TALKING ABOUT GENERATION X:
Defining Them as
They Define Themselves

ANGIE WILLIAMS
JUSTINE COUPLAND
University of Wales, Cardiff

ANNETTE FOLWELL
LISA SPARKS
University of Oklahoma

In response to a recent explosion of media attention to so-called Generation X, the authors investigated young peoples' responses to media constructions of this generational category label. Twenty-six volunteers aged 19-23 participated in six audiotaped focus group discussions. A discourse analytic perspective enables the authors to explore how these young participants worked together to negotiate their generational identity and their position in the life span vis-à-vis other generational groups. The respondents' talk uses personal accounts to reject the negative media stereotypes of Generation X, yet reveals that the media may be one of the defining characteristics of their generational identity. The analysis also reveals themes of out-group denigration and blame, which are interpreted as indicative of the intergroup processes triggered when groups are identified and made salient.

In the 1960s, the voice of youth rebellion against the status quo and the older generation's values was loud and clear, and generational icons such as the rock group The Who sang of hoping to die before getting old. More recently, this age cohort has come to be known as the baby boomers, those people born between 1946 and 1964. In the 1960s, baby boomers numbered around 83 million, and the oldest members of this generation were in their late adolescent years. The baby boomer generation grew up in a distinct social, economic, and political climate

(Reich, 1970). They are frequently characterized as the free-loving hippie generation who dodged the draft, protested against the war in Vietnam, attended Woodstock, and enjoyed economic prosperity. Perhaps because of all these social forces, their radical views and political activism, the boomers were expected to bring about immense social and political change (Delli Carpini, 1986; Jones, 1980; Wheeler, 1984).

Today, the baby boomer generation is now in the position once held by its elders and is allegedly itself under attack from a new and rebellious generation (Bennett & Rademacher, 1994). Variously known as the busters, the Thirteenth Generation, and Generation X, these are the children of baby boomers, born between 1965 and 1976 (dates vary between 1961 and 1981). Harwood, Giles, and Ryan (1995) commented that although age is "quite literally a continuum" when categorizing others (which we take to mean out-groups), "less refined categories will be deemed adequate" than when categorizing ourselves. This will predict variable age bands being imposed on out-groups. Again, as Harwood, Giles, and Ryan (1995) comment, "[W]e conceive of the boundaries between age groups as somewhat soft and open" (p. 137). Generation X are the first generation to be demographically fewer than their predecessors. For at least the last 3 or 4 years, they have been the subject of an outpouring of journalistic and media attention as journalists, marketing experts, demographers, and sociologists endeavor to understand this relatively newly identified and labeled generation.

In the sections to follow, we review and summarize media representations of baby boomers and Generation X as they impinge on generational identity. Our research examines the ways in which young people negotiate their generational identity in relation to media portrayals of their generation. Primarily, we are interested in young people's interaction with media images as a site of discursive struggle that reveals a focusing and refocusing of discussants' individual and collective identities. This is achieved partly via processes of coconstructed social comparison with other generational groups.

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF BOOMERS AND BUSTERS

According to media reports, the term Generation X or "Xers" was taken from a novel by Douglas Coupland (1991), although *Time* magazine is credited with the first use of "twentysomethings" (Ladd, 1993), and Howe and Strauss (1993) coined the term "the thirteenth generation" to reflect the fact that this group is the 13th generation of Americans since the founding of the country (Nelson & Cowan, 1994).

According to these writers and others in the popular press, not only is Generation X facing economic and social instability, but reports include some very negative characterizations of Generation X as losers, slackers, whinging and whining, overly dependent on parents, and so forth. The labels themselves are sometimes given a negative redefini-

tion. The term twentysomething has often been rephrased as twen-tynothing, and negative characterizations of Generation X have for some time been ubiquitous, although more recently there have been attempts (mainly from younger journalists) to counter these characterizations (e.g., see Giles, 1994). In addition, there are many Internet sites and Usenet discussions that are used by self-proclaimed Xers to publish and exchange ideas on what it means to be part of Generation X.[1]

Apart from popular press rhetoric, particularly pertinent for this new generation of young people making the transition into early adulthood is a cluster of social and economic factors that may affect the value of their education and job prospects, among a host of other considerations. Economic observers point out that Generation X was born in a time of immense economic prosperity, which turned into economic recession (hence the labels "boom" and "bust"). Employment prospects for new graduates are declining (Van Sant, 1993). They will pay more in and get less out of social security (Malkin, 1994) and experience a reduced standard of living (Howe & Strauss, 1993).

The voices of doom and gloom are by far the loudest and most dominant, but there are others who paint a brighter picture. For example, Samuelson (1993) points out that prosperity is still gradually increasing and living standards are dramatically higher than half a century ago. Other commentators suggest that demographically, small generations typically fare better in the economy than large ones because they are in competition with fewer people for resources (Easterlin, cited in Quinn, 1994). A recent article in *Newsweek* documented at least seven ways in which busters will be better off both socially and financially (Quinn, 1994). Also, the focus of energy and interest of advertisers in Generation X demonstrates their belief in the potential spending power of this generation.

However, the predominant rhetoric foregrounds what are framed as negative social conditions, not only in relation to the economy but also the family, social conditions, and even the ecological environment. For example, the United States had the world's highest divorce rates by the 1970s (40% of marriages ended in divorce), and women had entered the work force in increasing numbers. Consequently, many youngsters grew up in families with stepparents and stepsiblings, with both parents in full-time employment (see Giles, 1994).

Important anchoring points for this debate are comparisons with other generations, particularly the boomers. Generation X is characterized as "doing worse" or experiencing relative deprivation. Some media representations are quite alarmist in their framing of current or impending intergenerational conflict. In their recent book, Nelson and Cowan (1994) warn of a clash between generations brought on by the alleged greed of baby boomers, shrinking social security, the budget deficit, and so forth. These authors characterize the boomers and the busters as "heading toward conflict" (p. 57) and encourage young people

to become politically active, outlining what they should do to "rescue their future" (p. 75) from a Washington dominated by boomers (Nelson & Cowan, 1994). In the next section, we critically examine the notion of categorization of social groups into so-called generations and question the validity of such definitions in the context of the group discussions that follow.

DEFINING GENERATIONS

It is not surprising, given the tendency of the media to homogenize social groups, that images of two distinct generations with different life experiences, even conflicting values and interests, have emerged, which, in the most negative characterizations, are pitted against each other in an economic and social struggle. And these accounts recycle, with a new economic and social twist, the age-old notion of the generation gap.[2] However, many theorists and researchers engaged in empirical work reject the notion that generations can be identified and categorized in this way (Ladd, 1993). As Harwood et al. (1995) suggested, "[A]ge categories seem more inherently ambiguous, and hence perhaps more contextually and communicatively negotiable, than most other social group memberships" (p. 137). The issue of establishing generational boundaries is discussed by Giddens (1991), who rejects the notion of generations defined by familial position (grandparent, parent, child) in favor of generations located sociohistorically.

