

**The Modern Puer:  
Disillusionment and Generation Y**

by  
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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

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## **Abstract**

### The Modern Puer: Disillusionment and Generation Y

by Elizabeth Thompson

Generation Y is one of the most studied generational cohorts in history, and much has been written about the psychology of this generation. Generation Y has been influenced by a number of factors, including the technological revolution, the economic recession, and the self-esteem movement. These factors have hindered Generation Y's psychological and maturational development. In addition, Generation Y shares many characteristics with the psychological archetype of the puer aeternus. Using hermeneutical and heuristic methodologies, this thesis focuses on the relationship between the puer aeternus archetype and the millennial generation, as well as the main factors contributing to Generation Y's delay in achieving traditional developmental milestones. Both psychological and demographical literature and research, along with personal experiences of the author, are incorporated to demonstrate the connection between Generation Y and the puer aeternus archetype, as well as to examine the critical factors that have influenced Generation Y's psychological and maturational development.

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## Chapter I Introduction

### Area of Interest

Demographically, politically, economically, socially, and technologically, the generations are more different from each other now than at any time in living memory.

Taylor, 2014b, p. 29

Generation Y, which is composed of individuals born between the years of 1980 and 2000 and is also known as the millennials, have been regarded as “liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident, and broke” (Taylor, 2014b, p. 26). Although fortunate to have been the first digital natives, Generation Y is facing a future of financial distress. Statistics show a decline in marriages, a spike in unemployment, a disproportionate influx into higher education, and a decline in the housing market among these young adults (Taylor, 2014b). Technological advances, paired with the self-esteem movement and an unstable economy, have created a childlike, narcissistic attitude that replicates characteristics of the *puer aeternus* archetype. What does the future hold for this optimistic yet seemingly entitled generation?

*Puer aeternus* is a psychological archetype described by analytical psychology founder Carl G. Jung. *Puer aeternus* is

Latin for “eternal child,” used in mythology to designate a child-god who is forever young; psychologically it refers to an older man whose emotional life has remained at an adolescent level, usually coupled with too great a dependence on the mother. (Sharp, 1991, p. 109)



This thesis consists of an in-depth exploration of the differences between Generation Y and previous generations, highlighting the factors that have caused a delay in development among this age group. It identifies the factors that have led to a *puer* or youthful attitude among Generation Y and explores the phenomenon of predominant puer identification among this population. Although Generation Y has many positive attributes, this thesis explores, through the Jungian concept of the shadow, the negative aspects of this seemingly resourceful generation and the challenges it may face in the future. Jungian analyst Murray Stein (1998) defined the shadow as “the rejected and unaccepted aspects of the personality that are repressed and form a compensatory structure to the ego’s self ideals and to the persona” (p. 234).

### **Guiding Purpose**

Generation Y has been provided with a variety of resources previous generations did not have access to, which has created a gap between generations. “Generational theory correctly predicts that each new generation entering a specific life stage will redefine that life stage and change it” (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2012, p. 25). The research problem this thesis investigates is the influx of technological advances paired with the self-esteem movement and the current state of the economy, which have significantly influenced the overall development and attitude of Generation Y.

The purpose of this research is to identify the specific factors that create and reinforce puer aeternus identification and a delay in achieving developmental milestones among this population. The research question this thesis addresses is: How are the changes and advances in culture, technology, and the economy contributing to and

maintaining a delay in development and puer identification among members of Generation Y?

### **Rationale**

This topic is worthy of further exploration due to its contemporary nature and the pressing problems faced by Generation Y. Although generation Y is one of the most studied generational cohorts in history, little has been written about the connection between the puer aeternus archetype and Generation Y. In this thesis, I intend to highlight specific aspects of this phenomenon that have not been previously addressed as well as implications for future development, providing insight to mental health professionals working with individuals who identify with or share characteristics of the puer aeternus archetype. In addition, my research offers detail and clarity to the general public on the noticeable differences and delays in the emotional, social, and cognitive development of Generation Y as compared to previous generations. This thesis may also offer some insight or clarity to members of Generation Y who are stagnant in their development and are looking for answers; it may also help Generation Y parents better understand the differences between themselves and their millennial children in hopes that they may better relate to one another.

### **Methodology**

The methodology in this thesis is qualitative. The research question is explored using both heuristic and hermeneutic methodologies, and there is no attempt to prove a hypothesis. In heuristic research, a particular phenomenon in the researcher's personal experience is explored over time. In heuristic research, whatever presents itself to the researcher can be considered data; the researcher, in turn, is both the object and subject of

the research (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2014, p. 52). Heuristic research is, however, limited in that it focuses only on the researcher's personal experiences, thereby making it difficult to draw conclusions that apply to a broad population. This thesis does not incorporate the use of human participants, so employing a heuristic approach adds a personal element to the body of statistical and empirical research surrounding this recent trend in development.

Hermeneutic research involves the search for meaning in and between different contexts, including texts, stories people tell about themselves, films, and art (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2014, p. 51). Hermeneutic methodology places concepts in dialogue with one another to look for deeper meaning through exploring their relationships to each other and involves the comparative study of various source materials. A hermeneutic exploration provides the reader with information from multiple sources through both a developmental and depth psychological lens.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethical considerations to take into account include the importance of not offending members of generation Y who may disagree with the position of this thesis. In addition, as a member of generation Y, I must take into account my own bias and acknowledge that perspectives from additional frames of reference may contribute to a fuller understanding of the topic. That being said, this thesis is written strictly from and about my own experiences and perspectives as a member of generation Y, avoiding any statements that reveal the identity of or information about others.

## Overview of Thesis

Chapter II, the Literature Review, presents a review of pertinent literature underlying the concepts, assumptions, and theories that provide a foundation for the body of research. The areas explored include the puer aeternus/puella aeterna archetypes, the polarity of the archetype, generation Y, the prominence of arrested development among the members of generation Y, and the influencing factors of modern development.

The review begins with an analysis of Jung's (1943/1966, 1936/1968, 1954/1968, 1973) first descriptions of the puer aeternus archetype. Research then draws from Jung's student and Jungian Psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, whose groundbreaking works, *Puer Aeternus* (1981) and *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus* (2000), were key in bringing the archetype to the attention of many scholars and psychologists. Additional insight is taken from another one of Jung's students, Jungian Psychologist James Hillman (1979, 1989), in particular with regard to his opposing views of the puer aeternus archetype. Research pulls from each of the aforementioned theorists regarding the best methods one can utilize for overcoming identification with the puer aeternus archetype.

Ideas are incorporated from the work of psychologists Jean Twenge (2006) and Twenge and Keith Campbell (2009), whose research on both Generation Y and narcissism has brought generation Y development to public attention. Additional insight is drawn from poet and storyteller Robert Bly (2004), whose book, *Iron John*, highlights the relationship between absentee fathers and puer aeternus identification. Demographic and statistical data taken from the Pew Research Center (2007, 2009, as cited in Taylor, 2014b) is included to illustrate the prominence and relevance of the vast generational differences between Generation Y and previous generations.

Chapter III, Findings and Clinical Applications, presents and integrates both historical and modern views of the puer aeternus archetype and highlights the influence of the archetype within modern society. In addition, Chapter III synthesizes the literature as the author applies it to her own personal experiences and findings. Chapter III also explains how the thesis contributes to the fields of counseling and depth psychology and highlights potential applications for clinical use. Finally, Chapter IV, Summary and Conclusions, presents a summary of the ramifications and implications of my findings and provides suggestions for avenues of future research.

## **Chapter II Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This thesis topic includes several areas of research that are incorporated to address the research question: How are the changes and advances in culture, technology, and the economy contributing to and maintaining a delay in development and puer identification among members of Generation Y? The topics covered in this chapter are the puer aeternus archetype, the polarity of the archetype, some of the demographic and psychological characteristics of Generation Y, and factors that have influenced the psychological development of Generation Y.

