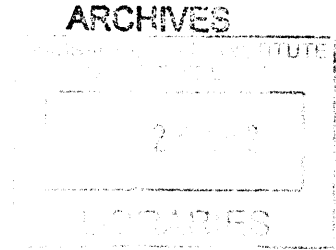


**The Souls of the One Percent: A Report on the  
Emerging Leaders of the Millennial Generation**

By

Priya Narayan Parker

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Virginia, 2004



SUBMITTED TO THE MIT SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
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Signature of Author: \_\_\_\_\_

MIT Sloan School of Management  
January 31, 2012

Certified By: \_\_\_\_\_

Thomas Malone  
Director, MIT Center for Collective Intelligence  
Patrick J. McGovern Professor of Management  
Sloan School of Management  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted By: \_\_\_\_\_

[Maura Herson]  
[MBA Program Office]  
[Program Director]



# **The Souls of the One Percent: A Report on the Emerging Leaders of the Millennial Generation**

By

Priya Narayan Parker

Submitted to the MIT Sloan School of Management on  
January 31, 2012 in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Business Administration

## **ABSTRACT**

I wanted to conduct a study of the future leaders of Generation Y at the moment in which they waded out into the career marketplace. It is a group of young people, who, because of their high levels of education and demonstrated ambition, will help to guide our common future and perhaps provide a glimpse of what is to come. What kind of world are they going to build? What kind of companies will they manage? What kind of governments will they run? I wanted to explore what moves them, how they make choices about their own futures, and how they think about their personal and public values and ability to make a difference. I wanted to understand what we might expect from our next generation of senators, ambassadors, CEOs, NGO founders, schools chancellors and team owners.

For this study, I interviewed 30 Dual Degree students, spanning three different classes across the Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard Business School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management. A series of patterns began to emerge. First, and above all else, the compass of this cohort is ever pointed toward something its members call optionality – which is, in a nutshell, the habit of making choices according to what keeps the most doors open for the longest possible time. Second, the guiding ideology of this cohort is pragmatism over ideology. They have very few sacred cows. They are passionately in favor both of profit *and* purpose; they imagine working in the public, private and social sectors, and they prefer to transcend the boundaries of their parents' generation and to keep politics out of it. But they also suffer from their pragmatism – from a sense of being unmoored, untethered, with very little but their ambitions to guide them. Third, this cohort is part of a global reimagining of ideal leadership behaviors: a shift from certitude and conviction as the epitome of leading to empathy and the ability to see from multiple perspectives, with all the good and bad that this entails. There is a belief among this cohort that influence increasingly comes from standing behind or on the sidelines, and there is an attraction to informal authority over the formal variety.

The most common fear mentioned among this cohort is not having their ideals match their choices and not meeting their potential. They are obsessed with making an impact, but, for the most part, have not yet determined how to make that impact. They are a risk-averse cohort, highly self-aware and tend to look to one another for guidance and advice. And, finally, there is an anxiety among this cohort that, given their education, their resources and their safety nets, if they don't take bigger risks to make an impact in the world, it's not clear who will.

Thesis Supervisor: Thomas Malone

Title: Patrick J. McGovern Professor of Management

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Look around the world right now, and you observe a grave imbalance between the problems confronting us and the capacity of our current generation of leadership to solve them. The world is struggling through a financial crisis, a transition from geopolitical unipolarity to multipolarity, the haltingly slow embrace of global responsibility by the emerging powers, worldwide aging coupled with a rapidly growing population – and, making all of this worse, educational and political and economic systems that seem poorly adapted to the new realities of this century. Everywhere people talk about a vision deficit, a leadership deficit.

Without entirely writing off the current crop of leaders, I set out to answer this question: How, if at all, might the coming generation of leaders – technologically savvy, global in outlook, unwounded by the 20th century's ideological wars – succeed where this present generation has failed?

I believe that globalization is creating – and globalization will require – a new leadership class. The leading edge of this rising generation, which has been called both Generation Y and the Millennials, born roughly between 1982 and 1996, is beginning to turn 30 and enter into the workforce for good. They have spent the better part of a decade exploring different jobs, cities and, in many cases, countries. They have worked for governments (their own and others'), NGOs, consulting firms and school districts. They have come of age after the Cold War and its ideological divides. They have lived through a financial meltdown that has raised questions about how the market, state and society should co-exist. Their public and personal lives have been defined and shaped by technology. They have also been shaped by globalization, and the Westerners among them are the first generation in centuries to come of age in a West that may no longer lead the world. They are the children of global interdependence. These young people tend to be proud of their own

society, and yet also carry a global sensibility.

I wanted to study this rising group of leaders at the moment when it wades out into the career marketplace. There is a group of young people, who, because of their high levels of education and demonstrated ambition, have a disproportionate role to play in shaping our future and may provide an early glimpse of what is to come. What kind of world are they going to build? What kind of companies will they manage? What kind of governments will they run? I wanted to explore what moves them, how they make choices and decisions about their own futures, and how they think about their personal and public values and ability to make a difference. I wanted to understand what we might expect from our next generation of senators, ambassadors, CEOs, NGO founders, schools chancellors and team owners.