> In modern times, however, the concept of "generation" increasingly makes sense only against the backdrop of standardized time. We speak, in other words, of the "generation of the 1950s", "the generation of the 1960s" and so forth. (p. 146)

In line with Giddens, the notion of a cohort is very important for understanding the vastly different experiences of different age collectivities living through distinct historical periods. A cohort is most commonly defined by a 10-year age band, and therefore conflicting views exist regarding the viability of characterizing boomers and busters as coherent groups, since the parameters of these groups can be set as far apart as 20 years. Common experiences may unite a cohort, particularly those who experience decisive and major historical events. Mannheim (1952) suggested that such factors can transform an age cohort into a generation. But historical events and social conditions would not be expected to affect all members of a generation in the same way, and we must be mindful that generations are made up of subgroups who may hold contrasting and conflicting values (Mannheim, 1952).

In addition, developmental issues must impinge on the notion of generational identity. As developmentalists point out, young people in early adulthood are at a crucial time in their lives, developing a sense

of self and an autonomy apart from parents while at the same time being dependent (as we all are) on social network and family support (Baltes & Silverman, 1994).

In summary, the notion of a generation can only achieve credence through a complex interaction between shared sociohistorical conditions during a particular time span and developmental life stage. How can individuals position themselves, psychologically and discursively, as generation members? We now turn to examine intergroup theory as a means of mapping such positioning.

AN INTERGROUP PERSPECTIVE

In developmental terms, we not only develop a sense of personal identity (who we are as a unique individual) but we also can be expected to develop a sense of social identity—who we are as a member of different groups or social categories, which may have differential meaning to us depending on our life stage, social circumstances, and so on. For example, being a woman or a member of a minority ethnic group may be more salient and important at some times and in some circumstances than others. In this case, we are concerned with peoples' identity as members of an age category or generational group.

Intergroup theory has most often provided an explanatory and predictive framework for research on interethnic and intercultural behavior (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), but it is applicable to any social behavior whereby people treat each other as group members. Recently, it has been argued that intergroup theory provides a useful theoretical account of certain aspects of age stereotyping and intergenerational behavior because it explains how age categorization can, through a number of related processes, lead to discrimination and age prejudice (Giles, Fox, Harwood, & Williams, 1994; Harwood et al., 1995; Williams & Giles, 1997).

Tajfel (1981) was one of the most prominent instigators of intergroup theory. He laid down the central tenets of intergroup and social identity theory by arguing that we have an inherent tendency to divide our social world into groups and social categories and we are aware of our own and other's membership in particular social groups. From this perspective, our own awareness of our membership in various social groups combined with our feelings about such membership constitute our social identity. Often, when we categorize others we do so based on salient features such as appearance, verbal behaviors, and so forth, regardless of whether those others subjectively feel they are members of such groups. Once categorization occurs, we ascribe certain attributes to group members and generalize them to all group members, downplaying any given individual's idiosyncratic or unique personality characteristics. This is the process of stereotyping, which ultimately can lead to prejudicial behavior toward out-group members.

As group members, we also attempt to assess our group standing relative to others through the process of social comparison. As a result of these comparisons, it is important that we gain distinctiveness and positive outcomes for our in-group in relation to relevant out-groups, showing in-group favoritism and out-group denigration.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), the main motivation for social comparison and the desire for positive distinctiveness is to gain self-esteem as group members. Other motivations may be present too, such as the desire for coherent self-conceptions and the desire to make oneself and one's experiences meaningful (Abrams & Hogg, 1988).

Some of the media rhetoric concerning Generation X is identifiably intergroup in flavor—groups are identified, people categorize themselves and others, members are homogenized, a stereotype of the group is developed and generalized to all members, and group members attempt to demonstrate that they are superior along important evaluative dimensions. Thus, we have the boundaries drawn around Generation X and baby boomers; the members of each group are characterized in simplistic ways and labeled negatively by each other. For example, Xers are stereotyped as slackers and crybabies, and boomers are stereotyped as free-loving hippies who have grown into money-focused yuppies (Giles, 1994). Ultimately, these groups are characterized as being in conflict for scarce resources, in this case jobs and employment, depleted social security coffers, and the like.

IDENTITY AS NEGOTIATED REALITY AND INTERGROUP POSITIONS

This article is part of a research tradition that sees identity as a construct negotiable and open to variation across different contexts rather than fixed and intransient. For example, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1990) interviewed members of various British youth subcultures (e.g., punks, gothics, and hippies) focusing on social comparisons that emerged in discourse. Three levels of social comparison emerged: discussing one or more subgroups in terms of genuine personal commitment, comparing the subcultures' past and present characteristics, and comparing old with new members. This analysis was able to inform an intergroup perspective by demonstrating that such comparisons serve to sharpen subcultural boundaries and establish authenticity both for the subculture and the self as a member. In contrast to earlier studies that treat identity and social categorization as rigid phenomena to be measured with surveys, Wooffitt and Widdicombe's approach suggests such phenomena may also be more fluid and may be used discursively by speakers to serve certain strategic purposes.

This constructivist, qualitative approach to identity realization in discourse is not new (see e.g., Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1932; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter & Gergen, 1989), although social identity has much less often been studied or characterized in this way (although

see Gumperz, 1982, for such an analysis of ethnic identity). For Giddens (1991), predictable social roles (e.g., wife, mother) are no longer valid in modern life (high-modernity), since such conditions demand that our identity be more fluid, uncertain, and complex than in pre-mass-mediated life. Thus, in Gidden's terms, the self is a "reflexive project" (p. 32) constantly in a state of renegotiation and readjustment. However, identification in discourse has rarely been explored with respect to life span issues. Coupland, Coupland, and Nussbaum (1993) have appealed for more research attention to discursive formulations of the life span, particularly age-self presentation and generational alignments. Recent research has begun to fill this apparent void, but for the most part it has focused on samples of older people. For example, Coupland, Coupland, Giles, and Henwood (1990) described a number of strategies through which elderly identity can be realized in talk.

