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How and why Millennials are initiating conflict in vertical dyads and what they are learning
A two-stage study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to contribute to extant conflict management theory by presenting evidence from a two-stage study of conflict initiated by pre-graduation Millennials in entry-level work environments.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents an inductively derived conceptual model, hypotheses and measurement scales grounded in Millennials' voices. Then, based on survey data, the scales are tested for structural coherence, and hypotheses are validated using structural equation modeling methodology.

Findings – Most Millennials initiate conflict with older coworkers and supervisors in the workplace because of the hurt they feel over the unfairness they experience. While confronting their superiors, they take an aggressive stand ("you are wrong, you should change") and learn that the organization is duplicitous and that they should initiate conflict with superiors in the future to protect against unfairness in a duplicitous organization.

Research limitations/implications – The findings and implications reflect the perspectives of Millennials who initiated conflict with superiors or more experienced coworkers in entry level workplaces. Reports of multiple perspectives and from other contexts are left to future research.

Practical implications – Millennials may well enter the workforce with attitudes and behaviors older coworkers and supervisors find aberrant. However, the interactions between Millennials, older generations and the socio-technical environment of entry-level workplaces lie at the root of the conflict Millennials initiate. Older generations may have implicitly produced – albeit to varying extents – opaque environments in which entry-level Millennials feel manipulated.

Originality/value – The study reports a relatively rare two-stage study that begins with exploration and discovery using qualitative data, and concludes with hypotheses tests based on survey data. A new context is explored; i.e. Millennials initiating conflict in vertical dyads. New concerns about the veracity of the entry-level work environment are raised.

Keywords Millennials, Conflict, Vertical dyads

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The conflict management literature is rich with well-delineated constructs, measurement scales and insights from multiple perspectives. A critical mass of empirical evidence coupled with acclaimed meta-analyses attest to a well-developed research tradition in the field [DeChurch *et al.* (2013), De Dreu and Weingart (2003), de Wit *et al.* (2012), O'Neill *et al.* (2013)

for meta-analyses, and Laudan (1977) for definition of research traditions]. However, an opportunity for new thinking, new exploration and theory development is emerging in two important ways. First, the demographic composition of US firms is rapidly changing. Seventy-eight million Millennials (born 1980-2000), 31 million aged between 18-24, are entering the workforce at the rate of a million a year (LaBarre, 2014). They are joining the 49 million Generation Xers (born 1965-1979) and 75 million Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964; Eisner, 2005; Ferri-Reed, 2016; Grabowski, 2013). Millennials will come to represent 46 per cent of the workforce by 2020 and 75 per cent of the workforce by 2025 (Miller, 2012). Scholars report that demographic and related psychosocial changes in the workplace are producing contentiousness between generations (Macon and Artley, 2009; Parry and Urwin, 2011).

Second, despite notable exceptions, conflict in vertical dyads is understudied in general (Ismail *et al.*, 2012). Current theory does not speak to the conflict Millennials initiate with supervisors and more experienced coworkers (henceforth *superiors*). At present, the bulk of scholarly attention is devoted to conflict within and between teams and interest groups (Roth and Schwarzwald, 2016). The Millennial-superior vertical dyad is a unique context that deserves scholarly attention because they represent different generations with naturally divergent perspectives and orientations and reflect asymmetries in power and vulnerability (Dijkstra *et al.*, 2014). At present, conflict theory is insufficiently connected to shifting demographic realities of the workplace and insufficiently informed by Millennials' experiences with conflict they initiate in vertical dyads.

This article reports findings from a two-stage study of the conflict pre-graduation Millennials initiated with superiors, and attempts to make the following contributions to future theory development efforts. First, we discuss our first-stage exploratory findings produced by the following research questions:

RQ1. Why, if at all, do pre-graduation Millennials initiate conflict in vertical dyads?

RQ2. How do they initiate the conflict, and what do they say and do during their conflict with superiors?

RQ3. What do they learn as a result?

RQ4. How are the antecedents they identify linked with their conflict behaviors and the learning they derive?

Grounded in Millennials' voices, we identify new constructs relevant to conflict they initiate in vertical dyads, develop a conceptual model and derive new measurement scales and hypotheses. Second, based on a survey, we empirically test our inductively derived scales and hypotheses. Third, we compare and contrast our findings with extant research, raise key questions that deserve additional academic scrutiny and discuss practical implications. Because this is the first study of its kind, we aim to make a preliminary contribution, stimulate new thinking and trigger new research versus the attempt to present formalized theory and widely generalizable findings.

The context of pre-graduation millennial-initiated conflict in the workplace
Our attempt here is to:

- explicate the older generations' perspective of Millennials in the workplace and point to the unrepresented voices of the new generation; and
- discuss the key findings from studies of conflict in vertical dyads – to make the case for our two-stage study.

This is distinct from the one attempting to replicate discussions of conflict management literature, or of superior–subordinate relationships, or of Millennials in the workplace – all of which have occurred elsewhere. For fuller explications of the nature of conflict in organizations, refer De Dreu and Weingart (2003), Jehn (1995), Jehn and Chatman (2000) and Jehn *et al.* (2015); for more on conflict behaviors, refer de Wit *et al.* (2012); for conflict in vertical dyads, refer Roth and Schwarzwald (2016); for subordinate–supervisor relationships, refer Nienaber *et al.* (2015); and for "Millennials in the workplace" construct, refer Hershatter and Epstein (2010), Myers and Sadaghiani (2010), Ng *et al.* (2010), Parry and Urwin (2011), Thompson and Gregory (2012) and Twenge *et al.* (2010).

The unrepresented Millennials' voice

The literature is rich with insights from Traditionalists, Boomers and Generation Xers who largely describe Millennials' attitudes and behaviors as aberrant, and as the cause of intergenerational contentiousness in the workplace (Eisner, 2005; Ferri-Reed, 2016). For instance, Millennials are self-centered and disrespectful (Marston, 2007), act entitled and exhibit poor work ethic (Allen *et al.*, 2015; Thompson and Gregory, 2012). They want instant respect for their command over information technology and ability to multi-task that older generations regard as undeserved (Deyoe and Fox, 2012). Millennials are unjustifiably concerned about the incompetence of Xers and Boomers (Eisner, 2005), and over-confident in their untested abilities – which leads them to challenge more experienced co-workers and supervisors and create conflict-prone work environments (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010). Compared to other generational cohorts, Millennials want more power (Tulgan, 2009), high-status work (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008), authority, prestige and recognition (Lyons *et al.*, 2005). They want to be seen as colleagues and not subordinates (Alsop, 2008), and taken seriously from their first day on the job (Sujansky and Ferri-Reed, 2009). They are over-confident in their abilities (Macon and Artley, 2009), demand flexible work-hours (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007), constant praise (Sujansky and Ferri-Reed, 2009) and unreasonable work–life balance (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). They reportedly want to feel successful without regard to their performance (Deyoe and Fox, 2012), and feel more entitled to positive results than their older generational cohorts (Allen *et al.*, 2015). They also expect a promotion within 15.1 months on the job (Ng *et al.*, 2010) and react overtly to unmet expectations by quitting or curbing citizenship behaviors (Allen *et al.*, 2011).

