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A Comparative Analysis of Intergenerational Conflict Between Women in the Workplace

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**A Comparative Analysis of Intergenerational Conflict between Women
in the Workplace**

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ABSTRACT

The 21st Century has introduced different generations of women to the workplace with different experiences, ambitions, and styles of communication. The number of working women has more than tripled from 18.4 million in 1950 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1980), to 66.9 million in 2006 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Today, the majority of women in the workplace represent three different generations. From the battle of women's rights, to Title IX, to the Internet Boom, women have been marching full fledged into today's workforce.

Women have been a strong force in the workplace of the US for three generations. The earliest of these generations of women in today's workplace researched in this paper are the women of the Baby Boomer generation who were born between 1946 and 1964. Baby Boomer women changed the view of women in the workplace. Women of Generation X and Generation Y followed suit and today, as all generations work together there may exist a generational culture clash.

The purpose of this study is to analyze communication styles of different generations of women and identify any resulting conflicts. If generational differences exist gaps may be occurring in some workplaces without the knowledge of the leaders and managers, and because this is inevitable, it should be brought to their attention. Since all women experience different kinds of conflict during their generation, it needs to be known that these experiences will produce also produce different outlooks in the workplace.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The 21st Century has introduced different generations of women to the workplace with different experiences, ambitions, and styles of communication. Throughout history, the social roles of women have failed to grant them the opportunities that are present today (Montserrat, 2007). This is important to note because the number of working women has more than tripled from 18.4 million in 1950 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1980), to 66.9 million in 2006 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Today, the majority of women in the workplace represent three different generations. From the battle of women's rights, to Title IX, to the Internet Boom, women have been marching full fledged into today's workforce.

Research is available in areas such as cross-gender communication (Marino, 2009), cross-cultural communication (Kudirka, 1989), and intergenerational communication. Yet, the specific topic of intergenerational conflict between women in the workplace is an area of minimal information although three, sometimes four, generations of women are, for the first time, working together. Women of the Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) and Generation Y (born between 1980 and 2000) are working side by side, each offering different experiences and perspectives.

“The situation women face creates competition over scarce, rewarding positions, which greatly diminishes opportunities for women to come together and promote cohesiveness” (Montserrat, 2007). This diminished opportunity and generational conflict combine with the increased number of women entering the

workplace to put added pressure on the large populations of women currently working together. This is especially the case within the categories of the larger Baby Boomer generation, of which the total (including males), amounts to 80 million, and Generation Y which has just surpassed the Baby Boomers with a total population of 81 million. Next is the smaller Generation X population, whose female members felt the changes that the Baby Boomer women initiated for the future generations, without the “spoiled” aspect of Generation Y. Generation X women are much smaller population that has never known job scarcity; they could demand more or move on (Kadlec, 2007). With these three very different generations of women, miscommunication is likely to be predominant where different generations of women collide. “The necessity to resolve the [potential] generational tension among women is nothing short of worthwhile for businesses, especially those led by women” (Montserrat, 2007).

There are already inherent differences among the generations in today’s workplace. In **Figure 1**, taken from *Communication World* (Reynolds et al, 2008), the differences of each generation are displayed in a graph. This graph portrays the differences in terms of both men and women of each generation; however, the researcher looked at this graph in terms of women and the social norm of the period in which they developed. For example, a Baby Boomer woman would have a communication style that is described by the graph as “semiformal” and a Generation Y woman would try to be ‘eye-catching and fun.’ In a workplace setting, these styles may clash and be misunderstood across different generations. A Baby Boomer woman may see the Generation Y woman as someone who is not

serious about her work or taking her job for granted. The Generation Y woman may see the Baby Boomer as too stern, with tendencies to micromanage, and not how she should be seen, as a role model.

“Although Boomers have a love/hate relationship with work and see it as an end in and of itself, Generation X and Generation Y women work to fulfill other, more important (to them) priorities” (Frakix, 2006). These different priorities may also cause conflict in the workplace because of the higher chance that different generations of women will misunderstand each other.

Figure 1.

	Baby Boomers (1946-64)	Generation X (1965-79)	Generation Y (Born after 1980)
Style	Semiformal	Not so serious; irreverent	Eye-catching fun
Content	Chunk it down but give me everything	Get to the point – what do I need to know?	If and when I need it, I'll find it online
Context	Relevance to the bottom line and my rewards	Relevance to what matters to me	Relevance to now, today and my role
Attitude	Accept the “rules” as created by the veterans	Openly question authority; often branded as cynics and skeptics	OK with authority that earns their respect
Tactics	Print; conventional mail; face-to-face dialogue; online tools and resources	Online; some face-to-face meetings; (if they're really needed); games; technological interaction	Online; wired; seamlessly connected through technology
Speed	Available; handy	Immediate; when I need it	Five minutes ago
Frequency	As needed	Whenever	Constant

(Source: L. Reynolds, E. Campbell Bush and R. Geist. “The Gen Y Imperative.” Communication World. March-April 2008.)

Figure 1 suggests that Generation X women will be quite self-reliant. One writer suggests that Generation X women were “instilled with the belief that they would inherit a world of unlimited workplace opportunities” (DeMarco, 2007). They did grow up during a time of two-income homes, rising divorce rates, and they saw their single parents struggle and lose their jobs due to the rise in downsizing (Parker, 1999). Due to this, their communication style is reflected in the graph as being “not-so serious”; perhaps, because they saw their parents struggle and they do not want to do the same.

All these differences can make for a bigger generational gap than originally observed. Making businesses and women workers of all generations’ conscious of these disparities between generations may facilitate a better work environment for all women. “The result of a harmonious relationship among women of different ages will not only encourage market success but also help define the word ‘woman’ for women” (Montserrat, 2007).

A Study of Intergenerational Conflict between Women

“We are on the verge of having more women in the workplace than ever before and on the verge of having more women in positions of power” (Raymond, 2001). Women have been a strong force in the workplace of the US for three generations. The earliest of these generations of women in today’s workplace researched in this paper are the women of the Baby Boomer generation who were born between 1946 and 1964. Baby Boomer women changed the view of women in the workplace. “With courage, resilience, and wisdom, they redefined adult

womanhood and made significant achievements with few role models or mentors and little social support” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.xiii). Women of Generation X and Generation Y followed suit and today, as all generations work together there may exist a “generational culture clash, in which a woman may end up working for a female boss that is twenty or thirty years her senior, and who rose through the ranks in a very different workplace” (Seligson, 2007, p.136).

In 1975, 46 percent (Hayghe, 1997) of women were in the workforce and by 2000 that number increased to 61 percent (Deloitte, 2006). Through the efforts of the earlier generation of women workers “women today are truly free to become fully self-actualized persons, without the constraints of gender” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.5). Though gender constraints still exist in the workplace, women often find it difficult to work with other women or go to other women for help. “Many younger women feel that older female colleagues and bosses aren’t helpful or relevant to them, and women of the baby boomer generation are uncomfortable helping a woman who might get her job next” (Zaslow,2006).

By 2010, it is expected that women will make up 63 percent of the total workforce (Deloitte, 2005) and, with that increase, it is important to understand the different generations of women and their communication styles and work habits. For example, a young woman of Generation Y needs to be able to identify that a Baby Boomer woman, who happens to be her boss or manager, will not always understand her perspective. As previously mentioned, for their part, many younger women feel that older female colleagues and bosses aren’t cooperative or significant to them – and only 53% of women said they learn from older female co-workers

(Zaslow, 2006). Women often believe that another woman will understand her because she is a woman, but if that woman happens to come from a different generation of women, it is not always likely she will.

“Young women and women in general, are increasingly finding traditional work environments unsatisfying and unrewarding” (Seligson, 2007, pg.184). It may be because of this that women of older generations, who stayed at their jobs for longer periods of time, find a generational gap with their Gen Y counterparts that feel the need to jump from one company to another. “Younger generations are willing to move every two or three years to get the job experience and work-life balance they want” (Kadlec, 2007). This difference is also a key to understanding the intergenerational difference between women workers. These younger generations of women will be especially important to understand because they will be, and have already began, entering the workforce in large numbers. Their lack of commitment and effort to one company and one job for a long period of time may cause some constraint on the relationships between them and older generations. And as one article suggests, “though there may be grounds to fear that less effort in the job market on the part of younger women could in fact be detrimental to the increasingly pertinent roles women play in business, it is not fighting against each other that females will break through their glass ceiling” (Montserrat, 2007). The researcher believes that “less effort” may not always be what it seems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze communication styles of different generations of women and identify any resulting conflicts. If generational differences exist gaps may be occurring in some workplaces without the knowledge of the leaders and managers, and because this is inevitable, it should be brought to their attention. Making them aware that this can cause problems and affect the work being done is crucial to ensuring that steps are taken to promote a positive work environment.

Women from the early Baby Boom generation may feel the intergenerational gap because they grew up in a time where social norms were very different for them than those of current generations. Women of the newer generations have come into the workforce without these pressures, and according to some of the older generation 'lack a strong work ethic' (Kadlec, 2007). Understanding the intergenerational gaps that exist may help managers and workers recognize them in their workplace while helping come up with a solution.

The researcher is looking to observe any possible communication differences of the women representing these three generations to determine if there are any differences that are impacting their ability to work together in the same workplace. "Even though women share the title of woman, they do not share the same history, the same obstacles, the same demands" (Montserrat, 2007). Since women experienced different kinds of conflict than their preceding generation, it needs to be known that these experiences will produce a different outlook in the workplace.

Research Questions

Research questions include:

1. Do major differences exist in communication patterns between women of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation Y and Generation X in the workplace?
2. What effects, if any, does generation have on communication preferences and styles and preferences of among women in the workplace?
3. If major differences do exist and have an effect on the work being done, what can a manager do to ensure a positive work environment for these women?

Definition of Terms

Generation - a) the entire body of individuals born and living at about the same time; b) the term of years, roughly 30 among human beings, accepted as the average period between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring; c) a group of individuals, who are the same approximate age, having similar ideas, problems, attitudes, etc.; d) a group of individuals belonging to a specific category at the same time. (*Dictionary.com Unabridged*)

Baby Boomer [also referred to as Boomers] – Baby Boomers is the name given to the generation of Americans who were born in a "baby boom" following World War II. The Boomers were born between 1944 and 1964. The oldest wave of the Baby Boomers is currently considering retirement options and looking at ways to make their elder years meaningful. The youngest group of Baby Boomers is managing the

Millennials and Generation-X groups of employees - and in some cases, being managed by them (Heathfield, 2008)

Generation X [or Gen X, Xers, Generation Me] – a) those born between 1965 and 1979; b) a generation of young people about whose future there is uncertainty; a lost generation. In later use: *spec.* (orig. *N. Amer.*) a generation of young people (esp. Americans reaching adulthood in the 1980s and 1990s) perceived to be disaffected, directionless, or irresponsible, and reluctant to participate in society (Oxford English Dictionary, 2001).

Generation Y [or Gen Y, Millennials, iGen, Generation We] – The generation following Generation X, especially people born in the United States and Canada from the early 1980s to the late 1990s (*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition).