In a similar analytic vein, the focus of the study reported here is how young generational identities are negotiated through talk.[3] From the perspective of intergroup theory, in the context of focus group discussions about Generation X, the analysis will display the means by which young peoples' discourse evidences age categorization and social comparison processes.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Discussants were 26 young people enrolled in introductory communication classes at a large midwestern university who took part in the study in exchange for extra credit. They were told that the researchers wanted them to discuss their responses to a newsmedia video clip. All respondents were within the age range of 19 to 23, with an average age of 20.1. There were 10 females and 12 males. Of the discussants, 16 were Caucasian (9 females, 7 males), 1 was a male Hispanic, 1 was a male African American, 2 were male Asian Americans, 1 was a male Native American, and 1 was female Hispanic/African American. Thirteen had parents who were still married, and 7 had parents who were divorced or separated (2 did not answer this question). Due to researcher error, demographic information was not collected from 4 respondents.

Groups were facilitated by one or two researchers. At the beginning of each discussion session, participants in groups of four to six people (all knew each other before the study) were shown a video clip, which lasted 3.46 minutes, taken from an NBC nightly newsmagazine program (see Appendix A). We used the video clip as a stimulus, initially enabling us to explore how discussants interacted with the media images presented to them. When the video clip ended, the facilitator asked, "So what do you think?" The open endedness of this question was intended to allow focus group participants to respond, at least

initially, to any aspect of what they had watched. As the discussion evolved, the facilitator held a number of questions in reserve to act as prompts. In some of the groups, discussion was so lively that not all of the questions were asked (see Appendix B).

Focus groups were very informal, and participants were allowed to expand at length on any issue related to their generation. Interviewers intervened with questions when a refocusing was needed (e.g., when the group was straying off topic), when the conversation faltered, or to ensure coverage of important issues. Group discussions lasted approximately 1 hour each. (Consent was obtained to record the focus groups with the assurance of anonymity.) Focus group audiotapes were fully transcribed.[4]

In the following analysis, we focus on the discursive means by which participants negotiated their generational identity in the context of media representations. Although being aware that we have established a salience for Generation X in using such stimulus material, this does not invalidate the significance of tracing the means by which these young people align themselves with or differentiate from a generational identity, and we find in these instances that this is most often achieved through comparison with relevant out-groups. We interpret these processes of identification unfolding as an individual-group dialectic realized in sites of discursive struggle.

GENERATION X: THEMES OF GROUP IDENTITY

In Tom Brokaw's introduction to the video piece on Generation X, he claims that "trying to define them as they define themselves" has become something of a preoccupation in the United States. He defines the generation by what they are not, or by their out-groups, pointing out that they are too young to be baby boomers, yuppies, or thirtysomethings, all groups whose names, in contrast to X, denote or connote their generational identity, or at least bring to mind salient images.

Our analysis centers on the way in which the discussants in our focus groups interact with the video they have been shown to formulate definitions of their generational identity. They did not find this an easy task. In all our discussion groups, participants engaged in discursive negotiation of the tension between the self as uniquely defined individual and the self as a collectively defined group member, and between definitions of the generation as definable through the personal characteristics of its constituent members or via the social circumstances experienced by members of the generational group as a sociohistorical cohort. We shall display these negotiations in the discursive analyses below. In general, however, we can identify a range of themes that groups raised, jointly oriented to, and displayed common interest in during the discussions. These were (a) complaints about misrepresen-

tation through negative images and stereotypes, (b) expressed unease about the generational boundaries presented on the video, (c) rejection of homogeneity of generational identity, (d) shared concerns about the economy and the job market, (e) worry about divorce and the resultant family schism, (f) promotion of monogamy and traditional family values, (g) a reclaiming of positivity through liberal acceptance of diversity, and (h) collective experience of media and technology.

Again, we shall illustrate the groups' orientations to these themes through close analysis of selected extracts from the group discussions. However, in terms of articulating generational identity, the focus groups appeared to find characterizing other generations easier than characterizing their own, as intergroup theory would predict. Indeed, we would have to represent talk about Generation X among these groups as a site of discursive struggle, with participants at times asserting individuality and heterogeneity and at times aligning with a communal definition of generation or at least generational value systems.

Sites of Struggle: Discursive Negotiation of Generational Identity

The struggle to provide definition is at times given impetus through a defensive posture against existing representations; for example, where media are not seen as representing Generation X fairly: *I don't think they know how to represent our generation* (Extract 1, line 2). Discussants at times accuse the media of selecting extreme individuals and/or generalizing or homogenizing all members of the generation. Extract 1 shows an attempt to establish in-group positivity by drawing attention to extremism of media exemplars.

Extract 1, Focus Group 4 (at this point the group members have established a consensus of generational difference between them and their parents)

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 1    I2: how do you think the media portrays your
          generation?
      Patrick: I don't think they really know how to portray our
          generation (.) they are like bumping around trying to
 5        figure us out (.) we don't care about figuring
          ourselves out
      Shannon: they don't go to the focal point of our generation
          anyway (.) every time you see them interviewing
          someone on TV it is someone who lives in a suburb in
10        Chicago who don't know nothing about nothing you know
          (.) they are not doing a variety they are not mixing
          it up they are not getting a full perspective of what
          our generation is like (.) they don't touch you know
          they rarely touch everybody in the generation you
          don't see them going out like er like while they're in
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Chicago (.) go into the intercity (.) you know and
talking to someone who is at that age who is trying to do
something positive instead of going to the intercity and
trying to find the person who just
robbed someone they are not looking at the child that
bused out of the intercity to that suburb that goes
to that same school they are just talking to the
person who drives the Ferrari to school

25   (group laughter)

Patrick rejects formulation of a group identity partly through shifting the focus of the answer away from media portrayals (lines 3-6). Shannon suggests that the media do not go to the *focal point* (line 7) of the generation, indicating that she, at least, accepts the notion of an identifiably collective identity. But she also voices concern about media portrayals not embracing variation: *they are not mixing it up they are not getting a full perspective of what our generation is like* (lines 12-13), specifically calling up notions of heterogeneity. In lines 9-10, she expresses concern, too, that urban dwellers are being overrepresented. She goes on to promote the idea of generational heterogeneity partly through citing positive examples (lines 18 and 20). The struggle here is indicated in the contradictive adjacency of notions of a "focal point" and "heterogeneity."

In fact, although there is an expressed reaction against portrayed negativity here (lines 10, 18, and 20; see Extract 2, lines 2-5), the video clip only involves one individual who could in any way be considered "unconventional" (with dyed black disheveled hair and a plait arranged over her face, she states her rejection of traditional ideologies of success) and five who are more conventional in appearance and stated beliefs, one of whom is highly successful and actively working to give the generation a media voice. Yet, no one in our focus groups referred to these more conventional individuals. In all groups, talk instead tended to center on problems of media use of extreme examples of members of the generation, as in Extract 2 below. Focus group participants at times attempted to refute negative images of their generation by proposing themselves and others they knew personally as examples of positivity.

