular organisationally-based identity). Generational identity is likely an attractive concept to academics, policy makers and practitioners as a way to simplify the continuous process of aging by providing broad categories of self-definition in increasingly complex societies and organisations (Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018). For example, Becker (1991) suggests that generations, and not social class, have come to represent the most relevant divisions within society such that, "specific generations become institutionalized and partially take over the role of social classes as arrangements for the allocation of opportunities [and] the distribution of scarce goods" (Becker, 1991, p. 221–222). Indeed, the twentieth century appears to have been divided into four generations in a way that parallels earlier class analysis of society. These generations are known by precise, memorable, if often homogenising, *generational labels*: The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945), The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) and The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). The latter is portrayed as especially transformative and disruptive and is the focus of this research (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Moreover, at this time, one can identify an incipient discourse of the millennials' successor, Generation Z or The Centennials (born since 2000), currently in school, their narrative being written, more often than not, by others. In other words, contemporary ideas of generational identity appear to offer

individuals a potential source of selfhood and ideas of both sameness (i.e., with those of their own generation) and difference (i.e., to those of other generations).

However, another form of collective identity, *organisationally-based identity*, is proposed to be highly significant for selfhood in contemporary society (Brown, 2015; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018). Organisations are commonly theorised as important spaces for self-definition by which their norms, discourses and practices, “set the stage for members to construct their identities” (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, p.111; Wegner, Jones & Jordan, 2019; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Brown, 2015). Individuals are conceptualised to undertake *identity work* through which they actively shape and craft their sense of self within the organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). What I will call organisationally-based identity, represents “people’s efforts to define the self at work” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 4). This self-definition is subject to the *identity regulation* exercised by managerial and organisational leadership that motivates individuals to understand themselves in certain ways (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Scholarship on organisationally-based identities has principally focused on leader and managerial identity (Reedy, 2009; Pez , 2013; Ford, 2006; Western, 2008; Rose, 1989). This is perhaps understandable given the alleged importance of the role for organisational success and the societal privilege afforded it (Reedy, 2009). The responsibilities and *public persona* associated with leaders and managers imply the need to craft or mould a certain understanding and presentation of self that is consistent with personal, organisational and societal goals, values and expectations. Watson (2008) reflects that organisational leaders

cannot simply 'be themselves' at work. They have to act as the voice or the face of the corporation...at the same time, they must present themselves to others as credible human individuals (Watson, 2008, p. 122).

Of course, contemporary organisations are spaces in which members of different generations interact. In organisational studies they are increasingly theorised in terms of the diverse generations that cohabit the workplace (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013; Alsop, 2008; Tapscott, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Indeed, Rudolph, Rauvola and Zacher (2018, p.46) suggest theorists are “wed to the notions of generations and generational differences as meaningful and useful concepts” while Shullery (2013) claims, “academic theory appears to be accepting generational differences as the evidence continues to grow” (Shullery, 2013, p. 155). Moreover, many organisational processes such as recruitment, promotion and retirement support such a conceptualisation (Lyons et al., 2015). *Intergenerational diversity* or *intergenerational difference*, the differences between members of different generations relevant to the workplace, are theorised to influence organisational strategy, structure and outcomes. These differences, and the opportunities and tensions they potentially provoke, are studied with respect to organisational factors (e.g., productivity, turnover, longevity, flexible work arrangements) and individual variables (e.g. organisational commitment, preference towards feedback and recognition, work-values and work-life balance) (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Angeline, 2011; Legas & Sims, 2011). Unfortunately, both academic theories and the popular literature caution that successful cohabitation will not come easily (Herring, 2019; Alsop, 2008; Tapscott, 1998). Ideas of *generation gaps* and *intergenerational conflict* characterise this debate such that “*generational differences* has become a buzzword and many organizations feel the need to offer training in this area to their

workforce” (Urlick, 2014, p.398, italics in original). Shaw and Covey (2013) identify “too many corporate cultures poisoned by infighting between the generations” and pinpoint ideas of dress code, feedback, loyalty and work ethic as points of tension (Shaw & Covey, 2013, p. xv). Indeed, that Zemke, Raines and Filipczak (2000) describe the workplace as “awash with the conflicting voices and views” is representative of the sometimes alarmist tone in which generational differences are discussed (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p. 9-10.). However, Lyons et al. (2015) reflect that workplace generational stereotypes are useful heuristics for leaders and managers because “they ‘fit’ as explanations of the work-place dynamics they are encountering” (Lyons et al., 2015, p. 352). Offering an alternative perspective, a counter narrative purports that generational differences in the workplace “rely on unsupported stereotypes” (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015, p.321) and academic research is often inconclusive (Giancola, 2006; Parry & Urwin, 2010). Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher (2018, p.46) claim “we have ‘willed’ generations and generational differences into being simply by acknowledging them” while Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) recommend managers “focus on real, impactful and actual differences among workers” (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015, p.321). Indeed, in their review of the literature, Parry and Urwin (2011) find mixed empirical evidence to support claims of intergenerational difference and caution that “Managers may see little gain from a rigorous dissection” of their multi-generational workforce (Parry & Urwin, 2011, p. 93).

As I have stated above, the leader/manager role has always been of much importance in the study of organisationally-based identity (Reedy, 2009; Pez , 2013; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Ford, 2006; Western, 2008; Rose, 1989). However, it is also increasingly privileged as an important facet of intergenerational difference

(Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018; Anderson, Baur, Griffith & Buckley, 2017; Balda & Mora, 2011). Each of the four aforementioned generations are theorised to have distinctive leader preferences and differing leadership styles (Howe & Strauss 2007, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Indeed, Kraus (2017) alludes to the competitive advantage enjoyed by those organisations with the “ability to recognize and understand generational differences and leadership style preferences” (Kraus, 2017, p. 73). Ideas of leadership are particularly relevant to the generational identity of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000), the generation to which the participants of this research belong. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, ideas of leadership represent one of eight facets by which millennials are portrayed as different from their predecessors.

The Millennial Generation is suggested to comprise of 66 million Americans, 39 million Mexicans (Pew Research Center, *Most Millennials Resist the ‘Millennial’ Label*, 2015) and 2.5 billion people worldwide (PwC, *NextGen: A global generational study*, 2013). It has received much attention since the turn of the century and is portrayed to differ from its predecessors in terms of its use of new technology, family relationships, busy lifestyle, commitment to others and the competitive environment in which it was raised. With respect to the workplace, The Millennial Generation is portrayed to have differing expectations, motivation, commitment and behaviour (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Moreover, millennials are alleged to both favour and exhibit a leadership approach that differentiates them from their predecessors (Senduk, 2018; Inouye, 2018; Ellis, 2016). Balda and Mora (2011) suggest leadership theories must account for a “networked, relational, and connective” millennial whose learning, communication and technological preferences differ to prior

generations (Balda & Mora, 2011, p. 19). In Chapter Four, I will argue that the portrayal of this ‘millennial leader’ - what I will call *millennial leader identity* - draws upon the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. The millennial leader is differentiated from their predecessors in terms of both personal leadership style (e.g., communication, collaboration and societal awareness) and by means of the organisational and economic environment in which they exercise their leadership (e.g., internet of things, big data, artificial intelligence and the gig-economy). Kramer (2018), in his appropriately titled *Generation of Change: A Call to Millennials*, asserts, “millennials are most apt and capable of making meaningful change in a hurting world and their time is now” (Kramer, 2018, p.11). More sceptically, Little and Winch (2017) attribute the attention afforded ideas of millennial exceptionalism to the “politico-cultural milieu of a post-financial crash society and the rise of digital media” (Little & Winch, 2017, p. 136).

In summary, this research takes place in the context of great academic and popular interest in how generational diversity influences contemporary society, economy and the organisation. The latter is now understood as a space for both self-definition and a focal point of intergenerational difference. Both academic and popular literature, albeit to a differing extent, conceptualise a relationship between generational and organisationally-based identities that potentially impacts organisational strategy, structure and outcomes (Sessa, Kabacoff & Deal, 2007; Arsenault, 2004; Ahn, & Ettner, 2014; Chou, 2012; Howe & Strauss, 2008; Elmore, 2010; Alsop, 2008). In other words, in this research I explore the interplay of two themes central to contemporary discussions of selfhood in the organisation: i) the transformative and disruptive portrayal of The Millennial Generation

and ii) the idea that millennials have a distinctive understanding of leadership. The oldest millennials, now approaching their forties, are increasingly assuming leader roles in organisations and society at large. Moreover, millennials are becoming an ever-larger part of the workforce around the world (Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2008, 1997). As such, it is necessary for organisational scholars to understand whether, and if so how, millennials do indeed understand themselves in distinctive ways and to anticipate the implications of such difference, if indeed it does exist.

Motivation

the [research] question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1994, p.104).

My personal motivation for undertaking this research derives from my role as a high school principal in Guadalajara, Mexico. I am determined to understand the students that pass through my school beyond the generational label that necessarily accompanies them. I am intent on exploring if ideas of what it is to be a millennial (born 1981 to 2000) or centennial (born since 2000) reflect, and indeed are reflected in, their personal experiences and emerging identity. Moreover, I am interested to explore whether one facet of millennial distinctiveness - how the generation understands and performs leadership - is as relevant to ideas of selfhood as it has become to ideas of personal success, school culture and societal progress. As an educator of close to thirteen-hundred 15 to 18-year olds, I am more than a mere observer of these students. The decisions I make, from the recruitment of teachers to the design of extra-curricular activities, likely,

if in a small way, condition how the students experience high school, young adulthood and selfhood.

I emigrated to Mexico seventeen years ago after spending five years in managerial roles in the private sector in the United Kingdom and the Persian Gulf. I came to Mexico 'looking for something new' and planned to stay a few years before returning to industry in the U.K. Seventeen years later, and married to a Mexican lady, I consider the place home. During these years, I have worked at the Tec de Monterrey, an educational institution with 90,000 matriculated students in high school, undergraduate and postgraduate programs throughout the country. Founded in 1943 by businessmen from the city of Monterrey, the school is multi-campus, privately funded, non-profit and without religious affiliation. I am based in one of the high schools, with a population of 1,300 students, located in Guadalajara, a city of close to six million inhabitants and the capital of the state of Jalisco. In addition to my responsibilities in Guadalajara, I have oversight duties and travel frequently to a further eight high schools, with a combined population of 3,000 students, in central Mexico and the Pacific Coast. I understand my role as both leader and educator; my language both managerial and educational; my objectives both institutional and personal. I imagine that to others, particularly students, I am seen in leader terms, whether good or bad. My working day, and on many occasions, afterhours and weekends, revolves around these students. I find myself listening to their personal projects and future plans; understanding their academic difficulties; giving inaugural speeches in their extra-curricular activities; enforcing rules and promoting our honour code; celebrating sporting or other achievements and commiserating an infrequent defeat or failure. It is a highly time intensive role but ultimately extremely satisfying.

Indeed, it is a great honour to watch our students mature academically, personally and socially. Interestingly, I do not remember enjoying the same teacher-student relationships, in my all-boys, private, Edinburgh high school in the 1980s.

Although a cliché, my experience has taught me to believe that high school is a period of great change and growth, where lifelong friendships are made without self-interest and, at graduation, life's opportunities, for some, seem endless. Others of course experience a more difficult adolescence with challenges at home, at school, in their personal lives and indeed in defining their place in the world. Overall, it is tremendously satisfying to play some role, however small, in the students' personal development during high school.

It is of course during the *life-stages* of adolescence and young adulthood, much of which is spent at high school, that many young people are suggested to formulate, *work*, and define their sense of self or personal identity (Arnett, 2000; Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008; Bainbridge, 2009; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Each in their own way, sooner or later, helped or hindered, must start to construct their answer to the question *Who am I?* – that task of *identity construction*. I could of course explore the participants' ideas of selfhood through any number of identity influences. Traditional social identities of gender, nationality, religious affiliation and class play a role in self-definition. Likewise, idiosyncratic characteristics such personal beliefs, body identity, affiliation to school, sports teams and peer-group are also potentially employed by individuals to differentiate themselves from others or foster a sense of sameness. However, two identity options, that of millennial and leader identity, appear to have been afforded a special place in the lives of contemporary young adults. Given the ubiquity of ideas of generational identity, and

the societal privilege afforded ideas of leadership, I am motivated to explore whether, and if so how, the participants of this research understand selfhood in such terms.

My experience in the education sector leads me to believe that young adults are being too easily type-cast as transcultural, homogeneous millennials - a sort of *one millennial fits all* approach! Generation X teachers (born 1965 to 1980) and millennial students are portrayed to have differing expectations with respect to pedagogy, technology, motivation and discipline. Teachers are motivated to see their students as millennials and adapt their teaching accordingly. These 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), the students, allegedly baffle their 'digital immigrant' teachers with the use of new technologies. Both parties are continually reminded of their divergent views and needs with respect to classroom instruction, communication style and feedback. The much cited (read *bemoaned*) 'generational gap' is evident in terms of dress, mobile technology use and preferred learning styles. When things go wrong we turn to the other, in frustration, anger or hopelessness, and claim, 'they just don't get it!' Indeed, Shaw and Covey's (2013) astute observation rings home louder than the break bell, "The irony is that when we say another generation doesn't get it, we don't get it either" (Shaw & Covey, 2013, p. 6). Moreover, young millennial teachers, recent graduates with twenty-first century educational degrees, find themselves in a no-man's land: neither transformative student nor establishment teacher.

Further, I recognise, if often question, the societal privilege afforded leadership and how it has come to colour the expectations schools have of their students. The millennials are portrayed as leaders: the phenomenon one of eight facets by which those born between 1981 and 2000 are differentiated from their predecessors. Leadership, and

indeed leaders themselves, are often uncritically framed as the be-all and end-all of educational and organisational success - a sort of *leadership solves all* approach! Indeed, ideas of leadership are increasingly prevalent in school culture, *climate* or *ethos* and thus influence the beliefs, behaviours, shared norms and expectations of educational leaders, teachers and students (Deal, 1993; Hallinger, 2011; Thapa et al., 2013; Peterson & Deal 1998; Mitchell, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010). I believe that schools over-promote the leader identity, now an indicator of student and school success, at the cost of other potentially rewarding roles that offer alternatives for selfhood. Indeed, I recognise the way my own school prioritises leadership and developing future leaders: these ideas appear in the institution's educational vision and given their place in the school's honour code alongside universal values of respect, responsibility, honesty, tolerance and solidarity.

In summary, I am motivated to understand whether, and if so how, ideas of millennial identity, and particularly millennial distinctiveness, are important for the self-definition of young adults in Mexico. Moreover, I explore if, as millennials, they appear to understand and perform leadership in a distinctive way. These reflections provide ample opportunity for academic debate and theorisation. They are also relevant to my daily work. Indeed, this research offers me the opportunity to reflect upon my own educational and leader paradigms and practices. Good research is not only born from gaps in the current literature, but “through an engagement with problems in the world that you find personally interesting” (Kilduff, 2006, p.252). This research is born from both.

Theoretical background to this research

Having presented the context of this research and my motivations for undertaking it, in this section I outline the theoretical background that guide its principal objectives. I do so to provide the reader the opportunity to locate this research in the relevant academic fields, understand its purpose and evaluate both its empirical findings and claims of theoretical contribution and originality.

Ideas of selfhood or identity are at the heart of this research, specifically the idea that millennials understand themselves, and the world around them, in ways that differentiate them from their predecessors. The concept of identity is generally understood as one's answer to the question *Who am I?*. Ideas of identity are commonly theorised through three foundational approaches that guide generational, organisationally-based, and indeed other, conceptualisations of selfhood. *Psychosocial approaches* privilege the idea that the individual is capable of constructing a coherent sense of self across a series of life-stages, each with particular psychosocial challenges and risks (Erikson, 1959; McAdams, 2001). *Symbolic interactionist approaches* understand selfhood as an amalgam of both personal identity and social identity, the latter influenced by the groups one associates with. Social identities such as class, ethnicity, age, gender, profession and religion provide individuals shared meaning and a sense of sameness with others (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Increasingly, generational identity is conceptualised in such terms - those born within a certain time period, and having experienced certain formative events - share a common understanding of self and the world (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Finally, *postmodern and poststructuralist approaches* conceptualise identity in the postmodern world not in terms of definition and stability but instead as a project of

continual redefinition (Reedy, 2009). Globalisation and communication technologies expose individuals to multiple and dynamic identity influences that must be accommodated into ideas of selfhood (Gergen, 1991; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Simultaneously however, postmodernity can be understood in terms of *identity control* in which options for self-definition are limited to a set of “ready-made identities” (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016, p.4) thus reducing individual autonomy and agency.

Ideas of generational identity, and particularly intergenerational difference, have come to colour our understanding of organisations and society. The study of generations can be traced to Mannheim (1952) who understood the phenomenon as a sociological construct, an expression of social and historical processes and a mechanism of social change. People born within the same historical, societal and cultural period are understood to share “an inborn way of experiencing life and the world” (Mannheim, 1952, p.282; Ryder, 1965). It is theorised that a *generational consciousness*, or common bond, emerges between individuals “born and living contemporaneously, who have common knowledge and experiences that affect their thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors” (Johnson & Johnson, 2010, p.6). This conceptualisation commonly forms the basis of academic theories of generations and a *popular discourse of contemporary generational identities*. The twentieth century is understood in terms of four generations, each with their own distinctive generational identity or portrayal: The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945), The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) and The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Ideas of legacy (i.e., the generation’s impact on society) and organisational role (i.e., the organisationally-based identity assumed by the generation) are common to these portrayals. The Millennial

Generation, to which the participants of this research belong, is portrayed in especially transformative terms, “most assuredly different than their predecessors with respect to ideas, behaviours and viewpoints” (Anderson, Baur, Griffith & Buckley, 2017, p.245; Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Drawing upon the work of popular authors, I conceptualise this millennial distinctiveness through eight facets, or *millennial roles*, one of which refers to how the generation understands and performs leadership.

Ideas of organisationally-based identities can also be understood in terms of the three aforementioned foundational approaches (Brown, 2015; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ashford, Harrison & Corely, 2008). Organisations are conceptualised as spaces for self-definition in which individuals undertake identity work, “continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.626). However, this self-definition is not unbounded and organisational leaders aspire to control or regulate the identities of their members by communicating organisational visions, norms, discourses and stories and through institutional processes and practices. Brown and Coupland (2005) refer to this control in terms of “the discursive production of ‘quasi-fixed’ meanings which reify social orders” (Brown & Coupland, 2005, p. 1054). For example, in his study of U.K. managers, Reedy (2009) alludes to ideas of conformity and credibility and states, “They wished to acquire the right ways of thinking, speaking and behaving in order to be seen as legitimately occupying the identity of ‘manager’ in the eyes of others” (Reedy, 2009, p. 8).

Leader or managerial identity has received particular attention in generational and organisational studies. Each generation is portrayed to understand and perform the

phenomenon in a distinctive way. Simultaneously, organisational portrayals of leadership have evolved through the twentieth century (Western, 2008; Rose, 1989) and a *contemporary popular portrayal* frames the leader figure in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms (Meindl, Ehrich, & Dukerich, 1985). Millennials are portrayed to have a distinctive understanding of the phenomenon, one that draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. Indeed, Inouye (2018) alleges

With a worldview radically different from their forebears, millennials are changing the ways we approach our lives and our work - including how we learn and how we lead (Inouye, 2018, p.i).

In conclusion, the individual's answer to the question *Who am I?* has been extensively theorised by scholars through multiple perspectives. Academic theories and popular discourses appear to prioritise generational and organisationally-based identities as especially relevant for selfhood in the early twenty-first century. The Millennial Generation is framed as particularly transformative and portrayed to understand and perform leadership in a way that differentiates it from its predecessors.

Purpose of this research

This research is concerned with the experiences and emerging identities of young adult Mexicans living in Jalisco, Mexico. It is located in the literature of generational, organisational and identity studies. It looks anew at contemporary truths of generational and organisationally-based identities and in doing so contributes to the contemporary debate surrounding *generational determinism*, “the systematic appeal of the concept of generation in narrating the social and political” (White, 2013, p.216; Bristow, 2016).

Specifically, it explores ideas of millennial distinctiveness, and in particular, the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation.

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First, I explore whether, and if so how, the participants articulate a distinctive understanding of emerging selfhood, one that incorporates ideas encapsulated in millennial identity. I do so by analysing how they draw upon four relevant identity influences and if they do so in a distinctive way. These identity influences emerged from my understanding of the data and are i) family ii) faith iii) altruism and iv) future plans and aspirations. Secondly, I look to understand if there is anything distinctively millennial about how the participants understand and present themselves as leaders. I do so by exploring whether, and if so how, they articulate an emerging leader identity consistent with the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation. The findings I derive from this research, and resulting theoretical contribution, extend our knowledge of the relevance of generational identity to selfhood and of the interplay between generational and organisationally-based identities. For example, if the participants' accounts could be read to suggest they understand ideas of family, faith, altruism and leadership in distinctively millennial ways, then I could make fairly strong conclusions about the relevance of generational identity in the self-definition of young adults. In summary, the purpose of this research can be synthesised in two general research questions.

1. To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?
2. To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?

To answer these questions, and as I will discuss fully in Chapter Five, I employ a qualitative approach and collect data with the use of open-ended interviews. The findings I derive from my understanding, analysis and interpretation of the participants' narratives allow me to construct three theoretical contributions that extend our knowledge of generational identity, organisationally-based identity and identity construction. It is to these contributions that I turn in the following section.

Contribution to theory

Given my personal, professional and social context, I believe I am in a unique position to explore generational and organisationally-based identities. I am U.K. educated, former private sector manager now in an educational leadership role in Mexico. As a high school principal, understanding identity construction in young adulthood is a professional and personal interest. From my leader role, I have the opportunity to explore the relevance of these two predominantly Western constructs (i.e., discourses of millennial and leader identity) in the lives of Mexican young adults.

Indeed, young-adult Mexicans are an often-underrepresented group in scholarship of generational identity and the field relies principally on insights from Anglo-Saxon populations (Adams, Berzonsky & Keating, 2006; Reeves, 2006; Giancola, 2006). McAdams and McLean (2013) state, "because narrative identity is exquisitely contextualized in culture, future researchers need to examine the development of life stories in many different societies, nations, and cultural groups" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p.237). In this research I do exactly that, exploring what it is to be a millennial in contemporary Mexico. Further, research on organisational-based identities commonly

explores the identity work of adults in full-time professional, managerial or leader roles (Brown, 2015; Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). In this research I explore how young adults, (i.e., future or recent school leavers who live with their parents and have yet to enter the full-time employment) understand themselves as leaders. That is to say, I explore their emerging leader identity that is likely informed by their personal experiences of the phenomenon at home and at school and by the availability of dominant leader discourses of selfhood. I recognise the role schools increasingly play in promoting a leader identity in their students and how ideas of the phenomenon have come to influence school culture. Researching generational and organisationally-based identities in a group of young adults at “life’s critical crossroads in the transition to adult life” (Kroger, 1989, p.29) provides a complementary perspective of these phenomena that extends our knowledge of the field (Grotevant, 1987; Schwartz, 2001). In summary, by exploring the emerging millennial and leader identities in Mexican young adults, I aspire to give a voice to a group widely stereotyped and written about by others. Beyond this representation, and indeed the very relevant personal development I take from my doctoral studies, I offer the following theoretical contributions.

First, this research extends our understanding of millennial identity and particularly generational change, or lack thereof. The empirical findings of this research, contrary to the popular discourse, lead me to understand The Millennial Generation more in terms of generational continuity and stability than of change and transformation. I account for the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants’ narratives by theorising that the generation’s portrayal is over reliant on ideas of a ‘digital generation’: the supposed technological superiority of millennials to their predecessors is the

generation's principal differentiator. While the differentiation attributed to other generations is derived from, or based upon, a wide range of *generation causing events*, ideas of millennial distinctiveness are highly coupled with concepts of technology, innovation and change. However, the 'digital generation' or 'technologically-superior millennial' characterisations do not stand up to academic scrutiny. Scholarship appears to suggest that millennials *per se* are not a homogenous and technically more competent group than their predecessors (Stahl, 217; Selwyn, 2009). It might be that millennials are not so technological different from others after all - a theorisation that allows me to explain the relative lack of ideas of millennial distinctiveness, change and transformation in the participants' narratives.

Secondly, while scholars of organisational studies have debated ideas of generational diversity in the contemporary workplace, less attention has been afforded to how young adults, likely the youngest group in the workforce, might understand and perform leadership (Lyons, Schweitzer & Ng, 2015; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). This research extends our knowledge of organisational studies by theorising the emerging organisationally-based identities of young adults in terms of *micro* and *macro process of identity construction*. The findings of this research, contrary to popular and academic pronouncements, reveal no simple relationship between millennial identity and leader identity. I theorise that the participants' understanding of leadership is not derived solely from *macro process* of identity construction (i.e., dominant leader discourses of identity) but instead from their daily interaction and relationships with others in the organisation: those *micro process* encapsulated in conversations, observations and time spent with others. Those 'others' - the relevant leaders or role models in the participants' lives - are

predominantly members of other generations (i.e., family members, teachers, church leaders). I prioritise these frequent interactions with non-millennial leaders in my understanding of the participants' emerging leader identity. This theorisation allows me to explain the inconclusive findings of this research with respect to claims for a distinctive millennial understanding of leadership.

Thirdly, in this research I theorise an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adulthood. The aforementioned foundational approaches to the phenomenon (see Chapter Two), and indeed ideas of generational identity, emphasise the importance of the life-stage of young adulthood in identity construction (Becht, Branje, Denissen, Koot et al., 2016; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Self-definition is portrayed as an arduous task, one of crisis and struggle, that is complicated further by the opportunities offered by social media (Baym, 2010; Boyd, 2014). The findings of this research lead me to offer an alternative portrayal of identity construction in young adulthood, one in which self-definition is not the be-all and end-all of the participants' lives. I theorise that they successfully draw upon a wide range of identity influences and employ an *informational identity style* in which selfhood is defined "in a rational, open-minded fashion" (Berzonsky et al., 2013, p. 894). I privilege autonomy, decision-making and identity work before ideas of crisis, uncertainty and identity regulation.

Summary of methods

Given my aim of understanding the identity work undertaken by The Millennial Generation, I developed a particular methodological strategy to elicit the participants' ideas of selfhood. A constructionist epistemology, interpretivist ontology and narrative approach to identity guided this strategy. Qualitative data was collected from twenty-four

participants by means of life narrative interviews with exploratory, open-ended questions. The participants are so-called *late millennials*, born in the second half of the generational range (i.e., born from 1990 to 2000; the generational range is 1981 to 2000). They were identified using a *purposeful sampling strategy* that controlled for gender, public and private education and place of residence (capital city and surrounding towns) (Polkinghorne, 1988). The participants were neither from the high school where I work nor any affiliated school. They were in their final semester of high school or had graduated the year prior to our interviews. With the exception of one participant, they lived with their families and were not in full-time employment. I drew on *interview best practice* and recognised the importance of active listening, empathy and establishing rapport (Kvale, 2007). The interviews took place in a public place, often a coffee shop, and were recorded digitally. The participants were each interviewed twice, with a space of three to five days between each interview. The interviews were carried out in Spanish and the digital recordings later transcribed by a third party. I undertook all translation, confident in my language ability and aspiring for the best ‘feel’ for the data. This ‘translate early’ strategy allowed me to analyse the data and present it here in English (Temple & Young, 2004).

I interpret the participants’ narratives as an articulation of their personal identity. *Narrative analysis* is the study of stories and their plots and is commonplace in disciplines such as history, anthropology, folklore and sociolinguistics (Riessman, 2000; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). This ‘narrative turn’ in the human sciences has also extended to professions such as law, nursing, medicine, occupational therapy and social work (Riessman, 2000). Narrative approaches to identity privilege language and meaning

making and are consistent with the constructionist and interpretivist perspectives I bring to this research. Narrative approaches conceptualise the individual's personal narrative, the stories we tell about ourselves, as an articulation of selfhood. These personal narratives "express the story-teller's identity, which is a product of the relationship between life experiences and the organized stories of these experiences" (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh & Adler, 2005, p.17). Through the process of *emplotment*, the individual crafts a coherent personal narrative that brings together distant events and characters (Ricoeur, 1992). By doing so, the individual gives meaning to, and makes sense of, self, others and the world around them (Polkinghorne, 1988). I employ direct quotations from the participants' narratives to support my interpretations and conclusions. The extracts in which the participants refer to, or I interpret them as referring to, their personal identity, I call *identity talk*. Likewise, I use the term *leader talk* to identify those extracts that refer to, or I interpret as referring to, ideas of leadership.

I recognise that in qualitative approaches the researcher is a co-constructor of knowledge and not a neutral tool in the collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of data. Indeed, my roles as a researcher, teacher and high school principal, provide the different lenses I bring to this research. Finally, I recognise the ethical implications of working with a group of young adults. Of particular concern was the power relationship implied in an interviewee-researcher relationship of a high school student and high school principal. During the interviews I aspired to demonstrate that I valued the participants' contribution and prompted them to offer long and detailed answers. I concluded each interview by asking them if they wished to add something more. By employing the correct ethical considerations, I hope to have been faithful to the participants' accounts and their

ideas of selfhood. I remind the reader and myself that the data of this research is in fact the storied lives of young adults.

Chapter summaries

In this research, I explore whether, and if so how, the participants' experiences and emerging identity reflect the ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation. In this section I outline the content of each chapter.

In chapters two, three and four, I review the literature that pertains to this research. In Chapter Two I discuss foundational approaches to identity (e.g., psychosocial, symbolic interactionist and postmodern approaches), identify their commonalities and differences, and allude to how they inform ideas of generational and organisationally-based identities. In Chapter Three I discuss and critique popular theorisations of generational identity. I offer a brief portrait of the most commonly discussed generations. I dedicate more space to The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) and identify its principal characteristics and differentiators. In Chapter Four I discuss the theoretical constructions of organisationally-based identities, ideas of identity work and identity regulation. I trace the evolution of managerial and organisational portrayals of the leader figure and present the *contemporary popular portrayal* through which it is commonly understood. In particular, I explore the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation and discuss how it differentiates the generation from its predecessors. I close my review of the literature by describing the unresolved debates in the field and identifying areas of potential contribution for this research.

In Chapter Five I discuss the research design I employ in this study. I discuss the epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions that guide it and explain

the narrative approach to identity by which I understand and access the participants' ideas of selfhood. I present issues of access to the field, data collection, transcription, translation, interpretation and presentation. I close the chapter by discussing relevant ethical considerations and dedicate space to discuss my role as a researcher and researcher reflexivity.

The following two chapters I dedicate to my findings. In Chapter Six I explore whether the participants' accounts of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations can be read to suggest a distinctive millennial understanding of these themes. I find only weak support for such an idea and instead suggest that traditional identity influences, before generational ones, appear to inform the participants' ideas of selfhood. In Chapter Seven I discuss how the participants draw upon two dominant discourses of leadership (e.g., *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal*) and adapt or mould them into four nuanced understandings of leader identity. I find only partial support for the idea that millennials understand leadership in a distinctive way.

In Chapter Eight, and drawing upon the findings of this research, I propose three alternative theorisations that extend our knowledge of generational identity, organisationally-based identity and identity construction. First, I theorise that the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' narratives is due to the over reliance on ideas of the 'digital generation' for such claims. Secondly, I theorise that *micro* identity processes, before *macro* ones, better account for the participants' understanding of leadership and the inconclusive results I obtain with respect to leader identity. Thirdly, I offer an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adults, one that suggests

identity construction is not the all-consuming, investment intensive challenge of the mid to late-teens and early twenties that popular culture and academic theories often profess.

Finally in Chapter Nine, I summarise my key findings and theoretical contribution and identify possible implications for educational and others organisations. I discuss some recommendations for future research and reflect on my growth as a researcher during this extended period of study.

Chapter Two: Foundational theories of identity

Introduction

This research is concerned with the identity of Mexican young adults, members of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). It explores to what extent, if any, the participants articulate a distinctive understanding of selfhood that draws upon ideas associated with millennial identity. Further, it scrutinises if there is anything distinctively millennial in the way in which the participants understand themselves as leaders. In the previous chapter, I outlined the background to this research, my motivation for undertaking it, its specific purpose and theoretical contribution.

In this and the following two chapters, I review the academic and popular literature that pertains to the fields of identity, generational identity and organisationally-based identity. I do so with two objectives. First, I locate this research's specific purpose and contribution within these fields and provide the reader with the relevant theoretical background to critique its findings. Secondly, I identify and make evident to the reader how this research extends our knowledge with respect to ideas of millennial distinctiveness and the interplay of generational and organisationally-based identities.

In my search for literature I used keywords such as *theories of identity*, *identity work*, *leader identity*, *generational theory*, *generational identity* and *Millennial Generation*. This search suggested three major areas of theory that I evaluate in the following three chapters. In this chapter, I present three foundational theories of identity that explore the individual's answer to the question *Who am I?* By exploring *psychosocial*, *symbolic interactionist* and *postmodern/poststructural* approaches, I identify the relevant theoretical foundations that inform generational and organisationally-based identities. In

Chapter Three, I discuss ideas of generational identity, offer a brief portrait of twentieth-century generations and describe in greater detail The Millennial Generation. Further, I evaluate claims of millennial distinctiveness and critique popular conceptualisations of generational identity. In Chapter Four, I present theories of organisationally-based identity, particularly leader identity, and discuss how the phenomenon is allegedly understood and performed by millennials. I conclude my review by exploring some unresolved debates in the aforementioned fields and discussing the contribution of this research.

Foundational theories of identity

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns...‘Identity’ is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. Hence ‘identity’ though ostensibly a noun, behaves like a verb (Bauman, 1996, p. 19).

As Bauman’s reflection in his *From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity* (1996) suggests, concepts of identity converge around ideas of self and other; sameness and difference; belonging and outsiderdom. Ideas of identity are relevant to a diverse range of disciplines and the term’s meaning and theoretical role varies considerably between each (Hammack & Toolis, 2015; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) caution that the term ‘identity’ is now associated with certain ambiguity, its “usages are not simply heterogeneous; they point in sharply differing directions” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.8). In the fields of philosophy, psychology, gender and sexual studies, the term is associated with ideas of one’s core characteristics, sameness with, and difference to, others. In history, anthropology and sociology, the term

more commonly describes a certain social group or category and their shared characteristics and behaviours (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This distinction between self-definition and collective identity is at the core of this research. I explore how self-definition reacts and relates to the collective identities associated with generational and leader discourses. The former is increasingly understood as a contemporary collective identity and an alternative to traditional social identities (e.g., nationality, race, class, gender). The latter is increasingly privileged in contemporary organisations, the education sector and society at large.

Across the diverse theorisations of identity, two shared consensuses appear to emerge. First, identity is generally conceptualised as one's answer, individually or collectively, to the question *Who am I?* (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). Identity represents our sense of self or who we believe ourselves to be. Secondly, identity was previously conceptualised as relatively stable and linked to traditional identity categories (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, family or occupation). However, in recent times, individuals are assumed to more actively craft or perform their identity such that, "the modern self is experienced much more as a project" (Reedy, 2009, p.89).

This research is concerned with that identity project, specifically, how Mexican young adults understand themselves as millennials and leaders. Indeed, in this research, I use the term *emerging identity* to reflect that, as young adults, the participants are in the process of defining their adult identities. In this chapter, I provide the reader with the theoretical background to understand and contextualise this research's findings. I do so by discussing three foundational approaches to identity. These approaches are i) Psychosocial ii) Symbolic interactionist and iii) Postmodern and poststructural. Each

provides me with a complementary perspective with which to understand the participants' emerging identity and process of identity construction.

Psychosocial approaches to identity

This research is concerned with the emerging generational and leader identities of young adults. Psychosocial approaches understand identity construction as a life-long project but conceptualise adolescence and young adulthood as particularly important life-stages (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1980). Indeed, Arnett (2007) understands these stages as the “age of identity exploration” (Arnett 2007, p. 69). By drawing on such approaches, I provide the reader with a theoretical introduction to ideas of identity construction and the tensions the participants in this research potentially face in defining their sense of self as young adults. In other words, psychosocial approaches provide me with a theoretical justification to explore identity construction in young adulthood. As I will discuss in Chapter Eight, the findings of this research appear to contest the idea that self-definition consumes the individual's attention and energy, physical, mental and emotional, during adolescence and young adulthood.

Psychosocial approaches can be traced to Erik Erikson's *lifespan theory of human* development articulated in his works *Childhood and Society* (1950), *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959), *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) and *The Life Cycle Completed* (1982) (Marcia, 1980; Waterman; 1999; Schwartz; 2001). Identity is understood as a natural and individual project, a life-long task that is developed across eight stages: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. This development is *epigenesist* in nature, the characteristics of one stage building on those of the previous one. In each stage, one's personal identity, or *ego-identity*, faces a

psychosocial crisis that must be addressed and a psychosocial strength acquired before transitioning to the next stage (Erikson, 1950). The life-stages of adolescence and young adulthood are suggested as particularly important for identity construction (Erikson, 1950; Arnett, 2000). Marcia (1980) states that in adolescence

physical development, cognitive skills, and social expectations coincide to enable young persons to sort through and synthesize their childhood identifications in order to construct a viable pathway toward their adulthood (Marcia, 1980, p. 160).

Further, in adolescence the individual explores available ideological, social and occupational roles in the search for a coherent understanding of oneself - “a dialogue with society, with language, and with others” (McCallum, 2002, p.1). Given this approach, I conceptualise discourses of generational identity as akin to roles (i.e., the role of ‘being a millennial’), that the individual potentially draws upon in their process of self-definition. Given the ubiquity of the discourse of The Millennial Generation, I recognise that the participants might willingly understand themselves in such terms to conform to societal expectations (Coupland, 2003). However, successful self-definition is no given and adolescents are hypothesised to face the psychosocial crisis of *Identity Synthesis vs. Identity Confusion* (Erikson, 1950, 1959; Marcia, 1980). The former, a successful definition of selfhood, is associated with well-being, self-confidence, self-understanding, “a feeling of being at home in one’s body” and a sense “of knowing where one is going” (Erikson, 1968, p.165). Erikson (1998) states this synthesis of identity is characterised by

the creation of a sense of sameness, a unity of personality now felt by the individual and recognized by others as having consistency in time - of being, as it were, an irreversible historical fact (Erikson, 1998 p.12).

Unsuccessful self-definition, so-called *Identity Confusion*, is understood as, “a fragmented or piecemeal sense of self that does not support self-directed decision making” (Schwartz et al., 2013, p. 2). In the life-stage of young adulthood, identity is understood with respect to relationships, love and worldview (Erikson, 1950). This stage is characterised by the crisis of *Intimacy versus Isolation*, the search for personal intimacy, the emotional closeness to others, and the acceptance of greater personal responsibility and autonomy (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) prefers the term *emerging adulthood* to describe those between 18 and 25 years old, and who “explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (Arnett, 2000, p.469).

Erikson’s (1950) lifespan theory of identity development has been extensively studied, applied and extended and now represents an umbrella theory for a diverse body of research, so-called *Neo-Eriksonian perspectives* (Hammack & Toolis, 2015; Schwartz, 2001; Waterman, 1999). These perspectives share an emphasis on understanding how the individual integrates “multiple identity domains into a cohesive sense of self” (Meca et al., 2015, p.2). Marcia’s (1980, 1968) *identity status model* operationalises Erikson’s (1950) theory through two *identity dimensions*: i) *Exploration*, the ability to select, come to know and understand one’s identity from a group of potential identity alternatives and ii) *Commitment*, the ability to define and adhere to one’s beliefs, values and goals (Waterman, 1999). The model therefore provides a taxonomy of four potential *identity states* by which to evaluate and understand an individual’s identity development and construction. *Achievement* represents the successful commitment to a particular identity after a period of identity exploration; *Moratorium* occurs after the individual explores identity alternatives but cannot commit to one; *Foreclosure* is commitment to a particular

identity without prior exploration; and *Diffusion* describes both a lack of exploration and commitment. Each of these states is associated, and has been studied with, personality traits such as maturity, openness and curiosity and also with conditions such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Schwartz et al., 2013). Marcia's model is critiqued for misrepresenting and over simplifying Erikson's theorisations and assuming that identity formation is complete in adolescence (Grotevant, 1987; van Hoof, 1999).

Berzonsky's (1989) *identity style model* understands *identity style* as a problem-solving strategy with which to make relevant identity and life decisions. Berzonsky (1990) suggests that by adolescence most individuals have the ability to employ one or all of three identity styles. *Informational styles*, associated with autonomy and agency, employ a proactive style that involves information search and a flexible approach to self-definition. *Normative styles* employ a more passive approach and understand selfhood principally as a function of external identity influences such as cultural and family norms and expectations. *Diffuse-avoidant* styles avoid, renounce or postpone important identity and life decisions for a lack of goals, commitments and perhaps even a sense of a lack of personal control over their lives (Schwartz et al., 2013). In Chapter Eight, and based on my findings, I will discuss how Berzonsky's (1989) *informational style* can be understood to most closely represent my theorisation of the participants' experience of identity construction. Côte's (1997) *identity capital model* examines identity from a macro perspective and the social viability of one's identity decisions (Schwartz, 2001). Individuals employ their "identity capital resources" to support ideas of selfhood (Côte, 1997, p.578). These resources can be tangible (e.g., financial resources, personal social status, prestige associated with educational qualifications, membership of social groups)

or intangible (e.g., personal ego, locus of control, critical thinking skills, sense of purpose, self-esteem). Côté (1997) hypothesises that individuals with a greater overall quantity of tangible and intangible identity resources more easily form stable and accepted personal identities (Schwartz, 2001).

In summary, Eriksonian and Neo-Eriksonian approaches understand identity construction as a life-long series of psychosocial challenges. The decisions made in the life-stages of adolescence and young adulthood are particularly important for ideas of selfhood. Critics of such approaches point to an oversimplification of the process of identity construction and a lack of theoretical validity for the various categories employed in the different models (Côté & Levine, 2002; van Hoof, 1999). Further, these theories are often tainted as being overly optimistic, drawing on Christian and Enlightenment traditions of individual autonomy and the continuous development towards a one *true self* (Reedy, 2009; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Moreover, psychosocial approaches fail to account for the socially constructed contexts in which identity construction takes place. Self-understanding is likely subject to the influences and meanings associated with, and constructed by, others. As such, the identity project is not inherent to self nor isolated from social and historical contexts. These contexts - one's relationships with others and the world around us - likely inform our ideas of selfhood. *Symbolic interactionist approaches* to identity, the subject of the following section, do theorise this social construction of identity and provide an alternative lens through which to understand the participants' ideas of selfhood.

Symbolic interactionist approaches to identity

Psychosocial approaches theorise identity construction as a set of universal processes of personal development. In contrast, symbolic interactionist approaches recognise the relational and contingent nature of self-definition. These approaches theorise that individuals understand themselves subject to social context, social interaction, language and relationships. The idea of selfhood is conceptualised as derived from one's collective identifications and attachment to certain social groups and not simply inherent to the human condition. Identity is "socially, historically, politically, and culturally constructed at both the institutional and individual levels" (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007, p. 2). This *social identity*, "derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 63). The meaning of these identities, "cannot be fully captured as they change with evolving contexts and relationships" (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007, p. 2). One's identity then, "orientated to the social world" (Elliot, 2001, p. 26), encapsulates both self and other, the individual and the collective (Spears, 2010).

Symbolic interactionist approaches are traced to Mead (1934) and theorise that selfhood is developed in relation to, and constrained by, one's relationships with others and the social world. Mead (1934) states

Selves can only exist in definite relations to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also (Mead, 1934, p.164).

To accommodate this relational approach, identity is conceptualised as both 'I' and 'Me'. 'I' represents the autonomous subject and is the personal, decision-making, spontaneous, creative and unorganised part of self. 'Me' is the social self, a set of beliefs,

attitudes, understandings and behaviours that have been learnt from others over time. Identity construction therefore is no longer wholly a private project but a public one, occurring in relation to others and in the context of symbolic meaning (Hammack & Toolis, 2015). Given the number and complexity of the personal relationships one enjoys, symbolic interactionist approaches suggest a more fluid, multiplicity of identity in which the personal and social self are in continual dialogue. Mead (1934) states, “There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions” (Mead, 1934, p.142). Indeed, my own participants tended to stress the significance of relational roles such as the obedient daughter, the trusting friend, the competitive sportswomen and the caring classmate.

Stryker’s (1968, 1997) *Identity Theory* can be traced to symbolic interactionism and understands personal identity with respect to social groups and structures. Stryker and Burke (2000) understand identity as

a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organized, embedded in an array of groups, organisations, communities, and institutions, and intersected by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other variables (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.285).

Identity Theory hypothesises that individuals assume a different identity for each of the complex and dynamic groups they interact with. These identities are ordered in a salience hierarchy, where *identity salience* is the probability that one identity is evoked in certain situations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In other words, the more important a particular identity for the relationships within a certain network, the more likely an individual is to evoke it and act accordingly. Such a conceptualisation recognises the role of both personal autonomy and the influence of traditional social structures (e.g., class, ethnicity,

gender, profession and religion). Indeed, Jones and McEwen (2000) propose a *core identity* that intersects with dimensions such as class, religion, gender, culture, race and sexual orientation to form a structure of multiple identities. *Role-Identity Theory* (McCall & Simmons, 1966), *Identity Accumulation Theory* (Thoits, 1983), and *Identity Control Theory* (Burke, 1991) are further articulations of Stryker's (1968, 1997) *Identity Theory*.

Another important articulation of symbolic interactionism is *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals are conceptualised to classify themselves and others into social groups and categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, religious denomination and sexual preference (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Each of these groups or categories represent "a collection of people who share the same social identification or define themselves in terms of the same social category membership" (Turner, 1984, p.530). As I will discuss in Chapter Three, (see pages 53 to 66), scholars and popular authors have increasingly come to conceptualise generations as social groups, albeit big ones, that share "an inborn way of experiencing life and the world" (Mannheim, 1952, p.282). Segmenting the social world in this way provides reference markers by which individuals understand their position in a given social context. The individual's participation in, and sense of belonging to, a certain group or category provides "emotional and value significance" (Tajfel, 1972, p.292), self-esteem, pride, uncertainty reduction, meaning and a sense of acceptance (Tajfel, 1972; Hogg & Grieve, 1999; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Cast & Burke, 2002). Individuals "differentiate their own group positively from others to achieve a positive social identity" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987, p.42). Self-verifying feedback provided by the *ingroup* (i.e., other group members) reinforces the feeling of acceptance and value, and thus increases

worth-based self-esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002). However, group membership also represents a *depersonalisation* of individual identity as one assumes collective norms, values, beliefs and ascribed behaviours (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity theory therefore conceptualises one's sense of self as an amalgam of *personal identity*, one's idiosyncratic characteristics such as abilities, traits and interests, and *social identity*, the characteristics of the group or category one considers themselves part of (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identity is "relational and comparative" (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, p.16) as people define themselves with reference to other groups or categories. In different contextual situations, different social identities become more salient and the individual transitions from an 'I' to 'we' understanding of self. Indeed, Albarello, Crocetti and Rubini, (2018) reflect that "personal and social identity are the two poles of the continuum along which individuals self-define" (Albarello, Crocetti & Rubini, 2018, p.692)

Symbolic interactionist approaches such as *Identity Theory* (Stryker 1968) and *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) theorise identity as defined in relation to others and society, "Society shapes self shapes social behaviour" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.285). In colloquial terms, the individual cannot answer the question *Who am I?* without first understanding *Who I am with?* or *Which groups do I belong to?* The individual's sense of self is an amalgam of idiosyncratic characteristics and those appropriated from those groups they belong to.

However, I recognise that symbolic interactionist approaches, and indeed psychosocial ones, do not adequately theorise ideas of power and social control. In simplifying ideas of agency, these two approaches fail to recognise the potentially homogenising and universalising nature of group association - the need or pressure to

understand oneself in terms of collective and societal expectations. In the following section, I turn to how postmodernist approaches theorise such complexity and ideas of identity work and identity regulation.

Postmodernist/poststructuralist approaches to identity

If psychosocial approaches prioritise the developmental character of identity construction, and symbolic interactionist its relational nature, then *postmodernist/poststructuralist* approaches emphasise the complexity and dynamism of contemporary selfhood. They challenge the idea that the autonomous individual is capable of constructing a stable sense of self and contest the conceptualisation of identity as an “irreversible historical fact” (Erikson, 1998 p.12). Instead, in postmodernity, identity construction is the continual commitment of choosing between, and bringing together, multiple options of self-definition.

Postmodernist philosophical approaches are evident since the 1970s in the arts, architecture, literature, media and social organisations. Such philosophies suggest a loss of faith in current political, economic and social systems; question rational discourse and scientific objectivity; and critique the belief of continued technological and social progress. McAdams (1996) states these philosophies represent a “sceptical and playfully ironic attitude about grand systems and universal claims” (McAdams, 1996, p.298). Indeed, Schachter (2005) suggests postmodernism “questions the universality and essentiality accorded to basic theoretical concepts such as self, development, identity” (Schachter, 2005, p. 147). Lyon (2005) in *Postmodernity: The History of an Idea*, describes a postmodern state in which

knowledge is partial, fragmentary, and incomplete; they [postmodernists]

problematize the authority of the traditional author to speak for any social group entirely; and they challenge the authority of the written text to represent social phenomena fully. Postmodernists also prioritize the importance of personal expression, individual voices, and cultural particularism in explaining social life (Lyon, 2005, p. 249).

In this research, I will explore identity in what might be more accurately understood as *postmodernism as context*, “a relatively specific social and cultural condition that serves as a context for human development” (Schachter, 2005, p.139). Schachter (2005) describes this context in terms of constant change, multiple contexts of identity, scepticism towards future progress, “an atmosphere of relativity” and “a sense that reality is frail” (Schachter, 2005, p. 143). In such a context, the individual is understood to be exposed to, enjoy, or indeed suffer, a vast array of identity, consumer and life-style alternatives. Of this world Gergen (1991) states,

Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind - both harmonious and alien. As we absorb their varied rhymes and reasons, they become part of us and we of them. Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For everything we ‘know to be true’ about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships (Gergen, 1991, p.6).

The result of this “social saturation” (Gergen, 1991, p.6) is that traditional identity categories such as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, family or occupation “can now be fashioned at will to a much greater extent than was possible in the past” (Huddy, 2001, p. 137). Moreover, they compete with a new and vast array of identity possibilities (Gergen, 1991). Cushman (1990) understands this multiplicity as revealing “a significant absence of community, tradition and shared meaning” (Cushman, 1990, p. 600). Given the ubiquity and prestige associated with millennial and leader identities respectively, I understand the two as forming part of this menu of identity options. The individual faces

what might be considered 'identity overload': an infinite list from which to choose, adapt and appropriate ideas of selfhood. Given this context, postmodernists contest the very possibility of constructing a unified and stable identity and question the theoretical foundations of identity research. Cerulo (1997) states, "postmodern-identity scholarship deconstructs established identity categories and their accompanying rhetoric in an effort to explore the full range of 'being'" (Cerulo, 1997, p.391). Indeed, identity becomes a continual task of construction, revision and deconstruction in "a world where anything goes and can be negotiated" (Gergen, 1992, p.7). Identity is illusionary, fluid, and "multiphrenic", characterised by a "struggle to self-name, self-characterise, and claim social prerogative" (Cerulo, 1997, p.393). Indeed, Gergen (1991) states, "The fully saturated self becomes no self at all" (Gergen, 1992, p.7).

Giddens (1991) conceptualises postmodernism through the term 'high modernity', a period characterised by technological development, continuous yet unexpected change and the prevalence of crisis and uncertainty (Giddens, 1991). This state, "opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by standardizing effects of commodity capitalism" (Giddens, 1991, p.196). Giddens (1991) recognises greater individual autonomy than is commonly associated with postmodernist conceptualisations of identity. Instead of being subject to dominant discourses of selfhood, the individual has the opportunity to select from a set of packaged life-style choices defined as

more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (Giddens, 1991, p.81).

These life-styles are articulated through dress, dietary preferences, consumption choices and the way one behaves and relates to others (Giddens, 1991). They act as "a

shared vocabulary of meaning which both communicate our sense of identity to others and validate it to ourselves” (Tiwsakul & Hackley, 2012, p.492). Marwick (2013) reflects that self-definition draws upon the “media they [individuals] consume, the clothes they wear, how they adorn themselves, and even how they transform their bodies through exercise or plastic surgery” (Marwick, 2013, p. 356). Identity construction is therefore a continuous process of synthesising a plurality of alternatives where, “self and body become the sites of a variety of new lifestyle options” (Giddens, 1991, p.225). Indeed, virtual worlds, fostered by the internet and other communications technologies, let individuals assume alternative identities or motivate them to conform to desirable self-presentations (Baudrillard, 1994). Giddens (1991) warns of both unification and fragmentation of the self, the feeling of powerlessness and loss of control, and the difficulty of differentiating between the many claims of truth and authority. In a similar vein, Tracey and Trethewey (2005) conceptualise postmodern identity as a *crystallised self*, the sum of a growing number of different facets or available discourses, “ready to be polished, cleaved, or transformed” (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 188). The stable identity is replaced by one “emphasizing fragmentation, fluidity, and performativity” (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009, p.55). In a more optimistic tone, Lifton (1993) does not “equate multiplicity and fluidity with disappearance of the self”, but instead understands postmodern identity as, “a quest for authenticity and meaning, a form-seeking assertion of self” (Lifton, 1993, p.8).

The aforementioned authors understand postmodern identity in terms of fluidity, multiplicity and abundance. Autonomy and control over identity construction are swamped by the alternatives of selfhood on offer. However, there is a second

interpretation of postmodern identity construction, one almost diametrically opposed to ideas of overload and saturation.

A Foucauldian understanding of the postmodern world conceptualises identity in terms of identity control, conformity and homogeneity. Such approaches suggest the individual is subject to institutionalised control and power that limit agency and the alternatives for selfhood. Control is exercised through “modern technologies of control” (Taylor, 1984, p.158) such as computerised payments, surveillance video, identity cards and security services that are constantly watching, measuring, classifying and controlling postmodern life. *Technologies of power* create the rules for self-definition and, “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends of domination” (Foucault, 1988, p.18). In this theory of discursive practice, identity is no longer represented by the question *Who I am?* but instead must be understood in terms of *Who is speaking through me?* Self-definition becomes a process of selecting from a controlled set of identity options in which, “society has evidently assigned you a membership” (Gitlin, 1994, p.153). Indeed, Reedy, King and Coupland (2016) understand identity formation within the organisation as “a precarious biographical project vulnerable to capture by ready-made identities and subject to managerial control” (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016, p.4). I find resonance in this Foucauldian conceptualisation of identity control. Discourses of generational identity are universalising, homogenising and potentially oppressive in nature. They prescribe a set of valued behaviours, attitudes, aspirations and ways of seeing the world. The individual, perhaps unknowingly so, defines themselves “within, not outside discourse” (Hall, 2000, p.17) and conforms to the

ideas of selfhood articulated in generational discourses and “consuming all-pervasive and inescapable ideologies” (Reedy, 2009, p.88).

