WHAT DO THEY HAVE TO TEACH US?
TALKIN’ ’CROSS GENERATIONS!

Well, people try to put us down. Just because we get around.
The things they do look awful cold.
I hope I die before I get old. Talkin’ bout my generation.
—THE WHO (1965)

The Who’s (1965) classic lyrics to the song “My Generation” highlight the tensions between generational perspectives and call attention to misunderstandings of adolescence and of youth culture: misunderstanding of what adolescents are like and of who they perceive themselves to be. The adolescent generation that first heralded this song to the top of the billboard charts are the hippies who now work at ad agencies, who have founded organic ice-cream companies, and who became high-tech entrepreneurs that quote Dylan and wear black jeans to work (Brooks, 2001). Though the sentiments expressed in “My Generation” are nearly 40 years old, they haven’t been limited to the adolescent Baby Boomers who first heard it. This song has been respun, recreated, and reinvented by contemporary rock bands, holding relevance for youth almost four decades after its creation. Adolescents today, the so-called Millennial Generation born after 1982, continue to use The Who’s mantra of “My Generation” as it has been repackaged by contemporary adolescent bands such as Green Day (1992), Limp Bizkit (2000), and Blink 182 (1999). Actually, although teens of the Millennial Generation are sometimes portrayed as dichotomous to their Baby Boomer counterparts (Gee, this volume), they might easily share with these elders similar pleasures in classic youth culture texts such as those by Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, and The Doors produced more than 40 years ago. These kinds of cultural affectations of youth culture can’t be expected to be wholly dissimilar across generations. For example, recently, The Beatles’ (2000),
a compilation of The Beatles' 27 singles that reached the top of the pop charts in the United States and the United Kingdom between 1962 and 1970, was one of the top selling albums among teenagers in the United States in 2000 (Puterbaugh, 2001). Yet in other areas, similar transfers across generations are either rare or decidedly submerged. Most poignant, as we argue in this chapter, shifts in literacy practices have occurred, creating disjunctures between the Millennial Generation and the literacies familiar to older generations such as the Baby Boomers. While some common themes of adolescence and some youth culture texts survive across generations, we believe that the literacies that are embedded in the lives of today's Millennial Generation are substantively and culturally unique. And we argue that they need to be better understood to comprehend and to influence positively literacy development in contemporary society.

In this chapter we explore generational literacies of adolescents in the sense of a separate and identifiable “MY” generation alluded to in The Who's lyrics. We begin by examining how current adolescents of the Millennial Generation are discussed within a rhetoric of generational descriptions of literacy practices. Then we present portrayals of literacies in the lives of several individuals defined as Millennials and as adults. From these individuals' words, we examine how parallels and disjunctures open up and close off conceptualizations about literacies across and between generations. Finally, we use the disjunctures to discuss literacy practices in contemporary society that focus on adolescents.

A key assumption of generational analysis, as outlined by Crispell (1993), is that “each generation has its own perspective because its members were born and grew up during particular eras” (Where generations divide, para. 10). Generational understandings are, therefore, related to economic, political, and social constructions of a particular time in history, and they affect how we view aspects of life and society. We realize that identification of generational categories artificially pigeonholes individuals into a particular group with particular characteristics. Nonetheless, we knowingly use the broad generational characterizations of adolescents as Millennials in order to explore the rhetoric of generational categorizing within historical, political, cultural, and social frames.

Drawing from structural, poststructural, and sociocultural theories, we connect generational characterizations to the work of others who have moved away from a narrow psychological focus and who have embraced social, cultural, and historical explanations for literacy and its practice and influence (e.g., Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; New London Group, 1996). Gee (2000b) explains, “reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political and economic) practices of which they are but a part” (p. 180). Guided by this perspective, we approach generational depictions as socially constructed ways of considering and discussing literacies. We cannot, therefore, separate individuals and their literacy practices from society, but rather we proceed from the idea that “society inhabits each individual” (Sarup, 1993, p. 6). It is from that notion that we explore the construction of people and of literacy as a societal construction of generational differences.
Who Are THEY?