Extract 2, Focus Group 6

1   I2: how do you think the media portrays your generation?
Jenny: anytime you see someone who has something to say they
have their hair three different colors (.) and shaved
up and spiked up you know and smoking something
standing outside on the corner (.) I don't smoke, I've
never had my hair several different colors and I
don't stand outside on corners

Min: yeah it's amazing because you don't see very many
positive aspects on TV about our generation (.) all
10   you see is kids murdering other kids or kids doing
drugs or or smoking or what not (.) they never have any
positive things like a student saving someone from
drowning whatever (.) but you rarely see that on TV
Terri: I think it makes me (.) ((mad)) when I see things like
that because I am not like the people who get
portrayed it makes me all the more determined to
succeed when I think Generation X I think a lot of the
stereotypes what comes up is when the older
people think we are all losers that we don't think and
that just makes me determined not to even look like
that I could fall into the category
Jenny: you see that's just it it shouldn't matter what you
look like (.) there are people I have known for all my
life that maybe be considered progressive I don't
know call them whatever you would like (.) they are
just people my friends that may dress differently
from what everyone else sees as normal but you know a
lot of them have four-point grade point averages and
29   med school and they are doing this or doing that

In this extract, Jenny begins by proposing that the image being portrayed by the media is an extreme (lines 2-4). She is undoubtedly citing extreme images not to be taken literally but to raise extremism as a problem more generally. She then attempts to discount media stereotypes by using herself and her friends as counterstereotypical examples of her generation (lines 4-6). Terri shifts focus from the media as the proponents of the negative stereotypes to *older people who think we are all losers* (lines 18-19). Jenny contributes to this discursive antistereotyping work by dismissing the importance of appearance (lines 22-25). It is something of an irony within this sequence that Jenny claims that her nonconformist (in looks) but conformist (in lifestyle and behavior) friends are *just people* (line 26). We can read an implicit link between *just people* (line 26) and the descriptor *normal* (line 27) and an implied contrast between *progressive* (line 24) appearance and hard work, ambition, and academic/professional success (lines 28-29). There is discursive work here that indicates investment in establishing positivity for the generation under scrutiny. More generally, there is evidence of the groups establishing commonality not through positive redefinition but through comparisons with out-groups, as shown in the two sections that follow.

Explicit Out-Group Comparisons

Extract 3, Focus Group 2 (the group members have been talking about media portrayals of Generation X as lazy or directionless)

1   I1: do you think that is an accurate portrayal?

> Conrad: well (.) you have to think about who the media is (.)
>   I mean they are older than we are for one thing and we
>   always have older people looking down and how they had
>   it so bad when they were young (.) everybody's had it
>   on equal levels I think (.) my dad is the worst about
>   though he had to plow the field or whatever just
>   getting us mad (.) then my grandma will tell me things
>   about him he never had to do anything like that he
>   didn't have it so bad
> Alan: no but she had got it really bad
> (group laughs)
> Conrad: even Tom Brokaw (the presenter on the video the group
>   was shown) how old is he? late forties I don't know
>   early forties (.) he's just the newscaster he can't do
>   too much (.) he loses a little objectivity there
> I1: do you think there are those people out there that do
>   believe the media?
> Group: oh yeah
> 20   (?): especially the older people because they identify with
>   the older people broadcasting the news (.) they were
>   raised different
> Group: yeah

Discursive comparisons with older people. In Extract 3, some partici-
pants propose that those who expound negative stereotypes of Genera-
tion X might be discredited as having a vested interest in doing so: *you
have to think about who the media is* (line 2). Discussants claim that
the media is being run by older people *and we always have older people
looking down* (line 4). We began to see the emergence of a shift from
the media to *older people* in Extract 2 (lines 18-19), but this is more
explicitly articulated in Extract 3. This appears to reveal a more
explicit out-group strategy based on age difference, which we interpret
as an attempt to shift blame. Tom Brokaw, the presenter of the video
clip (who looks to be in his 40s) is cast as an older person who thus *loses
objectivity* (line 16). In combination with lines 3-5 and line 12, the group
is working here, at times with humor, to express generational distinc-
tiveness.

A hierarchy of deprivation is invoked by Conrad as a theme visited
and revisited by successive generations: *everybody's had it on equal
levels I think* (lines 5-6). The differentiation strategy here is functioning
with three generations; for Conrad there is me, dad, and grandma, with
grandma, by implication, as the most deprived (witness the verbal play
on older cohort group hardship being joined by Alan on line 11).
Members of discussants' families were frequently used in this way as
readily available exemplars of generational difference.

Throughout our focus groups, our respondents portrayed the life
span metaphorically in spatial (above-below) terms, as we saw in
Extract 3 *older people looking down* (line 4). In Extract 4, again we see
a spatial up-down or lower-higher characterization of generations at
different life stages (line 7).

Extract 4, Focus Group 2 (the group members have been talking about their parents and how they have the advantage of having seen their children as children; the converse is not, of course the case)

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 1    I1: do you think they have a good view of what your
          generation is or what you're about?
      Conrad: no not really
      Gary: but I don't know that anybody did do they really?
 5    I1: I don't know you tell me
      Conrad: I think it's just the parents (.) parents are forever
          doing that (.) just looking down on you because they
          changed your diaper
      Gary: especially the generation in war and stuff
10    Kristin: (voicing) "oh gosh we're our generation's so smart
          cause we had to learn all this stuff that they never
          oh my gosh that we (.) classes since the twelfth
          grade and" (laughs) I don't even know what that
          means (.) you know they always just assume that we
          haven't any interest in all these like intellectual
16        questions
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The reference to *they changed your diaper* (lines 7-8) evokes notions of control, power, or superiority of the older over the younger (dependent) generation, with physical dependency giving way to critical scrutiny. In some senses, parenting is by definition correctional, and so criticism, perhaps in the form of negative evaluations, may be seen as part of that aspect of parenting. The out-group theme is dramatized by Kristin in her voicing or taking the verbal part of a member of an ascending generation (lines 10-13).

In Extract 5, the speakers are engaged in much the same process, although this time there is a good deal of humor. Ironically enough, participants poke fun at older generations who engage in intergenerational comparisons.