### **Puer Aeternus**

*Puer aeternus*, the Latin term for eternal youth, derives from the Roman poet Ovid, whose work, *Metamorphoses*, described the child-god Lacchus in the Eleusinian mysteries (Franz, 2000, p. 7). The term was later used within mythology to describe the child-god and has been identified with Dionysus and the God Eros (p. 7). In Jungian psychology, puer aeternus is a term used to describe a psychological archetype. The term *archetypes* is described by Jung as “primordial . . . universal images that have existed since the remotest times” that are stored in the collective unconscious (Jung, 1954/1968, p. 5 [CW 9i, para. 5]). Stein (1998) defined the term *archetype* as “an innate potential pattern of imagination, thought, or behavior that can be found among human beings in all times and places” (p. 233). Jung (1936/1968) defined *the collective unconscious* as “a

part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition” (p. 42 [CW 9i, para. 87]).

Von Franz (2000) described how the puer archetype is manifested in men:

The man who is identified with the archetype of the *puer aeternus* remains too long in adolescent psychology; that is, all those characteristics that are normal in a youth of seventeen or eighteen are continued into later life, coupled with too great a dependence on the mother. (p. 7)

The term *puella aeterna* refers to the feminine form of the archetype (Jensen, 2009). Jung (1954/1968, 1973) and his students, von Franz (1981, 2000) and Hillman (1979, 1989), explored both the problems and advantages related to identification with the archetype. In her groundbreaking work *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus*, von Franz (2000) described the puer as follows:

He is merely the archetype of the eternal youth god, and therefore he has all the features of the god: he has a nostalgic longing for death; he thinks of himself as being something special, he is the one sensitive being among all the other tough sheep. He will have a problem with an aggressive, destructive shadow which he will not want to live and generally projects, and so on. There is nothing special whatsoever. The greater the identification with the youthful god, the less individual the person, although he himself feels so special. (p. 121)

The typical puer aeternus identifies too closely with the adolescent characteristics of the puer archetype and neglects those qualities of the wise old man, or the *senex* archetype (Hillman, 1979). Hillman (1979) claimed that the polarities of the puer and senex “provide the psychological foundation of the problem of history” (p. 8). When split from its constellation, the puer aeternus archetype deals more with arrested development than eternal youth (Jensen, 2009, p. 7). The puer therefore struggles to integrate the vertical qualities of adolescence with the responsibilities associated with adulthood (Hillman, 1979, p. 24).

## **The Polarity of the Puer**

The puer aeternus archetype, like all archetypes, is bipolar, exhibiting both positive and negative qualities (Moore & Gillette, 1991, p. 14). According to Jungian analyst Robert Moore and mythologist Douglas Gillette (1991), “This bipolar dysfunction can be thought of as immature in that it represents a psychological condition that is not integrated or cohesive. Lack of cohesion in the psyche is always a symptom of inadequate development” (p. 14). The positive side of the puer aeternus archetype is represented in the Divine Child, who symbolizes newness, innocence, potential for growth, and hope (Gevert, 2011, p. 98; Moore & Gillette, 1991, p. 20), whereas the negative aspects of the archetype depict a child-man who refuses to grow up and meet the challenges of life head on, waiting instead for an “other” to come in and solve all his problems (Gevert, 2011, p. 98). In “Senex and Puer,” Hillman (1979) wrote,

Because the puer gives us connection to the spirit it is always concerned with the eternal aspect of ourselves and the world. When this concern becomes only-puer, exclusive and negative, the world as world is itself in danger of dissolution into the otherworldly. This danger is especially present in the psyche and history of this fraction of our era. Therefore it is of immense importance that the puer be recognized and valued, for it carries our future—positive or negative. (p. 28)

The puer or puella is especially noted for his or her optimism, charm, and free spirit. Von Franz (1981) wrote, “Many have the charm of youth and the stirring quality of a drink of champagne” (p. 4). Hillman (1989) interpreted the concept of the puer aeternus to be an “archetypal dominant which personifies or is in special relation with the transcendent spiritual powers of the collective unconscious” (p. 227). From Hillman’s point of view, identification with the puer aeternus archetype is viewed as the creative aspect within all humans that has the potentiality to break free from the rigidity of adulthood (p. 227). According to Hillman (1979), “As the senex is perfected through



time, the puer is primordially perfect. Therefore there is no development; development means devolution, a loss and fall and restriction of possibilities” (p. 25).

Whereas Hillman (1979, 1989) mainly emphasized the positive aspects related to puer identification, Jung (1973) and von Franz (1981, 2000) highlighted the problems faced when one becomes wholly identified with the puer archetype. Von Franz wrote that the puer is characterized by a significant potential that is ultimately immobilized in creative pursuits due to a strong mother complex (as cited in Delaney, 2009, p. 216).

Jung (1973) wrote, “I consider the puer aeternus attitude an unavoidable evil. Identity with the puer signifies a psychological puerility that could do nothing better than outgrow itself” (p. 82). Von Franz (2000) added,

Generally the youthful charm of the puer aeternus is prolonged through later stages of life, but there is another type of puer who does not display the charm of eternal youth, nor does the archetype of the divine youth shine through him. (p. 9)

This less charming manifestation of the puer von Franz characterized in these terms:

He lives in a continual sleepy daze, and that, too, is a typical adolescent characteristic: the sleepy, undisciplined, long-legged youth who merely hangs around, his mind wandering indiscriminately so that sometimes one feels inclined to pour a bucket of cold water over his head. (p. 9)

According to von Franz (2000), the problem with the puer is that he runs the risk of soaring so high above the pathology of reality and ordinary life that he loses balance and is unable to integrate the shadow side of his psyche. Von Franz described the puer’s tendency toward avoidance: “The puer aeternus is, in a way, the opposite of a tree, because he is a creature who flies and roams about. He always refuses to be in the present and to fight in the here-and-now for his life” (p. 130). Von Franz also detailed the puer’s fear of commitment:

The one thing dreaded throughout by such a type of man is to be bound to anything whatever. There is a terrific fear of being pinned down, of entering space

and time completely, and of being the singular human being that one is. There is always the fear of being caught in a situation from which it may be impossible to slip out again. (p. 8)

Hillman (1979) wrote about the dangers related to overidentifying with an archetype:

Relation with any archetype involves the danger of possession, usually marked by inflation. This is particularly true of the puer, because of his high-flights and mythical behavior. Of course, possession through the senex brings an equally dangerous set of moods and actions: depression, pessimism, and hardness of heart. Even a minimum of psychological awareness . . . can spare complete archetypal possession. This awareness is made possible through the reflective, echoing function of the psyche. This function is the human psyche's contribution to spirit and to meaning, which noble as they may be can also be, without psyche, runaway destructive possessions. So the main puer problem is not a lack of worldly reality but a *lack of psychic reality*. (p. 29)

## **Generation Y**

**Generation gap.** According to Jung (1943/1966), the psychology of the individual is reflected in the psychology of the culture. Generation Y, also referred to as the millenials, includes individuals born between the years of 1978 and 2000. Generation Y accounts for nearly 95 million people within the United States and approximately 17% of the entire world population, the largest cohort size in history (Greenberg & Weber, 2008; Taylor, 2014b). Generation Y is regarded as being liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident, and broke (Taylor, 2014b, p. 26). Generation Y's contradictory characteristics have kept both scholars and the general public at odds with one another regarding their perspectives of this coming-of-age generation.