Postmodern approaches, whether conceptualised in terms of multiplicity and abundance or control and loss of autonomy, appear to challenge the very possibility that I might understand the participants by means of a unified and stable millennial identity. Selfhood is simply a fleeting expression of self, continually reshaped, adapted and abandoned as other options become available. The participants might continually negotiate their identity - so called “self-investments” (Gergen, 1992, p.7) - as situations dictate. Alternatively, and drawing upon Foucauldian ideas, identity construction is reduced to the act of selecting among a controlled set of options of selfhood and thus reflects who others want you to be.

In summary, for postmodernist identity scholars, generational, and indeed organisationally-based identities, are conceptualised as an infinite array of alternatives for self-definition. Identity construction is the task, or challenge, of continually choosing from this long list of alternatives. On the other hand, and returning to Foucauldian ideas of control, generational discourses are examples of identity straight-jackets, written by members of one generation to prescribe certain behaviours to the members of another. Either way, agency is partially lost: drowned in a multitude of options or confined to predetermined alternatives of selfhood.

Summary of foundational approaches to identity

In this chapter I have discussed psychosocial, symbolic interactionist and postmodern/poststructuralist approaches to identity and identified their relevant

similarities and differences. Psychosocial approaches understand identity construction as a life-long project but prioritise the life-stages of adolescence and young adulthood (Erikson, 1950; Arnett, 2000). Successful identity construction results in a state of *identity synthesis*, the idea of “being at home in one’s body” (Erikson, 1968, p. 165). Symbolic interactionist approaches theorise identity as defined in relation to others and society and not inherent or essential to the human condition. Individuals define themselves by drawing on publicly available discourses and the meanings associated with the social identities of the groups they associate with. Finally, postmodern approaches theorise a complex identity project characterised by identity multiplicity and fluidity. Individuals are exposed to an almost infinite range of identity options yet simultaneously controlled or regulated by dominant institutionalised discourses.

Having presented and contrasted these three broad approaches to identity, in the following chapter I discuss how they inform ideas of generational identity. Organisations and society at large are increasingly understood in generational terms. The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities suggests members of different generations understand themselves, and the world around them, in distinctive ways. Indeed, the twentieth century has been neatly compartmentalised into four generations each with their own particular characteristics and worldview (e.g., The Silent Generation, 1925 to 1945; The Baby Boomers, 1946 to 1964; Generation X, 1965 to 1980; The Millennial Generation, 1981 to 2000). It is to these generations that I turn in the following chapter. I will discuss the academic theories and popular conceptualisations on which they are built, describe at length ideas of millennial identity, and offer a critique of the field.

Chapter Three: Theories of generational identity

Introduction

Generation goes to the heart of a number of debates about the nature of contemporary society. It has biological roots through the family, where generations generally refer to successive parent-child bonds. There are psychological dimensions in the sense of belonging and identity that can arise, depending upon the stance that an individual takes toward the generation in question. Generation is also used to locate particular birth cohorts in specific historical and cultural circumstances, such as the 'baby boomers.' It is a truly crossroads phenomenon that links a number of different fields and levels of analysis (Biggs, 2007, p. 695).

In the previous chapter I introduced psychosocial approaches, symbolic interactionist and postmodernist approaches to identity. Despite differing theorisations of the phenomenon, I stated that the concept of identity is generally understood as one's answer to the question *Who am I?* (Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). Further, I suggested that while one's sense of self was previously considered relatively stable and informed by traditional identity categories (e.g., class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, occupation, religious affiliation), it is increasingly understood as dynamic and fluid - a continuous identity project (Reedy, 2009).

Increasingly, organisations and society at large are conceptualised in generational terms and characterised by the supposedly differing, if not conflicting, generational identities of their members (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000). Popular discourses of generational identities articulate a diverse range of ideas such as relationships, values and ethics, technology use and legacy (i.e., the generation's impact in society) and organisational role (i.e., organisationally-based identity). Additionally, and as I will discuss in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities*, ideas of leadership are an important facet by which members of one generation

are differentiated from another. This is particularly true in the case of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Indeed, popular authors such as Howe and Strauss (2007, 2000), Elmore (2009) and Alsop (2008) appear to conceptualise generational and leader identity as interlocking: a specific generational identity can be identified by the type of leadership associated with it and vice versa. The objective of this research is to explore ideas of millennial distinctiveness and the portrayal of leadership associated with the generation.

The quotation with which I opened this section alludes to the relevance and breath of ideas of generations and generational identity in contemporary society and in academic fields as diverse as biology, history, gender studies, media and communication studies, consumer sciences and sociology. I approach this “crossroads phenomenon” (Biggs, 2007, p. 695) from an organisational perspective and recognise that organisationally-based identities are often conceptualised as informed by generational identity.

Ideas of generational identity are articulated in both the popular and academic literature. The two serve somewhat complementary roles: former’s headline-catching, if not alarmist, pronouncements have undoubtedly brought ideas of generations into the public space; the latter’s theoretical and methodological rigour allow for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to define oneself in generational terms. In this chapter I discuss the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities, offer a brief portrayal of twentieth century generations and present The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). I also offer several critiques of these popular discourses. Before doing so, and drawing upon the foundational approaches of identity I presented in the previous chapter, I discuss theories of generational identity in more academic writing.

Part I: Academic and popular conceptualisations of generations

Academic theorisations of generational identity

Academic theories of generational identity understand generations as an explanatory category for individual and collective values, attitudes and behaviours, so-called *generational determinism* or *cohort determinism* (Walker, 1993). The following quotation from Pilcher (1994) is illustrative of this conceptualisation.

The notion of generation is widely used in the everyday world to make sense of differences between age groupings in society and to locate individual selves and other persons within historical time. We speak, for example, of ‘my generation’ and of ‘the other generation’. We describe those who grew up in say, the 1960s, as belonging to ‘the sixties generation’. We speak of ‘a few generations ago’, a ‘new generation’ and of ‘the generation gap’ (Pilcher, 1994, p. 481).

I discuss ideas of generational identity by unpacking this quotation. In doing so, I identify how ideas of generational identity draw upon foundational approaches of identity and provide the reader with a concise introduction to the field.

First, generational identities are assumed to form because people experience some historically relevant event or circumstance at the same stage of their life-cycle. That is to say, they have a common location in historical time, so called *generational location*. ‘Generation-causing’ events take the form of political, economic, social and cultural change and, especially in the case of The Millennial Generation, technology and technological innovation. Zemke et al. (2000) allege such events, “capture the attention and emotions of thousands if not millions of individuals at a formative stage of their lives”, such that “People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents” (Zemke et al., 2000, p.16). This *defining events perspective* can be traced to Mannheim’s (1952) sociological understanding of generations as conduits of societal change that “has been largely accepted (albeit perhaps unconsciously) and adopted by practitioners, the

popular media, and scholars” (Perryer & Plowman, 2011, p.456). Drawing upon psychosocial approaches of identity formation, generational identity is suggested to result from the events experienced during adolescence and young adulthood. Perreyer and Plowman (2011) state that, “experiences during a persons’ youth have a profound impact upon the beliefs and attitudes that a young person takes into adulthood” (Perreyer & Plowman, 2011, p.456). For example, the popular portrayal of the Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) draws heavily on ideas of challenging authority that derives from their participation as young adults in Vietnam War protests, the civil rights movement and the 1967 Summer of Love.

Secondly, generations are understood as groups of individuals that share certain values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview. These recognisable characteristics promote individuals to see themselves as similar to some and different from others: one is assumed to feel a sense of belonging to one generation and a sense of difference to others. This *generational consciousness* or *common bond* is “an inborn way of experiencing life and the world” (Mannheim, 1952, p.282). The academic literature, and indeed popular authors such as Howe and Strauss (2000), Elmore (2010) and Alsop (2008), have come to use the term *generational identity* to represent this sense of belonging. This conceptualisation of generational identity draws heavily on academic theorisations of *social identity theory* and collective identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1986). As I have stated in Chapter Two, social identity theory purports that individuals classify themselves and others into certain social categories (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, class). A generation, a group of people born within the same age range and sharing certain experiences, is conceptualised as one such category that encapsulates a set of shared values, attitudes and beliefs. In

other words, considering oneself a member of one generation (e.g., Generation X, born 1965 to 1980) is akin to understanding oneself a member of a certain social category or group and adopting the appropriate norms and behaviours.

Thirdly, given the existence of *generational location* and *generational consciousness*, generations are understood to be predictors of behaviours as might be the structures of class and gender (Gilleard, 2004). Indeed, Becker (1991) states, “specific generations become institutionalised and partially take over the role of social classes as arrangements for the allocation of opportunities [and] the distribution of scarce goods” (Becker, 1991, p. 221-222). Members of the same generation are assumed to act in the same and predictable way - but different to those of other generations. As such, the behaviour of today’s 40-year-olds is not a good predictor of the behaviour of tomorrow’s 40-year-olds; instead one must understand the behaviour of today’s 20-year-olds (tomorrow’s 40-year-olds). Mannheim (1952) states:

belonging to the same generation or age group, endow[s] the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291).

Generational identity therefore conveys both similarity or sameness (with those of the same generation) and difference (to those of other generations), drawing again on ideas of social identity theory. It is important to note that Mannheim (1952) does recognise the phenomenon of *intergenerational variance*: not all individuals will adopt and internalise their generational identity in the same way (Alwin & McCammon, 2007). Indeed, I do not assume *a priori* that all the participants understand themselves as millennials in the same way.

Academic theorisations of generational identity however are not without their critiques. Theorisation is hampered by the lack of consensus over *generational range*, the length, in years, of each generation, and an acknowledgement that ‘cuspers’ or ‘tweeners’, those born at the very beginning or very end of generational boundaries, might understand themselves as part of two generations (Arsenault, 2004, p.125; Raines & Hunt, 2000; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt and Gade (2012) state “This lack of consistency has implications for the conceptual definition of the generations, their operationalization (i.e., when they start and finish), and the assessment of their impact on outcomes” (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt & Gade, 2012, p.377). Indeed, given the range, in years, of some generations (e.g., nineteen years for The Millennial Generation), important intergenerational variance likely exists.

Moreover, purported intergenerational differences are not consistently supported by academic studies and age effects are often offered as better explanatory variables (Appelbaum, Serena & Shapiro, 2004; Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Yang & Guy, 2006). Indeed, Sivricova and Moiseeva (2018) claim, “Researchers haven't provided enough convincing data on why there are generations, whether there are real distinctions between generations, or why these distinctions have an impact on the life of people” (Sivricova & Moiseeva, 2018, p. 1). In response to such critiques, Costanza, Darrow, Yost and Severt (2017) discuss the methodological innovations employed by researchers to attempt to isolate generational effects from age ones.

In summary, contemporary academic theories of generational identity and intergenerational difference draw upon Mannheim’s (1952) sociological conceptualisation of generations and the idea that those individuals who experience the

same events in the same period of their life-cycle share a common bond, values and behaviour. Scholars explore this generational determinism with the appropriate rigour, complexity and nuance. However, the popular discourse of generations, to which I turn in the following section, is often more homogenising, universalising and potentially oppressive in its pronouncements.

The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics

In the previous section, I discussed academic theories of generational identity. I did so by drawing upon Mannheim's (1952) sociological understanding of generations as conduits of social change, referring to ideas of generational location and generation consciousness (Mannheim, 1952) and conceptualising generations as a collective or social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

However, ideas of generations are broadly understood through a popular discourse of contemporary generational identities. This discourse neatly labels different generations (e.g., The Silent Generation, The Baby Boomers) and assigns them a set of differing characteristics. The following quotation, from often-cited popular authors Howe and Strauss (2007), is both representative of the popular discourse of generations and illustrates how this discourse draws closely upon the academic theorisations I discussed in the previous section. Indeed, it is similar to the quotation of Pilcher (1994) with which I opened the section titled *Academic theorisations of generational identity*. Howe and Strauss (2007) state

This is what constitutes a generation: It is shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at the time. As each generation ages into the next phase - from youth to young adulthood to midlife to elderhood - its attitudes and behaviours mature, producing new currents in the

public mood. In other words, people do not “belong” to their age brackets. A woman of 40 today has less in common with the 40-year-old women across the ages than with the rest of her generation, which is united by memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons. Generations follow observable historical patterns and thus offer a very powerful tool for predicting future trends. To anticipate what 40-year-olds will be like 20 years from now, don’t look at today’s 40-year-olds; look at today’s 20-year-olds (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.1).

In this section, and to illustrate how pervasive the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities has become, I draw upon selected noteworthy authors to offer a brief portrayal or portrait of the millennials’ predecessors. I do so for the following two reasons. First, later in this chapter, in the section titled *The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation: labels and characteristics*, I will argue that the popular discourse differentiates millennials from their predecessors through a series of *millennial roles*, or distinctive characterisations. To make such a claim for millennial distinctiveness, it is necessary to offer the reader both a portrayal of the millennials, as I will do on pages 69 to 84, but also a brief portrait of their predecessors. To do so, I identify the most distinguishing characteristics of the generational identity of three commonly cited twentieth century generations: The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945), the Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), and Generation X (born 1965 to 1980). I also include a brief sketch of the millennials’ immediate successors, Generation Z or The Centennials (born since 2000), given the recent emergence of its generational discourse. Given the objective of this research, I will pay particular attention to how the popular discourse assigns differing understandings of organisationally-based identities to different generations. Secondly, by presenting the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities, I aspire to illustrate its potentially universalising, homogenising and oppressive nature. I conceptualise discourses of generational identity, millennial or otherwise, as

‘Discourses with a capital D’ as suggested by Bourdieu (1991, 1985), Foucault (1985) and Gee (1999). These ‘big D’ discourses act in such a way that “others recognize you as a particular type of *who* (identity) engaged in a particular type of *what* (activity) here and now” (Gee, 1999, p.18, italics in original). In other words, these discourses potentially produce the phenomenon they purport to describe: their ubiquity and power effects motivate individuals to define themselves in such terms. These discourses might be understood to produce “certain truth effects in the world; indeed, discourse is anchored in a particular vocabulary that can be said to constitute a particular version of the social world” (Sveningsson & Larson, 2006, p. 205). Indeed, the objective of this research is to understand the participants ‘before and beyond’ the millennial label and discourse that often characterise them.

To construct the generational portrayals of the millennials’ predecessors, I have selected illustrative examples of the popular discourse from a vast and diverse popular literature. I have drawn on work of Neil Howe and William Strauss who have approached generations from economic, historical, demographic and social perspectives and are consultants to both the public and private sector. They are perhaps the most quoted and best-selling authors on generations with titles such as *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (1992); *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy-What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (1997); *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000); *Millennials Go to College: Strategies for a New Generation on Campus* (2003) and *Millennials and the Pop Culture* (2006). Likewise, I draw on Ron Alspop the BBC’s Generational Work Columnist, and author of *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation is Shaking Up*

the Workplace (2008). Alsop (2008) traces the impact of generational change within organisations and how best to take advantage of the intergenerational workplace. Elmore (2009) brings a leadership development perspective to help schools, universities and organisations develop the leadership potential of young millennials. He suggests the importance of strong character, storytelling and mentoring in works such as *Habitudes for the Journey: The Art of Navigating Transitions* (2016); *Generation iY, Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (2014); and *Life Giving Mentors* (2009). Finally, Don Tapscott, a senior advisor to the World Economic Forum and Chancellor of Trent University, Ontario Canada, understands generations with respect to innovation, media and technological change. Tapscott explores the economic and societal consequences of a hyper-innovative contemporary society in publications such as *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World* (2008); *Macrowikinomics: New Solutions for a Connected Planet* (2010) and *The Digital Economy: Rethinking Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence* (2014). I draw upon Tapscott's work principally in my description of The Millennial Generation. Finally, and recognising the risks of basing my portrayals on the work of relatively few writers, I have included other illustrative examples. I do however acknowledge the leadership of the aforementioned authors in defining and popularising the commonly accepted labels and characteristics of twentieth-century generations.

Before presenting the portrayals of the four aforementioned generations, I highlight the overriding theme that characterise them: change and difference. The idea that each generation has a distinctive identity seems ubiquitous in popular culture and literature. Little and Winch (2017) claim, "generation is seen as a pivot: the movement

from the past to the present to the future revolves around it” (Little & Winch, 2017, p. 139). Intergenerational difference, and indeed potential conflict, is illustrated in contemporary portrayals of the workplace (e.g., the differing needs, expectations and leader preference); consumer preferences (e.g., ecological awareness and spending decisions; ideas of the sharing economy (e.g., Uber, Airbnb and Taskrabbit); and use of modern communication technologies (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp). Given this introduction, I present the generations in chronological order, beginning with The Silent Generation.

The Silent Generation or The Veterans (born 1925 to 1945), now in their eighties and nineties, were born during the inter-war period, “just too late to be war heroes and just too early to be youthful free spirits” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 3). The events associated with the generation are some of the most pivotal of the last century: U.S. and global economic depression, unemployment and poverty, and the intercontinental tensions leading to the World War II. According to Howe and Strauss (2007), their generational identity is articulated in ideas of conformity, conservatism, dedication, service and sacrifice, “gray-flannel conformists, they accepted the institutional civic life” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.4). Elmore (2009) refers to a conservative generation that values relationships and understands career and work as a means to an end (Elmore, 2009). Drawing upon this conformist characterisation, Sheehy (1995) refers to The Silent Generation as the “last gasp of a generation that largely respected authority and believed in American institutions and corporate paternalism” (Sheehy, 1995, p.29). Indeed, ideas of service and sacrifice colour biographies and histories of the generation. A series of memoirs recounting the storied lives of The Silent Generation, usually in wartime service,

describe the challenges some of the generation faced in their youth. Boyett (2015) *Unsung Heroes: Voices of War World Two* opens with a series of interviews with World War II veterans. The author states,

The most important thing to remember is that they *served*, and *served* with distinction. And they don't think of themselves of heroes, they were just "doing their duty". My hat is off to them, and to all veterans who have served or are still serving. I want to thank them for all their commitment (Boyett, 2015, p. i, italics in original).

Ideas of conformity and conservatism are also evident in the organisationally-based identities articulated in the discourse of The Silent Generation. As workers, Howe and Strauss (2007) claim the generation understood commitment and organisational loyalty as the keys to career success, "taking their cues from those higher up on the age ladder" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4). Elmore (2010) claims the generation viewed work "as a duty and privilege", took advantage of their experience and were risk-averse (Elmore, 2010, p.138). With respect to leadership, and again reflecting ideas of conservatism (Howe & Strauss, 1992), the generation is portrayed to prefer a traditional leadership style, a well-defined hierarchy, formal communication and feedback (Hammill, 2005) and the values of honesty, loyalty, competence and credibility (Arsenault, 2004; Salahuddin, 2010). Howe and Strauss (2002, 2007), Elmore (2009) and Zemke et al. (2000) suggest the generation's preferred leaders include Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Churchill. As leaders, The Silent Generation are knowledgeable, experienced, well-connected "classic 'keepers of the grail' of yesteryear, irreplaceable repository of lore and wisdom" (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013, p. 4). Howe and Strauss (2007) state, "As elders, they have focused on discussion, inclusion, and process" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.4).

I recognise the portrayal of The Silent Generation, perhaps understandably given their sacrifice, as idealistic and selective in nature. Brokaw (2015) acknowledges their “mistakes” and alleges, “They allowed McCarthyism and racism to go unchallenged for too long” (Brokaw, 2015, p. XXVIII). Further, the portrayal of conformity might be challenged by the generation’s participation in important historical turning points such as the election of Attlee’s Labour government in the U.K. in 1945; the growth of the U.K. trade union movement in the 1940 and 1950s (Ferne & Metcalf, 2005); and Kennedy’s ascension to the presidency of the United States in 1961. Indeed, those aged over 65 voted predominantly ‘Leave’ in the U.K.’s 2016 referendum on European Union membership and for Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election in November of the same year. Moreover, while Howe Strauss, (2007, p. 4) refer to “retirement with a hip lifestyle and unprecedented affluence”, a contemporary discourse of the ‘greedy generation’ appears to reflect societal fear of “the massive political power that the group could potentially wield in self-serving ways” (Street & Cossman, 2006, p. 75). In summary, The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945) is portrayed in terms of conservatism, conformity, service and loyalty - respected and respectful in old age.

The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), the result of an increased post-war birth rate, are currently in their fifties, sixties and seventies. According to Howe and Strauss (2007) the boomers, “loudly proclaimed their scorn for the secular blueprints of their parents - institutions, civic participation, and team playing - while seeking inner life, self-perfection and deeper meaning” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4). Born in post-war optimism, industrial progress and increasing material wealth in the U.S. and Western Europe the 1960s and 1970s, The Baby Boomers are associated with the space race,

women's liberation, the sexual revolution, the civil rights movements, Watergate and the war in Vietnam (Howe & Strauss, 1992; Bradford, 1993). Howe and Strauss (2007) suggest the generation "indulged products of postwar optimism, Tomorrowland rationalism and a *Father Knows Best* family order" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4; Tapscott, 1998). Howe and Strauss (1992) conceptualise the boomers as a *prophet generation* born in "an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism, when a new civic order implants and the old value regime decays" (Howe & Strauss, 1992, p. 3). The generation is associated with ideas of social renovation, change and a "Replace them" attitude to authority and institutions (Elmore, 2009, p. 24). Willetts (2010) acknowledges the generation's transformational power and claims, "your values and tastes will shape the world around you - you will be able to spend your life in a generational bubble, always outvoting and outspending the generations before and after you" (Willetts, 2010, p.83). Hargrave (2008) credits the generation with "reshaping attitudes towards civil rights and government", and who "changed education, social mores and the American dream in the last century" (Hargrave, 2008, p.10). Even in retirement The Baby Boomers are suggested to challenge established norms with their "Create it" vision of the future (Elmore, 2009, p. 24). Hanson (2010) alleges retired boomers aspire "to be productive and meaningful - to really count for something" (Hanson, 2010, p.8). Indeed, the supposed transformational nature of the generation is illustrated in Huber and Skidmore's (2003) *The New Old: Why Baby Boomers Won't be Pensioned Off*. Echoing Howe and Strauss's (1992) idea of a *prophet generation*, the authors state

At every stage of their lives, the baby boomers have been at the forefront of radical social, economic and political change: within the family, within the education system, within the labour market, and beyond (Huber & Skidmore, 2003, p.11).

Ideas of transformation are also reflected in the portrayal of The Baby Boomers in the workplace. Elmore (2008, p. 24) alleges career is a “central focus”, the generation prioritising organisational before private and family obligations. Howe and Strauss (2007) refer to boomers “challenging the glass ceiling” and “refashioning themselves as yuppie individualists” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4). Indeed, Deal, Stawiski, Gentry and Cullen (2014) understand the generation as “materialistic workaholics who are at the top of the authority structure” (Deal, Stawiski, Gentry & Cullen 2014, p.2). Other authors recognise that the generation possesses a strong service attitude, are good team-players, enjoy positive workplace relationships and see the workplace as a social space (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Shaw & Covey, 2013; Abrams & von Frank, 2013). Reflecting the generation’s social activism and group decision-making, Al-Asfour & Lettau (2014) and Zemke, et al. (2000) suggest that the boomers’ preferred leadership style is “collegial and consensual” (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014, p. 62), and characterised by face-to-face meetings and private and public recognition. Indeed, and drawing upon ideas of social justice, Zemke, Raines and Filipczak (2013) claim boomer leaders are “about bringing heart and humanity to the office, and about creating a fair-and-level playing field for all” (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013, p. 5). Consequently, Howe and Strauss (1992) and Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal and Brown (2007) suggest boomers identify with the compassionate, spirited, experienced, forward looking and anti-hierarchical social leader such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. In summary, the generational identity of The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) is articulated in ideas of challenge to authority, life-style experimentation and life-long change.

Generation X or Xers (born 1965 to 1980), of which I am a member, are now aged in their mid-thirties to early fifties. The name of the generation is generally accepted to have been inspired by Coupland's (1991) novel *Generation X* that traces the bleak lives of three *Xers* in a world of increasing commercialism, spiralling crime, divorce and teen pregnancy rates, absent parents, sedentary lifestyles and decreasing career opportunities (Coupland, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2007, Erickson, 2010; Schewe & Meredith, 2004). Given this context, Howe and Strauss (1992, 2007) allege, "Xers learned early on to distrust institutions, starting with the family, as the adult world was rocked by the sexual revolution, the rise in divorce, and an R-rated popular culture" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4). They emphasise the challenge faced by Xers in their youth by employing phrases such as "latchkey childhood" and "navigating a sexual background of AIDS" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4). Other authors have generally emphasised the generation's allegedly negative aspects. Lee (2010), in her review of the representation of Xers in movies, alludes to a pessimistic, cynical and materialistic generation, "in need of a good cuff behind the ears. Boxed and labelled, they were going nowhere fast, or anywhere at all" (Lee, 2016, p. 11). Moreover, Frontiera and Leidl (2012) state, "divorce not only killed relationships, it hacked away at our very understanding of what relationships were" (Frontiera & Leidl, 2012, p.xx). Often portrayed as individualistic, or at least lacking "a galvanizing social and political context" (Jennings & Stoker, 2004, p.374), Howe and Strauss (2007) claim, "Xers have made barely any impression on civic life; they believe that volunteering or helping people one-to-one is more efficacious than voting or working to change laws" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.6).

This ‘wasted youth’ discourse has been somewhat resuscitated as the Xers have moved into middle-age. It is alleged that the “hardening pragmatism” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.4) they acquired in their youth (i.e., preparing their own food due to the absence of their parents) has led them to become committed, resourceful, pragmatic and value-oriented parents and entrepreneurs (Howe & Strauss, 2007, 2000). Indeed, Howe and Strauss (2000) claim Generation X to be the most entrepreneurial generation in U.S. history, “their high-tech savvy and marketplace resilience have helped America prosper in the era of globalization” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.4). In the context of corporate downsizing, overseas outsourcing and increasing foreign competition, Howe and Strauss (2007) understand Xers preferring “free agency over corporate loyalty” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 4), desiring to be their own boss (Howe & Strauss, 2003) and “interested in three hot meals and a bed” (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013, p.6). Schewe and Meredith (2004) understand the generation as “free agents, not team players” (Schewe & Meredith, 2004, p.4) while Lancaster and Stillman (2002) suggest Xers “resent inflexibility in scheduling, being micromanaged, feeling pressured to conform, and being viewed as lazy or unambitious” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p. xx). The leaders they admire display determination, ambition, competence and inspiration, “challenge the system and create change” (Arsenault, 2004, p.137), and include Bill Gates, Tiger Woods and Ronald Regan (Arsenault, 2004; Salahuddin, 2010; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). As leaders, and reflecting their pragmatism, Xers understand the importance of hard work and getting results but also the need for work-life balance (Howe & Strauss, 1992). In summary, and drawing directly on Howe and Strauss’ (1992, 2007) ideas of a *nomad generation*, Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) will likely “be remembered for their rising-adult years

of hell-raising and their midlife years of get-it-done leadership. Their primary endowments relate to liberty, survival and honor” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 6). It is a story of success born from challenge - what Gordinier (2009) calls “the Gen-X odyssey” (Gordinier, 2009, p.xxix).

Generation Z (born since 2000), are the millennials’ immediate successors, the oldest entering university, the youngest still children. During the time I have spent on this research, ideas of a collective Generation Z identity have started to be articulated in the popular literature. The emergent nature of this discourse is illustrated in the plethora of names used to describe it. *Gen Z* is preferred by Zarra III (2017) and Masback (2016); Howe (2014) uses *Homeland* Generation; and the popular press often employs the term *Centennials*. Like its predecessors, this generation is associated with change. Zarra III (2017, p. xii) alleges, “Gen Z is unique” and Seemiller and Grace (2018) understand the generation as “a powerful force ready to leverage their capacities and tap deeply into what they care about so they too can leave their legacy” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 33). Indeed, Masback (2016), herself a *Gen Zer*, understands the generation in terms of its relationship with technology, community consciousness, “non-partisan but pro-world approach” and race and gender diversity (Masback, 2016, p, 20). A self-proclaimed “advocate and enthusiast”, she claims “the future of our country and the world will be in safe hands” (Masback, 2016, p. 20). Howe (2014) suggests Zers are more traditional than their immediate predecessors, encouraged to perform well at school by Generation X parents, and taught the importance of social-emotional skills. Williams and Page (2011) consider the generation as “new conservatives embracing traditional beliefs, valuing the family unit, self-controlled, and more responsible” (William & Page, 2011, p. 10). Zarra

III (2017) and Dupont (2015) understand Generation Z as more individualistic, career focused and sceptical of the idea of the ‘American Dream’. In somewhat of a contradiction to this individualism, Masback (2016) espouses the societal commitment of Generation Z, “the first generation for which community service is the norm not the exception” (Masback, 2016, p.40). Indeed, Seemiller and Grace (2016), in their book *Generation Z Goes to College*, claim Zers understand their future leadership roles “grounded in a sense of integrity and tenacity” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 33).

The theme of technology, highly relevant to the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000), likewise characterises popular portrayals of Generation Z. Berkup (2014) claims Zers are “equipped with technological devices since they were babies” and understand technology as part of life, not a convenience nor innovation (Berkup, 2014, p. 224). Strong (2016) and Tulgan (2013) refer to the generation’s habit of *swiping* their cell phones to multitask on multiple screens, stream seamlessly between devices and communicate through ‘emojis’ and ‘emoticons’ (i.e., visual representations of words, ideas and emotions). Madden (2018), in her book *Hello Gen Z: Engaging the Generation of Post-Millennials*, suggests Generation Z does not just consume content but creates it through live-streaming and video production. She claims that the generation has become “the most global youth culture we have ever known, connected over social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, and communicating with ease and for free over Skype, Facetime and Messenger” (Madden, 2018, p. 6). Strong (2016) and Grohol (2017) suggest that ‘FOMO’, the ‘fear of missing out’, drives the generation to be constantly online, communicating and generating content with others. Pandit’s (2015) exploration of Generation Z identity focuses on the digital

worlds that have become part of the generation's life. The author claims that Zers understand these worlds as "extension of our real worlds, a place to create an extended identity" and in which digital identities "are becoming progressively more combined within the definition of who we are" (Pandit, 2015, p.3, p.12). Moreover, Zers make "a conscious choice to adopt new behaviours" in a workplace characterised by diversity, speed and online collaboration tools (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2014, p.5). In summary, the emerging discourse of Generation Z, like that of its predecessors, is characterised by change and transformation. Ideas of Generation Z distinctiveness appear to rely heavily on the generation's supposed technological superiority - an assumption particularly relevant to my understanding of the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation.

Summary of theories of generational identity and generational portrayals

In this section, I have discussed conceptualisations of generations and generational identity. First, and drawing upon psychosocial approaches, generational identity is theorised to form during adolescence and young adulthood. In these life-stages, according to the proponents of generational identity, a group of people experience the same events and thus develop a common set of values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview.

Secondly, both academic theories and popular constructs conceptualise generations as social identities by which members of one generation can be differentiated from those of another. For example, understanding myself as a member of Generation X is akin to joining this social group, albeit a particularly large one.

Thirdly, I presented the popular discourse of the generational identity of The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945), the Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), Generation X

or Xers (born 1965 to 1980) and Generation Z (born since 2000). The supposed differences between these generations, especially with respect to the workplace, have become an important theme in popular, business, managerial and academic literature. Lyons et al. (2015) recognise that “a new industry of consultants and public speakers seems to have emerged primarily to capitalize on the popularity of this topic” (Lyons et al., 2015, p.346). Each generation is portrayed with certain distinctive characteristics: The Silent Generation fought and sacrificed for a free world; The Baby Boomers challenged authority and brought change; Generation X transformed a wasted youth into a productive and entrepreneurial mid-life; and Generation Z is hypothesised to lead the technological disruption in the workplace and beyond. Moreover, the generations can be differentiated from each other by means of the leadership style employed by each: The Silent Generation’s traditional leadership style; The Baby Boomers’ inclusive and forward-looking one; Generation X’ pragmatic and entrepreneurial leadership.

However, generational identities are also universalising, homogenising and potentially oppressive in nature. They encapsulate a series of themes that individuals might incorporate into their ideas of selfhood. Simultaneously, they act as universalising heuristics through which others come to understand a certain population group. I believe that the latter is particularly true with respect to the popular portrayal of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). It is to this generation that I turn in the following section. I dedicate a separate section to discuss The Millennial Generation because it is the generation to which the participants of this research belong.

Part II: The Millennial Generation

In one sense, this new generation of young people is like the wind. They are gusting in all directions, causing quite a stir in the workplace, their schools, and at home. Sometimes their overconfidence or impatience can burst out of them with hurricane force. Yep, the generational winds are blowing hard (Elmore, 2010, p. 19).

Having discussed academic theories of generational identity, and presented the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities, in this section I turn to The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Millennials are currently in their late teens, twenties and thirties and portrayed as “causing quite a stir” in contemporary society (Elmore, 2010, p. 19). The ‘generation causing’ events associated with The Millennial Generation include the increasing use of computers at home and in schools, the birth of the internet, the Gulf War, Exxon Valdez oil spill, business scandals, and the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Tulgan, 2009, Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge et al., 2010).

As I have explained in my introduction to this research, one of my principal motivations is to understand the participants ‘beyond and before’ the millennial label that so often colours them. As a member of an older generation trying to understand the developing selves of a younger one, I wish to explore the salience of the millennial label in the participants’ accounts of themselves. In this sense, the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation might act as a useful heuristic in making sense of these accounts. In this section therefore, I discuss the generational identity of the millennials and the seven roles - or millennial roles - through which I have come to conceptualise it. Central to the way in which millennial identity is understood is a particular notion of leadership which I will discuss in the section titled *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*.

The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation: labels and characteristics

Like its predecessors, The Millennial Generation is portrayed as different, distinctive and exceptional - it seems ideas of change are *sine qua non* in generational portrayals. Howe and Strauss (2000, p. 79) state, “Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory”, while Twenge (2017) claims the generation “is distinct from every previous generation” (Twenge, 2017, p.3). Burstein, (2013, p.xviii) claims the generation has “the potential to be greatest agents of change for the next sixty years” while Howe and Strauss (2007) state the millennials will “transform young adulthood as America’s new junior citizens” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.12). Schwindt (2015) in his *Letter to my Generation*, a example of a millennial discussing their own historical location, frames the generation in distinctive terms. Employing the term *cohort*, often interchangeable with the *generation*, Schwindt (2015) reflects

Here and now, however I speak mainly to my own cohort. It is their situation that concerns me the most, because it is my situation, and because I believe that my generation has a very unique fate, and thus a very unique opportunity. I believe that we so-called “Millennials” were born at a rare culmination of social, political, and spiritual tension; a brief period of chaos when old things fall apart and new things are born (Schwindt, 2015, Kindle Edition ii).

More sceptically, Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) suggest that what most differentiates the millennials from their predecessors is simply the attention they have received in the popular press and academic scholarship.

I will discuss ideas of millennial identity, and particularly millennial distinctiveness, by means of a seven faceted framework. This framework draws upon Howe and Strauss’ (2000) book *Millennials Rising: The Next Greatest Generation* and incorporates ideas I have taken from Elmore (2009), Alsop (2008), Twenge (2006) and

Tapscott (1998). I conceptualise the generation's impact on society through seven complementary roles - what I call *millennial roles*. The aforementioned authors allege that these roles differentiate the millennials from their predecessors, something I will discuss later in this research with respect to my own findings. The various attention-grabbing names given to these roles likely illustrates the authors' attempts to differentiate their work in a crowded popular literature market.

Particularly relevant to this research is the fact that each role potentially acts as a set of discursive resources that the participants might incorporate into their emerging identity. These roles are prescriptive in nature, informing millennials, and others, how the former should behave. They generally exemplify positive characteristics (e.g., committed high achievers) but also articulate negative ones (e.g., narcissistic reward seekers). Indeed, Elmore (2010), understands millennials as “a generation of paradox” that has “a bright side and a dark side” (Elmore, 2010, p.36). Balda and Mora (2011) advance this idea and claim a “culture war wages over whether Millennials are the saviors or destroyers of the future” (Balda & Mora, 2011, p.17). Fisher's (2019) recent book, *The Gaslighting of the Millennial Generation: How to Succeed in a Society that blames you for everything gone wrong*, appears to suggest the latter! Indeed, the generation has endured its fair share of negative commentary and “a bad reputation” (Kramer, 2018, p. 12). Howe and Strauss (2008), Elmore (2009) and Alsop (2008) identify a long list of undesirable traits - what political cartoonist Bors (2013) refers to as “generational slander” (Bors, 2013). These include laziness, technology addiction, a sense of entitlement, over confidence in their abilities, a lack of persistence and resilience, mollycoddled, sheltered from reality and risk averse (Howe & Strauss, 2008; Elmore, 2009; Alsop, 2008). In this

section therefore, and to provide the reader a portrait of the generation, I discuss the seven millennial roles by which I understand the shared identity of The Millennial Generation. I start with what is perhaps the most commonly discussed characterisation of the millennials - the *digital generation* role.

i. The 'digital generation' millennial role. The terms "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001, p.2), *net generation* (Tapscott, 1998), *iY Generation* (Elmore, 2010) and *Google generation* (Gunter, Rowlands & Nicholas, et al., 2009) all depict the generation's use and misuse of technology. Millennials are technological natives, born with the gadgets and high-tech skills that other generations lack (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Their role in society is to quickly adopt, and adapt to, constant technological innovation such as the use of portable wireless devices, online learning, collaboration and socialising. These tools give the generation the ability to find new information, debate and argue in digital worlds, produce their own content and create new knowledge (Tapscott, 2000). In organisational terms, they are the 'computer quiz-kids' both necessary to, and feared by, older and less technologically competent leaders and managers. Ideas of the 'digital divide' or technological 'natives' and 'immigrants' frame millennials as possessing the technological skills, and indeed living in a technological world, different from that of their predecessors (Prensky, 2001; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Indeed, Tapscott (1998), suggests that "Society has never experienced this phenomenon of the knowledge hierarchy being so effectively flipped on its head" (Tapscott, 1998, p. 36).

The dark side to this role is the generation's supposed dependence on technology. Millennials are portrayed as isolated from others and the world around them, addicted to social media, subjected to *cyber bullying* and failing to recognise when to turn-off their

portable electronic devices. They are accused of spending more time with online friends than with 'physical' ones and incorrectly turning to multitasking to survive the rigours of their busy schedules (Keen, 2007; Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). Indeed Buckingham's (2000) title to his extensive research on the effects of media on children, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*, seems to encapsulate the fears associated with respect to the millennial and technology. At school they are criticised for learning 'netiquette' before traditional etiquette, writing messages in *N-Gen Language* (Tapscott, 2000), typing with their thumbs, expressing themselves with 'emojis' and lacking the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that industry needs (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). Fine's (2014) *Beyond Texting: The Fine Art of Face-to-Face Communication for Teenager* is written as a self-help guide for socially inept millennials. Somewhat condescendingly, Fine (2014) states, "I'll teach you how to start a conversation, keep a conversation going and leave a positive impression" (Fine, 2014, p. xvii).

Academics have explored more rigorously the idea of a universally tech-savvy millennial more than any other of the roles I will discuss in this section. Scholarship challenges the idea that millennials *per se* are 'native' in their access to, and use of, technology (Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010; Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray & Krause, 2008; Hargittai, 2010). Instead, it is suggested that economic, political and cultural contexts lead to *in-generational differences*, or inequalities, among millennials (Kennedy, Krause, Judd, Churchward & Gray, 2006). In their review of the field, Bennett, Maton and Kervin (2008) conclude that "young people's relationships with technology is much more complex than the digital native characterisation suggests"

(Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008 p. 783). In Chapter Eight, (see pages 278 to 284), I theorise the implications of an over-simplification of the generation's technology use and discuss how it might explain the lack of millennial distinctiveness I encounter in the participants' narratives. In summary, the 'digital generation' millennial role articulates the tensions between a generation accustomed with, and a talent for, all things technological, and the supposed risks to self and others from its over-use and abuse.

ii. The 'good team player' millennial role. This role portrays the millennials at school and university but principally in the organisation. How and why they interact the way they do with colleagues and leaders is subject to great analysis. Millennials are portrayed as generous teammates that prioritise group and societal goals before individual advancement (Alsop, 2008; Greenleaf, 1977). Educated to work in teams and taking advantage of their technological skills to share information, they collaborate virtually and forge strong peer and group bonds (Balda & Mora, 2011; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Alsop (2008) states

Millennials are suggested as natural team players as technology has facilitated communication, information sharing, and distance and virtual learning. Further, schools have responded by introducing team based pedagogies and evaluations to take advantage of this 'team player mindset' (Alsop, 2008, p.125).

Curtis (2010) claims the millennials "tend to see the world as flat from a collaborative perspective" and are comfortable collaborating beyond traditional boundaries such as formal teams and organisational units (Curtis, 2010, p.3). However, Elmore (2010) warns that millennials often join groups or projects, "before they embrace the beliefs of that group", suggesting membership is a function of being with others, whether physically or in virtual worlds, more than a specific commitment to certain causes (Elmore, 2010, p.49). Indeed, Stollings (2015) describes the challenges of

multigenerational teams, “the technology-saturated generations of the twenty-first century send short messages back and forth on smartphones” while “older generations are frustrated by the lack of face-to-face interaction” (Stollings, 2015, p. xi). Millennials are portrayed to aspire to participate in challenging and motivating projects, understand themselves as equal members of the team, and treat others as partners with whom to collaborate and not as rivals to outperform (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009; Robertson, 2016; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Elmore, 2010). They search for ‘meaning not just money’ in the tasks they are assigned to and “Rather than passively taking orders, they thirst for engagement, expect to be part of a team, and want to be in on the action” (Robertson, 2016, p. xviii). They place high value on close workplace relationships, coaching and mentoring (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Robertson, 2016; Elmore, 2010). However, millennials are also portrayed as having little organisational loyalty and the willingness to move to other employment if disappointed by the challenges and rewards of the projects they are assigned to (Shaw, & Covey, 2013; Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2010). This “sizzle to frizzle” (Elmore, 2010, p.134) perspective towards employment and supposed low tolerance to frustration (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Alsop, 2008) must be pre-empted by providing practical challenges, autonomy and continual feedback. Unlike other generations, millennials are portrayed as prioritising leisure, family and social relationships before work and organisational life (Howe & Strauss, 2007, 2000; Shaw, & Covey, 2013; Alsop, 2008; Elmore, 2008; Chester, 2002).

Academic scholarship generally supports popular claims that millennials display a ‘work to live’ attitude that contrasts with their predecessors’ ‘live to work’ perspective (Alsop, 2008; Elmore, 2010). Fields, Wilder, Bunch and Newbold (2008) state, “a

fulfilling lifestyle is more important than the job” (Fields, Wilder, Bunch & Newbold, 2008, p.15) prompting organisations to move towards more flexible work schedules and remote working. Indeed, Cates, Conjanu and Pettine (2013) state, “This generation views work as a means to an end. They value a work environment that is fun and provides creative communication as well as recognition” (Cates, Conjanu & Pettine, 2013, p. 1029). Such is the difference by which the millennials are portrayed in the workplace that Anderson et al. (2017) propose the need to “reevaluate our ideas about leadership in the context of these generational differences” and offer insights for “how leadership research must evolve to keep pace with a changing workforce” (Anderson et al., 2017, p.245). Smith and Nichols (2015) state, “Due to the natural influx of the upcoming generation, it will be crucial for managers to adapt their leadership style to the motivational needs of the Millennials” (Smith & Nichols, 2015, p.43). In summary, the ‘good team player’ millennial role articulates the strengths (e.g., technologically enabled collaboration) and weakness (e.g., reduced loyalty) the generation brings to the organisation and workplace relationships.

iii. The ‘conventional rule-abider’ millennial role. Through the ‘conventional rule abider’ role the generation is depicted as respecting societal rules and norms; accepting that such guidelines are in their best interest; and demanding that they be applied fairly to all (Elmore, 2010; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Martin & Tulgan, 2006). Howe and Strauss (2000) reflect

While Boomer children felt overdosed on norms and rules, and came of age famously assaulting them, Millennials show signs of trying to invite them back (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.185).

The generation is portrayed as recognising the importance of taking advantage of, and succeeding in, the opportunities they enjoy. Millennials are accepting of parental and other formal authority and allegedly share many of the same values and aspirations as their parents: a sound education, a successful marriage, good parenting and helping others in need (Pew Research Center, *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*, 2010). At first sight, this role seems inconsistent with the overall transformational and disruptive label commonly attributed the generation. Indeed, Howe and Strauss (2000) suggest millennials share their parents' ideas about what is good for their upbringing, "agreeing with them on matters of right and wrong" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 185). The negative counterpart of this role is the allegation that millennials are over-protected, by both families and institutions, and sheltered from reality, decision-making and risk taking. Howe and Strauss (2000) state, "A risky and creative project cannot get a grade above an A- but, if it misfires, could easily result in a lower grade and blight a transcript" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.185). With respect to ideas of the organisation, risk adverse millennials are portrayed as less entrepreneurial than their predecessors. While the Xers are described as "street-smart free-agent entrepreneurs", the millennials are instead "outer-driven, ideal-following team-players" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p.166). Popular literature and business magazines advance ideas of a missing generation of entrepreneurs; a generation with an entrepreneurial attitude but less entrepreneurial activity than its predecessors; and a generation with a preference for stability and security. Indeed, Struckell (2019) suggests that the characteristics associated with the millennials, "are nearly mutually exclusive with those attributes common to entrepreneurs" (Struckell, 2019, p. 163). However,

Thompson (2016) describes the generation as “a dormant volcano of entrepreneurship that will erupt in about a decade” (Thompson, 2016).

Academic scholarship, by means of macro-economic data, can be interpreted to support the idea that millennials are less entrepreneurial than their predecessors. The percentage of the U.S. population under 30 years old that own a business is at its lowest rate for 20 to 30 years (Wilmoth, 2016; Simon & Barr, 2015). However, economic and competitive factors, before anything distinctively millennial, might better explain falling entrepreneurial activity. These factors include increasing student debt; the lack of access to financial resources for start-ups; the increasingly dominant position of incumbent firms in the marketplace; and the slow recovery of U.S. and European economies after the financial crisis of 2008. In summary, the ‘conventional rule-abider’ millennial role portrays the generation as rule-abiding and rule-accepting. However, this preference for conformity is employed to depict the millennials as risk-averse and less entrepreneurial than their predecessors. This millennial role partially contests the overall generational narrative of the millennials as a transformative and disruptive generation.

iv. The ‘achievement-oriented goal getter’ millennial role. The millennials are portrayed as a generation of ‘achievement-oriented goal-getters’ in academic, employment and other aspects of their lives. They are suggested as motivated to work on challenging tasks and confident in their own ability (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). They are demanding of themselves (Alsop, 2008), require instant gratification and success (Tapscott, 1998) and expect recognition, promotion and reward (Elmore, 2010; Alsop, 2008). Implicit in this characterisation is a critique of the generation’s lack of self-

discipline, self-motivation, perseverance and long-term vision. The following reflection of millennial job-seekers partially illustrates this short-term focus.

Millennials want their dream job as early as possible but entry-level positions are seldom dream jobs. As young people encounter the realities of the workday world, many are quickly disillusioned and want to continue exploring to get it right (Alsop, 2008, p.12).

In organisational terms, I interpret the ‘achievement-oriented goal getter’ as portraying the millennials as ‘high-achievers’ or ‘goal-focused’ leaders. This individualistic, if not competitive, portrayal seems to sit uncomfortably alongside the ‘good team player’ I discussed earlier. I interpret this duality as an illustration of the popular portrayal’s overreach in attempting to characterise the millennials’ organisationally-based identities. In summary, the ‘achievement-oriented goal getter’ role articulates a tension between the confident and motivated high-achiever and the need for extrinsic rewards and public recognition.

v. The ‘busy and pressured’ millennial role. The ‘busy and pressured’ role depicts the generation as active participants in a wide-range of activities: academic projects; sports and exercise; cultural activities; communication and online technologies; entertainment and retail experiences (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000; Pew Research Center, *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*, 2010). Elmore (2010) alludes to an *overserved generation*, its members spoilt for choice about where to dedicate their free time. Such diversity of participation promotes “multiple interests that require variety in their tribal loyalties” (Elmore, 2010, p.45) and diverse friendships. Unfortunately, as the name of the role suggests, while living these very full lives, the millennials are simultaneously pressured by themselves, their parents and others, to achieve outstanding results. Elmore (2010) reflects that the generation is “under the

gun to study hard, avoid personal risk, and capitalize on opportunities their family has afforded them” (Elmore, 2010, p. 36). Howe and Strauss (2000) state

Today’s kids feel a growing sense of urgency about what they have to do to achieve personal and group goals. They feel stressed in ways that many of their parents never felt at the same age. Pressure is what keeps them constantly in motion - moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done. (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 184).

This pressure is often attributed to so-called ‘helicopter parents’, depicted as hovering over their children, planning their every activity, expecting nothing but the best and ultimately adding unnecessary pressure (Mangelsdorf, 2015, p.19; Alsop, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2010). In summary, the ‘busy and pressured’ millennial role articulates a tension between an active generation enjoying a wealth of opportunities and the high expectations and pressure they face to succeed.

vi. The ‘sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents’ millennial role. This millennial role - an idyllic portrayal of family and family relationships - somewhat redresses the negative depiction of parents in the ‘busy and pressured’ role. The millennials are portrayed as recognising the personal and economic sacrifice of their parents in their own upbringing. Consequently, they are accepting of their parents’ involvement in their lives (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Moreover, the generation is portrayed to understand their parents as a source of emotional stability (Howe & Strauss, 2000), providers of self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation (Pettigrew, 2015; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and their protectors and guardians (McAlister, 2009). These parental relationships have strengthened the millennials’ belief that they are loved, cared for and special (Twenge, 2006). Indeed *early-millennials* (born from 1981 to 1990) in the U.S. are suggested to have lived a “prolonged adolescence”

(Alsop, 2008, p.12), leaving home, marrying and having children later than previous generations. However, this portrayal of parental and familial support is also employed to advance the ideas of over-protection, coddling and a lack of preparation for the real world. Elmore (2010) suggests the generation has grown up in a “failure-proof environment in which they are never given a chance to lose”, and where, “Being perennially protected and provided for not only tends to foster a prolonged childhood; it also nurtures a sense of entitlement” (Elmore, 2008. p. 43). Indeed Tyler (2007) conceptualises a “Tethered Generation” that enjoys constant communication, and resulting protection and care, with their parents and others” (Tyler, 2007, p.1). Without measured risk-taking, the generation acquires little experience of real-world problems that is so valued in the workplace. This over-attention and over-protection have led to accusations of a narcissistic generation, or Twenge’s (2006) *GenMe*, high on its own self-importance but low in social skills and tolerance for others. Self-aggrandising on Facebook, frequent selfie photos and ‘likes’, and ‘followers’ on other social media are cited to support this criticism (Twenge, 2006). Indeed, Howe and Strauss (2003) suggest that the media’s acute interest in the generation might contribute to its sense of being special. Of the millennials the authors reflect,

they naturally come to the conclusion that their problems are the nation’s problems, that their future is the nation’s future and that by extension, everyone in America is naturally inclined to help them solve their problems (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p.175).

In summary, the ‘sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents’ millennial role illustrates the challenges of parenthood, the tension between providing a supporting and nurturing environment and one that is overly-protective and stifling.

vii. The ‘young altruist’ millennial role. The themes of shaping society and leaving a legacy for one’s successors are common to the generational identities of the millennials and their predecessors (e.g., The Silent Generation’s sacrifice, The Baby Boomers’ challenge to authority, Generation X’s entrepreneurialism). Interestingly, these same discourses tend to overlook the intergenerational problems or challenges bequeathed to subsequent generations (e.g., geo-political instability and nuclear proliferation; non-sustainable development and consumerism; increasing economic inequality between rich and poor). Kramer (2018), himself a millennial, reflects that his generation has not had such clear opportunities to display their commitment and sacrifice and laments, “None of us [millennials] lived through World Wars, a military draft, the polio epidemic, or The Great Depression” (Kramer, 2018, p. 12).

However, the generation’s societal contribution is articulated in the ‘young altruist’ role in which millennials are depicted with a strong belief in their ability to positively change society and a high commitment to do so (Pettigrew, 2015; Howe & Strauss, 2000). The millennials are portrayed as motivated to participate in noble causes, unselfish in the giving of their time and money (Elmore, 2010) and galvanised by acts of mass violence (e.g., Columbine High School shooting, Oklahoma City bombings). Credo, Lanier, Matherne and Cos (2016) allege, “Millennials believe their time makes a uniquely meaningful contribution and that they are personally responsible for making the world a better place” (Credo, Lanier, Matherne & Cos, 2016, p.193). Their vision for change, and indeed their search for meaning, are reflected in their interest and participation in voluntary organisations and community service (Zemke, Raines & Filipeczak, 2000). Indeed, they are afforded the somewhat lofty challenge to become, “community shapers,

institution builders, and world leaders” (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p.4). Demanding of others, millennial employees, consumers and potential voters, expect business and other leaders to assume their role in the betterment of society as a whole (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000; Howe & Strauss, 2003). Interestingly, millennials do not appear to be more altruistic than their predecessors and the overall rate of volunteerism appears relatively stable across time (Pew Research Center, *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*, 2010). Indeed, acting benevolently in the interests of others appears not to be informed by generational identity but by other predictors such as personality characteristics (Mechler & Bourke, 2011; Carpenter, 2012), self-efficacy (Lindenmeier & Dietrich, 2011), family influences (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002) and religiosity. The latter has been identified as an important indicator of civic engagement (Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006; Wilson & Janoski, 1995). The factors that account for this relationship include the prosocial values learnt in religious teaching (Einolf, 2011); the social networks and resources provided by religious institutions (Putnam & Campbell, 2010); the role of clergy in promoting, organising and leading civic participation (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995) and the practical skills learnt in religious communities (e.g. organising events and fundraising) that can be put to use in civic projects (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

In summary, the ‘young altruist’ millennial role is perhaps the popular discourse’s most idyllic, portraying the generation as engaged in their community and contributing to positive change. This role is common to generational portrayals, if in differing guises, suggesting all generations leave, or at least are invited to do so, a positive legacy for their successors.

