TARGETING THE INTERSECTION OF MILLENNIALS' ATTITUDES ON ABORTION, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

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Abstract

If abortion continues to be as contentious an issue in the future as it is now, with almost equal numbers of people wanting to repeal Roe v Wade as want to protect it, then its *legislated* future will increasingly be in the hands of Millennials. Since this generation is said to express diminishing support for abortion (Jones, Cox, Laser, 2011) and have conflicting ideas on the efficacy of political activism (Burstein, 2013), pro-choice groups need to be prepared for this generational shift in attitude in order to ensure that access to abortion remains legal. Additionally, as this Millennial group is frequently defined by its constant creation of new ways of receiving and sharing information (Lenhart, 2015), being attuned to its rapidly shifting social media preferences and the technological developments driving them is critical for those hoping to create and deliver effective messaging on key issues.

This paper uses a survey developed by the author to investigate Millennials' preferred methods of receiving, sharing and distributing messaging of a sensitive or political nature. It details two Millennial focus groups' own attitudes on the best ways to both attract their attention and to motivate them to identify and engage with activist communities. It also looks at research in Cognitive Science and Linguistics to explore methods of framing the discussion around keeping abortion legal, which was used to test focus group participants' reaction to specific words and images thought to be relevant to pro-choice targeted messaging. It examines data on Millennials' habits and preferences collected by marketing and advertising agencies, describing their generational characteristics and defining features. It also analyzes research on the branding techniques advertisers use to target Millennials in order to sway opinion, drive purchasing or modify behavior.

The findings are that pro-choice groups, along with other issues based organizations, should be aware that while Millennials are linked to broad social media networks, the nature of their communications is shallow:

- They are hesitant to share opinions on social issues with these networks

- The way to politically engage them is personally or through friends and family

- Harnessing their connectivity is vital for activist groups' viability in the future

In addition, several words and phrases, along with different imagery, were tested; it had been hypothesized that these might resonate with Millennials, based on earlier research findings. Surprisingly, they were proven to be wrong—or inconclusive at best. **"Together"** and **"Friends"** might be useful words, if paired with images that resonated and reinforced the concepts. **"Making choices for myself"** needs further examination to determine its usability. "**Stand up with me to support a cause,"** **"Future"** and **"Freedom,"** while intuitively—or to a previous generation— might seem likely to resonate, do not seem to do so. Using them in targeted messaging campaigns aimed at Millennials is not recommended, or at best need further research.

Pro-choice groups and supporters should not only take note of the rapidly changing and evolving forms of social protest favored by this next generation of potential activists, but make use of it now to ensure the future of legal access to abortion.

Targeting the Intersection of Millennials' Attitudes on Abortion, Political Engagement and Effective Messaging

On January 22, 2015, pro-choice advocates celebrated the 42nd anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision striking down abortion restriction laws, but its future as settled law remains uncertain. Research is showing that only 44 percent of the Millennial generation actually know what issue Roe is about, compared to 74 percent of Baby Boomers and 62 percent of all respondents (Pew Forum 2013). And what is troubling to supporters of legal access to abortion is that these Millennials are also expressing conflicting views on whether access to abortion should even remain legal and available (Jones, Cox, Laser, 2011).

For those who are old enough to remember when abortion was illegal, there is a generalized concern that these young Millennials have not been witness to a time when thousands of women, driven into unsafe, backroom abortions or botched attempts at self- induced miscarriage, did not survive the procedure. Millennials have come of age when in the United States, and in most higher-income countries, women have had the right to exercise some control over their own fertility, family planning and access to abortion.

But the further one gets away from any personal connection to the issue, the more impersonal and theoretical the debate becomes. And while that debate continues to be unresolved, the *legislated* future of reproductive rights in this country, along with the responsibility for electing people who will support them, will soon be in the hands of Millennials. Since this generation is said to express diminishing support for abortion (Public Religion Research Institute, 2011) and have conflicting ideas on the efficacy of political activism (Burstein, 2013), pro-choice groups need to be prepared for this generational shift in attitude in order to ensure that access to abortion remains legal. Additionally, as this Millennial group is frequently defined by its constant creation

of new ways of receiving and sharing information (Lenhart, 2015), being attuned to its rapidly shifting social media preferences and the technological developments driving them is critical for those hoping to create and deliver effective messaging on key issues.

Who Are The Millennials?

As defined by the US Census and other governmental and administrative agencies, the Millennials who are the focus of this study were born between 1977 and 1994. In 2014**,** they were between the ages of 20 and 37 and accounted for one quarter of the U.S. population, or 78.3 million individuals (US Census Bureau, interim population projections released 2012). They are the most racially diverse group of adults in U.S. history; almost half of Millennials are self-identifying as non-White: 19.4 percent are Hispanic, 14.8 percent are African American and 5.2 percent identify as Asian American.
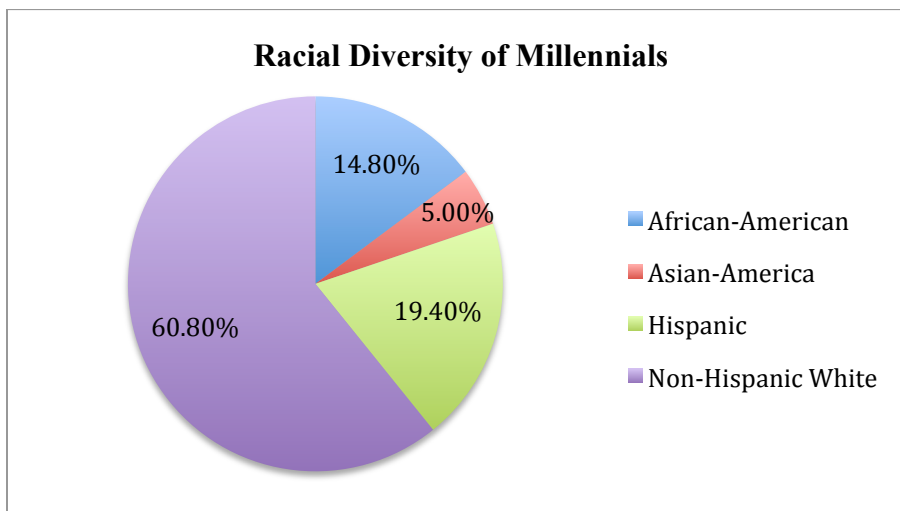

Figure 1 Millennials are the most racially diverse generation in U.S. history.

Millennials have witnessed profound social and technological changes and advances at an early enough age that they have experienced and incorporated them as the *norm*, not as outlier

events. One of their most defining characteristics is that they grew up with many of the

technologies that have been shaping our future for over a decade; they saw the introduction of:

- The iPod in 2001
- Facebook in 2004
- Twitter in 2006
- The iPhone in 2007
- The iPad in 2010

The technology bubble burst of 2000, the collapse of Enron in 2001 that led to the decade's

first economic downturn, and the housing collapse that precipitated the 2008 financial crisis all

happened while Millennials were young. They are continuing to feel the after effects of the Great

Recession, as recovery is slow and their employment prospects remain uncertain.

- As a result of the 2008 economic collapse, median income for those aged 15-24 declined

  13 percent between 2007 and 2012 and declined 9 percent for those aged 25-34. There

  are predictions that some Millennials may never catch up or compensate for lost wages.

- As of December 2013, 10.3 percent of Millennials aged 20-24 and 6.8 percent of

  Millennials aged 25-34 were unemployed, compared to the 6.5 percent national average.