The gap in current thinking relates to the largely unrepresented Millennials' perspective into attitudes and behaviors of older generations in the entry-level work environment. The neglect of Millennials' perspective is anomalous, given the rich tradition of attention to multiple perspectives in the conflict management literature. For instance, even a brief review highlights concerns for conflicting perspectives among interdependent entities in organizations, e.g. participants in teams (Lovelace *et al.*, 2001), departments (Song *et al.*, 2006) and genders (Hofäcker and König, 2013). Multiple perspectives are sought because asymmetric views are known to exacerbate conflict (Johnson and Anderson, 2016). Perspective taking is also regarded as part of conflict resolution. Jehn *et al.* (2015) conclude that the first step in alleviating conflict in organizations involves a process that facilitates perspective taking – so that conflicting parties can understand each other.

Conflict in vertical dyads

Conflict occurring in vertical dyads are under-reported in the literature. Current theory is largely informed by samples of co-workers, or leaders and co-workers. As Dijkstra *et al.* (2014) note, conflict with leaders is examined primarily as an issue of "leader intervention".

Despite the skewed focus, scholars have made valuable contributions to current understanding of task conflict in vertical dyads (McMillan *et al.*, 2012), leaders' conflict behaviors and the gossip in which followers engage (Dijkstra *et al.*, 2014), supervisors' influence tactics given the variance in the performance of subordinates (Roth and Schwarzwald, 2016), the role of culture in shaping conflict in vertical dyads (Bruk-Lee and Spector, 2006) and impact of subordinates' moods on perceptions of relationship conflict (Ismail *et al.*, 2012). Yet, conflict theory remains uninformed by conflict initiated by the youngest generation in the workplace in vertical dyads. How and why they overcome their low-power status, take the first and often risky step to initiate conflict with superiors and what they learn as a result, remains unknown.

This state of the art precludes a theory-derived hypotheses testing effort because current concepts and measurement scales are rooted in contexts wholly different than that of interest to our study. Instead, it implicates a two-stage study:

(1) exploration and discovery for identification of relevant constructs and development of hypotheses and measurement scales; and

(2) testing of scales and confirmation of inductively derived hypotheses using survey data.

Method

First-stage data collection

Data were collected from pre-graduation Millennials enrolled in organizational behavior-related courses taught by one of the co-authors in a business school at a regional state university in the northeastern USA. Students enrolled in two sections of organizational behavior (fall semester) were asked whether they had initiated a conflict with superiors in the workplace while working full or part-time, or as interns. After over 80 per cent of students responded affirmatively, they were asked to complete a homework assignment if they had initiated such a conflict. The homework required description of the nature and extent of conflict, and its causes and consequences. If they had initiated more than one, students were asked to respond to questions with respect to the most intense conflict. Students with no experience of conflict were assigned another homework.

During the subsequent class, students were asked to work in teams and discuss the antecedents and consequences of the conflict. Then, a class discussion was led by the instructor, and the key points made by students were noted on the whiteboard. After the class, the instructor transcribed the whiteboard notes and made a note of her observations and learning.

In the subsequent spring semester, the above process was repeated in three sections taught by the co-author (two sections of "Organizational Behavior", and one section of "Leadership in Organizations"). After the end of the spring semester, the responses from 113 students (of a total 133 enrolled), coupled with the transcripts of the white-board notes, and instructor comments were content analyzed separately by the co-authors. The response rate of 84 per cent is explained as follows: some students reported they had either not worked at all or not worked for any significant length of time to make a report, or had not initiated a conflict with someone from the older generation.

The sample was 60 per cent male, 40 per cent female and 96 per cent held the status of junior or higher. Most were working full time (58 per cent) when they initiated the conflict. Twenty-three per cent were working part-time and 19 per cent were serving as interns. Sixty per cent of the 113 participants characterized their conflicts as *high intensity*. Most conflicts occurred with Boomer managers (58 per cent), followed by Xers (including managers and

older coworkers, 38 per cent). Traditionalists were confronted (4 per cent) almost entirely because of the older generation's lack of fluency with information technology. Most conflicts (74 per cent) occurred with supervisors and 26 per cent of the conflicts occurred with more experienced co-workers. About 35 per cent of conflicts produced satisfactory or better outcomes.

Qualitative data analysis

To ensure internal consistency, the co-authors conducted content analysis of homework assignments, whiteboard transcripts and instructor notes – closely following guidelines of Miles and Huberman (1994). We created a spread sheet in which each column represented a question on the assignment and each row represented a student (113 rows). Columns were added to reflect additional information gained from whiteboard transcripts and instructor notes. In the resulting cells, we summarized the key points expressed by students, made specific references to transcripts so we could draw inferences rooted in actual quotes and coded responses into nominal categories. This data matrix eventually came to reflect the entire breadth and depth of the data we had collected. We also recorded the learning we derived while producing the matrix in terms of patterns and themes emerging from the data.

In the first iteration, the co-authors independently derived inferences from the data matrix, and identified antecedents and consequences of conflict initiation. Figure 1 shows the results of the discussions during which the independently derived findings were compared, contrasted and reconciled. It illustrates the grounded nomological framework we derived to "impart meaning to our observations and develop a vocabulary to express our propositions" (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2008, p. 233). The framework makes explicit our data-derived learning about convergence and shows directionality of relationships that we posit are significant (Cavusgil, *et al.*, 2008).

The nomological framework served as a basis for propositions and measurement scales we collaboratively developed – closely following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), Churchill (1979) and Hinkin (1995). The resulting scales are included in Table I. The process of scale construction was as follows. We began with structural theorizing about key constructs and their relationships and followed with operationalization. In other words, we identified the observed indicators for the measurement scales and ensured content validity by reflecting the breadth of relevant issues we identified for each construct (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2005; Hinkin, 1995).