It is difficult to understand the psychology of Generation Y members without first examining the generations that have come before them and the environment that is facilitating their development. In the early 19th century, historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1980) wrote, "Each generation is a new people" (p. 152). Generation Y is largely distinct from its predecessors and has grown up in a time of immense change. The generation gap

between the millennials and prior generations has never been larger (Taylor, 2014b, p. 30). *Generation gap* is a phrase used to describe significant differences of outlook or opinion between people of a younger generation and their elders (“Generation gap,” 2014). Generation Y, although unique, has followed two other well-known generations: the baby boomers, the parents of the millennials who are known for leading the counterculture of the 1960s (born 1946–1964), and Generation X, known for its lack of social and political identity (born 1965–1977) (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 19).

Generation Y is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in American history (Taylor, 2014b, p. 26). According to philanthropist and entrepreneur Eric Greenberg and editor Karl Weber (2008), Generation Y is “remarkably open minded and tolerant on social issues, [and] they are more accepting of gender equality, gay rights, racial blending and immigration than any other generation” (p. 38). Generation Y’s tolerant and progressive attitude has been largely attributed to the diversity of the generation itself (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2012). Generation Y’s tolerance and open-mindedness has also overflowed into the political arena and has been a catalyst for a strong progressive political shift within the United States. According to a survey by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Americans age 18 to 29 identify themselves as Democrats over Republicans by a 58 to 33% margin (as cited in Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 36). Since 2004, younger generations have voted substantially more Democratic in each election than older generations, whereas older voters have predominately voted Republican in each election since 2008 (Taylor, 2014b, p. 34). “The greater liberalism of the young and conservatism of the old in part reflect the differences in their racial and ethnic profiles” (p. 34).

Generation Y grew up in an era that protected children and invested in their futures. The millennials childhood formative years were characterized by economic stability, promises of a bright future, and expanding opportunities (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2012, p. 73). As a result, Generation Y is proving to be the best educated generation to date. High school graduation rates currently stand at 72%, which is the highest level of high school completion in more than two decades (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011), and undergraduate enrollment rates in 2004 for 18- to 19-year-old millennials was 64% compared to boomers in 1970 of only 48% (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 21).

The social trends and gender roles of Generation Y are vastly different from those of the boomers. Today, just 20% of adults ages 18 to 29 are married, compared with 59% in 1960 (Taylor, 2014b, p. 107). The median age at first marriage has risen by about 6 years for both men and women (p. 107). The advancement of woman in the workforce coupled with a more liberal sexual attitude has significantly influenced Generation Y's attraction to and the timing of this social rite of passage. Today, gender roles are being tested and gender equality is on the rise. With more educated women entering the workforce, more men are adopting a stay-at-home parent lifestyle. According to the most recent census, the number of stay-at-home fathers in the United States has tripled in the past 10 years, up to 154,000 (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2012, p. 16). In addition, median earnings for women with at least a bachelor's degree rose 20% over the last 30 years, evidence of the advancement of women in the workplace.

Despite growing up in a time of economic stability, Generation Y is currently facing the threat of being the first generation to be less successful than its parents. In

addition, many boomer parents who are entering retirement are facing similar economic worries. Demographer and vice president of the Pew Research Center, Paul Taylor (2014a), described the common thread that binds Generation Y and the boomer generations together, "Compared with their elders, millennials are political liberals, they're digital wizards, they're not particularly religious, they're slow to marry and have kids, and they're broke" (para. 3)

Taylor (2014a) also asserted:

In fact, economic insecurity is a thread that binds these two massive generations. Many boomers haven't saved enough for retirement; meanwhile, millennials have lower incomes, less wealth, higher unemployment, and greater debt than the boomers had at the same stage of life. They're at risk of being the first generation in modern American history to have a lower standard of living than their parents enjoyed. (para. 5)

**The polarity of Generation Y.** Generational analysis rests on the premise that members of the same generation experience the same historical events at roughly the same stage of their life cycle and as a result share what is called a *generational persona*, which is also shaped by and in reaction to the persona of their parents' generation (Taylor, 2014b, p. 31). Being part of a certain generation has an influence on a person, "even if every generation has all the range of psychological, emotional and personal variation human beings have always exhibited" (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 19). To generalize, generations have specific features that manifest, creating a generational identity. However, "There are as many different personality types *within* a generation as across generations," which may contribute to the polar and contradictory traits exhibited by Generation Y (Taylor, 2014b, p. 32).

Paralleling the puer aeternus archetype, the millennial generation also has bipolar qualities. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2012), Generation Y

is one of the most heavily studied generations thus far and as a result has received both positive and negative attention (p. 3). Although this thesis discusses the negative implications associated with Generation Y's identification to the puer aeternus archetype, many scholars and Generation Y members argue against the negative illustrations presented in the media and insist that instead they will be the cultural revolutionaries of our time (Focardi, 2014).

According to Greenberg and Weber (2008), the members of Generation Y “are smart, well educated, open-minded, and independent—politically, socially and philosophically” (p. 12). Findings from the Greenberg Millennial Study (GMS) indicate that millennials have a clear sense of generational identity (p. 22). Research also demonstrates that millennials agree by 10 to 1 that their generation shares specific beliefs, attitudes, and experiences that set them apart from generations that have come before them (p. 22). In addition to being the best-educated generation in history (p. 21), Generation Y is largely driven and shaped by technology (p. 24). As the first digital natives, Generation Y has embraced innovation and believes that this is the hallmark of its generation (p. 29). According to the GMS, 78% of millennials think that their generation is more likely than earlier generations to embrace innovation and new ideas (p. 30).

Generation Y has been acknowledged for being politically engaged and civic-minded. In 2006, the GMS found that 69% of the millennials surveyed agreed that political activism was a very or somewhat effective way of solving the major challenges facing the country, and 73% stated that community volunteerism was an effective way of solving those challenges (Greenberg & Weber, 2009, p. 33). In addition, 78% of

millennials say they are willing to make significant sacrifices in their own lives “to address the major environmental, economic, and security challenges facing our country” (p. 31).

Not only does Generation Y have a strong belief in collective social action (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 30), but the generation is developing strong progressive views on a wide range of social and political issues (p. 35). Generation Y’s progressive ideals have led millennials to be more tolerant and open-minded regarding equal rights among genders, social classes, and races. Ninety-five percent of 18- to 29-year-olds in a 2005 poll stated that they approve of blacks and whites dating, and 60% disclosed that they had dated someone of a different race (p. 39). In addition, according to a 2007 survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 56% of 18- to 29-year-olds supported allowing gays and lesbians to marry, whereas the public as a whole opposed gay marriage by a 55 to 37 majority (as cited in Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 39). In addition, from a 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) survey of 18- to 25-year-olds, 58% expressed that the country needs to work harder at accepting and tolerating gays, rather than upholding traditional values (as cited in Greenberg & Weber, p. 39). Generation Y also has an open attitude regarding immigration. Unlike generation X and the Boomers, 52% of 18- to 25-year-olds surveyed believe that immigrants strengthen the country with their hard work and talent rather than being a burden on the country (p. 39).