- Younger Millennial's median household income is significantly lower, at $30,604, than

  that of Older Millennials, $51.381. However, this discrepancy may be explained by the

  fact that younger Millennials are more likely to be in school or in an entry-level job,

  whereas older Millennials are working full time and more established in their careers

  (Mintel, 2014).

Millennials also came of age during one of the more unsettled political and societal eras in

recent memory, becoming heir to a feeling of generalized angst afflicting large swathes of people

in the United States. They are among the most likely to prioritize preventing terrorism above

other social concerns. The only issue that came close to it in importance among younger adults was improving education (Barna, 2014). This may be explained by their having lived through the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the "Arab Spring" as impressionable children and teenagers. They have also witnessed a spate of domestic violence and terror attacks: at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook Elementary School and the Boston Marathon—all committed by members of their generation.

Millennial Attitudes on Social Issues

Millennials and the population as a whole share many values. However, their level of agreement on the relative *importance* of different social issues differs significantly from all adults, which could presage a shifting of values and priorities.

- Several polls have found that Millennials are more progressive on key issues such as gun safety, climate change and renewable energy (Tierney, 2014), which might affect the changing of political emphases by candidates and officials in the future.

- Millennials are more likely to say that issues of mental health and equal rights for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Transsexual, Queer) communities are very important to them (Mintel, 2014). In the survey developed for this paper (Appendix A), 95% of respondents rated LGTBQ issues as important, the highest response given for any of the other issues posed.

But when it comes to abortion, the *Millennials, Abortion and Religion Survey* (2011) conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute and funded by the Ford Foundation, found that:

Controlling for other factors, while Millennials are slightly less likely than the general

population to support the legality of abortion, they are slightly more likely to say

abortions should be available from at least some health care professionals in their local

community. This suggests the traditional measures of legality may not fully capture

support for legal abortion among Millennials (PRRI News Release, June 9, 2011).

But this shouldn't be surprising as the same survey found that two-thirds of Americans

describe themselves simultaneously as "pro-choice" and "pro-life." "On the issue of abortion,

many Americans hold complex views and fluid identities," says Daniel Cox, PRRI Research

Director. "For some time now, Americans have held a stable tension between two views:

majorities both say that abortion is morally wrong (52 percent) and say that it should be legal in

all or most cases (56 percent). The binary "pro-life" and "pro-choice" labels don't reflect this

complexity" (Jones, Cox, Laser, 2011). While young people today are more educated, more

liberal and more likely to be religiously unaffiliated than their parents, all factors traditionally

correlated with support of abortion rights, they are not actually *more* likely to support abortion

(Hess, 2011).

The fact that younger Americans are increasingly in favor of gay marriage but are not

showing the same degree of support for maintaining legal access to abortion is referred to as a

"de-coupling" of attitudes (Jones, Cox, Laser, 2011). Support for same-sex marriage and

abortion rights have historically been linked, but that connection is changing and weakening. The

increasing success of the freedom to marry movement would seem like a model that the

reproductive rights movement could emulate, particularly in light of the recent Supreme Court

decision legalizing same-sex marriage in all 50 states. But over the past several decades, the

mainstream gay rights movement has tactically aligned its priorities with fundamentally

conservative ideals: marriage, adopting children and serving in the military (Jones, 2014). These are "family friendly" demands that appeal to almost everyone and are used to dispel the lingering stereotypes of a promiscuous gay lifestyle, which was comparable in people's minds to the behavior of "loose" and immoral women seeking abortions; both groups occupying a space outside of accepted norms of behavior and action. "While abortion and same-sex marriage are both about constitutional and human rights, they are culturally distinct. Same-sex marriage is framed as an issue of love, commitment and normalcy. Abortion, on the other hand, is about sexual activity, reproduction, and bodily autonomy... marriage equality is about love and abortion is about sex" (Rankin, 2015).

There are many in both the "Pro-choice" and "Pro-life" movements who would describe their position as "Pro-family," but whose definition of what constitutes a "family" might differ. If pro-choice activists are not able to convince the younger generation of the validity of women having the right to make the best decisions for their families, which would include the ability to seek safe, legal abortion, then the stage is being set for an uncomfortable conflict in the not so distant future. The fact that there would also be fewer activists ready to take the actions thought necessary to keep abortion legal—educating, lobbying, organizing and protesting— could prove troubling as time passes and "Second Wave" feminists and their age cohort and donor base die off. Among Millennials, huge mass marches in Washington requiring months of planning is seen as a waste of time, as is the endless calling and writing to legislators (Burstein, 2013). The traditional forms of advocacy may not be Millennials' preferred methods, but they are adept at exploiting social media networking—the domain where they live— for rapidly organizing smaller and more sustained protests, seen most recently in Ferguson, Missouri and with the "Black Lives Matter" campaign. This new way may turn out to be the best way in the

interconnected 21st Century, and social movements must acknowledge it and adapt, or risk becoming outdated and irrelevant.

Millennials' Defining Characteristics in Terms of Communication Strategies

Before discussing what forms of messaging should be aimed at Millennials, it is imperative that we first acknowledge what sets this generation—and their world—apart from those that came before:

- The technological advances, particularly in communications, that have grown exponentially since the 1980s

- The degree to which they are interconnected with one another

- Their having come of age in an era of global unrest and rapidly changing values

For the first point, the fundamental changes in the way information is received and processed is being redefined and rewritten every day, while the impact this has and will have for message formation, distribution and reception is still in flux. What may be the most important consideration coming up is what *technological language* everyone speaks, and whether one is a native speaker or someone struggling to catch up on a difficult second language. In 2010 A.C. Grayling defined more precisely these differences and people's relationship to technology:

> A distinction is drawn between the younger generation of people who are 'Technologically Native' and the older population that are 'Technological Tourists,' that is, rather tentative and not fully competent 'venturers' [sic] in the land of computers and powerful mobile phones and the like—they do not know the language well and miss a great deal of what is happening, what is possible, what is coming at them with the speed

of light in this brave new world of technology. Technological Natives, by contrast, consist of those who have grown up acquiring hyper-fast thumbs on their mobile phones buttons, who read with comfort the tiny screens and take every new development in their stride and with relish (p. 161).

For their second defining characteristic, interconnectedness in communication and thought, we should revisit Marshall McLuhan, who told the Baby Boomers that, "The medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). Were he alive today he might tell Millennials that the messenger is the medium. They are the most inter-connected generation in history—never far from a constant data stream of information and opinion exchange. More than 90 percent of Millennials say they check their phones before getting out of bed in the morning and it's the last thing they do before turning off the lights at night (Mintel 2014). They want to know what their friends and family are doing and thinking every moment. And a few key "influencers" can have a tremendous impact on ever widening circles of people.

For the third point, Millennials' parents and grandparents will say, with some justification, they grew up in eras more fraught with worldwide war, upheaval and the specter of mass nuclear annihilation, than what we are witnessing today. But there are indications that this generation is growing up in a less stable world more fragmented along theological, ideological, technological, economic and cultural fault lines than we've ever seen. Older, "tribal" identities are threatening to reemerge and replaced the notionally modern political entities created over the past 200 years. Millennials in this country are also expected to be the first generation in our history to face a less promising future than their parents, with the very real possibility that they will shoulder the financial, economic and social burden not only for themselves and their children, but for their

parents as well (Horn, 2014). Knowing this, it is not unreasonable to see them less sanguine about their lives today and more hesitant about their prospects for tomorrow (See Appendix B).