New Girls' Network – a network of young women who help each other climb the ladder, similar to *Old Boys' Club* (Seligson, 2007).

Old Boys' Club - an exclusive informal network linking members of a social class or profession or organization in order to provide connections and information and favors (especially in business or politics); "professional women have developed an old boy network of their own" (*The Free Dictionary by Farlex*, 2008)

Title IX – a part of the 1972 Education Act (U.S.) stating that no person could be denied the benefits of a federally funded educational program or activity on the basis of their gender; also called [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972](*Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition, 2008*).

Communication style - A set of culturally learned characteristics associated with both language and learning style, involving such aspects of communication as formal versus informal, emotional versus subdued, direct versus indirect, objective versus subjective, and responses to guilt and accusations (Cushner et al., 2003)

Intergeneration conflict – Refers to the clash of ideas, beliefs or expectations that occur between generations.

Limitations of Study

The researcher chose to study women of three generations, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Women of the Veteran generation had the “lowest rate of employment of any generation of women” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.62), and therefore were not included in the study.

The researcher chose to study the women in workplaces in the United States.

Chapter II Literature Review

This study focuses on women and the generational gaps that may occur among Baby Boomers, Generation Y and Generation X women, the main focus in the research are the subsequent conflicts that may result from these differences. The literature review examines each generation of women and their perspectives, and their preferences in the workplace through published research and articles. Different generations of women and their varied experiences have made for very different perspectives within the workplace of women.

Generational Gap: Effects on Women Communicating in the Workplace

Jeff Zaslow (2006) states that “women born before 1945 often worked primarily out of economic necessity and less because it was a fulfilling life choice, and that is why their advice doesn’t always resonate with those born later”; the researcher believes that generations following this group of women still have the problem of resonating with newer generations.

One source of tension between Generation Y women and the older generations is that the older generation women think that “young women do not value how much of a history there is with an older person,” says Jean Otte, founder and CEO of Women Unlimited in the book *New Girl on the Job*. “Young women today grew up with the protection of Title IX, it’s why many women of other generations think Gen Y women see themselves as entitled” (Seligson, 2007, p.136).

Baby boomer women went to college in unprecedented numbers – some went to find a husband, but many went to prepare for a career” (Shelton and Shelton, 2005, pg.16). Baby Boomers’ parents expected them to pursue what their mothers’ had; they were expected to marry young and devote their lives to their children. However, “Baby Boomer women intended to change the world order – at least in the workplace” (Shelton and Shelton, 2005, pg.16).

Baby Boomer women had expectations of future generation women following in their footsteps in the workplace and working just as hard for their positions. But many Baby Boomer women do not feel that the younger generations have done what they did to get where they are.

“Women of Generation Y are said to put in less time and effort than their predecessors, creating segregated age groups within the workplace” (Montserrat, 2007). This creates a conflict of beliefs between generations because it needs to be recognized who, in fact, believes that Generation Y women are putting in less effort. Because Generation Y approaches the workplace differently than a Baby boomer woman, for example, it is important to note that effort is defined differently for both generations. The researcher believes that this may create a fuzzy perception about how effort is calculated in terms of work being done. The researcher believes that the workplace is a very different place than it was thirty years ago with differences in technology and how it has changed the way communication occurs. As for not taking the time to do the work with the unprecedented access to technology Generation Y has, time needed for a project may not equal the time needed as perceived by a Baby Boomer woman. A Baby Boomer woman would not have had

the technological advances that are currently available to today's women when compared to what was available when she began working. Time and effort are not seen the same today as compared to thirty years ago and this unrecognized issue may create friction between older and younger women and should be addressed.

In fact, many Baby Boomer female managers seem reluctant to be mentors because "when Baby Boomer women were young, there were few or no female role models, and their attitude often is, 'I toughed it out and made it on my own. You can too'" (Zaslow, 2006). This attitude may also add to antagonistic feelings between younger and older women because younger women will feel hesitant in approaching an older woman with this attitude and may opt to approach an older male instead. An older woman will feel validated for her hostile feelings towards a younger woman she feels has it 'too easy,' and take it upon herself to make work life more difficult on the younger female coworker.

The effect that Baby Boomer women had on the female mentality and what females were capable of, reflected on the Generation X women, who in turn have reflected on the Generation Y women. All these generations of women have taken for granted that they, like men, deserve their fair share of the American Dream (Sidel, 1999).

Baby Boomer Women in the Workplace

The women of the Baby Boomer generation “came of age during the women’s movement and civil rights era,” (Bregel, 2008) as the Silent Generation began to be phased out, having the lowest rate of employment for women when compared to any of the generations discussed in this thesis. Therefore, Baby Boomer women have become the predominant female role models in the workplace for Generations X and Y. “This generation was the first in which great numbers were granted access to the working mainstream and they changed the rules of the American workplace by holding fast to the same high standards and idealistic aspirations they held as 1950s good girls” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.63). As the first group to develop a mainstream workplace for women, Baby boomer women can, and often do, see themselves as the architects for the foundation of women workers. “Because these women entered young adulthood in the late 1960’s, a time of enormous social change, their thoughts and actions directly challenged society’s narrow and stifling rules for girls, going where women had never gone before” (Evans and Avis, 1999, pp.3-4). They began this era of women working and becoming self-reliant individuals and therefore believe their approach should be the standard for all woman workers. Often this is reflected off younger generations in a negative way because younger generations of women workers do not feel the need to uphold those standards because their experiences have taught them otherwise.

The beginning of the disappearance of the conventional and social norms of what a woman “should” do began with the Baby Boomer generation of women. “Women of the Baby Boomer generation saw no reason they couldn’t contribute to

fields like medicine, law, or politics...most agreed that if they were ever to gain the same recognition and respect as men, they would have to enter the male-dominated public sphere, for that is where the real money, power, and status lie” (Sidel, 1999). They were the first of their kind who initiated a workplace that catered to women as well as men. “Like early pioneers, these women took different roads, made distinctly different choices than their predecessors, and learned that those who ‘go first’ face difficult times when they reject established social and cultural conventions” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.4). Baby Boomer women, knowing that their decisions were different from those women who came before them need to be reminded that the new generations may have a similar approach in their decisions. The decisions that younger generations make are going to be different from their predecessors, especially in the case of generations coming after the Baby Boomer women.

Friction between Baby Boomer women and the preceding generations of women may be caused by the fact that Baby Boomer women had to fight for their position in the workplace. This is in stark contrast to the current younger generations of women who enter the workforce without a doubt in their minds that they will more than likely get a job in their field of choice.

In an article written by M. Montserrat, “A Generation Crisis in the Workplace: Bridging the Gap for Women”, Montserrat (2007) argues that “A female manager in her late 40’s who has probably had to put in years of overtime to get where she is will likely see the job market for Generation Y women as fed to them with a silver spoon” (Montserrat, 2007). It should be no surprise then that

Baby Boomer women may seem a little put off when working side by side with a younger female worker who just began working.

“Their incredible efforts have created less of a struggle for women of subsequent generations” (Montserrat, 2007). So Baby Boomer women may feel resentment towards the younger females who walk into work and expect to be treated with respect and equality before they have lifted a finger; a very different experience than what Baby Boomer women were subject to when they first entered the workforce. “This reflects the reality that many older female managers are reluctant to be mentors” (Zaslow, 2006). When compared to older men who have been established in the workplace and may seem more ready to be mentors for the younger generations of men coming up in the ranks, without the possible resentment that many younger generations of women feel from older women they work for.

The role models of the Baby Boomer generation of working women were mostly males. Therefore, “because of the alien culture of the workplace, and the sharp differences between themselves and prominent men in the same field, many women tend not to see themselves as particularly successful or as matching the stereotype of someone in their profession” (Evans and Avis, 1999, p.64). This could be a reason why women of the Baby Boomer generation are reluctant to be mentors; they question themselves as having the grounds to be mentors to younger women, and due to this fact, it may not be fully due to a generational gap.

For the successful group of Baby Boomer women “the absence of rules, mentors, and well-defined career ladders have led many to view themselves as achieving their goals by default rather than because of conscious planning” (Evans

and Avis, 1999, p.64). It is important, therefore, for the younger generations to understand that an older woman coworker is not trying to avoid being a mentor, but simply put, she does not see herself as one and does not understand why a younger woman would want to learn from her.

The Baby Boomer generation of women pioneered the role of women in the workplace. According to S.Evans and J. Avis (1999) in their book on Baby Boomer women entitled *The Women Who Broke All the Rules*, “it is the very absence of rules and role models for professional women which compelled them to invent new and effective principles for the workplace” (p.64). It is these values which Baby boomer women apply to their work ethic that may be erroneously viewed by the women of Generations X and Y.

The struggle for equality and women’s rights have made the Baby Boomer generation give birth to an ideal about what it is to make it in the workplace as a female, and naturally, is not regularly reflected in the younger generation female worker whose struggles are different. “Their incredible efforts have created less of a struggle for women of subsequent generations” (Montserrat, 2007). In situations where generational gaps are predominant, Baby boomer women often share the feeling that “women of Gen Y need to start thinking about how to work more effectively with the women who came up in the ranks before them” (Seligson, 2007). This needs to be a two way street and Baby boomer women must not forget that the approach to the workplace by younger women will be different than theirs. The new approach needs to be recognized and not mistaken for conflicts that are

non-generational that can simply be explained by a lack of respect or another non-generational issue.

Generation X Women in the Workplace

The women of Generation X grew up in a time of increasingly flexible gender roles. They witnessed their earlier Baby Boomer-era mothers, who themselves had very few role models, inching their way up the proverbial ladder in the workplace, “slowly shattering the glass ceilings they encountered along the way” (Shelton and Shelton, 2005, pg.24). Women of Generation X saw their mothers struggle to work long hard hours with little pay and unlike their mothers, Generation X women want to make sure they come first. The context that is relevant to them is “what matters to me,” and they “openly question authority,” this could be due to the lack of authority they had when both parent were at work or divorced, so their access to authority from parents was limited in most cases. So it is not shocking that they can often be viewed as “skeptics and cynics” since they developed and observed a time where parental relationships were struggling. This Generation X era of women came after the generation of women that were willing to work harder and longer hours to make it; as a result, their expectations for the workplace were a lot higher. DeMarco (2007), who wrote the article “Seven ways to retain a Gen-X Woman,” believes these women were wrong in their assumptions of a level playing field stating that “Gen-X women were not focused on feeding their egos and gaining corporate status as much as feeling a sense of job satisfaction, they believed they were entering into a level playing field.”