Despite an uncertain economic future, Generation Y is considered highly optimistic. According to a study by Pew Research Center conducted in 2009, 41% of millennials are satisfied with the way things are going in the country, compared with 26% of those over 30. Although the generation is aware of the issues that lie ahead of them,

Generation Y appears to be relatively positive about its ability to eventually overcome obstacles and achieve personal and community oriented goals (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 27). Despite being the first generation in history to be less successful than its parents, Generation Y is optimistic about its potential and is “a generation that believes in the power of human ingenuity and creativity to develop solutions to the problem we face” (p. 28). Taylor (2014b) described Generation Y’s seemingly unwarranted sense of optimism:

Despite inheriting the worst economy since the great depression, despite rates of youth un- and underemployment that are the highest since the government began keeping such records, despite the growing albatross of student loan debt, and despite not being able to think about starting a family of their own, Millennials are America’s most stubborn optimists. They have a self-confidence born of coddling parents and everyone-gets-a-trophy coaches. They have a look-at-me élan that comes from being humankind’s first generation of digital natives. (p. 20)

Not all of the research regarding Generation Y has been so positive. Many of Generation Y’s positive characteristics are stained with a dark shadow. Popular opinion is that millennials are more optimistic, civic-oriented, and politically engaged than previous generations (Greenberg & Weber, 2008). However, psychologist and generation Y researcher Jean Twenge (2006) strongly argued against those assumptions. She wrote that due to the self-esteem movement, millennials feel entitled to special privileges and are more concerned with feeling good than engaging in civic duty (p. 68). Twenge described Generation Y as overly self-confident and self-absorbed. Twenge and psychologist W. Keith Campbell (2009) wrote that the new parenting culture has fueled the narcissism epidemic (p. 73), adding that the change in parenting is driven by the core cultural value of self-admiration and positive feelings (p. 73). They explained that “the movement toward parental involvement . . . has now turned into overinvolvement” (p. 79) and that



“unfortunately much of what parents think raises self-esteem . . . actually leads to narcissism” (p. 74).

According to social worker Robert Weiss and physician Jennifer Schneider (2014), “The single most defining characteristic of Gen Y is that its members use digital technology as a primary resource for communication, interaction, and information gathering” (p. 19). Although technology has offered Generation Y a new means of accessing information and the ability to connect with millions across the globe (p. 105), technology has thus created a generation that is becoming reliant upon convenience and is increasingly isolated.

Currently, there is not enough research in behavioral science to offer any broad or factual conclusions about how digital technology is affecting children (Weiss & Schneider, 2014, p. 65). However, despite the increase in digital interconnectivity, current research reveals that more individuals express feeling more detached and alone than ever before, and that Americans’ current social conditions leave them feeling increasingly more empty (p. 109). Weiss and Schneider (2014) wrote, “Digital communication by its very nature encourages users to engage in a more frequent and greater display of narcissistic or self-focused engagement” (p. 108).

One study by The NPD Group, a market research company, estimated that kids ages 8 to 18 spend 11.5 hours per day using technology, with many of those hours spent engaged with two or more technologies simultaneously (Weiss & Schneider, 2014, p. 71). It is not difficult then to understand why young adults within Generation Y have faced negative consequences due to their overuse of technology. For example, digital natives, such as the millennials, are particularly at risk for developing a gaming addiction

(p. 143). “Technology in all of its forms delivers an increasingly wide array of powerful substances and experiences that are for some, emotionally, psychologically, and/or physically unmanageable” (p. 135).

### **Influencing Factors of Generation Y Development**

The millennials were brought up in a world that looks much different from the world they live in today. As part of its development, Generation Y has been summoned as the revolutionary pioneers of the time, challenged with the task of navigating and adapting to a changing world and economy. Generation Y grew up in a time of economic security and financial stability (Taylor, 2014b). In addition, members of generation Y were predominantly raised by parents who adopted hands-on parenting styles and instilled a strong sense of self-esteem (Twenge, 2006). As the first digital natives, Generation Y has been the first generation to grow up in a globally connected world and experience the benefits and repercussions of the technological revolution (Weiss & Schneider, 2014). Psychological development among the millennials has been significantly influenced by the shift in parenting styles, the economic recession, and the technological advances of the 21st century. American culture has drastically changed in the last 20 years and Generation Y is the first generation to fully feel the effects of these immense cultural changes.

According to Taylor (2014b), Generation Y is the first generation in American history in danger of having a lower standard of living than its parents (p. 26). Research demonstrates that poverty is twice as high among the young than the old (p. 46). Millennial novelist Haley Tanner described generation Y as “wandering in the purgatorial landscape of postgraduate inertia, premarital indecision, and protocareerist yearning” (as

cited in Taylor, 2014b, p. 19). Taylor (2014b) explained that “a terrible job market, runaway college tuition costs, record student loan debt, and a housing market bust” has affected the millennials much more than older generations (p. 60). As a result of inheriting a “nation rife with economic peril” (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 72), Generation Y is developmentally stuck in a protracted adolescent phase of “psychological puerility” (Gosling, 2009, p. 137).

Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren stated, “The next generation is starting their economic race 50 yards behind the starting line” (as cited in Kamenetz, 2006, p. 1). Taylor (2014b) echoed Warren’s claim, writing that “millennials are in worse financial shape than prior generations and are also in worse shape than these older generations were back when they were the age that millennials are now” (p. 60). Taylor explained that millennials are having a difficult time finding work in a high unemployment economy (p. 60). According to a government estimate, 93% of the growth in the U.S. labor force from 2006 to 2016 will be among workers ages 55 and older (p. 65). As a result of the economic recession, older adults are staying in the labor force longer and younger adults are staying out of it longer (p. 65).

Due to the lack of availability of jobs, higher rates of young people are enrolling in college. Forty-one percent of 18- to 24-year-olds are enrolled in college compared to 25% in 1980 (Taylor, 2014b, p. 61). Thus, as a result of attaining higher levels of education, Generation Y is accumulating immense student loan debts. In 2010, 40% of all households headed by someone under the age of 35 were carrying student loan debt up from 17% in 1989 (p. 61). About half of individuals with student loan debts say that debt has made it more difficult to make ends meet, and about a quarter say it has affected their

career choices or made it harder to buy a home. One in 13 say that it has caused them to delay marriage or parenthood (p. 61).

The current sluggish state of the economy has influenced the rate of millennials purchasing homes. As a result, 4 in 10 twenty-somethings have returned home to live with their parents at some stage of their adult lives (Taylor, 2014b). Forty percent of all millennial men ages 18 to 31 and 32% of all young women were living in their parents' homes in 2012, the highest rate in recent history (p. 19). Taylor (2014b) explained,

Their low levels of income and wealth and high rates of student debt are likely to put a damper on their economic fortunes for decades to come. They're also facing trillions of dollars in taxes or foregone governments goods and services, or both, to pay off the public debt bequeathed to them by their elders. (p. 67)

The most defining characteristic of Generation Y is their complex relationship with technology (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 19). For Generation Y, instant communication is central to every aspect of its members lives, including relationships, jobs, and education (p. 94). Greenberg and Weber argued, "Having been immersed in technology their entire lives, generation Y will have greater potential than any previous generation to innovate and benefit from other new and emerging technologies" (p. 95). Technology has completely changed the rules of engagement and has provided generation Y and the rest of society with vast opportunities to access information and connect globally instantaneously.

On the other side of the technological coin, psychiatrist and Jungian analyst John Gosling (2009) warned that "American society has become increasingly technologically driven, and this is resulting in increasing numbers of individuals being separated from their roots, the ground of their being" (p. 147). Despite the profound contributions technology has provided to society, there is a strong danger of Generation Y becoming

too reliant on the technologies its members love so much. Greenberg and Weber (2008) described the danger in millennials becoming so accustomed to communication via computer and cell phone that they have forgotten how to engage with one another in the real world (p. 95). The danger lies in millennials using technology as a crutch and forgetting “the power of direct human interaction, eye-to-eye contact and public assembly” (p. 96). Gosling (2009) described the potential danger of technology to society:

When we have become removed from contact with nature and caught up in the maelstrom of technologically driven urban life, a gradual severance occurs for most of us from our roots—our original, unconscious, instinctive, primitive psyche—represented by the archetype of the child. This split-off, vital aspect of our psychic functioning continues to exist in the nether regions of the unconscious where it gains power and inevitably constellates in a more negative form such as the negative pole of the puer/puella archetype. (p. 148)

The parenting styles of millennial parents have had a large impact on the rate of development among their children. In the 1950s, the parents who raised the baby boomers were often described as “emotionally distant authority figures who rarely got down on the floor to play with their children” (Twenge, 2006, p. 78). In contrast, boomer children became the parents of the millennials and adopted a more hands-on, child-centered parenting style as a result of the lack of involvement in their own upbringing (p. 78). Twenge (2006) also attributed the shift in parenting styles to the introduction of birth control. She described the relationship between the debut of the birth control pill and the trend toward higher parental involvement:

In the 1950s it was considered selfish not to have kids, but by the 1970s it was an individual decision. As a result, more and more children were born to people who really wanted to become parents. Parents were able to lavish more attention on each child as the average number of children per family shrank from four to two. (p. 58)

Twenge (2006) continued to describe how the development of the self-esteem movement significantly shaped the attitudes and beliefs among Generation Y. According to Twenge, “In the years after 1980, there was a pervasive, society-wide effort to increase children’s self-esteem” (p. 53). Programs designed to build self-esteem started appearing in schools and were quickly adopted by parents into the home (p. 58). Millennial children were thus born into a world that celebrated the individual and were taught the importance of self-focus. As a result, the average child in the mid-1990s had higher self-esteem than 73% of kids in 1979 (p. 53).