Adolescents today may seem to share similar interests in classic youth culture with adults in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, but they are portrayed as a distinct generation growing up in an era markedly different from the revolutionary 1960s. Luke and Roe (1993), for example, stated that the “universe is substantially different in kind from that accompanied by the print and media narratives with which the last ‘modern’ generation of the 1950s and 1960s grew up” (p. 118). Noted often in magazines and newspaper articles, today’s adolescents were born into a world mediated by digital culture (Gordon, Underwood, Wiengarten, & Figueroa, 1999; Springen, Figueroa, & Joseph-Goteiner, 1999). Television, music videos, movies, the Internet, email, instant messaging, online chats, streaming video, and computer-generated games, for example, entail literacies that permeate the lives of today’s Millennial youth, affecting the information they encounter and the texts they read.

And, though “the sixties” is often and perhaps erroneously understood as “the decade of the big change” (Frank, 1997, p. 1) that created new culture, fashion, ethos, and a sense of individuality, the technological explosion of the previous ten years has accordingly brought about the newest decade of big change in the literate lives of adolescents.

The Millennial Generation has sometimes been represented in contradictory ways, depending on the context. Like the sentiments relayed in the lyrics of “My Generation,” adolescents occupy a precarious position in society—one that can be described as fringelike, irrelevant, and indecisive on one hand; and central, knowledgeable, and powerful in the workings of capitalistic society on the other. Stereotypical descriptions of adolescence in general portray teenagers as indeterminable (Epstein, 1998; Hebdige, 1988), and Millennials are no exception in inheriting that characterization. Millennials, like past generations of adolescents, are often characterized by adults as “bundles of raging hormones” and “unruly” and are thought to be acritical consumers or apathetic citizens based solely upon their age (Finders, 1998; McGregor, 2000).

However, Millennials are positioned and constructed differently in an economic sense. In capitalist societies, Millennials are crucial for economic success. They comprise a market segment valued at $150 billion a year and are the most researched group of people in history (Frontline, 2001). And they drive several industries, such as fashion, entertainment, and technology, defining what’s in, what’s out, and how products get used (Look-Look.com, 2001). Those in media-related fields are attuned to the fact that Millennials engage in media use for an average of 6.5 hours a day outside of school (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). According to Nye, co-founder of the marketing firm U30 Group, Millennial Generation adolescents are indispensable for determining current trends and in shaping the kinds of products made available for them. As he explained,

They are used to choosing and manipulating their experiences—creating their own CDs on the Internet, for example. You can’t just take a snapshot of them every six
Just as Millennials' views influence production and consumption in society, they have also been implicated in influencing the shape and direction of our future. Rushkoff (1996), a cultural theorist, purported, "Kids are our test sample—our advance scouts. They are, already, the thing that we must become" (p. 13).

Clearly, the Millennial Generation has been constructed in society as engrossed in media—sometimes as passive recipients and sometimes as savvy consumers and creators of multimedia texts. Even the field of literacy research has begun to entertain notions of how adolescents might employ literacy beyond the traditional definitions and confines of print-based secondary classrooms. This broadened perspective is notably marked by a shift in terminology from the study of content area literacy, which centralizes the curricular content, to adolescent literacy, shifting the focus to adolescents and to the culturally defined contexts of their lives (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Also, in light of increasingly popular and pervasive digital media in adolescents' lives, several writers have called for broader conceptions of literacy, suggesting terms such as representational literacy (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt University, 1994) and visual literacy (Flood & Lapp, 1995).

As this shift in defining literacy has occurred, the literacy practices studied have accordingly expanded to include literacies used in out-of-school contexts (e.g., Alvermann et al., 2001; Bean, Bean, & Bean, 1999; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000) and literacies that extend beyond print-based, alphabetic texts (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear, 1997; Reinking, McKenna, & Labbo, 1998; Tierney, 1997). The opening up of the definitions and contexts of literacies in research has contributed to the documentation and portrayal of dynamic literacy practices used by youth as those practices intersect with media other than print-based texts, including film and television viewing and production (Bloustien, 1998; Tobin, 2000), video gaming (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998), online instant messaging (Lewis & Fabos, 2000), telephoning (Gillard, Wale, & Bow, 1998), and musical interests (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2000; Hagood, 2001). Although broadening perspectives of literacy to include digital media has been clearly acknowledged as an important generational difference, it is important to note that there has been little systematic accommodation of it regarding how literacy instruction including these kinds of literacies plays out in typical school settings (Leu & Kinzer, 2000).

People Try to Put US Down: THEIR Literacies?