In the book *The NeXt Revolution*, co-author Laura Shelton (2005, p.21-2) describes her expectations as a Generation X woman, “we Gen X women grew up believing, not only that we could achieve our dreams, but that, due to our mother’s hard work, we would enter equal opportunity workplaces where we would find encouragement, support, and enjoyment as we rapidly ascended the career ladder” (pp.21-22). Today, we see women of Generation X being “especially cognizant of career realities. Many of them are ruling out jobs in management consulting and corporate finance, the jobs women in the Baby Boom generation coveted” (Lankard, 1995). This generation of women had, and still has, aspirations different than those of the Baby Boomer women, leading their work and lifestyles in a way that is different to what the traditional Baby boomer women intended. So it may not be shocking to find that “many Baby Boomers fail to grasp why Gen-Xers demand so much while lacking loyalty, and complain that Xers constantly question their decisions – and their authority” (Parker, 1999). It is this friction between Baby Boomer women and Generation X women that may be the cause of some underlying hostility between these two generations.

Just like the Baby Boomer women may find the gap with women of Generation X, “female bosses from Generation X are finding a clear generation gap with female employees from Generation Y” (Zaslow, 2006). Although Generation X and Y women have similarities in their understanding of technology and their willingness to pull away from the norms of Baby Boomer women, there exists a generational gap between them. “Gen X sees Gen Y as arrogant and entitled, while Gen Y sees Gen X as a bunch of whiners” (Gelston, 2008). The difference in work

styles between these two generations is clear cut. Both Generation Y and Generation X women share many of the same aspirations about the expectations in the workplace and technological savvy; however, the approach is slightly different and may be what causes head bunting between these two generations.

In Rebecca Thorman's opinion in the advice column "Twentysomething: The rising rift between gen X and gen Y" on the Web site *BrazenCareerist*, Thorman (2007) believes "generation X tried to change the status quo while entering into one of the worst job markets since the Great Depression. They scorned the good ole boys, but had to play by their rules anyway, while millenials [Generation Y] are able to create their own rules" (2007). With Generation X stuck between two of the largest generations, they are often overlooked or left to their own devices.

The women of Generation X are a smaller generation in population and are often similar in nature to the generation closest to their date of birth. For example, many of the earlier born Generation X women may identify and be lumped in with the later born Baby boomer women, and the later born Generation X may identify and be lumped in with the earlier born Generation Y group. But no matter how small the group or how overlooked, Thorman's belief is that "the fact that Gen Xers worked hard with little success beyond casual Fridays means that they are 'only mentioned to be polite' in generational discussions" (2007), and her opinion can be validated by Generation Xs' unfortunate status as a somewhat transitional group between the workaholic Baby Boomers and the 'entitled' Generation Y. Yet we have to still consider that this generation was still able to etch their own era, their

own set of beliefs and standards, and that are often unlike the Baby Boomers and Generation Y.

Generation Y Women in the Workplace

Generation Y women are coming into the workforce with confidence and an attitude of 'wanting it all,' with the belief that they actually can have it all. Yet, according M. Montserrat (2007), "to many women of older generations, women of Generation Y are said to put in less time and effort than their predecessors, creating segregated age groups within the workplace." Why are Generation Y women seen as not putting in time and effort? And how is this effort measured? This group of women is a "new generation working woman, who are today in their twenties and representing an important stage in the evolution of womankind, being relatively less burdened by the baggage of the past, less steeped in legacy, with less need to rebel and adopt reactionary stances" (Parikh, 2002). It is no wonder Generation Y women are viewed as 'spoiled,' and think they are 'entitled'. According to Penelope Trunk (2008) women are "entering a workforce where women are making more than men in major cities, and the salary gap is essentially gone in most fields of business for this demographic" (Trunk, 2008). Many would argue this statement is a testament to the fact that young women are entering a workforce where they can be what they want to be without the setbacks of being a female. It may be because of this lack in the belief that gender inequalities still exist that N.A. Hira (2007) states "and so perhaps the girl power approach mightn't be ideal for companies trying to recruit Y'er women; not because those young women don't value their girl power, but

because they don't think their gender should be of any consequence when it comes to choosing a career" (2007).

Generation Y women entering the modern diverse workplace will have an approach to their initial work setting that is unlike any other generation before theirs. According to C. Rexrode (2007) Generation Y women expect "to have fun, meaningful work at the beginning of their career. Time and a balanced life are very important to them." According to Willow Bay (*Huffington Post*, 2007) Generation Y women "want more than a job – they want a career they are passionate about." The idea that Generation Y women will jump from job to job is a broad view shared by many according to the research that was found.

It seems, then, that the issue at hand is how young women can make work meaningful, lucrative, and satisfying in the early stages of their career. It's easier said than done, of course, but just imagine how different the workplace would be if young women thought about *building* careers instead of *finding* jobs, negotiated more aggressively for raises and salaries, tried to stay off the doormat track, built team of mentors, and made a concerted effort to squelch all the catfights and competition with their female co-workers. Perhaps someday *Time*, *Newsweek* and the latest trend piece in the *New York Times*, will be talking about the *opt-in* revolution (Seligson, 2006, 185).

The simple fact is that women play a very different role in today's workplace, a role that is full of potential positive experiences. "The social roles of women throughout history have never granted women the opportunities that are present today" (Montserrat, 2007). Generation Y women may not have come from the struggles of their counter-parts, but it is a generation of young women that, according to Bay (2007) "value control and flexibility over climbing the corporate ladder." Though they come into the workplace with a "language of their own and fashion differences that stand as a constant reminder to the Baby Boomers that there

truly is an unbridgeable generation gap, they don't come empty-handed." (Nicefaro, 2004). The argument in favor of this young generation is that they are a generation that has unprecedented "expert-level computer skills and entrepreneurial drive, as well as an optimistic outlook" (Nicefaro, 2004, para.7).

Title IX and its Affect on Women

In the book *Generation Me: The Equality Revolution*, author Dr. Twenge (2006) observed the effects that Title IX had on the average woman. The researcher found that this aspect in women's history was vital in shaping the characteristics that today's generation of women portray. Title IX which was enacted in 1972 states that:

No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid. (Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972)

Dr. Twenge observed that Generation X college women reported more masculine traits than 80% of Boomer college women in the early 1970s (2006). This change was reportedly so great that by the early nineties men's and women's scores were impossible to differentiate when determining what were more manly attributes and feminine attributes. This is an interesting attribute for female employees in general because the workplace of the United States was dominated by males among the workers of the Baby boomer generation. Even today the "corporate world remains predominantly male, though women have succeeded immensely in penetrating this world, there is still no denying the roles of women continue to be undermined and unrecognized when it comes to business" (Montserrat, 2007). The

fact that eighty percent of the Baby boomer women did not exhibit what Generation X women were in terms of male traits after Title IX passed should stand as proof that women were becoming more like men; socially, emotionally, and psychologically in their beliefs and behaviors in the real world.

“The generational change in personality had turned the very definition of ‘masculine trait’ on its head; clearly these traits were no longer masculine, but human” (Twenge, 2006, pg.193). Dr. Twenge also observed that girls who participated in sports were more likely to develop traits such as independence and competitiveness. These traits would assumingly stick with women of future generations and hence, reflecting in their work ethic and general approach to life.

Women were assumingly becoming more confident and less like their Baby Boomer counterparts who did not have the benefits of Title IX to help them participate and succeed in sports. Title IX has allowed women to grow in the competitive field of sports, and in turn, this may have affected the younger generations of women who presuming have developed a more independent and competitive attitude in the working world.

The Generation of the Opt-Out Revolution

In 2003, Lisa Belkin wrote an article in the *New York Times* aptly titled “The Opt-Out Revolution.” Belkin coined the term ‘opt-out revolution,’ which, if it was accurate, describes a generation of women forsaking the gender struggle for equal power in the workplace to become stay-at-home mothers. The researcher observed

evidence of bitterness between the younger generations that made up this so-called 'opt-out revolution,' and the older generations that fought for gender equity.

If one was to accept Belkin's view, one can see that it does point to a potential cause for friction between the older women who had fought the traditional domestic expectations and their younger counterparts. These older women, who would include Baby Boomers, would not understand how these younger generations, who include later born Generation X and early born Generation Y women, are "rejecting the workaholic ethos before they even have kids" (Martin, 2006), and drop out of such potential careers as lawyers or doctors to stay at home.

In her article, Belkin (2003) makes her argument by describing a scene of eight women, who have all earned degrees from Princeton, "which was a citadel of male everything until the first co-educated classroom entered in 1969" (Belkin, 2003). Women who went on to earn "law degrees from Harvard and Columbia, chose husbands who could keep up with them, not simply support them, they waited to have children because work was too exciting, they put on power suits and marched off to take on the world" (Belkin, 2003). Belkin states that an early feminist would have been proud and would be optimistic about the future of women.

Belkin (2003) stops short at this and contradicts this scene when quoting one of the women of the group. Katherine Brokaw, who decided to leave the workforce to stay at home with her three children states, "I don't want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm...some people define that as success. I don't" (Belkin, 2003).

Another woman, Sarah McArthur Amsbary, a woman who earned a master's degree in English, states "I don't want to be famous; I don't want to conquer the world; I don't want that kind of life" (Belkin, 2003). With these sorts of quotes Belkin makes her argument for the opt-out revolution stronger. This particular woman has her Master's degree in English, but stepped out of the working world when her daughter was born. We need to remember, however, that this may be because of different options that are available to these kinds of women. Perhaps her husband has a job that allows her to stay at home, or simply because this is a personal decision.

Belkin's (2003) argument is simple, is this not what women were battling against?

"We've gotten so used to the sight that we've lost track of the fact that this was not the way it was suppose to be. Women – specifically, educated professional women – were supposed to achieve like men" (Belkin, 2003). Belkin sees this as a crisis in the women's movement through the generations. and bitterly views this revolution "as certain progress, measured against the way things once were, but when measured against the way things were expected to be, this is a revolution stalled" (Belkin, 2003). Belkin interviews a woman in her article who was part of the Women's movement, where things were set in motion for her to be successful. And now she "finds herself presiding over a new generation, one that is, arguably, more accomplished and more qualified than any other that has come before, but one that is not at all sure what to do with all that talent" (Belkin, 2003).

And another more current article in *The New York Times*, Linda Hirshman (2007) agrees with Belkin's cynical view and questions society in terms of these women who are leaving. "That the most educated have opted out the most should raise questions about how our society allocates scarce educational resources. The next generation of girls will have a greatly reduced pool of role models" (Hirshman, 2007, para.12). These women are arguing that we are going backwards; "wander into any Starbucks after the commuters are gone, when all the mothers are watching over their toddlers, the scene could be the 50's, but for the fact that the coffee is more expensive and the mothers have M.B.A.'s" (Belkin, 2003).

These young generations of women, primarily made up of Generation X and Y women, apparently opting out of the professional world to be stay at home mothers, are seen as women "shrinking from their potential" (Martin, 2006).

For these young women of this so-called opt-out revolution, it is not like that. They do not see themselves as opting out, a term that holds a very negative connotation, they want something else. According to Courtney E. Martin (2006), author of *Gen Y's opt out vision*:

We aren't shrinking from our potential in the big, bad world in favor of safe stay-at-home options. We are defiantly rejecting a culture that doesn't recognize the value of family, flexibility, and fun. We don't even want it all if that 'all' includes sleep deprivation, regrets, and illness. We'd rather be excellent at less than mediocre at more, selfish and happy than sacrificing and bitter. We'd rather have a little bit of financial strain and insecurity and a lot of fulfillment, than a whole lifetime of biding our time for some mirage of retirement nirvana. (Martin, 2006)

Martin (2006) argues that this apparent opt-out revolution is not trying to move against the grain, they simply want more, but their more is defined and fulfilled by family. The researcher believes that these opposing views create a

certain bitter relationship between the different generations. Should younger generations of women feel obligated to follow the direction that the women's movement was paving for future generations?