Who Has Abortions in the United States?

While the total number of abortions has decreased, surveys consistently show a relatively constant number of women seeking abortions annually, 1.21 million. At least half of all American women will experience an unintended pregnancy by age 45 (Jones, 2014). Using 2008 abortion rates, one in 10 women will have an abortion by age 20, one in four by age 30 and three in 10 by age 45 (Jones, 2014).

- Teens aged 15-19 years old account for 18 percent of U.S. women seeking abortions (Jones, 2014).

- Women in their 20s obtain more than half of all abortions: those aged 20–24 account for 33 percent of all abortions, and women aged 25–29 account for 24 percent (Jones, 2014).
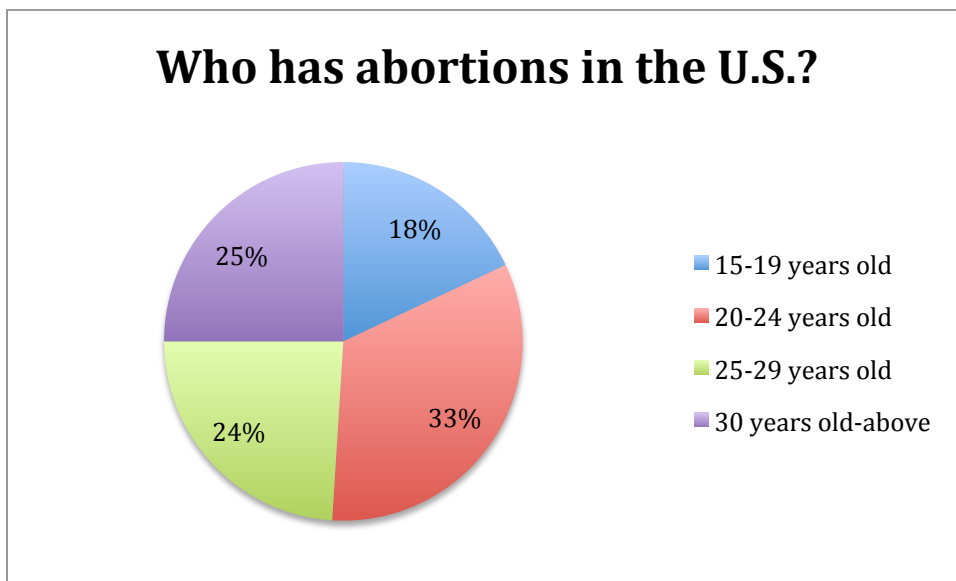

Figure 2 Age of women having abortions in the U.S.

Collectively, women in the Millennial's generation account for 75 percent of all abortions annually. It would appear that the effects of overturning Roe V. Wade would be most acutely felt by Millennials, as women between the ages of 15 and 30 are more likely to experience unintended pregnancies and choose to receive abortion care (Guttmacher Institute, 2014). Understanding *why* this age group seems hesitant to support a service that a number of them will so clearly need is work pro-choice supporters must do; this paper will explore the best ways to develop the effective strategic messages and delivery mechanisms that will help educate, persuade and engage Millennials in upholding the continuation of safe, legal access to abortion.

Activating Brand Advocacy

When identifying and defining key qualities and characteristics of Millennials, with a view towards creating the most effective pro-choice messaging for them, approaching the problem from a traditional marketing perspective could prove helpful. The comprehensive data that has been collected by advertising agencies about Millennials' attitudes, purchasing habits and media preferences is not a tool normally used by social issues activists, but it would foolish to ignore this research. Analyzing this information could be a first step in understanding the "target market" sought by pro-choice groups as they explore approaches toward reaching and recruiting both voters and activists.

Companies that have been engaged in this data collection and interpretation, such as Mintel and Piper Jaffrey, have also developed insights into this group with an eye towards consumption and developing "brand loyalty." Fiona O'Donnell, Senior Lifestyle & Leisure Analyst for Mintel believes that:

Companies or brands that successfully market to Millennials are ones that recognize that

there is no such thing as a 'Millennial'—just individuals or groups of individuals who are

at a similar life stage and have lived through similar experiences. They want to be treated

for who [sic] they are, rather than lumped together and labeled (O'Donnell, 2014).

While this group accounts for 25 percent of the population, it should not be thought of as one

target market but as many market segments, bound together by date of birth and shared

experiences. The most significant differences between Millennials and other generations are not

in values—Millennials share many of the same values as all adults. The differences are based on

lifestyle, affected by the extent of racial and cultural diversity and shaped by the introduction and

adoption of technologies that have disrupted industries and radically changed the way consumers

communicate and interact (Mintel, 2014).

Pro-choice groups need to study the way companies and advertisers view the concept of

"brand advocacy" and incorporate it into their own forms of advocacy. They would learn that the

successful marketers are using their employees and customers as a way of validating their

product (Fromm, 2013). Astute advertisers have found that engaging influencers to become

"brand advocates" is the key to success. With the advent of all the myriad platforms and

channels of communication, and with people being able to aggregate information on individual

preferences, advertisers have found that getting a consumer to do your advertising for you,

becoming their "brand ambassador," is a substantial way to increase their audience (Mintel,

2014). Writing in *Advertising Age,* Jeff Fromm (2013) also noted that Millennials want to be

engaged in social activities and to feel good while doing it:

Millennials celebrate brand purpose. This is one of the most compassionate generations

with regard to social issues. This quality extends to purchasing and brand preferences;

research shows that Millennials will seek out and buy brands that support a cause that aligns with their values. When you analyze brands they prefer—Nike, Target, Gap—each is strongly connected with a social purpose. Millennials want a personal connection. Millennials don't want to be *spoken to*—they demand to be *spoken with*. They engage with brands that allow them to make personal connections…they expect a dialogue. With Millennials, the days of pushing a brand message only through storytelling are over. Brands must embrace a two-way dialog in the form of "story-doing," which means giving consumers the opportunity to co-create products, services, the experiences by which the products/services/ideas are delivered and enjoyed; and the marketing and social media messages.

A Millennial is most likely to buy something, or believe something, because it's been vetted and validated by a peer (Fromm 2013). Pro-choice groups need to be more attuned to giving a *face* to their organization. Millennials will respond better to "Jessica," "Emma," or "Ben," who tell their story in a way that represents the group's goals, than they will to an outmoded appeal aimed at the broadest possible audience, framed in the most general of ideas, words and slogans. ComScore, Inc. in their January 2012 article, "Next-Generation Strategies for Advertising to Millennials," also noted that:

Millennials are often defined in large measure by their use of digital technologies, and it is the digital world that appears to present marketers with some of the best opportunities to reach and persuade them. Some optimistic news for marketers is that Millennials appear to strongly engage with the media they choose to view. In this regard, digital is well suited to this generation, as their relative engagement versus older viewers is stronger for digital than for television.

Re-Framing The Abortion Debate

Words matter. Images matter. Putting words and images together to define an issue matters. But the emotions, moral values and world-view triggered by seeing and hearing them together matters most. How you think about an issue, particularly a contentious one, is dependent on how the conversation, debate or slogan is framed. And nowhere is this more telling than in the debate over keeping access to abortion legal.