This is, of course, not a study of the entire leadership class of the coming generation. That would prove impossible. Rather, I set out to study a cohort of potential future leaders in my own backyard: the so-called Dual Degrees. Among high-achieving American elites, there is a new fashion of pursuing twin master's degrees in both business and government, so as to prepare oneself to work at the dynamic, lucrative nexus of policy, commerce and human impact. Several universities have collaborated to create programs that allow students to obtain these degrees from two institutions simultaneously. While the programs have existed for many years informally, in 2008 Harvard University created the first formal joint degree program between the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Kennedy School. Its creation suggested a recognition of the growing need to understand problems from multiple perspectives and of the increasing interplay of business and government. On its Web site, the program described its offering this way: "Armed with the skills required to manage complex organizations and shape innovative public policy, students will be prepared to work in positions of influence at the interface of business, government, and nonprofit

organizations, dealing with challenges in such critical areas as health care, the environment, economic development, and government regulation.” The Harvard Kennedy School also has concurrent programs with other business schools, including the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Stanford Graduate School of Business and The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Every year, Harvard accepts roughly 25 students into its joint degree program. MIT and others fluctuate from year to year. The first HBS/HKS Joint Degree class graduated in June, 2011, and its members are roughly the age of the leading edge of the so-called millennial generation. This cohort of young leaders each decided at some point that studying both public policy and business would be the best way to equip themselves with the skills (and networks) to understand a changing world and play a leadership role within it. It is this cohort – students who have enrolled in or completed a Dual Degree since 2008 from the Kennedy School and either HBS or the MIT Sloan School of Management – that I set out to study, as a small corner of the emerging leadership class.

These students come from all over the world and have an average of four years of work experience, of which part is typically in the private sector and part in the public. On average, they have lived outside their home country for at least two years and have visited 20 countries. They performed well at leading undergraduate institutions, and have passed through some of the leading institutions of the world, including McKinsey & Co., the Gates Foundation and Teach for America. They also have demonstrated significant leadership at a young age through founding their own organizations or leading specific initiatives within larger institutions. They describe wanting to change the world as a very high priority. Their average age is 29. They hail from New Jersey; New Delhi; and Cape Town and many places besides. One hundred percent of them, when asked, imagined that they will know someone

on Fortune magazine's list of the most powerful people in 40 years. One could argue that this group provides a reasonable proxy for the new global elite.

These young people, by the very fact that they've applied to this Dual Degree program, have demonstrated an interest in the public and private sectors, and are influenced by various motivations, including doing good and its cousin, doing well. This generation of graduates lives at a time when they have more opportunities, scattered further around the world, than any generation before them. Many of them are also heavily involved in the budding social enterprise field, perhaps working in the private sector as a kind of apprenticeship and then in a public or social context. There are a considerable number of ex-management consultants in each class. Many of these Dual Degrees tend to be bicultural or biracial or otherwise bound to more than one place – whether by growing up in multiple countries themselves or having immigrants as parents. In part because of this background, the Dual Degrees tend to see with multiple lenses. They have a deep well of options and opportunities even in an age of austerity, because of how the world is changing. And they've self-selected into programs that advertise themselves as generative of leaders.

So these are the Dual Degrees. Now I hope to raise some issues and questions and offer some early conclusions on how this new class of leaders might shape our world.

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For this study, I interviewed 30 Dual Degrees, spanning three different classes, spending 60 to 90 minutes with each of them, going through a long list of questions (see Appendix I for the list and Appendix II for more information on my methodology). A clear set of patterns began to emerge from the interviews, mapping onto the three major thrusts of my questions:



First, how does this cohort make decisions about its future? Second, what does this cohort believe in and what drives them? Third, what are the hallmarks of this cohort's leadership style? Here is a short summary of the three answers to these questions that my research indicated:

First, and above all else, the compass of this cohort is ever pointed toward something called optionality – which is, in a nutshell, the habit of making choices according to what keeps the most doors open for the longest possible time. And the ascendancy of management consulting as a profession of choice for this group has, I believe, played a substantial role in fostering this cult of optionality.

Second, the governing ideology of this cohort is pragmatism. They focus on what works and are less worried about where it comes from. They are passionately devoted to the pursuit both of profit and of purpose; they imagine working in the public, private and social sectors, and they prefer to transcend the ideological wars of their parents' age and to keep politics out of things. But they also suffer from their pragmatism – from a sense of being unmoored, untethered, with very little but their ambitions to guide them.

Third, this cohort is part of a global reimagining of leadership behaviors: a shift from certitude and conviction as the epitome of leadership to empathy and the ability to see from multiple perspectives, with all the good and bad that this entails. There is a belief among this cohort that influence increasingly comes from lurking behind or on the sidelines, and there is an attraction to informal authority over the formal variety.

What we have in this study may be a window into how we may be led a decade or two from now, when the young people setting out into the job market today are the captains of their fields. Here, then, without further delay, is an impressionistic portrait of the future One Percent.