Key constructs

Hurt

Why Millennials initiate conflict with superiors. The notions that older generations are unfair toward them, and that this unfairness is *hurtful* – is dominant in Millennials' voices. The details of how and why the perception of unfairness emerged was of secondary concern to
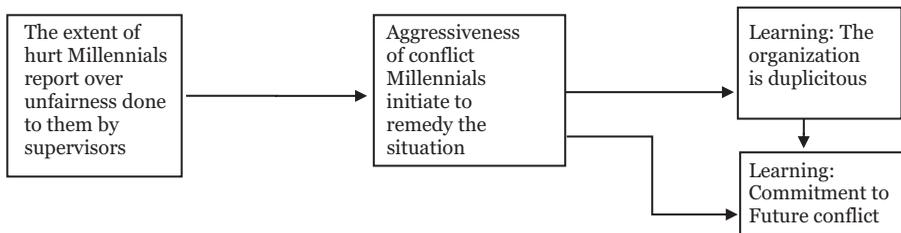

Figure 1.
Nomological framework derived from qualitative data

Factor 1 Hurt	U1	*When I think about my work-experience up to the time I confronted the other person, I can honestly say that*: I was not being treated fairly
	U2	The unfairness in the situation was gnawing at me
	U3	The situation made me feel insulted and disrespected
	U4	I was very angry and aggrieved because I was treated unfairly
Factor 2 Aggressiveness	I1	*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about how you handled the conflict with the older coworker or supervisor*: I asked the other person to change their behavior
	I2	I called the other person directly on their dishonesty
	I3	I brought proof to show the other person that they were wrong
	I4	I remained steadfast in advocating my point of view till the very end
	I5	*I rejected convenient compromises and pursued what I thought was the right outcome* (dropped after the first step of CFA)
Factor 3 Duplicitous organization	IA1	*Based on what I have learned as a result of working prior to graduation, I can say that while thinking about working after graduation, you should*: Prepare for unfair demands about devoting more time to work than you expect
	IA2	Prepare for how little others will care about you in the workplace
	IA3	Prepare for how often the people you work with will go back on their word and promises
	IA4	Prepare for how quickly others will dismiss your ideas for change and improvement
	IA5	Prepare for how often you do not get credit for your good ideas
Factor 4 Commitment to initiating conflict in the future	C1	*Based on what I have learned from working prior to graduation, I can honestly say that when I am working full time after graduation*: *I will not hesitate to confront others and handle it in the same way I did prior to graduation* (dropped after step 2 of the CFA)
	C2	I have learned a lot about how to confront others and influence outcomes in my favor
	C3	I have learned that it is very important to stand up for oneself in organizations
	C4	It is very important to call others out when you know they are wrong
	C5	I am willing to take greater risk while confronting others

Table I.
Likert scales

the Millennial. The primary issue was the extent of hurt because it shaped Millennials' conflict-related attitudes, behaviors and learning. Hurt refers to affect-rich, visceral elements: i.e. the unfairness *gnaws* at them, makes them feel insulted, disrespected, angry and aggrieved. Phrases such as "I was furious", "it made me very angry", "I was insulted in front of other people" and "I kept thinking about it, it bothered me for many days", are commonly described as the triggers of conflict.

The hurt Millennials describe emerges from a highly interactive context of different perspectives on task (what to do), process (how to do it) and relationships (interpersonal friction) – long recognized as the key dimensions of organizational conflict (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; de Wit *et al.*, 2012; Jehn, 1995). Millennials' descriptions of unfairness leading to hurt are aligned with recent evidence of workplace bullies (Olive and Cangemi, 2015), dysfunctional bosses who steal credit (Rose *et al.*, 2015) and high incidence of workplace incivility this generation encounters (Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, 2014, report). Millennials' reports are also consistent with recent reports that they are willing to fight for what they believe is right and are likely to blame others for the problems they face (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Consider the following voices:

I felt angry and made me want to quit and get a different job.

I was furious because I was still new and I know she (my older colleague) never brought it (one of my job responsibilities) to my attention. I had a notebook that I kept and I wrote down anything of importance that she told me. I know if she had told me that, I would have written it down. I felt that she was placing the blame on me because she knew that I was just a temporary intern and she didn't want to look bad.

Table I includes the five-item Likert scale we used for the second-stage study. Each scale reflects our data-derived inferences about the observable measures (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981) – which taken together measure the breadth of the *hurt* construct as Millennials describe (Churchill, 1979).

Aggressiveness: how Millennials initiate conflict with superiors
Millennials vary in terms of the aggressiveness with which they engage in conflict and skew toward the more-aggressive end of this continuum. Millennials' description of conflict initiation is explained as:

- they viscerally felt hurt by the unfairness of superiors; and
- they took the first step and confronted relevant superior, and forcefully asked them to change their behavior.

Their tone is aggressive: "you are wrong and dishonest, you should change". The conflict initiation is aggressive and contrasts with current notions of gentle persuasion (De Wine *et al.*, 1991) because they ask others to change their behaviors, call the other person's dishonesty, bring evidence to show that the other person is wrong and remain steadfast in advocating their point of view till the very end.

The notion of aggressive conflict has attracted some attention in the literature, but in different contexts. For instance, Jehn *et al.* (1997) have shown that aggressiveness positively effects perceptions of performance in groups with outcome and detail-oriented values. Aggressive conflict between protégés and mentors has received attention (Baum, 1992). Scholars seem to mostly agree that aggressiveness worsens and does not alleviate conflict (Moeller and Kwantes, 2015). Current definitions of aggressiveness relate to attacks on other person's self-concept that aim to inflict psychological pain (Gudykunst *et al.*, 1995; Infante and Wigley, 1986), or to actions intending to inflict harm on others (Baron, 1977). Millennials' definition relates to different intents. Their style of initiating conflict is aligned with:

- the aggressiveness that people exhibit when facing injustice and unfairness (Tedeschi and Felson, 1994); and
- forceful, competitive confrontation that people prefer when they know they are right, others are wrong, and that accommodation and acceptance will result in others taking undue advantage (De Dreu and Van Vianen, 2001).

The following are examples of words from which we derived our five-item Likert scale to measure the *aggressiveness* construct (Table I):

I acted assertively because I was bothered by the fact that I didn't get the job I wanted. Also, I knew that if I ignored the problem there would be no incentive but if I confronted him there may be a chance to get what I wanted.

I confronted my manager with the reasons why I should have been chosen as head guard in an assertive way. I chose this action because it is not disrespectful and I thought it would be the best way to try and get him to change his mind.

When I went to confront her and tell her that she had made a mistake and had to (rework), she started yelling at me. She told me not to tell her how to do her job and that she was right [. . .] I think she thought she was above me because she was older than me so in turn she could boss me around even though technically our positions are equal. Also, I believe that because I am younger she thought I was blaming someone else so I did not get in trouble, but really it is what she was doing. I knew I needed proof to back myself up because there was no way she was going to believe me. So I printed out the receipt and showed it to her. It turns out I was right and I had typed it out correctly but she just made it wrong.