Twenge (2006) argued that Generation Y’s “childhoods of constant praise, self-esteem boosting, and unrealistic expectations did not prepare [them] for an increasingly competitive workplace and the economic squeeze created by sky high housing prices and rapidly accelerating health care costs” (p. 7). Twenge continued by noting that “young people have been consistently taught to put their own needs first and to focus on feeling good about themselves” (p. 7). She claimed that this attitude is not conducive to following social rules or favoring the groups’ needs over the individual’s (p. 7).

Child psychologist Dan Kindlon argued that compared to earlier generations, millennial parents are emotionally closer to their children, children confide in their parents more, and they have more fun together. However, he argued, “We are too indulgent. We give our kids too much and demand too little of them” (as cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2009, p. xi). Kindlon wrote that “when children are overindulged, it leads to outcomes resembling the seven deadly sins: pride, wrath, envy, sloth, gluttony, lust and greed” (as cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2009, p. 76). Twenge and Campbell (2009) described how treating children as special leads to young adults who are self-absorbed

yet fragile in the face of hard work and negative feedback (p. 83). “They feel entitled to high status occupations but quickly become discouraged when they aren’t highly successful right away” (p. 83).

Poet and storyteller Robert Bly (2004), psychologist Robert Moore (as cited in Bly, 2004), and Hillman (1989) have all emphasized the role of the father in maturational development. Hillman (1989) specifically argued that many individuals have overidentified with the puer aeternus archetype in an effort to make up for or “redeem” their remote or absent fathers (p. 225). Bly (2004) explained,

It’s becoming clear to us that manhood doesn’t happen by itself; it doesn’t happen just because we eat Wheaties. The active intervention of the older men means that older men welcome the younger man into the ancient, mythologized, instinctive male world. (p. 15)

Bly (2004) added that “if no old man or competent initiator is present at this stage all moves slowly” (p. 87). According to Bly, “When women even with the best intentions bring up a boy alone, he may in some way have no male face, or he may have no face at all” (p. 17). He continued to explain that “women can change the embryo to a boy, but only men can change the boy to a man. Initiators say that boys need a second birth, this time a birth from men” (p. 16).

Moore stated, “If you’re a young man and you’re not being admired by an older man, you’re being hurt” (as cited in Bly, 2004, p. 31). Bly (2004) explained that “not seeing your father when you are small, never being with him, having a remote father, an absent father, a workaholic father is an injury” (p. 31). Bly argued that “having no soul union with other men can be the most damaging wound of all” (p. 33). “When people identify themselves with the wounded child, or remain children, the whole culture goes to pieces” (p. 35). Bly asserted that “the recovery of some form of initiation is essential to

the culture” (p. 35). Bly highlighted the necessity of male mentors in order for the individual to witness his shadow and the possible outcomes of ignoring it:

The old men tell the boys stories as soon as they enter the men’s world. If we have no story, we cannot take hold of the wound. We either climb above it, so far up that we can’t reach down to take hold of it, or we become the wound, get stepped on by something so huge we see only the ground below us. (p. 34)

Von Franz perceived the puer’s flight upward as a revolt against the “earthly, conservative, possessive, clinging part of the maternal feminine” (as cited in Bly, 2004, p. 100). Bly (2004) wrote, “Flying people . . . do not inhabit their own bodies well, and are open to terrible shocks of abandonment; they are unable to accept limitations and are averse to a certain boring quality native to human life” (p. 57). Bly explained the importance of owning one’s wound and shadow:

When a man has reclaimed his grief and investigated his wound, he may find that they resemble the grief and the wound his father had and the reclaiming puts him in touch with his father’s soul. Once his senses are sharpened, he will be able to smell the father’s wound. (p. 88)

### **The Modern Puer**

Research has found that Generation Y has been significantly influenced by recent cultural, technological, and economic changes that have resulted in a stunting of its members psychological development (Taylor, 2014b). The youthful traits that have been associated with members of generation Y share characteristics exhibited in the puer aeternus archetype (Gosling, 2009, p. 139). The negative aspects associated with the archetype have been recognized to potentially cause problems when individuals overidentify with the archetype (Franz, 2000). Professor of comparative literature Steven Walker (2002) described the potential problems for the 21st-century puer:

The numinous force of the puer aeternus creates problems for modern peter pans, who, inflated with a sense of archetypal youthfulness, feel justified in never



wanting to grow up. In modern society the same myth works to discourage initiative and to block the empowerment of the oppressed, depriving them of the sense of responsibility for improving their lot. (p. 153)

From a Jungian perspective, many of the problems related to the contemporary difficulty in successfully passing through the stages of life are due to the lack of initiation rites within modern American culture (Henderson, 1967). “In many cultures, initiation was a public event designed to signal the passage from childhood to adulthood, thus overcoming the child’s regressive longing for the safety of infancy and childhood” (Stevens, 1999, p. 130). In order to move into the next life stage, “the ‘hero within’ that each child longs to embody must be integrated or internalized in order for the individuals to move on to the next critical stage of growth” (Porterfield, 2009, p. 89). Initiation rituals facilitate the transition into different life stages and also activate “archetypal components in the collective unconscious appropriate to the life stage that had been reached” (Stevens, 1999, p. 64). The disappearance of initiation rituals has thus left society without a mythic context and thus a lack of meaning.

Gosling (2009) described the developmental state of modern America society and its relation to the puer aeternus archetype: “The collective American psyche is developmentally stuck in a protracted adolescent phase of ‘psychological puerility,’ unconsciously identified with the negative aspect of the archetype of the puer aeternus/puella aeterna” (p. 137). Psychologist Sally Porterfield (2009) argued that as a culture, modern Americans have become possessed by the hero archetype, thus keeping society in an artificial, provisional state of vicarious experiences that characterizes the archetype of the puer aeternus (p. 89). Porterfield explained, “A society, though, like an individual, can become stuck or fixated at a certain stage of development because of its

inability to integrate a certain archetype, resulting in what Jung called a possession by that archetype” (p. 89). Psychologist Anodea Judith (2009) described society’s task in overcoming possession of the archetype: “The puer society that is consuming our world with its rampant consumption and delusions of grandeur needs to find its sacred ground in the Earth, acknowledge its denied Shadow, and balance the archetypal energies of Masculine and Feminine” (p. 17).