Extract 5, Focus Group 4

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 1    I1: what do you think the other generations are saying
          about your generation?
      (?): corrupt slackers lazy
      Justin: I think every generation before has said that about
          the other generation (voicing) "oh yeah when I was a
          kid, we didn't get to do that (.) we had to walk to
          school."
      (various voices): a mile both ways=
      = always uphill= = (laughter)
10    Justin: then the generation before that (voicing) "well, I
          didn't even get to go to school I was working since
          I was six." everybody thinks you know I hear people
          of different ages talking about (.) when I was a kid
          candy bars were a dime and you could walk down the
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road catch a ride with someone on the way home (.) now
you have to worry about beat up I think everyone
thinks that the generation that comes after them is a
little more corrupt (.) has a little less values than
they did (.) it's just sort of (.) we have a
perspective on ourselves like (voicing) "we're so
great" like you said the kids younger than us you
just said that they have no values what are people
older than us saying? (voicing) oh kids have no
values
(people respond simultaneously, unintelligible)
Shannon: I know when I am talking to my mom or whatever, she
is real set in her ways boy! she is open-minded to
some things but oh! but back in the days she was
born in 1949 her generation is weird I call it weird
30   anyway=
=(group laughter)=
=have you my mother's name is Love that says it all
(laughter) ok so she used to say when she wouldn't get
to go to school because she had to help her dad in the
cotton field I'm like (voicing) "woah that's wild"
we'll drive by the cotton field and she'll be like
(voicing) "that's where your butt needs to go in the
summer instead of on those little trips (.) you need to
go pick cotton because that's where you will learn
the value of respect and hard work" and all this
stuff right? (.) and then my brother he is older than
me he's like almost thirty I think (.) he'll be saying
(voicing) "when I was in school yeah I had to take the
bus" and when he didn't have a car so (.) he don't
want me to have one (.) I was the last child I was
like the last generation in my family they all just
have different values different values get passed
down (.) weird (.) I think that it just flows down the
chain

A theme picked up from Extract 3 is Justin's suggestion (lines 4-5) *that every generation before has said that about the other generation*; presumably those following them (line 3) and his voicing *when I was a kid* (lines 5-7) is joined by other members of the group together, as in Extract 3, playing with the script of older cohort group hardship (lines 8, 9, and 10-14). Again, there is acknowledgment that this is a constantly recycling generational exchange: *everyone thinks that the generation after them* (lines 16-18) and *it just flows down the chain* (lines 48-9). And significantly, here as elsewhere (as we shall see), metacommentary on intergroup discursive behaviors emerges. Here, Justin proposes (lines 20-21) that the process occurs because people want to see their generation positively in comparison with others, a comment that is extended to include the discursive behaviors of his own group (lines 21-22). And neatly displaying an instance of such comparison, Shannon uses negatively valent and distancing discourse markers to speak of her own mother (lines 26-40)—*real set in her ways*; *her*

generation is weird; back in the days she was born; so she used to say when she wouldn't get to go to school because she had to help her dad in the cotton field—descriptions we might expect to be used of people in their 70s or 80s, not their 40s.[5] The *love and peace* generation, the boomers, are clearly the object of fun and ridicule here: *my mother's name is Love which says it all* (line 31). Shannon's comments are interspersed with group laughter. But even her brother, not yet 30, is portrayed as a member of a different generation: *I was like the last generation in my family* (line 46). As we shall show, there is evidence here as elsewhere that discussants at times struggle to find similarity with others supposedly sharing the Generation X label at least as defined by the 20-year "born between 1961-1981" classification on the stimulus video and elsewhere.

The means by which our focus group participants made explicit comparisons with members of other age groups or generations directly speaks to the popular author Douglas Coupland's (1991) charge that baby boomers engage in "clique maintenance." "The need of one generation to see the generation following it as deficient so as to bolster its own collective ego" (p. 64) exactly as would be predicted by intergroup theory.

Discursive comparisons with younger people. Returning to above-below metaphors identified above, the following extracts see respondents discussing people younger than them who they "look down on" both figuratively and (at times presumably) literally. For example, in Extract 6, the speakers are negotiating criteria for membership of their generation.

Extract 6, Focus Group 4

1   I2: then how would you describe yourself?
    Patrick: how would I describe myself? I am very independent
        very independent and I don't think I think that
        every person that was born I don't agree with the fact
        sixty-one to eighty-one cause I don't think anyone
        after seventy-five is in the same group with me so=

    Chris: =why?
    Patrick: why? cause I don't share their values (.) like my
        sister was born in seventy-six and she and I (.) are
        com really really you know besides the fact that most
        Generation X people are supposedly different she and
        I (.) she had me to look up to you know and I was with
        her all the time while I didn't have anybody above me
        you know (.) too often
    Chris: you know how you said children after seventy-five and
        seventy-six and all that (.) in the eighties those
        kids are now committing crimes at twelve and thirteen
        years old (.) those are the ones doing drive-bys

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        robbing elderly people (.) I mean to me there are no
        values like decreased totally you know (.) people our
        age have a little values or try to and try to do
        something with ourselves and these kids that are born
        (.) after us or whatever (.) the ones that are in high
        school now they are sit around well (voicing) "it
        doesn't matter you know. . . . I am supposed to be in
         jail or something and there's nothing out here
        positive for me to do" it seems like they have no
        values it seems like there are two Generation X1 and
30         then a subscript or something
        (group laughs loudly)
```

Patrick rejects the 20-year time span as a defining criterion (lines 3-5), specifically denying commonality with anyone born after 1975 (line 6). Like Shannon above, he is more persuaded by the significance of sibling age hierarchy. As an exemplar, he expresses a sense of differentiation from his sister in terms of a kind of surrogate parenthood he has assumed over her: *she had me to look up to* (line 13). Chris elaborates this theme by pointing out that young people born after 1975 or 1976 (at the tail end of Generation X, we might say) are *the ones doing drive-bys robbing elderly people* (lines 19-20), aligning with Patrick's orientation to values. She continues to make a direct comparison with *people our age have a little values* (lines 21-22). This seems to absolve the participants by suggesting that the negative image of Generation X is more appropriately applied to people who are *kids that are born (.) after us* (lines 23-24, see especially how she portrays the disillusionment and apathy of *the ones that are in high school now* in lines 25-28). This discursive comparison serves to sharpen boundaries between Generation X and a younger cohort (lines 29-30) and presumably to promote participants' generational esteem by making positive social comparisons with the out-group.

Many of the themes developed in Extract 6 are revisited in Extract 7, where there is again metacommentary in the form of mutual acknowledgment that comparison with the out-group, or following generation, is an ongoing behavior (line 12): *I am already saying that about the next generation! little eight year olds cursing . . .*

Extract 7, Focus Group 6

```
1    I1: how would you guys describe your generation?
     .
     .
     (5 lines omitted)

6    Min: you know how you were saying that our parents are
         probably saying about our generation that we have no
         respect or that we're lazy or whatever (.) well I
         think that of just the next generation down like my
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10   younger brothers and sisters and they get away with a
        lot of stuff (.) I mean just disciplinary stuff as
        well as (.) I am already saying that about the next
        generation! little eight year-olds cursing and
        being=
15   =(group laughs)=

The TV and Media Generation

Throughout the discussions, group members draw on media images, shows, or personalities (especially derived from television) not only to illustrate their points of argument but, apparently more significantly, as a means of accessing shared meaning of experience for their ongoing negotiation of generational identity. Film, television, advertising, computer games, and other "new" technology are raised in a number of contexts and facilitate a number of identity positions both for locating respondents themselves in time and space and for locating older generations. Generation X is often characterized by sociologists and others as the "TV generation" (Howe & Strauss, 1993; Owen & Dennis, 1994), and the talk by these groups provides some evidence of the meaningfulness of media as a means of generational identification.