Post-conflict learning: duplicitous organization

Post conflict, Millennials come to view the organization as duplicitous. After their experience with initiating conflict, they have come to expect a workplace that makes unfair demands, expects more than what they can reasonably contribute or commit to doing, makes promises it has no intention of keeping, dismisses their ideas for change and improvement and refuses to give them the credit for the contributions they actually make.

Meaningful differences exist between the post-conflict learning Millennials describe and reports of conflict-related learning in the literature. Scholars are concerned about organizational learning from conflict (MacDonald, 2012), about the role of Hegelian dialectical inquiry (Woods, 2012) and learning orientation of teams engaged in conflict (Jia-Chi, 2010). The literature's focus is on what firms (MacDonald, 2012), teams (Jia-Chi, 2010) and individuals (Bobco and Colella, 1994) can learn to avoid, prevent or alleviate conflict in organizations. Millennials speak of a wholly different kind of learning that the organization is unfair, uncaring and duplicitous. The learning seems to emerge from the chagrin they feel about superiors and organizations that fail to validate their unique abilities and contributions as some scholars have noted (Janssen and Prins, 2007). More importantly, their learning seems prescient because it mirrors the sentiments expressed by industry veterans and scholars who point to the pervasive duplicity in organizational life (Frankfurt, 2005; Sutton, 2007). Consider some of the words from which we derived the five-item Likert scale for measuring the learning about *duplicitous organizations* construct (Table I):

> I brought up question and ideas for ways to implement the use of these technologies. My manager responded in something similar to "our system is working fine, we get things done". I was a little upset about being put down. My manager seemed too preoccupied during my suggestion. She was not fully listening to the suggestion and my concerns that I saw as someone from outside of the department. My manager acted in a way to just leave the things alone.

Millennials learn that older generations lie and manipulate:

> After around two months of work, I had received little training and I began to get frustrated. I questioned whether my boss had lied to me during the job offer simply as a way for me to join her team of employees.

Post-conflict learning: commitment to initiating conflict in the future

Even though most conflicts (65 per cent) do not produce favorable outcomes for Millennials, nearly *all* report feeling good about standing up for themselves and confronting others. Commitment to conflict refers to the learning: "I must and will confront and initiate conflict with my superiors again". This learning is the most clearly articulated construct in verbal protocols:

- Millennials' personal experiences of an unfair, hurtful workplace lead them to initiate conflict with superiors;
- they forcefully ask others to change their behavior;

- the conflict they initiate does not produce a common understanding nor build rapport or trust to the extent they expect;
- they learn that the organization implicitly or explicitly permits unfairness toward them; and
- they must therefore stand up for themselves and confront superiors in the future to prevent others from taking advantage (aligned with Sanchez-Navas and Ferras-Hernandez, 2015).

The distinction between current writings and Millennials' reported learning bears deliberation. Millennials offer a unique view of post-conflict learning from the bottom of a vertical dyad. Millennials speak of a renewed commitment to confront and initiate conflict with superiors in the future, whereas current thinking is focused on finding ways by which people and organizations may commit to resolving conflict. Moreover, if conflict is not producing the results a lower-power individual expects, current theory predicts that Millennials will seek accommodation and not confront the powerful-other (Ergeneli *et al.*, 2010). Millennials' reported learning stands in sharp relief. Despite high incidence of failure to produce desired behavioral change from others, they report increased determination to confront others in the future. The undeterred, confident Millennials' voices resonate with current writing about their:

- disregard for rank and authority (Eisner, 2005);
- experiences with negotiating outcomes to their liking with those who hold more power (Lowe *et al.*, 2008); and
- strong concern for maintaining their self-respect (Murphy *et al.*, 2010).

Consider some of the following language from which we derived the five-item Likert scale to measure the *learning about commitment to initiate conflict in the future* construct (Table I):

> Here are several things I believe I should keep in mind for future employment: Don't hesitate to self-advocate, It is one's obligation to act against unfair treatment or procedures, Stepping out of comfort zones may be difficult but is necessary for conflict resolution, Problems should not go unnoticed and left to worsen over time and should thus be acted upon as soon as possible.

> I learned that day that if you have a problem in the workplace, you shouldn't just keep it to yourself. You should respectfully confront your boss and voice your opinion because that is the best way to get what you want. This worked for me and I will be using it in future conflicts in the workplace.

> I will continue to confront problems when they arise. I have learned that is the only way to make change happen.

> My issue with how my boss treated me had a lot to do with my quitting. If I learned anything from this experience it is that standing up for yourself when feeling taken advantage of at work is important, not defiant.

> If things are highly unethical and having a direct negative impact on me, I won't be afraid to say something in the future.

> I think the most important lesson is that someone will not change their behavior unless you ask them. They might not know that their behavior is annoying you.

Hypotheses
What are the linkages between conflict Millennials initiate, its antecedents and consequences?
The following hypotheses are a part of a single conceptual model because the hurt,

aggressiveness and learning emerge from a common gestalt (Figure 1). Consider the following response:

> I felt very defensive as he was accusing me of something that not only was I not guilty of but that I was completely unaware of. What mattered most to me was that I was paid the money I earned by working the hours that I did and that I was treated in a respectful manner while at work. I told my boss simply that the mistake, while I did not know who made it, was not made by me. I tried to remain as calm as I could while internally I was very upset. He remained very angry at me throughout the altercation until we figured out what the problem was. Afterward he gave me a half-hearted apology and walked away. I felt proud of myself that I stood up to my boss when he acted very irrationally toward me.

As Figure 1 shows, we hypothesize the following relationships among these constructs in the context of conflicts initiated by pre-graduating Millennials with superiors in the workplace:

H1. The higher the level of hurt, the more aggressive the conflict initiated with superiors.

H2a. The more aggressive the conflict initiated with superiors, the greater the post-conflict learning that the organization is duplicitous.

H2b. The more aggressive the conflict initiated with superiors, the stronger the commitment to conflict in the future.

H3. The stronger the learning that the organization is uncaring, the stronger the commitment to conflict in the future.

Survey and hypotheses validation
Data collection
We created two identical survey instruments: a Qualtrics survey and a paper-pencil questionnaire. Instructors of the business school were asked to administer either of the surveys in their classes. In the first stage, instructors of 18 sections asked students to complete the Qualtrics survey in class using their laptop computers. Only those students who had worked full or part time, or as interns, *and* had initiated a conflict with superiors were asked to complete the survey. Students who had participated in the qualitative study were instructed not to participate in the survey. After two weeks, instructors of 24 sections who did not require students to bring laptops to class, asked their students to complete a paper-pencil questionnaire (if they had not already completed a Qualtrics survey in other classes, not participated in the qualitative study, and subject to the same qualification of experiences working and confronting superiors). The Qualtrics data were used to purify scales and test for composite reliability and discriminant validity, and for validating hypotheses simultaneously. The paper-pencil survey data were used as a validation sample – as Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggest.