The concepts of literacies and their attendant features are requisite aspects of society, and the definitions of the terms literacy and literacies guide the sorts of texts that are recognized, used, and valued as literacy practices. Rather than provide a list of possible activities that might fall under these amorphous and problematic terms, we draw from two separate studies about adolescents' and adults' literate
adolescents and literacies in a digital world

lives to ascertain how they define and use literacy. Selected data clips from in-depth interviews with adolescents are drawn from a six-month cross-continental interview and observational study of seven eighth-grade, 12- and 13-year-old adolescents (four living in Australia and three in the United States). This study examined the adolescents' uses of and perceptions of literacy and popular culture in their everyday activities, inside and outside of school (Hagood, 2001). Data clips from in-depth individual interviews with adults are taken from a five-month qualitative study of preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate, content-area literacy course in a southwestern city in the United States (Stevens, in press). The latter study used field notes, interview data, and artifacts to document the participants' perceptions of literacy and of adolescents and their literacy activities.

When talking with the adolescents and adults whose voices are represented in this chapter (all names are pseudonyms), we espoused a broad definition of literacy, one that included any type of communicative interaction involving speaking, reading, listening, and writing with text in print or nonprint forms. This broad definition not only gave us a lens that views literacy as reading both the world and the word (Gee, 1996b), it also allowed us to elicit others' conceptualizations of literacy without imposing our own views on them. From the large body of data that comprises our ongoing research, we selected the following data clips as samples to compare and contrast generational views of literacy conceptualized both inside and outside of school. To push against the divisive tendencies of labels and structures that belie daily interactions across generations, we first present the adolescents' and adults' comments in an integrated fashion, and then we discuss the generational parallels and disjunctures among the examples.

On any day, the best place to find me after 4:00 is in my bedroom talking to my boyfriend [on the phone] and watching music videos, OW! Girl, you learn a lot from them. I know the songs and the dances and all about the people from the Places in the Crib. Go on and ask me anything about rap or hiphop and maybe about R&B and I can answer it. (Lil' J, 13-year-old African American)

I don't really like reading. It's because I can never find a good book. But computers are good because I like to create cards and things on the computers. I don't really like to play [video] games that much. I like to create cards because I can do different things with it. I can write silly stuff or proper stuff and put in different pictures. Oh, and did I tell you that I really like music and dancing? I learn all the words of songs so that I can make up dances to the beat. . . . I am teaching some girls in HPE [Health and Physical Education] this dance I made up to that song "Shackles" by Mary, Mary. Do you know them? (Tee, 13-year-old New Zealand immigrant to Australia)

It seems like it's the higher the grade level, the fewer opportunities were provided for me to choose reading material. . . . We read from books and wrote on notepaper. I can kinda remember doing some game about Lewis and Clark on a Commodore 64 when I was in eighth-grade, but that's about it. . . . Now, it makes a lot more sense to
me that literacy is reading and writing but also a whole lot more. . . . I feel that literacy is simply a negotiation towards communication. It can take various forms and can mean anything from Shakespeare, email, and even film. If you are deriving a message from it, you are reading it. Adolescents need teachers that use technology in their classrooms and are not afraid to embrace the changing faces of text. But I don’t feel very confident about doing that myself. The class I had here went through some programs and software, but not enough to show me how to integrate it using one computer in my classroom, if I’m lucky. . . . I am actually pretty apprehensive about teaching a bunch of kids who know way more than I do about computers and stuff. I wish I knew more, not just because it would be easier to teach it, but it also looks like a lot of fun. (Carminda, 20-year-old Filipino-American in a preservice teacher education program)

Yeah, I love my computer. It’s a Compaq Pentium III, 750-megahertz, 20-gigabyte hard drive with 128 meg of ram and 6 USB ports and that’s all I can think of off the top of my head. And, um, I just use that mainly for the Internet unless I’m like making a project or I’m typing homework because I really despise writing with my hands. It takes forever and it hurts my hand so I just use that for that kind of stuff, and obviously it’s what I use to make my web site, which I made a new entrance for it. It’s really cool. It took me forever to get the html code because I had to find a page that had that kind of similar thing to actually get the code. That’s how I get all of my html stuff . . . I didn’t like ever learning anything from people [about computers]. Really, I just did stuff. I just messed around with it until I figured something out. That’s all I ever did. And now I know a lot about computers. (Timony, 13-year-old European American)