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed various psychological theories regarding the psychological archetype of the puer aeternus (Franz, 1981, 2000; Hillman, 1979, 1989; Jung, 1943/1966, 1954/1968, 1936/1968, 1973). In addition, this chapter also reviewed pertinent research regarding the major factors that have influenced a delay in development among the women and men of Generation Y (Greenberg & Weber, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2007, 2009; Taylor, 2014b). The polarity of the puer aeternus archetype and the similarities between the archetype and the millennial generation were examined. The chapter then explored the current generational gap and highlighted the differences between Generation Y and preceding generations. It also addressed the unique challenges specific to Generation Y’s ability to reach traditional developmental milestones, specifically the influence of the economic recession, the technological revolution, and the self-esteem movement (Gosling, 2009; Taylor, 2014b; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell 2009). Finally, the chapter looked at the prominence of puer identification among members of Generation Y within modern America (Gosling, 2009; Porterfield, 2009; Stevens, 1999). The literature reviewed provides a foundation for the

following chapter's discussion of the author's personal experiences as a member of Generation Y.

## **Chapter III Integration**

### **Overview**

Chapter II reviewed the topic of the puer aeternus archetype, the polarity of the archetype, and the major factors that have influenced a developmental arrest among members of Generation Y. In Chapter III, I integrate relevant literature and empirical research with my own personal experiences as a member of this generation. Through the integration of hermeneutic and heuristic research, I provide both personal and theoretical evidence that addresses my research question. Incorporating my personal experiences and observations and interactions with other members of Generation Y allows for a dynamic perspective of the factors influencing a developmental delay among my generation.

It is apparent that the technological advances of the 21st century, the economic recession of the late 2000s, and a cultural shift in parenting have significantly influenced Generation Y's professional, maturational, and psychological development. Twenty years ago, individuals in the same developmental stage that the millennials are in now were attaining greater levels of success and reaching developmental milestones at earlier ages (Taylor, 2014b). Due to a lack of resources and available opportunities, Generation Y has been forced to meander in a purgatory-like state of development, caught between adolescence and adulthood, which shares characteristics of the puer aeternus archetype. As a generation that was brought up on the values and success of its forefathers and mothers, Generation Y has been left to redefine the so-called American Dream.

## The American Dream

Writer and historian James Truslow Adams (1931), in his book, *The Epic of America*, stated that the American Dream is

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (pp. 214-215)

The promise of success and good fortune based upon ability and achievement is no longer relevant for the majority of Generation Y members living within the United States.

According to reporter Elliot Blair Smith (2012), “Generation Y professionals entering the US workforce are finding careers that once were gateways to high pay and upwardly mobile lives turning into detours and dead ends” (para. 5). The financial and employment gap between generations is threatening to dismantle an essential tenet of the American Dream that each generation will do better than the last. As a result of the recession and an uneven economic recovery, the millennials, the nation’s youngest workers, are suffering. Joan Chiaramonte, head of the *Roper Youth Report*, argued that for young people today, the “gap between what they have and what they want has never been greater” (as cited in Twenge, 2006, p. 2).

An analysis by *USA TODAY* showed that living the American dream would cost the average family of four approximately \$130,000 a year (Gold, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 1 in 8 households earned that much in 2013 (Noss, 2014). As a result of the change in the American economic landscape, younger Americans are forced to delay many of the initiation rites and developmental milestones that have traditionally

been associated with their age and developmental state. According to *New York Times* writer, Robin Marantz Henig (2010), millennials have had to push back each of the five milestones of adulthood: completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having children (para. 4).

As a member of Generation Y, I have had a front row seat to the cultural changes within the United States over the last two decades. Generation Y has been the only generation to witness a stable economy, a technological revolution, and an economic recession all within its members youth. Technological advances, the economic recession, and the values and ideals that millennials were raised upon have greatly influenced the route that I and other Generation Y members must take in order to advance within society. The traditional models of attaining success that were instilled in Generation Y during youth are not a guarantee to prosperity within modern society. The uncertainty of success and financial instability has led members of Generation Y to reevaluate their goals and pathways to achieving success.

When I was a little girl, I had imagined that by the age of 25 I would have completed my education, married, purchased a home, and been on my way to becoming independently successful and a contributing member of society. The messages I internalized from my parents and society cast unrealistic images of adulthood onto me throughout my youth. Although I followed a carefully mapped-out plan as to how to attain those milestones by an “appropriate” age, external factors such as an unstable economy and a terrible job market have led me to delay “traditional” milestones and initiation rites for a later time.

Now, at the age of 25, with those developmental milestones far off in the distance, I am left feeling caught between being chronologically mature yet lacking the resources needed to reach expected milestones and actually contribute to society in order to feel like I have reached adulthood. The American Dream is thus being redefined by younger generations, like the millennials, who no longer relate to past American ideals. The promise of success based on the concepts of ability and achievement no longer applies to modern American society. Members of Generation Y must begin to abandon the values taught to them by their parents and teachers who grew up in an era that is almost entirely distinct from the world today.

### **Entitlement Versus Disillusionment**

Growing up, I was taught that if I worked hard and tried my best, I would be able to be anything I wanted to be. Although I worked hard, got good grades, and essentially am entering into my dream profession, I was not prepared for the fact that I would end up in thousands of dollars of debt, scraping by to pay rent and buy groceries, and still faced with difficulties in finding employment. To some, this may sound like an entitled 20-something complaining about enduring a reality check. However, I and many other members of Generation Y were raised to believe that good things come to those who work hard and are now left feeling both disillusioned and disenchanted by a lack of rewards for our hard work and dedication. Generation Y is not isolated in its feelings of disillusionment as members of older generations are also struggling to stay afloat after years of relative economic stability. How does one come to terms with a reality that is far from what one was taught to expect?

*Entitlement* is defined as “the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment” (“Entitlement,” 2014, def. 1.2). Generation Y is largely believed to be an entitled generation that has been showcased in the media as having expectations that are too high and unrealistic demands within the workplace. Twenge and Campbell (2009) argued that entitlement is being expressed in the perpetual adolescence of many adults, which they believe to be a central facet of narcissism (pp. 231-234). It is apparent that the general consensus is that millennials demonstrate characteristics of entitlement that result from the belief that they deserve privilege and success. However, it is my opinion that those in Generation Y are not asking for special treatment; they are simply asking for equal opportunity.

*Disillusionment* is defined as a feeling of disappointment resulting from the discovery that something is not as good as one believed it to be (“Disillusionment,” 2014, def. 1). According to general manager of GfK Consumer Trends and Roper Reports, Kathy Sheehan, “Young Americans are struggling to reconcile their lack of economic rewards with their relatively privileged upbringings by Baby Boomer parents and the material success of their older peers, Generation X, born in the late 1960s and 1970s” (as cited in Smith, 2012, para. 15). Generation Y was raised in a time of economic stability and came of age during one of the worst economic recessions in history, without any warning of the possibility of a change in the economic climate. Generation Y was taught to expect that good things come from hard work. How then can society expect the millennials, who was raised on this premise, to abandon what its members were taught to value so highly? It is naive of society to expect Generation Y to instantly create and adopt



a new set of beliefs. If these values and expectations were instilled by past generations, how can millennials be blamed for simply wanting what was promised to them?

Organization management professor Paul Harvey asserted that Generation Y is characterized by a “very inflated sense of self” that can lead to “unrealistic expectations” and “chronic disappointment” (as cited in Archer, 2014, p. 14). On the contrary, it is my opinion that Generation Y is actually very realistic about the future and is simply unwilling to tolerate the current structure of American society. What is currently being labeled entitlement is really the disillusioned expectation that hard work, and not luck, will create advancement, which is actually the product of the current system. It seems that members of Generation Y are being labeled as entitled because they are unwilling to accept and settle for the current conditions that were passed on to them. It is my experience that members of Generation Y are disillusioned by the losses they have received in return for their investments and have been cast unfairly and without being understood, as entitled.