In this section I have described seven neatly packaged roles, what I have called millennial roles, through which I understand the generation's shared identity. Drawing upon popular authors, I conceptualise these roles to clearly articulate the generation's supposed impact in contemporary society and to allude to how the millennials allegedly understand certain organisationally-based identities. Four of the roles in particular articulate ideas closely aligned to organisational concepts such as technology, teamwork, organisational structure, competition and achievement (i.e., 'digital generation', 'good team player', 'conventional rule-abider' and 'achievement-oriented goal-getter' roles). While they appear to differentiate the millennial in the workplace from their Generation X predecessor (e.g., the 'good team player' millennial versus the individualist Xer), they are also somewhat contradictory (e.g., the collaboration of the 'good team player' versus the individualism of the 'achievement-oriented goal-getter'). Indeed, scholarship is less conclusive with respect to how generational membership might influence organisational roles and often points at the "de-bunking of some of the generational stereotypes" (Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon, 2008, p. 888). In particular, it is difficult to identify meaningful millennial distinctiveness with respect to organisational factors such as employee productivity and individual variables such as work-attitudes (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010; Kuron, Lyons & Schweitzer, 2015). Indeed, Kowske, Rasch and Wiley (2010) conclude that generational membership accounts for only 1-2% of the variance in workplace attitudes and state, "This study confirms past conclusions: generational differences at work are small overall, at least with regard to work attitudes" (Kowske, Rasch & Wiley, 2010, p 278).

In summary, conceptualising the millennials' collective identity through seven roles is a useful way to illustrate how the generation is differentiated from its predecessors. This idea of *millennial distinctiveness* is at the heart of this research. In Chapter Six, I will explore whether the participants' accounts of their experiences and emerging identities can be read to support such claims of distinctiveness.

Critiques of popular conceptualisations of generational identity

In the previous sections I have discussed the popular portrayals of The Millennial Generation and its predecessors. However, I do not wholly subscribe to popular conceptualisations of generational identity *per se* nor to specific ideas of millennial distinctiveness. The inconsistencies between some of the millennial roles I discussed in the previous section (e.g., 'good team player' vs. 'achievement-oriented goal-getter'), are illustrative of some broader critiques of the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities. I discuss these critiques in this section.

First, discourses of generational identities suffer from an under-theorising of generational formation. Although the popular discourse draws inspiration from Mannheim's (1952), *defining events perspective*, it fails to explain *how* certain events might provoke large groups to understand themselves and the world around them in the same way. For example, Howe and Strauss (2007, p. 5) favour "historical events and moods", "a period of national crisis" or "a period of cultural renewal or awakening", while Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal and Brown (2007) prioritise demographic changes. Wyatt (1993) suggests generations result from collective memories, ideals and so-called 'sacred spaces' (e.g., Woodstock for U.S. baby boomers) while Ryder (1965) alludes to the role of

revolution, war or political upheaval; rural-urban migration; and educational and technological change. Scholars question if there is sufficiently robust evidence to link such a diverse set of events to personal beliefs, identity and behaviours (Joshi, Dencker, Franz & Martocchio, 2010; Schuman & Scott, 1989; Jaeger, 1985). For example, Becton et al. (2014) find, “little or no evidence that links important events experienced by generational cohort groups and their stereotypical values/characteristics” (Becton, et al., 2014, p. 177). While Alwin and McCammon (2007) acknowledge that important historical and social events impact people’s lives, they recognise the difficulty of identifying “their distinctive impact on the youth of the period” (Alwin & McCammon, 2007, p. 226). Indeed, Gilleard (2004) suggests scholars might look to employ “a new approach beyond that offered by the ‘critical event’ approach” (Gilleard, 2004, p.113).

Secondly, I critique the lack of empirical data to support many of the claims, or characterisations, encapsulated in the discourses of generational identities. These portrayals are prescriptive in nature, are “couched in dramatic terms” (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008, p.7), and offer “folk understandings of generations” (Biggs, 2007, p. 707). Indeed, Little and Winch (2017) warn of “frequently recurring - and loaded - media archetypes” that are pushed into the public’s consciousness (Little & Winch, 2017, p. 130). Scholars claim that the concept of generational identity lacks scientific rigour and is based instead on “anecdotal evidence, or data not otherwise open to critical peer review” (Macky, Gardner & Forsyth, 2008, p.857; Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Pedro, 2006; Jorgensen, 2003). Lyons et al. (2015, p.352) refer to “generational caricatures”, while Costanza and Finkelstein (2015) allege “stereotypes and others have been alternately promoted and derided in books by academics and articles in major magazines and

newspapers” (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015, p.312). Indeed, Urick (2014) laments that “very few publications or training events address how or why individuals choose to act or not act in a manner consistent with the stereotypes’ expectations” (Urick, 2014, p.399).

A third critique, and particularly relevant to this research, is the fact that the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities has been constructed principally from Anglo-Saxon media sources and academic studies undertaken in the U.S., U.K., Western Europe and Australasia. The resulting discourse has been extended to characterise other populations, prompting Lippmann and Aldrich (2016) to warn that geographical diversity is “glossed over by these popular generational labels” (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016, p.9). For example, Donnison (2010) questions if the events often used to explain millennial characteristics (e.g., Columbine High School shooting, Oklahoma City bombing) can be expected to have influenced all populations in the same way given geographical distance and differing news coverage. Interestingly, a more nuanced and localised understanding of global populations can be found in the fields of branding, marketing and consumer behaviour in which the concept of generations is considered “a valuable segmentation technique for marketers” (Noble & Schewe, 2003, p. 979). Of generations, Ladhari, Gontheir and Lajante (2019) state, “It is a powerful market segmentation tool since cohort members share similar values, experiences, and preferences” (Ladhari, Gontheir & Lajante, 2019, p.114). For example, Fernández-Durán (2016) identifies seven post-war Mexican generations derived from events such as severe economic crisis and currency devaluations (1954, 1982 and 1994); the 1968 student rebellion and the end of seventy years of one-party rule in 2000; international events associated with national pride and community such as hosting the Olympic Games (1968)

and World Cup (1970 and 1968); and the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. This research contributes to the field of generational studies by exploring the emerging identities of Mexican young adults, an under-studied group.

The fourth critique I offer of the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities derives from postmodernist understandings of identity. Discourses of generational identity are potential instruments of control and submission: universalising, homogenising and potentially oppressive in nature. These discourses act to prescribe individual behaviour and become models or archetypes for the way one should think and behave. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter (see page 54-55), the ubiquity and general acceptance of these ‘big D’ discourses potentially motivate individuals to see themselves in such terms - conforming to accepted and desired identities at the cost of personal agency. In other words, these discourses can potentially produce the phenomenon they are intended to describe. I reference this critique to Cohen’s (1972) concept of *moral panic*: the idea that one generation looks to control and regulate how another sees itself. Born from research into the societal response in the 1960s to such phenomena as youth culture, delinquency, vandalism, drug use and football hooliganism, Cohen (1972) states

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates (Cohen, 1972, p.9).

Generational identities potentially reflect the moral panic of one generation with respect to the emergence of another. The discourse that articulates millennial identity

ultimately reflects the preferences of those non-millennials who wrote it. In an illustration of *gerontocratic power*, the millennials are invited, or expected, to conform to the values, expectations, aspirations, authorities and social arrangements prescribed by Baby Boomers and Generation X (Likes, 2005; Burbles, 1986; Foucault, 1982). As such, they are conditioned to avoid those behaviours “which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous” (Bourdieu, 1985, p.78). Indeed, the ideas of conformity and conservatism I outlined in some of the aforementioned millennial roles potentially reflect the efforts of non-millennials to preserve the *status quo* (e.g., ‘conventional rule-abider’, ‘young altruist’, ‘good team player’ roles). In fact, Donnison (2010) cautions, “In general, Millennials have allowed others to determine who they are, what they believe and what they can become” (Donnison, 2010, p.8). I concur with Donnison’s (2010) analysis and recognise the possibility that the participants of this research conform to these well-known discourses - telling me what they think I want to hear *vis-à-vis* their millennial identities. My objective in this research is to give them a voice and understand them ‘before and beyond’ this homogenising and potentially oppressive label.

A final critique of the popular discourse of generations challenges the very concept of generational identity itself. Little and Winch (2017) claim generational identity “is not an identity in the same way as class, race or gender” because by definition it “lacks the long histories that those established vectors of identity carry with them” (Little & Winch, 2017, p. 140). In a similar vein, Cannadine (2013) omits generational identity from his list of “the six most commonplace and compelling forms” of human solidarity (Cannadine, 2013, p.3). Snubbing, at least partially, ideas of generational determinism, scholars appear to suggest that other forms of self-definition such as national culture

(Becton et al., 2014), influences such as family, peer group and religious beliefs (Noble & Schewe, 2003) and individual development experiences (Rosow, 1978; Stewart & Healy, 1989), provide better explanatory categories. Indeed, and in contrast to the ideas of intergenerational difference that characterise the popular discourse of generations, Kraus (2017) states, “there is a tendency towards the opinion that more similarities between generational cohorts may exist than previously thought” (Kraus, 2017, p. 66).

Summary of the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation

In this section I have presented the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Drawing on the work of popular authors such as Howe and Strauss (2007, 2000), Elmore (2009) and Alsop (2008), I conceptualise the generation’s place and impact in society - their shared identity - through seven millennial roles. Ideas of millennial distinctiveness, or intergenerational difference, are articulated through themes of technological superiority, collaboration and teamwork, respect for authority and convention, high personal expectations, living a busy and pressured life, familial relationships and altruism. These roles provide the foundation for claims of millennial distinctiveness - the idea that millennials are different from their predecessors - the generation a transformative and disruptive one.

However, I have also offered a five-pronged critique of popular conceptualisations of generations. These critiques identify, and draw upon, an under-theorising of generational formation; the lack of empirical support for generational characterisations; the field’s reliance on Anglo-Saxon popular media and literature; ideas of moral panic (Cohen, 1972); and the conceptual validity of generational identity. Indeed, I reflect that

generational portrayals might be thought of as stereotypes, heuristics or “shortcuts, and shortcuts are welcome in a busy world” (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015, p.313).

In the following chapter, I continue my discussion of the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation. I do so by presenting what might be considered an eighth millennial role: how millennials are portrayed as leaders. Howe and Strauss (2007, 2000), Elmore (2009), Alsop (2008) and other popular authors allege there is something distinctive about how millennials understand and perform leadership. This portrayal, what I will call *millennial leader identity*, is thus another facet by which to differentiate The Millennial Generation from its predecessors. It is to this portrayal of leadership, and how ideas of generational identity have come to colour conceptualisations of organisationally-based identity, that I turn to in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Theorising identity in contemporary organisations

Introduction

In organisations, people are required to take on various corporate personas. These personas are likely to differ from the ones that they adopt in other parts of their lives and, indeed, may come into tension with them (Watson, 2008, p.122).

Albert, Ashforth and Dutton (2000) understand identity in contemporary organisations as a “root construct” because of its relevance to organisational strategy and outcomes, culture and leadership, power relations and employee wellbeing (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton 2000, p.13). In 2003 research into organisationally-based identities was portrayed as among “the most popular topics in contemporary organisation studies” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1163), and by 2010 was “at the heart of a burgeoning stream of research” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p.135). Researchers explore the phenomenon at different levels within the organisation (i.e., individual, group, organisation or industry), between these different levels, and from short- and long-term perspectives (Ashforth et al., 2010). An individual’s organisationally-based identity emerges “from the central, distinctive, and more or less enduring aspects - in short, the essences - of the collectives and roles in which he or she is a member” (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008, p. 328).

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical constructs of organisationally-based identity. I will identify how ideas of organisationally-based identity draw upon, and indeed reflect the debates between, the three foundational approaches to identity I presented in Chapter Two (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Brown, 2015). Later, I will explore the evolution of one particular organisationally-based identity, leader identity. Moreover, I will advance the idea that the *contemporary popular portrayal of*

leadership has become the generally accepted understanding of the phenomenon and simultaneously, a potentially oppressive dominant discourse. Further, and acknowledging that ideas of leadership are an important component of contemporary discourses of generational identity, I will discuss that portrayal of the phenomenon associated with The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) and how it differentiates the generation from its predecessors.

Before starting my review, I wish to make clear to the reader that this research is concerned with the individuals' self-definition within, and with respect to, the organisation - a sense of *organisational self*. I recognise that the term 'organisational identity' is commonly used to describe an organisation's unique characteristics and those, "features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the organisation from other organisations" (Giola, Schultz & Corley, 2000, p. 64). I will use the term 'organisationally-based identity' to refer to the individuals' project of self-definition within the organisation and not the identity of the organisation as a whole.

Theoretical constructs of organisationally-based identities

In this section, I discuss theorisations of organisationally-based identities. Identities within organisations are "hailed increasingly as central to understanding processes of organizing" and "key to understanding and explaining, almost everything that happens in and around organisations" (Brown, 2015, p. 20). Brown (2001, p. 114) states "identity is central to our understanding of how individuals relate to groups and organisations in which they are participants" while Cheney (1991) claims, "Contemporary organisations do more than manage issues by inculcating values, they also manage

identities” (Cheney, 1991, p.9). From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that most academic writing on organisationally-based identities has explored Anglo-Saxon populations and assumes westernised conceptualisations of the organisation and organisational roles (DeRue, Ashford & Cotton, 2009). Indeed, Ayman and Korabik (2010) claim,

In leadership, most theories have been developed in North America and embody a primarily ethnocentric viewpoint. One of the effects of this situation is that the theory can privilege certain types of scientific knowledge and marginalize other viewpoints (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p. 160).

As I discussed in Chapter Three, (see page 84), the same criticism can be levelled at generational writing, both academic and popular. This research, by exploring emerging millennial and leader identity in Mexican young adults, goes a little way in contributing to the diversification of these fields. It is one of its claims of originality.

I understand organisationally-based identities or *organisational self*, as how individuals answer the question *Who am I?* with respect to the organisations they belong to and the roles they perform within them. In Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*, I illustrated how organisationally-based identities have come to be seen as informed by, or influenced by, generational identity. I did so by discussing the popular portrayal of four twentieth century generations and how they are alleged to understand and perform leadership. In this section, I discuss more generally how organisationally-based identities are theorised and do so by drawing upon ideas of identity work, identity regulation and the relevant conceptual debates in the field.

First, organisations, whatever their size, structure, objective or culture, are theorised as “identity workspaces for their members” (Petriglieri, Ashford &

Wrzesniewski, 2019, p. 29). Wegner, Jones and Jordan (2019, p.4) understand organisations as “living social entities comprised of identity-based actors” while Miscenko and Day (2016) claim “organisations are often crucial in shaping a person’s identity” (Miscenko & Day, 2016, p. 216). This conceptualisation of the organisation appears to be informed by symbolic interactionist approaches to identity and the idea that self-definition is an amalgam of personal and collective identities. Indeed, even in occupations that might be considered ‘dirty work’ (e.g., garbage collection, cleaner, prison guard), individuals are understood as “able to create and maintain a positive work role identity” (Ashorth & Kreiner, 1999, p.428). Interestingly, given contemporary economic, social, organisational and technological complexity, recent research has focused on the challenges and opportunities for identity construction in non-traditional organisations and the gig-economy (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018; Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016; Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017). Identity construction can be “especially problematic for independent workers operating outside of organisations and established professions, who lack the reference of codified roles” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p.2). Beck (1997) suggests that without strong supporting collective identities, “individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves” (Beck, 1997, p. 95).

Secondly, organisations and their leaders are theorised to *regulate* or *control* the organisationally-based identities of their members (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). They do so by articulating certain organisational visions, norms, discourses, themes and stories and by means of processes such as recruitment, training, decision - making and change management (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Alvesson & Willmott,

2002). Fleming and Costas (2009) somewhat bleakly claim, “organisational domination seemingly becomes increasingly geared towards constituting the identities of employees” (Costas & Fleming, 2009, p. 355). Ideas of organisational regulation and control can be understood to draw upon the Foucauldian approaches to postmodern identity I discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, they are embodiments of those *technologies of power* that “create rules for self-definition” (Foucault, 1988, p.18). Specifically, *identity regulation* refers to the organisational and managerial control of the identity of organisational members and “encompasses the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.625; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Bévat & Suddaby, 2016). Reedy, King and Coupland (2016) understand organisations as “arenas where individuals embrace, modify or resist such identities” and yet are often “sites of [identity] determination rather than autonomy” (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016, p.4). Consequently, organisations become “spheres of prescribed action and expectation” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 338) in which identities are ‘regulated’, ‘engineered’ or ‘manufactured’ (Brown, 2015). Indeed, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) identify “nine modes of regulation” that they classify into four types: i) definition of the employee ii) definition of the appropriate work to be done by the employee iii) definition of the social relations enjoyed by the employee iii) definition of the over context or *scene* in which the employee operates (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.632). Moreover, “these forms of identity regulation occur simultaneously, and may contradict as well as reinforce each other” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.632). For example, and in a rare example of scholarship of organisationally-based identities in Mexico, Ruiz Castro (2012) explores how time demands act to regulate how employees

understand ideas of commitment to the organisation and potential for career advancement. In a similar vein, Reedy (2009) identifies the strategies employed by U.K. managers to shelter their private and family lives from encroaching career commitments. In “a struggle to contain their managerial selves”, these individuals construct their work identities as “heroes, often idealising home and family as a place of blessed inaction where they can recuperate” (Reedy, 2009, p. 175).

Thirdly, organisational members are theorised as “*identity workers*” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622, italics in original) that actively craft their sense of sense in the workplace, subject to organisational discourses and other identity influences. They are not passive recipients of an ascribed identity but undertake identity work, that “range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p.1348). By means of this investment in self-definition, individuals “*strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity*” (Watson, 2008, p. 129, italics in original). This acknowledgement of autonomy and agency reflects a more Giddensian view (see Chapter Two, page 42) of identity construction in postmodernity. Individuals find ‘space’ between, or indeed resist, organisational discourses and have the opportunity to craft their own sense of *organisational self*. Echoing Giddens (1991), Down and Reveley (2009) understand organisational members undertaking

reflexive self-narration that draws on socially supplied narratives and discourses, on the one hand, and face-to-face interaction that involves mounting credible dramaturgical performances, on the other (Down & Reveley, 2009, p. 383).

The motivation to undertake identity work is theorised in terms of belonging and acceptance (Vignoles et al., 2011), self-coherence and the need to feel ‘complete’ (Ibarra

& Barbulescu, 2010) and self-verification, the desire to be seen by others as one sees oneself (Cable & Kay, 2012). Coupland (2003) suggests workers construct 'counter-identities' as a response to identity regulation while Ford (2010) claims, "individuals invest in discourses when these offer them positions which they believe protect them from anxiety and support their narratives of self" (Ford, 2010, p. 53). Indeed, it is alleged that individuals search for a work environment that is aligned to their preferred work identity (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Smollan & Pio, 2016; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Identity work is described in a multitude of ways (e.g., 'defining', 'reconciling', 'restructuring') that allude to the strategies and practices actively employed by individuals to mould their sense of self within the organisation (Petriglieri, 2011; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Indeed, an extensive literature examines these strategies in industries as diverse as education (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Sachs, 2001), management (Reedy, 2009; Watson, 2008; Pez , 2013), sport (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2010; Brickson, 2012), the freelance economy or gig-economy (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Bellesia, Mattarelli, Bertolotti & Sobrero, 2019; Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017) and social movements (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016; Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014). For example, in their study of employees of a global manufacturing organisation, Adams and Crafford (2012) identify four broad categories of identity work: personal philosophy, relationships, career management, and negotiating balance. In their study of male rugby players, Coupland and Brown (2015) state that threats to their player identities (i.e., injury, short playing career) are "used opportunistically as a recourse for identity work" (Coupland & Brown, 2015, p. 1316). Thornborrow and Brown (2009) understand British paratroopers

resisting the stereotypical portrayals of military personnel as docile and obedient subjects. Despite being subject to identity regulation (e.g., assessment, surveillance, cultural practices and disciplinary power), the paratroopers frame themselves as heroes in which, “the journey is perilous, and success not merely uncertain but (for most) perpetually deferred” (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009, p. 371). Olsen (2008) suggests that first year teachers “experience fundamental identity conflicts” and build their professional identity on the motivations they had for entering the profession (Olsen, 2008, p. 37).

Fourthly, organisationally-based identities are commonly studied by employing a *narrative approach to identity*. This approach conceptualises the individual’s life story, or personal narrative, as an articulation of their personal identity (McAdams, 2001). Identity work is thus a narrative exercise and linked to the availability of a particular set of discursive resources. Rosenwald and Ochsberg (1992) state,

Personal stories are not merely ‘a way of telling someone about one’s life’, they are the means by which identities may be fashioned (Rosenwald & Ochsberg, 1992, p.1).

Through their personal narratives, individuals “convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future” (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). It is through storytelling or *narrativization*, “the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.1), that humans give meaning to their personal experiences and understand their place in the world. Moreover, our personal narrative reflects our specific historical and social context, so to “mirror the culture wherein the story is created and told” (McAdams, 2008, p.246). As such, these narratives are subject to particular societal norms, traditions and rules. In an organisational sense, these ‘rules’ can be understood as

the vision, norms, discourses, themes and stories that organisations create and communicate in an attempt to regulate identify work. Consequently, they are likely reflected in personal narratives and self-definition of their members.

Importantly, narrative approaches to identity do not theorise personal narrative as a methodology through which to understand or access self. Instead, personal narrative *is* self, or more precisely, an articulation of that self (McAdams, 2001; Bruner, 1991; Gergen, 1994; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Moreover, this narrative approach can be understood to draw upon any of the three foundational approaches to identity that I discussed in Chapter Two. Psychosocial approaches suggest that during adolescence individuals develop the relevant cognitive skills to start to construct their personal narrative (Arnett, 2000, 1999; Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005). The societal demands of this life-stage (e.g., applying for a job or further education) and psychological needs (e.g., expanding social networks) motivate young adults to think about themselves in coherent and communicable terms (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Symbolic interactionist approaches conceptualise narrative identity as an example of intersubjective identity work: the stories individuals tell of themselves, “focusing on the creation of personal identity through the interaction with others” (Smit & Fritz, 2008, p. 92). Contrastingly, postmodernist approaches of identity understand personal narratives as a collection of potentially free-floating stories subject to discursive analysis. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, these stories might reveal a fragmented or *saturated self* (Gergen, 1992), without a coherent plot or structure. Conversely, personal narratives potentially reveal the availability, attractiveness, or necessity, to understand oneself in terms of socially acceptable dominant discourses - those “ready-to-hand widely accepted collective identities” (Moufahim,

Reedy & Humphreys, 2015, p. 96; Foucault, 1980). In Chapter Five, in the section titled *Understanding identity as narrative*, I will discuss how I employ a narrative approach to identity in this research to explore the participants' emerging millennial and leader identities.

Fifthly, theories of organisationally-based identities are characterised by a series of conceptual debates that derive from the differences between the aforementioned foundational approaches. The first of these debates, ideas of agency and control, I have referred to in my discussion of identity work and identity regulation: the understanding of organisationally-based identities as actively constructed by organisational members or being simply ascribed to them. Most research privileges a limited agency through which the individual undertakes identity work to “accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, conform, and define and redefine” (Kunda, 1992, p.21) their *organisational self*. Interestingly, generational discourses, and particularly the idea that generational identity informs leader identity, reframes this debate. As I illustrated in Chapter Four, theories of generational identity suggest organisationally-based identities are informed by one's generational membership. Consequently, identity work, if not fully redundant, takes place within certain boundaries articulated in generational discourses. For example, the millennial's alternatives for leader identity are supposedly limited to the portrayal of the phenomenon encapsulated within the generational discourse.

A second conceptual debate arises with respect to the relative *stability* or *fluidity* of organisationally-based identities. Most recent research challenges the idea that individuals “need a relatively secure and stable sense of self” to fulfil their responsibilities successfully (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999, p.417; Albert & Whetten, 1985). Meyer,

Bartunek and Lacy (2002, p. 6) claim, “instead of being seen as enduring, identity has been proposed to be multifaced at any given moment”, while Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) reflect “a sense of continuous formulation and preservation of the self through interaction is essential to notions of individual identity” (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000, p.65).

The third conceptual debate, drawing strongly upon a postmodernist perspective, considers the extent to which organisationally-based identities are *coherent* or *fragmented*, the later implying incoherence and possible contradiction (Brown, 2014). Drawing on Eriksonian traditions, Syed, Walker, Lee and Umaña-Taylor et al. (2013) define *identity coherence* as “the generalized feeling of synthesis, clarity, purpose, authenticity, and satisfaction with the self” (Syed, Walker, Lee & Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013, p.145). Postmodernists challenge the feasibility of unity and stability and conceptualise ideas of ambiguity, insecurity and inconsistency, so called “meaning-giving tensions” that recognise the ability of individuals to adapt their ideas of selfhood to different circumstances (Beech, 2008, p. 71). Ford (2006) claims that the identities of U.K. public sector managers “revealed both simultaneous and different selves, bursting with complexities and deeply felt, nuanced and often contradictory elements” (Ford, 2006, p 96). Of musicians, Beech, Gilmore and Hibbert (2016) state,

their self-questioning was ongoing and unresolved; it was not a means to an end; it was an end in itself. They did not ‘work’ on their identities to achieve coherence and consistency; it was an inherent part of their notion of who they were (Beech, Gilmore & Hibbert, 2016, p. 519).

A final conceptual debate relates to the *authenticity* of organisationally-based identities in a postmodern world characterised by identity multiplicity and fluidity. Heidegger (1962, p. 117) defines authenticity as “the loyalty of one’s self to its own past,

heritage and ethos” while Reedy (2009) refers to “a dynamic self characterised by a conscious steadfastness towards our past, present and future” (Reedy, 2009, p.109). Commonly, the individual is theorised with a ‘true’, ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ self that “is the accomplished identity of a self that can tolerate being alone, feels in charge of its actions, and is courageous enough to explore the world” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019, p.33; Winnicott, 1965; Ibarra, 1999). Fleming and Costas (2009) explore how individuals construct a ‘real self’, free from organisational regulation, and through which they “distance themselves from managerial domination by protecting/constructing their more ‘authentic’ identities” (Fleming & Costas, 2009, p. 353). Contrarily, conceptualisations of *performative identity* reject the idea of any inherent or essentialist ‘true self’ (Goffman, 1958; Butler, 1998; Gergen, 1991). Interestingly, the concept of authenticity has been incorporated into theories of leadership, such that the *authentic leader* acts, “in a genuine manner relatively unconstrained by traditional role requirements” (Hoy & Henderson, 1983, p.66; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Strum & McKee, 2014; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis & Dickens, 2011; Shamir, Eilam-Shamir, 2018).

In summary, theories of organisationally-based identities draw upon the idea that the workplace is a space of ongoing identity construction, agency, regulation and control. Whilst organisations attempt to regulate the *organisational self* of their members through visions, norms and practices, these same individuals undertake identity work to craft more nuanced and acceptable ideas of selfhood.

Although the diversity of organisationally-based identities is potentially endless, one in particular has received notable attention from scholars and popular authors: *leader identity*. It is to this identity that I turn in the following section.

Theorising leader identity

Having discussed in general the ways ideas of organisationally-based identities draw upon foundational approaches of identity, I will now go on to explore in more detail what many have argued to be the preeminent self-identity associated with contemporary organisations, that of the leader (Sinclair, 2011; Reedy, 2009; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Ford, 2006; Western, 2008; Rose, 1989).

Leader identity is particularly relevant to this research because it is one facet by which members of different generations are differentiated from each other in both the academic and popular literature (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013, 2000; Alsop, 2008; Tapscott, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 2010). Leadership is afforded a privileged place in contemporary society, is especially significant in the generational identity of The Millennial Generation, and is an increasingly important component of educational objectives and school culture (Rich & Schachter, 2012; Levinson, 2001; Brickhouse, Lowery & Schultz, 2000). Given such a favourable environment for ideas of leadership, and drawing upon Coupland's (2003) concept of *reflexive 'buy-in'*, I theorise that the participants in this research might aspire to understand and portray themselves in such terms.

The complex phenomenon of leadership is defined and theorised in multiple ways and understood through an extensive popular literature and diverse academic traditions (Dinh et al., 2014; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). I acknowledge the diversity of the field and

recognise that it is beyond the scope of this research to offer a complete review. Readers are directed to Rudolph et al. (2018), Dinh et al. (2014) and Yammarino (2013) for comprehensive contemporary discussions. However, within this diverse field, the phenomenon is increasingly understood in terms of identity (Hogg, 2001; Knippenberg, De Cremer & Hogg, 2004). In their review of the field, Dinh et al. (2014) state “Identity based perspectives are seeing an impressive increase in interest as the millennium progresses” while Knippenberg, De Cremer and Hogg (2004) claim that “developing the self-concept analysis of leadership will advance our understanding of leadership processes” (Knippenberg, De Cremer & Hogg 2004, p. 849). Indeed, Ford et al. (2008) reflect “where leadership used to be a series of tasks or characteristics, it is now an *identity*” (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008, p.28, italics in original).

In this section, I explore theories of *leader identity*, or *managerial identity* as it is commonly referred in the field of organisational studies (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). Conceptualising leadership as identity draws upon postmodernist approaches to identity. Leadership becomes ‘discourse’, a contemporary discourse of identity or ‘big D’ discourse, that communicates to self, and others, who one is (Gee, 1999; Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1985). These discourses are socially constructed and constitute a set of *discursive recourses* that individuals potentially draw upon in the construction of their leader-self. These discursive resources project different assumptions and conceptualisations of the leader role (Ford, 2010) and, according to Foucauldian interpretations, are potential instruments of identity control (Foucault, 1985). Indeed, and returning to my discussion of identity regulation (see page 94), alternatives of leader identity appear to be particularly controlled by organisations (Ford, 2010; Reedy, 2009).

The regulation and control of this identity “expose oppressive discourses and subject positions” (Ford, 2010, p. 51) such that the leader has become “both authors of and objects in identity production” (Sinclair, 2011, p. 509).

In this research, and as I will argue in Chapter Four, in the section titled *Ideas of leader associated with The Millennial Generation*, millennials are portrayed to understand and perform leadership in a distinctive way. This portrayal draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and what I call the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. In order for the reader to evaluate claims of millennial distinctiveness, I need to do two things. First, and by turning to managerial and organisational portrayals of leadership, I identify those characterisations of the phenomenon associated with the millennials’ predecessors. I initially developed this idea in Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*. I did so by discussing the leadership preference and style of The Silent Generation, The Baby Boomers and Generation X. Secondly, I identify those features of a more transgenerational understanding of leadership - those enduring ideas that have come to shape how we think about the phenomenon in the early twenty-first century. I do this by discussing what I will call the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership. In other words, by describing how the millennials’ predecessors allegedly understand leadership and presenting the generally accepted contemporary portrayal, the reader can more easily evaluate my claims for a distinctive millennial understanding of the phenomenon. I start by exploring how understandings of leadership in the organisation have evolved over the last century.

i. Managerial and organisational portrayals of leadership have evolved throughout the twentieth century. These portrayals respond to the *metadiscourses* of organisations: how their role is understood and portrayed with respect to socio-historical understandings of economy and society. I will signpost how these portrayals can be detected in the leader preferences and styles articulated in the generational identity of The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945), The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) and Generation X (born 1965 to 1980).

In the early twentieth century, and influenced by Taylorism and scientific management, the organisation was portrayed as a unit of production, of inputs, outputs and processes (Western, 2008; Etzioni, 1961). In an era of standardisation and mass production, both worker and leader roles were reduced to observable and measurable actions, responsibilities and goals. This portrayal illustrates a functional and transactional understanding of the leader role: the leader is the sum of the actions, responsibilities and goals assigned to them. Western (2008) suggests a *controller discourse* best portrays the “technocrat leader focusing on efficiency” in the early part of the last century (Western, 2008, p.12). This organisational portrayal is partially reflected in the articulation of leadership in the generational identity of The Silent Generation. As I discussed in Chapter Three, this generation is described as respecting the leader figure as a formal and institutional role, irrespective of the individual who occupies it. In that sense, leadership becomes a ‘function’, a depersonalised role within the organisation with responsibility for certain objectives and decision-making.

From the middle of the last century, post-war economic growth in North America and increasing scholarship of the organisation produced new portrayals of leadership

(March, 2007). A greater number of social scientists understood the organisation not simply as a unit of production but as a social space, a nexus of interpersonal relationships and a place for personal development and learning (March, 2007). In this context, Rose (1989) and Western (2008) identify a *therapist discourse* through which leaders were understood as promoters, protectors and a positive resource for their subordinates. Indeed, the act of leading itself was now understood as a process of personal development, self-awareness and identity (Rose, 1989). Further, not only was leader identity the result of personal self-definition, but potentially a determinant of the individual's leadership ability (Karp, 2013; Hogg, 2001; Brewer & Gardner, 1991). This organisational portrayal is reflected in the leader identity of The Baby Boomers. As I discussed in Chapter Three, this generation is portrayed to desire a participatory, compassionate and inclusive leader style (Arsenault, 2004, Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal & Brown, 2007). They see the organisation as a social space and enjoy constructive workplace relationships (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Shaw & Covey, 2013; Elmore, 2010; Abrams & von Frank, 2013).

In the 1980s, globalisation, deregulation, innovation and technological transformation coloured the competitive landscape of organisations. Facing global competition in uncertain times, leaders were portrayed as charismatic and transformational (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Conger, 1989; Zaleznik, 1977) and understood in *messianic* terms, “promising salvation from the chaotic world in which a lack of control is experienced and where traditional community is diminished” (Western, 2008, p.13). By presenting leadership as transformational, the phenomenon is understood more clearly in terms identity (*who* the leader is) and less as a transaction or function (*what* the leader does) (Zaleznik, 1977). However, Ford (2006) suggests that this

understanding draws heavily on a “macho-management identity” discourse that relies on traditional masculine understandings of competition and power (Ford, 2006, p.87). Interestingly, this messianic-macho management discourse is evident in many cultural stereotypes of leaders: American freedom, individuality and autonomy (Bligh & Meindl, 2004); Australian masculinity, physical toughness and self-reliance (Sinclair, 1994); Russia’s heroic and celebrity head of state (Goscilo, 2013); and the strength, charisma and masculinity of Latin America’s *caudillo*, or military leader (Eickhoff, 1999; Wolf & Hansen, 1967). As I discuss later in this section (see page 109), this charismatic and transformational leader portrayal seems to both inform, and be informed by, the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the heroic, romanticised and game-changing leader figure.

Finally, a *post heroic leadership discourse* emphasises the leader’s personal, collective, organisational and societal responsibility (Western, 2008). Leadership is understood as relational, shared and dynamic (Ford, 2006). These approaches, “emphasize leadership as a collaborative, relational process dependent on social networks of influence” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 648; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Senge & Kaeufer, 2001). This *leadership-as-identity* perspective understands leadership as a component of one’s sense of self or personal identity (Dinh et al., 2014). For example, Manfred et al. (2010) draw upon this perspective and offer a series of leader “representations” or identities (Manfred et al., 2010, p.2). Indeed, the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation appears to draw upon some aspects of the *post heroic leadership discourse*. In doing so, it frames the millennials’ leadership as distinctive from their predecessors.

In summary, managerial and organisational portrayals of leadership conceptualise the phenomenon evolving over time as organisational, competitive, economic and social realities dictate (Western, 2008). I have identified how certain characteristics of these portrayals appear to have been incorporated into the generational identity of The Silent Generation and The Baby Boomers. I alluded to, and will discuss in greater depth later, the idea that the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation is *post heroic* in nature. However, in the early twenty-first century, these managerial and organisational portrayals appear to be less ubiquitous, if not ‘crowded out’, by one particularly public, and indeed publicised, portrayal of the leader figure. It is to this *contemporary popular portrayal of leadership* that I turn to in the next section.

ii. The *contemporary popular portrayal* of the leader figure is very evident in the popular media, literature and press. It appears to draw upon the aforementioned messianic, charismatic and transformational organisational portrayal and colours how ideas of leaders are understood in contemporary society (Western, 2008). The *contemporary popular portrayal* understands the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms and on whose shoulders success depends (Meindl, Erlich & Dukerich, 1985). Of this portrayal Manz and Sims Jr. (1991) reflect

The leader represents a kind of heroic figure who is somehow able to create an almost larger-than-life vision for the workforce to follow. The promise is that if organisations can just find these leaders that are able to capture what’s important in the world and wrap it up into some kind of purposeful vision, then the rest of the workforce will have the clarifying beacon that will light the way to the promised land (Manz & Sims Jr., 1991, p.21).

This portrayal draws upon academic theories of the ‘great man’ leader figure, blessed with superior personal traits or behaviours that differentiates them from others (Yukl, 2012; Bass, 1990). Traits and behavioural approaches continue to be relevant to

academic theorisations of the phenomenon (Dinh et al., 2014; Storey, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018). Traits traditionally studied with respect to leadership are historically, if not exclusively, agentic attributes such as competitiveness, dominance, initiative, mastery, charisma, motivation, risk-taking and self-confidence (Collins, Burrus & Meyer, 2014; Eagly, 1987; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Behaviours offered as predictors of leader success include planning, organising and communicating organisational goals, roles and responsibilities (Yukl, 1989). The idea of the ‘great man’ is not lost on me. In Western cultures, men have historically occupied leader roles and thus societal expectations of the leader have come to mirror male gender roles (e.g., male breadwinner; family decision-maker and protector) (Ford, 2006). In this research, ideas of leadership appear to be important to the identity of six of twelve female and nine of twelve male participants.

The *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership appears to be the default discourse, or understanding, of the phenomenon in the early twenty-first century. Returning to Foucauldian ideas of postmodern identity, it is the quintessential ‘big D’ discourse: leaders, whether in the organisation, in politics, on the battlefield or the sports field, are heroic game-changing figures. Consequently, this agentic, competitive and transformative portrayal is also likely an oppressive or dominant discourse of identity, signalling to leaders and aspiring leaders how they should behave. The idea that the leader is heroic, ‘special’, a ‘great man’ blessed with superior abilities and traits draws on academic theorisations based on “the assumption that there are heritable traits that distinguish leaders from non leaders” (Hoffman et al., 2011, p. 349). This Anglo-Saxon and westernised conceptualisation is reflected in hundreds of popular titles, media coverage and popular understandings of what it is to be a leader. Bligh and Meindl (2004)

researched nearly three hundred such popular titles and identified four common leader identities: the *change-maker*, the *inspirer*, the *expert-guru* and the *hero-leader* (Bligh & Meindl, 2004). Alluding to both the social construction of these leader identities and their potentially oppressive nature, the authors reflect, “the production and consumption of these culturally ambient aspects of leadership, are a mirror image of how we as a society define and interpret leadership itself” (Bligh & Meindl, 2004, p. 34).

Of the four identities offered by Bligh and Meindl (2004), the heroic identity is the most prominent, both drawing on and supporting, the messianic and transformational organisational portrayals. In the news media, leaders are hero-like, ‘CEO-celebrities’ that become “familiar and relatively simple explanations of firm performance” when deadline-pressured journalists need to quickly understand breaking news (Hayward, Rindova & Pollock, 2004, p.641). Meindl, Ehrich and Dukerich (1985) state

It appears that as observers of and participants in organisations, we may have developed highly romanticized, heroic views of leadership - what leaders do, what they are able to accomplish, and the general effects they have on our lives. One of the principal elements in this romanticized conception is the view that leadership is a central organisational process and the premier force in the scheme of organisational events and activities (Meindl, Ehrich & Dukerich 1985, p.79).

Alluding to the potentially oppressive nature of these discourses, Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) suggest media outlets conform “to the idea that news should be about individuals and personalities rather than group dynamics or social progress” (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007, p.3). As a result individual leaders are privileged in stories of organisational success before more complex explanations. Moreover, the leader role is often afforded a divine status and certain mysticism (Meindl, Ehrich & Dukerich 1985; De Vries, 2011) such that “leadership fantasies may emerge, expressed in a shared folklore” (Gabriel, 1998, p.338). Indeed, De Vries (2011) reflects if leaders themselves

perpetuate these stereotypes with the objective of conserving their personal prestige and economic value within the organisation and the labour market.

The heroic leader portrayal is also commonly found in television, film and other media portrayals. For example, the presentations of Steve Jobs in recent films and documentaries are illustrative of the series of mythical archetypes through which leaders are often portrayed (e.g. *Steve Jobs*, 2015; *Jobs*, 2013). Jobs is portrayed as a hero forced out of Apple; a saviour of the music industry; and a visionary of new technology. Campbell's (2004) hero monomyth is an enduring theme in the series of Star Wars movies and Islam (2009) finds evidence of it in the animated films *Antz* (Dreamworks, 1988), *A Bug's Life* (Pixar, 1998), *Monsters Inc.* (Pixar, 2001) and *Robots* (Blue Sky Studios, 2005).

The *personalisation* of the leader role is common in contemporary portrayals and reflected by the increasing importance attributed the leader's human characteristics (i.e., personal and family life) before their technical competency and experience (Langer, 2010, 2007; van Santen & van Zoonen, 2011). Chen and Meindl (1991) illustrate this phenomenon in their analysis of the portrayal of businessman Donald Burr. The founder of People Express Airline Inc., Burr was likened to a preacher, a parent, a builder, a maverick, a visionary and a wizard during the company's birth and growth; he later became a fallen hero when the company hit hard times. Burr's portrayal illustrates the values (e.g., entrepreneurship, risk taking and 'thinking big') privileged in the cultural leader stereotype of the United States (Chen & Meindl, 1991). Heroic and personalised portrayals are also prevalent in Mexico's business literature. Carlos Slim, the often-cited world's second richest man is depicted in titles such as *Inspirational Lessons of Carlos*

Slim: The Richest Man of the World (Barker, 2013) and *Ready, Aim, Influence! Join Forces, Expand Recourses, Transform Your World* (Winterton, 2013). Another telecoms magnate, Ricardo Salinas Pliego, is presented in similarly heroic terms and Emilio Azcárraga Jean suggested as the saviour of a dynastic television empire (Villamil, 2012). However, Khurana (2002, p.64) warns that these heroic stories “of white knights, lone rangers, and other heroic figures who rescue us from danger” lead to overconfidence in the celebrity status of leaders. Indeed, *romance theories of leadership* warn of over simplifying the leader role and too quickly attributing organisational and societal success to it (Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985; Meindl, 2004, 1995). Bligh, Kohles and Pillai (2011) warn, “Leadership remains a favoured explanatory category for understanding organisational, political, military, religious, economic and social outcomes” (Bligh, Kohles & Pillai, 2011, p. 1059). More critically, and in their support for the role of management, organisational routines and control, Gabris, Maclin and Ihrke (1998) caution, “If everyone in the organisation were a leader, nothing would get done” (Gabris, Maclin & Ihrke, 1998, p.347).

At this stage in my review I consider it important to emphasise that ideas of leadership are not confined to the profit-oriented organisation. I also recognise how ideas of the phenomenon have come to colour contemporary educational objectives and school culture. Schools play an increasingly important role in promoting the desirability, and even necessity, of leadership. Education has long been understood to promote economic growth (Barro, 2013; Benos & Zotou, 2014), contribute to societal values and norms (Inglehart, 2015; Ball, 2013) and influence individual wellbeing (Clark & Royer, 2013; Cohen & Syme, 2013). However, since the late 1980s, educational institutions have added

developing future leaders to their list of priorities (Sinclair, 2007). Sinclair (2011) states that people

in schools, in community organisations, not-for-profit sectors, in sports, in medicine and health, as well as in corporations and bureaucracies are all encouraged to ‘be’ or ‘become’ leaders” (Sinclair, 2011, p. 509).

As ‘big D’ discourses (Gee, 1999), ideas of leadership have permeated other areas of education such school culture, the conceptualisation of teachers’ and principals’ roles and the design of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Barth (2002) suggests that school culture can be understood as “a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organisation” (Barth, 2002, p.6). I understand leadership as a privileged idea in contemporary education: it is represented in the mission of the school where I work alongside universal values of collaboration, integrity and honesty. Given its place in contemporary school culture, and indeed the societal value attributed the phenomenon in general (e.g., prestige, status), it is perhaps no surprise that leadership appears to be particularly important in the discourse of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Further, alluding to lost autonomy and agency, Sveningsson and Larson (2006) lament that “parts of the contemporary leadership discourse could be seen as regulating identity work” (Sveningsson & Larson, 2006, p.204), potentially encouraging young people to define themselves in leader terms. Indeed, the leader roles that the participants refer to in their narratives appear to illustrate how the phenomenon has permeated school culture (e.g., group leader, student group president).

In this research, and as suggested by the discourse of The Millennial Generation, I explore if leadership does indeed play an important role in the participants’ ideas of

selfhood. In particular I scrutinise if they appear to understand and perform the phenomenon in a distinctively millennial way. It is to that millennial portrayal of leadership that I turn to in the next section.

Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation

In Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation: labels and characteristics*, I discussed seven facets, or roles, through which I have conceptualised how The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) is differentiated from its predecessors. An eighth facet, the topic of this section, is the portrayal of leadership associated with, or encapsulated within, the discourse of the generational identity of the millennials. As I alluded to in my description of twentieth century generations in Chapter Three, each is portrayed to understand and perform leadership in a distinctive way: The Silent Generation's example and conservatism; The Baby Boomers' challenge to authority; and Generation X's pragmatism and entrepreneurialism. These portrayals of leadership appear aligned and consistent with the evolving organisational and managerial understandings of the phenomenon that I discussed earlier in this chapter. I also identified a *contemporary popular portrayal of leadership*, an almost default understanding or characterisation, that frames the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms.

In this section, I discuss the portrayal of leadership associated with the generational identity of The Millennial Generation. I have separated this eighth millennial role from the other seven for two reasons. First, I wanted to discuss my conceptualisation of organisationally-based identity in general before turning to the specific millennial

portrayal. Secondly, I believe it is easier to make the argument that generational and leader identities have converged and colonised each other now that I have presented how the phenomenon is understood with respect to both other generations and managerial and organisational portrayals.

This interplay between generational and organisationally-based identity is evident in the portrayal of leadership associated with, or encapsulated within, the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation. Popular authors suggest that millennials understand and perform leadership in a way that differentiates them from their predecessors. This example of generational determinism alludes to a loss of identity agency in the construction of organisationally-based identities: identity work becomes less necessary and relevant if, for example, one's leader identity is influenced by, if not defined by, generational membership (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2013, 2000; Alsop, 2008; Tapscott, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). In this section, I present what I refer to as *millennial leader identity* - that portrayal of leadership intertwined or encapsulated within the discourse of millennial identity. This portrayal describes the millennial leader with respect to both leadership style and the context in which leadership is exercised.

Millennial leaders are suggested to be passionate about providing solutions to societal problems and exhibit the values of respect, empathy, communication, collaboration and a commitment to personal, organisational and societal goals (Elmore, 2010; Alsop, 2008). Indeed, Pearce (2014) confidently titles her book *Millennial Leaders Today Will be Great Leaders of Tomorrow*, and claims the generation has "*the ability to lead with integrity and respect, which all will follow*" (Pearce, 2014, p. 4, italics in

original). Winograd and Hais (2011) offer an equally inspiring characterisation of millennial leadership

Millennials have been taught since they were toddlers that the best way to solve a societal problem is to act upon it locally, directly, and part of a larger group. Tired of exalted rhetoric from Boomer leaders that rarely produced results and frustrated by their older Gen-X siblings' lack of interest in pursuing any collective action to address broad social problems, young Millennials have embraced individual initiative linked to community action (Winograd & Hais, 2011, p. 226).

Millennials conceptualise leadership in terms of guiding and mentoring others in search of “collective coming of age triumphs” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.7; Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Spears (1995) alludes to a more relational understanding of leadership, “moving back and forth between leading and following” and style characterised by firmness, fairness and friendliness and a commitment to family and faith (Spears, 1995, p.34; McEwan, 2015). Howe and Strauss (2007) allege millennials reject the leadership style of their predecessors, “what they perceive as the negativism, moralism, and selfishness of nations politics” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 11). Harlan (2016), herself a millennial leader, conceptualises the phenomenon in terms of high achievement, influence and “working to be an exemplary and balanced human being” (Harlan, 2016, p.iii). Reflecting the generation's desire for a work-life balance, Harlan (2006) states

more than what we achieve or accomplish. It's also about enjoying life and having a positive impact on others and the world around us (Harlan, 2006, p.iii).

This perspective of ‘balance’ and helping others is attributed to the generation's relative prosperity, its understanding of the importance of contributing to their community and images of global terrorism and suffering (Fields, Wilder, Bunch & Newbold, 2008, p.52). McEwan (2015) understands millennial leadership by means of a sporting analogy, “a coach, ready to support and help the team win. In addition to being part of the team,

the leader needs to be outside the team pushing them to success” (McEwan, 2015, p.1). Elmore (2010) articulates this idea by drawing upon the theme of serving others.

Leadership is more about disposition than position. More about service than superiority. More about perspective than behaviour, leveraging my influence for a worthwhile cause (Elmore, 2010, p. 192).

The popular portrayal of millennial leadership appears to draw heavily, if not exclusively, on two related ideas: i) servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and ii) *the discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. Additionally, it is likely supported by the role schools play in promoting leadership in their school culture. Greenleaf (1977) defines the servant leader as “a person who has an innate desire to lead by serving, serves to align with own beliefs, and strives to meet the highest priorities of others” (Greenleaf, 1977, p.13). He develops this idea in his works *The Servant Leader* (1977, 1970) and *The Institution as Servant* (1972) and reflects,

The servant leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (Greenleaf, 1977, p.7, italics in original).

With its focus on community and empowering others, Reinke (2004) suggest that servant leadership is informed by Judeo-Christian philosophy and scripture, something I will discuss further in the section titled *Beyond leadership: identity work and alternatives for selfhood*. Servant leaders are associated with the ideas of empathy, understanding and communication; persuasion through arguments not positional power; commitment to the autonomy, growth and development of others; involvement in the building of their local community; vision, foresight and thinking beyond the present (Parris & Peachey, 2013;

van Dierendonck, 2011; Spears, 1995, 2010). Parris and Peachy (2013) state that millennial leaders are “defined by their character and by demonstrating their complete commitment to serve others” (Parris & Peachy, 2013, p. 379). Of course, some of these ideas are not unique to the servant leadership (e.g., inspiring others, vision, foresight) and van Dierendonck (2011) suggests the approach, “adds the component of social responsibility to transformational leadership” (van Dierendonck, 2011, p.1229). Servant leadership behaviours have been explored with respect to employee creativity and innovation (Yoshida et al., 2014), employee performance and customer service (Liden, Liao & Meuser, 2014) and follower trust in leaders (Sendjaya & Pakerit, 2010). Moreover, servant leadership has found space in the popular leadership and managerial press in titles such as *Principle-Centered Leadership* (Covey, 1999), *The Heart of a Leader* (Blanchard, 1999) and *The Servant: A Simple Story about the True Essence of Leadership* (Hunter, 2008). Millennial leader identity appears to draw so significantly on this servant approach that Fields, Wilder, Bunch and Newbold (2008) claim millennials “believe that servant leadership is the norm, not the exception” (Fields, Wilder, Bunch & Newbold, 2008, p.51).

The second component of the millennial portrayal of leadership describes the context in which leadership is exercised. The *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* suggests that millennial leaders, and indeed followers, experience a workplace subject to great technological, organisational, economic and social change. They live in a ‘VUCA world’, one characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Such a context requires a new leadership that challenges established norms, is flexible and inclusive, and understands the needs of the individual,

organisation and society. What I have come to call the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* articulates these challenges. A multigenerational workforce, artificial intelligence (A.I.), big data, robotisation, bio-tech and fin-tech, the internet-of-things (IOT) and the gig-economy are all suggested to contribute to radical changes in the relationships between organisations, employees and customers. For example, technological change will force the millennials to act as freelancers constantly updating their skills; others will become independent workers on short-term contracts in the gig-economy. Further, organisations will transition from offering ‘jobs’ to searching for ‘solution requirements’; jobs in the West will no longer be principally threatened by low cost competition but instead by the structural takeover of artificial intelligence and machine learning, a “profound restructuring of workplace relations” (Padavic, 2005, p113). Moreover, countries and industries that once relied on labour-intensive, low cost, low value-added manufacturing techniques are warned of impending mass unemployment as such roles are eliminated by new technologies. This discourse of course reflects current economic, technological and organisational trends and is widely studied (Abraham et al., 2016; Siau, 2018; Brougham & ve Haar, 2018; Siau, Lacity & Sauter, 2018). It is reflected in popular titles such as *Gigged: The End of the Job and the Future of Work* (Kessler, 2018); *Thriving in the Gig Economy* (McGovern & Gendron, 2017); *Humans Need Not Apply: A Guide to Wealth and Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (Kaplan, 2015) and *Reinventing Jobs: A 4-Step Approach for Applying Automation to Work* (Jesuthasan & Boudreau, 2018).

I recognise that the participants in this research are not yet in full-time employment and thus do not experience this new reality within the organisation. However, I believe

that the most representative ideas of this reality have become part of our everyday lexicon, constants in the news cycle and addressed in schools, online courses and career planning activities. Terms such as ‘artificial intelligence’, ‘big-data’, ‘the internet-of-things’ and ‘gig-economy’ are contemporary *buzz words*. A quick scan of the popular literature, of popular film and television, and of online courses reveals the prevalence of these concepts. For example, popular titles such as Tegmark’s (2017) *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*; Kessler’s (2018) *Gigged: The Gig Economy, the End of the Job and the Future of Work*; and Sinclair’s (2017) *IoT Inc: How Your Company Can Use the Internet of Things to Win in the Outcome Economy* are illustrative of this phenomenon. Drawing upon personal experience, I would argue that these concepts and ideas have also been incorporated into the school curriculum, or at least into school activities, projects and virtual classes. Educators have realised the importance of preparing students in competencies (Santos & Serpa, 2017); teaching transferable and applicable twenty-first century skills (Rotherham & Willingham, 2010); developing project-based learning (Kokotaski, Menzies & Wiggins); and providing the necessary technological, computing and programming skills (Malik & Coldwell-Neilson, 2017). In other words, I suggest that although the participants in this research are not in full-time employment, they have been exposed to, at school or in their lives in general, the ideas encapsulated in the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. This discourse suggests their working lives, and the organisation and economy in which they work, will be very different from that of their predecessors. This new reality spurs and necessitates a new type of leadership (i.e., *millennial leader identity*), a leader that serves “by making available to followers

information, time, attention, material and other resources and high corporate purposes that give meaning to work” (Fairholm, 1988, p. 190).