The idea of framing a conversation has gained currency over the past 20 years, particularly in the political realm. In 2004, George Lakoff wrote a book for progressives to explain why they kept losing elections and to help them with their deficient messaging. This power to influence mass thought was explored in his book "*Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate.*" Lakoff, a scholar in Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California, Berkley, wanted to know *why* Republican messaging was resonating more with voters and *how* it happened. He sees frames as constructed mentally to mold how we see the world:

> They are the invisible part of what cognitive scientists call the "cognitive unconscious"—
> structures in our brains we cannot consciously access, but know by their consequences:
> the way we reason and what counts as common sense. We also know frames through
> language. All words are defined relative to conceptual frames. When you hear a word, its
> frame (or collection of frames) is activated in your brain (2004).

Lakoff argues that in political thought, frames are complex and may include the "Family Values" metaphor. This can be important as it relates to issues of personal freedom, as liberals and conservatives have very different values lenses through which they see and define individual liberty. And while you may think you and an opponent are having a rational discussion on

specific, concrete and logistical policy decisions—such as who pays for birth control—both of your brains are actually being activated by multiple layers and collections of values that define who you are and your place in the world. The power of words to frame an issue is probably the most unrecognized aspect of the emotional debate that surrounded legalizing abortion during the turbulent decades leading up to Roe v Wade in 1973. And it is hard for many "Second Wave Feminists" to acknowledge that once the issue was framed as "Pro-Life" versus "Pro-Choice," half the emotional battle was already lost. For who isn't, at their core, "Pro-Life?"

"Life" is an easily understood, positive and basic concept and research has shown that basic words resonate most. But "Choice" is more complicated, evoking images and thoughts that are highly individual and not always positive. For this issue, what exactly are the choices being made, and by whom? Understanding the complexity and fluidity of this linguistic problem, some pro-choice organizations have finally begun thinking about reframing the debate, consciously choosing other words. In an article in the New York Times on July 25, 2014, Janet Colm, president of Planned Parenthood Action Fund of Central North Carolina said:

> The labels we've always used about pro-choice and pro-life are outdated and they don't mean anything. I used to be a one-issue voter—pro-choice—but I think most younger people today aren't."

Cecile Richards, the president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said in the same New York Times article that the change in language was something they had been talking about for several years:

> I just think the 'pro-choice' language doesn't really resonate particularly with a lot of young women voters. We're really trying to focus on, what are the real things you're going to lose? Sometimes that's rights. Sometimes that's economic or access to health

care for you or for your kids.

But Suzanne Staggenborg, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh who researches social movements has also discussed why the terminology of choice has been used for so long:

> 'Choice' has been extraordinarily successful as a frame for the abortion-rights side because a lot of Americans may not like the idea of abortion but they definitely agree with the idea of choice. And they agree that it should be a woman's choice in consultation with her doctor (New York Times, 2014).

Whether and how pro-choice groups choose to position themselves through a change in their messaging structure may be a deciding factor in how well they engage Millennials, both women and men, to participate in the movement going forward.

Results of Focus Groups and Survey

Two focus groups were held on the campus of St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota, on March 15, 2015 and April 12, 2015. Participants were there as a result of invitations given both verbally and through email by a senior at the school, who is the daughter of the author. Recipients were asked to send it on to anyone they thought might be interested in the project. They were told they would be participating in a research project conducted by the hostess' mother, as part of a study at the University of Minnesota on Millennials and communications strategies. This was both a modified form of the Snowball means of soliciting participation, and of a Convenience, or Availability sampling method.
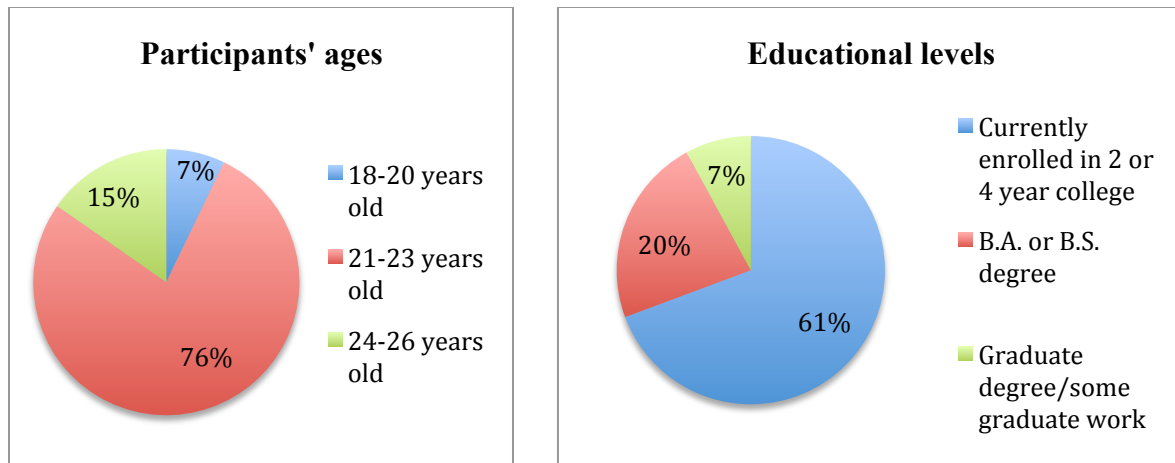
Figure 3 Age and educational levels of focus group participants

There were 45 participants divided among one group of twenty and one of twenty-five; most were students or recent graduates of St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. They were predominantly female, 84 percent. Seventy-six percent were in the 21-23 years old age group; 15 percent in the 24-26 years old age group; and seven percent in the 18-20 years old group. The majority of participants, 61 percent, are currently enrolled in a two or four- year college program. Thirty percent have a B.A. or B.S. degree and seven percent are either doing or have done some graduate work.

Since homogeneity is optimal in focus groups, having students from two closely related schools, most of whom were either known to the hostess or her roommates, was advantageous. However, it is also recognized that they are not necessarily the best representative sampling of their age cohort generally.

As the participants arrived they were offered donuts and beverages, and each was asked to complete a survey individually while waiting for the group to begin (Appendix A). The purpose of the survey and the focus groups was to explore and probe deeper into Millennials' attitudes on which forms and channels of messaging are best suited to reach them, particularly as relates to political messaging. Attitudes relating to the following areas were probed:

- How Millennials prefer to communicate with one another

- How they prefer to receive information on social issues

- How they prefer to share information and political ideology

- Their reaction to selected words, phrases and ideas

The survey was designed to elicit scalable responses to specific questions on Millennials' attitudes on preferred modes of communication, and on sharing political ideas and opinions online and in person. It also dealt with the best ways to convince them to believe in an issue, and how committed they would be to that issue. A second part of the survey (Appendix B) gave them words and phrases that they were asked to react to and to record their thoughts. The words and phrases had been chosen specifically to see if they would resonate positively with Millennials, with a view towards recommending they be used in targeted pro-choice literature. The specific words chosen were the result of two things: discussions the author had had previously with leaders of Planned Parenthood, Pro-Choice Resources and womenwinning[1] on the efficacy of frequently used words within the movement and in their literature; and the result of studying the use of metaphor in language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). These answers were also discussed as part of the focus group.

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[1] womenwinning is always written with a lowercase "w," as it is used on their logo and literature.

How do you prefer to communicate with family/friends?