Survey sample
Of the 1,193 undergraduate students enrolled in the undergraduate business program during that academic year, we used 639 survey responses to test our hypotheses [Qualtrics survey, $n = 400$ after elimination of incomplete responses ($n = 98$) and paper questionnaire ($n = 239$) after elimination of incomplete responses ($n = 22$)]. We estimate that all students enrolled in undergraduate business courses during the second semester of our study ($N = 1193$) had the opportunity to participate (except the ones who participated in the qualitative

study) – yielding an effective response rate of 53.56 per cent (i.e. proportion of pre-graduation Millennials who had worked prior to graduation, *and* confronted older, more established persons in the workplace, *and* had not participated in the qualitative study, *and* fully completed the survey instrument they had received). Males ($n = 347$; 54.3 per cent) were more represented than females ($n = 292$, 45.7 per cent). Most of the sample represented majors in business administration (58 per cent) followed by accounting (39 per cent). The majority (91.8 per cent) of the sample was aged between 20 and 24 years, and the average age was 22.38. Most students (62 per cent) were enrolled as sophomores or juniors, 12 per cent as seniors and 3 per cent as graduate (4 + 1 master's program). Most conflict occurred in non-internship related positions (84 per cent), and most sampled students (58 per cent) were working full time when they initiated conflict with superiors. Students received no incentive for completing the survey.

Analysis. We used EQS6.1 to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as part of the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) procedure (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The base model included latent factors and measured variables for the four constructs in the hypothesized model (i.e. hurt, aggressiveness, duplicitous organization and commitment to future conflict). We used robust estimation for the goodness of fit of the CFA because non-normality is known to bias multivariate estimation procedures (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Bentler and Wu, 2002). We used Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test while conducting the CFAs to identify items that cross-loaded on more than one latent variable (see items in *italics* in Table I, we dropped one from Factor 3, and one from Factor 4). The third iteration of the CFA produced excellent fit indices, suggesting that the underlying factors had structural coherence (Non-Normal Fit Index (NNFI) = 0.969, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.974, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.974, Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.034; see results of CFA steps in Table II).

Reliability and validity. As Churchill (1979) notes, we initially calculated Cronbach's alphas for each measurement scale and found them acceptable (0.77-0.822). Because all scales are new, we took steps to assess composite reliability (based on Hair *et al.*, 1998; CR ranged from 0.79 to 0.83; see Table III). To ensure face validity, we only used five-point Likert scales. Convergence was demonstrated by showing significance of hypothesized paths. Additionally, we calculated average variance extracted (AVEs) for each of the four latent variables using the factor loadings produced by CFA (Hair *et al.*, 1998). The ratio of variance captured by the latent constructs from the observed indicator is higher than the measurement error, and comparable in the case of *aggressiveness*. Given the preliminary nature of the study and its intent to contribute to future theory development efforts, the AVEs point to convergent validity of constructs.

Discriminant validity of measures was established in two ways. First, to identify potential problems, we examined correlations between latent variables. Correlations higher than 0.8 are regarded as indicators of problems with construct discriminance (Yanamandram and White, 2010; correlations range from 0.355 to 0.546, see Table III). Second, as Table IV shows, the AVE values for each of the four latent variables is greater than squared correlations (r^2) between each pairs of factors. In other words, in comparison to

	Model	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	Action based on LM test
Table II.							
Purification of	1	0.908	0.958	0.964	0.964	0.038	Remove I5
measurement model	2	0.915	0.962	0.968	0.968	0.037	Remove C1
(results of CFA)	3	0.924	0.969	0.974	0.974	0.034	Purification process ends; fit parameters are excellent

Factors	Alpha	Mean	SD	CR^a	AVE^b	Correlations r (see note c. below)		
						F1 Hurt	F2 Aggressive-ness	F3 Uncaring organization
F1: Hurt	0.821	3.274	0.9854	0.83	0.55	1		
F2: Aggressiveness	0.79	2.791	0.9127	0.79	0.48	0.429	1	
F3: Duplicitous organization	0.822	3.174	0.8103	0.83	0.5	0.416	0.356	1
F4 Commitment to initiating conflict in the future	0.776	3.413	0.7503	0.80	0.5	0.355	0.546	0.468

Notes: [a]CR: Composite reliability; [b]AVE: Average variance explained; [c]p-values for all reported correlations are 0.000

Table III.
Key statistics and
correlations among
factors

the shared variance among any two latent variables, the variance captured by any latent construct from observed indicators is higher and attests to discriminant validity (based on Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Results. Once the measurement model was purified using CFA, we tested for the significance of the hypothesized relationships – consistent with Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Although Wald's coefficient is used to identify whether paths should be added, the model converged in the first iteration with excellent fit indices (NNFI = 0.958, CFI = 0.964, IFI = 0.965 and RMSEA = 0.04). Path coefficients and t-statistics are shown in Figure 2, standardized solutions for the hypothesized model are shown in Table V, measurement and structural parameters for the revised theoretical model are shown in Table VI, and fit indices are shown in Table VII).

Using the same path specifications, we tested the hypotheses on the validation sample (n = 239) as Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggest. A test to estimate equality of means shows no significant difference between sampled males or females (p-values for aggressiveness of conflict, and the two indicators of learning are over 0.05); however, the average feelings of hurt over unfairness reported by females is significantly higher than that reported by males (p = 0.002). However, when we also used the same specifications to examine whether a significant difference existed among sampled males (n = 347) and females (n = 292), we found the models robust across genders (see fit indices in Table VII).
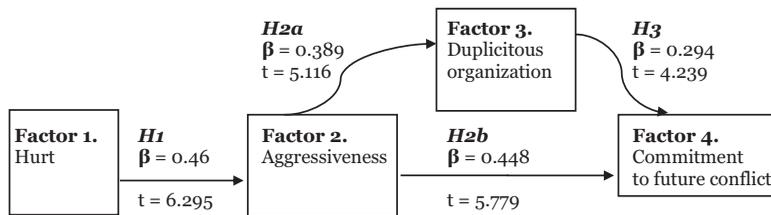
The results indicate the following. Based on the sample of pre-graduation Millennials we included in the study, we find evidence to infer that:

- the higher the level of hurt, the higher the aggressiveness of conflict (supporting *H1*);
- the higher the aggressiveness, the greater the learning that the organization is duplicitous, stronger the commitment to conflict in the future (supporting *H2a* and *H2b*); and

Table IV.
Comparison of AVE values and squared correlations for establishing discriminant validity of measures