Summary of theories and portrayals of leader identity

In this chapter, I have discussed theories of organisationally-based identities and alluded to the role of identity work and identity regulation in the construction of such identities. I stated that one particular organisationally-based identity, leader or managerial identity, has received particular attention from scholars. I explored the evolution of the portrayal of the leader figure during the twentieth-century by means of *controller*, *therapist*, *messianic* and *post-heroic* discourses (Western, 2008; Manfred et al., 2010; March, 2007; Rose, 1989; Burns, 1978). I suggested that the default understanding of leadership, the *contemporary popular portrayal*, depicts a heroic, romanticised and game-changing leader figure that draws upon romance theories of leadership (Meindl, Erlich & Dukerich, 1985). I also described that portrayal of leadership - *millennial leader identity* - encapsulated in the discourse of millennial identity. Popular authors differentiate the millennial leader from their predecessors in terms of their personal leadership style, drawing upon Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leadership, and the context in which they exercise their leadership (i.e., new organisational and economic realities represented in ideas of artificial intelligence, the internet-of-things, the gig-economy).

Generational and organisationally-based identity: unresolved issues

I have presented my review of the literature that pertains to this research over three chapters. In Chapter Two, I discussed psychosocial, symbolic interactionist and postmodernist approaches to identity and identified their principal commonalities and differences. I identified how these approaches inform ideas of generational and organisationally-based identity.

In Chapter Three, I discussed academic theorisations and popular conceptualisations of generations. I offered a brief portrait of The Silent Generation, The Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Z, concentrating on their principal differences and associated organisationally-based identities. Drawing on the work of popular authors, I presented the shared identity of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) through seven roles, or millennial roles. Additionally, I offered a critique of popular conceptualisations of generations.

In this chapter, I discussed academic theories of organisationally-based identities, explored the evolution of managerial and organisational portrayals of leadership and described a *contemporary popular portrayal* that frames the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms. Further, I discussed *millennial leader identity*, that portrayal associated with The Millennial Generation, and that acts as an eighth facet of millennial distinctiveness.

In this concluding section of my review of the literature, I highlight some of the unresolved debates and issues with respect to generational identity, millennial distinctiveness and organisationally-based identity to which this research contributes. The objective of this research is to look anew at the collective identity of The Millennial

Generation. Specifically, it explores whether the participants' experiences and emerging identities reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness and a distinctive understanding of leadership. While these concepts have been widely studied, through my analysis of both popular and academic accounts of generational identity, I identify certain opportunities to extend and diversify our knowledge of the phenomenon. Indeed, in Chapter Three, in the section titled *Critiques of popular conceptualisations of generational identity*, I identified five critiques of the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities that point to the need for further research. I summarise these critiques as: i) an under theorising of generational formation ii) the lack of empirical support for generational characterisations iii) an over-reliance on Anglo-Saxon popular media and literature iv) ideas of moral panic (Cohen, 1972) and v) the conceptual validity of generational identity.

The contribution of this research is born from my interest and motivation as a researcher, my understanding of the current 'state of the field' and the aforementioned critiques and opportunities. As such, I identify the following areas in which this research extends our knowledge of generational identity, organisationally-based identity and identity construction.

First, and as I have identified in my aforementioned critique of the field, ideas of generational identity are drawn predominantly from academic studies, popular literature and media sources of Anglo-Saxon populations (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016; Donnison, 2010; Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Watson, 2008). Drawing on ideas of Foucauldian identity control that I discussed in Chapter Two, I understand the popular discourse of contemporary generational identity as universalising, homogenising and potentially oppressive in nature. This "discursively

available” (Watson, 2008, p. 130) social identity describes *who* one is, *what* one does, and makes individuals recognisable to others (Bourdieu, 1991, 1985; Foucault, 1985; Gee, 1999). However, and as I alluded to in my discussion of narrative identity in Chapter Five (see page 98 to 100), local and historical context are very relevant for ideas of selfhood (McAdams, 2000). I understand the participants constructing their emerging identities, “in the particular and complex contexts that individuals move through in their everyday lives” (Halford & Leonard, 2006, p. 699). This research enriches and diversifies our understanding of both generational and organisationally-based identities by exploring the emerging identities of a group underrepresented in academic studies: young adult Spanish-speaking Catholics who live in Mexico. As such, this research builds upon the work of Fernández-Durán (2016) on generational identity in Mexico and Ruiz Castro’s (2012) analysis of Mexican organisationally-based identities. Indeed, it complements an incipient literature that explores organisationally-based identities in non-Anglo-Saxon populations such as Africa (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Booyesen, 2007), Asia (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011; Xing & Liu, 2016; Leonard, 2010) and South America (Rodrigues, 1996; Solari, 2000). In summary, in this research I recognise the importance of local context in the participants’ emerging identity and challenge the idea that they might be understood solely in terms of universalising and homogenising generational and organisational portrayals. Consequently, this research extends our knowledge of generational and organisationally-based identities by studying an underrepresented group and giving them the opportunity to tell their own story.

Secondly, organisationally-based identities are commonly studied with respect to adults in full-time, part-time or informal employment (Sutherland, Howard &

Markauskaite, 2010; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Reedy, 2009; Pez , 2013; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Bellesia, Mattarelli, Bertolotti & Sobrero, 2019; Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017). There is an incipient literature that explores the organisationally-based identities of university students and another that focuses on older workers transitioning from working life to retirement (Helve, C t , Svyarenko, & Svyarenko, 2017; Mara on & Pera, 2015; Miller, Wynn & Webb, 2018; Tempest & Coupland, 2017; Coupland, Tempest & Barnatt, 2008).

However, young adults are underrepresented in research of organisationally-based identities. This research contributes to the literature by coming to the participants at a time, as young adults, in which they are in the process of forging their adult identities. Adolescence and young adulthood are often suggested as particularly important for identity construction (Schwartz, C t  & Arnett, 2005; Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980). Their particular situation (i.e., recent school leavers who live with their parents and have yet to enter full-time employment) provides an unexplored perspective from which to understand their emerging organisationally-based identity. Drawing upon Eriksonian theories of identity (see Chapter Two), I understand the twenty-four participants undertaking a process of completing their personal identity puzzle and involved in “problem-solving behaviour aimed at eliciting information about oneself or one’s environment” (Grotevant, 1987, p.214). It seems adequate to conceptualise the construction of their emerging identity as an active process of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003). Given my understanding of the scholarship, I conceptualise the participants drawing upon multiple identity influences to construct their emerging sense of selfhood. These include traditional identity categories (e.g., nationality, gender, family

and faith), social identities (e.g., collective identities associated with membership of teams of groups) and generational identity (i.e., their supposed 'millennialness'). In summary, this research extends our knowledge of organisationally-based identities by exploring the phenomena in an under-represented group of young adults who have yet to enter full-time employment.

Thirdly, organisations are conceptualised in terms of both organisationally-based identities and the generational characteristics of their members (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Wegner, Jones & Jordan; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018). Indeed, the potential for intergenerational conflict between different generations has been extensively explored in the literature. Popular authors allege that The Millennial Generation understands the workplace differently from its predecessors and brings a distinctive understanding of leadership to the organisation (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Elmore, 2009; Alsop, 2008). I have stated that millennial and leader identities appear particularly intertwined and interlocking: the popular discourse espouses that to be a millennial is to understand leadership in a specific way. However, both of these identities prescribe a particular set of values, behaviours, attitudes and world views that promote conformity and obedience. Returning to Foucauldian ideas of identity control, these discourses illustrate how "Societies regulate the identities that may be taken up" (Sinclair, 2011, p.509), thus limiting personal agency and autonomy. Woe betide that technologically-averse millennial! Shame on those who do not aspire to lead the organisation they belong to! Given the potentially oppressive nature of these discourses, postmodern and narrative conceptualisations of identity seem particularly useful concepts with which to explore the

relationship between millennial and leader identity. I will explore the participants' narratives to understand them 'before and beyond' the millennial and leader identities often prescribed to them. I aspire to identify how they construct more localised and personalised accounts of selfhood. Specifically, my objective is to understand whether, and if so how, the participants' experiences and emerging identities reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness as suggested by the popular portrayal of the generation.

In conclusion, in this and the previous two chapters, I have surveyed the popular and academic literature of the fields of identity, generational identity and organisationally-based identity. In doing so I have provided the reader the relevant theoretical and empirical background to place and contextualise this research. In the following chapter I discuss how I will carry out this research. To do so, I present the research design, epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions that guide this research and my methods of data collection, interpretation and presentation.

Chapter Five: Research Design

Introduction

This research is concerned with the collective identity of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). I explore the extent to which, if any, ideas of millennial distinctiveness (i.e., those characteristics that allegedly differentiate the generation from its predecessors) are reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identity. In particular, I look at how the participants adopt, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be illustrative of a distinctive millennial identity.

In Chapter One, I discussed my objective and purpose in exploring millennial identity in young adults. I outlined my motivation for undertaking this research and introduced myself as a high school principal, researcher and member of Generation X (born 1965 to 1980). I outlined the theoretical contributions I make through this research to the fields of generational studies, organisational studies and identity studies.

In chapters two, three and four I reviewed the literature that pertains to this research. In Chapter Two, I presented three foundational approaches to identity and discussed how they inform generational and organisationally-based identities. In Chapter Three, I discussed academic theories and popular conceptualisations of generations and described four commonly cited generations (i.e., The Silent Generation, The Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Z). At greater length I presented the collective identity of The Millennial Generation, the generation to which the participants of this research belong, and offered a five-pronged critique of the field. In Chapter Four, I explored theories of organisationally-based identity through ideas such as identity work, identity regulation and the debates that characterise the field. I explored managerial and

organisational ideas of leader identity and discussed their evolution and articulation through *controller, therapist, messianic* and *post-heroic* discourses (Western, 2008; Rose, 1989). I suggested that the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the leader figure is the default portrayal of leadership in the early twenty-first century and frames the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms. However, I argued that the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation, what I have called *millennial leader identity*, differentiates the generation from its predecessors and alludes to both the style of leadership (i.e., servant leadership) and the context in which leadership is exercised (i.e., *the discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*).

I concluded my review of the literature by discussing some of the unresolved debates surrounding the interplay of generational and organisationally-based identities. I suggested that ideas of generational identity are predominantly studied with respect to Anglo-Saxon populations; that theories of organisationally-based identity draw principally on research of individuals in full-time employment; and that popular discourses of generations advance the idea of a simple link between millennial and leader identities. This research extends our knowledge of the aforementioned fields by exploring that link in young adult Mexicans not in full-time employment.

In this chapter, I present the research design I employ to achieve my objective of accessing the participants' understanding of selfhood - their answer to the question *Who am I?* The quality of their answers to this question, and indeed many others - the very data of this research - depends on the interview setting and questions I construct. Moreover, given the qualitative nature of this research, its design should account for the

fact that as a researcher I am a co-constructor of knowledge: that *myself* is reflected in the collection, understanding, interpretation and presentation of the data.

I present my research design in the following way. I first discuss the epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions that guide this research and explain my methods of data collection and interpretation. Later, I analyse the relevant ethical considerations and reflect on my role as a researcher and co-constructor of knowledge. By clearly presenting my research design in this chapter, I provide the reader with the opportunity to evaluate its appropriateness for addressing my principal objectives.

Epistemological and ontological foundations

Crotty (1998) suggests the researcher consider four elements in the design of their research: the epistemological and ontological perspectives through which they understand knowledge and meaning; the methodology that guides the design of the research; and the methods used for data collection, interpretation and analysis. Epistemology, or “theories of knowledge” (Crotty, 1998, p.3), refers to what is considered to be knowledge within a certain academic discipline or field of study (Crotty, 1998; Bryman & Bell, 2003). Crotty (1998, p.3) suggests three principal epistemologies, *objectivism*, *subjectivism* and *constructionism*, guide the relationship of the researcher with their study, how they undertake their research and how results are presented. This research has its foundation in a *constructionist epistemology* that suggests social reality, meaning and knowledge are not discovered through the application of scientific methods but constructed through the interaction of human actors. Meaning is neither objective nor unique but constructed in

the individual's interaction with others and the world around them (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Crotty (1998) defines *constructionism* as

the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998, p.42).

The theoretical approach to generational and organisationally-based identities that I bring to this research is consistent, and indeed draws upon, a constructionist epistemology. I understand these two forms of identity, and indeed others, as essentially discursive in nature. These identities are discursive formulations that articulate what it is to be millennial, or a leader, in ways that are both potentially descriptive and performative. They do this by providing models of identity with accompanying discursive resources to individuals who may then utilise them within their own identity work. Whisnant (2011) understands these discursive resources as

specific patterns of language that tell us something about the person speaking the language, the culture that that person is part of, the network of social institutions that the person is caught up in, and even frequently the most basic assumptions that the person holds (Whisnant, 2011, p. 7-8).

My challenge as a researcher is to explore whether, and if so how, the participants undertake this identity work and the extent to which discourses such as millennial identity predominate in the accounts they give of themselves. Indeed, I recognise that the knowledge claims I make in this research derive from my understanding and interpretation of the discursive resources the participants employ to 'perform' the identities they wish to present to me. Drawing upon Watson (2008), my role as a researcher is to "ascertain the extent to which they have taken on a 'managerial identity', a 'professional identity' or an 'enterprising self'" (Watson, 2008, p. 128), or in my case, a millennial identity.

Consistent with this constructionist epistemology, is my understanding of reality and meaning by means of an *interpretivist ontology*. Ontology refers to claims made about the nature of social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Grix, 2004). The interpretive tradition suggests there are fundamental differences between the natural and social worlds. While the former can be studied in a detached and value-free way, human meaning and interpretation play an essential role in the latter (Bryman & Ball, 2003). An interpretivist ontology suggests that the individual's understanding of the social world is born from their interaction with others and the world around them. Reality is not fixed but in continual construction and valid within a certain situation or context (Nueman, 2006). Indeed, Morgan and Smircich (1980) state

The social world is a continuous process, created afresh in each encounter of everyday life as individuals impose themselves on their world to establish a realm of meaningful definition. They do so through the medium of language, labels, actions and routines, which constitute symbolic modes of being in the world. Social reality is embedded in the nature and use of the modes of symbolic action. The realm of social affairs thus has no concrete status of any kind (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 494).

Given this conceptualisation, social phenomena such as class, gender, culture - and indeed ideas of generations and leaders - are not simply 'out there' as observable and scientific truths. Instead, they are constructed through the use of language and other symbolic modes (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Consequently, as a researcher, I am not an independent observer of scientific phenomena but a co-constructor of knowledge through my understanding and interpretation of the participants' narratives. I aspire to "understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.19). Indeed, the knowledge claims I make in this research cannot be claimed as definitive but instead are but one

contextualised version of social reality (Bryman & Ball, 2003). In this research, that contextualisation is provided by the age (i.e., young adults) and location (i.e., Mexico) of the participants. As such, it enriches our understanding of emerging millennial identity.

The constructionist epistemology and interpretivist ontology that I bring to this research require that I “investigate from within the subject of study”, exploring and interpreting the participants’ lived experiences (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 497). To do so, I conceptualise *identity as narrative* and employ a qualitative methodology that allows me to access the richness and wholeness of personal experience. It is this narrative approach to identity that I turn to in the following section.

Understanding identity as narrative

the personal narrative of identity provides a window into the individual’s momentary integration of experience into a life story that creates meaning and coherence (Hammack, 2008, p. 233).

In the previous section I discussed the epistemological and ontological foundations that guide this research. In this section I turn to the narrative approach to identity through which I will understand and access the participants’ sense of self.

Narrative approaches to identity are found in disciplines as diverse as psychology, cognitive science, anthropology, communication studies and education. Indeed, and as I discussed in Chapter Four, organisationally-based identities are often understood in narrative terms. Narrative approaches conceptualise the stories we tell about ourselves - or *personal narrative* or *life story* - as an articulation of our personal identity or sense of self. In constructing one’s personal narrative, “experience is reflexively reconstituted, made meaningful, and made communicable” (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p.9). Narrative

approaches to identity do not theorise personal narrative as a methodology through which to understand or access self. Instead, personal narrative is more than a simple transmitter of reality, but a creator of it, such that narrative *is* self (McAdams, 2001). In suggesting a narrative construction of reality, Bruner (1991) states, “The central concern is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality” (Bruner, 1991, p. 6). Personal narratives bring together the ordinariness of human life into a coherent understanding of self (Bruner, 1991) and “express the story-teller’s identity, which is a product of the relationship between life experiences and the organized stories of these experiences” (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh & Adler, 2005, p.17). McAdams and McLean (2013) state

Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person’s life story synthesizes episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233).

Personal narratives are one of many types of story. Stories entertain, explain, educate, convince and inspire. However, their real significance is not their factual content but their ability for “turning life into language” (Bochner, 2001, p. 154). They do so by presenting a series of events and characters as a coherent and self-contained plot, with a start, middle, end and the presence of a narrator and addressee (Czarniawska, 1998; Toolan, 1988). The process of *emplotment* - the construction of the plot - brings together temporarily different elements to form a coherent narrative or story. However, emplotment is not a fixed process and individuals have a wide range of possibilities in the stories they construct. Indeed, we interpret ‘a good story’ as one that allows us to recognise and understand each individual event while capturing the overall meaning of its

plot. The story we tell about ourselves, our personal narrative, is continually evolving and “incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future” (McAdams, 1996, p.307). Indeed, Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) claims, “Self-narratives are, in a sense, anchors that ground human actors in a world that is in constant flux” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008, p.116).

The data of this research is the collection of stories the participants relate to me during our time together. My role as a researcher is to interpret and understand them with respect to the participants’ experiences and emerging identity. In the section titled *Data collection* method, I will discuss in detail how I elicited these stories during the interviews with the participants. Here I reflect on some general considerations that guide my interpretation of them.

How the participants understand themselves and their versions of reality, history, culture and tradition is the result of a *narrative accrual* of innumerable individual and collective stories (Bruner, 1991). Due to the unstable nature of autobiographical memory and the continual experiencing of new events, the participants’ narratives will contain factual errors and embellishments. This dynamism reflects the evolving nature of their experiences, goals, motivations and priorities (Singer, 2004). Indeed, I recognise how the stories I tell about myself, now in an educational leadership role, differ from those when I understood myself as a ‘simple’ classroom teacher. Further, I recognise that the participants are unlikely to tell me everything about themselves, nor indeed tell me things they might relate to a family member or close friend. I understand them consciously and continuously crafting their stories by which they “selectively appropriate aspects” (McAdams, 2001, p.101) of their personal experiences they wish to share with me. Given

my role as a high school director, they are likely to emphasise certain ideas of themselves, those stories that “generate feelings of authenticity and are deemed valid by their target audience” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p.136). That validity has much to do with our respective roles: a high school principal interviewer and a young adult interviewee. They are likely to present themselves in a favourable light to me, provide the answers they think I want to hear and emphasise those aspects of themselves that are socially acceptable to a high school principal (e.g., responsible, hardworking, academically successful) (Punch, 2002). Again, I reflect on performing a similar type of *narrative editing* in my own professional life. From personal experience, I understand that there is something more genuine, valuable and noble about being in the trenches (read *classroom*) than ‘managing from afar’ (read *director’s office*). I certainly understand myself as an educator first, and a leader second, and narrate my professional life to others in such terms.

The narrative approach to identity I bring to this research offers several theoretical and methodological advantages. First, such an approach is consistent with the constructionist and interpretivist perspectives that guide this research. I understand the participants’ identity as defined with respect to others, personal experiences, language and context. It is not essentialist in nature, “a substance which can be excavated from interior depths” (De Vries, 2010, p.73), but the result of continuous narrative identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Secondly, personal narratives ‘locate’ individuals in a specific historical and social context. They both reflect one’s social-historical location (i.e., twenty-first century Mexico) and are conditioned by it (i.e., the prevalence of stories of faith can be understood

as reflecting the role of the Catholic Church in Mexico). Indeed, McAdams and McLean (2013) state,

different cultures offer different menus of images, themes, and plots for the construction of narrative identity, and individuals within these cultures appropriate, sustain, and modify these narrative forms as they tell their own stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 237).

The participants' personal narratives reflect what it is to be a Spanish speaking young adult in a predominantly catholic, modern day Mexico. By analysing direct quotations from their interviews, I provide an account of the experiences and emerging identity of a group often underrepresented in generational and organisational research. In doing so, I enrich our understanding of selfhood, particularly with respect to millennial identity, in contemporary Mexico.

Thirdly, a narrative approach allows me to explore if themes associated with millennial distinctiveness are relevant to the participants' ideas of selfhood. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, discourses of generational identity are universalising, homogenising and prescriptive in nature and leave little opportunity for individual agency. However, I recognise that the participants are not passive receptors of these discourses but instead 'work' them to frame themselves in certain terms. As such, I explore whether, and if so how, their experiences and emerging identities reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation. For example, are the participants as tech-savvy as the 'digital native' (Prensky, 2001) portrayal alleges?

Fourthly, by employing direct quotations from the participants' narratives, I give them a voice and let their stories be heard before my interpretation of them. Of course, these same quotations provide the reader the opportunity to scrutinise the conclusions I

draw from them. As such, a narrative approach to identity allows for both representation and transparency.

Having discussed the narrative approach to identity that I bring to this research, in the next section I explain my research method: the decisions I made and actions I took with respect to the 'how' of participant selection, data collection, interpretation and presentation.

Research method: access to the field, data collection and interpretation

In the previous two sections I discussed the methodological theory that guides this research. First, I outlined the constructionist and interpretative perspectives that inform my understanding of knowledge and reality respectively. Secondly, I discussed the narrative approach to identity through which I understand the participants' sense of self. In this section, I turn to the practicalities of my research method. The 'how' of this research (i.e., data collection, interpretation and presentation) must be consistent with its methodological framework (i.e., epistemological, ontological and narratives perspectives). I divide my discussion of how I undertook this research into the following five sections: i) participant selection and access ii) data collection method iii) transcription and translation iv) interpretative strategy and v) data presentation. As I discuss each one, I will signal how certain decisions were informed by my methodological framework.

i. Participant selection, access and interview location

Polkinghorne (2005) suggests the objective of qualitative research is to enrich our understanding of experience and recommends that "selections are purposeful and sought

out; the selection should not be random or left to chance” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.140). I identified twenty-four participants by employing a *purposeful sampling strategy* that considered gender, age, location (state capital or surrounding town) and public or private education. I did not have sufficient information of other variables to further refine my selection (e.g., family context, academic performance, behaviour at school).

The participants were between 16 and 21 years old and enrolled in either public or private high schools in the city of Guadalajara or surrounding towns (within 4 hours by car) in the state of Jalisco. Two participants were enrolled in undergraduate programs at universities in the city of Guadalajara. Eleven of the participants studied at public schools that typically only charge a nominal administrative annual fee. Some of the rural schools were particularly antiquated, had very limited recreation spaces and lacked modern computing facilities. The latter might partially explain the lack of ideas of technology in the participants’ accounts of their school experience. The eleven participants in diverse private schools paid between one and four thousand dollars a year in tuition fees. While facilities varied, these participants would generally have access to services common to contemporary private schools in the United Kingdom (e.g., computing facilities, project-based learning spaces, sports fields, arts and music facilities, international exchange opportunities).

The participants were neither from the high school where I currently work, nor from schools with whom my institution has a strong or formal relationship. The participants were identified through referrals from a teacher, tutor or head teacher, so called *gatekeepers* (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I recognise the concerns of *representativeness* that arise from academics identifying potential participants from their

own school. Indeed, if the objective of this research had been to evaluate certain school-specific variables (e.g., student satisfaction with teaching quality; student participation in extra-curricular activities), then such an approach would have been unacceptable and the credibility of the findings poor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Even if the students were handpicked 'star pupils', and I do not believe they were, their understanding of their millennial identity merits study. Gatekeepers were informed of the objectives of this research in writing and asked to identify potential participants. No monetary or non-monetary compensation was offered. If the student agreed to participate, the gatekeeper would either forward me their email and telephone or the student would contact me directly. The participant would then be informed of the research's objectives and methodology through a formal invitation letter sent by email (See Appendix A: Recruitment Letter). I believe that opening this communication channel before meeting the participants in person contributed to my initial rapport with them. I made it clear at this stage that no monetary or non-monetary compensation would be offered for their participation. The simple to-and-for of a few emails with the participants to set the interview date inevitably revealed to me something about their personal interests. For example, in scheduling Diana's and Ricardo's interviews, I came to appreciate the hours they dedicated to debating and music respectively. Two students identified by gatekeepers declined to participate citing heavy workloads in the last weeks of their high school.

Finally, the participants were catholic, typical of the Mexican population as a whole. The National Statistics and Geography Institution (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI) reported that 92.9 of 112.3 million Mexicans identified

themselves as catholic in a 2010 population census (INEGI. *XXI Censo General de Población y Vivienda*, 2010). While this statistic does not necessarily reflect the strength of current day religious observance, nor indeed the importance of the church in the participants' everyday lives, it does suggest people still understand themselves as catholic, a collective or social identity. I anticipated, and indeed found to be true, that religious identity formed an important part of the participants' ideas of selfhood.

Given the narrative approach to identity I bring to this research, the location and ambience of the interviews were very important for the quality of the participants' answers (Kvale, 2007). In the case of the twelve participants from Guadalajara, the interviews most commonly took place in a Starbucks-like coffee shop that they identified prior to our meeting. In the case of the twelve participants that did not live in Guadalajara, the gatekeeper was instrumental in recommending a place for the interviews to take place. I would meet the participant at their school, commonly in the presence of the gatekeeper, and walk to a nearby location. By leaving school premises I looked to reduce the obvious power differential between my roles as a researcher and high school principal and a high school aged participant (Waksler, 1991). I hoped the informality of a coffee shop would provide the participants a certain familiarity and security to answer my questions fully and honestly. In Table 1, I summarise the relevant characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Summary of the participants' characteristics

Characteristic	Number of participants
Gender	
- Male	11
- Female	13
Age	
- 16 or 17 years old	2
- 18 years old or older	22
Location	
- Guadalajara (state capital)	12
- Surrounding town	12
Education	
- Public school	11
- Private school	11
- High school graduate	2

ii. Data collection method

The narrative approach to identity that I bring to this research necessarily guided my choice of data collection method. Ricoeur (1991) states that individuals have an “intuitive preunderstanding” (Ricoeur, 1991, p.73) to conceptualise their lives in narrative terms. I met the participants at a time, at least theoretically, when they would have been writing their personal narrative of school life, reflecting back on accomplishments and disappointments, and envisioning themselves taking a step into the unknown (e.g., leaving home, first job, going to university). Indeed, as young adults they would be honing the relevant cognitive skills to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the stories they wished to tell me, and many others, about themselves (Arnett, 2000, 1999; Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005). Perhaps as students soon to graduate from high school, or having recently done so, they would understand themselves at a certain turning point in their lives?

Whatever their ideas of selfhood, stories of self are not ‘within’ the participants, ready to be dug-out with scientific precision. My objective was not to measure the

participants' sense of being a millennial in any objective way. Instead, I acknowledge that the stories the participants told me were co-constructed between them and myself, specific to a certain context, and subject to negotiation and interpretation. Indeed, I do not understand millennial identity, or any other category of selfhood, inherent to the participants' sense of self *per se*, but brought to life through the stories they tell of themselves. As such, my data emerged both from my real-time interaction with the participants and my later analysis of their interview transcript.

To access the data - the participants' accounts of themselves - I elicited long and detailed answers by employing open-ended questions that motivated them to share their experiences and talk at length (Crotty, 1998). As I alluded to above, I believe the setting of the interview also contributed to the participants having the confidence to offer expanded reflections and commentaries. Of course, not all of the twenty-four participants were equally responsive and my interview transcripts clearly reveal those who were less forthcoming. However, I found no pattern or reason to account for this: the most forthcoming participant was a female student from a small town; the least, a male student from the city of Guadalajara.

I drew upon an extensive literature of interview best practice in an effort to ensure the quality of my data. In qualitative research, the quality of data obtained in interviews depends to a large extent on factors such as i) that the questions asked are consistent with the objectives, epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research (Roulston, 2006) and ii) the skill and craftsmanship of the researcher, their active listening and the empathy and rapport they establish with the participants (Kvale, 2007). I was very aware throughout the research process that my data was nothing less than the storied lives of

young adults. What was constructed during our time together was not simply a transcribed text of twenty to thirty pages, but the participants' understanding of themselves and the world around them. Indeed, Kvale (2007) recognises that the interview "may be a rare and enriching experience for the subject, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation" (Kvale, 2007, p.14). While I cannot be sure if that was the case in this research, I did get the sense that the participants felt comfortable with their experience.

From a previously undertaken pilot study, I experienced and learnt the importance of establishing rapport with the participants, 'breaking the ice' and putting them at ease. To partially counter the power differential between us, I tried to make certain *small talk* as we first met, thanked them for their time and invited them to a coffee, juice or something to eat. I would read aloud the formal invitation letter and ask them to sign it. With hindsight this did little to help establish rapport as it introduced a certain formality at the start of the interview. In future research, I would consider just asking the participants if they had read and understood the letter. I started the interviews with supposedly easy to answer questions regarding their family, hobbies, school experience and inviting them to present themselves (Waksler, 1991). For reasons of both rapport and security, I did not ask the participants to turn off their mobile phones and indeed would encourage them to take an incoming call if necessary. Despite the portrayal of millennials as addicted to their technology (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2010), incoming calls, messages or emails did not in any occasion prove to be a distraction. Perhaps, and responding to my role as a high school principal, the participants put their phones on 'silence' and suffered it out during the interview.

I collected the data with the use of open-ended interviews with open-ended exploratory questions that encouraged the participants to offer long, descriptive and in-depth answers. I used a loose interview guide, “outlining a set of issues to be explored” (Patton, 1990, p. 280) and focused on the participants’ past, present and future, their life’s key moments, successes and challenges (McAdams, 2008) (See Appendix III: Interview Protocol). I anticipated, and as was the case, that themes of school, family, hobbies and friendships were the most common in their interviews. However, they also offered personal histories or experiences through which I interpreted them aspiring to differentiate themselves from others. Given the apparent ubiquity of ideas of millennials distinctiveness, and indeed the societal privilege afforded leadership, I was conscious not to prompt the participants to define themselves in such terms. I wished to avoid them feeling they had to conform to my expectations of them. On some occasions, when the participants appeared to refer to specific ideas associated with millennial identity, I did ask more direct questions (e.g., ideas of family, altruism and leadership). As I wanted to privilege the participants’ own voice and personal experience, I finished each interview by asking them if they would like to add anything more or return to something we had discussed previously. After thanking the participants and closing the interview, I recorded my impressions of them, their demeanour and my sense of their engagement (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Each participant was interviewed on two occasions ranging in time from 45 to 75 minutes. In general three to five days passed between interviews although there were some exceptions. All interviews were recorded with a digital recording device to allow for future transcription and to give confidence to the participants that there would be

documented evidence of what was said (Seidman, 2006; Silverman, 2003). All but one of the participants were interviewed in their native language of Spanish. Guided by the constructionist approach to knowledge that guides this research, I conceptualise and privilege language as constructing social reality. Consequently, I did not want the participants to have to express themselves in their second language, English, with the potential limitations associated with doing so. The exception was a Mexican-American participant who indicated her preference to be interviewed in English - an early illustration of the ideas of difference and outsiderdom that would flavour her narrative. As a footnote, learning good interview technique is one of the outcomes of this research that has been most applicable to my professional life. The ability to formulate a series of open-ended questions is very important to best understand a student's complex academic or personal context.

iii. Transcription and translation

The transcription of the interviews to written language was contracted to a third party with no relation to the participants or myself. Linguistic and cultural context inevitably play a role in how the oral language is interpreted and represented in written words (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). I opted for a *strict translation* of the oral language given the narrative approach I employ in this research (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Representations of pitch, pace, dialects, silences, pauses, gestures, physical movement, and non-word elements such as “uuhhs”, laughing and coughing were generally ignored in the transcription (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). I thus considered the transcription as part of the data collection process.

I employed a 'translate early' strategy, personally translating the Spanish language transcripts to English and later undertaking data interpretation in English (Temple & Young, 2004). Having worked with students, teachers and parents in Mexican schools for fifteen years, I consider myself bilingual. As such, I conducted the interviews in Spanish without the use of an interpreter and did my own translation. Further, the practice provided in translating interviews in my pilot study gave me additional confidence to do so in this research. I also recognise that working with an interpreter or translator is not without its difficulties, particularly in qualitative research that attempts to capture the richness and wholeness of experience (Edwards, 1998). I therefore consider translation as the first step in my interpretation of the data. Language necessarily implies cultural and historical meaning and these meanings will vary, in differing degrees, between one language and another. Indeed, Simon (1996) states, "language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities" (Simon, 1996, p.165). In doing my own translation I looked for the best 'fit' or 'feel' between the two languages. Throughout the interpretation of the data I would move between the Spanish transcriptions and English translation to produce the best contextual translation. Despite Temple and Young (2004, p.164) warning that there "is no neutral position from which to translate", I hope to have been faithful to one of this research's principal objectives of giving the participants their own voice and respecting them as "experts about their own lives" (Curtin, 2001, p.297). However, I do recognise that translation inevitably involves a power relationship where one language is prioritised over another. In the following chapters the participants are presented as English speakers, "or as if the language they use is irrelevant" (Temple &

Young, 2004, p.163). Whilst I heard their ideas of selfhood in Spanish, the reader understands them in English.

iv. Interpretative strategy

Consistent with the constructionist epistemology through which I understand knowledge, my interpretative strategy of the data took the form of a continual re-reading of the participants' narratives. As I stated above, I conceptualise narrative as identity. In my reading of the narratives I could identify a coherent plot and a fairly clear sense of *who* the individual was (McAdams, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998). I achieved this by employing open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to offer long answers, generally between twenty and forty seconds, and also let them 'move' or 'focus' the conversation, at least partially, on ideas they wished to share with me. Indeed, the detail contained in their answers, along with the appropriateness of research design, are the qualitative researcher's principal tools in aspiring to *credibility, worthiness, sincerity, resonance* and *coherence* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010).

My interpretative strategy was executed through three distinct readings of the narratives. I focused first on gaining the 'big picture' of the participants' lives and identifying the key events or experiences that appeared to have influenced or flavoured their sense of who they are in the world. I explored how the participants described their past, present and future (McAdams, 2008). Likewise, I was alert to the key figures or episodes in their lives that potentially influence their sense of self. I paid close attention to how they described their relationships with family members and other potential *influencers* (e.g., school teachers, church leaders, sports coaches). Further, I was keen to

detect if the participants understood themselves by means of common social identities such as nationality, gender, class or religious affiliation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Secondly, I interpreted the narratives with respect to ideas of millennial identity and millennial distinctiveness as articulated in the popular discourse of the generation. I did not assume *a priori* that the participants understood themselves in such terms but was alert to ideas articulated in the millennial roles I described in Chapter Three. With respect to understanding what it is like to be a young adult in Mexico, I paid close attention to the stories in which the participants reflected on family, friendship, faith, shared experiences and schooling. I anticipated, but did not find, issues of the drug trade and cartel violence to be relevant to their narratives. I do not know whether the participants choose not to articulate these ideas, unfortunate realities of contemporary Mexico, or that they have simply become so commonplace so not to warrant mention. Thirdly, I interpreted the participants' narratives with respect to leadership, conceptualising the phenomenon as an eighth facet of millennial distinctiveness. Again, I did not assume *a priori* that the participants understood themselves in such terms but looked to identify those stories that referred to, or I interpreted as referring to, ideas of leadership. Given the participants' age and personal situation (i.e., living at home, not in full-time employment) many ideas of leadership were framed in terms of family and school experiences and articulated in non-managerial language.

During this research, I would continually revisit the participants' narratives with the objective of adjusting, or indeed confirming, my interpretation of their stories. Moreover, on many occasions my interpretation of the participants' stories was enhanced by drawing upon, or bringing together, stories from different readings of the narratives

(e.g., María José's family experience appears particularly relevant to her understanding of leadership).

v. Data presentation

In the following two chapters, I present, analyse and discuss my data and identify the key findings of this research. The data of this research constitutes a series of direct quotations that I take from the participants' interviews. The passages I include in this document represent between twenty and twenty-five percent of the total interview transcripts. Space constraints, and indeed my desire for clarity and precision, inhibit me from including the full transcripts. My selection of what I believe to be the most illustrative passages reveals the negotiated nature of narrative and exemplifies my role as a co-constructor of knowledge. I have stated that personal narrative is an individual's understanding of self. As such, the passages I include in this document, guided by the research's objectives, act as certain 'windows' into the participants' ideas of selfhood. I recognise that I alone have chosen what windows to present - an "exclusive privilege" afforded my role as the researcher (Kvale, 2007, p.15).

The direct quotations I employ to illustrate my interpretation of the participants' experiences and emerging identity I call *identity talk*: passages of narrative that refer to, or I interpret as referring to, the participants' identity or sense of self. I prefer the term *identity talk* to *millennial talk* to acknowledge that self-definition draws upon many more influences than generational ones alone. Further, given the objective of this research, I use the term *leader talk* to identify those passages that refer to, or I interpret as referring to, the participants' experiences of leadership or their emerging leader identity.

I conclude this section by summarising the components of my qualitative research method: i) purposeful sample strategy ii) open-ended interviews with exploratory questions iii) a strict translation and ‘translate early’ strategy from the participants’ native language (Spanish) to English iv) a three-reading interpretation of the participants’ narratives v) qualitative data presentation characterised by rich detail.

However, this research method should not simply be conceptualised as a series of operational processes. Instead, it must be understood in the context of whom carries it out (i.e., the researcher) and who experiences it (i.e., the participant). In the following section I discuss important issues that guide the relationship between the two.

Ethical considerations and reflexivity

As the ‘big interpreter’, the researcher maintains an exclusive privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee really meant (Kvale, 2007, p.15).

In this section, I discuss my ethical duties as both a researcher and an educator of young people. I take with much responsibility the ‘big interpreter’ role I bring to this research: I alone have decided which of the participants’ stories to include (Kvale, 2007). Such responsibility is often conceptualised in two ways: *procedural ethics* that ensure the safety and basic rights of participants through informed consent and reviews by institutional ethics committees; and *ethics in practice* that consider the day-to-day ethical decisions I made during the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Procedural ethics were particularly important in this research given I was working with young adults (22 of the 24 participants were 18 years old or older, two were seventeen). It was my responsibility to ensure the participants understood the objectives, methodology and potential risks of their participation. I hoped to start each interview

confident that the participant was both fully informed and voluntarily consented to participate, so called *informed consent*. Hollmann and McNamara (1999) define *informed consent* as

the process by which a competent person voluntarily agrees to participate in research activities based on a full disclosure of the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, alternative available procedures, and limits of confidentiality of the research (Hollmann & McNamara, 1999, p.141).

As I described when discussing my access to the field, the participants were identified by a known gatekeeper, commonly a principal, teacher or tutor, who informed them of the research and invited them to participate. I later sent by email a formal invitation letter that explained the research's objectives, methodology and potential risks. I read aloud the same document before starting the interview the first time we met. I invited the participants to raise any questions or objections and asked them to sign a physical copy before starting with my questions (See Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form). On reflection, and while recognising the importance of informed consent, reading aloud and signing the formal invitation letter immediately before starting our interview was counterproductive. It often seemed to startle the participants, or raise their suspicions, just as I was looking to establish rapport and put them at ease. In future research, if time and logistical considerations permitted, I would consider obtaining the informed consent of the participants in a brief meeting a day or two prior to the interview.

With respect to *ethics in practice*, I was particularly aware of the *power relationship* implied in an interview between a high school principal and student. During the interviews I had four specific concerns. First, I wanted the participants to recognise that I valued their personal experiences and stories and acknowledged their expertise about their own lives. I did so by inviting long and detailed answers, showing an active

interest in those answers and only loosely guiding both the content and rhythm of the interview. To the best of my ability I avoided sending signals, either approving or disapproving, to their answers by means of my facial expressions and body language. Only the participants themselves will really know if I achieved this objective. I feel the responsibility to not only write a solid thesis but to repay the participants' faithful, voluntary and unrewarded participation.

Secondly, I was aware that adults rarely seek the opinions of young people, what Dejong and Love (2014) refer to as *adulthoodism*, “the systematic subordination of younger people, as a targeted group, who have relatively little opportunity to exercise social power” (Dejong & Love, 2014, p. 536). I anticipated that in a long interview, an unusual and formal experience, the participants “may feel pressure to give 'correct' answers to research questions”, thinking and acting as if they were in a classroom environment (Punch, 2002, p. 329). Moreover, in an example of *impression management* (Goffman, 1958), I acknowledge the participants likely aspiring to “control the impressions others form of them” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). In the context of a long interview with an academic authority, they might assume a more mature, academically-focused and conservative presentation of self and “act in accordance with expectations of the roles that will make her or him appear in a positive manner to others” (Urick, 2014, p.405). I myself do such things: I acknowledge the impression management or diverse ‘faces’ I present to students, teachers and parents respectively during a school semester. Would not my young adult participants do the same? In an attempt to foster authenticity, honesty and rapport with the participants, I decided to conduct the interviews out of school in a more informal, less academic environment. In doing so, I aspired to signal that our relationship

was that of researcher-participant, not teacher-student. I enjoyed listening to the participants' stories and my multiple readings of the transcripts have given me a sense of knowing them. I hope to have represented them to the best of my ability.

Thirdly, as the principal of a high school that forms part of a nationwide university system, I recognise that the participants, or their parents, might have thought that their involvement in the research would aid their entrance to the university. This was not the case: decisions on admission and financial aid depend on high school grades, an admissions exam and formal interview. While some participants did ask me about university entrance, I believe it was more from curiosity and a genuine interest to explore possible options, than to look to capitalise on their participation. Since our interviews, two participants have asked me to write letters of recommendations for university entrance. I remember reflecting from my researcher *self* if doing so would be appropriate. A power relationship was at play. I had asked of them 18 months earlier and now it was my turn to respond. Beyond a researcher or principal self, it was my feeling of common fairness that motivated me to write the letters.

Fourthly, I acknowledge a certain power relationship between myself and the teachers and principals that acted as gatekeepers. I work at one of the country's most prestigious private high schools. Many of the gatekeepers were employed in publicly funded schools in rural areas. I wanted to avoid the perception that I was there to offer, or more likely give, advice to other schools - the private schooler from the city out to correct the woes of other less fortunate schools. On several occasions I declined the opportunity to have a tour of the school or observe a class in progress. Meeting and chatting to other teachers and staff was unavoidable and enjoyable. I was very conscious

not to appear consultant or examiner-like and tried to turn the conversation towards my research. Teachers will be teachers however and we inevitably talked about our common challenges and gripes!

Finally, I have attempted to be reflexive throughout this research and consider “how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel” affect data collection and analysis (Pillow, 2003, p.176). *Reflexivity* or *self-reflexivity* refers to self-awareness, “a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness” (Callaway, 1992, p.33). Cunliffe (2003) suggests a researcher’s reflexivity

recognizes the influence of the researcher’s values and assumptions on the process of inquiry. Researchers need to confront themselves and make their assumptions explicit so that the reader is aware of their impact. This may take the form of researcher confessions about personal biases, textual strategies such as writing from the first person singular, or writing a story about the researchers’ fieldwork experience (Cunliffe, 2003, p.995).

It is relevant to critique my own ability, as a 45-year-old male, to faithfully interpret and understand the narratives of participants less than half my age. I recognise that I come to this research with a history, gender, race, language, culture and professional career that inevitable influences my interpretation of the data (Way, 2005). Indeed, as Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) reflect,

The researcher as instrument can be the greatest threat to trustworthiness in qualitative research if time is not spent on preparation of the field, reflexivity of the researcher, the researcher staying humble (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003, p. 320).

As member of Generation X (born 1964 to 1980), educator and high school principal, I reflect if I am not a co-constructor, consciously or not, of the very millennial and leader identities I now look to explore through the lives of others? Am I capable of understanding the participants’ experiences and emerging identities without first framing

them as millennials? Further, might the participants not accuse me of having a hidden motivation to conserve the economic, political and social *status quo* by perpetuating a conservative and conformist millennial identity? I observe that teachers are often the most critical of ‘these new generations’, attributing societal problems, and sometimes even their own, to those sitting in front of them. Can I escape this cloud of scepticism and see the participants for who they are? Moreover, I recognise that leadership is commonly portrayed as the *raison d'être* of education and career aspirations, a sales-pitch I myself often assume when talking with students and teachers! While I aspire to be faithful to the storied lives of the participants, I recognise that their narratives are necessarily interpreted and presented through my own experiences, place, time and language. However, I am humble enough not to pretend to be an expert on their lives nor to suggest that my understanding of their emerging identity is definite or unique.

Summary of research design

In this chapter I have presented the constructionist epistemology and interpretive ontology that I bring to this research. I discussed the narrative approach to identity that conceptualises personal narrative as an articulation of selfhood. I outlined my research method and explained issues such as participant selection, data collection, transcription and translation, data interpretation and presentation. I recognise I bring a researcher, principal and teacher self to this research and aspire to faithfully represent the lives and experiences of the participants. Drawing on ideas of *ethics as procedure* and *ethics in practice*, I reflected on my responsibility towards the individuals who voluntarily participated in this research.

This marks the half-way point of this research. I have discussed its principal objectives and my motivations for undertaking it. I have explored the relevant scholarship of identity, generational identity and organisationally-based identity. In this chapter, I presented my research design and methodology. In the following two chapters, I turn to my data and findings. In doing so I present the participants' voices and accounts - those 'windows' into their selfhood.

Chapter Six: Stories of emerging selfhood in young adults

Introduction

The objective of this research is to explore the emerging identities of twenty-four young adult Mexicans. It is located in the literature of generational studies, organisational studies and identity studies. It explores if the participants' ideas of selfhood reflect the millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation. Specifically, it addresses the questions *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* and *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?*

In my review of the literature in Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*, I discussed the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities and made the claim that this discourse emphasises ideas of generational change and intergenerational difference. I argued that popular understandings of generational identity appear to draw upon social identity theory and ideas of collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1986). That is to say, that individuals share certain characteristics with members of their own generation (i.e., the ingroup) and are distinct to those of other generations (i.e., the outgroup) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1986). Members of different generations are differentiated from each other in terms of i) relationships ii) economic impact of the generation iii) understanding of organisations and organisationally-based identities iv) *legacy*, how the generation will transform society v) access to, and use of, technology and vi) specific values, attitudes and behaviours. For example, and referring to ideas of

legacy, the popular discourse describes The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) transforming ideas of civil liberties and civil rights through their activism. On the other hand, Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) is depicted as bringing a new pragmatism and entrepreneurialism to the workplace and economy. Of course the popular discourse, drawing upon Mannheim's (1952) *defining events perspective*, also differentiates generations by means of their socio-historical location, or context. The distinctive events experienced by members of different generations are not however characteristics of the generation *per se*, but themselves theorised as 'generation-causing' (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000). For example, while The Baby Boomers enjoyed post-war optimism, increasing economic and material growth and global industrial progress, Generation X lived through increasing economic uncertainty, the phenomenon of both parents working full-time jobs, and increasing rates of divorce, teen pregnancy and AIDS.

In Chapter Three, I presented the portrayal of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) and identified how its members are differentiated from their predecessors. Drawing upon the work of popular authors, I conceptualised this millennial distinctiveness by means of seven roles, or millennial roles. These roles articulate the generation's alleged impact in contemporary society and act as a set of discursive resources that individuals potentially draw upon for self-definition. These seven roles are i) digital generation ii) good team player iii) conventional rule-abider iv) achievement-oriented goal-getter v) busy and pressured vi) sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents and vii) young altruist. In Chapter Four, in the section titled *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*, I described an eighth role, or facet, of millennial differentiation: the portrayal of leadership associated with the

generation. This portrayal, what I have called *millennial leader identity*, is based on ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. It depicts a new empathic, empowering and socially aware leader in an age of a changing organisational and economic realities (e.g., artificial intelligence, big data, robotisation and the gig-economy).

What then of the experiences and emerging identities of my millennial participants? To what extent do their experiences and emerging identities reflect the popular discourse of their generation? Do they necessarily see themselves as millennials, drawing upon the aforementioned roles, or do they find other available, and equally attractive, options of selfhood? Do ideas of leadership colour their self-definition as suggested by millennial identity? Reflecting on my role as a co-constructor of knowledge in this research, can I come to understand the participants ‘before and beyond’ the millennial label that so often characterises them? Can I understand their accounts free from the perspectives and prejudices, conscious or otherwise, I bring to this research as a forty-five-year-old Xer and high school principal?

This chapter explores these reflections and others. Specifically, it addresses the question, *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants’ experiences and emerging identities?* My motivation as a researcher is to probe at the persuasiveness of generational identity and “challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, assertions and assumptions” (Fraser, 2004, p. 182). If ideas of millennial identity do in fact strongly influence the participants’ understanding of selfhood, as suggested by the popular discourse, I would expect ideas associated with the aforementioned eight millennial roles to figure significantly in their narratives. In other words, the findings that

I derive from my interpretation of these narratives will allow me to comment upon the apparent salience of millennial identity in the self-definition of Mexican young adults.

To discuss the participants' experiences and emerging identity, and consistent with the narrative approach to identity that I bring to this research, I present direct quotations from their narratives. I will refer to these quotations as *identity talk*, passages in which the participants refer to, or I interpret them referring to, their personal identity or sense of self. Fraser (2004) states, "Through the retelling of stories, they [individuals] represent their identities and societies" and "organize their experiences into meaningful episodes" (Fraser, 2004, p. 180). I conceptualise the participants' narratives as both *story* (i.e., plots, characters and events) and *self* (i.e., the participants' personal identity) (McAdams, 2008, 2000). When relevant, I offer a brief introduction of the participant before discussing their identity talk. I do not do this, for reasons of space and continuity, when I employ only a brief quotation to illustrate an idea.

As I discuss the participants' identity talk or "meaning episodes" (Fraser, 2004, p. 180), I bear in mind two things. First, the *performative* nature of identity (Goffman, 1958) and the idea that self-presentation is "always situated: it may be in a gathering, an occasion, in a setting, indeed, any place in which two or more people interact" (Manning, 2008, p. 680). As I have discussed in Chapter Five, I recognise the likelihood of young adults presenting themselves in the best possible light to a high school principal or responding in the ways they think I consider correct. Secondly, and relatedly, I acknowledge that the participants likely "selectively appropriate aspects" (McAdams, 2001, p.101) of their personal experiences and emerging identities to communicate with me. I do not have the full picture of their lives and, for the reader, represent it only in the

quotations and interpretations I include in this document. Despite these two challenges, by employing a close reading of the participants' narratives, and accompanying interpretation and reflection, I believe I have something valuable to say about them. I acknowledge however, that there is no one definitive interpretation of their lives.

I present the participants' stories through four identity influences that appear to play an important role in their self-definition. Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen and Kokko (2016) claim that while identity is often conceptualised as an overall concept, it "is in practice studied within various life domains" (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2016, p.9). I have privileged four influences or life domains before others because of their relevance in the participants' narratives: they either refer to them on multiple occasions (i.e., breadth of use) or develop them very thoroughly on a few occasions (i.e., depth of use). These four influences encapsulate diverse ideas and discursive recourses that potentially inform the participants' ideas of selfhood. These themes are: i) family, ii) faith iii) altruism, iv) future plans and aspirations. My objective is to explore to what extent, if any, ideas of millennial identity and millennial distinctiveness are reflected in these four themes. I address them one by one and close the chapter by bringing together my findings.

In the following chapter, I will look more closely at another alleged facet of generational differentiation - ideas of leadership - and explore if the participants appear to understand and perform the phenomenon in a way that differentiates them from their predecessors.

Stories of families

Family is the first identity influence through which I understand the participants' experiences and emerging identity. I include the theme of family as a significant identity category because it appears to be relevant in the identity construction of sixteen of the twenty-four participants. 'Family', and I will use to term liberally to represent all understandings of the institution, conjures ideas of love, security, care, growth, communication, confidence and commitment. In this section, I will explore whether, and if so how, stories of family reflect certain ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation.

Family, as a social institution, reflects the wider culture and society and is a primary system through which one generation educates another. As such, it has the potential to provide an alternative set of discursive resources for selfhood to generational discourses. Contemporary Mexican culture "places a strongly held value on intergenerational family unity that is thought to result in a greater reliance on immediate and extended family" (Fuller-Iglesias & Antonucci, 2016, p.2). Indeed, and as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, I recognise that accounts of family are likely influenced by cultural factors relevant in Mexico. Moreover, given that my participants are just emerging from adolescence, I anticipate that stories of family might be particularly relevant in their narratives. Indeed, these *late-millennials* (born 1996 to 2000) are likely much more dependent on family than *early millennials* (i.e., born nearer the start of the generational range, 1981 to 2000). In this sense, the participants' life-stage (e.g., young adulthood) might be more relevant than generational identity in understanding their

experience of family. As I discussed in Chapter Three, (see page 52), the arbitrariness of generational labelling potentially masks significant *in-generational* differences.

I discuss stories of family by means of three sub-themes that emerge from my analysis of the data: i) communication and shared confidence ii) intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and moments spent with loved ones and iii) parents as educators and mentors. My objective is to explore whether, and if so how, these stories reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation. I will also keep in mind that themes of family likely offer the participants options for selfhood (e.g., collaboration, stability and care) that contest ideas traditionally associated with leadership (e.g., autonomy, competition, decision-making). I will explore this idea further in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Beyond leadership: identity work and alternatives for selfhood*.

The accounts of a first group of five participants, namely Diana, Claudia, Andrea, Sarahí and Tiffany can be read as emphasising the quality of the *communication and shared confidence*, they enjoy with their parents and siblings. These stories advance ideas of an emotional closeness between parent and child; the acceptance of parental authority; and of understanding family as a source of formal and experiential learning. Do these stories reflect an aspect of millennial distinctiveness - the aptly titled 'sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents' role? Might they be better understood from the perspective of the participants' particular socio-historical location? Indeed, it will not be lost on the reader that all five participants I cite in this section are females which perhaps suggests the prevalence of traditional gender roles in Mexican understandings of family and family relationships.