Belkin (2003) contradicts her earlier cynicism by making the point that perhaps "sanity, balance and a new definition of success might be contagious, and in fact instead of women being forced to act like men, men are being freed to act like women, because if women are willing to leave, men are more willing to leave, too" (Belkin, 2003). She supports this statement by stating that there has been an 18 percent increase of men who are full-time caregivers to their children (Belkin, 2003).

By the end of the article Belkin has a similar view to Martin. She states that "It is about a door opened but a crack by women that could usher a new environment for us all" (Belkin, 2003). And Martin states, in defense of this so-called opt-out generation that "we are composing lives of free agency and ingenuity, making second-wave feminist rhetoric about 'choice' real. It is not a failure of feminism that we are opting out. It is, in fact, a tribute to it (Martin, 2006).

Generation Me: Which generation is all about the 'me'?

Another conflict of interest that was discovered by the researcher in her findings is the view of certain generations that view other generations as very selfish and generally self-absorbed. We often hear that generations are different and often the argument is because of how selfish one generation is over another. The researcher found that the women of all three generations the Baby Boomer

generation, Generation X and Generation Y have been dubbed “Generation Me” at some point, for being narcissistic in their own right.

Sarah Pinkston, in the article *Generation Me* (2006), states, “Generation X should stand for X in the fact that they've never heard the word no, and Generation Y should stand for the generation that will continually ask WHY instead of learning their place and take responsibility or deal with authority.” With that one statement the researcher found arguments for both Generation X and Y for being the “Generation Me.”

The researcher also found arguments for Baby Boomers, who have commonly been “thought to be the most self-absorbed generation in American history” (Kadlec, 2006), due to their lavish spending and “nonstop quest for self gratification” (Willard, 2005). Baby Boomer women, “who came into their own after World War II, combined with their widespread entry into the workplace, ... led to their increasing control of the purse strings of American households and businesses” (Willard, 2005).

The most enticing argument for the generation that was all about the ‘me,’ was made by Dr. Jean Twenge who observed the shift in current society’s view of women in her book *Generation Me* (2006). In a review of the book, James Bemis (*New Oxford Review* 2008) states that Dr. Twenge does a good job of illustrating this shift. “In the 1960s women in the workforce were expected to be secretaries, nurses, teachers, or librarians. Currently, women are expected to be just about anything they want to be” (Bemis, 2008). Dr. Twenge discusses how “GenMe females” are “expected to lead a contradictory existence” (Twenge, 2006). The

researcher believed that it was worth noting the mixed messages that Dr. Twenge claimed are given to young women. When these young women enter the workplace they are going in with the message they heard their whole teenage lives that “You Can Do Anything,” but when they get close to their thirties “we turn around and say, ‘You Can’t Have it All’” (Twenge, 2006, p.202). Twenge recognizes the big gap that exists in these two very differing messages, and at the same time she gives justification to young women entering the workforce believing they can have it all.

How Do We Resolve Intergenerational Conflict Between Women?

Intergenerational conflict between women may become a problem in the workplace as more and more different generations of women find themselves working in close quarters. Managers need a solution or a way to prevent and address any negative situations that may occur in the workplace.

Each generation requires different factors to motivate them at work. But for a company to be truly successful, all need to understand and value each other, even when their perspectives differ vastly. Spending time getting to know your talent will enable your company to better capitalize on the strengths of multiple generations (Fralix, 2006).

As more young generations of women enter the workplace more research will begin to appear pertaining to this gender and the differences between the generation that struggled to make a difference and a generation who was handed everything on a ‘silver platter’.

In the book *Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook for a New Workplace* (2003), the author Raines suggests that organizations move in the direction of helping to bridge the gaps that exist in the workplace. Raines suggests creating a Generational Awareness Week where employers and employees review benefit package and any reward programs that are valued by each generation and seek out a person from another generation to learn about his or her history and work preference (Raines, 2003).

The New Girls' Network

In the book *New Girl on the Job* (2006), author Hannah Seligson suggests a "New Girls Network," (p.139) similar to what men have been known to do with their Old Boys' Club. "It's based on the simple idea that you should be reaching out to women in your peer group" (Seligson, 2006, p.139). It is a mentoring program that seeks to establish an extended network for women. For young women mentoring is important, especially the "need for feed back, and not just validation, but all constructive criticism. While this isn't unique to young women, it does speak to the immense need for strong networks" (Hirs, 2007, para.5).

Seligson stresses that the amount of women in the workplace can be beneficial to all generations of women working together. "Over 20 million women have influence over hiring, and you certainly don't have to have been in a sorority to take advantage of this growing number of women in management positions" (Seligson, 2006, p.140). Her belief is based on a simple notion, women helping women.

“Women need to start thinking that for every one woman who succeeds, I succeed a little and for every woman who fails, I fail a little. We need to get on the same team, which is something we haven’t done yet,” says Gail Evans in regards to all working women, author of *She Wins, You Win* (CNN Live Saturday, “Dollar Signs: Women in Business,” aired November 15, 2003). The purpose here is to help women find a common ground and “as many have pointed out, imagine the impact women could have if they bonded together to create change at work” (Seligson, 2006, p.140).

The New Girls’ Network is meant to establish a connection for women while at the same time helping companies acknowledge the possible occurrence of intergenerational conflicts and managing them within the population of their working women. “It’s not just about ‘helping’ other women in the spirit of altruism. It’s about creating a culture where women assist each other in advancing to higher positions” (Seligson, 2006, p.141). Leaders and managers alike, when educated on how to recognize intergenerational conflict, can create mentoring programs or tools that can help reach out to areas in the workplace where intergenerational conflicts exist but have yet to be recognized and improved.

Intergenerational Conflict: Does it exist?

As the literature reviewed suggests, intergenerational conflict between women does exist. There are those who suggest that it is not limited to just women, and still others who believe intergenerational conflict does not exist.

In the article “Gap in generalization, not generations,” Gettler (2007) argues

that “like a lot of dogma, there is an element of truth to the claims of generational differences. But it's not the real world.” Gettler (2007) believes that the literature provides general descriptions: “baby boomers are more accustomed to hierarchical styles of management, generation X lacks loyalty to an employer and puts family and community above work, generation Y loves collaboration, innovation and change” (Gettler, 2007). This argument on stereotypes matches another article where it states that “the literature on generational personality is replete with stereotypes ...and they go unchallenged” (Pruitt, 2002).

Furthermore, Pruitt (2002) argues that “the generational personality is unproven and the evidence that it exists is anecdotal and subjective.” and suggests to HR not to burden their diversity programs, benefit design, management training or other HR programs with this notion” (Pruitt, 2002).

However, unlike male managers, who have for centuries “interacted with younger male subordinates in familiar patterns -- some paternal, others more jocular,” for women “it's a far newer and less certain game for female leaders trying to navigate generational relationships” (Zaslow, 2006). Women in leadership positions are inevitable and it is a growing trend and potential generational problems should be considered.

Chapter III Research Methodology

In Chapter 2 many different arguments and themes were presented that described intergenerational conflict and communication in the workplace. To determine if these conclusions were accurate the researcher developed a survey to study responses by women across all generations in the workplace on intergenerational issues and communication

The survey was reviewed and approved by Seton Hall University's Institutional Review Board in October 2008. It includes 11 substantive questions and three demographic questions.

The researcher chose the survey method to gather information from a large quantity of women in an organized way to help make the collection of data more organized. The desired number of respondents was 100. Partially finished surveys were not accepted for the final data analysis. All responses were confidential and subject's identities remained anonymous.

The survey was posted on Zoomerang.com, an online survey tool. Zoomerang provided the survey format, gathered responses, and displayed the initial results. The survey was open for three months, from February 25, 2009 to May 25, 2009. The researcher forwarded the survey to potential respondents using online tools such as email, Facebook groups, and other messaging services. Zoomerang was selected because it would help to obtain the maximum number of respondents while keeping their identities anonymous and allows for an organized and accurate means of large data collection for the researcher.

The survey was developed to gain a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of women in the workplace that included: intergenerational conflict between women; coming of age in different eras; communication preferences; potential affects and what companies can do to minimize these problems. The demographic questions were designed to understand the subject's generation, work experience and education level. The substantive questions are made up of seven in the Likert scale of measurement; two to decide which generation is best suited for the subject, one that showed us what the subject believes a company can do, and one open ended question to include any information not discussed in the survey. The researcher conducted this survey to answer the research question, "What major differences and conflicts exist between women of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation Y and Generation X in the workplace?" as well as the supplementary questions:

1. Do major differences exist in communication patterns between women of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation Y and Generation X in the workplace?
2. What effects, if any, does generation have on communication preferences and styles and preferences of among women in the workplace?
3. If major differences do exist and have an effect on the work being done, what can a manager do to ensure a positive work environment for these women?

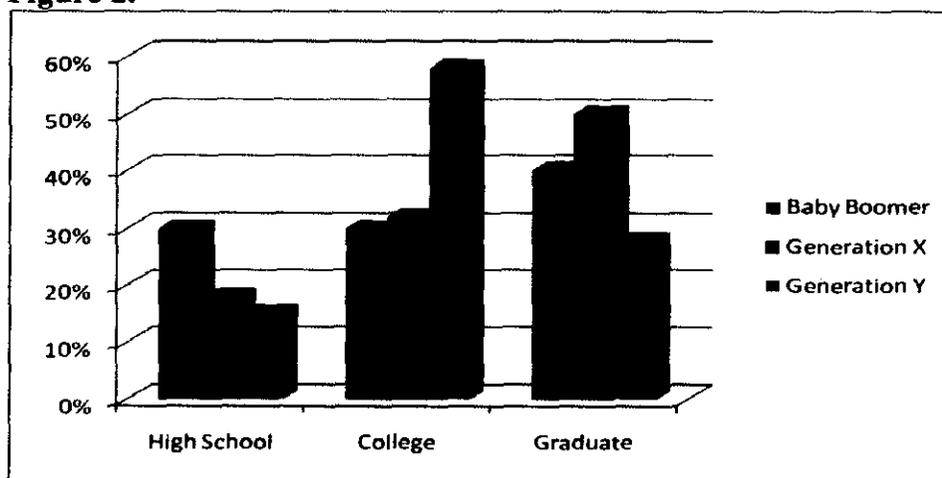
The survey focuses on women of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X, and Generation Y who have been employed at a United States-based company.

Chapter IV Survey Results

Question 1 in the survey was a demographic question. It identified a respondent's generation: Baby Boomer, Generation X, or Generation Y. Of the total respondents, 49 self-identified as Baby boomers, 31 as Generation X, and 67 as Generation Y.