The significance of TV as an index of social trends. Apart from explicit references to the significance of particular media and technologies to generational identity, we suggest that these young people locate themselves in sociohistorical time zones by the way they use media images in their talk. In this case, media images are invoked to illustrate a theme or interwoven in talk such that they become metaphors for how things are. We would suggest that such discursive practices are another means by which these young people can be identified and achieve mutuality and cohesion as a cohort group, distinct from others.

Extract 8, Focus Group 4 (the group members have been discussing divorce)

1   I1: how would you define it [Generation X] then?
      Chris: I don't know (.) I don't consider myself to be like a
         lot of other people (.) like they say we are all out
         here and just doing (.) like he said we are doing our
         own thing talking about social security and marriage
         and the girl in there (the video) she made a point
         that a lot of people our age come from (.) I guess you
         would call it, broken home, you know, parents got
         divorced and all that (1.0) so where do we I think
         that I am just struggling with values (.) values have
         changed totally like when you guys [said] before it
         was like the *Leave It to Beaver* family you know mom
         dad and the happy little family and now you rarely see

        that (.) you see a lot of single parent families (.)
        divorce is up and everything
    (6 lines omitted)

    Patrick: I think also our generation has emerging ethnic groups
        now (.) when we were younger the only two major ethnic
        groups were Black and White and now you have your
        Native Americans you have your Pacific Islanders and
        your Hispanics (.) they're all emerging (.) and I
        think even beyond this we will have more emerging
        groups I think handicapped people are going to emerge
        and er deaf people are going to emerge even more (.)
        and er right now we are seeing an emerge in sexual
        values (.) sexual orientation values so er that's what
        our generation is

    Matthew: you are talking about emerging in popular culture I
        guess (.) because like (.) they have always been around
35 Chris: it's like they're coming out more . . .
    (5 lines omitted)
    Justin: they are just getting into the limelight now (.) they are
        being more accepted

In Extract 8, Chris approximates what Bill Strauss says toward the end of the video when she defines her generation as *doing our own thing* (lines 4-5), and refers to the video clip specifically in relation to their experience of divorce: *a lot of people our age come from I guess you would call it broken home* (lines 7-8). A rather poignant generational comparison follows, based on the change in family structure, with the TV image used as an index of real social change. The clear implication is that the current situation is not a happy one: *before it was like the* Leave It to Beaver *family mom dad and the happy little family now you rarely see that* (lines 11-13).

From line 22, Patrick and other members of the group interweave definitions of the generation with media themes, referring to emergent cultural diversity, with ethnic minorities, handicapped people, and people with a range of sexual orientations gaining a higher profile and a more powerful voice. This gains a high level of consensus within the group, with Matthew referring to *popular culture* (line 33) and Justin *the limelight* (line 41) as evidence of this trend toward social change in their generation.

In Extract 8, reference to the TV program *Leave It to Beaver* contrastively illustrated the change in family structure over the generations. In Extract 9, group members use another TV program (*Ozzie and Harriet*) to illustrate uncertain cohort positions within the new world where not only familial roles but also career trajectory, economic stability, and gender and partnership roles must be seen as far less

fixed than in the media world portrayed, far more fluid, and open to change and decay.

Extract 9, Focus Group 3

1   I2: you said that you don't know how you can survive,
         you mean economically or family wise?
     Doug: yeah (.) I ((am not as)) concerned socially as
         much I know there is a lot of social change but I am
         talking specifically like economically how things are
         going to go (.) whether you are going to have
         the same economic country that you had like I mean
         in the 1950s everybody was working you had the
         typical I don't know TV shows er Ozzie and Harriet
         you know everyone had his family and that changed
         in the sixties you had the counterculture and then you
         just went on from there and that counterculture and
         civil rights and everything that affected everything
         like a great deal where there was a lot of change and
         everything you didn't have to be like that, you could
         have single parents . . .it didn't just have to be a
         nuclear family I am not concerned I mean that I know
         that I am fine but socially whatever else happens (.)
         I know how I want to raise my kids how I would like my
         family (.) but I never have seen it as like a huge
         huge concern but the economic thing the ability to
         survive the ability to live comfortably and be secure
         and not have to worry about anything

25   Monica: yeah I think that is a major concern now it's like
         both parents it seems like they are going to have to
         work now whereas you know a long time ago the
         mother did the laundry and had dinner ready when you got
         home (.) you know what I mean? . . . I think a lot of
         people's parents are putting a lot of pressure on us
         to make sure that we have something versatile
         something you can get a job in and you know you don't
         just a lot of times they say whatever job is
         available is what you are going to get when you
         graduate from college (.) you can take all the
         architecture classes you want and be an architect but
         if there is not an opening then you will not be an
         architect (.) I think that it kind of nerve racking
         too.

Speakers in Extracts 8 and 9 construct a romanticized version of events in which life before the 60s, the counterculture, and civil rights were simpler and more predictable. Group members depict a situation in which young people looked forward to predefined, comfortable roles, values were explicit, and women did not have to work. Echoes of prefeminism are here, with *everyone had his family* (line 10; a male) and *a long time ago mother did the laundry and had dinner ready when you got home* (lines 27-29; a female). Doug (lines 10-14) proposes the

counterculture (and by implication the baby boomers) as the cause of such social changes. In Extract 8, Chris cited the breakdown of the nuclear family as contributing to her *struggling with values* (line 10). Instead of having roles and norms to aspire to, Xers are faced with a multitude of choices—now they have to draw their own life maps instead of following well-established paths (cf. Giddens, 1991). This uncertainty about who to be and how to be it is *nerve racking* (Monica, Extract 9, line 38). Relatedly, Coupland (1991) referred to "option paralysis" as a problem for this generation; the tendency when faced with unlimited choices to make none. Returning to media references, in lighter moments, media were raised in terms of positive commonality in shared viewing experiences, as below.

Media as generational anchor. At some point, all the focus groups defined their generation in terms of media experiences or familiarity with technological advances, as shared by all members of the generation.