Diana is eighteen years old and the daughter of Cuban immigrants. She was born in Mexico and spent the first three years of her life in Cuba where her extended family still lives. She has a younger sister of thirteen and depicts an idyllic family life characterised by spending the weekend at the movies, enjoying art and playing music. She is a graduate of a private, religiously affiliated school in Guadalajara and is soon to start an undergraduate career in international relations. I understand the following quotation as alluding to the confidence and transparency she enjoys with her family.

Diana: We tell each other everything, absolutely everything. There's never been taboos or things off-limits. We all believe that it's better to talk about things and analyse them together.

Diana also employs family relationships to differentiate herself from others and claims, "this relationship between us, well, I realise there're a lot of children that don't live their family relationships like that. I'm fortunate to have parents that are so committed to us. They're always there for us".

Claudia's stories of family echo Diana's. She is eighteen years old, lives with her parents and is a triplet. She recently graduated from the American Foundation School in Guadalajara. This private school offers the U.S. curriculum taught in English. Of her parents, Claudia states, "We're really very close. I tell everything to my mum, sister and brothers. We tell each other everything". In the following extract she alludes to the advice and confidence her parents have offered her. Again, I understand family being employed as a differentiator, Claudia's relationships with her parents, "something not many teenagers have".

Interviewer: The confidence to tell your mum everything, where does that come from?

Claudia: I don't know where it comes from, this relationship. I think that since I was little my mum never judged me, even if I'd tell her something that she didn't approve of. She's always given me good advice. I mean she'd say 'Claudia why not do this instead of that'. But she never says, 'You're in trouble'. I mean, she'll tell me if I've made a mistake or did something wrong, but she's never punished me. I think it's something not many teenagers have.

Indeed later, she differentiates herself more directly from her friends, alleging "a special confidence" with her mother.

Claudia: Because I compare myself to my friends and my friends that say 'No, my mum doesn't know I'm here'. That's not right. I tell my mum where I am every minute because I feel I've got a special confidence with her. I get on great with my brother too, and my sister. I mean we do everything together and if we're not together, then it's like we're in constant contact.

Tiffany is a final semester student of a Jesuit high school in Guadalajara. She lives with her parents, sister and two brothers and claims, "all of us share almost the same interests" and "academically, we're almost always getting good grades". I reflect if this almost idyllic synchronicity might have something to do with the fact that Tiffany is preparing to leave home to study economics in Mexico City. This is uncommon in Mexico where the culture is to stay with one's family during undergraduate studies. However, and reflecting the confidence she has with her parents, she states, "there's a lot I've learnt from them" and "I know they'll always be here for me, in Guadalajara". I read the following quotation as reflecting confidence and trust.

Tiffany: They know everything about me, it's like, well a combination of their influences. That's made me understand that there's a certain way of doing things. I mean, I trust they'll show me the right way.

Andrea's family situation is different to that of Diana, Claudia and Tiffany. An 18-year-old female, she lives with her mother, older brother and younger sister. She was born in Mexico but lived in the U.S. between the ages of four and thirteen. She currently

lives in the medium sized town of Tequila, home of Mexico's national drink, and is finishing her final semester in a public high school. Her father remained in the U.S. and while they communicate everyday by Skype, she has not seen him in person for five years. However, and referring to him as "my rock" and "my biggest influence". She advances the idea that the two share an intimate and confidence-filled relationship. She claims, "With him it's something deeper, about achieving your personal goals and being the best, you can be. That's what we've always talked about".

Sarahí is nineteen years old and lives with her mother and two sisters of twenty-five and twenty-nine years old. Her father died when she was twelve. She lives in the small rural town of Sayula and is finishing a technical degree in agronomy at the local public college. Sarahí emphasises the confidence she enjoys with her older sisters and states "They'll give me advice and tell me what they think about what's happening and give me advice on the decisions I make". Like Diana (e.g., "I'm fortunate to have parents that are so committed to us") and Claudia (e.g., "Because I compare myself to my friends), Sarahí draws on her siblings to differentiate herself from others and states "it's like an advantage having my older sisters as examples". Interestingly, I interpret the relative absence of her mother from her narrative as suggesting that Sarahí sees her older sisters assuming a paternal role. Indeed, she states that after her father's death, "it was difficult at the start because my sister, the oldest one, well she had to take the role of my dad. It's like she felt the responsibility for the family, for all of us". In summary, the accounts of Diana, Claudia, Andrea, Sarahí and Tiffany can be read to suggest they understand their family relationships in terms of communication and shared confidence.

The accounts of a second group of nine participants can be read to suggest they value *intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and the moments they spend with loved ones*. As I alluded to above, while these stories can be read as suggesting the participants understand themselves in terms of the ‘sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents’ role, undoubtedly the fact that they live at home explains somewhat the privilege afforded stories of family. While all of the participants necessarily referred to family in their narratives (e.g., in introducing themselves), nine of the twenty-four advance the idea that spending time with their parents and siblings is a common, enjoyable and valued activity. The accounts in this section can also be read to contest other millennial roles (e.g. ‘busy and pressured’ and ‘achievement-oriented go-getter’) and also ideas of leadership. For example, ideas of domesticity and spending time with loved ones do not sit with forward-looking, change-driven ideas of leadership.

María Isabel, is nineteen years old and lives with her parents in the town of Barranca de Santa Clara. Her older sister emigrated to the U.S. and her older brother to a bigger city within the state. She reflects, “It’s tough as a family being apart a lot, I mean, it’s hard that us five aren’t together much”. Her father is a farmer, her mother a housewife, and she claims to enjoy going to the movies with them. She talks about working with her parents in a small shop they have opened next to the family house. Her portrayal alludes to the comfort of domestic routines and the enjoyment of spending time with loved ones. She frames her role in the shop as “part of the way we spend our day” and not in entrepreneurial or managerial terms. By doing so, María Isabel appears to reject ideas associated with leadership, the ‘busy and pressured’ and ‘achievement-oriented goal getter’ millennial roles.

María Isabel: It's like the responsibility of everyone. After homework, housework and well, my dad's work, we're all there together. It's work, I mean it's to make money, but it's good to be together doing it, like a team, a family team. I think we all enjoy it, it's like part of the way we spend our day. Working but together. It feels good to be there helping, talking as we're working, asking how the day was. We joke around too, there's not always customers around. I mean, I guess I don't have to do it, if I had too much homework, they [her parents] won't make me stay. But no, it's ok, it's our time together.

Claudia, who I introduced previously, (see page 166), articulates ideas of spending time with her family in almost idyllic terms, claiming, "it's being together that's important".

Interviewer: Is there any activity that you like to do as a family?

Claudia: We love just to be together. We'll always sit down and eat together. Even if it's just lunch, we try and well, once a day, seven days a week. I mean breakfast and dinner are complicated because of everyone's schedules. But it's being together that's important, and I don't just mean eating and drinking, but having the time to talk about the day together, that's what we love.

Juan Pablo, alleges "being very close to my extended family" and claims "family are the people I spend the most time with". While Gerardo spends the weekend playing golf, "as a family", Diana alleges, "We all love art. There's not a weekend where we don't see a movie together, or we'll listen to music". Alexis express this sentiment with the phrase, "We almost always spend the weekend together, in family", and offers a list of activities, "anything to spend time together." Mich claims, "we always give each other Sunday together", and "we're always together", while Christian states, "we take advantage of Saturday and Sunday to go around the lake in Ajijic, or Joco". José Carlos refers to the routine of daily life and claims family is "about spending time together, enjoying things together". In summary, the accounts of nine participants can be read to

suggest they understand their family relationships in terms of intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and the moments they spend with loved ones.

The stories of a final group of two participants, Roxanna and Estela, can be read to suggest they understand their parents as educators and mentors. The two emphasise the teaching provided by them and allude to a certain dependence and need. Roxana is twenty years old and in her third year at university. She lives with her parents and two brothers. Of her parents Roxana states, “They’ve taught me to be who I am” and “I’ve learnt good from bad”.

Interviewer: You mentioned your parents at the start? Can you tell me more about them?

Roxana: Since I was young, well, well they’ve always given priority to our family, given priority to school. Simple things, like asking for permission. I don’t know, simple things, but I know they worry about me. I mean, thanks to them, like I said, I’ve learnt good from bad, what’s really important, what’s worth worrying about, what’s not.

Later Roxana reflects on the pressures she faces and alleges some classmates, “feel stuck, like frustrated”, while attempting to “live up to society’s ideal of the perfect person”. She attributes her happiness to her parents’ guidance.

Roxana: It’s thanks to my parents, and what they’ve taught me about being happy. I mean, having your family close, doing well at school, that’s what happiness is about. My parents have taught me how to be happy, grateful.

Like other stories in this section, Roxana draws upon her relationship with her parents to differentiate herself from others. Of the intimacy they share she states, “well, it’s different from my friends or classmates” and “I’m lucky to have excellent parents”.

Finally, Estela, who lives with her parents and two siblings in Tequila, likewise draws upon the educator role of her parents. Claiming they have a different vision with

respect to family and education she states, “their [her parents] ideals are different” and “the majority of other parents think differently, no?”. In the following quotation she appears to differentiate herself from her classmates because of “how they’ve educated me”, referring to her parents.

Interviewer: So how do you see yourself with respect to your classmates?

Estela: More than anything in the way I’ve been educated and my ideals, by my parents I mean. Since I was young my parents have always given me lots of attention, they’ve looked out for me. They’re always at school asking, ‘How’s my daughter doing?’ It’s like others see it as something old-fashioned because their parents never worry about them and their ideals are different. Yes, I think the majority of the group think differently, no? They think about the moment, in the now and well sometimes they judge you. But I don’t worry about it. If I think about it, I do feel different because well, their ideals are different, their education too, how they’ve educated me.

In this section, I have presented the stories of sixteen of the twenty-four parents that can be read to suggest that ideas of family play an important role in selfhood. I have discussed these stories by means of three sub-themes that emerged from the data: i) communication and shared confidence ii) intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and the moments spent with loved ones ii) parents as educators. The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation alleges that millennials enjoy a special sense of care, nurturing, education, guidance and protection from their parents. This facet of millennial distinctiveness is articulated in the ‘sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents’ millennial role that I discussed in Chapter Three. At first sight, the accounts of the sixteen participants appear to support the idea of a distinctive millennial experience of family. However, in Chapter Eight, I will discuss these stories with respect to Mexican culture and reflect if they might be better understood

in cultural terms, before generational ones. I will also discuss how accounts of family appear to provide the participants alternatives for selfhood that contest ideas traditionally associated with leadership.

Stories of faith

Faith is the second identity influence through which I understand the participants' experiences and emerging identity. I include the theme of faith as a significant identity category because it appears to be relevant in the identity construction of thirteen of the twenty-four participants. Drawing on the Oxford Dictionary, I understand the term 'faith' as a belief in the doctrines of religion based upon spiritual conviction before empirical proof or scientific explanation. In this section, I will explore whether, and if so how, stories of faith reflect certain ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation.

Faith, like family, reflects the wider culture and society. In general, young people globally, both the millennials and their successors, Generation Z (born since 2000), are commonly depicted as less religious than previous generations (Pew Research Center, 13th June, 2018). A 2018 Pew Research Center report states, "Lower religious observance among younger adults is common around the world" and "Although the age gap in religious commitment is larger in some nations than in others, it occurs in many different economic and social contexts" (Pew Research Center, *The Age Gap in Religion Around the World*, 2018). However, and as I discussed in Chapter Five, (see page 141), the participants in this research are catholic, typical of the Mexican population as a whole. Camp (1997) recognises the Catholic Church's influence in the education of values, as a

social mobilizer and “infiltrating religion into more explicit secular affairs” (Camp, 1997, p. 6). While the national constitution guarantees a secular and free public education, private institutions can offer religious instruction and eight participants spent some or all of their primary, secondary or high school years in religiously affiliated schools. Garcia Alba (2011) supports the idea that religion is still relevant in identity construction in Mexico and states,

Catholicism has provided, and indeed still provides, both order and regulative norms for members of certain social groups, because despite everything, it remains the majority religion of Mexicans (Garcia Alba, 2011 p. 249).

Given the participants’ socio-historical location, I naturally anticipated a greater salience of their religious identity than is articulated the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation. Their narratives are littered with reference to their faith (e.g., Diana reflects on the implications of a Latin American Pope for Catholics in the region while José Carlos refers to allegations of child abuse in the church and laments, “everyone makes mistakes, every organisation too”). Indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, faith potentially informs the participants’ understanding of leadership. Exploring ideas of faith in young adult millennial Mexicans enriches and textures the discourse of millennial identity - universal generational portrayals, by definition, have little space for the richness and complexity encapsulated in localised expressions of faith and religious beliefs. While I wish to make clear that it is not my objective to explore the relative piety of the participants, I also recognise that they likely exaggerate the importance of faith in their lives. After all, independent of one’s actual religiosity, framing oneself in such terms likely provides a sense of *positive self-worth* and *positive value*: the belief that one is a

valued individual living a meaningful life with “a sense of goodness or positivity to life” (Baumeister & Vohs 2002, p.610).

I discuss stories of faith by means of two sub-themes that emerge from my analysis of the data: i) obedience and reverence and ii) empowerment and optimism. My objective is to explore whether, and if so how, these stories reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation.

The accounts of a first group of eight participants, namely José Carlos, Ricardo, Roxana, Gerardo, Juan Pablo, Diego, Lety and Christian can be read as emphasising their obedience and reverence towards religious doctrine. They advance the idea that their faith acts as a standard or reference by which they live their lives. They appear to present themselves as willing devotees, subject to and accepting of, the ideas, teachings and collective identity associated with their faith. The accounts of José Carlos, Ricardo and Roxana can be read to suggest the three understand themselves acting in God’s name. They advance the idea of living their life as God’s disciples and doing God’s work.

José Carlos’ account of his faith must be understood within the context of recent personal and professional decisions. An eighteen year-old-male, he lives with his parents and two younger brothers in Guadalajara. Educated in a private school with religious affiliation, he was a competitive swimmer until the age of sixteen. I met him at the end of a one-year sabbatical, or ‘year-out’ after high school, which he spent reflecting on his future career options. Of his decision to join the clergy he claims, “God and the church can do many good things through me” and refers to “my calling” and “helping others in the name of God’s love”.

José Carlos: I consider myself a witness. I believe what’s God done in me, what others have done in me, I mean the church, everything, they’ve

transformed me. That's what I want to work in, no? So, I consider myself a witness. God and the church can do many good things through me. And I want to do it, no? I mean, so others see me as an example.

He continues,

José Carlos: The motivation I have is God. The love of God. I mean, if my calling is to become a priest, that's what I've got to dedicate my life to no? And as motivation, if something defines me it's that - strong will. The willingness to help others in the name of God's love.

Ricardo likewise portrays himself as an obedient devotee. He is nineteen years old and recently graduated from a private high school in Guadalajara. He has two older sisters and lives with his mum and dad, an international public speaker and financial director respectively. Within the first thirty seconds of our conversation he declares "I'm a catholic" and "I'm in another band, of Christian music, catholic music". Ricardo frames his faith in terms of this band, playing music to honour God. He advances the idea of understanding the band members as God's "instruments, tools to evangelise" and alleges "making decisions with God in mind, it's about your ethics and morals". In the following extract he discusses tensions between band members, reflecting "that's what we do, evangelise with music".

Ricardo: Well it's a catholic group and so we all sing for God, not to shine ourselves. It was difficult for everyone but we were losing sight of the group's objective. I mean, everyone was fighting because they wanted to shine, because they want to be the singers, they want to be at the front of the stage. That's not our objective. On the stage it's God that has to shine the most. We are simply his instruments, his tools, to evangelise. At the end of the day that's what we do, evangelise with music.

Roxana, who I introduced on page 171, appears to see herself as a willing vessel, called upon, or inspired to act, by God. She alleges her motivation is “God inviting me to get involved” and alludes to a sense of religious obligation, “I can’t say no to him”.

Roxana: It’s like this, when someone invites me to participate in something, some cause, well I see it more as God inviting me to get involved. I can’t say no to him. It’s like God is thinking of me to participate here. I’m going to go for it, be positive and I’m going to do it. That’s what motivates me, knowing that he’s thinking in me to do it. Knowing that others are thinking in me, that I can help. So, I’ve got to do it.

José Carlos, Ricardo and Roxana are the most forceful in articulating ideas not only of religious obedience and commitment but in framing themselves as acting in God’s name. They allude to ideas of sacrificing personal autonomy and willingly doing God’s work (i.e., God ‘works’ through José Carlos; ‘invites’ Roxana to participate in activities; and uses Ricardo as “his tools”).

The accounts of a further five participants are less definitive, less deferential or submissive to God’s will. These five participants, namely Gerardo, Juan Pablo, Diego, Lety and Christian, articulate their obedience and reverence in terms of religious influence and guidance. While not acting in God’s name, they advance the idea that their faith is relevant to who they are. Gerardo states, “it’s about how faith guides the way I live my life” and alludes to understanding himself as a role model.

Gerardo: But I also feel it’s about how my faith guides the way I live my life. I don’t know. Look after my personal relationships, be concerned for others. I don’t know. I think others can see this and they say ‘You know what, he’s concerned for me so I can consider him a good person.’ People follow you for your actions. I don’t know, but I feel that faith does help.

Juan Pablo recognises the religious influence of his school pastor who he claims, “has this interest to bring people closer to God”. In the following extract he alludes to

ideas of empathy, motivation and admiration and states, “this person influenced me personally for the way that he explains to you what he does, no?”.

Juan Pablo: And, well he’s someone that’s always looking to be involved with us. And well I admire him a lot for the way he treats others and the way he motivates you to be someone. He’s a member of the Opus Dei. I don’t know if you know the Opus Dei? So, I guess he has this interest to bring people closer to God and to make God more approachable to people. What most catches my attention, and the reason I admire him the most, is the way he is, the way he treats you. So, this person influenced me personally, for the way that he explains to you what he does.

Other participants likewise appear to present themselves as guided and influenced by their faith. Like Juan Pablo, Diego alleges his pastor, “motivates you to do good, to improve”, and claims “he’s got a certain way” to teach and influence others. Lety claims, “Faith is my base and it’s fundamental to me. I see everything I do influenced by faith”, and “it’s about compassion for others, and compassion, not pity. It’s about acting for the suffering of others.” Christian draws on his faith to guide his upbringing of his younger half-brother. Referring to himself, he states, “The Bible is a guide to life” and “If Jesus was obedient to his parents, you, as the only child, my brother hadn’t been born yet, should behave yourself the right way”. In summary, the stories of eight participants can be read to suggest that they understand their faith in terms of obedience and reverence towards religious doctrine.

The accounts of a second group of five participants, namely Michelle, Estela, María José, Diana and Tiffany, can be read to suggest they understand their faith in terms of empowerment and optimism. In contrast to the eight participants of the previous section, these five advance the idea that faith is a source of liberation, inspiration and action: ideas of influence and followership are implicit in their stories but they have

chosen to emphasise how their faith motivates or transforms them to act. Their portrayal of faith *vis-à-vis* ideas of selfhood appears to privilege empowerment before obedience.

Michelle is eighteen years old and lives with her parents, a younger sister of fourteen years old and another of twenty. She claims her father has been absent because of work during most of her childhood. She is a member of the Scouts, enjoys painting and for ten years participated in competitive gymnastics. Her accounts of school (“it sucks life out of me”) and gymnastics (“it was so regimented, you couldn’t move”) can be read to suggest a controlled and regulated childhood experience. I reflect if her faith, articulated in terms of empowerment and leadership, acts as an antidote. Michelle alludes to this idea by stating “I’m catholic, and that’s my guide in life” and “Faith is like having a purpose or mission in life”. In the following quotation, by employing the language “about living life as you wish” and “having a positive outlook”, she alludes to the empowering nature, and indeed optimism, that her faith provides her.

Michelle: I mean, I’m, well I consider myself a spiritual person. I’m catholic, and that’s the guide in my life. And I believe, I mean, it’s more than just a symbolic thing, more about living life as you wish, the best you can. And doing what you want, doing things and working towards things that make you happy. It’s about searching for happiness, having a positive outlook. I believe it’s about looking forward, like having a purpose or mission in life.

Like Michelle, Estela appears to understand her faith in terms of empowerment and optimism. She claims her faith, “helped me feel good about myself, to feel complete, to feel happy” and aspires to “always achieve what I set out to do”. In the following quotation, she advances the idea of a link between her faith and family intimacy, personal development and “trying harder to give the best of me to others”.

Estela: Faith is very important for me because it has helped me feel good about myself, to feel complete, to feel happy. I’m more complete

with it. I don't feel I'm missing anything. It motivates me to spend time with my family and to be a good example to others, to try and always think about others and put them before myself. Also, it's helped me become more responsible, more tenacious and to always achieve what I set out to do. For example, its satisfying spending time with church leaders because they encourage me to keep growing as a person, to keep trying harder to give the best of me to others. To offer my help, maybe my knowledge sometimes, or its just your time, giving time to help someone.

María José, a 19-year-old female from Mascota, Jalisco, lives with her parents, one older sister and two younger brothers. A bit of an all-rounder, she dedicates her free time to basketball, ballet, the marching band and school council. She claims “my family, they're, we're very, very religious, very catholic”, but understands her faith, “not so much about religion” and more as a personal relationship with God. I wonder if this philosophy is a convenient cover, or excuse, for her less than impressive church attendance.

María Jose: We just can't do it, I mean we can't. There's always too much going on, too much on, even Saturday and Sunday. I mean, I don't think we've been to church together for, what, a couple of years I guess. I'm just running around too much...all that stuff I told you I do.

Whatever the case may be, she frames her faith in optimistic terms, of spiritual development and balance. She claims, “faith is about your soul, about living better, living for now and the future” and “about thinking of your soul, the idea that all of us are body, mind, heart and soul - about keeping these things in balance”. Two participants, Diana and Tiffany, who I presented earlier, discuss their faith in the context of their educational experience. The two advance the idea of acting according to their school's Jesuit philosophy, inspired to contribute positively in their community. Diana, cites her school's motto - *Men and Women with and for others* - as inspiration and claims, “I truly feel that I want to live that philosophy all my life, until my last breath”. She continues, “I feel this

Jesuit education is totally part of me” and claims, “it’s taught me I’ve got the responsibility to act”. She goes on to allege that she organises religious missions to rural parts of the state and claims, “Faith’s about church, about God, and yes, about you, and me. But it’s humanitarian too, about others”. Like Diana, Tiffany acknowledges her school’s religious influence and claims the Jesuit philosophy, “is something that I have very close to me”. She is more combative in her discourse, echoing ideas of leadership, and claims, “you can’t be a source of change if you stand aside” and “you have to be heard, say what you think”.

Tiffany: It could also be part of the Jesuit philosophy. There’s a phrase that I like a lot by Father Arrupe ‘I don’t want to risk that when I die the world will continue as if I hadn’t lived.’ So, I think it’s part of the Jesuit philosophy to say ‘You know what? You have to be a source of change and you can’t be a source of change if you stand aside.’ What they teach us is that you’re a change agent and so you have a responsibility to others. You can’t stand aside and simply play along, you have to be heard, say what you think and work with others.

In this section, I have presented the stories of thirteen of the twenty-four parents that can be read to suggest that ideas of faith play an important role in selfhood. I have discussed these stories by means of two sub-themes that emerge from the data i) obedience and reverence and ii) empowerment and optimism. The contemporary popular portrayal of generational identities, universalising and homogenising in nature, has little space for the richness and complexity encapsulated in localised expressions of faith and religious beliefs. Reflecting on this omission and the contemporary secularisation of various fields of academic study, Turner (2001) states, “differentiation and institutional specialization of religion as a distinct field of activity have been characteristic of modern societies” (Turner, 2001, p.140). Moreover, and as I identified in my critique of generational theory

in Chapter Three, generational portrayals are principally drawn from popular and academic studies of Western Anglo-Saxon populations (Korte, 2007). However, religious identity forms part of the complex mosaic of identity influences relevant in the participants' emerging identities. Given their historical location (i.e., catholic Mexico), I anticipated the privilege afford faith in their ideas of selfhood. Interestingly, the conservative nature of the participants' accounts of their faith does little to support claims for a transformative and disruptive Millennial Generation - religious identity appears not to be employed to challenge the *status quo*. Their accounts of faith however, and as I discuss in Chapter Eight, can be understood to inform the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation.

Stories of altruism

Altruism is the third identity influence through which I understand the participants' experiences and emerging identity. I remind the reader that my objective in this chapter is to address the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* So far, I have done so by exploring the participants' accounts of family and faith. At first sight, stories of family can be read to support the idea of the 'sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents' millennial role. Accounts of faith, traditional and conservative in nature, appear to contest the idea of a transformative and disruptive Millennial Generation.

What then of the participants' experiences of altruism? I include the theme of altruism as a significant identity category because it appears to be relevant in the identity

construction of seventeen of the twenty-four participants. While ideas of altruism are clearly related to religiosity, the theme was significant enough in the data to be explored in its own right. ‘Altruism’, and I use the term liberally to represent ideas of selflessness and volunteerism, I conceptualise as *prosocial behaviour* (Penner, 2002). Further, I will use the term ‘social service’ to encompass a diverse range of activities, fundraising, projects and volunteering that the participants refer to in their narratives.

Ideas of altruism, or what I have called *legacy*, are common to the popular discourses of twentieth century generations. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, The Silent Generation is portrayed in terms of heroism and sacrifice while The Baby Boomers depicted as transforming civil liberties and race relations. The legacy of Generation X is articulated in ideas of a ‘wasted youth’, redemption and later entrepreneurialism. In the case of The Millennial Generation, ideas of altruism are encapsulated in the ‘young altruist’ millennial role. Millennials are portrayed as understanding their responsibility towards society and confident in their ability to achieve change (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Sax, 2003; Elmore, 2010; Pettigrew, 2015). However, and returning to Foucauldian ideas of identity regulation that I discussed in Chapter Two, this role seems particularly prone to reflect the preferences of the writers of the popular discourse (i.e., non-millennials). Motivating a younger generation to understand selfhood in terms of their social responsibility towards others appears a particularly convenient *technology of power* (Foucault, 1988) for an ageing generation. Indeed, the ideal of altruism is likely a powerful source of selfhood irrespective of whether or not the participants actually contribute in a significant way to their communities. Like ideas of faith, altruism provides opportunities for morally worthy and socially acceptable presentations of selfhood.

Indeed, it would take a lot of courage for the participants to present themselves to a high school principal as a selfish Grinch!

What then of the participants' account of themselves helping others, donating their time or money or participating in community projects? Do their accounts suggest that like their predecessors, they are 'doing their bit' for society? Does there appear to be anything distinctively millennial in how they do so? I discuss stories of altruism by means of three sub-themes that emerge from my analysis of the data: i) the institutionalised and instrumentalist nature of altruism ii) teamwork and collaboration and iii) care, generosity and personal satisfaction. My objective is to explore whether, and if so how, these stories reflect ideas of millennial distinctiveness articulated in the popular discourse of the generation.

The accounts of a first group of nine participants can be read as emphasising the institutionalised and instrumentalist nature of their altruism. Their stories advance the idea that their social service is both a necessary administrative requirement for high school graduation and something that enhances future academic or career prospects. Absent from these stories are ideas of affiliation, generosity, unselfishness or pure altruism. Instead, the participants appear to understand themselves as 'part of the system', their altruism depersonalised and institutionalised within their school curriculum.

Six participants, namely Alexis, María José, Andrea, José Carlos, Aldo and Juan Pablo, draw attention to the obligatory nature and administrative process associated with their social service. Alexis is eighteen years old and lives with his parents and two sisters. He recently graduated from a public high school in the town of Tequila. He works part-time in a car repair shop and claims to be nervous about starting a technical degree in

electrical engineering. Alexis talks to me at length about his social service at *Casa Cuervo*, a producer of tequila in his hometown. He states, “I’m just getting on with it, just to get it done”. In the following quotation, Alexis appears to emphasise the bureaucratic nature of his participation and an instrumentalist motivation.

Interviewer: Ah, ok, you do community service. Tell me about it? How long have you been doing that?

Alexis: Well, community service is 480 hours, I mean I’m in a technical school but it’s still something you’ve got to do to graduate. You’ve got to do community service. I was involved for five months, Saturday and Sunday, like nearly all day. It’s only just now that I’m getting to the end of it. I’ve got to put my papers in and pretty soon I’ll get it finished completely.

Like Alexis, María José emphasises the administrative nature of the process stating, “I’ve spent more time on the papers [of her project] than going there” and “the hard bit is getting it through [the approval process], that’s what takes time”. Later, when we are closing the interview, I ask her what advice she would offer younger students. I am surprised, and disappointed perhaps, that she returns to her social service - not the impact it had on her, nor her in the community - but its bureaucratic nature.

Interviewer: What advice or tips would you give to the first semester students?

María José: Well, I’ve already told them, community service. It’s about not leaving things to the end, start planning ahead. Like for example, you’ve got to get all your paperwork in order, when you started, what you did, getting your papers and stuff together.

Andrea echoes this sentiment when discussing a social project that she participated in over several Saturdays, “a project that was obligatory as part of your grade”. She goes on to say, “we all did it. I mean, you’d get to choose between a couple [of options]. Or you could do it yourself. I just saw it as something else I had to do”. Referring to the institutionalised nature of her participation, she states, “I remember the day that the

teacher signed it [the authorisation], we all got together, and I said ‘let’s come up with some ideas’ so I grabbed my notebook and started writing”. A further three participants make short comments with respect to their school-managed social service. Of his participation José Carlos reflects, “sometimes I think you just did it because you had to do”, while Aldo acknowledges that he took advantage of playing in the school band to “get out of the community service they made us do in high school.” Indeed, while Juan Pablo claims his altruism is motivated by his faith, he acknowledges, “we’d invite others from high school because that year the school made a rule that you had to do community service, like, it was just something you had to do”.

Three participants, namely Claudia, Christian and Alexis clearly articulate the instrumentalist nature of their participation. They advance the idea that their social service projects serve as work experience and add value to their curriculum. Claudia aspires to become a doctor and describes how she selected to work in a hospital operating theatre as a volunteer Spanish-English translator for a medical charity. She states, “we’d be the translators, because lots of them [the doctors] are from the U.S. or the U.K., so they need people in surgery”. Later she claims, “It’s experience, I mean you’re not going to get that, well, just by studying, just by reading”. I interpret the following quotation as Claudia recognising the professional benefit of the experience. She claims,

Claudia: I get to see what’s going on, right there, next to them, the doctors I mean. It’s a bit like being in class, but, I mean it’s real. It’s incredible to be there, and what’s more the operation only takes minutes.

A student of information technology, Christian describes doing his social service in local internet cafes. He states, “we do our social service by maintaining the computers, we can give maintenance to the wireless internet, maintenance to the local internet” and

“it’s ok, a bit boring, but I guess I’m getting practice”. Alexis, a student of electrical engineering, chose a social service project in which he describes himself as “the mechanic’s assistant, but I’m learning a lot”. He reflects, “I didn’t know much [before the project], and well I can name the car parts, identify defects, repair whatever defect”. He claims, “I’m lucky, I mean, we all [classmates] had to do something, I mean, I’ve got one [project] that’s useful for me”. In summary, the accounts of nine participants can be read to suggest that they understand their altruism in institutionalised and instrumentalist terms. In Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Institutionalised altruism: a new form of millennial identity regulation*, I will discuss how this experience of altruism likely illustrates a new role schools are assuming and potentially differentiates the millennials from their predecessors.

The accounts of a second group of four participants, namely Christian, Denis, Saul and Juan Pablo, can be read as suggesting that social service is an opportunity for teamwork and collaboration. They articulate their stories in the third person and employ managerial language. While the stories in the previous section emphasised bureaucracy and instrumentalism, in this section ideas of collective responsibility, mutual dependence and companionship prevail.

Christian refers to a school recycling project and reiterates its collective nature by the recurrent use of the third person.

Christian: Together we collected plastic bottles and cups, cutting them up and making figures like flowers and toys, for children I mean. It helps people become more conscious of their use. Like for two or three days and then there’re thrown away. We also got people together to help us collect bottles, plastic and aluminium cans, and then we’d sell them on. Our motto, like a team motto, was ‘Why throw your money away?’ We got to know lots of the companies that do that stuff, collecting PET, washing it and then selling it on.

The stories of Denis and Saul share similar themes and emphasise collective action. In the following extract, Denis alludes to how a shared interest motivated his group of friends to act.

Denis: We've done a lot of stuff. For example, last year, well our group of friends, I mean, we're interested in ecology. We'd do some reforestation, we'd plant trees, in a ranch. Before that I was in a municipal group, with young people. It was stuff like recycling, tidying up the streets. We'd do fundraising activities to keep these projects going.

Saul refers to a project in a special needs school and alludes to the teamwork required for its successful implementation.

Saul: We thought about going to help at a special needs school, and make them, make it a day for them. And it was this time when we really got together and we organised a very, very special event. It was very stressful, but it turned out really, really great. Everybody pitched in, everybody had a good time. It was really special.

Finally, Juan Pablo frames his participation in a social service program in a rural part of the state in terms of collective responsibility and “everyone doing their bit, doing their work”. Referring to his friend Alex he states, “They [the school] had confidence in us, I mean that we'd work well together, that we'd prepare things together”. Later he reflects, “we really formed a strong friendship. Like the ups and downs I mean. I don't know how the project would have turned out without Alex. We made a good team, I guess it made things easier”. In summary, the accounts of four participants can be read to suggest that they understand their altruism in terms of teamwork and collaboration.

The accounts of a third group of four participants, namely Diana, Estela and Claudia Roxana, can be read as emphasising ideas of care, generosity, and personal gratification. I interpret their stories as suggesting the four understand their social service as a *sum-sum game*, of mutual benefit to the giver and the recipient. However, as I have

alluded to before (see page 174-175), I recognise the participants' temptation to present themselves to me in glowing terms. Framing oneself as a socially responsible as 'do-gooder' appears an easy way to do so.

Diana claims to have participated for three years during high school in *Guadalajara Unidos*, a charity for disabled and Down syndrome children. She employs non-managerial language, emphasises the idea of enjoying herself while making others happy and claims, "I mean, they really enjoyed themselves and it was incredible for me".

Interviewer: How do you spend your weekends and free time?

Diana: During all of high school I've been a volunteer in a help centre for disabled people. It's called Guadalajara Unidos. What caught my attention about the place is that it's not only about giving charity, economic help, giving food parcels or visiting the place. It goes further than that. We take them out to socialise, to the zoo, places they can dance, to the movies. We'll go out with kids with disabilities. Like with the younger ones, well you think to yourself that there are lots of ways you can help. But sometimes the most basic things, well for a young person, well it's being with friends, spending time with friends, like having a normal life. That's what we do.

Estela echoes the sentiment of personal enjoyment and satisfaction when referring to her volunteer role as a teacher in a low-income community close to her home. She accentuates ideas of generosity and care and claims, "It's about helping each other, showing that we care for each other, about helping others".

Estela: First, it's about looking after the kids, teaching them good values, talking to them about what it is to be a good person. I like it because I feel the kids see me as an example. They respect me, they show me a lot of emotion. I feel really good around them. The other group I belong to, well it's young people, roughly of my age. I really enjoy being around them because we talk about things, who we want to be, our goals, where we want to go. It's about helping each other, showing that we care for each other, about helping others.

Claudia advances ideas of care, generosity and personal satisfaction when referring to her participation in INAFAL, a charity that provides for orphaned children. She talks reflectively about the social obligations of the better off and claims, “It’s about doing something, and everyone can do something to help, help those in need around them”. Later she provides a concrete example.

Claudia: For example, they called us from INFAL on Christmas Eve to give out food parcels and I went. There’s a lot of gratification seeing people so happy and so thankful for being given food. It’s something so basic, but they don’t see it that way. I mean it’s a privilege for them to have chicken for dinner that day. ‘You’re giving me chicken? wow! Thanks a lot’. I like to disconnect myself from, well I’m thankful to God that I live in a good situation, I mean economically well off. I like to disconnect myself from that and go to places where people don’t have that much. Despite that, with the little they have, there’re happy. And when you give them something they thank you like, well, like it was the whole world. And well I love that.

Finally, Roxanna, reflecting on her school’s social service program, claims “I guess we all do what we can to help others, sometimes it’s a lot, other times something simpler. It’s about understanding everyone’s important”. Alluding to her motivation she states, “There’s a satisfaction about it, I mean, it’s nice to feel that you’re doing something there [in the community]. It’s my motivation, it means a lot to me”.

In this section, I have presented the stories of seventeen of the twenty-four participants that can be read to suggest that ideas of altruism play an important role in selfhood. I have discussed these stories by means of three sub-themes that emerge from the data i) the institutionalised and instrumentalist nature of altruism ii) teamwork and collaboration and iii) care, generosity and personal satisfaction. Ideas of altruism are common to generational portrayals, each generation suggested as ‘doing their bit’ for others. Given the relationship between altruism and religiosity, I anticipated the privilege

afforded ideas of altruism in the participants' ideas of selfhood. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss how accounts of altruism can be read to suggest ideas of both millennial distinctiveness and generational continuity. In particular, I will reflect if the institutionalised and instrumentalist nature of altruism illustrates a new role schools are assuming in the education of their students.

Stories of future plans and aspirations

Ideas of future plans and aspirations are the final identity influence through which I understand the participants' experiences and emerging identity. I understand the theme as a significant identity category because it appears to be relevant in the identity construction of fourteen of the twenty-four participants. I use the phrase, 'future plans and aspirations' to allude to ideas of *future orientation*, how individuals think about, understand, plan and make decisions relevant to the future (Nurmi, 1991, 1989). Seginer and Schlesinger (1998) describe young adult future orientation as "the images individuals develop concerning their selves in the future and express in terms of hopes and fears" (Seginer & Schlesinger, 1998, p. 152). Future orientation is influenced by family, educational, economic, historical, social and cultural-specific factors (Seginer, 2003; House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002) and associated with personal development and goal achievement. Kerpelman, Eryigit and Stephens (2008) state "future orientation allows an adolescent to dream and hope for better possibilities in the future, setting the stage for actions that increase goal attainment" (Kerpelman, Eryigit & Stephens, 2008, p.998).

The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation suggests a transformative and disruptive generation (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Elmore, 2009, Alsop, 2008). Ideas of the future are articulated most clearly in two related millennial roles. The ‘digital generation’ role and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* advance the idea that the millennials, present and future, will have a new type of relationship, or interaction, with others, education, the workplace and the organisation. The generation is both engulfed in, but ultimately leading, a new reality that privileges technological skills (i.e., ‘digital native’ Prensky (2001)), complex computing power (e.g., internet of things, big data) and a new relationship with value creation (e.g., the gig-economy). Often encapsulated in the concept of the ‘VUCA world’ (volatile, uncertainty, complex and ambiguity), the millennials’ future, albeit one of opportunity, is characterised by change, complexity and technology. Indeed, this neat division of historical time seems to extend an invitation to the ‘digital natives’ (i.e., millennials and Gen Zers) but closes the door to their predecessors.

What then of the participants’ stories of their future? Do they reflect this new reality when they talk about their future plans and aspirations? Does there appear to be anything distinctively millennial about how they present their ‘post-high school’ selves? I discuss the accounts of fourteen participants through three themes that emerge from the data i) economic opportunities and cultural diversity ii) educational attainment and iii) business ownership and management. I recognise that the participants’ stories of the future, reflecting hopes, dreams, fears and expectations, are probably highly edited. They are unlikely to present themselves as future ‘drop-outs’ or failures. However, they might

also shy-away from overly successful portrayals as aspiring billionaires, high-tech gurus or national leaders, least I think of them as arrogant or pretentious.

The accounts of a first group of four participants, namely, Mabel, Aldo, Marcos and María Isabel, can be read as alluding to ideas of lifestyle and how the participants' see themselves *vis-à-vis* ideas of economic opportunities and cultural diversity. These accounts reflect the small towns the participants live in and the economic migration common in certain parts of Mexico. However, their accounts can also be read to suggest ideas of independence, risk-taking and entrepreneurialism. Mabel is nineteen years old and lives with her parents in Jocotepec, a town of less than 50,000 people on Lake Chapala, an international tourist destination for retirees. Her older brother of twenty-three lives in Guadalajara and her sister emigrated to Los Angeles. Perhaps motivated by their example, one year after finishing high school, Mabel advances the idea of searching for a more metropolitan lifestyle because of "more opportunities" and "Everyone's the same around here".

Interviewer: Your plan is to stay here in Jocotepec in the future?

Mabel: No, of course no. Well, I mean, I don't want to sound bad or anything. It's great here, my parents are here, my school, my friends. But there's not much to do. Now that I'm a bit older I want go somewhere I can meet new people, I mean a place with more opportunities. Everyone's the same around here and well, you see other places, even in Mexico I mean, like my brother. He's in Guadalajara now and when he comes home, well. Well, I guess you grow, like change when you're in a big place. He's different now. We all say that to him.

Aldo is nineteen years old and lives in the town of Sayula with his mother and step-father. His biological father died when he was three and because of economic difficulties the family moved from Guadalajara to live with his step-father. "We had to

move into an apartment, we couldn't stay in the house any longer", he says. He works part-time in a restaurant to make some money but plans to "get back to the city, I mean, it's a world of difference". Later, echoing Mabel, he alludes to the idea of the bright lights of the big city that "offers more, more of everything" and where he can "be the person you want to be".

Aldo: It was hard at the start coming here [to Sayula]. You feel comfortable, that's true. It's like a community here. But it's like, well here or Guadalajara? I'm good at getting things done and my plan is to move away. I mean, it's not like I don't love my family or anything. But, all the stuff you see in the news, with my friends, the real life is a big city. Like money too. It's where the big companies are, the opportunities are. I guess that's what I'm saying. Guadalajara offers more, more of everything. It's just a different place, to be the person you want to be.

Marcos is a twenty-four year-old-male and the oldest participant in this research. He lives with his mother and younger sister and has no communication with his father. Unlike Mabel and Aldo, Marcos appears to advance ideas of lifestyles in terms of international opportunities. He refers to his participation in the Scout World Jamboree in the United States where he met "all sorts, I mean Scouts from places I had never heard of". He goes on to reflect about future aspirations.

Marcos: I love my country, I mean I've told you I'm in the marching band, we do the Flag Ceremony and everything. But it was incredible [the jamboree]. A scout is a scout, like I said, we share stuff. But for me, to meet people from Germany, Japan, Spain, Africa, even from some Asian countries. What they talked about too. I felt a bit left out. I mean, there were things I didn't have a chance to speak about. I mean, well I understood them, but I didn't have much to say. I didn't feel bad, no. But you realise there's a lot to see. It's easy to say that I'm going to travel the world, that's not really possible. But live in other places, I mean, see how people are, different from me, but in good ways. Just like, be in a completely new place. I'd really love that, I've got to do it one day.

Finally, María Isabel, who I presented earlier (see page 169), values the intimacy of her family relationships in the town of Barranca de Santa Clara but aspires to follow her sister and emigrate to the U.S., “a place where you can get on, make something of your life”.

María Isabel: I told you about her [older sister]. She’s in the U.S. now, she’s been in California and Texas. She’s really responsible about it. I know she wants me to go but also, well, she knows our parents would be alone. For young people it’s a place where you get on, make something of your life. There are more opportunities for me there. I mean, more than here for sure! I don’t know, maybe Guadalajara or Mexico City are like that. The U.S. offers you more, I mean I’m not greedy and I don’t want to be a millionaire. She’s told me about it. Like the places you go at the weekends, the things you can do.

In summary, the accounts of four participants can be read to suggest they understand their future plans and aspirations in terms of economic opportunities and cultural diversity - a move to the big city.

The accounts of a second group of six participants, namely Denis, Estela, Alexis, Christian, Saul and Diego, advance the idea that educational attainment is both the default next step after successfully completing high school and a mark of respectability and success. Of course, I recognise that sitting across from high school principal they are likely to have provided me with the answers they thought I want to hear *vis-á-vis* education. However, and as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Future plans and aspirations: a reflection of identity security*, while the millennial is portrayed to understand and take advantage of new innovations in education, the participants’ stories allude to a traditional understanding of the phenomenon. Indeed, the generic and universal nature of the ideas articulated in the stories of these six participants suggest

conservatism and conformity (e.g., striving for good grades, university entrance, self-improvement).

Denis is eighteen years old, has recently graduated from a public high school in the town of Mascota and aspires to become a civil engineer. The youngest of five siblings, he lives with his parents and two brothers. His father works in agriculture and he describes his mother as a housewife. Denis, reflecting on coming to the end of high school, alludes to the importance of further study while simultaneously differentiating himself from others. He refers to a sense of “knowing that’s the right way forward, to keep studying”.

Interviewer: How do you feel about coming to the end [of high school]?

Denis: There’re some [friends] that aren't going to keep studying. They're seeing it as the end, but I want to study civil engineering at university. I still want to keep studying.

Later he continues,

Denis: Like I said before, I mean, I’m grateful for school, my teachers. It’s been tough, but well, it’s about preparing yourself. I want to go to university, and a good one, then maybe, well some specialist courses, even try and go to the U.S. It’s not about the grades, I mean, you’ve got to pass. But, it’s knowing that’s the right way forward, to keep studying. I know that Mascota hasn’t got the highest, well like academic level, but I’m prepared, I think I’ll do well. I have to, I’ve got to be prepared. I guess I’m worried about it. It's not knowing if I’m capable. If I’ve got the ability to study a degree, to finish my studies.

Estela, who I presented earlier, articulates a career plan in terms of the accumulation of academic degrees. She claims, “I’m pretty decided on chemical engineering and I don’t think I’m going to change my mind”. Indeed, she alludes to a collective discourse that privileges academic achievement by employing the phrase “Everyone tells me that it’s about being ready”.

Estela: Once I finish community college, well I want to study English for a year and then go to the U.S. for a while. To practice my English, I mean. Then I'll come back and look for a financial scholarship to study at university. It's all about preparing myself, well, like the best I can. Everyone tells me that it's about being ready, like it's tough to get a good job and do well. So that's it, and anyway I like to study. I really do.

Alexis advances this idea by likewise referring to accumulating different degrees.

He appears to understand education as a platform, a stepping-stone, "what you need to get there, to get where I want to go".

Alexis: Well, there's a lot I want to do. Travel, work, my own business. But look, I mean you have to be prepared first. Nothing is going to be easy. And look, right now my parents help me. They want me to be in school. I understand that, I mean, it's like what you've got to do. My plan is to keep studying least until I finish a master's degree, at least a master's, and maybe even a doctorate. Once that's done, well, you're going to be ready, no? I mean, it's not 100% but it's what you need to get there, to get where I want to go.

Christian, Saul and Diego also understand their future in terms of educational attainment. The former states "Now I've got some experience, it's about getting more qualifications, like from universities or even some companies" and "my field [computer technology] is changing so fast. You've got to keep studying. I mean, I've got a good basic knowledge, from the college I mean, but I can't stop, not in computing". Saul advances a similar idea by employing the phrases, "I want to study architecture in Vallarta in the future, finish my studies, do a master's degree or doctorate" and "I know it's tough to find good work if you're not prepared, don't have the knowledge to do a good job". Likewise, Diego understands that his chosen field, medicine, requires many years of study.

Diego: In my case I'm going to study medicine. I know it's a long time, it's like eight years. Everyone tells me that. But I'll study hard. I mean I'll get a general degree, then do some hospital work. I mean,

then I can specialise in something. It's like you become a new doctor again. It's almost like starting again, like, well making yourself the most qualified doctor in your area.

In summary, the accounts of six participants can be read to suggest that they understand their future plans and aspirations in terms of educational attainment.

The accounts of a third group of four participants, namely Ricardo, Andrea, Mich and José Carlos, can be read in terms of their ideas of business ownership and management. In very generic terms they draw upon ideas of pragmatism, entrepreneurialism, independence and control. Indeed, I reflect if these accounts potentially mirror the pragmatic entrepreneurism of their Generation X (born 1964 to 1980) parents. As I will discuss in Chapter Eight, the participants appear to understand their futures in leader roles within business - and again, it is likely they think that is what I want to hear. However, leadership is not articulated in ideas of disruption, change and creativity, values often associated with the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*, but instead in traditional managerial language.

Ricardo, who I presented on page 176, refers to his “businessman father” or “business guy” father on four occasions during the interview. In what I interpret as an example of narrative editing, and given the privilege he afforded his faith in our interviews, he states, “I’m going into business too, but it’s not all about money, it’s about opportunities for my workers”. Ricardo’s account emphasises the operational nature of business, “I could run a big business, like manage it, all the money, customers, the factory”.

Interviewer: Do you have plans for the future, maybe even beyond university?

Ricardo: I want to build something, something new. I’ve said my dad is in business, and my mum’s a conference speaker. So, what am I

going to do? Well, I'm not sure yet, I mean, I'll have my own company in the future, I'll own my own business or something like that. I'm going to have a good idea about something. I'd like to think I could run a big business, like manage it, all the money, customers, the factory, with people working for me. And have good results, be successful in business.

Andrea, who I presented on page 167, is more specific in her business goals. At first she appears to doubt her ability to get into university, stating, "I'm still hoping I'll get in" and "I can't fail, once I get in, well, I can't fail". Later however, and employing more managerial language (e.g., "a team of good people" and "direct and supervise"), she gives a fairly detailed account of what a future business of hers might look like. By employing the phrases, "It's like people have woken up to looking after their health" and "People will pay for that", her account has a more of a marketing feel to it.

Andrea: It'll be a health clinic, that's what I'm going to do. I mean, sure, you are making money out of people's health, but it's giving solutions. I've got some good ideas about obesity and diet problems. People will pay for that, more and more people. It's like people have woken up to looking after their health. But not here, not in Tequila. People just come for the tequila tours. No, I'm going to Guadalajara. And in the U.S., it's more. My dad says people pay lots of money for the best doctors and dieticians. That's what I'll need, like a team of good people. I can own it, and direct and supervise things, I mean I'll be an expert too. I'm going to study psychology. But the business needs other people.

Mich is twenty years old and lives with her parents and brother of eighteen. She was born in Costa Rica to a Mexican father and Costa Rican mother and moved to Guadalajara when she was seven years old. She graduated from a private high school and is currently studying an undergraduate career in business and another in music, her passion. It appears Mich has spent some time thinking about how she can combine her musical talents with a business career. She acknowledges the fear of her parents towards a potential career in music - "the syndrome of the parents that have a kid that wants to

study music” - and accepts that “I know people say you can’t make money being a musician, but I think I can”. The following quotation can be read to understand Mich in terms of the pragmatic entrepreneur building her business around “the reputation of the teacher”.

Mich: Being a professional musician is not about being famous. As I see it, being a professional means you’re able to play or teach, and be paid for it and live off it. And it’s not only about the money, I mean, it’s not only money. But I know I’ll have to put my own school, I mean get a good reputation and put my own one. And look, that’s where the business degree helps. I can’t just get other people to look after the school, like paying people, like the accounts. Then there’s stuff like buying things, like guitars, music, like simple things like chairs and music stands. But I’ll do all of that, at the start anyway. I’m going to be successful, and well, the place will grow, I’ll get people in to help. I’ve seen how it works, here in Guadalajara, it’s all about the reputation of the teacher.

Finally, José Carlos, who I presented on page 184, reflects on his future career in the clergy. He advances the idea of have considered carefully his career decision and states, “I know they’ll be things I’ll miss out on, and yeah, everyone jokes with me about the obvious one. But that’s ok, I’ve really thought things through”. He articulates his career plan in ways similar to Andrea and Mich, alluding to the importance of “priests who have a good name, like reputation or credibility”.

José Carlos: So, in a couple of months I will start my training process. It’s ten years so I’m anxious to start no? It’s been the most important decision of my life. But now I see it like a career, like I was going to study psychology. I told you I like that too. I’ve got to study too, pass exams, show people I’m good at it.

Interviewer: You’ve said you see it as a career, what do you think that holds for you?

José Carlos: Well, yes, but I mean, I guess you don’t look for getting promoted to earn more money. But I know I will start in a small parish, I hope here in Jalisco. They say that’s common so you have your family close to you. It’s not a business, not a traditional career.

But at the same time, well, just try to impact the congregations that I'm invited to. You've got to prove to them you're helping. But sure, I'd like to impact on more and more people, move to bigger congregations. But, it's about doing a good job, finding your place in the community. I don't know, I know priests who have a good name, like reputation or credibility. I mean, people come to them to reflect and discuss things. There're known to give good advice, good attention.

In this section, I have presented the stories of fourteen of the twenty-four participants that can be read to suggest that ideas of future plans and aspirations play an important role in selfhood. I have discussed these stories by means of three sub-themes that emerge from the data i) lifestyle expectations and ii) ideas of educational attainment and iii) ideas of business ownership. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss how these accounts can be read to contest ideas of the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* and the very idea of a transformational and disruptive millennial identity. Moreover, I will discuss what they might reveal of the participants' understanding of leadership.

Understanding millennial distinctiveness through four identity influences

In Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*, I discussed the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities and conceptualised millennial identity through seven millennial roles. Each of these roles differentiates the generation from its predecessors and advances the ideas of generational change and intergenerational difference. The objective of this research is to explore if indeed millennial identity, and ideas of millennial distinctiveness, are relevant to the selfhood of Mexican young adults.

In this chapter, I explored ideas of millennial distinctiveness through four particular identity influences and in doing so addressed the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* The four identity influences that appear to be particularly relevant to the participants' ideas of selfhood are i) family ii) faith iii) altruism and iv) future plans and aspirations. These themes, and indeed their sub-themes, emerged from my understanding of the data. I will discuss a series of findings that derive from my understanding of these themes in Chapter Eight. I present them here briefly as a way to conclude the chapter.

First, while at first sight accounts of family might be understood to support the idea of the 'sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents' millennial role, they are likely better understood in terms of Mexican cultural values. Moreover, accounts of family do appear to provide the participants alternative models of selfhood to those of leader discourses.

Secondly, accounts of faith can also be understood in cultural terms (i.e., the Catholicism of the participants). Such stories are traditional and conservative in nature, do not challenge the *status quo* and allude to generational continuity and not millennial distinctives. However, and as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Beyond leadership: identity work and alternatives for selfhood*, many ideas articulated in stories of faith appear to inform the portrayal of leadership associated with the generation.