Categories (left to right): Facebook, Texting, Telephone, Blogging, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Sky;e
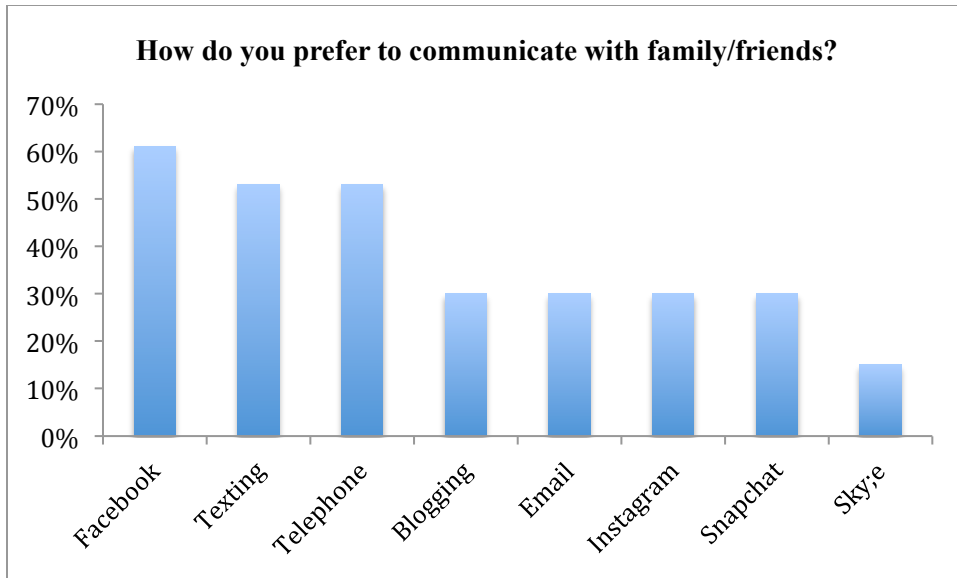
Figure 4 How Millennials prefer to communicate with family and friends

While it might not be surprising that 61 percent of the group communicate with family and friends through Facebook and 53 percent through texting, what was interesting is that an equal number, 53 percent, still use the telephone, which had been thought to be a dwindling form of communication in this age group. Equal numbers, 30 percent each, also said they communicated through blogs, emails, Instagram and Snapchat. Only 15 percent indicated they used Skype to communicate.

How do you prefer to communicate with SMN?

Categories (left to right): Facebook, Instagram, Texting, Blogging, Email, Snapchat

When communicating with their social media network, 76 percent use Facebook, 38 percent each used Instagram and texting, 23 percent used blogs and emails and 15 percent used Snapchat.
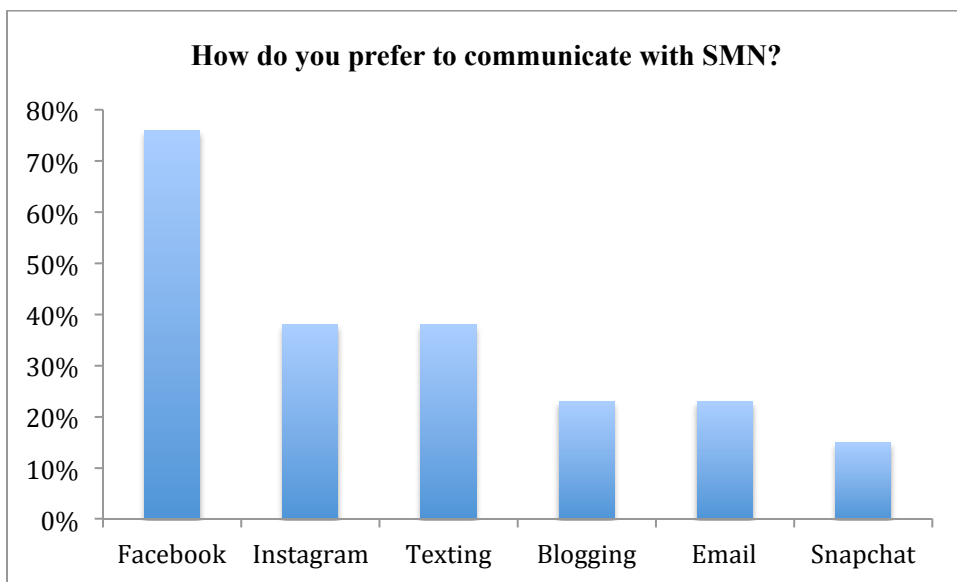
How do you usually follow current events?
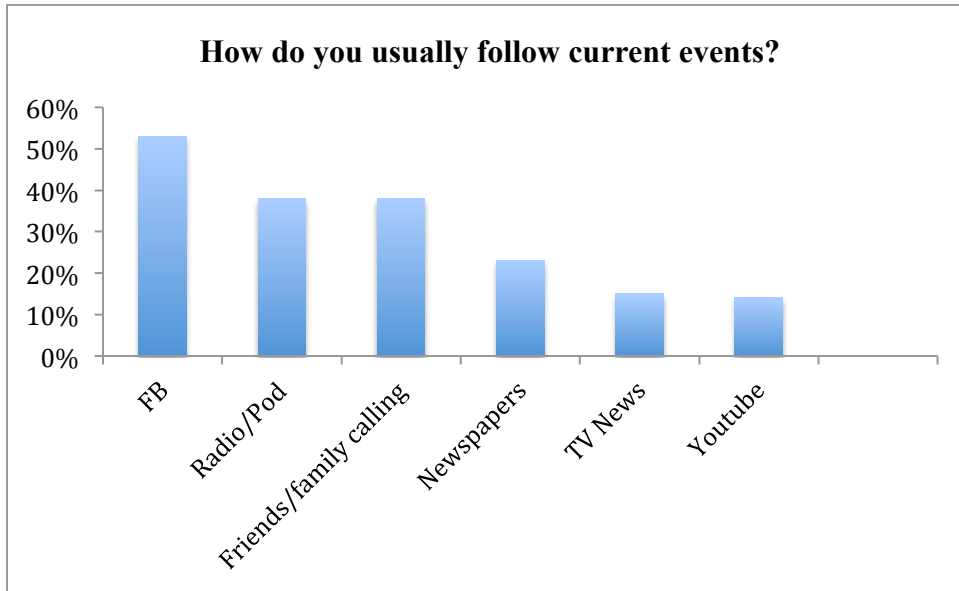
Figure 6 How Millennials prefer to follow current events

For news and current events, the same percentage, 53 percent, said they get their news through Facebook or through reading online newspapers, 38 percent listened to radio or podcasts, with an equal number, 38 percent, getting their information hearing from family and friends calling them. Only 23 percent read traditional newspapers, 15 percent use traditional television news broadcasts, while the same percentage, 15 percent, get their news from Youtube. Further research might determine what their definition of 'news" actually is. Taken together, online newspapers and traditional newspapers together account for 75 percent of news origination, considered as more traditional forms of information gathering.

How often do you share your opinons online with family/ friends?

- Sometimes 51%
- Often 33%
- Never 16%

How often do you share your opinons online with your social media network?