I went to school a while ago, so there definitely wasn’t any contact with computers. These days, I use them for typing my papers and projects, and my kids help me to email my sister who lives in Montana. . . . I think that we still need to get the basics down before we get into other kinds of literacy, including the classics and the writing process—the stuff that we know works well and we’ve been doing for a while. Computers have changed things, but not so much to change what and how we teach. Reading and writing are still being taught the same way that it has been for several decades. But teachers should use computers in classrooms because students will have to deal with them in their working careers. Maybe the younger teachers will do bet-
ter at this because they grew up during the home computer boom. (Diana, 45-year-old European American enrolled in a preservice teacher education program)

As you know, I love art. Japanese cartoons are the best, especially Dragonball Z. I really appreciate the pictures that they draw because I know how hard they are, and when they fight [on Dragonball Z] the drawing is really, really good. So I like the cartoons because the artists draw on paper, and they use the computer. And I like a good story line. If it doesn't have a good enough story line, I won't watch something. And in Dragonball Z, I think it is a really complex storyline. I can't believe how they could actually think of it. So, I learn a lot [about drawing and writing stories] from actually watching cartoons because a lot of them, some of them, have messages and you have to look for them. (Tommy, 12-year-old Australian)

One must know how to use the computer to help them do their homework by searching the Internet for articles and research items, create reports and articles using word processing software, or create items like cards... It is replacing the way work is being done at all levels of life, especially in the workplace, where everyone must know how to use email systems... I don't think teaching computer skills should be done in preadolescents in the schools, I think by the time students get to junior high school and definitely senior high school, they should have curriculum available to learn anywhere from basic computer skills to more intermediate ones, like basic programming skills... I didn't have much exposure to computers until I entered college... Had I been exposed to computers earlier in my life, there is little doubt in my mind I would have worked towards a computer science degree [in college]. (Chris, 30-year-old European American computer programmer who works for a public utility company)

I think of literacy in general in two ways. One way is to have fun with it and enjoy it. The other way is to learn something from it. Like when I saw The Princess of Egypt. I first saw it with my dad and my sister. That was just for fun. I wasn't there to learn something. It was just family time. But then I had to watch the cartoon at school. The teacher showed it because she was a substitute, and she didn't have anything else for us to do. So at school we watched it and learned about what kinds of clothes people wore and the kinds of houses they lived in. That time, I watched it to learn something from it. (Amanda, 12-year-old Australian)

Talkin' about MY Generation

The previous data clips suggest distinct contrasts between the literacies of today's adolescents and adults. They might suggest, too, that adolescents' literacies fit the depiction of Millennials as "the Nintendo Generation" (Provenzo, 1991), growing up in a world mediated by digital texts and distinctly different from the adults' ideas about literacies. Some of the statements suggest that adults don't quite
understand the literacies of today's youth. For adolescents, literacy is multimodal, and rather than receive information from static texts, they actively create meaning dynamically across diverse media. For example, Timony creates new ways to learn about computer programming by examining the code on different sites as he surfs the web. And Tommy doesn't just watch cartoons after school; he studies how characters are drawn using both three-dimensional computer graphics and two-dimensional paper sketches so as to improve his knowledge of various visual art forms. In contrast, Carminda, Diana, and Chris, like the adults that Hinchman and Lalik (this volume) describe, are more tentative about literacies that depart from conventional forms. They are seemingly grounded in descriptions of alphabetic, print-based or computed-mediated texts, trying to bring themselves up to speed in dealing with new communication technologies. They seem to worry about how they should teach adolescents about these media that seem so new to themselves as adults. For example, Carminda and Diana worry that they aren't prepared to integrate technology into their teaching, especially with students who are likely to know more than they do about new communication technologies.

Delving further into generational characterizations of Millennials, differences become apparent in the literacies defined and used by adolescents and adults. The adolescents' literacies incorporate diverse media such as computer technology with penciled art, programming codes with photo layout and web design, and music lyrics with dance movements. Absent from the adults' comments is the inclusion of more visual or auditory literacies that seem central to adolescents' lives. For example, none of the adults mention literacies pertaining to music, whereas LilT's afternoons are filled with visual and audio literacies developed in the music videos she views, and Tee studies music lyrics and rhythmic beats to compose intricate dances. The adults' perceptions of literacies that adolescents need to use center on curricular, school-based learning and on work-related topics. The adults' perceptions seem disconnected from the literacies the adolescents use independently, especially literacies that encompass interests in popular culture such as music videos, cartoons, and film targeted within current youth culture. As the adults recognize the need to encompass technologically based alphabetic literacies, they typically do so by situating these literacies within the context of traditional school subjects and classes. Conversely, the adolescents make few references to school-based literacies, and those that are mentioned are only given in connection to the literacies they choose to use outside of school. The persistence of viewing literacy in terms of conventional schooling is interesting in light of Barton's (2000) findings that adults, and teachers in particular, have incorporated new technologies into their everyday literacies, often with the help and guidance of the more technologically astute children that they teach.