Factors	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1: Hurt	AVE = 0.55			
F2: Aggressiveness	r^2 = 0.184	AVE = 0.48		
F3: Duplicitous organization	r^2 = 0.173	r^2 = 0.127	AVE = 0.5	
F4: Commitment to initiating conflict in the future	r^2 = 0.126	r^2 = 0.298	r^2 = 0.219	AVE = 0.5

Figure 2.
Pre-graduation Millennials' perspective into intergenerational issues in the workplace

Note: (Main sample, n = 400, all p-values lower than 0.05)

Factors	Variable	Beta	Error	R^2
Factor 1. Hurt	I was not being treated fairly	0.637	0.771	0.406
	The unfairness in the situation was gnawing at me	0.737	0.664	0.559
	The situation made me feel insulted and disrespected	0.803	0.596	0.645
	I was very angry and aggrieved because I was treated unfairly	0.774	0.633	0.599
Factor 2. Aggressiveness	I asked the other person to change their behavior	0.633	0.775	0.4
	I called the other person directly on their dishonesty	0.759	0.652	0.575
	I brought proof to show the other person that they were wrong	0.695	0.719	0.483
	I remained steadfast in advocating my point of view till the very end	0.667	0.745	0.445
Factor 3. Duplicitous organization	Prepare for unfair demands about devoting more time to work than you expect	0.585	0.811	0.342
	Prepare for how little others will care about you in the workplace	0.733	0.68	0.537
	Prepare for how often the people you work with will go back on their word and promises	0.813	0.583	0.66
	Prepare for how quickly others will dismiss your ideas for change and improvement	0.735	0.678	0.54
	Prepare for how often you do not get credit for your good ideas	0.651	0.759	0.423
Factor 4. Commitment to initiating conflict in the future	I have learned a lot about how to confront others and influence outcomes in my favor	0.646	0.763	0.418
	I have learned that it is very important to stand up for oneself in organizations	0.774	0.633	0.599
	It is very important to call others out when you know they are wrong	0.697	0.717	0.586
	I am willing to take greater risk while confronting others	0.713	0.701	0.509

Table V.
Standardized solution for the hypothesized model

- the greater the learning that organizations are duplicitous, the stronger the commitment to conflict in the future (supporting *H3*).

Discussion

Findings and current theory

Our purpose was to channel Millennials' experiences with initiating conflict in vertical dyads and draw implications for future theory and practice. We find that Millennials' voices resonate with current thinking in important ways. For instance, we learn that the key predictor of the aggressiveness of the conflict Millennials initiate in vertical dyads is the hurt they feel. This concern is in the mainstream. Evaluation of superiors' unfairness is intrinsic to conflict in vertical dyads (Colquitt and Greenberg, 2003). Moreover, Millennials' words mirror the literature's view that feelings of hurt and perceptions of unfairness are conceptually inseparable. For instance, employees are known to perceive unfairness when decisions made by supervisors hurt them (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). Employees are reportedly hurt when they view others as untruthful, unjustified and disrespectful (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, the concern for fairness and interactional justice are central to workplaces, and not a unique attribution of Millennials [Cropanzano *et al.* (2007) and Skarlicki *et al.* (1999) for discussion of the interactional justice construct, and Greenberg and Lind (2000) for concerns about fairness].

Structural model	Betas (t-values)
Aggressiveness → Hurt	0.046 (6.295[*])
Uncaring organization → Aggressiveness	0.389 (5.116[*])
Commitment → Aggressiveness	0.448 (5.779[*])
Commitment → Uncaring organization	0.294 (4.239[*])

Measurement model

Hurt → I was not being treated fairly	1[**]
Hurt → The unfairness of the situation was gnawing at me	1.106 (12.44[*])
Hurt → The situation made me feel insulted and disrespected	1.205 (12.71[*])
Hurt → I was very angry and aggrieved because I was treated unfairly	1.11 (12.228[*])
Aggressiveness → I asked the other person to change their behavior	1[**]
Aggressiveness → I called the other person directly on their dishonesty	1.22 (11.755[*])
Aggressiveness → I brought proof to show the other person that they were wrong	1.16 (10.08[*])
Aggressiveness → I remained steadfast in advocating my point of view till the very end	1.053 (10.204[*])
Duplicitous O → Prepare for unfair demands about devoting more time to work than you expect	1[**]
Duplicitous O →Prepare for how little others will care about you in the workplace	1.247 (11.104[*])
Duplicitous O →Prepare for how often the people you work with will go back on their word and promises	1.383 (10.974[*])
Duplicitous O →Prepare for how quickly others will dismiss your ideas for change and improvement	1.185 (11.242[*])
Duplicitous O →Prepare for how often you do not get credit for your good ideas	1.109 (10.164[*])
Commitment to ICF →I have learned a lot about how to confront others and influence outcomes in my favor	1[**]
Commitment to ICF →I have learned that it is very important to stand up for oneself in organizations	1.203 (12.52[*])
Commitment to ICF →It is very important to call others out when you they are wrong	1.14 (11.407[*])
Commitment to ICF →I am willing to take greater risk while confronting others	1.143 (10.983[*])

Notes: *Parameter estimates are standardized with *t*-values shown in parentheses; all values are significant at $p < 0.05$ **Indicant loading fixed at 1 to set the scale (*t*-values, all significant at $p < 0.05$)

Table VI.
Measurement and structural parameters from the revised theoretical model

Key statistic	Model 1 Sample via Qualtrics (Main sample for purification of measures)	Model 2 Sample via paper questionnaire (Validation sample for assessing hypothesized linkages)	Model 3 Males in the sample	Model 4 Females in the sample
Sample size	400	239	347	292
Mardia's coefficient	52.3619	93.1472	60.3117	75.0097
NNFI	0.958	0.938	0.953	0.963
CFI	0.964	0.948	0.96	0.969
IFI	0.965	0.949	0.967	0.969
RMSEA	0.04	0.042	0.039	0.037

Table VII.
Fit indices for models

Millennials' feelings of hurt as triggers of aggressive conflict similarly parallel current thinking (Griffith *et al.*, 2014). For instance, we know that:

- employees want to feel appreciated and acknowledged by people with higher status (Goldman, 2003);

- perceptions of unfairness produce anger (Lind *et al.*, 2000);
- disregard for employees' views, actions without explanation interfere with feelings of interactional justice and reduction of trust, respect and loyalty (Skarlicki *et al.*, 1999); and
- feelings of hurt accentuate the desire to defend oneself (Amason, 1996).

Millennials' recount of dysfunctional superiors who steal credit also parallel those reported by Rose *et al.* (2015). Finally, Millennials' are not unique in noting that organizations are duplicitous, i.e. reports of organizational duplicity have received attention and acclaim from the mainstream (Frankfurt, 2005; Sutton, 2007).