- Sometimes 46%
- Often 16%
- Never 38%
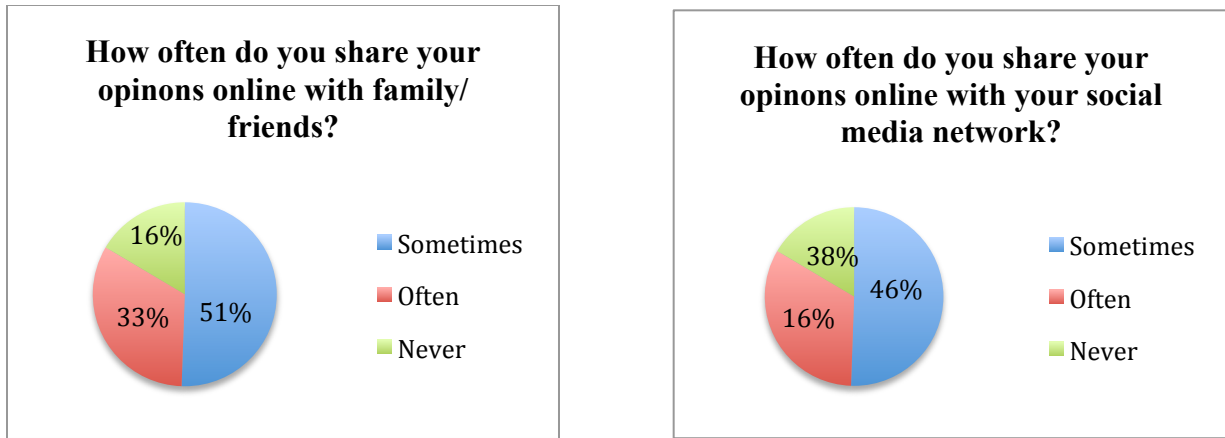
Figure 7 How Millennials prefer to share opinions with family, friends and social media networks

When asked about sharing their opinions about current events online with family and friends, 51 percent said they sometimes do, 33 percent said they often share them online, and 16 percent said never.

When asked about sharing opinions online with their social media network (which is actually defined as being online), a slightly fewer number, 46 percent said they sometimes do, 16 percent said they often do, but 38 percent said they never would, double the amount for family and friends. The same amount, 38 percent, said they would never share opinions on line with fellow students or co-workers, but more, 60 percent, said they often or sometimes do.

Best way to convince me
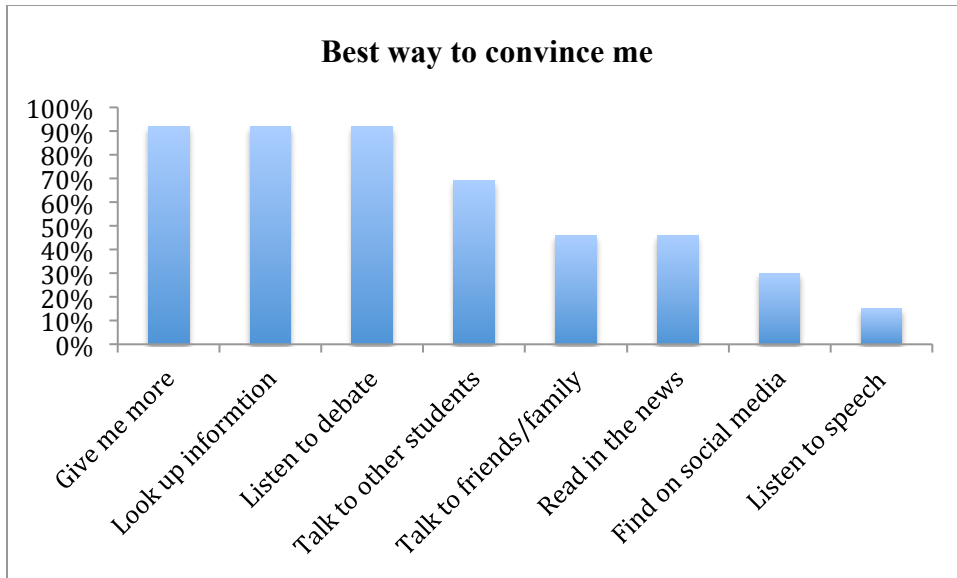
Figure 8 The best ways to convince Millennials to believe an issue

When given choices on the best way to convince them of an issue, where they could choose more than one, an overwhelming number, 92 percent each, said that giving them more information, looking up information on their own and listening to a debate would be most effective. Talking in person to fellow students, 69 percent, and talking to friends and family or reading about it in the news, 46 percent each, was the next highest.

What actions would you take?
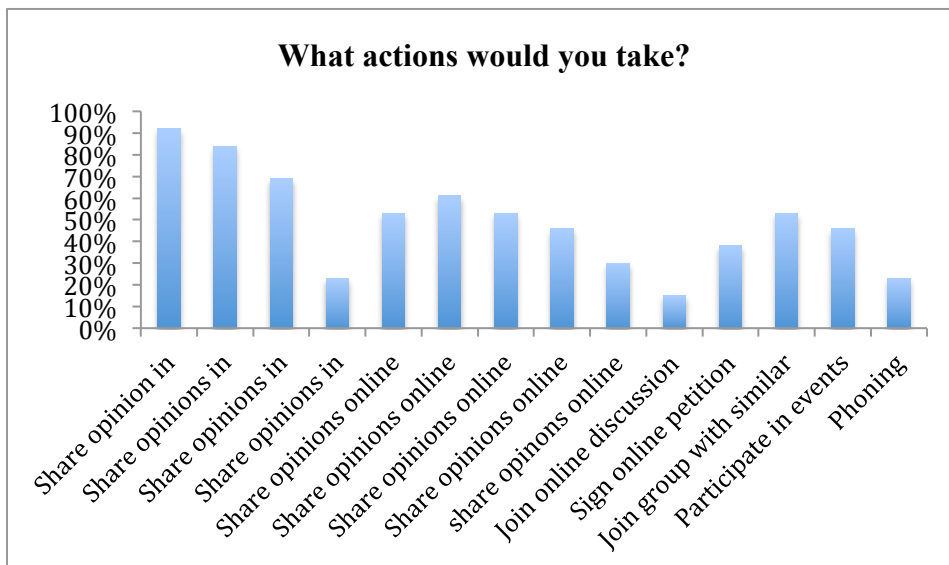
Figure 9 Possible actions to take if believed strongly in an issue

If they felt strongly about an issue, overwhelming majorities said they would discuss the issue in person with family, 92 percent, and friends, 84 percent. Fewer would discuss issues online with friends, 61 percent, and social media networks, 53 percent. Only 38 percent would sign an online petition, and 23 percent volunteer for a candidate or political party. Willingness to participate in traditional political venues was low.

A majority, 76 percent, said they might change their views if family or friends disagreed with them. Only 46 percent of respondents said that their fellow students could influence their opinions and only seven percent would listen to their social media networks. For messaging, 84 percent of participants said they would be persuaded to believe in an issue by hearing things that made them think more about the issue and 61 percent said they would want to know things that made them question their beliefs.

Highlights of Focus Group Dialogue and Opinions

The questions that dealt with communicating via social media and sharing political opinions online elicited some of these responses:

EF (female) said:

> I use different forms of communication to keep my friends around me. Social media can create a bubble around yourself (sic). You pick and chose what you want to hear, what you want to listen to, what political causes you want to subscribe to.

NI (female) said:

> One of the things about social networks is that you can un-friend people you disagree with. I mean, politically or otherwise. You aren't as free to do something like that if you're talking to them face to face.

CG (male) said:

> I think we all want to be with people who think like we do. Maybe we just go onto sites and find people who agree with us politically. But I don't try and get someone to believe something just because I do.

BS (male) said:

> I'm not sure how reliable the Internet is for finding things out. You can try and check out if a source is reliable, but unless you know where they're coming from, it's hard to tell. I mean, I think Fox has an agenda, but I don't know about social media links.

SB (female) said:

> I don't know if the people I see on social media sites are telling the truth or not. I don't think they'd be good people to get my political information from. I don't trust a lot of Youtube sites because they all might have an agenda.

When thinking about how they like to learn about issues to be persuaded, or how they'd persuade someone, participants had generally similar answers.