Carminda and Diana, the preservice teachers, tend to relate their own computer literacy practices to the context of other classes they had taken, while simultaneously grappling with concerns about simply exposing students to technology on a more frequent basis in schools. Even Chris, a businessman whose career is inextricably tied to computer literacies, concentrates on relating his work-associated
computer literacies to school learning. He recommends that adolescents have exposure to digital literacies in school, but only after having established a baseline of conventional writing and reading processes and only as a separate course. Although the adults in our sampling of comments concurred that adolescents need exposure to computer literacies, they frame those literacies primarily in terms of existing school curricula, as opposed to a revolutionary shift in the nature of literacies found both inside and outside of schools. Often, teachers seem to resist applications of technology that are at odds with conventional curricular goals. In fact, they may sometimes benignly undermine the transformative intentions of particular applications to bring them in line with conventional reading and writing. Bruce and Rubin documented an instance of this phenomenon when they introduced teachers to a computer software program designed to integrate authentic reading and writing activities into the language arts curriculum. Despite the program’s intent, teachers implemented it in a way that was consistent with their more skills-based orientation.

The adults tend to address computer-mediated literacies as general signs of the times, as supplemental bodies of knowledge for effective pedagogy, or as alternative classroom tools that students need to prepare them for work-related fields. The framing of literacies in terms of globalization, particularly in regard to economic implications, reinforces these views (e.g., Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). The adolescents, however, seem to live in the moment engaged in the literacies they enjoy. The adults—even Carminda and Chris, who are relatively close to the Millennials’ ages and perhaps on the cusp of being labeled Millennials themselves—believe strongly that their own exposure to various literacies, especially those related to computers, has only happened recently, and apart from secondary school contexts and adolescent youth culture. The adolescents’ detailed and context-rich references to the diverse media and the literacies they entail do not seem to be part of the adults’ perspectives or fully integrated into adults’ daily literacies. In contrast to the integrated literacies that the Millennials discussed, the adults’ literacy practices seem only superficially affected by newer media.

Talkin’ ’Cross Generations

A less dichotomous picture of adolescents and adults becomes clearer when looking at similarities across generational literacies. In other words, rather than trying to determine differences in what texts MEAN between generations, one might instead examine what literacies DO similarly across generations. For example, the desires for knowledge, power, and pleasure may play out differently across generations but they may provide another vantage point for understanding and bridging generational differences.

Literacy in the broadest sense implies knowledge and practice that traverse gener-
ational categorizations. The sampling of comments in this chapter illustrates a wide range of media and literacies—television, computers, telephones, film, and books; activities such as creating web sites, cards, and computer programs; learning from televisual music videos and movies; communicating via email or the phone; and using word processing. These literacy practices provide opportunities to display knowledge about teaching and learning for both adults and adolescents. Lil’J, for example, perceives her afternoon music video watching not as a mindless activity while talking on the phone but as a way to understand particular music genres and cultures, and she excitedly pushes to be quizzed (and to teach others) about her knowledge. Likewise, watching *Dragonball Z* (a popular Japanese anime) facilitates Tommy’s learning about animation and plot development within a different culture. Learning song lyrics assists Tee in determining rhythms and beats to choreograph her own dances, which she later teaches to others. Carminda, Timony, and Diana, too, refer to developing computer skills to perform tasks such as writing reports or completing homework assignments. And Amanda considers watching movies to be learning, though she separates such literacy learning from having fun. In fact, she only considers viewing as literacy when she was made to watch a film for a particular purpose at school because the substitute teacher didn’t have anything else for the students to do. Both Millennial adolescents and adults clearly use literacy practices to exercise knowledge and expertise, even if their cognitive and sociocultural attributions to media and their use vary (cf., Adoni, 1995; Salomon, 1984).