Thirdly, accounts of altruism can be read to support either claims for millennial distinctiveness (e.g., the institutionalisation and instrumentalisation by which the participants conceptualised their altruism) or generational continuity (i.e., all generations

leave their legacy on society). The former likely reflects a new role schools play in the education of their students.

Finally, accounts of future plans and aspirations do not appear to support ideas of a transformational and disruptive Millennial Generation. The participants articulate their future in fairly traditional terms (e.g., economic mobility, educational attainment and business ownership). As such, their accounts can be read to contest ideas associated with the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*, that contemporary reality that supposedly characterises the millennials' experience of work and the organisation.

Having explored ideas of millennial identity by means of four identity influences, in the following chapter I turn to what I have referred to as an eighth facet of millennial distinctiveness: leadership. Given how discourses of generational and organisationally-based identities have come to colonise each other, ideas of leader identity are of particular interest to this research. The Millennial Generation is portrayed to understand and perform the phenomenon in a way that differentiates it from its predecessors. I have called this portrayal *millennial leader identity*. In the following chapter, I explore if this idea of leadership, or indeed the *contemporary popular portrayal*, appear to inform the participants' understanding of their emerging leader identities.

Chapter Seven: Stories of emerging leader identity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored if the participants' accounts of selfhood can be read to support claims of millennial distinctiveness and generational change, addressing the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* I did so by exploring how the participants drew upon, or employed, four identity influences that appeared relevant to their self-definition (e.g., family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations).

In this chapter, I turn to ideas of leadership. In Chapter Three, I discussed how different generations are conceptualised to understand and perform leadership in different ways. Likewise, in Chapter Four, I described the evolution of managerial and organisational portrayals of the phenomenon during the last century. For example, The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945) grew up in times of economic depression and global intercontinental tensions and is portrayed in terms of the values of conservatism, service and loyalty. Resonating with the *controller discourse* (Western, 2008), The Silent Generation is alleged to demonstrate a traditional leadership style and favour a well-defined hierarchy and formal communication (Howe & Strauss, 1992; Hammill, 2005). Contrastingly, The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964), enjoyed post-war optimism, increasing economic and material growth and global industrial progress. Depicted as fighting against the establishment for social change, and resonating with the *therapist discourse* (Western, 2008), The Baby Boomers allegedly display an anti-hierarchal, participatory, “collegial and consensual” leadership style (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014, p. 62) and exhibit compassion, fairness and a transformative vision. Finally, Generation X

(born 1965 to 1980) experienced a difficult adolescence and young adulthood and often had to fend for themselves. This “hardening pragmatism” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.4) is supposedly reflected in their hands-on, entrepreneurial and pragmatic leadership style (Howe & Strauss, 2007, 1992).

Ideas of leadership are particularly relevant to the popular discourse of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). In Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation: labels and characteristics*, and drawing upon the work of popular authors, I suggested that ideas of millennial distinctiveness are articulated through seven millennial roles. For example, the ‘digital generation’ role portrays millennials as technologically more sophisticated than their predecessors. An eighth facet of millennial distinctiveness is the portrayal of leadership associated with the generation. In Chapter Four, in the section titled *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*, I argued that millennial leadership is articulated in terms of i) the context or situation in which the generation exercises its leadership and ii) the way in which the generation understands and performs leadership. The Millennial Generation is portrayed to exercise leadership in a ‘VUCA world’ characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, and resulting new organisational, economic and technological realities (i.e., artificial intelligence, robotisation, internet-of-things, gig-economy). I understand this contemporary reality, or context, as the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. In this context, the millennial leader is characterised by empathy, communication, the development of others and the recognition of personal, organisational and societal goals (Parris & Peachey, 2013; van Dierendonck, 2011; Spears, 1995). This portrayal resonates with the *post-heroic* organisational

portrayal (Western, 2008) and draws partially upon Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership approach. What I have called *millennial leader identity* not only differentiates the generation from its predecessors but also from the default understanding of the phenomenon, the *contemporary popular portrayal*. This latter portrayal, very evident in the popular press and media, conceptualises leadership as "a central organizational process and the premier force in the scheme of organizational events and activities" (Meindl, Ehrich & Dukerich, 1985, p.79), and depicts the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms and on whom organisational and societal success depends.

What then of the experiences and emerging identities of my participants? In this research I have argued that leadership has come to colour ideas of personal success, student achievement, school culture and school performance. However, do my participants necessarily see themselves in leader terms? Are there other available, and equally attractive, options for selfhood? Moreover, and given the ubiquity of the millennial label, do the participants perform leadership in a way that resonates with the context and leadership style articulated in the discourse of their generation? Is this portrayal the only way the participants might understand themselves as leaders, if indeed they do? In other words, and drawing on Coupland's (2003) concept of *reflexive 'buy-in'*, do the participants conform to societal expectations by understanding leadership as an available and attractive option for selfhood?

This chapter explores these reflections and others. Specifically, it addresses the question *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?* In the previous chapter, I probed at the persuasiveness of ideas of millennial distinctiveness in general.

However, given the increasingly important roles those born between 1981 and 2000 now play in organisations, government and society as a whole, I believe it is particularly relevant to explore if they do indeed understand leadership in a distinctive way as suggested by the popular discourse.

To discuss the participants' experiences and emerging identity, and consistent with the narrative approach to identity that I bring to this research, I present direct quotations from their narratives. I will refer to these quotations as *leader talk*, passages in which the participant refers to, or I interpret them referring to, ideas of leadership. As I discussed in Chapter Five, (see page 154), recognise that I am not getting the complete picture of the participants' experiences and ideas of the phenomenon. In particular, given the age and personal situation of the participants (i.e., living at home, not in full-time employment) their *leader talk* often draws upon experiences of family or school and is articulated in non-managerial language (e.g., the leadership style of a parent; the leader role they assume in the school classroom). Despite these contextual factors, I do believe I sufficiently accessed their ideas of selfhood to make some relevant conclusions about their emerging leader identity.

I divide this chapter into two parts. I first discuss those accounts of leadership that can be read to support the idea that millennials have a distinctive understanding of the phenomenon. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to those stories that advance the idea that the participants understand leadership in a more transgenerational way.

Stories of leadership that appear to suggest millennial distinctiveness

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*, the popular discourse of contemporary generational identities emphasises ideas of change and difference: individuals share characteristics with members of their own generation that are different from those of others. Ideas of leadership are one facet by which The Millennial Generation is differentiated from its predecessors. The alleged distinctive millennial portrayal of the phenomenon, what I have called *millennial leader identity*, draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. In this section, I explore whether, and if so how, the participants' stories of leadership reflect these ideas.

The accounts of fifteen of the twenty-four participants can be read to suggest that the theme of leadership is important in their ideas of selfhood. They appear to draw upon, or incorporate, certain ideas associated with the phenomenon in their self-definition. Eight of these fifteen participants do indeed appear to understand or perform leadership in a distinctively millennial way, supporting claims that millennials are different from their predecessors. It is these stories that I discuss in this section and do so through two themes that emerged from my interpretation of the data. These themes are i) coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others and ii) communication and shared goals. These themes should be understood as illustrating the participants' emerging leader identities in the context of their life-stage. The organisations they employ to illustrate their leadership (e.g., family, school, church and Scout groups) reflect the fact they still live at home and have yet to enter full-time employment.

i. Stories of coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others

Millennial leaders are portrayed with the ability to coach and mentor others, interested in their success, wellbeing and “having a positive impact on others” beyond the workplace (Harlan, 2006, p. iii; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Elmore, 2010; Alsop, 2008). This ‘coaching’ component of *millennial leader identity*, draws on ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and appears to parallel the growth in the use of coaching and mentoring in contemporary organisations which dates back to the 1950s (Rekalde, Landeta, Albizu & Fernandez-Ferrin, 2017; Goleman, 1998). Whitmore (2009) defines coaching as “unlocking people’s potential to maximise their own performance” (Whitmore, 2009, p. 109), while Grant (2016) claims the contemporary leader needs to “coach people in a wide range of situations from short collaborative brainstorming conversations, through on-the-run corridor-coaching conversations through to formal sit-down coaching sessions” (Grant, 2016, p. 11). The portrayal of millennial leaders, more than their Generation X or Baby Boomer predecessors, suggests the generation is particularly apt to assume this leadership-coach role that organisations allegedly require.

The stories of four participants, namely Andrea, Marcos, José Carlos and Alexis, can be read in a way to suggest that they see themselves as leaders in ways consistent with ideas of coaching, mentoring or acting as a role model for others. Given their age and particular situation, their coaching of others does not take place within commercial organisations. However, their stories share the ideas of wanting to see others succeed; reflect intimacy and confidence; and frame their leadership as something authentic or natural. Of course, recognising the fact the participants likely aspire to present themselves

in a positive light, a pro-social and ‘other-centred’ leader portrayal is potentially an attractive option for selfhood.

Andrea, who I presented in Chapter Six, (see page 167), appears to understand herself as an outsider in her new school in Tequila. She claims to have higher academic standards and ambitions than her classmates and is frustrated by their mediocrity. I interpret her account of high school as likely reflecting her desire to return to the U.S., and a sense that she is wasting time in Mexico. Despite philosophical differences with her classmates, her *leader talk* can be read to suggest she understands herself as a guide and mentor, one offering ‘hard love’, to them.

Andrea: I want to see them successful, I want to see that they meet their goals, I want to see that they’ll fulfil their own dreams. I want to see them go far.

While Andrea does employ organisational language in her description of leadership, albeit in the context of school (e.g., “I’ve got goals”, “I need to be effective about planning what do to with them [her classmates]” and “They’ve got to learnt to set themselves a target, a goal, and take steps to get there”), she draws principally on a discourse of care and guidance. In the following quotation she downplays her own leadership (e.g., “It’s not like I’m a real leader, I mean, I’ve got no proper role”) and emphasises care (e.g., “I want to take care of them”).

Andrea: It’s not like I’m a real leader, I mean, I’ve got no proper role. But I want to take care of them, want to help them get better. To succeed at school, and I mean, when they’re older. I’ve got goals. Well they need someone there, well, I mean just to help them along. The teachers don’t do that. I can be close to them. Maybe I can help, well I mean, just a little bit.

Later, she refers to her ambitions to return to the U.S., an option that is perhaps not available to all her classmates. She states, “I’m going to try and make a life there one

day, and get out of here. I can go there, there's more there. I will one day". I detect a sense of pity in this quotation, a sense that she can escape from her predicament whereas others cannot.

Andrea's stories can also be read to suggest she is a willing and confident role model to others and advance the idea that leadership comes naturally to her. She claims, "I think I was born to make people feel better", "I've done it before, I mean it's something that's almost natural to me" and "I just seem to find myself in these moments, helping out, listening to others". Later, when I refer specifically to her leader role, she alludes to being an accepted and effective leader.

Interviewer: Did the group ask you to be the leader or did you just take the role? Or the teacher said 'Andrea can you organise us?'

Andrea: I think, they're comfortable with me, because I've shown I'm effective, I've shown that I can take care of them. For example, I think I mentioned it, when we entered school we needed books and I got them for them. I promised I would get them for them, that they would have their stuff on time. I feel good that I've shown I can get things done for them.

Before closing our interview, Andrea talks at some length about a fellow student who had failed several classes the previous year. She portrays herself offering personal advice on how to proceed, illustrates her 'hard love' by employing the phrase, "from the start it was his fault", but also advances the idea of empathy by claiming, "we understood each other".

Interviewer: You mentioned a student that you helped who had not performed well in the final exams. Can you tell me more about how you helped?

Andrea: Look, from the start it was his fault. He didn't do anything during the semester. Sometimes, didn't even come to class! I mean, he just doesn't care! So, he fails and then, well, looks for ways out. I know him quite well. I said, 'Look, Sam, it's not like that, you

can't, well, get through doing nothing'. I said he should take it as a learning experience, like well, it's done. And here it's 60 to pass. I mean, I said he should set a goal, like challenge himself. Like prove to himself he can do it. We talked three or four times about it, we understood each other. I got the feeling he understood, but who knows?

I presented Marcos in Chapter Six, (see page 194), I reflect if the absence of his father is relevant to how he presents himself to me as a leader. He states categorically, "I don't have a relationship with my father" and alleges "it's great, I mean, to see my classmates with their dads, like doing stuff, doing it together". His stories of leadership, in which he frames himself as an educator, mentor and role model, can be read to suggest Marcos understands himself assuming a role he lacked in his own childhood. The context in which he does so is not family, but Scouts. Like Andrea, he claims he wants others to succeed stating, "I'll push them, make them work at it, get them to improve it" and "I guess you could say I'm a big brother, a motivator...someone who wants to, well, like guide them the best I can". I understand the following quotation as Marcos understanding leadership as an intergenerational responsibility where, "it's my turn to give back, to help others" and "it's about helping others develop, I mean, a few years ago people helped me in that way". I interpret Marcos' use of the word 'forge' to suggest he understands himself as an educator and role model.

Marcos: I want to forge in them what they [older Scouts] forged in me. It's the values of courtesy, humility, responsibility and hard work. It's about being someone who they can see living that way. You've got show them how, I mean, it's not like I'm perfect, but I have them in mind. I mean, when they're watching me. It's like showing them and well, being an example for them.

Marcos' stories can be read to suggest he understands himself as a good listener and communicator. He states, "I've got to listen to them, get to know them, get to know

what they're interested in and how they feel", and "it's all about communication, simple, but it's true". In the following quotation he advances the idea of being a coach-like figure, "speaking positively" and "giving them the confidence, so they feel they can do it".

Marcos: I'm always searching for ways to motivate them. It's about speaking to them, I'm always like, 'How are you doing champion?', motivating them, never shouting. It's about speaking positively, talking to them professionally, but at their level, to keep them interested in the conversation. I mean, it's about confidence too. Giving them the confidence, so they feel they can do it. Showing them I'm with them, I mean, that I care too.

Like Andrea (e.g., "I think I was born to make people feel better"), I interpret Marcos presenting his leadership as innate and authentic. He describes leading others in terms of sustenance (e.g., "It's like recharging my battery"), motivation (e.g., "doing the thing that motivates me the most"), and natural and effort-less (e.g., "It's just what I do, I mean, it's not something I think about much" and "Really, I don't think about it much, I feel it's something that's, well, just part of me").

Interviewer: How do you understand your experience as a Scout leader?

Marcos: Being a scout, I mean, now I'm a leader and everything, well it's great. I see it like this. I was once their age, and there were people that gave me advice, they listened to me, they helped me. They were my friends. Now it's my turn to give back, to help others. I mean, the Scouts is also about education no? What's it called? No, I mean, for example at school the education is inside the classroom, so this [Scouts] is education outside, I mean, there's no walls, you're outside you could say. I mean, it's being part of the education of kids who are 16 years old. It's just what I do, I mean, it's not something I think about much. Really, I don't think about it much. I feel it's something that's, well, just part of me.

Later he continues,

Marcos: It's like recharging my battery, it's a real pick-up, everything we do in the week too. There's a lot of satisfaction in saying, 'I was with them, I helped them.' I'm doing the thing that motivates me the most.

José Carlos is the third participant that privileges ideas of coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others. José Carlos, who I presented earlier in Chapter Six (see page 175), took a sabbatical year after high school during which he decided to join the clergy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his stories of leadership can be read to suggest he understands his emerging leader identity in terms of his faith. He states, “God and church can do many good things through me” and “I’d like to have an important position because from there I’ve got more opportunity to help more people in the community”. However, and echoing ideas of the contemporary coach, José Carlos alludes to ideas of influence, active listening and claims, “it’s not always about giving an answer”.

José Carlos: Well, like I said, in the church, you want to influence people, that’s what it is for. I mean, my intention is to help others. That’s sufficient for me. I get the satisfaction of helping others do something. We’ve become dehumanised, I mean, technology, well does it really make us happier? I just want to be there for people, to listen. We don’t really listen to each other, I mean, most of the time. Sometimes, well, it’s like, they’ve taught us that it’s not always about giving an answer. I mean, it’s listening to the person, telling them they have God’s grace, motivating them to think, to reflect on it.

While Juan Carlos does not refer directly to a natural ability to lead, his language can be interpreted to suggest he attributes particular importance to personal authenticity. By employing the phrases, “I think the first thing is to be myself”, and “Just being myself helps”, he advances the idea that his personal persona is that of a leader.

José Carlos: I think the first thing is to be myself, if I tried to be someone else, well, I’ve never been a very authoritative person. So, if I tried to lead like that, well things aren’t going to work out. I try and be myself, the way I am, patient, someone who listens to others. Just being myself helps. And well the fact that I’m a generous person, not self-interested, I mean, people can ask for my help, or if I’m working on something, I’ve got no self-interest. That’s sufficient for me, I get the satisfaction of helping others do something.

Unlike, Andrea, Marcos and José Carlos, Alexis' stories of leadership do not refer to himself. I presented Alexis in Chapter Six, (see page 184), and suggested he understood his social service in Casa Cuervo in institutionalised and bureaucratic terms, "I'm just getting on with it, just to get it done". However, later in our second interview together, he identifies a person in the tequila factory that appears to have offered him some sound advice. The following stories can be read to suggest that Alexis understands the leadership of this person in ways consist with ideas of mentoring (e.g., "I saw him like a guide" and "Like a teacher") and care (e.g., "maybe he's more like an uncle" and "looked out for me").

Interviewer: So, looking back on your last semester, has anyone or anything influenced or changed you? Is there something you've learnt about yourself?

Alexis: Well, yeah, lots of things I guess. Remember the social service in *Cuervo* I told you about? It was pretty routine stuff, nothing special. But there was a person there, I won't tell you his name. But he helped me a lot, I mean, not with the social service, that was easy! But like, he saw me as a younger brother, no, maybe he's more like an uncle. He joked and teased me a bit, at the start I mean. But he showed me some things, like tips, I guess, to be better. And he'd talk to me about my plans, almost push me, or how to say it? Like challenge me to think ahead. I saw him like a guide. I mean, it wasn't hard work, but he was someone that like, well, looked out for me.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about him, not his name, it's ok?

Alexis: It was all at work. But he'd say I should plan ahead, make sure I study something useful. He'd read the newspaper every day, like the free one that's around town. But he'd also have some comment to say, I mean, I wasn't paying much attention to what's going on. He said I should. I didn't really do it, well, I mean, I'd look at stuff, but I didn't really think ahead too much. But, I liked the way he treated me as an adult I guess, talking about the future, motivating me to have a plan, talking about how I should be prepared to work, prepared to do an interview, to speak well. I haven't seen him in a while, but, really, it was useful. Like a teacher, but, well, for

practical things. The little things, things that maybe are going to help in the future.

In this section, I have discussed the stories of four of the eight participants that appear to illustrate a distinctive millennial understanding of leadership. The accounts of Andrea, Marcos, José Carlos and Alexis can be read to suggest that they understand the phenomenon in terms of helping or serving others. This idea of serving others is central to Greenleaf's (1977) servant leader and informs the millennial portrayal of the phenomenon. For example, Andrea claims, "But I want to take care of them, want to help them get better"; Marcos states, "it's my turn to give back, to help others" and José Carlos alleges, "my intention is to help". Alexis, reflecting on the leadership of another states, "he'd talk to me about my plans, almost push me, or how to say it? Like challenge me to think ahead".

However, I differentiate the accounts of Andrea, Marcos, José Carlos and Alexis from the second group of four participants I discuss in the section titled *Stories of communication and shared goals*, because of their emphasis on ideas of coaching, mentoring or being a role model for others. Despite presenting themselves in different roles (e.g., Andrea the concerned friend; Marcos the educator; José Carlos the adherent; Alexis, the intern), what is common to their stories are ideas of wanting others to succeed, claims of effective personal leadership and stories that can be read to suggest that the three understand their leadership as something natural or inherent (The latter is not evident in Alexis' stories). The intimacy and confidence they allude to in their stories is a further point of differentiation. The four allude to the idea that leadership is a function of personal relationships (e.g., For example, Andrea states, "I can be close to them", while Marcos states "Showing I'm with them, I mean, that I care too". José Carlos aspires to "just want

to be there for people” while Alexis, of his mentor, reflects, “he was someone that like, well, looked out for me”). Finally, Andrea, Marcos and José Carlos allege a sense of personal authenticity, or something inherent and natural about their leadership. Andrea alleges she was born for the role; Marcos’ energy is recharged when he assumes the role; and José Carlos claims his ‘self’ is the role.

In summary, the stories of Andrea, Marcos, José Carlos and Alexis can be read to suggest they understand leadership in a distinctively millennial way. They do so by drawing upon ideas of serving others and emphasising aspects of mentoring and coaching; intimacy and confidence and leadership as a natural ability. They appear not to draw upon ideas of *millennial leader identity ad litteram*, but instead appropriate parts of this portrayal to work or fashion a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. I conceptualise this portrayal as a *counsellor identity*. In Chapter Eight, I discuss why I have used this label and what the four participants’ accounts likely reveal about ideas of millennial distinctiveness.

ii. Stories of communication and shared goals

Millennial leaders are portrayed as strong communicators, empathic, persuasive, and “leveraging my influence for a worthwhile cause” (Elmore, 2010, p. 192; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Alsop, 2008). A leader’s communication and networking skills are seen as increasingly important in complex contemporary organisations (Edwards & Fredriksson, 2017; White, Locket & Currie, 2016). Through persuasion and negotiation, they motivate others towards achieving personal, organisation and societal goals (van Dierendonck, 2011; Harlan, 2006) and understand “that the best way to solve a societal

problem is to act upon it locally, directly, and part of a larger group” (Winograd & Hais, 2011, p. 226). Ideas of shared goals and responsibilities are also reflected in the ‘good team player’ millennial role that portrays the millennial as competent (i.e., technology-enabled) and willing to work with others locally or remotely (Howe & Straus, 2008; Alsop, 2008).

The stories of four participants, namely, María José, Denis, Diego and Aldo, can be read in a way to suggest that they understand their leadership in terms of ideas of communication and shared goals. They appear to frame themselves as capable communicators and negotiators who emphasise collective goals before personal ones. Interestingly, and given the prestige afforded the leader figure, their stories can be read to suggest they are not completely comfortable presenting themselves in such terms. Like Andrea (see page 210) who claims, “It’s not like I’m a real leader, I mean, I’ve got no proper role”, the four participants do not define themselves as leaders but use an alternative term.

María José, who I presented in Chapter Six, (see page 180), recognises that her family context has flavoured her own understanding of leadership. Her father served as town mayor as she was growing up and she advances the idea he employed an authoritarian leadership style. Her stories are the most critical, and indeed lengthy, description offered by any of the twenty-four participants of a parent or family member. While others refer to abandonment (i.e., Marcos, Christian), María José’s account is unique in the sense that it can be interpreted as a critique of one generation (i.e., millennials) of the behaviour of another (i.e., Generation X). María José describes her father as “old-fashioned, he’s not one to ask”, claims, “He sets his mind on something,

well, that's it, it's the way it's going to be" and reflects, "I think that one of his biggest problems is lack of communication". Indeed, of his behaviour at home, she claims, "it's hard work for us [family] to communicate with him because he's really closed-minded, what he says goes". The theme of communication is central to her understanding of leadership. Her stories can be read to suggest she understands the phenomenon in terms of communication, negotiation, positive relationships and collective success.

María José: A leader always thinks of 'win-win', it's never 'I win and you lose', or 'I lose and you win'. No, it's about forming win-win relationships. Now, tell that to my dad. I mean, well, it takes time, but you've got to listen. That's what I've learnt. I mean, well, everyone wants to be listened to, like, to share their ideas and what they think.

Later, reflecting on her father's elected role, she again refers to "his ways" and alludes to a lack of communication and inclusion.

María José: They'd do it [have a meeting] at the house sometimes. Or my mum would go to some of their offices. People would say that he [her father] lost the re-election because he didn't listen, I mean to nobody. I mean, he's like that at home too. He had good ideas, but, well, if you don't give others a chance to talk, I mean, everyone's got something, well, I mean, to contribute. He made all the decisions, he talked a lot, he wanted this, wanted that. Who knows? Maybe he didn't care? Maybe it is just his way?

In our second interview, María José describes herself in a leader role, as the president of the Graduation Committee. Such committees are common to Mexican high schools, an autonomous group of students that plan, organise and finance parties, trips and events for final year students. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, (see page 113), the existence of such committees potentially illustrates how ideas of leadership and management have permeated school culture. These committees, at least in principle, are organised around an elected president and a finance, logistics and marketing department.

My experience is that while this organisational structure is neatly articulated during the election period, in practice the student elected president quickly comes to realise that they will assume a disproportionate workload. The following quotation can be read to suggest that María José believes that teamwork is the key to success. She states, “for things to go well, well it’s because of us, everyone, because of the team”. By employing the phrase, “we’d deal with it together, talk it over, make the best decision together”, I understand her prioritising communication and collective decision-making. Indeed, intentionally or not, her description of her own leadership could not be more different from that of her father’s. Of course, I recognise that she is unlikely to present herself in authoritarian terms before pluralistic and collective ones.

María José: At the start I said to everyone, well that I wanted to see us as a team. That it was important to remember that for things to go well, well, it’s because of us, everyone, because of the team. Not so much because of me, or someone in particular, but because of the effectiveness of the team. We’d work together, if something came up, a problem or something, then we’d deal with it together, talk it over, make the best decision together.

She continues,

María José: I never felt conformable, well, like I mean, we were a team. There were moments when classmates, even some teachers, well, they’d congratulate me. It’s not like I didn’t work hard, I mean I did, we all did. But it’s uncomfortable sometimes, like strange, everyone thanks you. But I didn’t see it like that, I don’t think I did anything, well, I mean, like anything really special compared to the others. We all did, we all did it together.

I interpret the phrases, “Not so much because of me” and “I don’t think I did anything, well, I mean, like anything really special compared to the others” as María José alluding to a certain reticence to present herself as a leader. This reticence is reflected in others parts of her interview. She presents her election to the role of president of the

committee as if responding to the wishes of others by employing the phrase, “They formed a graduation committee and well, they elected me to president”. Downplaying the potential status associated with the role she alleges, “I learnt from her [mother] to be humble, to value myself as a person, but to never think of myself as superior to anyone else.” She alleges that her personal commitment is unrelated to the role she plays in a project and reflects, “Whether I’m the Mexican President or the street sweeper in the central square, whatever it is, I like to do it the best I can, give the best of me”.

Denis and Diego also draw upon a leadership role common in Mexican schools, that of *class leader*. This student is elected by their peers and helps teachers with administrative responsibilities (e.g., taking attendance, collecting written homework, distributing information). While this role might be seen as an illustration of the ubiquity of the leader discourse in schools, I concede that it is probably also a practical response to alleviate teacher workload and large class sizes.

Denis’s *leader talk*, like that of María José, can be read to advance the idea that he understands the role in terms of communication and guiding others towards a collective goal. I understand Denis portraying himself as an intermediary between the teacher and the students to “manage the situations that come up”. He prioritises the collective by employing the phrases, “everything’s for our benefit. If they listen to me, well, the actions are going to benefit us”.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me what you do as class leader?

Denis: It’s just about helping the teacher make sure everyone has the right information, I mean, the things we have to do in the next days. I mean, you just manage the situations that come up, try to work together, to organise everyone. Like, the teacher will tell me to explain something to them [classmates] and so, well, maybe it’s something easy, something for tomorrow or the next day.

Sometimes, they'll ask me questions about it. Like, when we have to take something home and get our parents to, well sign or authorise it. There's always students that don't bring it back, I mean, I have to ask them day after day. They forget, or maybe, I mean, they don't care. So, I'll remind them, maybe two or three times. That's the class leader I guess, well anyway, in this school. But look, in the end, everything's for our benefit. If they listen to me, well, the actions are going to benefit us.

When he refers to the challenges of the role, ideas of communication, or lack thereof, are more evident.

Denis: I'm the one who talks a lot, I mean talking is the key, communicating with them [classmates] and teachers and like between us all. I mean, sometimes it's about speaking to two or three classmates, and well, other times, I mean the teacher asks me to speak to the whole group. I was really bad at that at the start, like, I mean, it made me nervous. Now it's ok, I mean, I've had the role for nearly a year. But yeah, if I had to say one thing, it would be that, communication, like how to make sure everyone understands the things the teacher wants.

Later, I ask Denis to talk about the satisfaction he has taken from the role and whether he would do it again. Prioritising the collective, he refers to "what we achieved, we achieved together".

Interview: You got something out of it? Would you recommend it to anyone, would you do it again?

Denis: Yes, I think so, well, yes. I think, my most important achievement, more than anything, the satisfaction, my own satisfaction. Of knowing that I helped my classmates through it, and because what we achieved, we achieved together. There's a satisfaction I'm going to take with me when I leave here. Knowing that my classmates are going to say that I did a lot of stuff. That I was the leader, someone important. But more than the title, what I'll take away is that they'll say 'You were the one that helped us'.

Like María José, (e.g., I don't think I did anything, well, I mean, like anything really special compared to the others"), I understand Denis as reticent to present himself as a leader. While I recognise that he does make direct reference to the role and its

importance (e.g., “That I was the leader, someone important”) he privileges action (e.g., helping others), “more than the title”. Indeed, Denis is almost apologetic when referring to his election to the position, advancing the idea of responding to the wishes of others with the phrase, “I think most of us could do it, it’s not like it’s so hard”. Of course, I recognise he might wish to temper the successes he is presenting me, cautious that I might see him as self-serving or arrogant.

Denis: It’s not like I said I wanted the role [of class leader], but instead my classmates proposed me. Between everyone, they elected me. That’s when, well, they motivated me to take on the role. But look, I think most of us could do it, it’s not like it’s so hard.

The third participant who appears to draw upon ideas of communication and shared goals, Diego, lives with his mother and four younger siblings. His father died two years ago and it appears he has assumed a father-figure role within the family. He is nineteen years old and has recently graduated from a private, all-boys, high school in Guadalajara. He enjoys horse riding and science. Diego’s *leader talk* differs from that of María José and Denis. While the latter two emphasise working towards a collective goal while being part of the group, Diego’s stories can be read to suggest that he positions himself apart from, or removed from, the group - a negotiator or conciliator - in search of the best collective outcome. His accounts emphasise his lived experience in the classroom and he appears to draw upon traditional gender stereotypes to exaggerate the challenge he faces. He frames himself as the rational coolheaded male stating “I’m the person that calms the others down” and “I think I can keep calm in most situations, I mean, at least at school yes”. However, he describes his female classmates as “a bit explosive”, “sometimes they [classmates] start with crazy ideas” and “they can be too picky sometimes”. The boys however, “say silly things that make them angry”. I understand

the following quotation to suggest that Denis understands himself as a capable communicator and negotiator through which he brings the group “back down to earth” and “the girls to keep calm”.

Interviewer: What’s your role in the group and the classroom?

Diego: Well, I feel that I’m the person in the group that as well as having initiative and ideas, well I’m the person that calms the others down. Because sometimes they start with crazy ideas or things that don't go with what we’re trying to do. So, I’m the one that brings things back down to earth. And in the classroom, because it’s the first year that it’s mixed, I mean, there’s lots of friction between the boys and the girls. And I feel I gained the respect of the girls. So, my role in the classroom is to be the referee, like, to conciliate. Because maybe the girls are a bit explosive, or maybe, well, the boys say silly things that make them angry. So, I’m the one that gives the message of the boys with more tact, and tell the girls to keep calm, that it’s something simple, that they don’t need to get angry and start dividing the generation. I guess that’s how I help the most, I mean, that’s how I see it.

Like María José and Denis, I interpret a reticence on behalf of Diego to present himself in leader terms. In the above passage he likens his class to two teams in which he plays a mediating role (e.g., “explosive” girls and “silly” boys). He does not use the word ‘leader’ but instead refers to himself as “to be the referee” with “more tact”. I understand Diego framing himself as a third-party arbitrator with the objective of bringing the group together and avoid “dividing the generation”.

Aldo, who I presented in Chapter Six, (see page 193), is the fourth participant whose stories can be read to suggest he understands leadership in terms of communication and shared goals. He is a member of the school marching band and, as sergeant, responsible for directing and “to make sure things like, well the money we need, the places we’re going to play, I, mean, all that’s organised”. When I ask him how he understands his role he emphasises communication, coordination and “everyone getting better

together”. In the following quotation, he refers to a series of competitions that take place every other Saturday and emphasises the need for strong communication (e.g., “checking with each member that they understand the routine, their role, how the thing is going to be”).

Interviewer: So, can you tell me more about how you get them [band members] to perform well?

Aldo: We’re working together, well, maybe six or seven times a week. I’m the one that gives the orders, but it’s not about that. The work’s done during practice, not in the shows or competitions, I mean it’s too late then. It’s about making clear what we’ve got to do on Monday and Tuesday. Going over it again and again, I mean like checking with each member that they understand the routine, their role, how the thing is going to be. It’s the time we spend together during the week that makes us better, I mean everyone get better together, practicing and checking things over.

Later he adds,

Aldo: I know the sergeant, well, like, you see him shouting. Well you have too, the music is playing! But it’s not really like that, I mean at least not in a school band. During the week, well I don’t shout at them [band members]. No. Actually, well maybe it’s like doing a homework, like when the teachers make teams and you do it together. You’ve got this objective, and well, everyone’s doing their part. You’ve got to know what the other is doing. Maybe it’s a bit like that. I don’t know, but we have to be clear about who’s doing what stuff, that everyone understands it all.

I interpret Aldo not wanting me to understand him in terms of the stereotyped sergeant barking orders at others. The claims, “it’s not about that” and “it’s not really like that”, as if to deemphasise his absolute leadership. Later, when referring to his more administrative functions, I understand him articulating ideas of collective responsibilities, “if we work together, like on small things, then it means a lot”. Moreover, by acknowledging, “I can’t do it all myself” and “The troupe know they have to help”, Aldo

aspires to diminish the importance of his leader role and frames himself as ‘one of the rest’.

Aldo: I can’t do it all myself, I know it’s the role, well, I mean, like officially the sergeant does it all, like a team manager maybe. But I’m working, I’ve got other things. The troupe know they have to help, like in a good way. I mean, it’s not like they think I’m lazy. But they know, well, if we work together, like on small things, then it means a lot. It means we’re going to be more successful, like organised I mean. It’s stuff like booking buses, and well, maybe hotels, because sometimes we stay the night. And then, well, like planning what time we leave, stuff like that. Maybe it’s good that way because we all work together,

In this section, I have discussed the stories of four of eight participants that appear to illustrate a distinctive millennial understanding of leadership. The stories of María José, Denis, Diego and Aldo can be read to suggest that they understand leadership in ways that resonate with the servant leader portrayal (Greenleaf, 1977). The four advance the idea of trying to get the best out those they work with. For example, María states, “A leader always thinks of ‘win-win’”, Denis reflects, “everything’s for our benefit”, Diego claims “that’s how I help the most” while Aldo, refers to “everyone getting better together”.

However, I differentiate this second group of four participants from the first group I discussed in the section titled *Stories of coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others*, because of their emphasis on ideas of communication and shared goals. They draw upon formal leadership positions available to them at school (e.g., class leader or marching band sergeant) and present their leadership in terms of communication, negotiation and collective goals. For example, María José claims, “then we’d deal with it together, talk it over, make the best decision together” while Denis states, “it’s just about helping the teacher make sure everyone has the right information”. Diego frames himself

as “the referee, like, to conciliate” while Aldo claims, “because we all work together”. Another interesting point of differentiation with the first group is the apparent reticence of the four to present themselves in leader terms (e.g., María José claims not to have done “anything really special”; Denis states, “I think most of us could do it, it’s not like it’s so hard”; Diego uses the word “referee” to describe his role and Aldo acknowledges, “I can’t do it all myself”). Of course, I understand that the four likely undertake this narrative editing to avoid framing themselves as overly heroic or indispensable.

In summary, the stories of María José, Denis, Diego and Aldo can be read to suggest they understand leadership in a distinctively millennial way. They do so by drawing upon ideas of communication and shared goals. Like the aforementioned participants in the section titled *Stories of coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others*, they appear not to draw upon ideas of *millennial leader identity ad litteram*, but instead appropriate part of this portrayal to work or fashion an understanding of the phenomenon that I will call the *communicator identity*. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss why I use this label and what the four participants’ stories likely reveal about ideas of millennial distinctiveness.

Stories of leadership that appear to suggest a transgenerational understanding of the phenomenon

In the previous section, I claimed that the *leader talk* of eight of the twenty-four participants can be read in such a way to suggest that they understand and perform leadership a distinctively millennial way. Their stories reflected certain ideas of leadership associated with *millennial leader identity* (e.g., coaching, mentoring, role model, communication and shared goals). Finding support for a distinctive millennial

understanding of leadership advances the idea of intergenerational difference and a distinctive millennial identity.

In this section, I begin to question this interpretation by drawing attention to the presence of discourse that reflects a transgenerational leader identity that little resembles the millennial concept of leadership. That is to say, in this section, I discuss examples of *leader talk* that can be read to suggest that seven participants understand their emerging leader identity in terms more commonly associated with the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership and ideas of a heroic, romanticised and game-changing leader figure. In Chapter Four, and based upon my analysis of the popular media and literature, I argue that this portrayal has become the default understanding of the phenomenon in the early twenty-first century. It appears to draw upon Western's (2008) idea of the *messianic leader identity* that was born in the 1980s in response to globalisation, deregulation and technological innovation (Western, 2008). If not the anthesis of *millennial leader identity*, the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership, articulates a very different idea of the phenomenon.

In this section, I discuss how the accounts, or *leader talk*, of a second group of participants can be read to suggest they understand their experiences and emerging leader identity in terms associated with the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership. I discuss these stories through two themes that emerged from my interpretation of the data: i) stories of superior personal traits and ii) stories of initiative and risk-taking. I recognise that accounts of leadership likely experience narrative editing, the participants aspiring to present themselves to me in certain ways.

i. Stories of superior personal traits

The *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership frames the leader in heroic, romanticised and game-changing terms and who “will light the way to the promised land” (Manz & Sims Jr., 1991, p.21). Encapsulated in this portrayal are ideas of competitiveness, dominance, mastery and self-confidence (Western, 2008; Ford, 2016; Collins et al., 2014; Eagly, 1987; Spence & Buckner, 2000). These agentic traits are often studied with respect to ‘great man’ theories of leadership (Yukl, 2012; Bass, 1990) that suggest the leader has a special set of traits not found in non-leaders. The stories of four participants, namely, Christian, Tiffany, Claudia and Diana can be read in a way to suggest that they see themselves, as leaders, as possessing personal traits that differentiate them from others. Moreover, their *leader talk* advances the idea that they are capable of resolving particular challenges that are beyond the ability of others. Their stories share two further commonalities. First is the use of exaggeration which I interpret as the participants emphasising the magnitude of the challenge they face and their resulting heroism. Secondly is their use of supporting comments from an adult in a position of authority as if to lend support and credibility to the participants’ claims of leadership and distinctiveness.

Christian is eighteen years old and lives with his mother and younger half-brother of eleven in Ixtlahuacan, a small town of twelve thousand people. He claims that both his biological father and step-father have since left home, “maybe something my mother, well and me, we’ll never get over”. Since then, he advances the idea of having assumed a father figure role for his half-brother and states, “when my half-brother was born, well my step-dad left also. I’d see my mum sad, overwhelmed, stressed-out. I was the oldest

one, so, I felt it was personal, something moral. I felt the obligation to become the male figure for my brother, like my grandfathers had been for me”.

Christian’s account of his high school experience can be read to suggest that he understands himself as a leader within his school community and differentiates himself from others by means of his intellect and maturity. In a characteristic common to stories of superior personal traits, he refers to an authority figure, I believe, to lend credibility to his own claims.

Christian: Once I got there [high school], well I think I’ve made an impact. The director started to appreciate me because I’ve offered a lot to the school. Well, the director started to see me as someone capable, an intellectual person, a person with a future. The director knows my grandparents, he knows my family. So, when I entered he was waiting for something, like he had a prototype Baeza in his head. I’m hoping I can live up to that ideal.

Later we talk about Christian’s academic performance, social service and extra-curricular activities. His *leader talk* can be read to suggest that he believes himself intellectually superior to others - a leader of opinion within the school. Christian claims, “I’m the one, well how do I say it, I’ve given the school a greater intellectual level, well, standard no. More like dimension, like bringing new things to others”. He also alleges, “I read more than anyone, I mean, it really helps me formulate my opinion on things, to understand things better” and claims, “that’s an advantage for me, they [classmates] know I’m going to be most up-to-date, I mean things like artificial intelligence, computers, well, I’m the one participating, like giving most opinions on these things”. Referring to his participation in the school debating team, he appears to make more direct claims with respect to his intellectual leadership and influence. He alleges he is “the one who’s going

to direct the rest, I mean, it's like it's my team" and "I'm capable of that, I mean intellectually, well, at least I think I am".

Christian: He [the teacher] looks to me because he knows that I'm going to be the most prepared. The most organised, maybe, like the one who's going to direct the rest, I mean, it's like it's my team. That's the way I see it. It's about, well, you have to be prepared, organised. And get the best arguments, get your brain to understand them. I'm capable of that, I mean intellectually, well, at least I think I am. Anyway, I like to feel this type of pressure and especially when I'm about to participate. I'm really focused, totally centred on it. I give myself the homework of looking for topics that are ignored by the others, like topics *in favour* or *in contra* to the debate question. The others always ask, how I come with so many, like notes, I mean preparation notes? They can see I'm better prepared. That's why, maybe, I mean in the debates, well I'm the leader, maybe I speak about half the time. I speak a lot, but, well, it's because I think I can make more points, better arguments.

Interviewer: And how do the others, I mean your teammates, respond to that?

Christian: They know it's my passion. I'm always going to try and be the best, so the team can win. They know I can help them, I mean, I'll always have an argument or counter-argument that I'll share. I've told them I'm in this adult discussion group in the church. We like to make people aware of the country's brain drain. We talk a lot about technology. They [teammates] see me as an adult, they know I'm talking about these sorts of things.

I interpret Christian's mention of an adult study group, "it's about fifteen adults, I mean, I'm the only one, that's like younger than maybe, twenty-five, maybe around that" as a narrative strategy to support his claims to superior intellect and maturity. The following quotation can be read to suggest that others, "value what I'm saying, and doing".

Christian: I love knowing that people see me as an adult. When I was younger, like twelve or thirteen, well I felt people would ignore my ideas because of my age. They didn't think what I was saying was correct because I was young. However, now I'm happy because

the things I say make them [teammates] react. ‘Look at him. What’s he doing and why?’ They value what I’m saying and doing.

Tiffany is the second participant that appears to understand her leadership in terms of her personal traits. I presented Tiffany in Chapter Six, (see page 167), and met her soon before she was due to leave Guadalajara, “for the biggest challenge of my life there” in Mexico City, for undergraduate studies. Tiffany’s account can be read to suggest that she differentiates herself from others in terms of ideas of planning, execution and influence. Her *leader talk* is managerial in nature: she describes herself as a “change agent” and recounts an academic project in organisational terms (e.g., “there was a lack of control”, “they didn’t have an overall plan, like a strategy” and “how we were going to divide up the work”). Ideas of heroism first surface in her interview when she refers to her school experience. Alluding to the impact she has on others around her, she claims her physics teacher once described her as “like an atom bomb, when the nucleus separates and there’s a chain reaction everywhere” and “someone with just more to give than the others”. In the following quotation, in what I read as certain exaggeration, Tiffany alleges being invited by her teachers to instruct and influence other students. Of her superior personal organisation, she states, “I mean, the teachers know I’m prepared, like organising, like balancing my activities. Sometimes, they even ask me to show them [classmates] how they should organise it [their academic commitments]” and “if it’s a lot for me [homework], they’ll know it’s hard, I mean too much for most of the class. It’s not like I’m the only one, but most of them won’t manage”.

Ideas of how Tiffany appears to understand herself as a leader emerge as we discuss whether she has enjoyed high school and the legacy she believes she leaves

behind. She claims “I see myself a bit different from others” and reflects, “I think I’ve got something, an ability, like well, well, yes to lead the others”.

Interviewer: I think you’ve clearly enjoyed high school, you talk very enthusiastically about your time there. What is your reflection, I mean, your overall sense of it?

Tiffany: Academically I’ve done, well, let’s say, I’m proud of my achievements. I mean, I see myself a bit different from the others. Like the physics teacher I told you about, the atom bomb? I give my opinions and share my values to convince others of a certain way of seeing things and the world. There’s a lot of times when I’ve played a big role, like I mean a leader or coordinator position, in projects and everything. I want to do well, I mean, I think I’ve got something, an ability, like well, well, yes to lead the others. Well, I mean, when I’ve got a good idea, well, I’ll show it to others and they’ll do it too. I know I’ve got good ideas, I mean, there’s nothing wrong with doing things a certain way.

While not directly referencing specific personal traits, I understand the phrases, “I give my opinions and share my values to convince others of a certain way of seeing things” and “I’ll show others and they’ll do it too” as Tiffany advancing the idea others follow her lead. Later, she claims a school tutor also identifies her as someone, “capable of getting things done”, who get others to “accept the decision I make, like they value them”.

Tiffany: It’s satisfying to hear things like that from her [the tutor]. I mean, that I’m capable of getting things done. When I commit myself to something I feel it’s necessary to do everything to make it work. I mean, I don’t like doing things halfway, I won’t let others, not do their part of it [group work]. I’ve been in projects where people just don’t care. I mean, I get things done. I’m committed. She says I’m decisive, like I make my own decisions, get others, I mean, I don’t know how to say it, but like, accept the decision I make, like they value them. I think, well, they understand it’s the best way.

Claudia is the third participant whose account can be read to suggest that she understands her leadership in terms of her personal traits. Unlike Christian (intellect) or

Tiffany (planning, execution and influence), Claudia refers directly to her leadership ability, frames herself as a leader within her school and claims, “it’s always me, I mean, the one that’s coordinating things” and “I’m the one that gets the team working together”. With reference to the school’s Graduating Committee of which she is a member, she claims, “There’s ten of us. And it’s me who’s the one that’s coordinating the ten”. She continues, “Even the teachers say, well, like, I’m doing too much, that it’s my fingerprint on it. That I’m the leader there”.

Claudia first refers to her leadership when discussing her academic commitments and “all the things they [teachers] give us to do in teams”. In the following quotation, prompted by my question about teams, she presents herself in leader terms, stating, “I’m almost always the leader” and “the one that organises everything”.

Interviewer: Can you describe to me the dynamics of working in teams?

Claudia: I’m almost always the leader, the one that organises everything. And well, between everyone we get together in my house, or in someone’s house and get it done. We’ve always got so much to do. And I always try to organise my team so we get it finished as quickly as possible. I mean, not leaving it until the last day. And then well, everyone’s running around like crazy to get it done. So, I’d say my teammates like that, getting everything done on time.

I have stated that I detect a sense of exaggeration in stories of superior personal traits. In the case of Claudia, I understand this in the sense of the scope (e.g., organising ten people, and ‘always’ being the leader) and the pressure under which she exercises her leadership (e.g., “so much to do” and “running around like crazy”). Further, I understand Claudia drawing upon her membership of the National Honours Society to articulate her emerging leader identity. This prestigious academic society is for “the leaders of the school” and “I mean, those that others see as leaders”. She appears to depict the selection

process in exaggerated terms to lend credence to ideas of exclusivity. For example, she alleges “a super-long application” with “like around more than thirty questions, no more” and reflects, “it’s the first real tough part”. However, membership affords her the status as one of the school’s elite. The following quotation can be read to suggest that Claudia understands herself as such, “one of the leaders of the school, I mean, I guess that’s what it means”.

Interviewer: Tell me more about the National Honours Society you mentioned in our first meeting.

Claudia: Well, like I said, we’re the leaders of the school. I mean, the others always choose use to coordinate the activities. I guess well, I mean it’s not something I talk about much, but it’s recognition of your achievements, what you’ve given to the school, I mean it’s prestigious I guess. I’m one of the leaders of the generation. I don’t know, but many times when someone in the generation has a problem and they want to talk about it they come to me. So, I mean, it’s nice because you can really see that they are [the members], the leaders of the school.

Diana is the fourth participant that appears to understand her leadership in terms of her personal traits. I presented Diana in Chapter Six (see page 166). She is the daughter of Cuban immigrants, was born in Mexico and spent the first three years of her life in Cuba. In her interview, she advances the idea that her communication skills provide her influence over others. She states that her diverse extra-curricular activities bring her into contact with a wide range of people: a hipster group with a relaxed atmosphere; mountain climbers with a more edgy feel; and an intellectual ‘musicians’ group. Diana advances the idea that she is capable of adapting and communicating with each, describing herself as “a little piece of each, moving between each”. She alleges that her dual Cuban-Mexican heritage has “well, it’s taught me to see things in certain ways” and “it’s an upbringing

that very different from the majority of people here in Guadalajara”. Of her social life she reflects,

Diana: I’m moving between different groups, like being a part of all of them. I think that’s a part of who I am, like knowing what each wants, like responding to each. And well, how do I say it, they respond to me. It’s like they have some confidence, or like a trust. So maybe they’ll accept my ideas, my recommendations when we want to do things.

Ideas of communication and empathy also colour her discussions of school. In the following quotation she describes her experience at a Jesuit high school in Guadalajara.

Interviewer: Can we go back to your experience of school? What stood out for you, I mean what do you take from your time there?

Diana: Well, we work in teams a lot. I mean, I think that’s part of, like the school philosophy, the way they teach us. I think I’m good at it, I mean, well, I seem to get along with people, know how to treat them. It’s about knowing what to say to certain ones [classmates]. Maybe because I’ve got a diverse family, like in Cuba and Mexico, but I mean, I feel I can communicate well, differently with each one.

Later she continues, with specific reference to leadership

Diana: I guess that’s why others, I mean classmates, often call me a leader. It’s like, I’m the one that’s often doing the planning, planning things, making everyone do certain bits of the project, or the work. They tell me, ‘Diana, you’re good at speaking to so-and-so, go and ask for this’ or maybe when someone is not working, like being lazy, they’ll say, ‘Diana, can’t you get so-and-so to do his part’. I mean, stuff like that, like they see me as a good communicator.

In this section, I have discussed the stories of four of the seven participants that appear to illustrate a transgenerational understanding of leadership. The accounts of Christian, Tiffany, Claudia and Diana can be read to suggest that they understand the phenomenon in terms of certain personal traits. The idea that the leader has superior personal characteristics informs part of the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the leader

figure. Christian alleges his intellect and maturity help him “to direct the rest” while Tiffany’s planning, execution and influence motivates her to “see myself a bit different from others”. Claudia refers directly to her leadership ability (e.g., “it’s always me” and “it’s me who’s the one that’s coordinating the ten”) while Diana alludes to her ability to communicate with others, “knowing what to say to certain ones [classmates]”.

However, I differentiate the accounts of Christian, Tiffany, Claudia and Diana from a second group of four participants that I will discuss in the section titled *Stories of initiative and risk taking*, because of their use of exaggeration and supporting comments from an adult in a position of authority. For example, Christian claims he is part of an adult discussion group despite his young age; Tiffany alleges her teachers ask her to show others what to do; and Claudia claims she is ‘always’ the leader. The three also refer to certain adults as if to provide greater credibility for their claims (e.g., Christian’s high school principal; Tiffany’s physics teacher and tutor; Claudia’s teachers). Interestingly, I do not detect the same exaggeration in Diana’s account, nor does she employ supporting comments from a third person. She does however appear to present herself in a very positive light, an empathic chameleon moving between, and allegedly influencing, diverse groups. In summary, the stories of Christian, Tiffany, Claudia and Diana can be read to suggest they understand leadership in a transgenerational way, drawing upon the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon and in particular emphasising their personal characteristics. However, they do not appear to draw upon that *contemporary popular portrayal ad litteram*, but instead understand their emerging leader identity in terms of personal traits - what I will call the *trait identity*. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss what the participants’ stories likely reveal about ideas of millennial distinctiveness.

ii. Stories of initiative and risk taking

In the previous section, I discussed the accounts of four participants that appear to understand their leadership in terms of a series of personal traits (e.g., intellect, organisational ability, leadership and communication). In this section I draw upon two particular traits encapsulated within the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership: initiative and risk taking (Yukl, 2012; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). Leaders are generally understood as employing their initiative and accepting certain risks while making important decisions. Lindsey (2011) refers to a *Warrior-Knight* leader archetype that reflects, “the important balance they [leaders] must strive for between risk taking and prudence” (Lindsey, 2011, p. 61).

The stories of three participants, namely Juan Pablo, Mabel and Ricardo can be read in a way to suggest that they see themselves, as leaders, in terms of initiative and risk taking. Their stories share two commonalities. First, the three advance the idea that they have the ability to identify new opportunities, an entrepreneurial-like sense to start something from nothing. Secondly, their accounts advance the idea that they understand themselves capable of convincing others of the merits of their ideas in the face of certain uncertainty and risk.

Juan Pablo is 19 years old and recently graduated from a private catholic high school in the city of Guadalajara. He lives with his parents and five siblings and enjoys outdoor activities such as trekking, climbing and camping. Consistent with how he appears to understand himself as a leader, he states, “I used to play basketball, but, to be honest, you’ve got more at stake when you’re climbing. I mean, it’s about confidence, trust, making decisions. There’s some risk, I mean, I’m not stupid or anything, but risk,

well it's part of the excitement". Juan Pablo refers to ideas of leadership, initiative and risk taking when discussing the extra-curricular options available at his school. He advances the idea of identifying an opportunity to form a debating team. By employing the phrase, "Honestly, we didn't know what we had gotten ourselves into", I understand Juan Pablo alluding to the uncertainty associated with the project.

Juan Pablo: I was one of three students that decided to start the [debating] team. The school offered workshops in the afternoon but they were workshops, well nothing related to humanities and that's what I like the most. There were workshops in mechanics, electricity, and robotics. Honestly, we didn't know what we had gotten ourselves into. But it sounded good, so we mentioned it to our coordinator who liked the idea. And we joined the tournament. And, well basically we started to learn to prepare the debates, really from nothing, for the Mar Adentro tournament.

Later, Juan Pablo goes on to describe the process of registering the team and of the need to convince ten fellow classmates to join, "not something that looked, I mean, it looked almost impossible at the start". In the following quotation he alludes to ideas of influence, persuasion and self-confidence, "selling it to them".

Interviewer: How did you convince them to join?