Question 2 asked respondents to identify the level of education they had achieved so far; high school, college, or graduate. Of the Baby Boomer generation, 30% completed high school, 30% completed college and 17 completed a graduate degree. Of the Generation X category, 4 completed high school, 7 completed college and 11 completed a graduate degree. Finally, of the Generation Y respondents, 6 completed high school, 23 completed college and 11 completed a graduate degree.

Figure 2.



	High School	College	Graduate
Baby Boomers	30% (13)	30% (13)	40% (17)
Generation X	18% (4)	32% (7)	50% (11)
Generation Y	15% (6)	58% (23)	28% (4)

When comparing the generations of women with their educational levels, one can see in **Figure 2** that Baby Boomers are more equal among education levels ranging between 30-40%. Generation X respondents increase in number as the education level increases. Generation Y respondents have a clear majority as college graduates, at 58%.

Question 3 asked respondents how long they have worked at their present company. All respondents who answered between 0-11 months were omitted from the final data analysis. The researcher looked for respondents who had spent a period of time of at least one year at their current workplace to better evaluate communication skills and any possible existing conflicts of coworkers in their present workplace.

Question 4 identified respondents who worked with women from different generations in their workplace. The statement was “I interact with women of different generations on a consistent basis.” Only those respondents who checked “agree” or “strongly agree” were used in the analysis. The researcher did not believe that those respondents who did not have consistent interaction with women of different generations were relevant to the study.

The total number of respondents to the survey was 147. The total number of useable responses was 105, slightly over the desired number of 100.

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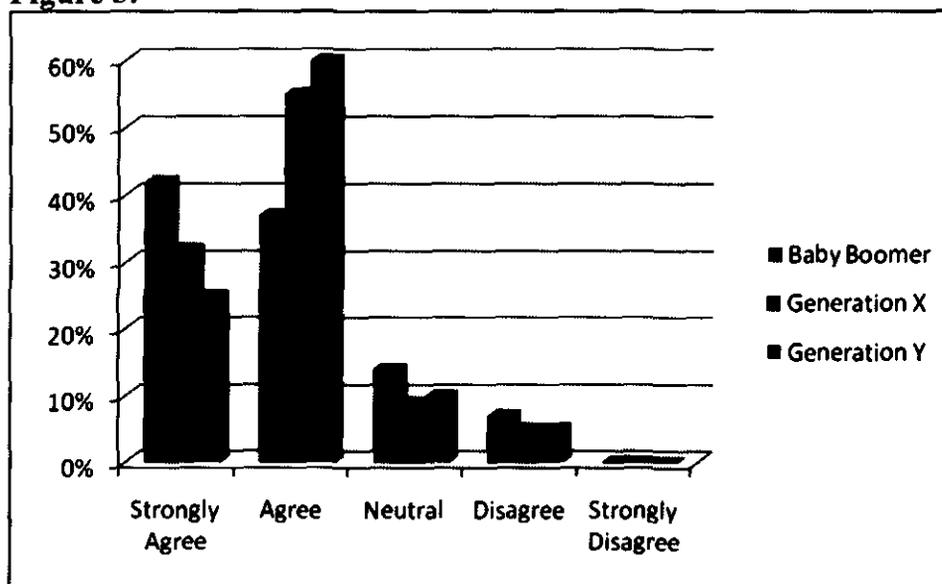
The total number of respondents to the survey was 147. The total number of useable responses was 105, slightly over the desired number of 100.

Question 5

At work different generations of women have different communication styles.

As we can observe, for Question 5 most respondents agreed that women of different generations have different communication styles. 83% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that differences exist. Of these respondents, 79% of the Baby Boomers strongly agreed or agreed, 87% of Generation X, and 85% of Generation Y strongly agreed or agreed. It can be observed that a majority of respondents from each generation believe that communication styles differ between generations.

Figure 3.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	42% (18)	37% (16)	14% (6)	7% (3)	0% (0)
Generation X	32% (7)	55% (12)	9% (2)	5% (1)	0% (0)
Generation Y	25% (10)	60% (24)	10% (4)	5% (2)	0% (0)

The percentage of respondents who felt neutral or disagreed with this statement is considerably lower; no respondents strongly disagreed. From the graph

the researcher observed that majority of the neutral, disagree or strongly disagree respondents were of the Baby Boomer generation. This may tell us that Baby Boomer women may not always feel as strongly about younger generations having different communication styles as the research suggested. However, Baby Boomer women did have the highest percentage of respondents who believed differences in communication styles did exist, so it does coincide with research that states that “although Boomers have a love/hate relationship with work and it as an end in and of itself, Generation X and Generation Y women work to fulfill other, more important (to them) priorities” (Frakix, 2006).

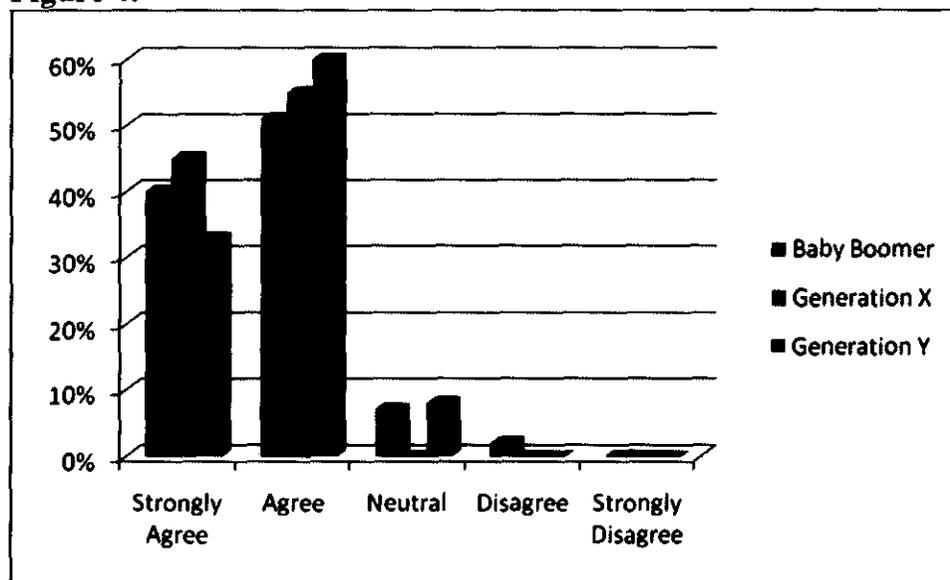
Question 6

It is important that women from different generations recognize that there may be different views on the way work should be done.

A majority of the responses to this statement were strongly agree and agree across all the generations. 91% of the Baby Boomer women respondents, 100% of the Generation X women respondents, and 93% of Generation Y women respondents were in agreement that recognizing differences in views on how work should be done is important.

A minimal number of respondents, 9% of Baby Boomer women and 8% of Generation Y women, felt neutral or disagreed that it is important to recognize differences in communication.

Figure 4.



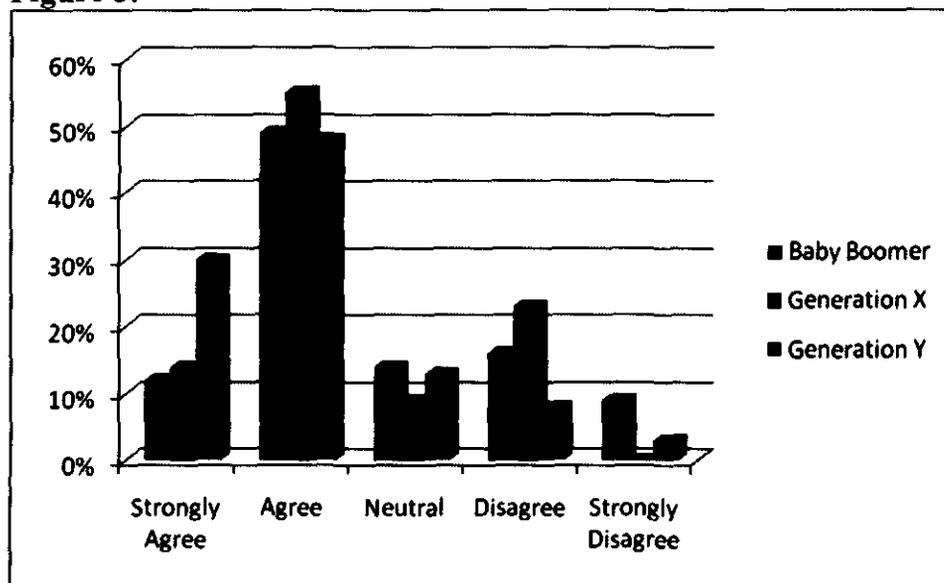
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	40% (17)	51% (22)	7% (3)	2% (1)	0% (0)
Generation X	45% (10)	55% (12)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Generation Y	33% (13)	60% (24)	8% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Question 7

A difference in age will affect how I communicate with a female coworker.

A majority of the respondents from each generation agreed that a difference in age would affect how they would communicate with a female coworker. 60% of the Baby Boomer women strongly agreed or agreed, 68% of Generation X women strongly agreed or agree, and 78% of Generation Y strongly agreed or agreed to this statement.

Figure 5.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	12% (5)	49% (21)	14% (6)	16% (7)	9% (4)
Generation X	14% (3)	55% (12)	9% (2)	23% (5)	0% (0)
Generation Y	30% (12)	48% (19)	13% (5)	8% (3)	3% (1)

The researcher observed that 30% of Generation Y strongly agreed with this statement, almost double the amount of the other generations responses in this category. This correlates with the research on Generation Y who “come into the workplace with a language of their own and fashion differences that stand as a

constant reminder to the Baby Boomers that there truly is an unbridgeable generation gap” (Nicefaro, 2004, para.15), and that a Generation Y female worker knows she is entering a workplace that is very different from what it was before she entered. Generation Y recognizes that her communication style will be considerably different than the communication style of a Baby Boomer.

Of the respondents, 26% of Baby Boomer women, 23% of Generation X, and 10% of Generation Y, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that a difference in age will not affect how they communicate to a female coworker.

The respondents who indicated they felt neutral to this state included 14% of Baby Boomer women, 9% of Generation X women, and 13% of Generation Y felt this way. One reason for these responses may be that women feel it is unnecessary to change their communication styles towards other women by disregarding generational differences.