As a result of the self-esteem movement, I was taught to be ambitious, to procure self-esteem and self-confidence, to want the best and be the best, and not to settle for anything lower than my standards. I did not choose to be this way; I was raised to be this way. Wanting rewards for the investment of hard work, money, and dedication does not reflect the ungrounded idealism of the puella or the entitled shadow side of the archetype, but rather belief in the system that was promised but that failed before Generation Y came of age. Although I may carry a sense of being deserving that is at odds with my experience of the outcomes I have reaped, thus producing a state of dissonance, my sense of self-worth is a positive artifact of the contemporary focus on self-esteem. In my

experience of the members of my generation—young adults who are employed, looking for work, in school, trying to establish careers—we do not feel entitled to reap success without first putting in our time, which demonstrates the difference between Generation Y being entitled and Generation Y being disillusioned.

### **Redefining the American Dream**

It is apparent that the American political, economic, and societal landscape is rapidly changing. Generation Y carries a completely different set of values, beliefs, and attitudes than previous generations. Generation Y is a predominately progressive generation that is already beginning to reshape American culture. Millennials have begun to forge a new pathway to success that places an emphasis on innovation, group consensus, and self-sufficiency. Generation Y refuses to accept the current social norms and is diligent about redefining traditional American values and roles. Often, rebellion and rejection are associated with youthfulness and immaturity; however, it is my opinion that Generation Y's refusal to accept the state of our country shows an immense amount of awareness and responsibility that many individuals within our culture seem to mistake for entitlement.

As the largest generation in U.S. history (Greenberg & Weber, 2008, p. 20), Generation Y holds a lot of power and responsibility for the future of America. Generation Y has a new vision of the American Dream and will prove to be the cultural revolutionaries of our time. Generation Y's refusal to accept the current conditions of society shows Generation Y's intent to change the structure of modern America. Generation Y is pioneering new ideals in civil rights, education, health care, politics, and environmental policies (Greenberg & Weber, 2008). The emergence of generation Y in

both the political and social arena marks a turning point for America. The progressive beliefs and attitudes of the millennials are essential in heralding a stark change within society.

As the first digital natives, members of Generation Y are using technology as a platform to enact change and influence actions within politics and corporate America. Generation Y has been significantly shaped by technology and will thus shape the world through its use of technology. Generation Y has the power to collaborate and educate and empower others on important social and political issues on a global level. Generation Y will begin to forge a new path of success through the means of technology and innovation. A study by Intuit and the Institute for the Future in 2007 predicted that “Generation Y will emerge as the most entrepreneurial generation ever” (Hewitt & Ukpere, 2012, abstract). Millennials have the opportunity to capitalize on the technological revolution and use technological innovation as a way to create a new economy and break free from the current restraints in the job market.

Millennials are emerging into the world at an unusual time. Generation Y must come to terms with the abandonment of old ideals and the creation of new means of living and success. Generation Y has the opportunity to collaborate with its members in order to create the world they envision for the future. However, this opportunity comes with a vast amount of responsibility and maturity that members of Generation Y must begin to cultivate. Millennials have the difficult task of overcoming the current challenges that keep them in an adolescent-like state of development. They must also learn to dispose of the values and ideals taught to them in their youth in order to cultivate the mindfulness, creativity, and confidence needed in order to overcome those challenges

that have been placed in front of them in order to fully reach maturation so that they may revolutionize society.

### **The Provisional Life**

The phrase “provisional life,” coined by Jungian analyst H. G. Baynes (1950), refers to a type of neurosis that is characterized by the strange attitude and feeling that one is not yet in real life, accompanied by the fantasy that something greater will come about in the future. Von Franz (1981) warned, “If this attitude is prolonged, it means a constant inner refusal to commit oneself to the moment” (p. 2). Generation Y is thus caught living a provisional life, waiting for society to become stable and safe to enter again. Millennials have chosen to ignore and disassociate from the harsh realities that are modern society and that appear so threatening and uncertain. This transient attitude, however, highlights Generation Y’s optimism that the present conditions within society will someday become better.

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm described the problem of the neurosis of the provisional life:

If one believes in Time then one has no possibility of sudden change, there is a constant expectation that “in time” everything will come all right. If one is not capable of solving a conflict one expects that “in time” the conflicts will solve themselves, without one having to risk a decision. You find that very often, especially in believing in Time as far as one’s own achievements are concerned. People comfort themselves, not only because they do not really do something but also for not making any preparation for what they have to do, because for such things there is plenty of time and therefore there is no need to hurry. The older such people get, the more they cling to the illusion that one day they will do it. In certain people the reaching of a certain age, generally at the beginning of the forties, brings a sobering effect so that they then begin to use their own forces, or there is a neurotic breakdown which is based upon the fact that one cannot live if one does not have that comforting time illusion. (As cited in Franz, 2000, p. 64)

However positive, Generation Y's optimism may also be its downfall. It is my hope that my generation will be able to sober up from the champagne-like qualities von Franz (2000) described of the puer aeternus and begin to face the reality that is modern America. It is time for the millennials to break free from the provisional attitude that is consuming the generation as a whole and to transform their optimism into action. Despite the challenges ahead of the generation, it is essential for millennials to stop waiting for a better life to come and in turn create the life and future it desires.

### **The Modern Puer Aeternus**

Jung (2002) regarded the advancement of technology and its influence on modern modalities of communication as a major factor influencing society's development (p. 153). "The ubiquitous post modern barrage of communication has thrown us back into a medieval anonymity in which the individual is subsumed by the collective" (Porterfield, 2009, p. 90). Technology has played a major role in the development of Generation Y. However beneficial it may be, millennials must learn to balance their use of technology in order to avoid falling victim to stagnant, surface-like ways of interacting. Modern society places an emphasis on instant gratification, which can turn an individual toward relying on convenience. When an individual relies on convenience, he or she becomes comfortable. Convenience essentially takes the work out of completing a task. When one relies too much on modern technologies, one becomes lazy and eventually stops putting effort into a task. Without exhibiting effort and working for one's goals, one eventually stops developing and has the potential to become entitled. If millennials do not learn to balance their reliance on technology, they have the potential of falling victim to entitled

ways of thinking and could become trapped in an adolescent-like way of being throughout their adult lives.

In his work, *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung wrote that the one cure to puer aeternus identification is work (as cited in Franz, 2000, p. 10). From a Jungian perspective, it will be difficult for the millennials to overcome puer identification without the ability to engage in hard work. The current state of the job market is making it difficult for members of Generation Y to find employment. If millennials are unable to work, they are essentially unable to grow, which slows them in their rate of development. It is likely that the conditions of the economy and job market are facilitating a sense of adolescence among generation Y because the generation does not have the means to engage in the actions needed to advance.

Hillman (1979) considered the puer aeternus archetype to represent a syndrome that gradually becomes an unconscious antidote to the lifeless and mechanistic world that is manifested in the philosophy of modern America. Hillman saw puer identification as a way for individuals to remove themselves from the conventional ways of society as embodied in the senex, the wise, tyrannical old man and the archetypal opposite of the puer. From Hillman's perspective, Generation Y's identification with the puer archetype demonstrates its refusal to accept the current conditions and structure of society and a way for millennials to express the light and youthful aspects of their character.