KB (female) said:

> I like to talk to people in person if it's important, and I guess politics or how you think about an issue is important.

BS (male) said:

> I like to give people all the facts. Then they can make up their own minds. I might not have all the answers but people can check out what I'm saying and look things up online.

BG (female) said:

> The best way to convince me of something is to my face. If I'm on a site, or texting or something, I can't really absorb a lot of information. I need to hear it myself.

NI (female) said:

> I might look up something to find out about it. I look up everything. I could talk to you
> about something I believe in, and think that you'd think about it and maybe look it up
> yourself.

The second part of the focus group was devoted to talking about words and images.[2]
Participants were told that they were first going to be asked to describe what images came mind
when given particular words or phrases (Appendix B). The words were chosen because it was
thought that themes of personal freedom and decision-making would resonate with Millennials
For the word, **"Freedom,"** almost half of the participants in the focus groups, 46 percent, talked
about images that are directly associated with America and its culture in a somewhat upbeat way:
eagles/bald eagles; flags/the American flag; the 4th of July and presidents. An equal number, 46
percent, used words with a slightly edgier, darker or more negative image, such as dictatorship
and propaganda.

What is interesting is that the word **"Revolution"** was used by seven percent of respondents
and the words "protest" or "protesting" cited by 15 percent. These are concepts that are both
associated with America and American history (we protested British taxation at the Boston Tea
Party during the American Revolution), but also have a more chaotic resonance when applied to
other countries and other situations. One could reasonably deduce that for this select population
of Millennials, "Freedom" has both positive and negative connotations.

When asked about the word, **"Future,"** 38 percent of the Millennial respondents envision a
"*Jetsons*"-like space age future populated by robots—as do so many in the general population.

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[2]For discussions on effective use of metaphor in language and in political thought see Kovacses (2002), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Lakoff (2008).

But a larger percentage of the focus groups' participants, 30 percent, see the future as a blank, vague nothingness; 23 percent describe it in terms of uncertainty and fearfulness; while 30 percent explicitly said, "struggling." Only 15 percent seemed to see the future as being better or brighter. It could be that the reason the word "Future" did not resonate well with this group is for them, finishing or continuing with their schooling, finding jobs, careers and life partners, combined with struggling with financial debt burdens, makes thinking about tomorrow too difficult to do today.

When asked to describe images of the word **"Friends,"** there was no particular word or image other than references to the television show, *Friends,* 23 percent. However, in aggregate, 84 percent used positive terms of being with people they cared about or loved. Since this group has so recently been heavily involved with and surrounded by their cohort in school, it could mean that thinking of themselves as part of a cohesive group is still top of mind.

For the word, **"Together,"** 23 percent specifically said holding hands. Thirty percent described the word in terms of unity and rallying, while the rest used vaguely happy terms. As with the concept of friends, their having spent so much time together might still evoke positive feelings*.*

For the phrase, **"Stand up with me to support a cause,"** 61 percent of participants indicated that the phrase had an overtly political tone to it, and "not necessarily in the good way," (quoting one participants). Answers ranged from "Politicians," "Empty audiences," "Hillary Clinton" and "Fear." Only seven percent related it in any way to young people. This could be a case of how difficult it is to take a controversial stand when unsure of your circle's opinions (Ariely, 2010).

Responses to the phrase, **"Making choices for myself,"** shows that there is a clear consensus that the word **"Choice"** has become highly politicized, with 38 percent making references to

women and birth control. Twenty-three percent explicitly used the word "alone," while the rest used concepts relating to struggle and fear. Recent articles have detailed how some groups in the pro-choice movement are discarding the word "choice," and this research bears that out (see above).

Since earlier research has shown that Millennials like to be connected with each other, they were asked, ***"If you see a group of people holding hands in a circle, what do you think they are doing?"*** A mystifying 38 percent of the Millennials used the words "Kumbaya/Singing Kumbaya in their responses, while another 23 percent used words such as "Hippie/Hippie nonsense." The largest percentage, 46 percent, envisioned a service or ceremony such as a wedding or a memorial.

It is clear that the words, phrases and imagery that had been hypothesized might resonate with Millennials, based on earlier research findings, have proven to be wrong—or inconclusive at best. **"Together"** and **"Friends"** might be useful words, if paired with images that resonated and reinforced the concepts. **"Making choices for myself"** needs further examination to determine its usability. "**Stand up with me to support a cause," "Future"** and **"Freedom,"** while intuitively—or to a previous generation— might seem likely to resonate, do not seem to do so. Using them in targeted messaging campaigns aimed at Millennials is not recommended, or at best need further research.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Interdependence on their networked community has resulted in Millennials valuing the opinions, reviews and endorsements of friends, family and acquaintances above claims made by officials, professionals, celebrities or corporate brands. A few key "influencers" can have an

impact that goes beyond their encounter in a single classroom, coffee shop or workplace. This generation seeks meaning and engagement through a sharing of key experiences — usually via smartphone.

As retailers have begun to exploit these findings, so too must the purveyors of social issues and thought. Pro-choice groups should be gearing up to use this addiction to constant sharing and feedback by injecting themselves into the data stream where Millenials live, to get them to not only visit relevant websites, but to make them feel that these sites (and organizations) are part of their individual "brand." By having a presence and blending in where Millennials congregate—virtually and physically— through music, fashion and information exchange, a pro-choice group might become a familiar parts of someone's networks and circles. By finding and convincing the convincers, ever widening circles of Millennials will be hearing and receiving pro-choice message about reproductive choice and health. When developing targeted messaging aimed at Millennials, pro-choice groups should realize that:

- While Millennials communicate with vast numbers of "friends" and contacts, the content and nature of those communications remains shallow.
- They are still hesitant to share deeply felt or closely held opinions on social or political issues with their broad social media network and platforms.
- The best way to convince them of something is still the oldest: by talking to them in person, or by personal recommendation, validation or endorsement by their friends.

In one of the focus groups, EM (female) had stressed that advocacy groups needed to be where Millennials are:

They really need to come to where we hang out, you know, coffee shops, music things, at shopping centers, schools. And it's better if they try and talk to us like they're a person

talking to a friend. I don't want [a] faceless big organization trying to make me believe

something.

It's clear that the message to any activist group willing to hear it is that in order to recruit

Millennials they must:

- **Go where they go.**

- **Find the influencers.**

- **Plug into the networks.**

- **Personalize the movement.**

- **Facilitate face-to-face discussion.**

Their blueprint for the future should look like this:

The circular diagram shows the following steps connected by arrows in a clockwise cycle:

- Activate Millennials by going where they go
- Find the influencers
- Enlist them as brand ambassadors
- Provide them with linkable content and visuals
- Let them personalize key messages
- Help them push it out to their social media networks
- Develop activities at familiar and comfortable venues

Millennials are living in an age where they are not only communicating digitally, but have been organizing politically via social media networking. They have been in the forefront of national and international responses to "The Arab Spring," events in Ferguson, Missouri, on Staten Island in New York, and in Charlestown, South Carolina. This might appear contradictory, as some surveys report that they prefer not to talk about substantive issues on and with their social media networks. But their responses to "hot button" events that garner wide media attention—if the issue is one that meshes with their sense of identity and definition of justice —means they are willing to activate the same mechanisms of collective engagement that they use to recommend the latest dance club, artisanal beer, or pair of jeans.