Unique context of aggressive conflict in vertical dyads

At first glance, the data-derived construct of "aggressiveness" seems to parallel notions of verbal aggressiveness as a personality trait (Infante and Wigley, 1986), or align with the conceptual underpinnings of the 20-item verbal aggressiveness scale (De Wine *et al.*, 1991), or align with current notions of aggressive conflict behaviors (Maltz and Kohli, 2000; Masterson *et al.*, 2000). As we discuss next, however, Millennials' description of aggressive conflict relates to a wholly separate construct.

Current notions of aggressive conflict behavior are about taking a clear stand and clarifying one's perceptions of an objectionable situation (Samson and Nowak, 2010). Millennials are not simply clarifying, they are asking superiors to change their behaviors. The notion of parallels fades further when the assessment scales are compared. The verbal aggressiveness scale refers to, among other things, the extent to which a person attacks another's character and derives pleasure from telling them off (De Wine *et al.*, 1991). These notions are absent in our data-derived scale. Millennials are neither trying to hurt nor tell others off. Similarly, Ayoko and Pekerti's (2008) three-item scale to assess conflict intensity consists of questions related to disagreement in the workgroup, friction in the workgroup and intensity of disagreement. The contrast with Millennials' voices is sharp (Table I). Millennials conflict behaviors are significantly more assertive and confrontational. They want superiors to admit mistakes and change their behaviors. To this end, they remain steadfast, bring additional evidence and get others to support their demands.

Current theory does not predict, however, the learning Millennials describe as a result of initiating aggressive conflict and experiencing low rates of success. Scholars suggest that when assertive, dominating or forceful ways of conflict fail to yield desired results, people switch to accommodating or obliging styles (Rahim *et al.*, 2001). Millennials, in contrast, say they come away with a renewed commitment to standing up for themselves, and confronting superiors in the future because they expect an unfair, hurtful work environment – even after largely failing to produce the outcomes they intend.

A theoretical issue that deserves mention relates to the strong likelihood of inferring that pre-graduation Millennials in entry-level, low-stake jobs may care less about consequences, and therefore initiate aggressive conflict. As a result, there is a likelihood that their words are disregarded as voices of immature youth and inexperience. Our data caution against the drawing of such inferences. More than half the sample was working full time (58 per cent) and financially supporting themselves, if not fully, then in part. Moreover, 60 per cent of the sample noted that their conflict was *high intensity*. As such, Millennials' descriptions and the resulting hypotheses and scales refer to a unique context of aggressive conflict initiation in vertical dyads.

Implications for future research

Age or cohort?

Whether the aggressive conflict Millennials initiate and the learning they derive reflect their age-related or cohort-related characteristics or both – deserves additional analysis. Current theory offers inconsistent narratives and gets in the way of inference drawing. First, for instance, current theory suggests that low-power individuals, such as the Millennials in vertical dyads, would choose accommodation and not aggressive conflict (Ergeneli *et al.*, 2010). Second, current evidence suggests that the age makes a decisive difference in the way people manage conflict (Beitler *et al.*, 2016), and that the young deal with daily job-related stressors differently than the old (Birditt, 2014). Younger people, such as Millennials, are likely to seek out conflict and more likely to confront others (Yeung *et al.*, 2015; Shin *et al.*, 2014). These findings produce contrasting narratives. The former suggests that Millennials would accommodate because of low-power, and the latter suggests they will confront aggressively because they are young.

The ways in which age, power and cohort effects interact and shape Millennials' aggressiveness deserve additional examination. At present, scholars agree that multiple generational identities exist in organizations, and the behavior of Millennials is attributable to a combination of cohort-related, age-related and incumbency-related factors (Joshi *et al.*, 2010),. i.e. scholars are hesitant about attributing intergenerational issues to a particular factor (Parry and Urwin, 2011). Future research, using experimental designs, is necessary for isolating the causes of aggressive conflict Millennials initiate in vertical dyads.

Spillover effect

Aggressive conflict is a cause of concern because it is uniformly regarded as detrimental to group and organizational outcomes, and Millennials are reporting a renewed commitment to initiating conflict in the future (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; de Wit *et al.*, 2012; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). Whether this learning is priming them for enduring contentious behavior, or will fade once socialized in organizations, is a question that deserves additional research. Current evidence from the literature suggests that the learning is likely to endure and produce contentiousness. Collective memories of common-age groups are known to shape attitudes and endure during working years (Schuman and Rogers, 2004; Schuman and Scott, 1989; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Boomers and Traditionalists held on to their generational values despite ageing (Cogin, 2012). The same research shows that Millennials respect rank or seniority less, are unafraid of negotiating outcomes with superiors, more likely to rock the boat and likely to challenge others if they feel morally wronged (Cogin, 2012). Hence, Millennials' emotional commitment to their jobs and trusting relationships they form with others in the workplace is increasingly concerning scholars (Joshi *et al.*, 2010). Longitudinal studies are necessary for establishing whether behaviors and learning endure, and whether Millennials' aggressiveness in vertical dyads changes as a result of growing older.

Practical implications

Organizations are reporting uneven success with retention of Millennials (Adkins, 2016; Sujansky and Ferri-Reed, 2009). Only three in ten from this generation are emotionally and behaviorally committed to their jobs (Adkins, 2016), and two-thirds are planning to leave their place of employment within four years (Deloitte, 2016). Each Millennial employee costs an equivalent of roughly six-to-nine months of their yearly salary to train (Kantor, 2016) and between US$15,000 and $25,000 to replace – costs particularly galling

when 10 per cent are reportedly leaving to join direct competitors (Schawbel, 2013a). We therefore devote this discussion to our data-derived learning that speaks to practitioners concerned with retaining Millennials and harnessing their talents and energies to fuel future organizational growth.

First, the overwhelmingly negative descriptions of Millennials as poor fits in organizations have likely produced unintended consequences. In particular, practitioners may benefit from asking: have these descriptions predisposed us into a defensive posture, triggered defensive reasoning and primed the workplace for intergenerational contentiousness as a self-fulfilling prophecy? The pejorative overtones in the literature reflect older managers' views that regard Millennials as disloyal, entitled employees with poor work ethic and unrealistic expectations of salary and fail to give them a chance to prove themselves (Schawbel, 2013b). If practitioners expect to encounter a spoiled, entitled and an unreasonably demanding Millennial, they are likely to find evidence to fit this narrative from their personal interactions. It is a short distance from these perceptions to defensive reasoning and actions that produce the unfair, hurtful environment that Millennials in our study describe. Self-fulfilling prophecies that hurt organizations and produce negative consequences as a result of pre-disposed beliefs and attitudes are widely discussed since Eden's (1984) pioneering contributions.