Practices of creating and acquiring knowledge cannot be separated from the power that one exercises in negotiating learning (Foucault, 1972). One’s comfort level with literacies reflects how knowledge and power are intricately bound together with interests in teaching and learning. For instance, Timony explained that he learned html programming on his own by experimenting with the code used on various web sites. Once he was proficient in this new language, he advertised his abilities on his *Dragonball Z* web site so as to assist other “newbie” web masters in their own web site development. His self-created and self-motivated knowledge of new media and his power to communicate with others through online access enabled him to shift fluidly and rapidly from learner to teacher. Timony’s desire to share his pleasures in learning by teaching is similar to Lil’J’s understanding of hiphop and rap culture as represented in music videos and her interest in challenging the adult who interviewed her to learn from her. In the same way, by assisting others in learning the various dance steps of a dance that Tee choreographed, she exhibits her knowledge and creativity. The power implicit in teaching others in many ways stems from a desire to share knowledge learned from various literacy practices.

The adults’ comments also point to issues of power related to their comfort level in using different literacy practices. They address concerns about power between disparities they perceive based upon their own historical conditions formed in academic learning as adolescents and the literacies that are important for adolescents today. With little or no exposure to various literacies—specifically digital literacies—until
adulthood, Carminda, Diana, and Chris are quick to rely heavily upon the import-
tance of traditional literacies in thinking about curricula for adolescent learners. 
Diana and Carminda acknowledge their discomfort with literacies about which 
they know little but which they'll be expected to teach. Without the knowledge of 
current literacies that are a part of adolescents' lives, they refer back to literacies in 
which they feel competent and over which they have control—traditional forms of 
reading and writing that, as Diana remarked, "are still being taught the same way 
that it has been for several decades." Consistent with views of literacy as enabling us 
to read both the word and world, the adults and the adolescents see themselves as 
competent users of particular literacies. Capitalizing on their own competencies, 
they use their power to share their learning with others.

Regardless of generational differences, literacies always function to assert and 
to maintain power. However, new digital technologies disrupt the conventional 
mechanisms for doing so within print-based technologies. For example, the 
printed office memo on official stationery which is available only to those in posi-
tions of authority has given way to the more open access and dialogue provided by 
inter-office email. These differences have not been lost on today's Millennial Gen-
eration. Nielsen (1998) reported that the lines of authority in a secondary school 
were readily disrupted by savvy students who took advantage of their access to 
digital forms of communication within their school. Schools, managed of course 
by the adult population, struggle in dealing with the fallout from the contingenc-
ies of new communication technologies and the control they have traditionally 
exerted over students' expressions of literacy in school. In both the United States 
and Australia, for example, educators struggle with the tensions created by allow-
ing students to freely access the information conveniently available on the Internet 
while worrying about them accessing pornography or other socially undesirable 
content. That is not to say that there are no mechanisms for exercising power 
within the new digital literacies. Adults, however, tend to discover these mecha-
nisms as a matter of necessity in the course of preserving the status quo (e.g., fire-
walls to prevent students from accessing undesirable materials), while adolescents 
discover them more spontaneously within an environment that is not at all alien to 
them (e.g., Zhao, Tan, & Mishra, 2000/2001).

Aside from desires for agency in power relations, the desires for using literacy as 
a means of personal pleasure for enjoyment crosses generational descriptions of 
literacy practices, as well. For example, Tee and Carminda noted their own inter-
ests in using various literacies when they were either unable to find or were uninter-
ested in finding books that were to their liking. Similarly, Tommy chose to 
watch computer-animated cartoons because he enjoyed combining his interests in 
drawing and plot development in order to learn about computer animation and 
story creation as a form of literacy. Carminda also explained her appreciation of 
and desire to participate in pleasurable aspects of various literacies as they relate to 
her chosen profession of teaching. Though she found adolescents' digital literacies 
daunting, she nevertheless perceived them to be fun. Her intuitive sense that digital 
forms are inherently more fun has been argued theoretically by Lanham (1993)
who asserts that the characteristics and uses of digital texts invite writers to take texts and themselves much less seriously and to be more playful.

The literacy practices mentioned by the adolescents and adults also create pleasures in different aspects of work and leisure in their lives. Although Timony's and Chris's computer literacy practices might be more advanced than Carminda's, Tce's, and Diana's skills, they all share pleasures in using computers, whether those pleasures related to computer programming for work, such as in Chris's profession, or for pleasure, as in Timony's programming for his self-created web site. And though Diana's desire to become a teacher propelled her to learn computer literacies involving basic word processing to complete her schoolwork, she also found pleasure in using these literacies to communicate with family over email.