A discrepancy the researcher observed was among questions 4, 5 and 6. In question 4 (see **Figure 3**) 83% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that differences exist between generations in communication styles. In question 5 (see **Figure 4**) 93% of the respondent strongly agreed or agreed that it is important that women from different generations recognize that there may be different views on the way work should be done. However, when we observe question 6 (see **Figure 5**) the same numbers do not reflect that women will change the way they communicate based on a difference in age. Only 69% of women strongly agreed or agreed they would alter the way they communicate to a female coworker according to their age. This is important to note because communication problems and misunderstandings

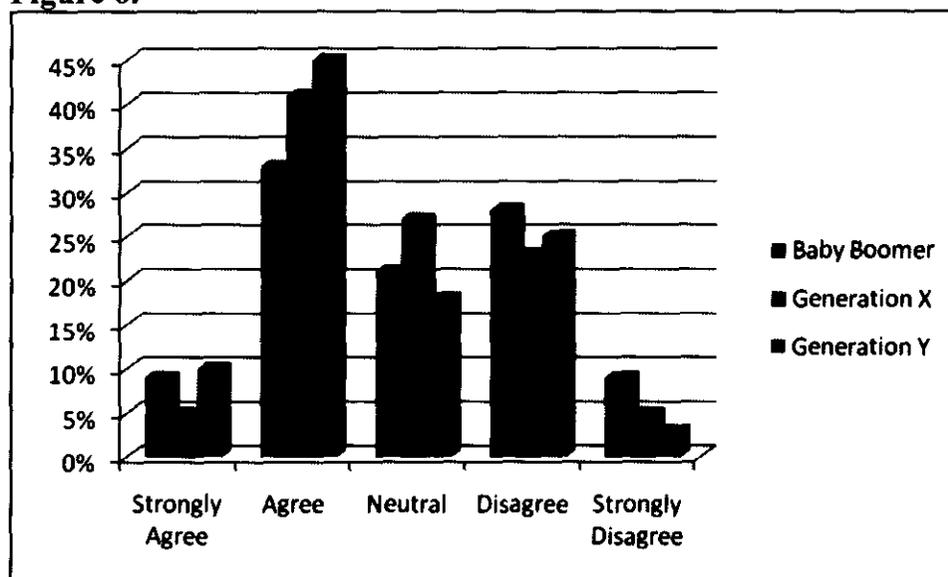
may occur at this level. Women need to recognize they may not be able to communicate the same way to a Baby Boomer woman that has put in years of work as they would to a Generation Y woman who has only recently entered the workplace.

Question 8

Intergenerational conflict between women, defined as the clash of ideas, beliefs, or expectations that occurs between generations, occurs in my workplace.

This statement had a wider range of responses. 42% of Baby Boomer women strongly agreed or agreed that intergenerational conflicts occur at their workplace compared with 37% of Baby Boomer women who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 46% of Generation X women strongly agreed or agreed that intergenerational conflicts occurs at their workplace compared to 28% of Generation X women who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 46% of Generation Y women strongly agreed or agreed that intergenerational conflicts occurs at their workplace compared to 28% of Generation X women who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 6.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	9% (4)	33% (14)	21% (9)	28% (12)	9% (4)
Generation X	5% (1)	41% (9)	27% (6)	23% (5)	5% (1)
Generation Y	10% (4)	45% (18)	18% (7)	25% (10)	3% (1)

56% of Generation Y women strongly agreed or agree that intergenerational conflict does occur in their workplace strongly agreed or agreed that

intergenerational conflicts occur at their workplace compared to 28% of Generation Y women who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

21% of Baby Boomer women, 27% of Generation X, and 18% of Generation Y women felt neutral about intergenerational conflict occurring at their workplace.

The difference between those that strongly agree to those that strongly disagree with this statement is level. When analyzing the data further, we break it down and we see that 9% of Baby Boomer women can see this strongly happening in their workplace compared to the 9% that strongly feel that this does not occur in their workplace. The same difference occurs between those who strongly agree and strongly disagree in the women of Generation X.

One reason that a large range of responses to this statement occurred may be explained by the fact that intergenerational conflict is not often recognized. Misunderstandings, miscommunication, differences, and the clash of ideas may often not be recognized as intergenerational conflict and hence, why many women do not identify it as such. The researcher believes that it should be considered as a potential reason because it may help to alleviate some conflict and may highlight other reasons conflict may occur.

The largest difference exists between Generation Y women, with 10% of those who strongly agree and 3% of those who strongly disagree. This is a 7% difference that shows more Generation Y women can see this happening. This could be because women play a very different role in today's workplace, roles that had never been granted to women before, like the opportunities that are present today (Montserrat, 2007). Generation Y women are "entering the modern diverse

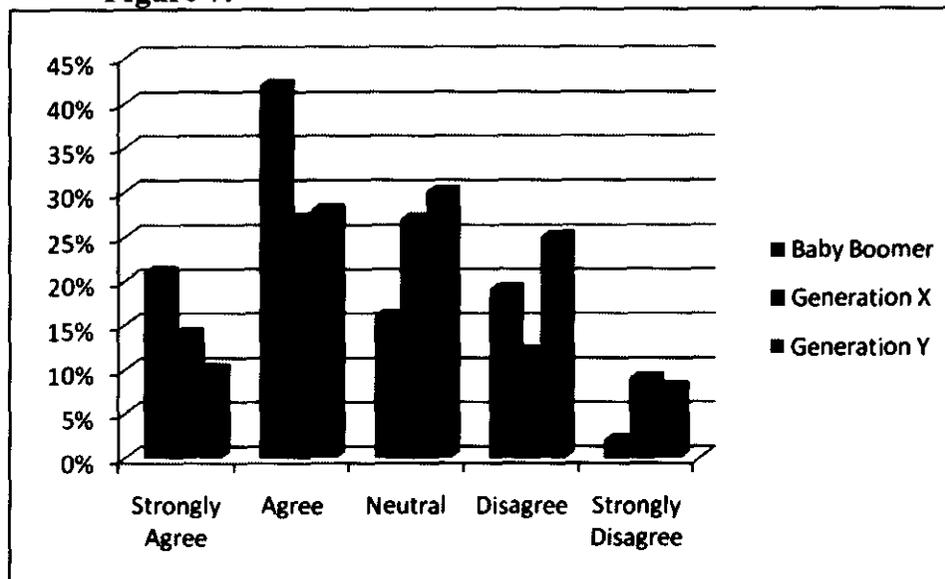
workplace knowing their approach to their initial work setting is unlike other generations of women” (refer to p.23), some may feel the difference whereas other Generation Y women find a way to assimilate with other women coworkers to the point where intergenerational conflict, from their perspective, does not occur.

Question 9

Intergenerational conflict decreases productivity at work.

For this statement we can see from **Figure 7** that 64% of the Baby Boomers either strongly agree or agree that intergenerational conflict decreases productivity. This may be due to the fact that Baby Boomer have the most misunderstandings with the younger generations. Baby Boomers have been in the workplace a lot longer, and because of this some of them may view the long term effects of intergenerational conflict as more disruptive to productivity unlike Generation Y women coming into a workplace for the first time, who have little experience in recognizing intergenerational conflict from their shorter lived experiences.

Figure 7.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	21% (9)	42% (18)	16% (7)	19% (8)	2% (1)
Generation X	14% (3)	27% (6)	27% (6)	12% (5)	9% (2)
Generation Y	10% (4)	28% (11)	30% (12)	25% (10)	8% (3)

Generation X and Y seemed to land in the middle; fewer respondents felt that they strongly agree or strongly disagree. This could be explained by the research

that suggests “many younger women feel that older female colleagues and bosses aren’t helpful or relevant to them, and women of the Baby Boomer generation are uncomfortable helping a woman who might get her job next.” (Zaslow, 2006).

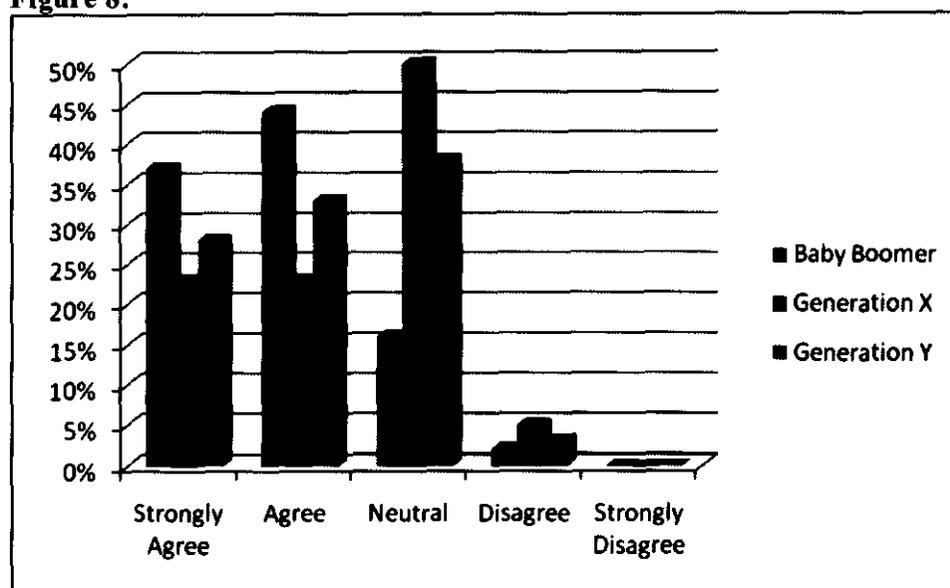
When question 7 and 8 were compared it was observed that the data correlated with intergenerational conflict existing and decreasing productivity. In situations where intergenerational conflict was observed by respondents at their workplace, 48% strongly agreed or agreed (see **Figure 6**) that it occurred in their workplace, a similar percentage of respondents felt that it decreased productivity in the workplace, 51% strongly agreed or agreed (see **Figure 7**). Nearly 50% of the women who took this survey indicated intergenerational conflict does exist in their workplace and it is a source of a decrease in productivity.

Question 10

Title IX (1972) offered women equal opportunity in sports and positively affected future generations of women.

The response to this question had no respondents strongly disagreeing that Title IX (1972) had a positive affect on future generations of women. The percentage of respondents who simply disagreed was also relatively low.

Figure 8.



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Baby Boomer	37% (16)	44% (19)	16% (7)	2% (1)	0% (0)
Generation X	23% (5)	23% (5)	50% (11)	5% (1)	0% (0)
Generation Y	28% (11)	33% (13)	38% (15)	3% (1)	0% (0)

The majority of Baby Boomer women, 81%, responded that they strongly agreed or agreed that Title IX (1972) had a positive affect on future generations of women. This could be explained by the fact that Title IX (1972) did not exist to give these women equality in sports in college when they were growing up and through first hand experience they have observed what it did not do for them in relation to the opportunities it has created for subsequent generations.

50% of the Generation X women felt neutral about this statement. This generation was coming of age when Title IX (1972) came to pass and it is possible they experienced little of the effects. Generation X were being raised by parents who may still have had a stigma about girls in sports and the idea of “equal opportunity,” and it is possible they saw few effects of Title IX (1972) because they did not experience it to the fullest. A similar situation may exist for Generation Y women.