Juan Pablo: I just told them they'd be good at it. I remember one, he's the one that's always discussing things with everyone in class. So, I said that if he debates well then someone will recognise him for it and he said 'yes'. Also, he's very intelligent. I told another that he was very intelligent, good grades, dedicated, responsible. 'Well the team would benefit by having someone like you in it, responsible and dedicated', I said. He wasn't so good at speaking in public, but he's intelligent and thinks critically. Someone with critical thinking, well we'd give him the argument and well, let him go with it. It was about like selling it to them, selling the idea I mean. That's what I think. I remember these two.

In the following quotation, Juan Pablo returns to the idea of initiative and risk taking, claiming, “something I started, like really from nothing” and “I got it started, something from nothing”.

Interviewer: And how did it go in the end?

Juan Pablo: We did ok, I mean we got the quarter-finals of the competition and then, well, how do I say it, well we were beaten badly, like 42-18 I think it was. But then, I mean, it's something new, something I started, like really from nothing. What did we expect? I mean, at the start we didn't really know the rules, like when you can interrupt or not, when you can move positions. I mean, if I hadn't done it, well, we'd all be in the mechanics or robotics class. That's ok, but we really wanted something more to do with the humanities. I got it started, something from nothing. It's like leaving something for my school.

Mabel is the second participant that appears to understand her emerging leader identity in terms of ideas of initiative and risk taking. I presented Mabel in Chapter Six, (see page 193), a nineteen-year-old that lives in the town of Jocotepec. She advances the idea that she has enjoyed her experience at a public school stating, “it's where I became who I am” and “it's a bit like another home, I mean, we're like, I don't know, 300 students, maybe like a family”. She does however refer to the lack of facilities and opportunities for extra-curricular activities, alluding to an entrepreneurial spirit in the phrase, “I wanted to try and raise some money, I mean, maybe something I can get others to help with, and see how it goes”.

Mabel: Like I said before, I mean I've really enjoyed school. But you know, I mean it's a small town, we don't have a volleyball court, basketball, a pool. I mean, I know we'll never have a pool. But like, I wanted to try and raise some money, I mean, maybe something I can get others to help with, and see how it goes. At least for something better for us, like in the afternoon, a place to do sports together.

Later, in a story that echoes Juan Pablo's, Mabel claims to have founded a volleyball team at school. In following quotation, she alludes to ideas of persuasion and influence, "I started to convince them" she claims.

Interviewer: You mentioned having started the volleyball team. What motivated you to start the team?

Mabel: I really like volleyball a lot, so, when I heard about the possibility to form a team. So, well I started to speak to my friends, the ones that like it, although maybe not as much as me. I started to convince them, 'You know what, we're starting a new team', I started to speak with others from different classrooms, I knew there were people that enjoyed it. So, the team started to take shape... 'Everyone that wants to be part of the team', I said, 'we're starting training', and that was it. We completed the team with twelve people, and well, that was us ready!

Later in the interview, I ask Mabel to reflect on her success at school. She cites her hard work (e.g., "it's about pushing yourself"), ideas of empathy (e.g., "I think I've always gotten along well with, well, really, them [classmates] and teachers), and initiative (e.g., "I've started a few projects too, I mean, things I think were my ideas, things that were new"). In the following quotation she considers the volleyball team one of her achievements (e.g., "I think it's something I can be proud of"), but also alludes to the uncertainty of its success (e.g., "they didn't think it would happen").

Mabel: The team, well it's important to me, I mean, I think it's something I can be proud of. How can I say it, I guess the school believed in me? They were like, 'Try, if you can get ten, fifteen people, well, we'll have a team'. Plus, the money, we raised about 16,000 pesos. I mean, just with some ideas, and well getting people interested. I don't think I'd imagine we'd have a team in less than a year. But, really at the start, I mean they [classmates], I mean they didn't think it would happen. Our court is like a smooth piece of land, but it's grass. It's ok for volleyball, but there's no roof. The sun, the heat! I remember thinking that ten people is a lot, I mean, my classmates like to go online, watch Netflix, that sort of stuff.

Ricardo is the third participant who draws upon ideas of initiative and risk-taking. Like the stories of Juan Pablo and Mabel, Ricardo claims to have started a Christian rock-band, inviting classmates and members of his church to join. He claims, “I didn’t have a lot of confidence it would work” and “I mean, I know that for most people, well, like Christian rock, you know, it’s not really important right now”. The following quotation can be read to suggest Ricardo sees himself in entrepreneurial-like terms, “I mean, you take a risk, it’s not like I’m doing anything bad, but, I mean, you’re never sure it’s going to work”.

Ricardo: The band I mentioned. Well, it’s like three years, nearly four years ago now. Like I said, Christian rock, well, it’s not so popular, but really, it’s a way to evangelise, like getting God’s message through. The first couple of people, well, they weren’t so interested. I just kept trying, I mean, a few people from the church said they’d join. I think they liked the idea of it, something new, like a more modern way of doing it, communicating to people.

Later, he alludes to the slow process of convincing others of his idea, “people started to see I was serious” and “they had confidence in me”.

Ricardo: I think I took a chance, I mean, you take a risk, it’s not like I’m doing anything bad, but, I mean, you’re never sure it’s going to work. People said to me, I mean, even those at church, that well, it’s not so popular now. I tried to convince some friends but I could see, I mean from the start they weren’t so interested. I wanted to try, I mean, what could happen? I guess it’d would take lot of time, plus we’d have to buy some things. But that’s like the challenge you take, I mean to start something new. It took about, let’s see, maybe around six months and well, I had to talk to lots of people, even friends I hadn’t seen since primary school. But people started to see I was serious. Like, they had confidence in me, a way of showing confidence in me. One joined, one left, then another. I mean, there were lots of changes, at the start I mean. Now it’s four of us, I think they know I’m not going to just stop.

In this section, I have discussed the stories of three of the seven participants that appear to illustrate a transgenerational understanding of leadership. The accounts of Juan

Pablo, Mabel and Ricardo can be read to suggest that they understand the phenomenon in terms of the *contemporary popular portrayal*. Their stories appear to suggest that they understand leadership in terms of initiative and risk taking, the ability to identify new projects or opportunities.

The accounts of Juan Pablo, Mabel and Ricardo can be conceptualised as a subset of the theme *Stories of superior personal traits*. The three emphasise the uncertainty surrounding their new projects yet portray themselves as having the ability to convince others to join them. Juan Pablo states, “it looked almost impossible at the start”, Mabel claims, “I don’t think I’d imagine we’d have a team in less than a year” and Ricardo reflects, “you take a risk, it’s not like I’m doing anything bad, but, I mean, you’re never sure it’s going to work”. Despite this uncertainty, the three advance the idea of convincing others of the merits of their project. Juan Pablo states, “I just told them they’re good at it”, Mabel claims, “I started to convince them” and Ricardo reflects, “I had to talk to lots of people, even friends I hadn’t seen since primary school”.

In summary, the stories of Juan Pablo, Mabel and Ricardo can be read to suggest they understand leadership in a transgenerational way. They do not draw upon the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership *ad litteram*, but appear to emphasise ideas of initiative and risk taking in their understanding of their emerging leader identity. I conceptualise this emerging leader identity as *risk taker identity* and in Chapter Eight, I will discuss what the participants’ stories reveal about ideas of millennial distinctiveness.

Understanding leader identity through two identity discourses

Theories of generational identity would suggest that the millennial participants of this research should understand and perform leadership in terms consistent with *millennial leader identity*, that portrayal of the phenomenon associated their generational identity. In Chapter Four, in the section titled *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*, I discussed this portrayal at length, suggesting it drew upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. I also discussed the evolution of organisational and managerial portrayals of leadership and argued that a *contemporary popular portrayal* can be understood as the default conceptualisation of the phenomenon in the early twenty-first century.

In this chapter, I explored claims of millennial distinctiveness through ideas of leadership and in doing so addressed the question *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?* I identified that while eight of the twenty-four participants appear to draw upon *millennial leader identity*, a further seven seem to understand their emerging leader identities in terms more closely associated with the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon. I supported my interpretation of the participants' portrayal of leadership by employing direct quotations from their interviews.

As I discussed the participants' *leader talk*, I alluded to a series of findings that I will explore in more detail in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Emerging leader identity in young adult Mexicans*. First, I suggest that leadership *per se*, despite its relevance in popular discourses of identity and its privileged role in schools, was less prominent in the participants' narratives than I expected. Fifteen of the twenty-four participants appear to

incorporate themes of leadership into their ideas of selfhood. Secondly, I find only partial support for the idea that millennials understand and perform leadership in a way that differentiates them from their predecessors. Only eight of the fifteen participants that understood themselves as leaders did so by drawing upon ideas associated with *millennial leader identity*. Thirdly, the participants did not adopt either dominant discourse of leadership *ad litteram*, but instead worked or fashioned four more nuanced alternatives of selfhood. I understand these four portrayals in terms of a simple heuristic: i) *counsellor identity* ii) *communicator identity* iii) *trait identity* and iv) *risk taker identity*.

In the following chapter, I analysis more fully the empirical findings of this research with respect to millennial distinctiveness. I will discuss how I come to conceptualise and theorise the results of this research and their contribution to our knowledge of generational identity, organisationally-based identities and identity construction.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Introduction

As millennials take the lead, all generations must attempt to forge strong interpersonal relationships that deepen their understanding of each other's backgrounds, motivations and perspectives (Ellis, 2016, p. ii).

Ideas of millennial distinctiveness are at the heart of this research. The above quotation alludes to a number of key concepts that have come to colour both popular and academic understandings of the organisation and society at large. First, popular authors portray each generation as different from its predecessors. The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) is no different. Its transformative portrayal, which I have conceptualised by means of seven millennial roles, advances the ideas of millennial distinctiveness and generational change. Secondly, organisations and organisationally-based identities are increasingly understood in generational terms. Ideas of 'generation gaps' and 'intergenerational conflict' allude to the supposed challenges of the multigenerational workplace (Howe & Strauss, 2007, 2000; Elmore, 2009; Alsop, 2008). Thirdly, ideas of leadership form an important part of generational portrayals, a characteristic by which members of one generation can be differentiated from those of another. Millennials are portrayed to understand and perform the phenomenon in a way that draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*.

However, as I discussed in my review of the literature in chapters two to four, I do identify certain unresolved debates with respect ideas of generational and organisationally-based identity. First, theories of generational identity draw predominantly upon academic studies, and the popular literature and media, of Anglo-

Saxon populations (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016; Donnison, 2010; Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Watson, 2008). Secondly, while much is known about how adults in full-time employment construct their organisationally-based identities, much can still be learnt about the emerging organisationally-based identities of those in young adulthood (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Pez , 2013; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; Bellesia, Mattarelli, Bertolotti & Sobrero, 2019; Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017). This research extends our knowledge of both fields (i.e., generational and organisationally-based identity) by exploring ideas of millennial distinctiveness in the emerging identities of young adults in Mexico. Finally, while the popular discourse frames generational identity informing organisationally-based identity, a closer look at these two contemporary alternatives of selfhood likely reveals a more complex relationship.

In this research I have engaged these aforementioned key concepts and unresolved debates by exploring the emerging identities of twenty-four Mexican young adults. I have done this by means of two research questions.

3. To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?
4. To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?

This research scrutinises both ideas of millennial distinctiveness (i.e., that millennials are somehow different from their predecessors) and the relationship between generational and leader identities (i.e., that being a millennial necessarily means understanding and performing leadership in a certain way). It does so by addressing the emerging identity of young adult Mexicans who have yet to enter full-time employment.

In this chapter I do three things. First, I discuss what my empirical findings reveal about emerging selfhood in young adults. In particular, I reflect if ideas of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations appear to support ideas of millennial distinctiveness. Secondly, I discuss what my interpretation of the participants' accounts of leadership reveal about their emerging leader identity. Thirdly, and drawing upon these findings, I theorise alternative conceptualisations of generational and organisationally-based identities.

In search of millennial distinctiveness

In chapter six, I addressed the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* I did so by discussing the participants' *identity talk* of ideas of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations. In this section, I discuss what my findings reveal about claims of millennial distinctiveness, generational change and selfhood in general.

i. Positive family portrayals: cultural before generational explanations

Ideas of family were relevant to the identity construction of seventeen of the twenty-four participants. I understood these accounts by means of three sub-themes: i) communication and shared confidence ii) intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and moments spent with loved ones and iii) parents as educators and mentors. What conclusions or inferences can I draw from these stories about ideas of

millennial distinctiveness? Do they support ideas of generational change or appear to reflect a transgenerational understanding of family?

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, millennials are portrayed to have a distinctive understanding of family, one articulated in the ‘sense of being special, protected by, and emotionally close to their parents’ millennial role. Millennials are protected from the dangers of life by caring, involved and engaged parents and the closeness and the intimacy of their family relationships are suggested to promote stability, self-confidence and self-esteem (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Alsop, 2008; Pettigrew, 2015). This millennial portrayal differs significantly from that of its predecessors. In the portrayal of the Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) and Generation X (born 1965 to 1980), the family is often associated with friction, tension and even intergenerational conflict. Young adult Baby Boomers challenged familial and institutional authority leading to the civil rights and liberation movements; meanwhile young adult Xers, rejected and distrusted family and other institutions as a result of experiencing the phenomenon of absent parents, divorce, teen pregnancy and AIDS. Indeed, in general, the life-stages of adolescence and young adulthood are conceptualised as a “turbulent development period” (van Petegem et al., 2015, p. 903; Arnett, 1999), in which family relations “are sometimes, perhaps even oftentimes, disagreeable and stressful” (Montemayor, 1983, p. 83). Indeed, I recognise that this is my own personal experience: returning from school and heading straight upstairs to my bedroom or outside to the sports fields.

It appears that the participants’ accounts of family can be read to support ideas of generational change, lending credence to ideas of a ‘sense of being special, protected by,

and emotionally close to their parents' millennial role. Family is portrayed in terms of communication and shared confidence (e.g., Diana claims, "We tell each other everything, absolutely everything"); stable domestic and family routines and moments spent with loved ones (e.g., Mabel states, "it's being together that's important"); and parents as educators and mentors (e.g., Estela reflects, "their ideals are different, their education too, how they've educated me"). Can it be that the rebellious and independently minded youth of the Baby Boomers and Generation X has been replaced by loving and respectful millennials? (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Alsop, 2008). Do the participants' accounts point to a new millennial understanding of family? Have relationships characterised by tension and distrust been replaced by those of illustrative of cooperation and confidence?

Before drawing such a conclusion, I offer the following reflections. First, and as I have discussed in Chapter Six, I recognise the likelihood of the participants presenting their family life in idyllic terms. Indeed, as young adults who live at home and have yet to enter full-time employment, it is reasonable to assume family plays an important part in their ideas of selfhood. Some particularly glowing stories do point to narrative editing by the participants, not itself unique to millennials, and one of the challenges faced by researchers generally (e.g., Claudia claims, "my mum never judged me" and Roxana reflects "I mean, having your family close, doing well at school, that's what happiness is about").

Secondly, given the participants' particular socio-historical location, their accounts of family might be better understood in terms of cultural influences before generational ones. In particular, the value of *familism* might account for the prevalence and very positive portrayals of family. Smith-Morris et al. (2012) define familism as "the

elevation of the needs of the family (both nuclear and extended) over the needs of the individual” (Smith-Morris et al., 2012, p.2). Familism is conceptualised as the individual’s commitment to familial relationships (Moore, 1970; Tallman, Marotz-Baden & Pindas, 1983), the value placed on family unity and solidarity (Baca Zinn, 2000), the prioritisation of family interests before personal ones (Bush, Supple & Lash, 2004), and “the perception of parents serving as legitimate sources of guidance and authority” (Stein, et al., 2014, p.242). Familism is “an essential feature of traditional Mexican culture” (Fuller-Iglesias & Antonucci, 2016, p. 3) and “a defining feature of social and personal relationships for individuals of Mexican origin” (Bush, Supple & Lash, 2004, p. 40). Many characteristics of familism are reflected in the sub-themes by which I understand the participants’ accounts of family: i) communication and shared confidence ii) intimate relationships, stable domestic and family routines and moments spent with loved ones and iii) parents as educators and mentors. Consequently, the centrality of accounts of family in the narratives of seventeen participants might be understood as reflecting cultural identity influences more than generational ones: the continued relevance of familism before any distinctive millennial understanding of the family. In other words, family is an important source of self-definition for the participants not because they are millennials, but because they are Mexican. This understanding of the participants’ accounts alludes not to millennial distinctiveness and generational change but to tradition, generational continuity and the importance of localised identity influences.

To conclude, while idyllic portrayals of family might appear to lend support for millennial distinctiveness, I suggest they are better understood in terms of the cultural

value of familism. This traditional and localised identity influence provides a better explanation for the participants' accounts than claims of a distinctive millennial identity.

ii. Faith: The forgotten institution of millennial transformation

Ideas of faith were relevant to the identity construction of thirteen of the twenty-four participants. I understood these accounts by means of two sub-themes: i) obedience and reverence and ii) empowerment and optimism. What conclusions or inferences can I draw from these stories about ideas of millennial distinctiveness? Do they support ideas of generational change and a distinctive millennial understanding or performance of faith?

As I have discussed in Chapter Six, ideas of faith are absent in universalising and homogenising generational portrayals. Their relevance to the selfhood of thirteen participants alludes to their socio-historical location and the continued role Catholicism plays in Mexican culture and society (Camp, 1997; García Alba, 2011). Some participants likely employed ideas of faith for my consumption, editing their narratives to frame their lives in more pious terms than they actually are. While I anticipated the salience of religious identity, what was revelatory was the way the participants' articulated their faith.

Faith is potentially a revolutionary and transformative institution, an inspiration for economic, political, social and historical challenge and change (Hjarvard, 2016; Lincoln, 1985). Likewise, The Millennial Generation is portrayed in transformative and disruptive terms. Faith then would appear to be a particularly apt conduit for the participants to promote, demand or enact transformation. However, their accounts cannot be read to support ideas of change and instead faith is experienced as a conservative, traditional and personal phenomenon. The participants conceptualise their faith as an

accepted set of values and ideals that guide individual decision-making and behaviour. They are either willing adherents (e.g., Gerardo claims, “it’s about how my faith guides the way I live my life”) or empowered believers (e.g., Estela states, “it’s helped me become more responsible, more tenacious and to always achieve what I set out to do”). In neither role do the participants challenge existing social, economic or political structures, nor indeed the authority of the church in contemporary society. While faith is cited as a motivation for community participation, it is done so within existing structures and without a challenge to the *status quo* (e.g., Estela refers to herself as “trying harder to give the best of me for others”; Diana claims her faith as “it’s humanitarian too”; and Tiffany alleges “so you have a responsibility to others”).

To conclude, the participants’ conservative and traditional portrayal of faith sits uneasily with the transformative and disruptive label attributed The Millennial Generation. It might reveal the performative nature of the participants’ religious identity (i.e., their exaggerated piety) or the conservative nature of Catholicism in Mexico. At least, it appears to suggest that the transformative millennial, if indeed one exists, finds other institutions or projects through which to channel their disruptive energy. Faith is not the millennial’s engine of generational change.

iii. Institutionalised altruism: a new form of millennial identity regulation

Ideas of altruism were relevant to the identity construction of seventeen participants. I understood these accounts by means of three sub-themes: i) institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of altruism ii) teamwork and collaboration and iii) care, generosity and personal satisfaction. Can I understand the participants’ accounts

in ways that advance ideas of millennial distinctiveness? Do they support ideas of generational change or simply illustrate that millennials, like their predecessors, leave their legacy upon society through good works?

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, millennial altruism is articulated in the ‘young altruist’ millennial role. Millennials are portrayed as understanding their responsibility towards others and confident in their ability to achieve change (Sax, 2003; Elmore, 2010; Pettigrew, 2015). Despite the catchiness of this neatly packaged role, academic studies do not reveal the millennials to be more altruistic than their predecessors. Indeed, altruism is a theme common to generational discourses, evoking nineteenth century philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson’s reflection that “to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived - that is to have succeeded.” The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945) is depicted in terms of service, sacrifice and fighting against tyranny for freedom and liberty. The Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) fought for civil rights and gender liberation against institutionalised discrimination. Generation X (born 1965 to 1980), suspicious of institutions, weathered social, economic and technological upheaval to prosper as practical entrepreneurs, wealth and job creators and dedicated parents.

The accounts of the seventeen participants can be read to support the idea that millennials, like their predecessors before them, leave a legacy to society. In stories of *teamwork and collaboration* and *care, generosity and personal satisfaction*, the participants allude to their positive contribution (e.g., Juan Pablo refers to “everyone doing their bit”; Diana claims, “there are lots of ways you can help”; and Claudia states, “It’s about helping others”). These stories appear to illustrate that millennials “appreciate

the feeling of serving others” (Elmore, 2010, p. 37) and do so through “individual initiative linked to community action” (Winograd & Hais, 2011, p. 226).

Of course, the participants’ accounts might also be interpreted to understand them conforming to certain norms and expectations *vis-à-vis* their role in the community. The writers of generational discourses (i.e., older generations) do well by inviting younger ones (i.e., those with greater economic potential), to understand themselves as altruistic contributors to society. The ‘young altruist’ role serves such a purpose. Indeed, millennials are “bombarded with messages that they should serve their community” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p.234), and schools play an increasing role in facilitating the opportunities to do so. Given levels of poverty, inequality and economic growth in contemporary Mexico, it is likely that the participants would want to exemplify their solidarity and commitment to others less fortunate than themselves.

The idea of conforming to societal expectations of altruism is relevant in understanding one particularly distinctive characteristic of the participants’ portrayal of their social service. Nine of the seventeen participants alluded to the institutionalised and instrumentalised nature of their altruism. They framed their altruistic activities not as personal projects, but subject to bureaucratic processes and integrated within their school experience (e.g., Alexis states, “it’s still something you’ve got to do to graduate” and Andrea refers to “a project that was obligatory as part of your grade”). Other participants, suggesting ideas of instrumentalism, refer to the benefit their participation confers for future career prospects (e.g., Christian claims, “I guess I’m getting practice” and Claudia reflects, “It’s experience, I mean you’re not going to get that, well, just by studying, just by reading”).

The formalisation of the participants' participation within schools appears to differentiate the millennials from their predecessors. Their accounts likely illustrate a new role schools are assuming in the preparation of their students. Increasingly, schools organise and formalise community activities, volunteer projects and social entrepreneurship programs, "training grounds for civic involvement...and create avenues for service work" (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002, p.31; Print, 2007; Hahn, 1996). Credit courses can require individuals to accumulate a certain number of hours in the community and schools with religious affiliation often have programs directed to more specific and disadvantaged groups. Further, pedagogies such as *servicing learning*, formal projects within the curriculum that offer "an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112), are increasingly common in schools in the U.S., Mexico and around the world (Crick, 2000, 1999; Ostler & Starkey, 2005; Print, 2007; Kiwan, 2007). Indeed, I recognise this trend in the school where I work. Students are exposed to relevant societal issues in a controlled and organised way. As they get older, their required social service becomes longer and more academically demanding. In their final semester, they must accredit a course of *Social Leadership* that entails around forty hours of necessary 'voluntary work'.

This new role assumed by schools can be considered an example of Foucauldian *technologies of power* (Foucault, 1998). These technologies of power act to invite individuals to understand themselves in certain ways and to conform to certain expectations (Foucault, 1998). The community activities, volunteer projects and social entrepreneurship programs offered by schools invite their students to assume an 'altruistic identity' and conform to school and societal expectations (Jeffrey & Troman, 2009). I

understand the participants' altruism then, not as "individual initiative linked to community action" (Winograd & Hais, 2011, p. 226), but as a type of identity performance that conforms to external expectations (Goffman, 1958). This conceptualisation contributes to debates within organisational studies about the authenticity of selfhood, a sense "that one's life, both public and private, reflects one's real self" (George, 1998, p. 134), of organisationally-based identities. If the participants' altruistic identity is encouraged, if not prescribed, by school administrators, one must reflect how they really understand themselves *vis-à-vis* their commitment to others. Indeed, an opportunity exists to explore if this experience of social service impacts on the participants' later *volunteer role identity* and likelihood of future altruism (Penner, 2002; Callero, 1985; Grube & Piliavin, 2000).

To conclude, the participants' accounts can be read to suggest, that like their predecessors, millennials assume their societal commitment. How they experience altruism however might be distinctive. The participants allude to an institutionalised process that illustrates how schools provide opportunities for their students to both act, and see themselves, in altruistic terms.

iv. Future plans and aspirations: a reflection of identity security

Ideas of future plans and aspirations were relevant to the identity construction of fourteen of the twenty-four participants. I understood these stories by means of three sub-themes i) economic opportunities and cultural diversity ii) educational attainment and iii) business ownership and management. Can I understand the participants' accounts in ways that support ideas of millennial distinctiveness? Do they envision their future in ways

different to their predecessors? Do their accounts of their post high-school life reflect ideas common to contemporary discussions of economy and organisation? (e.g., robotisation, big data, gig-economy).

As I have discussed in Chapter Four, The Millennial Generation is portrayed to experience a post high-school economy and workplace very different from its predecessors. The *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* alludes to the changes brought about by technological ‘disruptors’ such as artificial intelligence, big data, robotisation, the internet-of-things and the gig-economy. This discourse appears to extrapolate the ‘digital generation’ role into the organisation and society: technology transforming the millennials’ experience of career, organisation, economy and society.

However, the participants’ accounts cannot be read to support this transformative vision of the future. Their stories of future plans and aspirations draw upon traditional and conservative models of career paths and omit mention of the aforementioned ‘disruptors’. Nor do the participants appear to draw upon, as role models, some of the public figures that most clearly represent this technological revolution - and who have provided the apps in their cellphones (e.g., Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook; Brian Chesky, Airbnb; Drew Houston, Dropbox; Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Instagram). Despite the prevalence of these technologies and the apparent accessibility of their role model creators, the participants do not envisage themselves as future tech-gurus or industry-disruptors. Even in the participants’ accounts of education, there is no mention of contemporary technologies such as micro-credentials, online degrees and MOOCs. I recognise of course, and as I discussed in Chapter Five, (see page 140), that the absence of references to technology might reflect the limited recourses available to the participants

who attended public schools, particularly those outside of Guadalajara. Far from reflecting ideas of the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*, the participants' accounts appear to rely on more transgenerational and traditional understandings of their future. Four participants from rural towns aspire to move to bigger cities for greater economic opportunities (e.g., Mabel refers to "a place with more opportunities"). A further six participants appear to privilege educational attainment as the route to career success (e.g., Christian claims, "You've got to keep studying. I mean, I've got a good basic knowledge, from the college I mean, but I can't stop, not in computing"). A final four describe their future in terms of traditional business ownership and management (e.g., Andrea states, "I can own it, and direct and supervise things"). The transformative workplace, organisation and economy, so prevalent in popular culture, is absent from the participants' understanding of their future.

However, career paths have undoubtedly changed over successive generations (Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017; Landy & Conte, 2016). Lyons, Schweitzer and Ng (2015) refer to a "new career" model that is characterised by "increased individual agency, flexibility of career paths and greater mobility across career boundaries such as job and organization" (Lyons, Schweitzer & Ng, 2015, p. 9). Organisations have moved from long term fixed contracts to project-based contracts and outsourcing. Downsizing, globalisation and technological innovation have adjusted expectations for internal advancement, wage growth and work-life balance. Indeed, Audretsch and Thurik (2000) refer to an "entrepreneurial society", in which "new knowledge requires a very different industrial structure as well as economic values. People who can create new ideas and implement them become highly valued" (Audretsch & Thurik, 2000, p.24). With

particular reference to Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) promoted bilateral trade with the U.S., lead to the construction of factories or 'maquiladoras' in boarder states and accelerated rural to urban migration. However, in the twenty-first century, low price Chinese competition, a falling oil price and investment uncertainty caused by cartel violence have all limited economic growth to little more than 1% per annum. In other words, given the technological, structural and competitive changes in the economy, organisation and labour market, it seems very likely that the participants will indeed experience working life in ways very different from their father's generation.

However, these changes are not reflected in the traditional career paths through which the participants visualise their future. To understand their conservative accounts of their future plans and aspirations, I return to ideas of organisationally-based identities that I discussed in Chapter Four. The workplace is a space where we shape who we are (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt, 2000). The organisations we belong to, and the role we play within them, act to, "anchor members' identities and help buffer them from anxiety" (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 29). Very shortly many of the participants in this research will join the workforce for the first time. The *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* suggests they will experience a new relationship with their employer, one characterised by change and uncertainty. Both the organisation and its members are portrayed to require ceaseless innovation, learning and adaptation - reinventing themselves as technology, markets and economics require. In what Sennett (2000, p.9) calls "flexible capitalism", ideas of mutual loyalty, collective commitments and long-term goals are redefined (Sennett, 2000). Popular portrayals of

this ‘freelancer’ in the gig-economy suggest opportunities for greater autonomy, creativity and ‘blending’ work and home life. Pink (2002) states, “America’s new economic emblem is the footloose, independent worker - the tech savvy, self-reliant, path-charting micropreneur” (Pink, 2002, p. 14). This somewhat utopian portrayal is articulated in titles such as *Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself* (Pink, 2002); *Freelance Revolution: How to Make Big Money as a Freelancer in 7 Days or Less* (Krikpatrick, 2014) and *Gigonomics: A Field Guide for Freelancers in the Gig Economy* (Haber, 2018). Academic studies however appear to suggest such benefits are enjoyed by only the most skilled independent workers (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 29). Instead, the majority face a reality characterised by uncertainty over future income, overwork and irregular work hours, social isolation and only a limited ability to take advantage of time-flexibility (Keplinger, et al., 2018; Wood, Lehdonvirta & Graham, 2018; Padavic, 2005; Barley & Kunda, 2004).

Identity stability is also threatened by this new organisational-economic reality. Gold and Fraser (2002) find that without strong organisational identification, independent workers must find alternative sources of self-definition and “construct non-organizationally sustained accounts of their working lives” (Gold & Fraser, 2002, p. 583; Fenwick, 2002). Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski (2018) allege independent workers find themselves “in a void that clarified who they were not - organizational members - but left it up to them to define who they were in a predicament characterized by loneliness, freedom, and unrelenting direct exposure to the free market” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p.29).

Do the participants' accounts of their future reflect that 'void'? If during adolescence and young adulthood they have come answer the question *Who am I?*, they now need to construct new ideas of selfhood to successfully respond to the challenge of defining *Who will I be?* On leaving school they likely lose a set of social identities that have become an important part of their sense of self (e.g., school affiliation, membership of sports groups). However, and unlike the case of their predecessors, the twenty-first century workplace may not offer the same opportunities for self-definition - organisations no longer acting as the identity anchors they once were (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018). The participants' accounts of their future plans and aspirations might be understood as illustrating their ignorance about the realities that face them. Alternatively, and I believe more likely, they might reflect a desire for a sense of identity security and stability post-high school. Organisationally-based identities are often conceptualised in terms of *stability* and *fluidity* (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999; Albert & Whetten, 1985). In this research, I understand the participants privileging the former. Their accounts of the future rely on traditional models of career paths, both socially accepted, and commonly articulated, ways of defining their future selves. For example, those searching for better economic opportunities see themselves 'moving to the bright lights of the city'; those accumulating undergraduate and postgraduate degrees visualise their future in familiar terms; those with ideas of 'being their own boss' draw upon traditional portrayals of the business leader, autonomy and control. If the participants' accounts of future plans and aspirations disappoint with respect to the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*, it might reflect their desire, in uncertain times, to draw upon known alternatives for selfhood to understand their future self.

v. Millennial distinctiveness: popular portrayal or popular fiction?

In this section, I have discussed what the participants' accounts of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations reveal about ideas of millennial distinctiveness. In doing so, I have addressed the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* First, while stories of family appear to illustrate a distinctive millennial understanding of the phenomenon, they can be better understood in terms of the cultural value of familism. Secondly, stories of faith are likewise disappointing in supporting ideas of a transformative millennial generation. While, the participants' socio-historical location accounts for the prevalence of such stories, faith is employed in conservative terms and not as conduit through which to challenge to the *status quo*. Thirdly, the participants' accounts of altruism, a theme common to generational portrayals, do suggest there is something distinctive about how millennials experience their community participation. The institutionalised and instrumentalised nature of their participation likely reflects a new role assumed by schools. This role responds to societal expectations, a form of identity regulation in which young people are educated to see themselves in altruistic terms. Fourthly, accounts of future plans and aspirations appear to draw upon traditional career paths by which to understand the future. The very transformative context in which the millennials are supposed to experience work and the organisation is not reflected in their stories. I understand the conservatism of the participants' accounts as revealing their need for identity security as they leave school and enter the workforce for the first time.

Overall, accounts of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations appear to challenge the portrayal of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) as

transformative, disruptive and provoking societal change. My first principal conclusion of this research is that I find only weak support for a distinctive millennial identity, one clearly articulated in the popular discourse of the generation, but generally lacking in the participants' accounts. Later, in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *The overreliance of ideas of millennial distinctiveness on the 'digital generation' characterisation*, I will theorise why this popular portrayal of the millennial is not generally reflected in my participants' accounts of selfhood.

Emerging leader identity in young adult Mexicans

In Chapter Seven, I addressed the question *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?* I did so by understanding the accounts of leadership of fifteen participants by means of two dominant discourses of the phenomenon (i.e., *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership). In this research, I have argued that ideas of leadership are an available and attractive alternative for selfhood given the privilege afforded the phenomenon in contemporary society and its role in educational objectives and school culture. In this section, I discuss what the participants' accounts reveal about claims of a distinctive millennial understanding of the phenomenon. I do so by discussing how they appear to draw upon, resist and subvert the two aforementioned dominant leader discourses and fashion more nuanced alternatives for selfhood.

i. The millennial leader: evidence for a new understanding of leadership

The stories of eight of the twenty-four participants can be read to suggest that they understand or perform leadership in a distinctively millennial way. I understood these stories by means of two sub-themes: i) coaching, mentoring and acting as a role model for others and ii) communication and shared goals. What can I learn from the participants' accounts of their leadership? What do their portrayals of their emerging leader identity reveal about ideas of identity work and identity regulation?

Despite the absolutism of discourses of generational identity, I do not identify a universal *millennial leader identity*. Instead, the participants' accounts can be read to suggest that they work or fashion two distinctive and nuanced adaptations of it. The two aforementioned sub-themes illustrate the concepts of identity regulation and identity work I explored in Chapter Four, and likely refute the fears of *adulthood* (Dejong & Love, 2014) that I discussed in Chapter Five (see page 154). First, by not adopting *millennial leader identity ad litteram*, the participants resist, this leader identity straightjacket. Secondly, by crafting two alternative sources of selfhood, they illustrate their agency in identity construction. They conceptualise their emerging leader identity beyond the two universalising and homogenising portrayals of *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In other words, and contributing to our understanding of organisationally-based identities, it appears that young adults are capable of undertaking identity work to mold and shape their sense of emerging leader identity.

Given my interpretation of the data, I conceptualise the first of these portrayals as *counsellor identity*. I employ this term to encapsulate ideas of coaching and mentoring,

intimacy and confidence and personal authenticity (e.g., Andrea states, “I want to see that they’ll fulfil their own dreams”; Marcos claims “it’s about helping others develop”; and José Carlos reflects “I think the first thing is to be myself”). Organisational understandings of coaching and mentoring convey ideas of leadership development, change-management and goal attainment (Hann, Grant, Burger & Eriksson, 2016; MacKie, 2014). In the dyad of coach and coachee, the former offers insight and guidance to the latter (MacKie, 2014; Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2014). Indeed, the figure of the business coach is hyperbolised in its own popular discourse (Kauffman & Coutu, 2009), a status symbol and recognition of the importance of one’s role in the organisation (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Of course, the four participants in this research (i.e., Andrea, Marcos, José Carlos and Alexis) do not articulate ideas of the counsellor or coach in organisational terms. Instead, they do so within the context of those institutions of which they are a part (e.g., family, school, church, friendships). I conceptualise this as illustrating the ‘creep’ of organisationally-based identities into the culture, language and objectives of schools. The participants advance the idea of being willing, empathetic and sympathetic listeners, effective communicators and disinterested advice-givers (e.g., Andrea reflects, “I think, they’re comfortable with me”; Marcos alleges, “talking to them professionally, but at their level”; and José Carlos claims, “I try and be myself, the way I am, patient, someone who listens to others”). In other words, the accounts of the four participants can be read as drawing upon one aspect of *millennial leader identity*, that of coaching and mentoring, and modifying these ideas to their personal context. The *counsellor identity*, more relational than organisational in its articulation, reflects the age and situation of the participants and with whom they perform their leadership (i.e., young adult classmates).

I conceptualise the second portrayal of leadership that emerges from my interpretation of the data as the *communicator identity*. I employ this term to encapsulate ideas of communication and shared goals. The accounts of four participants (i.e., María José, Denis, Diego and Aldo) can be read to suggest they understand leadership in terms of another aspect of *millennial leader identity*: effective communication, negotiating and working towards collective outcomes (e.g., María José states, “A leader always thinks of ‘win-win’”; Diego alludes to being “the referee, like, to conciliate”; and Aldo claims, “You’ve got this objective, and well, everyone’s doing their part”). The *communicator identity*, unlike the *counsellor identity*, is articulated in terms that are central to the organisational discourse of leadership (e.g., María José refers to teamwork and effectiveness, Denis to communication and Aldo to coordination). The *communicator* appears to allow the participants to articulate emerging leadership in organisational terms, framing their role in terms of facilitating others to achieve a shared goal.

ii. Popular portrayals of the leader figure: the persistence of transgenerational understandings

While eight of the twenty-four participants appear to draw upon *millennial leader identity*, the accounts of a further seven can be read to suggest that they understand or perform leadership in a way that reveals a more transgenerational understanding of the phenomenon. Schools and the other institutions relevant to the participants’ lives - “identity workspaces for their members” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; p. 29) - appear then to offer alternatives for ideas of emerging leader identity. The seven participants allude to the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership and articulate ideas of the heroic, romanticised and game-changing leader figure. I understood these

stories by means of two sub-themes: i) superior personal traits and ii) initiative and risk taking. These accounts appear to contest the idea that millennials necessarily understand and perform leadership in a distinctively millennial way. What do they tell me about how the participants draw upon ideas of leadership for self-definition?

Four of the seven participants, namely Christian, Tiffany, Claudia and Diana, framed their portrayal of leadership in terms of their personal traits, implicitly superior to others, and echoing 'great man' theories of leadership (e.g., Christian draws upon his intellect, "I've given the school a great intellectual level"; Tiffany alludes to her planning, execution and influence "someone with just more to give than the others"; Claudia makes direct reference to her leadership ability, "the one that's coordinating things"; and Diana alludes to her communication skills, "I feel I can communicate well, differently with each one"). I conceptualise these accounts of leadership as *trait identity*, their ideas of emerging identities supported by superior personal qualities. Whereas *counsellor identity* and *communicator identity* suggest ideas of collaboration, care and shared goals, *trait identity* appears to suggest difference and outsiderdom: the participants are blessed with certain abilities that differentiate them from others. Moreover, I understand the participants attempting to embellish their leader identity by employing exaggeration and citing an adult in a position of authority to lend credence to their claims (e.g., Christian says, "The director started to appreciate me because I've offered a lot to the school"; Tiffany alleges, "There's a lot of times when I've played a big role"; and Claudia claims she is "one of the leaders of the school"). *Trait identity* allows the participants to bring to the fore their personal traits, frames leadership in traditional terms, and differentiates the leader from others.

I understand the accounts of a second group of three participants as alluding to a *risk-taker identity*. The accounts of Juan Pablo, Mabel and Ricardo can be read to suggest they understand leadership in terms of taking the initiative, assuming certain risk and convincing others to join them in a shared project. They frame their projects in heroic terms, emphasising the odds that face them at the start (e.g., Juan Pablo, on starting the school debating team states “it looked almost impossible at the start”; Mabel refers to her efforts in founding the volleyball team stating, “I don’t think I’d imagine we’d have a team in less than a year”; and Ricardo, of his Christian rock-band claims, “I didn’t have a lot of confidence it would work”). In *trait identity*, I understood the participants differentiating and distancing themselves from others. However, the *risk-taker identity*, while heroic in its actions, requires the help and participation of others. The three participants refer to convincing, or negotiating with others, to join their project (e.g., Juan Pablo alleges, “I just told them they’d be good at it”; Mabel claims, “I started to convince them”; and Ricardo reflects, “I had to talk to lots of people”). *Risk-taker identity* allows the participants to emphasis certain personal traits (i.e., initiative, risk taking and negotiation) while recognising the collaborative nature of leadership.

In the previous section, I discussed how the accounts of eight participants, drawing upon *millennial leader identity*, can be understood by means of a *counsellor identity* and *communicator* identities. In this section, I have argued that a further seven participants appear to draw upon the *contemporary popular portrayal* of leadership, understanding their emerging identity through two portrayals, *trait identity* and *risk-taker identity*. That leadership is both an attractive and accessible alternative for selfhood for fifteen of the twenty-four participants is perhaps understandable given the societal privilege afforded

the phenomenon and its increasing role in ideas of school culture and success (Coupland, 2003).

However, I find only partial support for the idea that millennials understand leadership in a distinctive way. Only eight of the fifteen participants that appear to draw upon ideas of leadership for self-definition, do so in ways that can be read to suggest a distinctively millennial portrayal. Contesting ideas articulated in the contemporary popular portrayal of generations, this research suggests there is no simple link between millennial and leader identity.

Indeed, this research advances the idea that identity work is still very relevant in understanding selfhood, resisting claims of generational determinism, and conserving agency and autonomy (Brown, 2015). The fifteen participants do not draw *ad litteram* on dominant discourses of the phenomenon but instead fashion four more nuanced representations (e.g., *counsellor*, *communicator*, *trait* and *risk-taker*). These four identities illustrate the participants' identity work and how they craft their own sense of leader self.

However, ideas of leadership are not only reflected in the participants' stories of the phenomenon. The accounts family, faith and altruism can also be read to reveal how the participants find alternatives for selfhood beyond dominant leader discourses. It is to that identity work that I turn to in the following section.

iii. Beyond leadership: identity work and alternatives for selfhood

In Chapter Six, I addressed the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* I did so by discussing four identity influences: i) family ii) faith iii) altruism and iv) future plans and aspirations. In this section I return to three of these influences. I discuss whether the participants' accounts can be read to suggest they employ these themes to support, resist or subvert ideas of leadership. What does their identity work reveal about alternatives for selfhood beyond ideas of leadership? Do ideas of family, faith and altruism provide the participants alternatives for self-definition that resist ideas commonly associated with leadership?

First, ideas of family appear to provide the participants with an alternative for selfhood to those ideas commonly associated with leadership. Framing oneself as 'part of the family' confers a set of values (e.g., care, intimacy, cooperation, dependence, guidance, learning, willingly letting others make decisions) that resist and contest ideas of autonomy, individualism, individual success and competition. An inclusive and collective 'we-family' identity advances ideas of shared values, learning and enjoyment. Confidence and acceptance abound, two psychosocial attributes important in the life-stage of adolescence (e.g., Diana claims "There's never been taboos"; Andrea states "with him it's something deeper"; and Tiffany reflects "They know everything about me"). Ideas of hierarchy, parental imposition, sibling rivalry and family tension are generally absent from the participants' stories. Indeed, their identity work can be read to suggest that they recognise the leadership of others, are willing to be guided by others, and accept the decisions made by those closest to them (e.g., Roxana states, "thanks to them, like I said,

I've learnt good from bad" and Estela refers to, "how they've educated me"). In summary, accounts of family appear to be an antidote to ideas of leadership and emphasise the collective before the individual; cooperation before competition; and dependence before autonomy. If school and society privilege individualism, competition and aggression, then the participants' portrayal of family encapsulates a set of more collectivist and humanistic ideas and values through which to understand selfhood.

Secondly, ideas of faith appear to allow the participants to portray themselves in both follower and leader roles. Stories of *obedience and reverence* allude to faith as a reference or standard by which the participants live their life (e.g., Gerardo states, "it's about how faith guides the way I live my life" and Lety claims, "I see everything I do influenced by faith"). Stories of *empowerment and optimism* advance the idea that faith is a source of inspiration and action (e.g., Michelle states, "it's about looking forward, like having a purpose or mission in life" and Estela alleges "it's helped me become more responsible, more tenacious and to always achieve what I set out to do"). It is unsurprising that this dichotomy exists, after all, the idea that submission leads to self-realisation is one of faith's core messages.

However, faith itself can be understood to inform ideas of *millennial leader identity*. In Chapter Four, in the section titled, *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*, I argued that this millennial portrayal draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. The former, servant leadership, with its focus on community and empowering others, is "highly consistent with Judeo-Christian philosophical traditions and teachings" (Reinke, 2004, p.34). Wong and Davey (2007) suggest that ideas of serving others have

a long history in Christian tradition and cite the Gospel of Mark, “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:42 NIV). Moreover, Jesus Christ is frequently offered as an example of the servant leader, “motivated not by a desire for status and control but by a call to servanthood, with a primary responsibility to care for others” (Ebener & O’Connell, 2010, p.319; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Indeed, Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) refer to servant leadership’s “biblical roots” and offer “the notion of servant leadership originates in the Bible” (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 61). However, Parris and Peachey (2013) also recognise that the theory “echoes the messages” of other historical and spiritual figures such as Gandhi, Lao-tzu and Confucius (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p.379). Given the participants’ socio-historical location, perhaps the accounts of *millennial leader identity* might be understood in terms of the salience of religious identity. Of the eight participants who draw upon ideas of *millennial leader identity*, faith appears to play an important role in the selfhood of only two (i.e., José Carlos and María José). I am left to reflect if faith, consciously or not, informs how the other six understand themselves as leaders? Might the participants’ accounts of *millennial leader identity* reflect the relevance of local identity influences (i.e., religious identity) before any distinctively millennial understanding of the phenomenon? As was the case of portrayals of family, the participants’ stories of a distinctive understanding of leadership might be less a result of their millennial identity and more to do with the Christian foundations of servant leadership (Reinke, 2004).

Thirdly, while ideas of altruism are common to generational portrayals and describe the societal contribution and legacy of each, they also reveal how each generation

conceptualises leadership. For example, The Silent Generation's heroism and sacrifice for others alludes to ideas of a heroic leader figure. The Baby Boomers' push for civil rights advances ideas of rebellion, transformation and challenge to authority. Generation X's rejection of institutions and pragmatic entrepreneurialism can be read to suggest individualism, autonomy and decision-making. These portrayals of legacy encapsulate or allude to ideas of leadership associated with the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon.

However, two of the themes by which I have understood the participants' altruism - *teamwork and collaboration*; and *care, generosity and personal satisfaction* - suggest a very different understanding of leadership. These accounts allude to ideas of unselfishness, generosity, shared experience, dependence and comradery. The eight participants claim to derive personal enjoyment and satisfaction from helping others and recognise the value of working towards shared goals. They advance the idea of caring not only for individual achievement but for the well-being of those around them and their community as a whole (e.g., Diana states, "they really enjoyed themselves and it was incredible for me"; Estela claims, "It's about helping each other, showing that we care for each other"; and Claudia reflects "It's about doing something, and everyone can do something to help, help those in need around them"). This sense of the collective, of common goals, collaboration and shared responsibilities, contrasts with the heroism, challenge to authority and individualism that characterises the altruism of the millennials' predecessors. Likely reflecting their religious identity, the accounts of eight participants of altruism can be read to suggest they understand leadership in terms consistent with *millennial leader identity*.

iv. Emerging leader identity: the somewhat missing millennial

In this section, I have discussed what the participants' *leader talk* and their accounts of family, faith and altruism reveal about a distinctive millennial understanding of leadership. In doing so, I have addressed the question *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?* First, and consistent with the privilege afforded leadership in contemporary society, fifteen of the twenty-four participants incorporate elements of the phenomenon in their ideas of selfhood. Secondly, given that only eight of these fifteen participants draw upon ideas associated with *millennial leader identity*, this research lends only partial support for the idea that millennials understand and perform leadership in a distinctive way. Thirdly, and illustrating ideas of identity work, the participants do not define themselves as leaders through the two dominant discourses of the phenomenon. Instead, they fashion four alternatives for selfhood that I have understood as *counsellor*, *communicator*, *trait* and *risk-taker* identities. These identities perhaps illustrate the participants, "*elaborating and developing identities and roles, and struggling to fit into different discourses*" (Andersson, 2005, p. 221, italics in original). Fourthly, accounts of family provide the participants with alternatives for selfhood to those ideas associated with leadership. Accounts of faith are employed by the participants to frame themselves in both leader and follower roles. More interestingly, faith itself seems to inform an important aspect of *millennial leader identity* (e.g., servant leader) thus challenging the supposed distinctiveness of the millennial portrayal. Accounts of altruism differ from those of the millennials' predecessor, suggest a distinctive millennial

understand of leadership, but are likely highly influenced by the participants' religious identity.

In Chapter Six, in the section titled *Millennial distinctiveness: popular portrayal or popular fiction?* I discussed the first principal conclusion of this research: the only weak support I find for ideas of millennial distinctiveness. Drawing on my understanding of the participants' *leader talk*, I offer a further two. The second principal conclusion of this research is to find only partial support for the idea that The Millennial Generation understands and performs leadership in a distinctive way, one that draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. While the phenomenon is relevant to ideas of selfhood for fifteen of the twenty-four participants, their accounts draw upon both dominant leader discourses (i.e., *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal*). The third principal conclusion of this research refers to the identity work undertaken by the participants. They do not draw upon the aforementioned dominant discourse *ad litteram* but instead work or mould four alternative models for their emerging leader identity (e.g., *counsellor*, *communicator*, *trait* and *risk-taker* identities).

Implications for understanding emerging identity in organisational studies

In the previous sections, have I discussed the three principal conclusions of this research. First, I find only weak support for an easily recognisable and distinctive collective identity of The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000). Secondly, I find only partial support for the idea that millennials have a distinctive understanding of leadership. Thirdly, I understand the participants undertaking identity work, moulding dominant discourses of leadership into more nuanced alternatives for selfhood. Given these findings, what can I say about the interplay of ideas of generational identity, organisationally-based identity and other sources of selfhood? Indeed, is the very concept of generational identity useful in understanding the participants' emerging identities? Are ideas of leadership so ubiquitous that the participants have the apparent option to understand themselves in distinctively millennial terms or more transgenerational ones?

The findings of this research make me reflect if the popular discourse of a transformative millennial, with a distinctive understanding of leadership, is a bit of much-ado-about nothing. Is what we have come to believe about the generation more discourse than reality? Perhaps a 'big D' discourse with 'little S' substance? Indeed, Cannadine (2013), in his study of the history of identity scholarship, alludes to the temptation of looking for difference and change while overlooking similarities. Cannadine (2013) claims

Most academics are trained to look for divergence and disparities rather than similarities and affinities, but this relentless urge to draw distinctions often results in important connections and resemblances being overlooked (Cannadine, 2013, p. 9).

The results of this research enrich this debate. In this section, I theorise a more complex interplay between ideas of generational identity, leader identity and identity

construction. I do so in three ways. First, I theorise that a lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' ideas of selfhood can be attributed to the popular discourse's overreliance on ideas of a homogeneous 'digital generation'. Secondly, I offer a theory of emerging organisationally-based identity that draws upon *micro* and *macro* processes of identity construction. Thirdly, I theorise an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adulthood that challenges the dominant discourse characterised by crisis, tension and uncertainty.

i. The overreliance of ideas of millennial distinctiveness on the 'digital generation' characterisation

In this research I have explored the link between generational identity and organisationally-based identities. As I discussed in Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of contemporary generational identities: labels and characteristics*, in contemporary popular culture, and indeed academic theories, generational identity has recently been afforded a privileged, if not decisive role, in supposedly shaping how we think about ourselves. The Millennial Generation is alleged to have a distinctive and transformative collective identity (Alsop, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Anderson et al. (2017, p. 245) allege, "there is clearly a perception that Millennials are most assuredly different than their predecessors with respect to ideas, behaviors and viewpoints" while Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) claim "Millennials have distinctive characteristics that may make interacting with them different from with previous cohorts" (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 234). Drawing upon the work of popular authors, I conceptualised millennial distinctiveness by means of seven millennial roles and a distinctive understanding of leadership.

However, the findings of this research lend only weak support to claims of a distinctive millennial identity, generational change and intergenerational difference. In addressing the question *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?*, I found a paucity of stories on which to build the case for millennial distinctiveness. Accounts of family appear to reflect the cultural value of *familism* before any distinctively millennial characterisation, while faith was articulated in terms of a personal project and not a transformational force. Moreover, accounts of future plans and aspirations lacked the characteristics associated with the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. Only in accounts of altruism, and particularly the theme of *The institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of altruism* (see page 182), did the participants' accounts appear to reveal something distinctively millennial. In other words, the findings of this research lead me to believe that discourses of generational identity overestimate and overemphasise the power of change and underestimate the power of continuity in self-definition. Indeed, traditional identity influences (e.g., family, faith, national identity) appear to be more relevant for self-definition than generational ones. Overall, the participants' narratives lend greater support for ideas of generational continuity and stability before those of distinctiveness, transformation and change. These findings resonate with me. After all, I understand myself principally in terms of profession (a teacher), language (bilingual), geography (immigrant to Mexico), nationality (British) and marital status (married). My generational identity, Generation X (born 1964 to 1980), at least consciously, does not seem to figure importantly in who I think I am.

What might account for the results of this research and the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' accounts of self? I theorise that the differentiation attributed the generation is too dependent on a narrow set of 'generation forming' events. Specifically, I believe that millennial distinctiveness is highly leveraged on ideas of the 'digital generation' or 'digital native' (Prensky, 2001) discourse. This contemporary 'digital discourse' suggests millennials have grown up surrounded by technology, are natural users, experts, and early adopters of new technology (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998; Elmore, 2010). With respect to technology, Rowlands et al. (2008) suggest to the "untested assumption is that this generation is somehow qualitatively 'different' from what went before" (Rowlands et al., 2008, p. 291).

Ideas of *generational consciousness* (Mannheim, 1952), that common bond and understanding of the world shared by members of the same generation, draw upon a *defining events perspective* of generational formation that privileges those events that "capture the attention and emotions of thousands if not millions of individuals at a formative stage of their lives" (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p.16). In my presentation of twentieth century generations in Chapter Three, I identified some of the events associated with the identity of each. These varied events encompass "various life domains" (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2016, p.9). The Silent Generation (born 1925 to 1945) are understood in terms of interwar tensions, global economic depression and the horrors and ultimate victory in World War II. The Baby Boomers (born 1948 to 1964) are framed in terms of post-war reconstruction, increasing material wealth, the civil rights movement, women's liberation and the sexual revolution and the Vietnam War. Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) are portrayed with respect to the challenges of

globalisation, commercialisation and downsizing and increasing AIDS, crime, pregnancy and divorce rates. Ideas of technology and innovation are present in these generational portrayals but they do not form the basis of them (e.g., The Veterans' experience of the technologies of war; the Baby Boomers' enjoyment of post-war consumer technologies; the production and communication technologies that changed the global economy of Generation X).