Harnessing this power to influence and make change might not be a form of social activism their parents are familiar with, but it is the wave of the future. Effective pro-choice groups need to learn to ride it, or risk becoming outdated, obsolete and irrelevant.

Appendix A
Survey Results For Millennials' Communications Preferences

Q1:   How do you communicate most often with family/friends?

Blog	30%
Email	30%
FB	61%
Instagram	30%
Skype	15%
Snapchat	30%
Phone	53%
Text	53%

Q2:   How do you communicate most often with your social media network?

Blog	23%
Email	23%
FB	76%
Instagram	38%
Snap	15%
Text	38%
Tumblr	7%

Q3:   How do you get most of your information on news and current events?

Blogs	30%
Fb	53%
F/F calling	38%
(Family/friends)	
Instagram	7%
Newspaper	23%
Online papers	53%
Radio/pod	38%
TV news	15%
Twitter	7%
Youtube	15%

Q4:   How credible is information from the Internet?

Not very	15%
Somewhat	53%
Don't know	38%

Q5:   How credible or reliable is information from social media?

Not very	30%
Somewhat	61%
Don't' know	7%

.

Q6: How credible is information from news channels?
Not very 30%
Somewhat 69%

Q7: How important to you are **each** of these social issues **(listed alphabetically):** please
choose from: unimportant (U), important (I), no opinion/no answer (N):

Alternative energy research	U: 10%	I: 90%	N: 0%
Economy	U: 08%	I: 85%	N: 07%
Ending poverty	U: 0%	I: 100%	N: 0%
Ending racism	U: 0%	I: 85%	N: 15%
Ending sexism	U: 05%	I: 85%	N: 10%
Finding a job	U: 15%	I: 85%	N: 0%
GLBTQ rights	U: 0%	I: 95%	N: 05%
Global climate change	U: 10%	I: 90%	N: 0%
Global war on terror	U: 15%	I: 80%	N: 5%
Keeping abortion legal	U: 05%	I: 80%	N: 15%
Maintaining Internet privacy	U: 45%	I: 40%	N: 15%

Q8: How do you feel about sharing your opinions online on social issues with
family/friends?
Never 15%
Sometimes 46%
Often 30%

Q9: How do you feel about sharing your opinions online with social media network?
Never 38%
Sometimes 46%
Often 30%

Q10: How do you feel about sharing your opinions online with fellow student/co- workers?
Never 38%
Sometimes 53%
Often 7%

Q11: How do you feel about sharing your opinion in person with Family/Friends?
Sometimes 46%
Often 53%

Q12: How do you feel about sharing your opinions in person with fellow students/colleagues?
Never 38%
Sometimes 30%
Often 30%

Q13:   Do you share the same views on issues as your Family/Friends?
No   15%
Yes   75%
Don't know   7%

Q14:   Do you share same views on issues as your social media network?
No   23%
Yes   15%
Don't know   61%

Q15:   Do you share the same views on issues as your fellow student/co workers?
No   15%
Yes   46%
Don't know   38%

Q16:   What is the best way to convince you to believe in an issue or change your mind on an issue?
Give me more information   92%
Hear from family through social media   30%
Hear from friends through social media   30%
Hear politician on tv   15%
Hear politician talk in person   15%
Look up info on own   92%
Listen to debate   92%
Read in news   46%
Read in social media   30%
Talk to family in person   46%
Talk to friends in person   46%
Talk to fellow students in person   69%

Q17:   What kind of messages do you think would convince you to believe in an issue?
Give me more info interesting way   61%
Funny way   15%
Info in serious way   53%
Things make me happy   15%
Worried   30%
Tell me things that make me think more about an issue   84%
Tell me things that make me question my beliefs   61%
Never change   07%

Q18:   If you felt strongly about an issue would you
Discuss in person family   92%
Discuss in person friends   84%
Discuss in person fellow student/co workers   69%
Discuss In person strangers   23%
Share views online family   53%
Online friends   61%
Online social media network   53%
Onlinefellow students   46%
Online strangers   30%
Participate on line discussion group   15%
Sign online petition   38%
Join group with similar views   53%
Participate in event   46%
Make phone calls   23%
Door to door lit   07%
Contact official phone or email   23%
Visit elected   30%
Volunteer for candidate or party   23%
Shop support biz that agrees   46%
Avoid biz that disagree   53%

Q19:   How likely you to change views if f/f disagree
Never   7%
Might   76%
Don't know   23%

Q20:   How likely change views if social media network disagrees
Never   53%
Might   7%
Don't know   38%

Q21:   How likely change views if fellow students or co-workers disagree
Never   46%
Might   46%
Don't know   15%

Appendix B Trigger Words and Answers

FREEDOM:

Eagle 46%; American flag/flag 46%; Independence Day (4th of July) 7%; presidents 7%; protest 15%.

   Some of the words used were: Eagle; flag; eagle; flag; woods; revolution; dictatorship; flag; propaganda; protesting; implicit oppression; illusory; bald eagle; American flag; eagle; power pose; view from a mountain top; protesting; signs; choice; American flag; bald eagle; wandering through the woods; eagle; flag; angry white men; 4th of July; presidents.

FUTURE:

Space Age, Robots, Jetsons 38%; Uncertainly 23%; blank, vague nothingness: 30%; bright better world 15%; fearful struggling 30 %.

   Some of the words used were: Tech, uncertain; gloomy; Making choices: struggling; shackled; politicians; advanced tech; robots; nuclear holocaust; regret; fear; jobs; government; power; bright; nebulous; uncertainty; pushing something away; procrastination; an upside down funnel; the elderly should not be allowed to vote because it's not their future; dirt path through a forest; blank space; vagueness; nothingness; robots; the Jetsons(3); apple; robots; older me; space age; better world.

FRIENDS:

TV show, 23%; Aggregate positive 84%.

   Some of the words used were: Hanging out; parties; TV show; laughing; TV show; handholding, crying, pizza; care group; people I love; cats; ships waving along a single path; big group hug; 2 people facing each other; some image of together; closeness; earth tone; handing

something over to the next person; companionship; my friends in real life; cats; TV show; my friends' faces; mutual friends.

TOGETHER:

Unity and rallying 30%; Holding hands, 23%.

Some of the words used were: Hanging out; couples; holding hands; roommates; sex; fear; people rallying; united goals; hive mind; I am Spartacus; 2 people side by side holding hands; meeting somebody; solidarity; happy leaping; connection; holding hands; hugging.

STAND WITH ME:

Overtly political tones 61%; young people 7%.

Some of the words used were: Empty audience; grass roots organizing; pickets; large group of people; fear; rejection; politicians; rallying; "steeple," presenting an opinion; fist in the air; protest march; white women; Hillary Clinton; power; black power salute; protests; super heroes; spunky youth.

MAKING CHOICES FOR MYSELF:

Women/birth control: 38%; alone 23%.

Some of the words used were: Eagle glaring; rehab; struggling teens; fear; alone; trees; women's bodies; paperwork; pen; person standing strong alone; younger upper class white women; individuality; my birth control pills; movie "Obvious Choice." my car; standing alone.

 A GROUP OF PEOPLE HOLDING HANDS/IN A CIRCLE:

Service/Ceremony: 46%; Kumbaya/singing Kumbaya: 38%; Hippie 23%.

Some of the words used were: Gathering for a cause; pow-wow; peace circle; weddings; hippie nonsense; hippie nonsense; a game; prayer; wasting time; having an important bonding moment; praying or doing some sort of memorial; singing Kumbaya (5); protesting; séances.

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