Extract 10, Focus Group 4

1   Matt: I don't think you can necessarily say that you were
          born January 1 1976 therefore you are not
          part of my generation (group laughter) so I don't
          know maybe it should be more of I don't know if you
          have watched "Conjunction Junction" as a kid then you
          are probably part of the generation

     (group laughs)

10   Matt: that might be more of a way to judge.
     (group laughs)
     Matt: (addressing I3, a British woman recently moved to the
          United States) do you know that song?
     I3: no
     (Matt starts the "Conjunction Junction" song and the other
          group members join in the song) (group laughs)

In Extract 10, speakers suggest that one way of identifying their generation is by the TV programs that they all watched when they were children. In this case, "Conjunction Junction" from the *Schoolhouse Rock* series is referenced, and the point is dramatically reinforced when the members of focus group join in singing the "Conjunction Junction" song (line 14). Matt rejects the idea of date cutoff points to define generations and proposes shared viewing as a stronger criterion, albeit with marked hesitation and humor. In other group discussions, the *Brady Bunch* and *Gilligan's Island* are proposed as candidate TV programs for generational identification.
   Another media identifier appears to be the common generational experience of certain media technology; for example, computer games,

such as Pac Man and Atari (Focus Group 4). At other times, the groups used media images metaphorically, as when Gary in Focus Group 2 says that the media at times characterize his generation as Beavis and Butthead (*we don't have anything to do . . .just clueless . . .we're kids*) and Richard claims (Focus Group 1) *there are perks to our generation*, illustrating this when pressed by adapting the script from a Pepsi advertisement that portrays images of carefree youth: *be young (.) have fun (.) drink Pepsi*. In Extract 11, group members center on technology as a point of intergenerational comparison:

Extract 11, Focus Group 4

    1   I2: how would you (.) compare and contrast your
            generation with other generations?
         Justin: (quietly, sounding thoughtful) compare and contrast
            our generation with others (louder) my grandpa won't
            talk on an answering machine (group laughs loudly)
         I2: well ok we can put it like this
            [
         Matthew: I think that sums it up right
            there! (claps his hands together as he says "there") (group laughs
            again)
    10   Chris: my grandmother does not know how to use her
            machine but she's learning

   The group is apparently enjoying sharing the joke about outmoded ways of behavior, and I2's reaction to the introduction of this differentiator shows that she does not take it too seriously. But with hindsight, there does seem to us to reside a serious point behind this verbal play around a minor issue, one that no doubt serves as a contributing factor in defining the contemporary lifestyle in general, and modes of communication in particular, of Generation X.

DISCUSSION

CATEGORIZATION, INTERGROUP THEORY, AND CYCLICAL PROCESSES OF TALK

   History shows that cohort groups are inevitably categorized through labels and attributes applied by those who stand outside them. Our analysis has examined how groups of young people interact with popularized accounts of their generation. Initially, many group members struggled discursively to negotiate personal integrity and were hesitant to align with the generational label or to accept membership or commonality with a group they represented as too large and diverse to reduce to simplistic categorization. But all the groups shared ontological insecurity; they raised issues such as job security, marital

stability, and familial cohesion, issues on which they expressed in-group empathy and out-group differentiation from older people, including their parents and grandparents, as well as younger people such as siblings and kids still at school. And all the groups united in self-defense against the negative stereotyping they had perceived not only in the stimulus video but in other media sources. In some cases, groups used discussion of these stereotypes to recontextualize social issues that impinged on their lives (such as unemployment and economic uncertainty) in meaningfully different ways from the interpretations of older generations (as exemplified by the video presenters or their parents, for example).

The range of topics raised and discussed from the groups' talk has been marked by group members' recurrent touches and retouches of discursive moderation in marked contrast to some of the negative (at times alarmist) portrayals of Generation X represented in media texts. Although at times discussion group members do ridicule those older and criticize those younger than themselves, this is usually done with humor that is handled both individually and jointly to mitigate the potential threat to the out-groups, even though those out-groups are not party to this talk. We have also seen how such negative out-group comparisons are often made to achieve positive in-group distinctiveness in the face of widespread media proclamations of doom and gloom and where in-group identity has been made salient. Beyond this, we have shown how participants exhibit a clear-sighted grasp that intergroup (in these cases intergenerational) comparisons are an inevitable and recycling aspect of social life in history. This is a discursive approach that rejects simplistic differentiation of generations through labeling or classification. Many of the group members suggested that if their generation was unique, it was only because of the distinct sociohistorical time period in which they found themselves (in line with Giddens's argument above), as illustrated in our final extract.

Extract 12, Focus Group 1 (p4) (the group has been discussing negative media representations of Generation X)

1   Richard: I don't think our generation is any worse than other
         generations except that the economy is a little
         different and the job market is different but as
         people other generations we're not that different

     Craig: if we had grown up in our parents' situation we would
         have grown up just like them probably (.) or very
         similar (.) the difference between the two
         generations is the difference between the two times

The arguments here are taking up a defensive position, given their textual context. The media have already been established as an out-group at this point in the discussion, represented by older people who

are on the attack. But the defense appears a most reasonable one; Richard and Craig are both resisting the "blaming" strategies Generation X have been subjected to and making a joint plea to be seen not as different but in many ways the same.

Discursive approaches to social text orient to microanalysis, tracing social processes in talk among a small number of participants to exemplify larger social meanings. Following on from the video clip we used as stimulus material, we have allowed talk participants to construct their own orientations to public discourses about Generation X. Our analysis has shown how intergroup categories can surface strategically in discourse. This supports the notion of social identity as a dialectic in which social categories are simultaneously realized in and constructed through talk as social action. Just as intergroup theory would predict, this leads to a related process of social comparison and competition as we have shown. And close analysis has enabled us to show the precise means by which such intergroup comparison and competition is achieved. Even where group participants did not initially identify with Generation X, their talk reveals how they are able to use the culturally available discursive resources to engage in an ongoing intergenerational debate.

We intend our analysis to represent the multiplicity of voices within a small subgroup of Generation X. What is perhaps most striking is the sensitivity and humor with which participants acknowledge their place in the recycling of intergenerational scripts and the positivity in the voicing of the concerns, values, and hopes of their generation (using themselves as exemplars). The groups themselves have told us that it is only through sharing these concerns, values, and hopes, and acknowledging the significance of their sociohistorical place and time, that generational definitions can achieve any meaning at all.