US and THEM: Literacies across Generations

If we consider that terms such as Millennials, adolescents, adults, and literacy have particular and stable meanings grounded in reality, then we will always search for confirmation of those meanings. We might become victims of what we've heard described as "hardening of the categories." We argue that understanding literacies within and across generations is not a matter of defining what the term literacy means to different generations, but rather what the term implies in various contexts to furthering or undermining the stability of the fixed categorical understandings, such as generational literacies. For example, defining the Millennial Generation as youth who solely spend their time mindlessly and acritically playing with computers, video games, and music, we run the risk of dismissing the highly engaging and increasingly valid literacies they create in their engagement with various media. And, to assume that adults have little or no desire to learn about diverse literacies created in the last ten years shortchanges them as well. By associating certain literacies only with Millennials and not with adults, we restrict the very possibilities of who has access to and can capably use various literacies.

In short, the notion of generational literacies may be an oxymoron, especially today with the rapid infusion of new media into everyday life and to a lesser degree into schools. Although generational literacies are tied to stable depictions of generational categories, the relation between literacy and society is neither stable nor predictable in a strictly generational sense. Thus, literacy practices of one generation are not necessarily particular only to that generation. In fact, to tether definitions and uses of literacy to particular generations may only continue to widen the "generation gap" and to solidify perceived incongruencies between literacy practices of age-defined groups of people. However, the examination of the instability of terms points us in new directions for the future of literacies in contemporary society. In the final section, which follows, we examine disjunctures across generations that open up and close off conceptualizations about adolescents of the Millennial Generation and about literacy practices and discuss the impact of these disjunctures on literacy practices in society.
Disjunctures between Generational Literacies and Contemporary Literacies

In Rushkoff's (1996) description of a postmodern world, he explained, "What we need to adapt to, more than any particular change, is the fact that we are changing so rapidly. We must learn to accept change as a constant. Novelty is the new status quo" (p. 3). Related to literacies, we agree and disagree to some extent. These times of burgeoning worldwide marketplaces that are driven by economies of attention and multimedia text (Lankshear & Knobel, this volume) bring into sharp relief the undeniably larger social context in which adolescents' literacies impinge on all of us. Rather than attribute all new literacies to shifts in current trends and to a new generation, it may be useful to think of literacies not based upon generational differences but as contemporary literacies that are products of contemporary times. In this sense, differences in terms of literacies and literate practices are better understood not as generational differences per se, but as a reflection of larger technological and sociological forces of change.

In describing the literacies of all learners today as contemporary literacies rather than as new literacies, Millennial literacies, or generational literacies, we are arguing for the need to acquire the skills necessary for engaging with literate practices in society. That is, it is incumbent upon everyone to learn these skills, not just adolescents who are coming of age during a technological explosion that invents new forms of literacy. So, rather than categorize which literacies belong to which age group, generation, or social class, thereby allowing people to dismiss one another's literacy practices based on potentially divisive differences, we propose the need to examine contemporary literacies across categories.

de Castell (1996) described the current state of literacy in society as one of "post-literate culture" which "has been fundamentally and irreversibly defined and shaped by literacy, but in which new technologies and practices of representation and communication have largely superseded writing and the written word" (p. 399). Thinking of contemporary literacies in a post-literate culture, we can perhaps address the disjuncture formed between not what literacies mean to users of a particular generation, but what literacies and literacy practices do when conceptualized across generations. Conceiving of contemporary literacies within a "post-literate culture" may provide a means for opening up and moving away from the conceptualization of literacies as print-based texts and toward the inclusion of more visual or auditory literacies embedded in media.

Disjunctures between Who Defines and What Counts as Literacy

In our own and in others' work (e.g., Bruce & Hogan, 1998; Knobel, 1999; Neilsen, 1998; Tierney & Damarin, 1998) it has become obvious to us that for many adolescents characterized as Millennials, their engagements in literacy practices in and out of school are vastly different undertakings in function, form, and purpose.
Like the adolescents whose comments are included in this chapter, we would wager that other adolescents often create, develop, and maintain ownership of literacy practices with little or no formal supervision by or guidance from adults (Lewis & Finders, this volume; Young, Dillon, & Moje, this volume). In many ways, adolescents' proficiencies exceed adults' knowledge and skills of their literacy practices (Barton, 2000; Green, Reid, & Bigum, 1998), and there is a profound disjuncture between the literacies adolescents competently learn and use on their own and the ones adults expose them to and require them to learn in schools (Bigum & Green, 1993; Richards, 1998).