Second, the literature currently assigns cause of errant behaviors of Millennials to extra-organizational factors. For instance, the *Wall Street Journal* (2008, p. D1) reports:

Blame it on doting parents, teachers and coaches. Millennials are truly "trophy kids," the pride and joy of their parents. The millennials were lavishly praised and often received trophies when they excelled, and sometimes when they didn't, to avoid damaging their self-esteem. They and their parents have placed a high premium on success, filling resumes with not only academic accolades but also sports and other extracurricular activities.

Scholars point to self-esteem as well (Twenge, 2000), and to reality TV, the war on terror, rapid technology change, social networks, the economic collapse of 2007, soccer moms and helicopter parents as causes (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Dries *et al.*, 2008; Smola and Sutton, 2002). In other words, all identified causal factors seem beyond the purview of organizations.

Based on our findings, we question the validity and the utility of these attributions. If all causes are defined as extra-organizational, practitioners may erroneously infer that they blamelessly inherit problematic Millennials in the workplace. This line of thinking can get in the way of understanding the complexity of the issue that is vital to retention, and to organizational survival and growth. We argue that:

- the agreement around "self-esteem" as the cause does not stand up to scrutiny; and
- the entry-level work environment deserves fresh examination because Millennials are pointing to wholly plausible causes of conflict intrinsic to organizations.

For instance, self-esteem is about how people feel about themselves, and it is an affect-rich evaluation and part of the self-concept (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). It refers to a construct antithetical to the anxiety and depression felt by adolescents and young adults (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994; Beardan *et al.*, 2001 for explication of the "self-esteem" construct). People with inflated self-esteem expect others to acknowledge they are worthy and deserving, and to treat them well – not because of effort they expended, but because they exist in a social relationship (Campbell *et al.*, 2004). Millennials' narratives are less about "self-esteem related sense of entitlement" and more about first-hand experiences with unfair, hurtful superiors and "experience-derived learning,

conviction, and confidence". They are reporting the results of their effort expended and risk taken. As Table I shows, "I brought proof to show the other person that they were wrong", and "I remained steadfast in advocating my point of view till the very end" are about effort and risk, not about their sense of entitlement or self-esteem. The notion of "self-esteem as cause" deserves a fresh look because risk-taking and actions are contra indicators.

In a related vein, we urge practitioners to question whether they have fostered, implicitly or explicitly, unfair, opaque entry-level work environments because Millennials' descriptions resonate with current theory. This generation is neither the first to speak of unfairness in organizations (Olive and Cangemi, 2015) nor the first to call out organizational duplicity (Frankfurt, 2005; Sutton, 2007). Fairness and transparency in the workplace are defined as inseparable constructs by scholars in the same way as Millennials in our study indicate (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012). Previous generations may well have noted the unfairness; however, a fresh look is warranted because generations differ meaningfully. Millennials are known to value transparency more than others (Gilbert, 2011), disdain opaqueness more than older generational cohorts (Ferri-Reed, 2014; Graen and Schiemann, 2013; Hershatter and Epstein, 2010) and seem more sensitive to manipulation by others (Furlow and Knott, 2009).

Finally, literature is clear that Millennials are infected by unrealistic values and expectations, and are therefore enacting dysfunctional cohort-related scripts of: "I deserve support, acclamation, and rapid advancement because my parents, coaches, and teachers told me so" in the workplace (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). However, the entry-level work environment is highly interactive and the dysfunctional cohort-related scripts that shape behaviors of Boomers and Xers deserve careful examination as well. Practitioners are likely to benefit from asking: are older generations acting out their scripts of "I had to overcome great odds, I endured and sacrificed a lot to get where I am", and co-creating the widely reported intergenerational conflict?

Such inquiry has a basis in current writings and theory. Scholarly writings (Lancaster and Stillman, 2003), guidebooks (Raines, 2003) and practitioner press are rich with evidence that older Boomers and Xers are playing out their own dysfunctional cohort-related scripts of "suck it up, pay your dues as I did, do not question my authority" (Alsop, 2007; Huang and Gellman, 2016). Whether the "pay your dues" script is triggering unfairness, and failing to produce compliance from Millennials infected with their own values and enacting their own scripts – deserves examination (Thompson and Gregory, 2012). One way to understanding the conflict Millennials initiate in vertical dyads is in terms of a co-created issue, and from the perspective of clashing generational values and clashing dysfunctional cohort-related scripts.

Limitations
First, we focused on a single event, i.e. the most intense conflict Millennials initiated, and their subjective views about the antecedents and consequences. It is one among many potential ways of understanding the conflict Millennials' initiate in entry-level work environments. A study of alternatives approaches is left to future research. Similarly, comparison of pre- and post-graduation Millennials, and exploration of all conflicts and perspectives of multiple generations is left to future research. Second, we attempted to survey *all* students enrolled in a business school and generated cross-section data. Longitudinal designs to track conflict initiation over time; experimental designs to isolate cause of conflict initiation to age, cohort or incumbency-related factors; and random samples from a population of *all* pre-graduation Millennials for producing widely

generalizable theory are left to future research. Moreover, the SEM procedure was used to simultaneously assess multiple hypothesized unidirectional relationships based on Anderson and Gerbing (1988); consistent with Fornell and Larcker (1981), no implications of causality are currently drawn. Third, common methods bias may have inflated measurement because of self-reports (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Self-reports from pre-graduation Millennials were essential for our study. We sought an understanding of their perspectives into how and why they initiated conflict with superiors, and into their post-conflict learning. No other independent source could provide these insights with greater credibility. To address this issue, we followed Conway and Lance's (2010) guidelines, i.e. we paid particular attention to demonstrating composite reliability and discriminant validity (Tables III and IV). Conceptualization of studies with alternative, independently assessed antecedents or consequences is left to future research. The scales we present are meant to help future conceptualizations, and not presented as definitive measures. Finally, the direction of arrows shown in Figure 2 is derived from qualitative data, not from the SEM procedure. This should address concerns about why the arrows point the way they do. Exploration of relationships in alternative directions is left to future research.

Concluding thoughts

Organizational and conflict theories cannot hold real world analogs, or produce practical implications if they are insufficiently informed about the demographic changes in the workplace or by the voices of Millennials who initiate conflict in vertical dyads. Similarly, a fuller understanding of conflict is unlikely if Millennials' behaviors are defined entirely as a problem of inheritance. Our study makes a contribution to the field by channeling Millennial perspectives, sheds light on conflict in vertical dyads and introduces newer definitions of key conflict related constructs, i.e. hurt, aggressiveness, duplicitous organization and commitment to future conflict. The discovery followed by tests of scales and validation of grounded hypotheses produce findings to stimulate new thinking and research to help insure that theory development remains vibrant with the changing psychosocial and demographic changes occurring in the workplace.

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