Bly (1996) argued that the increasing number of modern puers accentuates American culture's fascination with the puer aeternus archetype, which essentially speeds up the culture and influences a change in the structure of society that resembles social and psychological regression. Bly's perspective is similar to Hillman's (1979), in that

puer identification represents a cultural phenomenon of Generation Y's rejection of past values and means of success. From this perspective, Generation Y's association with the puer can be seen as a protest to the current structure within society that appears to the rest of society to be regression. Jungian psychologist Marita Delaney (2009) detailed the struggles of the modern puer aeternus and the difficulty of integration:

It is typical of the puer to hold on to feelings of privilege that are typical of youth long after youth is over. The United States of America is like a youngster who is saddened when no one understands how extraordinary s/he is. The psychological shift from a young nation that offers a beacon of light to the world for religious freedom and economic opportunity to mature nation is a difficult one. We continue to feel unique, the emptiness characterizes our relationship with the world and with ourselves because we cannot see the narcissistic wound that is startlingly visible to the outside world. (p. 219)

### **Clinical Applications**

As individuals grow and enter into different phases of their lives, they go through various challenges and overcome milestones unique to particular phases of development. Therapists and mental health professionals work with individuals of all ages and must be aware of the life cycle changes that one typically experiences in each developmental stage (McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011). It is crucial as psychotherapists to understand the unique characteristics and challenges associated with each stage of development. Enhancing the mental health community's knowledge of the difficulties related to members of Generation Y will allow clinicians to develop a greater understanding of the needs of their millennial clients and enable them to show more empathy regarding financial and existential issues.

It is also necessary for a psychotherapist to become culturally competent in order to successfully work with a diverse group of individuals. Therefore, having the ability to learn from one's client and acquiring the wisdom not to make assumptions or judgments

is essential in forming a warm therapeutic relationship (Hays, 2008, p. 31). Although it would be beneficial for any therapist to develop a greater understanding of Generation Y, family therapists in particular would greatly benefit in increasing their knowledge of the current generation gap and the challenges linked to Generation Y. Family therapists who understand the unique values, attitude, and struggles of Generation Y can help to facilitate a greater understanding of the differences between parents and their millennial children. It is important for mental health professionals to remain mindful of any countertransference that may arise when working with young clients.

As the generation gap continues to grow and younger generations continue to delay the rites of passage of developmental milestones, such as marriage and child rearing, therapists will be faced with the task of understanding and defining modern developmental stages. The field of psychology as a whole may eventually be challenged with the assignment of redefining traditional developmental theoretical models in order to match the current trends in modern American society.

New developmental theories exploring burgeoning life stages are already becoming culturally accepted. “Emerging adulthood” is a concept coined by psychologist Jeffery Arnett (2000) that refers to a new stage of the life-course that falls between adolescence and adulthood. Arnett argued that societal changes have altered the nature of development for young people in industrialized societies such as the United States (p. 469). According to Arnett (2000),

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and world-views. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has



been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course. (p. 469)

### **Summary**

Initially, when I started to write this thesis, I had a primarily negative association to Generation Y's adolescent-like attitude and the general slowness of the generation reaching developmental milestones. However, after completing research around the topic and doing my own interpersonal work, my attitude has changed slightly in regards to my associations of my generational cohort. I have since developed a more empathic view of Generation Y's predicament. Rather than harshly judging the generation as a whole for its seemingly slow rate of development and youthful qualities, I have come to identify substantial external factors, such as the economic recession, the technological revolution, and parenting that emphasized self-importance, that have contributed to maintaining puer aeternus identification among millennials. Generation Y is full of bipolar and contradictory qualities similar to those of the puer aeternus archetype. Mastering a balance of these contradictory energies will empower Generation Y to revolutionize the world as we know it. As the generation gap continues to grow and millennials continue to redefine themselves, the field of psychology as a whole may be challenged with the task of redefining developmental theoretical models in order to match the current trends of development within modern America.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Summary and Conclusions**

#### **Summary**

In Chapter I, I introduced the area of interest in this work: the factors facilitating a delay in development among the women and men of Generation Y. In exploring this topic, I became interested in the similarities and connections between Generation Y and the puer aeternus archetype. I also became curious about the factors that are contributing to Generation Y's slow passage through developmental milestones. Out of this inquiry, the research question developed: How are the changes and advances in culture, technology, and the economy contributing to and maintaining a delay in development and puer identification among members of Generation Y?

In Chapter II, literature about the puer aeternus archetype and Generation Y was reviewed. This included a brief history of the puer aeternus archetype (Franz, 1981, 2000; Hillman, 1979, 1989; Jensen, 2009; Jung, 1943/1966, 1954/1968, 1936/1968, 1973) and the archetype's polarities (Franz, 1981, 2000; Gevert, 2011; Hillman, 1979, 1989; Moore & Gillette, 1991); a general overview of some of the characteristics of Generation Y (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2012; Greenberg & Weber, 2008; Taylor, 2014a, 2014b; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009); and a detailed analysis of the varying factors influencing Generation Y's development (Bly, 2004; Gosling, 2009; Greenberg & Weber, 2008; Hillman, 1989; Taylor, 2014b; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). In addition, this chapter looked briefly at the literature supporting the prominence of

modern puer aeternus identification (Franz, 2000; Gosling, 2009; Henderson, 1967; Judith, 2009; Porterfield, 2009; Stevens, 1999; Taylor, 2014b; Walker, 2002).

Using hermeneutic inquiry, Chapter III integrated different pieces of literature that were reviewed in Chapter II and explored how various factors, such as the economic recession, technological advances, and the self-esteem movement, have contributed to a developmental delay among members of Generation Y. Chapter III highlighted the similarities between the puer aeternus archetype and generation Y. Empirical data and statistics were supplied in order to demonstrate the vast differences between Generation Y and earlier generations. In addition, Chapter III highlighted the challenges that Generation Y currently faces in its ability to attain success and reach appropriate developmental milestones. Using heuristic methodology, this chapter also integrated my personal experiences and observations in order to illustrate my own experiences as a member of Generation Y. Lastly, Chapter III examined the clinical applicability of this phenomenon and its contribution to the fields of marriage and family therapy and developmental psychology.

### **Conclusions**

Pioneers of their time, the men and women of Generation Y are challenged with the task of abandoning outdated values in order to create a new American landscape and roadmap to success. Generation Y carries the responsibility of generating new ideas and methods in order to solve global environmental and economic problems. This enormous responsibility may contribute to the polarized attention Generation Y is currently receiving. Generation Y's contradictory characteristics mirror the qualities represented in the puer aeternus archetype. The members of Generation Y's progressive ideals, paired

with their prolonged initiation into traditional developmental milestones, represent a stark shift in the traditional American dream.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this research was not to give a definitive answer to the stated research question. Instead, it was designed to stimulate the reader to question the impact that the economy, technology, and one's upbringing may have on one's own psychological and maturational development. This work was also created to promote further thought and inquiry into the area of developmental psychology and intergenerational research. Although research regarding Generation Y currently exists, there is still much to uncover regarding this emerging generation. Due to the current and pressing nature of the topic, further research is strongly encouraged.

The limitations of this study include the unfortunate non-use of human participants. In the event of continuing research pertaining to the topic, I would strongly encourage the use of human participants, including both members and nonmembers of Generation Y. Utilizing a methodology that collects data through a survey or questionnaire would offer insight into the perceptions of Generations Y's development both subjectively and objectively. Incorporating statistical data would also help to illustrate the variety of opinions between generations. Perhaps another opportunity for further research would be to include a longitudinal design that allows for researchers to track Generation Y throughout the course of its members lifetimes in order to detail the unique characteristics of this generation.

A cross-cultural examination of Generation Y's apparent developmental delay in both industrialized and nonindustrialized nations would be beneficial to include in further

research. This would allow researchers to uncover answers about whether this phenomenon is occurring outside of the United States. In addition, research identifying whether this attitude and developmental delay is polarized or relative between genders is also encouraged. Finally, further research regarding the role of absentee fathers in psychological and maturational development would also significantly add to the field of research.

Generation Y is one of the most studied generational cohorts in history. Fresh psychological and demographical research will continue to be published as Generation Y transitions fully into adulthood. Acknowledging the role of myth and image as it relates to the puer aeternus archetype provides a historical, cyclical, and bipolar component to a modern phenomenon. It is an exciting time to be a part of this burgeoning area of research that recognizes the influence of social and cultural factors on development.

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