To address this disjuncture between deciding who gets to define literacies and how they are valued is particularly important as adults hold the power to set the curriculum and pedagogy in schools. Whether adults opt for traditional literacies due to convention, to their apprenticeship of observation when they were students as described by Lortie (1975), or to a back-to-basics orientation, the result is a growing dissonance between literacies that take place within schools, and those used in other contexts, by people of all ages. Thus, by stabilizing the term literacy as the ability to read and to write print-based, alphabetic texts, other relevant texts, including those visual and auditory, may be discounted.

This rupture between how literacies are defined and valued in schools does not bode well for adolescents who are not given opportunities to develop the literacies of the post-literate world within school, especially among those populations that do not find post-literate literacies clearly embedded in their lives outside of school. For Timony, his computer and accompanying literacies are sources of great pride. We can easily imagine Timony fitting well into worldwide marketplaces that are mediated through digital technologies. However, what of adolescents who are less inclined to engage in such activities for a variety of sociocultural reasons? Without addressing in schools the various literacies within contemporary society and building upon adolescents' post-literate experiences, schools run the risk of becoming anti-educational sites (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1998).

On the other hand, we wonder if it is necessary for schools to teach the perhaps intuitive and naturally engaging literacies associated with digital media, or if it is simply a matter of accommodating these literacies within a different framework of teaching and learning. If a new framework for teaching and learning is inevitably needed, the resistance to integrating new technologies into the literacy practices of the school might be better understood as having less to do with preserving conventional literacy and more to do with the inherent threat of contemporary literacies in undermining traditional conceptions of schooling. For example, the International Society for Technology in Education's (1998) standards for using technology in schools reads like a manifesto for progressive education in which the roles of teachers and learners have little in common with the transmission model underlying the structures and practices that can be observed in many U.S. schools.
Disjuncture between Educational Institutions and Capitalist Society

Disjunctures between educational institutions' and capitalist society's definitions of adolescents and of their literacy practices bring to the forefront differences between how adolescents are constructed in these two contexts. In educational settings, adolescents are understood as a particular student audience, with particular literacy needs and experiences, and the educator's job as Carminda and Diana noted is to address those needs and to teach that audience. But in capitalist society, Millennials are perceived as both an audience and as a market whereby in many ways they take charge of their own literacy lives. The ensuing disjuncture between these contexts conceptualizes an unknowing, naïve youngster on one hand, and a knowledgeable, powerful youngster with influential creative power on the other. Thus, what may happen is that adolescents will continue to have access to various literacies outside of school and to be more knowledgeable about those literacies than their adult counterparts, as illustrated in the quotes previously cited in this chapter. By situating the literacies they enjoy in contexts separate from school, these adolescents highlight literacies that they have the freedom to control and that they could transform for their own purposes. Also, they demonstrate a desire and willingness to share these literacies and to teach others about these literacies.

We believe that implies a need to rethink ways to involve adolescents in both the teaching and learning of contemporary literacies and to acknowledge their knowledge and power of contemporary literacy practices. Giving them space to share those pleasures in relationships with others, whether in relationships as students and teachers or as employers and employees or as older and younger may assist in opening up educational contexts for dialogic interaction where information, skills, and processes are shared and exchanged dynamically (Bakhtin, 1981).

What Do THEY Have to Teach US?

Rushkoff (1996) noted,

Rather than focusing on how we, as adults, should inform our children's activities with educational tidbits for their better development, let's appreciate the natural adaptive skills demonstrated by our kids and look to them for answers to some of our own problems adapting to postmodernity. (p. 13)

Contemporary literacies are more than just an add-on to "real" literacy practices, and they pertain to all generations, not only to adolescents of the Millennial Generation who are growing up surrounded by and engaged in media. Though some contemporary literacies are new in function and form, they nevertheless build on previous literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Literacies are constantly in motion and continually changing such that new ones are acquired through informal learning and formal training. Because both forms of learning are crucial for
understanding how contemporary literacies are used, achieving literacy in contemporary society implies broad participation and broad interpretation along a full spectrum of media and activities that comprise today's literacy landscape. Like Barton and Hamilton (2000), we believe that we must draw upon users' insight about their own approaches to learning, on their theories about what counts as literacy, and on the strategies they enact for attempting to use contemporary literacies. Recalling that the lyrics of "My Generation" have been significant in the lives of people for almost 40 years, perhaps we'll feel more confident and capable to move beyond the confines of generational literacies and toward conceptualizations across generations of what literacies do, thereby eliminating the need to know where WE stand as US or THEM as members of "MY" generation.