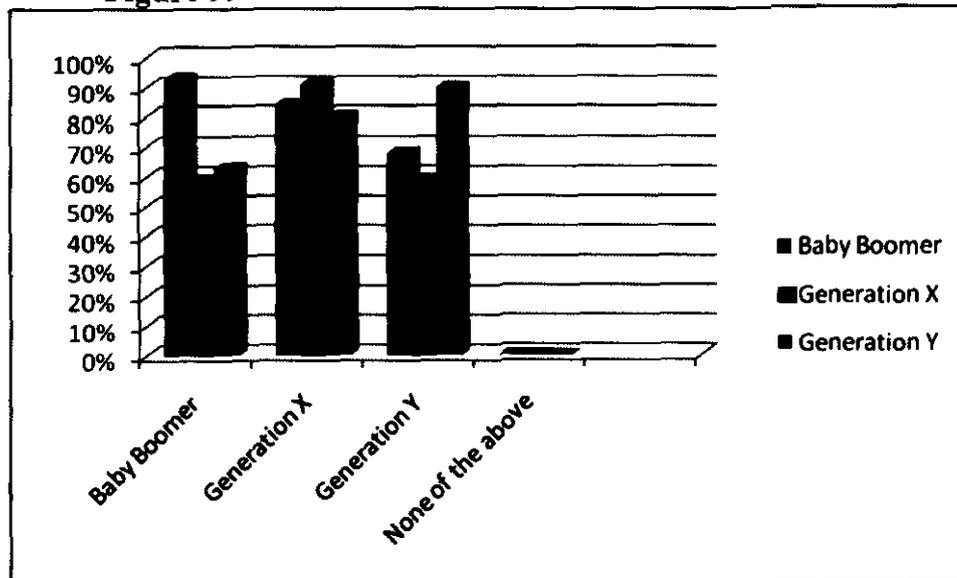
Generation Y women are spread most equally on this statement. They may be affected by Title IX (1972), however because it came to pass long before they were even born, the understanding of what this did for women may not be that conscious for many of them.

Question 11

I find it easy to communicate with women from the:

The responses to this question and the next question informed the researcher that a majority of women believed they get along with any generation of women.

Figure 9.



	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	None of the above
Baby Boomers	93% (40)	84% (36)	68% (29)	0% (0)
Generation X	59% (13)	91% (20)	59% (13)	0% (0)
Generation Y	63% (25)	80% (32)	90% (36)	0% (0)

The slope of the blue bars in the graphs does display the fact that the older generation of women, the Baby Boomers, find it easiest to communicate with women closer to their own age. The blue bar gets shorter as it approaches the younger generation.

The slope of the green bars in the graphs shows the same for the younger generation of women, Generation Y. The green bar gets shorter as it approaches the older generation.

The communication styles of the oldest and youngest generations differ more than the communication styles of Generation X women versus Baby Boomer women. We see that Generation X favors considerably communication with Baby Boomer women over Generation Y women. This could show the considerable communication differences that Generation X feels towards Generation Y even though it is not felt by Generation Y towards Generation X.

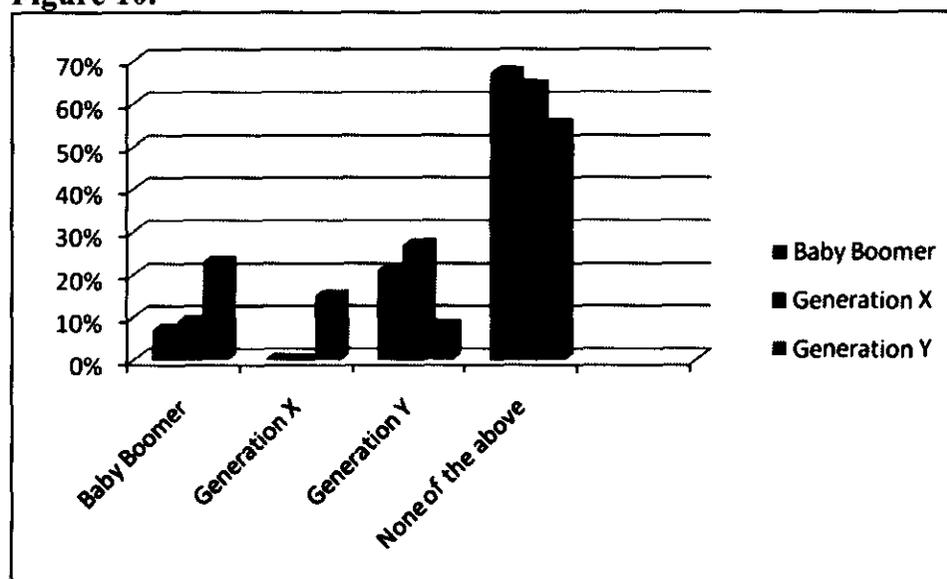
The option for none of the above was not checked by any generation in regards to this statement. It can be observed that all generations find communication easy with at least one generation.

Question 12

I find it difficult to communicate with women from the:

The responses to this question indicated that the majority of respondents do not find it difficult to communicate with any specific generation. However, the few respondents who did believe there was some difficulty were predominantly in the Generation Y category. 21% of the Baby Boomer women and 27% of Generation X women respondents found some form of difficulty in communicating with Generation Y females (see Figure 10). The majority here were Generation X, which is consistent with the research that indicates how Generation X see Generation Y as “entitled” (Reynolds et al, 2006).

Figure 10.



	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	None of the above
Baby Boomers	7% (3)	0% (0)	21% (9)	67% (29)
Generation X	9% (2)	0% (0)	27% (6)	64% (14)
Generation Y	23% (9)	15% (6)	8% (3)	55% (22)

As for the Baby Boomer women, research suggests that “Baby Boomer women may feel resentment towards the younger women who walk into work and expect to be treated with respect and equality before they have lifted a finger; a very different experience than what Baby Boomer women were subject to when they first entered the workforce” (Zaslow, 2006).

Generation Y women believe that there is a certain difficulty in communicating with Baby Boomers, which is consistent with this research. Their approach to work is different as are their standards in the workplace. Baby Boomer women have become self-reliant individuals and believe they set a standard for the younger generations; research suggests otherwise, that the younger generations do not feel the need to uphold those standards because their experiences have taught them otherwise.

Generation Y females were the only respondents to find difficulty in communicating with Generation X, at 15%, which is closer to what research suggested. The researcher found that Generation X women were difficult to work with, with some research suggesting that “Gen X sees Gen Y as arrogant and entitled, while Gen Y sees Gen X as a bunch of whiners” (Gelston, 2008). Difficulty in communicating with Generation X was not strongly justified in the survey responses.

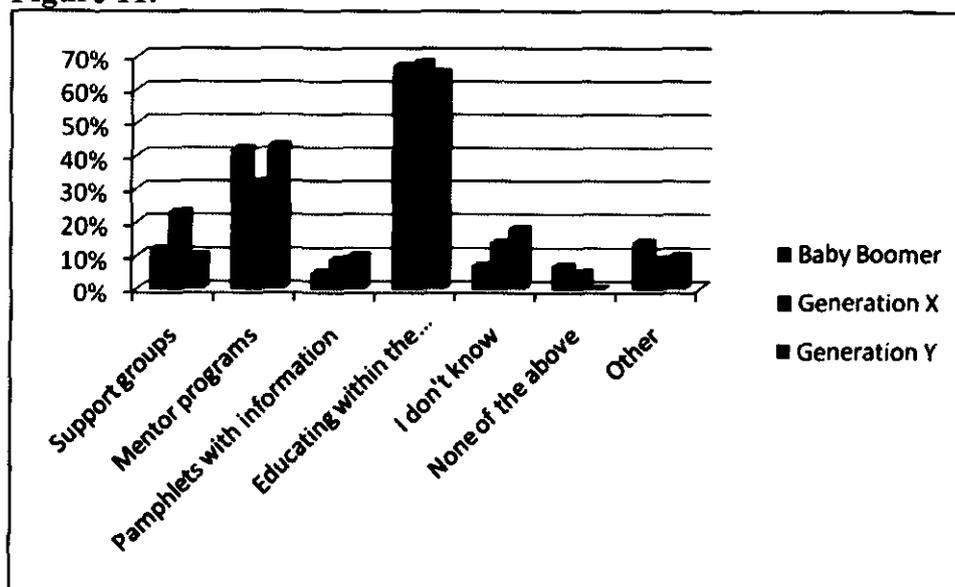
The low number of responses that indicated what generation was generally the most difficult to communicate with could be explained by many factors, mainly that conflict may not be recognized as generational, but instead could be mistaken as situational or in some cases it may not exist.

Question 13

I believe that intergenerational conflict among women in the workplace can be addressed by:

The number of responses here indicates that women of any generation believe this can be addressed at work. The majority of responses here look at educating within the workplace as an important process in which to address potential issues. Mentor programs have a high number of responses as well. It can be observed that all generations of women see mentor programs as a helpful way to address communication issues.

Figure 11.



	Support groups	Mentor programs	Pamphlets with information	Educating within the workplace	I don't know	None of the above	Other
Baby Boomer	12% (5)	42% (18)	5% (2)	67% (29)	7% (3)	7% (3)	14% (6)
Generation X	23% (5)	32% (7)	9% (2)	68% (15)	14% (3)	5% (1)	9% (2)
Generation Y	10% (4)	43% (17)	10% (4)	65% (26)	18% (7)	0% (0)	10% (4)

The responses indicated as “other “offered suggestions that were comparable to one of the other options. Those who selected the option of ‘none of the above,’ would either believe that this is a lost cause or that a problem does not exist.

Question 14

My comments about intergenerational conflict between women in the workplace that have not been addressed in this survey.

The responses to this question were optional. There were 9 responses from the Baby Boomer generation, 6 responses from Generation X, and 8 responses from Generation Y.

The responses that the researcher found relevant from the Baby Boomer generation were: (directly copied from survey analysis)

1. "Working with someone from generation y is the same age as my daughter, which makes it strange."
2. "I see the presence and interaction of multiple generations in the workplace as a positive thing."
3. "how women from diff. generations hold diff. values/approaches to the importance of work in their lives"
4. "Intergeneration [sic] respect (or lack thereof) which I think adds to the conflict."

The researcher observed that the responses to this last statement on behalf of the Baby Boomer generation of women varied. There is the calling attention to the "strangeness" of working with someone who is the age of your daughter, to "different generations hold[ing] different values/approaches to the importance of work," and "intergenerational respect." The researcher thought that response 3 was interesting in that the responder sees the interaction with different generations as a positive thing where everyone brings something to the table.

The responses that the researcher found relevant from the Generation X women were: (directly copied from survey analysis)

1. "From my view I think the problem stems from work ethic/attitude. There are two points I find challenging that fall under that.
The first point I would make is that I find the Baby Boomer is

resistant to change and growth where as my generation and, even more so, Generation Y get excited about change and innovation. They welcome and learn new procedures and policies proficiently. Baby Boomers take forever to learn to follow new procedure and in some cases even refuse. In my experience Baby Boomers work best under a consistent routine and changes are seen as negative. In today's work environment it's very important to recognize that everything is changing and evolving at a more rapid rate then ever before and in order to succeed you need to be able to grow with it. Baby Boomers seem to just be putting in their hours.

The second point I would make is that the Baby Boomers also tend to measure their value at a job based on their age and the years they have worked at a company. They feel entitled to more even though they aren't putting forward the effort of the Gen X and Y. Gen X and Y recognize that nothing is certain in today's work environment - you need to be efficient and flexible if you are going to keep up. It's no longer a 'last one hired, first one fired' environment. It's survival of the fittest out there and we recognize that you need to put in the effort to succeed and endure.”