However, and in contrast to the portrayals of their predecessors, claims for a distinctive millennial identity draw upon a narrower set of 'generation forming' events. I believe that ideas of millennial distinctiveness are overly dependent on one particular life domain (Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2016) - the access to, acceptance, use and expertise, of technology. The 'digital generation' discourse appears to *crowd out* other Anglo-centric events commonly cited by authors to support claims of a distinctive millennial identity (e.g., The Gulf War, Exxon Valdez oil spill, business scandals, the death of Lady Diana and the Columbine school shooting in 1999). The relevance of ideas of technology to sustain millennial distinctiveness is exemplified in the names given to the generation: Prensky's (2001) 'digital native'; Veen and Vrakking (2006) 'homo zappiens'; and Rowlands et al. (2008) 'Google Generation.' Stahl (2017) recognises how this technological discourse has come to characterise millennials stating, "the whole generation was described as possessing different characteristics such as being constantly connected and being both net and ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] savvy" (Stahl, 2017, p.89). Indeed, the technological nature of the millennials is alleged to have spawned "new paradigms of organisation that reflect the relational and technological nature of Millennials" (Balda & Mora, 2011, p. 22).

Of course, the concept of a ‘digital generation’ has as its foundation a set of very real events such as the birth and growth of the internet; the use of social media and social networks; the creation and sharing of online content (e.g., photos, videos and opinion); the idea of online or virtual identities; and the purchase and consumption of products and services online. Perhaps unsurprisingly, ideas of technology inform three of the seven millennial roles I discussed in Chapter Three: i) the *digital generation role* suggests the millennial is a natural, willing and competent technology user (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998; Elmore, 2010); ii) the *good team player* employs these technological skills to share, collaborate and co-create in virtual environments (Balda & Mora, 20011; Howe & Strauss, 2000) and iii) the *busy and pressured* millennial is ‘always on’ or ‘always connected’ and choosing between an exploding choice of technologically enabled entertainment and educational options. As I have stated early, the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace* can be read as extrapolating the millennial’s technological prowess to the organisation and society at large.

Given the importance of the ‘digital discourse’ in sustaining ideas of millennial distinctiveness, what do we actually know about the generation with respect to technology and innovation? Contrary to popular discourses, academic studies reveal a more diverse and complex pattern of technology use among millennials, dispelling, at least partially, the idea of millennial homogeneity (Creighton, 2018; Selwyn, 2009; McNaught, Lam & Ho, 2009). Creighton (2018), reviewing studies of those born between 1980 and 1994 states, “there is no empirically-sound basis for most of the claims about the net generation’s digital learning” (Creighton, 2018, p.134). The author uses the term “net generation” in acknowledgment of the popular characterisation of the generation - one he

cannot find evidence to support (Creighton, 2018, p.134). In their review of the field, and drawing on studies from Austria, Australia, Canada, Switzerland and the United States, Kirschner and De Bruyckere (2017) state

researchers found that university students, all born after the magical year of 1984, do not have deep knowledge of technology, and what knowledge they do have is often limited to the possibilities and use of basic office suite skills, emailing, text messaging, Facebook, and surfing the Internet (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017, p. 136).

Of millennials' technology use, McNaught, Lam and Ho (2009, p.633) acknowledge that, "students do not constitute a homogenous group" while Selwyn (2009) reflects, "engagements with digital technologies are varied and often unspectacular and in stark contrast to popular portrayals of the digital native" (Selwyn, 2009, p.364). Indeed, Bullen, Morgan and Qayyum (2011) state the need to "move away from the simplistic and unsubstantiated generational stereotyping" and conceptualise technology use and competence in more nuanced terms (Bullen, Morgan & Qayyum, 2011, p. 18). Moreover, given the Western centric and Anglo-Saxon nature of generational discourses (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016; Donnison, 2010) it seems likely that the participants' experience of technology differs from that of the imagined 'global millennial'. Indeed, Donnison (2010) states, "It is naïve to assume that a global generation can be defined and described based substantially on North American literature, research, and data" (Donnison, 2010, p. 8). The persistence of the 'digital generation' discourse in popular portrayals and academic research, illustrates an acceptance or willingness, by both millennials and others, to conform to cultural expectations of their respective technological superiority and inferiority.

To conclude, I believe that the ‘digital generation’ characterisation is not a robust foundation for claims of millennial distinctiveness. The discourse of millennial identity is too dependent on this technological facet and lacks the broad spectrum of ‘generational forming’ events that support the identities of the millennials’ predecessors. Academic research suggests the millennials are not homogenous technology users and both geographic and cultural contexts point to a more diverse and complex relationship between young adults and the access, use and preference towards technology. As Stahl (2017) succinctly states, “In the Digital Natives rhetoric, the simplified picture of homogeneous generations has been used as an overriding explanatory factor” (Stahl, 2017, p. 90). This ‘simplified picture’ does not reflect the more complex and heterogeneous technological reality and thus cannot be an effective foundation for claims of millennial distinctiveness. Theorising that claims of millennial distinctiveness are overdependent on ideas of technology allows me to account for the lack of such distinctiveness in the participants’ narratives. Academics and practitioners would do well to diversify the portfolio of events on which millennial identity is based. Moreover, they should avoid that the emerging generational portrayal of Generation Z (born since 2000) falls foul to the same critique.

- ii. Theorising emerging organisationally-based identity in terms of *micro* and *macro* processes of identity construction

Central to debates on generational identity is the extent to which this collective identity largely determines the self-identity of members of each generation and thus allows little room for individual agency. In this research, I have explored the interplay of generational and organisationally-based identity and find no simple relationship between

millennial and leader identities. While eight participants do appear to draw upon *millennial leader identity*, a further seven rely more upon the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon. By exploring these emerging identities in young adult Mexicans, I extend our knowledge of the field. Indeed, I come to the participants at an important time for identity construction. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, foundational approaches to identity understand adolescence and young adulthood as key life-stages for identity construction (Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005; Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980). Marcia (1980, p.160) understands these life-stages as a transition “from other’s expectations and directives to one’s own unique organisation of one’s history, skills, shortcomings, and goals” while Arnett (2000) claims, “When adults later consider the most important events in their lives, they most often name events that took place during this period” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

As I have discussed in my review of the literature, both generational and organisational-based identities are relevant alternatives for selfhood in contemporary society. Organisations are so-called “identity workspaces” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2019; p. 29), and regarded as “main referents for and hosts of people’s efforts to define themselves” (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 2). As I have identified in my discussion of organisationally-based identities, organisations themselves attempt to regulate or control their members’ identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Individuals “embrace, modify or resist” (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016, p.4) the options of self-definition articulated in organisational visions, norms and discourses and undertake identity work to construct their own sense of *organisational self*.

However, and as I have discussed in Chapter Four, these organisationally-based identities are increasingly conceptualised in terms of the supposed generational identity of their members (Howe & Struass, 2008, 2000; Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman and Lance (2010, p.1118) claim, “organisations need a clear understanding of the work values of the new generation and how they may differ from the values of previous generations” while Kraus (2017) acknowledges that “generational characteristics play a significant role in how employees prefer to be led and managed” (Kraus, 2017, p.62). In particular, and as I have discussed in Chapter Four, the idea that The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) has a distinctive understanding of leadership appears to have a special place in contemporary conceptualisations of organisations (Rudolph, Rauvola & Zacher, 2018; Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010; Cates, Conjanu & Pettine, 2013). Rudolph, Rauvola and Zacher (2018, p. 44) state “the idea that generational differences exist has also emerged within contemporary leadership theory”, while Anderson, Baur, Griffith and Buckley (2017) reflect, “Leadership is one important area of research in which changes in employee values urge us to engage in a reconsideration of our current theories” (Anderson, Baur, Griffith & Buckley, 2017, p.246).

However, the findings of this research led me to reject the idea that there is a simple relationship between millennial and leader identity. The participants draw upon, and indeed modify, two dominant discourses of leadership - *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal* - into four more nuanced alternatives of selfhood. These adaptations illustrate how individuals, “actively engage in identity work in order for the leader identity to become a salient component in their working self-concept”

(Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis & Lord, 2017, p. 108). How then, and contrary to the popular discourse of millennial identity, can I account for the diversity of portrayals of leadership the participants appear to incorporate in their ideas of selfhood? It appears that the participants, although not in full-time employment, undertake identity work as organisational studies suggests organisational members do (Brown, 2015, 2001).

I theorise that the construction of organisationally-based identities is based upon two processes (i.e., *micro* and *macro* processes), rejecting the absolutism of generational determinism and accommodating issues of agency and the role of identity work. Indeed, this theorisation conceptualises identity work as a *micro process* of identity construction through which the individual understands, assimilates and enacts the leader role (Klimstra et al., 2010). Within these *micro* processes of identity construction “concrete experiences take place, actions and interactions are carried out, and which involves minutes to hours to days” (Lichtwarck-Aschoff et al., 2008, p.374). These ‘actions and interactions’ represent the reality of organisational life: the frequent contact, formal or otherwise, with other organisational members, including leaders, that take various forms (e.g., conversation, instruction, observation, group work). Organisations however also ‘interact’ with their members by means of their visions, norms and processes (e.g., structure, training, decision-making). The individual’s self-definition with respect to the organisation, what I have called organisationally-based identity, is thus derived from interaction with the organisation itself and its members. Individuals take what they hear, observe, learn and experience from other people such that “utterances become absorbed into one’s story of the self” (Beech, 2008, p. 16). Indeed, of the leader, Karp and Helgo (2008) state, “The development of a self is hence strongly linked to interaction between

leaders and followers, and between leaders and human beings in general” (Karp & Helgo, 2008, p.892). In other words, I theorise that the participants’ understanding of leadership, and resulting emerging leader identity, derive from their frequent interactions with others, often individual leaders, and the organisations they consider themselves part of. These individual leaders might be conceptualised as “model figures perceived to be living successfully” that act as aspirational role-models (Waterman, 1999, p. 609). That the organisation itself influences self-definition recognises that “people are, in a large part, socially constructed beings - crafted through interactions with others” (Hoty, Burnette & Innella, 2012, p. 257). This theorisation privileges the individual’s identity work and supports common theories of organisationally-based identities that I discussed in Chapter Four, in the section titled *Theoretical constructs of organisationally-based identities*.

Who then are these ‘others’, individuals and organisations, that likely influence the participants’ understanding of leadership? They are of course a mix of adults (i.e., parents, school teachers, church leaders), young adults (i.e., siblings, classmates) and institutions (i.e., schools, church, Scouts). These individuals and institutions are clearly identifiable in the participants’ narratives. Importantly, the most commonly mentioned adults are predominantly non-millennials, alleged to understand leadership in a different way to that of the participants (Howe & Strauss, 2007, 2000; Elmore, 2009; Hoffman et al., 2011; Bligh & Meindl, 2004). The participants refer to their example (i.e., Christian’s uncle, the missionary), their teaching (i.e., José Carlos’ church minister) and influence (i.e., María José’s father in a leader role). The most commonly cited institutions in the participants’ narratives are school and church. I have argued in Chapter Four, that schools have come to play an increasingly important role in transmitting ideas of leadership and

motivating individuals to see themselves in such terms. Indeed, the participants illustrate the influence of schooling on their ideas of leadership by referring to mission statements (e.g., the Jesuit schools of Diana and Tiffany) and to the leader roles available to them in schools (e.g., group leader, student group president, sports team captain). Other participants refer to their roles in the organisational structure of the church (e.g., José Carlos group leader role; Ricardo's role in a Christian band). Given the often-conservative nature of school and church organisations, and indeed the names given to the aforementioned leader roles available within them, I would offer that the participants' experience with leadership is coloured by traditional understandings of the phenomenon (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). To summarise, I theorise that the *micro* processes that guide the participants' identity work towards their emerging leader identity are characterised by interactions with both non-millennial individuals and institutions likely to articulate a traditional understanding of leadership. The embodiment, or performance, of leadership that the participants experience is principally non-millennial.

What then of the popular contemporary discourse of generational identities on which this research is based? In my review of the literature in Chapter Three, I argued for the ubiquity and attractiveness of this discourse and the strength to which it has come to colour understandings of organisationally-based identities. Indeed, Anderson et al. (2017) state, "Scholars and practitioners alike have recognized that younger workers, collectively known as Millennials or GenMe, are different from workers in prior generations" (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 245). Can I conclude that generational identity, that "inborn way of experiencing life and the world", is devoid of influence? (Mannheim, 1952, p.282).

The conceptualisation of emerging organisationally-based identity that I propose does not abandon completely the influence of the discourse of generational identity. I theorise that the participants' sense of leader self is indeed also subject to 'big D' discourses of millennial and leader identity. After-all, I found that eight participants draw upon *millennial leader identity*, and a further seven on the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon. However, these "ready-made' identities" (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016) are adapted by the participants into four alternatives selfhood (e.g., *counsellor, communicator, trait* and *risk-taker* identities). I understand these dominant discourses as identity templates such that "others *recognize* you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) here and now" (Gee, 1999, p.18, italics in original). Returning to my discussion of identity regulation (see Chapter Four), these templates act to control or inform how individuals understand themselves in leader roles. In other words, I theorise these discourses of leader identity as *macro processes* of identity construction, those "cultural constructs such as Discourses and ideologies" (De Fina, 2013, p.47; Westenholz, 2006). Concepts of historical context, cultural change, social structural and educational environment are also considered *macro processes* of identity construction (Erikson, 1968; Baumeister, 1999; Adams & Fitch, 1983). Discourses of identity, as a *macro process* of identity construction, operationalise Mannheim's ideas of generational consciousness, such that "People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents" (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p.16).

To conclude, the findings of this research lead me to theorise leader identity not from the perspective of generational membership but in terms of both how the participants experience leadership through their relationships with others and dominant discourses of

the phenomenon. I come to the participants as young adults when they are constructing their emerging identities (Arnett, 2000). Their ideas of selfhood are influenced by *micro process* (i.e., those frequent interactions with leaders) and socially constructed *macro processes* (i.e., dominant discourses of leadership). However, given the participants' particular context, and that leadership is learnt "within relationships between people and environments" (Janson & McQueen, 2007, p. 647), I prioritise the former before the latter. The participants literally hear, observe, respond to and assimilate the "communicative practices that leaders engage in when carrying out their daily activities" (Svennevig, 2008, p. 536). Their identity work takes place on a daily basis, is accumulative in nature, and serves to tweak their understanding of their emerging leader identity. The leaders through whom they experience leadership, both individuals and institutions, are predominantly non-millennials and likely articulate and exemplify a transgenerational understanding of the phenomenon. Dominant discourses appear to play a role in the participants' self-definition as the accounts of fifteen participants reveal. However, I understand the inconclusive findings of this research (i.e., eight participants draw upon *millennial leader identity* while a further seven rely upon the *contemporary popular portrayal*) in terms of *micro processes* of identity construction. This theorisation accounts for the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' understanding and performance of leadership.

iii. An alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adults

This research has explored identity construction in young adulthood. My findings, with respect to generational identity, organisationally-based identity and relevant identity

influences (e.g., family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations), lead me to theorise an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adulthood. This alternative portrayal challenges the dominant discourse of identity construction characterised by ideas of challenge, uncertainty, risk and the high effort required for satisfactory self-definition (Erikson, 1950; Arnett, 2000; Marcia, 1980). Indeed, Erikson's (1968) seminal work *Identity: Youth and Crisis* is aptly named to exemplify how identity construction in young adulthood is often portrayed. However, I conceptualise the participants capably drawing upon multiple identity influences, including generational and organisationally-based ones, and understanding self-definition as just one of many personal tasks that require their time.

In Chapter Two, I discussed identity construction by means of three foundational approaches: *psychosocial*, *symbolic interactionist* and *postmodern*. Common to these approaches is the importance of the life-stages of adolescence and young adulthood to ideas of identity construction. While Albarello, Crocetti and Rubini (2017, p.689) state, "The development of personal and social identity is crucial in adolescence" (Becht et al., 2016) understand identity definition as "a key task of adolescents" (Becht et al., 2016, p. 2018). Adolescence is characterised by the onset of puberty and physical, cognitive and behavioural change, while young adulthood is experienced in expanding social networks in which individuals prioritise the opinions of their peers over those of family (Choudhury, 2010; Crone & Dahl, 2012; Larson et al., 1996). Psychological needs and societal demands motivate individuals to think about who they are and their place in the world. Job and university applications force young adults to understand themselves in biographical terms and define what to say about themselves (Habermas & Bluck 2000).

The relevance of adolescence and young adulthood to self-definition is supported by longitudinal studies and meta-analysis (Feliciano & Rambuat, 2005; Cramer, 2017; de Graaf et al., 2012; Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2010).

A second commonality shared by the three foundational approaches to identity is the portrayal of identity construction as fraught with risk and danger. Psychosocial approaches, drawing upon Erikson's *lifespan theory of human development*, identify a psychosocial challenge in each life-stage (Erikson, 1950). However, the crisis associated with adolescence and young adulthood - *Identity Synthesis vs. Identity Confusion* - is framed as particularly relevant, and challenging, for selfhood (Erikson, 1950, 1959; Marcia, 1980). The risk of unsuccessful self-definition is articulated in the idea of *Identity Confusion*, "an inability to develop a workable set of ideas on which to base adult identity", and characterised by "uncertainty and disorientation" (Schwartz, 2001, p.9, p.11). Other psychosocial approaches likewise allude to the challenges and risks associated with identity in young adulthood. For example, (see Chapter Two, page 34), Berzonsky (1990) emphasises the importance of employing the correct 'method' to achieve successful self-definition. That method, or *identity style*, characterises the individual as "an active processor of self-relevant information who has made personal decisions or commitments about identity issues and problems" (Berzonsky, 1989, p. 279). Côte (2000, 1997) theorises that successful self-definition depends on the type and amount of "identity capital recourses" the individual can draw upon (Côte, 1997, p.578). These resources "pertain to how much the individual has established a stable and viable sense of adulthood and found a validating community" (Côte, 1997, p.578).

Symbolic interactionist approaches also allude to the challenge of successful identity construction. Mead's (1934) conceptualisation of 'I' and 'Me' advances the idea of tensions between personal identity and collective identities. One's overall sense of selfhood is an amalgam, not easy to achieve, of these two selves. Indeed, *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) acknowledges the tensions that arise from the need for the individual to understand themselves as part of different social groups or categories (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, class, religious denomination). Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) understand the individual 'navigating' between these different ingroups. While membership of each provides "emotional and value significance" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292), it also represents a loss of identity agency as the individual must conform to the collective expectations and identity of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Self-definition therefore becomes a challenge of balancing individuality (i.e., personal identity) with depersonalisation (i.e., social or collective identity).

Finally, postmodern approaches understand the challenge of self-definition in terms of the hyper-connectivity and globalised world we live in (Giddens, 1991; Gergen, 1991; Cerulo, 1997). Technologies "saturate us with the voices of humankind" (Gergen, 1992, p. 6), offering a complex and dynamic list of identity options. The loss of a sense of community, tradition and shared meaning, leave individuals with few markers by which to understand themselves and the world around them (Cushman, 1990). Liberated from traditional sources of self-definition, identity is now "fashioned at will to a much greater extent than was possible in the past" (Huddy, 2001, p. 137). The challenge, or cost, to the individual is the continual need to 'work' on what is now a project of continual self-definition (Reedy, 2009). Simultaneously, and drawing upon Foucauldian understandings

of postmodernity, identity is increasingly subject to control, conformity and homogeneity. So-called *technologies of power* (Foucault, 1988) create rules or norms that dictate who one can or cannot be. Self-definition is conceptualised as a “biographical project vulnerable to capture by ready-made identities” (Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016, p.4). Indeed, I have brought this concept of ‘pre-packaged identities’ to this research, understanding ideas of millennial and leader identity as contemporary discourses of selfhood that potentially define who one is and how others see them.

Given that psychosocial, symbolic interactionist and postmodern traditions point to the challenges associated with identity construction in adolescence and young adulthood, when I first approached this area of theory I came away with the idea that the participants would have a lot to share about their own emerging identities. Indeed, as someone who works in a high school, I can identify a discourse among teachers and parents that almost condemns adolescents or young adults to an identity ‘crisis’, ‘struggle’ or ‘time to work out who he is’. This “demographically dense” (Rindfuss, 1991, p. 496) period of self-definition and decision-making is often associated with anxiety, depression and risk-taking. Indeed, Schwartz et al. (2015) claim that in young adulthood, “identity has become more and more of a self-directed task, without much external help” (Schwartz et al., 2015, p. 39). Moreover, given the role of social media in contemporary society, a phenomenon barely fifteen years old, it is theorised that individuals, “have more ability to expand, manipulate, multiply, and distort” their identities (Baym, 2010, p.106; Boyd, 2014; Bamman, Eisentein & Schnoebelen, 2014; Marwick, 2013). Further still, in this research the participants were subject to a very reflexive and self-conscious form of identity work (i.e., answering my questions about themselves during two one-hour long

interviews). In other words, given theorisations of identity construction (i.e., an all-consuming, crisis-prone task), the age and context of the participants (i.e., young adults in contemporary society) and my data collection method (i.e., long interviews), I expected the participants to have much to share about the challenges of selfhood. I anticipated that their identity work would come to the fore in their narratives. *Oh identity!*

However, my understanding of the participants' narratives appears to challenge this portrayal of identity construction. Given my findings, I theorise that, at the individual level, thinking about oneself is not the all-consuming, investment intensive challenge of the mid to late-teens and early twenties that popular culture and academic theories often profess. Instead, I understand identity work as just one of many tasks facing the participants (e.g., nurturing family relationships, expanding their social networks, balancing academic and social commitments, planning career decisions). I theorise that self-definition is not central to the participants' lives and conceptualise a less crisis- and risk- prone understanding of selfhood in adolescence and young adulthood.

Consistent with the narrative approach to identity that I bring to this research, I conceptualise the participants in the process of defining who they are, and doing so in different ways (McAdams, 2002; Reedy, 2009). As I discussed in Chapter Five, narrativisation is the process by which "human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.1). The participants' personal narratives reveal this meaning making. I understand their self-definition in terms of certain idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g., Juan Pablo's interest in debating; Aldo's diverse musical talents; Estela's care of young children; Alexis' interest in cars); social identities (e.g., José Carlos' religious affiliation; Mich's commitment to Scouts; Ricardo's membership of a Christian rock

band); and their supposed generational identity (e.g., Alexis' institutionalised and bureaucratised community service experience). I identify themes common to young adulthood (e.g., the opportunities and challenges associated with leaving school; the search and definition of future plans; a sense of needing to differentiate oneself from others); and stories that articulate, whether explicitly or implicitly, a set of values that guide the participants' world view (e.g., Claudia's claims for gender equality; Andrea's recognition of the value of education; Aldo's work ethic). The participants draw upon experiences of the past and present and allude to future aspirations (e.g., Christian's past childhood experience; Mich's current participation in scouting; Claudia's plans for a career in medicine). They can also be self-critical of their own behaviour and decision-making (e.g., Christian's transition from immature youth to responsible young adult; Mich's recognition of a personal mistake; Saul's acknowledgement of his own egotism; Marcos Gabriel's acceptance of mediocre academic performance). These diverse stories illustrate how the participants' narratives synthesise, "episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233).

Given my understanding of the participants' narratives, I theorise that self-definition is a continually evolving project of which they are in control. In Eriksonian terms, I understand them continually 'tweaking' their sense of self without renouncing a state of *identity synthesis* and successful self-definition (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Arnett, 2000). Such a conceptualisation is consistent with the daily and incremental identity work through which I suggested the participants constructed their emerging leader identity (see page 284). With respect to symbolic interactionist approaches, I

understand the participants as capable of finding adequate ‘positions’ between the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’: a balance between agency and individuality and the emotional wellbeing provided by group association (Mead, 1934; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). With reference to postmodernist approaches, I understand identity construction as the challenge of both incorporating “multiple identity domains into a cohesive sense of self” (Meca et al., 2015, p.2), while simultaneously moulding dominant discourses to fit individual ideas of selfhood. In other words, I recognise the participants drawing upon, working, and resisting multiple identity influences in the construction of their emerging identities. They are Mexican, Catholic, sons, daughters, older and younger brothers and sisters, friends and school leavers. I understand them, as I do myself, confident yet nervous; optimistic yet fearful; predictable yet spontaneous; individualistic yet compassionate; and clear-minded and confused. They adopt, adapt and resist the meanings and values associated with a wide variety of identity influences, at times presenting ‘sameness’ at other times ‘difference’ (Ricoeur, 1991). While self-definition is not an easy task, “*elaborating and developing identities and roles, and struggling to fit into different discourses*” (Anderson, 2005, p. 221, italics in original), the participants’ narratives do not suggest ideas of *identity confusion* (Marcia, 1980, 1968), “social saturation” (Huddy, 2001, p. 137) or a “struggle to self-name” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 393). Indeed, I consider Berzonsky’s (1990) *identity style model* that I discussed in Chapter Two, (see page 34), and particularly the *informational style*, to best capture my understanding of the participants’ emerging identities. Individuals with an *informational identity style* are suggested to reflexively search for, and evaluate, diverse identity options, “in a rational, open-minded fashion” (Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx et al., 2013, p. 894). This process is characterised by “self-

direction, autonomy and agency” (Schwartz et al., 2013, p.101) where the individual is “interested in learning new things about themselves...and they are willing to accommodate self-views in light of dissonant feedback” (Berzonsky, 2013, p.894).

To conclude, I theorise an alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adulthood. I understand self-definition as an incomplete jigsaw puzzle, but one the participants are generally capable of reflexively completing, piece by piece. Their identity work reveals them to draw upon complex, multiple, yet generally manageable, identity influences (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). They are *occupied* in this identity work but not consumed by it and I find echo in Mercer’s (1990) claim that “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis” (Mercer, 1990, p. 43). I leave this research with the sense that self-definition in young adulthood is not all-consuming nor risk laden. Instead, I offer a more nuanced, if less dramatic, *antenarrative* (Boje, 1995, 1991) of emerging identity that I derive from this rigours research.

Summary of findings and theoretical contribution

In this chapter I have discussed the findings of this research and the theoretical contribution it makes to the fields of organisational studies and generational studies. Two questions guided this research. *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants’ experiences and emerging identities?* and *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial?*

I summarise my findings as follows. First, I find only weak support for claims of a distinctive millennial identity. Contrary to the popular discourse of The Millennial

Generation, the participants' accounts of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations do not robustly support claims of a transformative and disruptive generation. Secondly, I find only partial support for ideas of a distinctively millennial understanding of leadership. I find no simple link between generational and organisationally-based identities: the millennial participants draw upon both ideas of *millennial leader identity* and the *contemporary popular portrayal* of the phenomenon. While the former is associated with their generational portrayal, the latter is a more transgenerational conceptualisation. Thirdly, the participants' accounts of leadership reveal they modify or *work* dominant discourses of leadership into four more nuanced alternatives of selfhood. Their identity work illustrates how they resist being defined by universalising portrayals of leadership.

To understand these three findings, I offer alternative theorisations of generational identity, organisationally-based identity and identity construction. First, I theorise the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants' accounts by understanding millennial identity as overdependent on ideas of the 'digital generation'. Given that academic research does not generally support ideas of the 'homogenous technological millennial', the 'digital generation' discourse is a weak foundation for claims of distinctiveness. Secondly, I theorise emerging organisationally-based identity in terms of *micro* and *macro processes* of identity construction. Rejecting ideas of generational determinism, I conceptualise the participants' leader identity as drawing upon both their experience of leadership through their relationships with others and dominant discourses of the phenomenon. Finally, I offer an alternative portrayal of emerging identity construction in young adulthood that understands the participants employing an *informational style*

(Berzonsky, 1990). The participants appear to avoid the crisis and tensions often associated with conceptualisations of identity construction in young adulthood. Instead, I understand them to be generally capable of drawing upon multiple identity influences and arriving at adequate definitions of selfhood,

In my final chapter I will reflect on this academic research, identify possible implications of its findings and identify areas of future research.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

Introduction

I note the obvious differences
Between each sort and type,
But we are more alike, my friends,
Than we are unlike.

Maya Angelou ("*Human Family*", in *I Shall Not Be Moved*, New York, 1990, p.5)

This research has been an extremely rewarding experience and my most challenging academic and professional undertaking. As a high school principal living in Guadalajara, Mexico, I was motivated to understand The Millennial Generation (born 1981 to 2000) 'before and beyond' the discourses through which it is often portrayed. As a teacher and principal, I consider myself an experienced practitioner who interacts with young adults on a daily basis. This academic research, my first formal period of study since the late 1990s, encouraged me to explore the theoretical underpinnings of 'the things I thought I knew'. It has been slow work. I have balanced full-time employment, almost weekly travel to different parts of the country, and family commitments, with this academic research. There were months I regressed and others when I experienced what felt to me to be quantum leaps. I struggled with the analysis of 'wads' of qualitative data and at times cursed myself for not having chosen a subject area in which I could have taken greater advantage of my quantitative training in economics. All part of the PhD roller-coaster!

That said, I have identified some important insights from my qualitative data that enrich our understanding of emerging generational and organisationally-based identities. This research's specificity – an in-depth study of the emerging identity of twenty-four

Mexican young adults - acts as an antidote to universalising theories such as generational identity. The participants' particular social-historical location has allowed me to identify certain factors with which to challenge homogenising millennial portrayals. My findings of course are only representative of this group and cannot be generalised to larger populations within Mexico and beyond. In the context of contemporary Mexico, I have found that young adults appear to craft their personal identity by drawing upon multiple identity influences - prioritising traditional sources of selfhood before transcultural and generational ones. I recognise, as I have discussed in Chapter Five, in the section titled *Ethical considerations and reflexivity*, the intricacies of qualitative research and an interview-based data collection method. I acknowledge that the participants might have been telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, their narrative editing clouding my vision of who they really are. This potential *identity performance* (Goffman, 1958; Punch, 2002) did not however make their stories less interesting, challenging or rewarding to work with.

I also acknowledge my own role in this research, my thumb-print on its findings and conclusions. In qualitative research, the *researcher is the research instrument* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2011). I believe my personal characteristics (e.g., foreign, non-millennial, high school principal) have provided me a unique perspective through which to explore emerging identity. Simultaneously, they reflect my particular experiences, relationships, worldview and understandings, conscious or not, of the phenomena under study. Chenail (2011) warns that researchers "may remain blind to their biases" throughout their research thus undermining the quality of their work (Chenail, 2011, p.261). Despite the unavailability of *bias management instruments* (Poggenpoel &

Myburgh, 2003) such as working in teams, triangulating information and peer evaluation, I have tried to be reflexive throughout this research with respect to my role as the research instrument.

Perhaps inevitably, if I had to do it again, I would do things differently. This however, so I am told, is all part of the process. That aside, and recognising the support of many, I am clear that the responsibility for this research and its findings, is mine and mine alone. Despite the (very relative) hardships experienced during the years of this research, I am satisfied with its findings, and perhaps more importantly, my growth as an academic. In particular, I understand myself being more interested in, and taking greater account of, the stories of 'others.' This new-found interest is most clearly illustrated in the personal trips I have taken to learn about certain communities that a few years ago held little interest for me (e.g., Native American Indians: Mormon community in Utah; experience of slavery in the southern states of the United States). Finishing this doctoral thesis, I reflect that my ultimate satisfaction, beyond presenting the stories of twenty-four young adults, is recognising my own transformation and academic growth. I am grateful to Dr. Patrick Reedy for his guidance, patience and general encouragement over the years.

Emerging millennial and leader identity in young adult Mexicans

The objective of this research was to explore generational identity, millennial distinctiveness and the interplay between generational and organisationally-based identity. Specifically, it addressed two questions. *To what extent, if any, are ideas of millennial distinctiveness reflected in the participants' experiences and emerging identities?* and *To what extent, if any, do the participants draw upon, resist or subvert*

dominant discourses of leadership in ways that might be distinctively millennial? I approached these questions through a constructionist epistemology, interpretivist ontology and narrative approach to identity. I collected qualitative data from twenty-four Mexican young adults by means of open-ended interviews. I presented the principal conclusions of this research in previous chapters and summarise them here.

First, as I explored in the participants' accounts in Chapter Six, I find only weak support for ideas of a distinctive and transformative millennial identity. The Millennial Generation is portrayed as especially transformative and disruptive (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2009; Alsop, 2008). Indeed, Rainer and Rainer (2011) offer to "go out on a metaphorical limb and project that these young adults will eventually become 'the Greatest Generation, part 2'" (Rainer & Rainer, 2011, p. 280). As I discussed in Chapter Three, in the section titled *The popular discourse of The Millennial Generation: labels and characteristics*, I conceptualised millennial distinctiveness in terms of seven millennial roles, or facets, and a distinctive understanding of leadership. However, and as I discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Millennial distinctiveness: popular portrayal or popular fiction?*, my understanding of the participants' accounts of family, faith, altruism and future plans and aspirations cannot be read to support claims of millennial distinctiveness and generational change. Overall, their stories suggest stability and generational continuity. I conclude that theories of generations over-estimate ideas of change and intergenerational difference in how individuals understand themselves.

Secondly, as I discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Emerging leader identity: the somewhat missing millennial*, I find only partial support for ideas of a distinctively millennial understanding of leadership. I have argued in Chapter Four, in

the section titled *Ideas of leader associated with The Millennial Generation*, that the portrayal of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation draws upon ideas of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and the *discourse of the twenty-first century economy and workplace*. However, I find that while eight participants do appear to draw upon *millennial leader identity*, the accounts of a further seven are better understood in terms of the contemporary portrayal of the phenomenon. I conclude that there is no simple link between generational and organisationally-based identities.

Thirdly, and supporting theories of organisationally-based identities, I understand the participants undertaking identity work by drawing upon dominant discourses of leadership and moulding or fashioning four alternative portrayals of the phenomenon. As I discussed in Chapter Eight, I conceptualise these fifteen participants “engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.626) ideas of leader identity and coming to understand themselves through one of four alternatives for selfhood (e.g., *counsellor, communicator, trait* and *risk-taker* identities).

These three findings generally contest popular, and indeed academic, conceptualisations of generations and ideas of millennial distinctiveness, generational change and intergenerational difference. However, they allow me to make a number of important theoretical contributions to the fields of generational identity, organisational studies and identity construction.

First, and as I discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *The overreliance of ideas of millennial distinctiveness on the ‘digital generation’ characterisation*, I theorise the lack of millennial distinctiveness in the participants’ accounts of selfhood as resulting from the popular discourse’s overreliance on ideas of a homogeneous ‘digital generation’.

Whereas the generational portrayals of the millennials' predecessors draw upon a broad set of 'generation-causing' events, millennial distinctiveness is highly dependent on the generation's supposed technological superiority. However, academic research suggests that the universalising and homogenising 'digital discourse' does not capture the diversity and heterogeneity of the millennials' access to, acceptance and use of, and expertise with, technology. As such, it is a weak foundation on which to sustain claims for millennial distinctiveness.

Secondly, and as I discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *Theorising emerging organisationally-based identity in terms of micro and macro processes of identity construction*, I understand emerging leader identity in terms of two complementing processes. This theorisation recognises both the participants' experience of leadership (i.e., with others in the organisations they form part of) and dominant discourses, or popular understandings, of the phenomenon. It rejects ideas of generational determinism and acknowledges that leadership is learnt through daily interactions and relationships with others (Janson & McQueen, 2007).

Thirdly, and as I have discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled *An alternative portrayal of emerging identity in young adults*, I conceptualise the participants' identity construction in a way that challenges foundational approaches of identity. I understand them as capable of drawing upon multiple identity influences, avoiding the identity crisis and risks associated with their life-stage, and defining a stable sense of selfhood. To do so, I understand them performing an *informational style* (Berzonsky, 1990) of identity construction.

In conclusion, the findings and theoretical contribution of this research call for a more critical and nuanced understanding of millennial identity and interplay between generational and organisationally-based identities. In a challenge to popular discourses of generations, I find little evidence for millennial distinctiveness and no simple relationship between millennial and leader identity.

For the novice researcher these findings disappoint, but I console myself with Angelou's sentiment. Selfhood is too complex a phenomenon to be understood in terms of a shared generational identity. Moreover, traditional identity influences appear to be a much more robust and enduring source of selfhood than generational theories would suggest. As welcoming, or alarming, as ideas of a transformative and distinctive millennial identity might be, this research points to continuity, stability and multiplicity in the selfhood of Mexican young adults.

Implications for educational and other organisations

In this section, I discuss what implications the findings and theoretical contributions of this research might have for conceptualisations of emerging identity in schools, organisations and society at large. Indeed, understanding myself as a practitioner before an academic, much of my motivation for this research was born from my experience with young adult Mexicans. This research has provided me with useful insights and practical tools for my high school principal role. However, its implications are applicable to a wide array of settings within organisations, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations. This research advocates a critical approach to the conceptualisation of the interplay of generational, traditional and organisationally-based

identities. It serves to caution against an oversimplified portrayal of the millennials' successors, the Generation Z (born since 2000). I identify four principal implications of this research: i) how educators and organisations should understand their students and members ii) towards the leader and managerial paradigms that flavour educational outcomes iii) how the leadership of young adults should be understood and iv) how altruism as an institutionalised and instrumentalised activity likely impacts *volunteer role identity*. (Gelmon, Driscoll, Holland, Spring & Kerrigan, 2018; Fullinwider, 2017).

First, educators, business, community and government leaders should understand those born between 1981 and 2000 'before and beyond' their generational label. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, this population group is often characterised by means of its generational identity (Mannheim, 1952; Perryer & Plowman, 2011; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elmore, 2010). Further, and as I alluded to in Chapter Four, organisations are increasingly understood in generational terms. Generational identity is depicted to influence, if not inform, the individual's organisationally-based identity (Howe & Strauss, 2008, 2000; Brown, 2015; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The findings of this research refute these conceptualisations of generational determinism: the paucity of millennial distinctiveness that I find in the participants' narratives seems to call for a more critical approach to potentially universalising and homogenising generational discourses. Might ideas of generational identity be socially constructed (by non-millennials) and aspire to prescribe a set of desired behaviours for an 'ideal millennial'? I find myself moving towards supporting such a hypothesis. Indeed, Donnison (2010) warns that the millennials have let others define who they are and that "The proliferation of published academic and popular literature on this generation of youth has gathered momentum with

their coming of age and their subsequent entry into tertiary education and positions of employment and social responsibility” (Donnison, 2010, p.1).

This millennial discourse is particularly prevalent to contemporary understandings of education. Popular and academic approaches propose a wide range of new educational strategies, relationships, techniques and technologies to accommodate the needs of the generation in high school, university and beyond. As I alluded to in Chapter Three, educators should not lose sight of the fact that both popular and academic research on millennials emanates principally from Anglo-Saxon countries (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016) and the field is dominated by certain authors, “with their claims being taken as axiomatic and forming the basis and parameters of thinking and research in this area” (Donnison, 2010, p. 8). For example, in this research I find few, if any, glimpses of the ‘digital native’ (Prensky, 2001), that portrayal so prominent in popular debates of the generation. I have found myself on innumerable training seminars and courses developing campus-wide or classroom specific strategies to accommodate, exploit and manage the technological characteristics of our millennials. Local insights, subject to contextual factors, most likely equip teachers better. Indeed, I would offer that the consistently most successful teachers at my school do not appear to have revolutionised the classroom experience as ‘how-to-teach millennials’ training would recommend. Content expertise, class preparation and quality evaluation and feedback appear to be transgenerational ingredients for achieving student-based outcomes. Educators, myself included, should be encouraged to take-off the millennial identity straight jacket and let teachers identify and share their best practices subject to particular contextual factors. In Mexico, factors such as economic, social, political and technological inequality, a young democratic system

and the need for second language acquisition (i.e., English), are localised factors that educators should consider in policy and instructional decisions. Generational identity should be one, but only one, of the way educators and organisations understand their members. However, Williams' New York Times article *Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z*, perhaps alludes to challenges of seeing beyond generational determinism (Williams, *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2015).

Secondly, I believe this research should make educators and government leaders reflect upon the recent drift of education towards a leader and managerial paradigm. Education is not all about leadership but has a wider purpose in preparing society's young adults for their personal and collective well-being. However, and as I discussed in Chapter Four, ideas of leadership have permeated school culture and students are invited to see themselves in such terms (Sinclair, 2011). Leader identity is promoted as a desirable, if not a necessary, characteristic of educational offerings and student success. In Chapter Seven, I presented examples of *leader talk* in which the participants do portray themselves in leader terms (e.g., group leader, band leader, team captain). However, they also define themselves through a wide range of experiences: academic challenge (e.g., Michelle claims, "School absorbs a lot of me" while Claudia states, "so it's really difficult"); teamwork (e.g., Christian and Juan Pablo's participation in debating; Ricardo's band membership; Mabel's inclusion in the volleyball team); community participation (e.g., Diana's religiously inspired missions to rural communities; María Isabel's reforestation work) and work experience (e.g., Aldo's restaurant work, Diana's job in a local store, Alexis' experience in a car workshop; Marco's experience in the electronics

industry). Schools, my own included, would be well served to recognise, celebrate and foster such diversity of alternatives for selfhood.

In my particular context, ‘transforming’ youngsters into leaders is an important variable by which schools compete for the best students, and consequently, their fee-paying parents. Indeed, the leadership scholarship is among the most prestigious the school offers. However, this leader fascination potentially overshadows other equally important, challenging and diverse roles that schools could make available to their students. The World Economic Forum identified ten growing skills necessary for 2020, among them leadership and social influence (Future of Jobs Report, 2018, World Economic Forum). The other eight skills do not appear to be encapsulated in such attractive discourses of selfhood (i.e., analytical thinking and innovation; active learning; creativity, originality and initiative; technological design; complex problem solving; emotional intelligence; reasoning, problem-solving and ideation; systems analysis). Educational systems owe it to their students, and indeed society as a whole, to ‘package’ these skills in attractive identities and promote them with the same rigour they do leadership. An ‘inventor-scientist’ identity could articulate ideas of creativity and complex problem-solving while a ‘humanist’ identity might promote students to understand themselves in terms of reasoning, empathy and emotional intelligence. I offer these simple heuristics to exemplify the need for schools to get away from the idea that leadership is the be-all and end-all of educational achievement. My school might start by recognising students’ creativity, emotional intelligence and problem-solving as it does their leadership. Organisations likewise must value and promote role diversity and dismantle the binomial leader-follower discourse (Uhl-Bien, 2011; Drath et al., 2008).

Thirdly, the findings of this research challenge the idea that generational identity informs organisationally-based identity. Specifically, it cautions against understanding millennials in terms of a distinctive and homogeneous leadership portrayal. As I discussed in Chapter Seven, the participants' understanding of leadership can be understood in terms of one of four leader identities (e.g., *counsellor*, *communicator*, *trait* and *risk-taker*). In other words, and contrary to the theories of generational identity that I discussed in Chapter Four, in the section titled *Ideas of leadership associated with The Millennial Generation*, there is no one millennial leader. This implication is particularly relevant for the leadership preparation at school of Generation Z (born after 2000). Schools and organisations must take a more nuanced approach to this generation and define clearly the objectives of the leader roles and training they offer. Leadership cannot be type-cast. Surrendering the phenomenon to claims of generational determinism would be to turn a blind-eye to the diverse leadership talents different individuals contribute, irrespective of their generational membership.

Fourthly, educators and volunteer organisations should recognise that the experiences encapsulated in the theme of *The institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of altruism* reflect a new role schools are adopting in formalising their students' community involvement. As I discussed in Chapter Six, in the section titled *Stories of Altruism*, nine participants alluded to the bureaucratic and institutionalised nature of their social service. What Stukas, Snyder, and Clary (1999, p.60) call "mandatory volunteerism", potentially influences the millennials' *volunteer role identity*. *Volunteer role identity* is the assimilation of a specific volunteer identity into a more general

understanding of self (Callero, 1985; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Penner (2002) states that volunteer role identity,

concerns the extent to which a person identifies with and internalizes the role of being a volunteer; that is, the extent to which this role and the relationships associated with it become part of a person's self-concept (Penner, 2002, p. 463).

In the strictest sense, the nine participants were not volunteering at all - they did not act out of free will but were in-effect obligated to participate in activities planned and organised by their schools (Hartenian, 2007; Ziemek, 2006). The obligatory nature of their experience has implications for their future volunteerism. Stukas, Snyder, and Clary (1999) warn that "requirements to volunteer may reduce interest in volunteer activities by altering individuals' perceptions of why they help" (Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 1999, p. 59). In institutionalising and bureaucratising community participation, schools potentially reduce their students' intrinsic motivation, sense of autonomy, commitment and future participation (Dienhart, Maruyama, Snyder et al., 2016; Deci & Ryan, 1985). The implication of this research therefore is that schools, and indeed other organisations, should rethink *how* they motivate their students towards prosocial behaviour. They should do so in ways that promote autonomy, independence and meaning. Beehr, LeGro, Porter, Bowling and Swader (2010) recommend these programs emphasise intrinsic rewards (e.g., personal satisfaction, skill development) before extrinsic ones (e.g., graduation or coursework requirements). Such initiatives should have at their core, "individual initiative linked to community action" (Winograd & Hais, 2011, p. 226) and recognise that the individual's personal motivation is the catalyst for engagement (Pearce & Larson, 2006). While the institutionalised nature of their community participation potentially differentiates the millennials from their predecessors, it does so at the risk of prejudicing

their future volunteerism. Promoting personal interest and initiative would be a better way to foster the millennials' altruism than packaging it within their academic experience (Cheung, Lo & Liu, 2015; Horton & Fagan, 2015).

In conclusion, this research invites schools and organisations to think more critically about generational determinism and the privilege afforded ideas of leadership. A more nuanced approach is required to fully understand, and not oversimplify, the emerging identity of young adult millennials. Similarly, discourses of leadership act as potential blinkers that guide young adults to aspire to one particular role. Schools and organisations should promote other roles as attractive alternatives for selfhood. Not being overly encouraged to see themselves in leader terms might come as a relief to many students. Indeed, identity work should be encouraged and a wider range of valued 'possible selves' would likely better accommodate the complexities of individual ideas, aspirations and ideas of selfhood (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This research invites us all to see those individuals born between 1981 to 2000 'before and beyond' the millennial label that has characterised them for too long. A more critical approach to selfhood might avoid their successors, Generation Z (born since 2000), suffering a similar misrepresentation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given that the millennials are now in leader roles in the workplace, public sector and society as a whole, I believe the potential for future research is great. The following suggestions for future research are offered.

First, Mexico's diverse ethnic, cultural, economic and social diversity present ample opportunities for future research into the emerging identities of millennials.

Generational discourses would be enriched by understanding other demographically and geographically diverse populations. Researchers could explore whether, and if so how, ideas of selfhood are influenced by socio-economic, educational and geographic factors. Future research could explore how the proximity to the U.S. border and employment in transnational organisations influence self-definition.

Secondly, research is needed to validate the four leader identities I identified in Chapter Seven. I have suggested that the participants *work* and *fashion* dominant discourses of leadership and understand themselves through one of four nuanced adaptations: *counsellor*, *communicator*, *trait* and *risk-taker*. Future research could validate these constructs in other populations and include the study of situational factors that potentially influence emerging leader identity in educational *vis-à-vis* organisational settings.

Thirdly, this research has explored emerging leader identity in millennial young adults. Future research could consider the study of millennial *follower identity*. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, (see page 73), millennials are depicted as ‘good team players’ that value coaching and mentoring, require frequent feedback and aspire to work on challenging and meaningful projects (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Robertson, 2016; Elmore, 2010). Researchers could explore whether, and if so how, these themes are reflected in millennials’ ideas of selfhood.

Fourthly, in Chapter Six, in the section titled *Stories of Altruism*, I discussed how nine participants appeared to articulate altruism in terms of *institutionalisation and instrumentalisation*. Future research should examine the impact of these school initiatives on students’ *volunteer role identity* and factors such as frequency and longevity of

volunteer participation, level of satisfaction with the volunteer work and the belief in the transcendence of the work being done (van Ingen & Wilson, 2017; Laverie & McDonald, 2007; Callero, Howard & Piliavin, 1987). Current academic research is inconclusive with respect to the long-term effects of mandated community service projects (Gelmon, Driscoll, Holland, Spring & Kerrigan, 2018; Fullinwider, 2017; Helms, 2013; Gallant, Smale & Arai, 2010; Hart, Donnelly & Youniss, 2007; Henderson, Brown, Pancer & Ellis-Hale, 2007). The findings of this research suggest the question should be revisited.

Finally, and as I discussed in Chapter Three, (see page 64), the popular press and media have started to articulate the generational identity of the millennials' successors, Generation Z, those born after 2000. As yet, this discourse says little about leadership. Researchers could explore how this generation's leader portrayal emerges and the influences that shape it. They could ultimately validate it with respect to the experiences and emerging identity of its members.

Closing remark

Ideas of generations and leadership are highly privileged in the contemporary popular discourse of organisations, economy and society. The two often appear unquestionably linked and understood in the context of the dynamic, technological, competitive and social forces that characterise the first decades of the twenty-first century. This research has explored ideas of selfhood – how twenty-four young adult Mexicans understand and present themselves to others. Despite the apparent definitive nature of both generational and leader identity discourses, this research reveals that the interplay between the two is more subtle, layered and complex. Cannadine (2013) reflects,

“humanity has not been, is not now, and should not be, best or solely understood in terms of simple, unified homogenous collectivities” (Cannadine, 2013, p.9). That selfhood is not solely informed by generational membership preserves space for autonomy in identity construction. Refreshingly, the answer to the question *Who I am?* continues to be guided by personal idiosyncrasies, shared meanings, context and historical location and the richness and diversity of experience. Our search for *sameness* and *difference* - our very sense of selfhood - remains a wonderfully complex project.

Appendix A: Recruitment letter

Dear _____

I am a student of a doctoral program researching ideas of The Millennial Generation. I am interested in exploring how young adults of your age describe themselves. The objective of this letter is to invite you to participate in this research and provide you with the relevant information about it.

The methodology of this research involves two one-to-one interviews of between 45 to 75 minutes. I will ask you to describe your personal experiences and talk about your family, school, friendships and other topics. I will use open-ended questions and invite you to offer long and descriptive answers. There are no right or wrong answers and I am interested in your personal experience. The interview will be conducted in Spanish, recorded on a digital recorder and notes will be taken.

After our two interviews, I will analyse the interview transcript and identify those themes most relevant to your personal experience and personal identity. In total I will interview between 20 and 25 young adults. Once I am finished all the interviews I will construct a general description of how young adults of your age understand themselves. The stories that you share with me during our two interviews could form part of my doctoral thesis document.

Your identity will remain anonymous, as will that of all participants. I believe that there is no foreseeable risk to you associated with this research, that you will find it enjoyable and that your participation may help you better understand your own personal experience. The topics discussed in our interview and information generated will be held confidentially and used only for the purpose of my research.

Your participation is voluntary and you may retire from the research at any time. Your participation has no academic credit nor does it form part of your academic classes. You will receive no monetary payment from me for your participation.

I invite you to participate in this study and ask you to complete and return the *Informed Consent Form* by the day _____.

Richard Huett
Doctoral student
Hull University

Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

To be completed by the participant

I, _____, have read and understood the information in the *Participant Invitation Letter* and agree to be a participant in this research. I understand that the objective of the research is to explore how young adults understand themselves.

I understand that

- I. The objectives, methodology, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study have been explained to me.
- II. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in this research.
- III. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
- IV. Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my written authorisation.
- V. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Participant's name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____ Phone number: _____

The contact details of the researcher are:

Richard Huett, Direccion PrepaTec, Tec de Monterrey, Campus Guadalajara, Av. General Ramón Corona, Col. Nuevo México, Zapopan, Jalisco.

Email: rhuett@itesm.mx, Tel: 3660 3000 ext. 4300.

Complaints mechanism:

Should you [i.e., the participant] have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, HUBS Research Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No (+44) (0)1482 463536; fax (+44) (0)1482 463492.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

(English translation of Interview Protocol)

Introductory comments:

Good morning. Thank you for coming to this interview. I am working on a doctorate about how young adults understand themselves. I am interested in exploring how you, a young adult of The Millennial Generation, understands themselves. The Millennial Generation is the name given to young people born between 1981-2000.

The interview today will last between 45 and 75 minutes. I will ask you a number of open-ended questions. Please answer these questions honestly and with detailed description. There is no right or wrong answer – I am interested in your own experience. Take your time to think about the question before answering. Please ask me to clarify if a question is not clear. This interview is being recorded on this device (*show device to participant*) and I will take notes (*show note pad to participant*) during our time together. Please speak naturally but with a volume that will be recorded clearly by the device. I may ask you to speak louder if necessary.

The information you share with me today will be held confidential and your real name will not be used in the final report of this study.

Please relax, enjoy this experience and answer the questions the best you can. There is water available if you want to drink something during our time together. Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. What can you tell me about your family, your friends?
3. Can you tell me a little about your relationship with your parents/family?
4. Are there any special events or interests you share as a family? Could you tell me about them?
5. Is there one family member that you are particularly close to? Could you describe that person to me?
6. What about your hobbies, what do you do in your free time?
7. How do you spend your weekends?
8. Have you ever been a member of a team of any kind? Could you tell me about that?

9. Can you tell me more about that team/activity/ _____?
10. Can you tell me about your time at school?
11. Do you have any particular hobbies or activities?
12. Can you tell me about a special or challenging academic experience?
13. Can you tell me about the extra-curricular activities you participate in?
14. Have you ever been a member of a team of any kind? Could you tell me about that?
15. Can you tell me if there is anyone at school that has influenced you in some way?
16. How did that person influence you? Can you tell me more about that?
17. Describe to me a person that you admire for their leadership?
18. What does that person do or not do to have won your admiration?
19. Have you ever been in a leadership role? Can you tell me about it?
20. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about yourself?

Closing comments:

Thank you very much for participating today! I hope you enjoyed the experience. As I mentioned at the start, this information will be held confidential and your real name will not be used in the final report of this study.

Do you have any final questions or comments?

Is there anything more you would like to share with me about yourself?

Thank you again for participating.

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