APPENDIX A
Transcript of NBC News Video Clip:
America Close Up (April 1994)

Opens with Tom Brokaw: America Close Up now it is called Generation X (.) the millions of young Americans who are the twentysomethings, younger than baby boomers and yuppies, not quite thirtysomethings trying to define them as they define them*selves* has become something of a preoccupation because they clearly are a major force in American society (.) and in the workplace (.) Generation *X* our subject for the next several nights tonight we begin with NBC's Dawn Fratangelo

(Scene changes to high school graduation with speaker in background calling student names.) Voiceover by Dawn Fratangelo: it should be the best time of their lives but today's young people graduate wearing a negative label before they've had a chance to make their own mark

Graduation Speaker Senator Patty Murray: sociologists call you Generation X but *I* believe that giving up is a *grave* and *tragic* error

(continued)

APPENDIX A Continued

(*Scene change to busy city street with shoppers.*) *Voiceover by Dawn Fratangelo*: Generation X born from 1961 to 1981 the generation *after* the affluent socially conscious baby boomers (.) the *lost* generation it's called

(*Scene change to close-up of young male speaker 1.*) *Young male speaker 1*: they think we're lost when we are just trying to fi y'know find something better and new

(*Scene change to* Melrose Place.) *Voiceover by Dawn Fratangelo*: television portrays the generation as *this* dysfunctional group that lives at Melrose Place

(*Scene change to* Reality Bites.) *Dawn Fratangelo*: at the *mo*vies Xers find that reality *bites* in a world of too much edu*ca*tion and too few *jobs*

(Reality Bites *clip in restaurant.*) *Actor server [to Winona Ryder]*: do you have *any* idea what it means to be a cashier at Wiener Schnitzel?

Winona Ryder: *yeah*! it's er taking orders and making change

(*Scene change to cover of* Generation X *novel.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: four years ago an author labeled this Generation *X* and it stuck

(*Newsheadlines about Xers now superimposed on the* Generation X *novel.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: add to that a slew of publications with terms like *slack*er and *twenty*nothings

(*Scene change to magazine rack in front of rows of TV monitors.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: and you get the *feel*ing the nearly 80-*mill*ion in the generation have no ambition and lots of time to watch MTV

(*Scene change to close-up of young male speaker 2 in front of another bank of TV screens.*) *Young male speaker 2*: I don't think we are sitting around bitching and moaning at all so which is a big perception you see on many talk shows

(*Scene change to Dawn Fratangelo at magazine rack picking out magazine with the cover she refers to and showing it to camera.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: you can't pick up a magazine profiling Kurt Cobain the leader of a popular band who recently committed suicide and say *this* is Generation X (.) to suggest the generation has *one* face, *one* sound *one* philosophy is to ig*nore* that it's the most di*ver*se in a *cen*tury

(*Scene change to Eric Lui with caption "25-year-old writer" in office with computer equipment, etc.*) *Eric Lui*: we *don't* have a war we *don't* have a depression we don't have (.) er you know legalized discrimination we don't have these (.) these hor*ren*dous and *tot*ally visible and identifiable (.) er challenges to face

(*Eric Lui shown at computer.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: Eric Lui is a foreign affairs speech writer for President Clinton trying to *shat*ter the myth (.) he started a *mag*azine that gives the generation a chance to define it*self*

Eric Lui: (.) that's how you get a much more *clear* much more compre*hen*sive sense of who we are as a gene*ra*tion

(*Scene change to close-up of young female speaker 1 with long loose dyed black hair and small braid across her face, in front of a bank of TV screens showing Kurt Cobain singing with his band.*) *Young female speaker 1*: I'm not interested in (.) blending in (.) and (.) getting as much money as *poss*ible

(*Scene change to graph showing salary average fall from $27,980 to $23,600.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: Gen X has no *choice* (.) over the past two decades the median income for people under thirty has dropped more than $4,000

(*Scene change to close-up of Bill Strauss, middle-aged popular sociologist.*) *Bill Strauss*: the economy is *so* much worse for young people today than

it was when *I* was young (.) that we have to give them *credit* for *find*ing their own *way* (.) *we* had the counterculture *they* have the counter commerce

(*Scene change to theater production showing what Dawn Fratangelo is describing.*) *Dawn Fratangelo*: Bill Strauss makes his living *an*alyzing generations (.) as a member of this Washington *com*edy group he makes fun of his *own* (.) as a lecturer in *high* school he listens to the woes of the *next pess*imism about institutions like social se*cur*ity

(*Scene change to classroom, chairs in a circle discussion group.*) *Young female speaker 2*: it's going to run out by the time it gets to us

Dawn Fratangelo: *and* marriage (.) their boomer parents had the highest divorce rate

Young female speaker 3: a lot of our parents discovered it wasn't *right* (.) so I don't think any of us expect that it'll be right the first time

Dawn Fratangelo: with no *big* revolution to unite them like the boomers had during the 60s (.) those of Generation X must focus on *small*er im*port*ant conquests like repairing the economy and broken family

(*Scene change to busy street with young couple walking holding hands.*) *Bill Strauss*: they're not out there trying to *save* the *world* as a group they're out there doing individual acts of generosity

Dawn Fratangelo: *if* Generation X *can* accomplish those things many believe Generation X will be the most influ*en*tial in history (.) Dawn Fratangelo for America Close Up NBC News, Chicago

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APPENDIX B
Focus Group Interview Questions

How do you view your generation?
How do you think others view your generation?
How do you think the media portrays your generation?
Do you think that the portrayal is accurate?
Do you feel a part of your generation?
How would you describe your generation?
It seems like every generation has a cause or an identifying characteristic. Do you think your generation has any of these?
What do you think are the primary concerns of people your age?

NOTES

1. This context would undoubtedly provide a focus for future study. However, our orientation here is to young people's resistance/acceptance of generational identity through talk.

2. The notion of a generation gap, implying intergenerational schism, is used here specifically in relation to the sociocultural contexts of the United States and the United Kingdom, although we have knowledge of this issue surfacing in other cultures around the Pacific Rim (Williams & Giles, 1997) and Germany (Thimm, personal communication).

3. The authors have conducted a parallel study with the parents (and their friends) of the Generation X volunteers, again, using the video as stimulus and eliciting responses

in group discussions. This data will give us access to boomers' discursive strategies in relation to the issues raised.

　　4. Transcribing conventions are as follows:

　　　　italic = emphasized and/or clearly enunciated speech
　　　　= = latched speech across turns
　　　　[= overlapping speech
　　　　(.) slight pause
　　　　(2.0) = pause of approximately 2 seconds
　　　　? = question function
　　　　((2 sylls.)) = two syllables of inaudible speech
　　　　((perhaps)) = insecurely identified form
　　　　(laughs) = nonverbal behavior or explanatory comment
　　　　. . . = omitted material

　　5. It should be acknowledged that the first and second authors are in their 40s, so this is a salient comment from their interpretive perspective at least.

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