2. “This is a two way street. Older women and younger ones need to value what the other has to offer. Older women also NEED to push themselves to integrate technology into the work place for the sanity of anyone under age 30.”
3. “I find that Generation Y relays to much on electronic communication and tend to use it even in situations where personal contact would be a better option.”
4. “I prefer working with men.”

The first Generation X open ended response was relevant because it calls to attention some of the findings of the review of literature. It discusses experience and the difference between putting in the time versus flexibility and growing with ones workplace. The researcher believes that this response came from a younger Generation X woman, one who identifies with the Generation Y women.

The responses 2 and 3 cite out technology as an issue. One response pinpoints the older generation as needing to integrate more use of technology while the other sees the younger generation as relying too much on technology. The improvement of communication is necessary to bridge the divide on the issue of

technology. This can be done by communicating what kind of technology is useful in the workplace and what preferences there are about communication in general.

The last Generation X response that pertains to the preference of working with men is consistent with research that states antagonistic feelings between younger and older women may exist which means younger women may feel hesitant in approaching an older woman with this attitude and may opt to approach an older male instead, “this reflects the reality that many older female managers are reluctant to be mentors” (Zaslow, 2006). Data shows that many younger women feel that older female colleagues and bosses aren’t cooperative or significant to them – and only 53% of women said they learn from older female co-workers (Zaslow, 2006).

The response that the researcher found relevant from the Generation Y women were: (directly copied from survey analysis)

1. “I think that the inter-generational conflict between women in the workplace goes much deeper than generational differences. I believe that morals, values, and personal/work ethics play an important role in positive communication in the workplace. I find it just as easy to communicate with people from the Baby Boomer generation through Generation Y when you share similar work ethics and values.”

The researcher found this open-ended comment by a Generation Y woman interesting in that it supports the purpose of this research to create a bridge of understanding among all generations of women when working together.

Survey Observations

Although the results of the survey were often supported by the existing research that was presented in Chapter II, there were some exceptions.

A majority of the respondents, 83%, indicated in question four that they strongly agree and agree that different generations of women have different communication styles. The responses varied in their belief whether or not conflict occurred because of intergenerational reasons. For the most part respondents recognized the need to address this potential issue by education within the workplace or mentor programs.

A high number of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that different generations need to recognize different views on how work should be done. This correlates with the majority of women who indicated they communicate differently to women of different generations. However, women did not indicate intergenerational conflict as occurring in their workplace in the same high numbers.

Baby Boomer women differed slightly in their belief that intergenerational conflict decreases productivity at work, their number was higher than the numbers for Generation X and Generation Y.

Data on the opportunities offered by Title IX (1972) were consistent across the board between those who strongly agree, agreed and those who were neutral.

The data on the generations that were easiest to get along with and those that were most difficult indicated that generations found it easiest to get along with any generation but more with those closest to their own generation. The majority of women respondents did not show a specific difficulty in communicating with a

specific generation. The low percentage that indicated difficulty pinpointed Generation Y as a difficult generation to communicate with. Generation Y however, indicated most difficulty communicating with the Baby Boomer women.

When asked each generation of women to indicate which generation was most difficult to communicate with, the result was that over 50% from each generation selected “none of the above.” Literature on the subject found that women of different generations were bound to have more communication issues with each other. This was inconsistent with the researcher’s findings.

Women of all generations indicated the best approach to intergenerational conflict would be to educate within the workplace, and a high number also showed some interest in mentor programs.

Chapter V Summary

This study examined communication patterns of women from different generations to determine if intergenerational conflict may exist at a different level between women of different generations then it might exist on a non-gender specific generational level.

The research showed different personality traits of each generation that could be a cause of conflict across generations if not understood. The research also observed the different histories of each generation of women and the change of social norms for each. As one researcher observed, “many younger women feel that older female colleagues and bosses aren’t cooperative or significant to them – and only 53% of women said they learn from older female co-workers” (Zaslow, 2006).

The study sought to prove or disprove the findings by using a survey to collect data on similar issues in reference to each generation. The data collected in the survey for this thesis indicated that differences exist in the area of communication styles and preferences. The study found that 83% of the women respondents spanning all three generations studied indicated that communication differences exist among generations. This was consistent with research that explained the differences that exist between generations. The difference between the Baby Boomer women with their love/hate relationship with work and who see it as an end in and of itself, and the Generation X and Generation Y women who work to fulfill other, more important priorities (Frakix, 2006). These different priorities were considered to be the possible cause of any possible conflict in the workplace

because of the higher chance that different generations of women would misunderstand each other.

The differences that the data proved were that Generation X women are not seen as difficult to get along with. One researcher stated that “many Baby Boomers fail to grasp why Gen-Xers demand so much while lacking loyalty, and complain that Xers constantly question their decisions – and their authority” (Parker, 1999), the findings did not correlate with this research. Baby Boomer women did not indicate any difficulty in communicating with Generation X. Research was slightly more consistent with the difficulty in communicating with Generation Y, “female bosses from Generation X are finding a clear generation gap with female employees from Generation Y” (Zaslow, 2006). It was observed shows that women of the Baby Boomer and Generation X generation, when indicating any difficulty communication with a specific generation, leaned towards Generation Y.

The effects of Title IX (1972) were consistent with respondents feeling mostly neutral or agreeable about its effects on subsequent generations after it was passed. Research stated that even though the corporate world remains predominantly male, women have succeeded immensely in penetrating this world (Montserrat, 2007).

The research came to find some similarities and some differences.

Based on the results of the study the researcher believes that differences in communication do exist between women of different generations.

Implications for Organizations

As the review of literature and survey results indicated, intergenerational conflict does, at times, exist between and among women in the workplace. The researcher believes that these findings prove that there can be potential consequences for organization's productivity and success if this problem is not addressed.

An organization needs to look at its population of its female employees and compare the differences in age. Larger differences in age may indicate potential intergenerational conflict.

Since organizations have the ability to classify their employees by their religion, race ethnicity, education level or disabilities, it may help for organizations to include age in a broader aspect of this classification. As we can see from **Figure 1** general differences do exist, some more significant than others. It may help organizations to help educate their employees in the workplace. Whether it is through managers, pamphlets, or small group communication, it is important to keep this potential problem highlighted so that employees can recognize and acknowledge when they are guilty of intergenerational conflict, or if they are a victim of it.

The percentage of the respondents who believe that intergenerational conflict exists in their workplace, 48% (see **Figure 6**) is substantial enough for this to pose a problem for organizations in the long run. The researcher believes that if organizations value communication between different generations than they will invest in intergenerational communication awareness programs that implement the

knowledge and understanding of what it takes to work with women of different histories. Women of different ages need to learn to work with each other and not against each other; when organizations help them do this they will create better work environments for everyone involved as well as more productivity.

Women often find themselves working closely with many other women and sometimes with very few women. No matter what the situation between female coworkers, knowing and understanding that differences exist between generations is important. Women share the same social responsibilities and gender struggles, and it is in their experiences and history where women have learned to overcome adversity. Understanding different female perspectives, especially in terms of generational perspectives will help women grow together and work together.

Therefore, it is in the best interest of organizations to make sure their female employees get along and understand each other; to invest in educating women about women is an investment in productivity.

Limitations and Future Research

The research in this study examined how women of different generations perceive intergenerational conflict and whether or not they believe it exists and what potential effects this may have on workplace cohesion. This research did not take into consideration the Veteran generation of women who can still be found in the workplace. Future research may include them for more accuracy in determining how all women work together.

The survey and research used generalizations of women from each generation studied to consider the effects of different generations coming together.

Other areas that could be covered in researching intergenerational conflict in relation to men versus women; the researcher noted a respondents preference for working with men (p.54) and research that also suggested younger females preference for working with older males (refer to p.16). It may help to research whether or not a preference does exist and if so, why?

The research in this study did not take into consideration the respondent's ethnic background. This extra variable may have also added some insight into what role ethnic norms may play in someone's communication style towards coworkers of different ages.

When observing the survey more direct questions could have been asked about the use of specific language and technology in the workplace. The review of literature in Chapter II suggested that different changes in the way younger generations speak and the use of technology (refer to p.15) often play a role in intergenerational conflict. The questions could have been more specific about what respondents felt about certain types of technology and what sort of language could be misunderstood.

To improve upon this research a larger sample audience needs to be used to establish if intergenerational conflict is viewed the same way across the board. This research had a lot more Generation Y respondents and a lot less Generation X respondents which could make the findings a less accurate. A wider sampling of women across the many different kinds of workplaces of the United States would make the findings more accurate.

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Appendix A: Survey

Intergenerational Women in the Workplace Research Survey

For each statement check your answer.

1. I belong to the following generation:

Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
 Generation X (1965-1980)
 Generation Y (born after 1980)
 Other (approximate date of birth) _____

2. My highest level of completed education is:

High school
 College
 Graduate

3. I have worked at my present company for:

0-11 months
 1-5 years
 5-10 years
 Over 10 years

4. I interact with women of different generations on a consistent basis.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

5. At work different generations of women have different communication styles.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

6. It is important that women from different generations recognize that there may be different views on the way work should be done.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

7. A difference in age will affect how I communicate with a female coworker.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

8. Intergenerational conflict between women, defined as the clash of ideas, beliefs, or expectations that occurs between generations, occurs in my workplace.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

9. Intergenerational conflict decreases productivity at work.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

10. Title IX (1972) offered women equal opportunity in sports and positively affected future generations of women.

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

11. I find it easy to communicate with women from the: (check all that apply)

- Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964)
- Generation X (1965-1980)
- Generation Y (born after 1980)
- None of the above

12. I find it difficult to communicate with women from the: (check all that apply)

- Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964)
- Generation X (1965-1980)
- Generation Y (born after 1980)
- None of the above

13. I believe that intergenerational conflict among women in the workplace can be addressed by:
(circle all that apply)

- Support groups
- Mentor programs
- Pamphlets with information
- Educating within the workplace
- Other _____
- I don't know
- None of the above

14. (Optional) My comments about intergenerational conflict between women in the workplace that have not been addressed in this survey are:

Appendix B: Letter of Solicitation

The following letter will be included in an e-mail message sent to participants and is also the “Introduction” page on the survey web site hosted by Zoomerang.

(date)

My name is Sylvia Jaros and I am a graduate student at Seton Hall University.

I am conducting this survey as a research component to completing thesis work for the completion of the Master of Arts in Strategic Communication graduate program at Seton Hall University.

The purpose of this study is to assess the differences in communication style between working women of the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979) and Generation Y (born after 1980).

This web-based survey will be accessible through Zoomerang, an online survey company (www.zoomerang.com).

This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

All respondents are anonymous and will remain strictly confidential. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Consent to participate in this survey is indicated by submitting the completed survey. Respondents can exit out of the survey at any time by closing the window.

Thank you for you participation.

This survey has been approved by the IRB at Seton Hall University.
For more information please email questions to IRB@shu.edu.