*“You like to live in a world where you can still talk about the future rather than be in it.” – one*

*subject*

*“My cohort makes non-choices.” – another*

## **PART I: Optionality and Fear: How does this cohort make decisions about its future?**

“I think in some ways we might be the Optionality Generation.” You might scratch your head at this sentence. You might ask, What does that mean? But if you did, you would be questioning the very North Star of the cohort I studied. Generations have emphases and special tendencies: there are save-the-world generations, get-rich generations, nice-house-in-the-suburb-with-white-picket-fence generations. For this group of leaders, though, when faced with choices about how to build their lives and invest their talents, the best option is invariably the option that expands their set of options.

The first thing I wanted to understand is how this cohort makes its plans, chooses its career path, plants its unique gifts. Though “purpose,” “passion,” and “impact” were prominent words when speaking of what motivates them, the majority of interviewees admitted that their current paths do not match these values. Rather, three main factors are driving this cohort’s decisions on what to do: First, preserving optionality has become an end in itself. That is to say, choosing options that “keep doors open” and “buy time” has become the guiding post of this group. Second, in part because of early success and ever rising expectations, and despite an abundance of resources and networks, it is an admittedly risk-averse group. Third, this group is prioritizing endless learning over actually launching.

And, additionally, what struck me again and again was the role that management consulting has played in fostering this ethic.

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*“The way I think about it metaphorically is choosing one door to walk through means all the other doors close, and there’s no ability to return back to that path, and so rather than actually go through any doorway it’s better to stand in the atrium and gaze” – one subject*

“I find myself just kind of defaulting to the option that preserves the most options,” one subject told me. At a time of great national and global challenge, the most talented and highly educated are protecting themselves. Fear of making the wrong choice or not meeting expectations is leading this cohort to “preserve optionality” as a principal goal. I first heard the term “optionality” among business school students. It came up repeatedly in interviews. Interestingly, the word “optionality” does not exist in the dictionary. It is a finance term that refers to an instrument that is based on an agreement between a buyer and seller of the potential future price of an underlying asset. As one of the subjects explained: “I think everyone, especially at business school, is affected by it. You’re taught to have ‘option value.’ They’re taught to have everything open until it expires, hold on to it as long as possible.” The concept comes from the idea that there is inherent value in holding on to an option and not “exercising” it. This could mean working in consulting, even if you don’t want to work in consulting, because it keeps other options open. It could mean spending years “keeping coals in the fire” by networking with large numbers of people across several industries “just in case” one day you want to join one of them. It could mean simply taking a course in

advanced corporate finance, even if you're not interested in it, to be prepared for the unlikely eventuality that you will need it. In decision-making, too, a number of respondents wait as long as possible to make decisions under the assumption that more time will give them more information. As one subject put it, "I'm a strong believer in postponing the decision for as long as possible, keeping as many doors open, as many balls in the air."

And it is possible to observe that optionality has gone beyond being a way of making decisions. In so many cases, it has become the decision itself. One subject described it this way:

A lot of the questions that I'm grappling with and a lot of the choices that I'm grappling with feel like choices of raising up one facet of me over another and being at a point in my life where I don't actually feel like "it's just for now," the world will see this as a choice and therefore harden around it and make concrete that decision in a way that will feel very hard to back away from.

It is as if the Dual Degrees fear that their lives will unfold like the history of the QWERTY keyboard: a path set for particular reasons of time and place, then unchangeable thereafter. And so, as another subject put it, the cohort "makes non-choices." A number of subjects said that the first step of making a decision for them is to open up all of the options and see what's available; then they will seek to choose the one that is the least likely to "close doors." One person described two terms from decision-making theory: optimizers and satisficers. Optimizers, the subject explained, try to get the best possible outcome on everything by optimizing as many variables as possible. Satisficers, on the other hand, are comfortable with adequacy. She said that she (and most of her cohort) would fall into the bucket of optimizers. And while everyone wants the best possible outcome, she explained, there are also dangers she sees:

I think the main downside of optimizing is that it's impossible to actually gather all the information...and part of that is just because that information is not readily available, but also part of it is that our world is dynamic, it's not a stock that remains constant over time, but a flow that evolves on a daily basis. New opportunities are going to come in and go out....[And] I may have walked out on certain opportunities that I ended up turning down simply because I wanted to know what else was possible, and as a result it creates a lot of one, distress, internal distress...In positive psychology and literature, people talk a lot about being grateful for...what we already have, whereas I think optimizers are more concentrated on what could be rather than what they already have.

Apparently, according to some happiness studies, satisficers tend to be happier than optimizers.<sup>1</sup> A number of people reflected on the balance between deferral of gratification and doing what you love now. One subject describes this tension:

Say I have two equally compelling jobs: one is in the private sector and public sector, and...say the private sector option is slightly less compelling but because your exit options are better... you take the private sector job, rationalizing that you will have better future opportunities, you're weighting the future more than the present. You're delaying or fulfilling gratification or fulfillment...in the belief that you'll have more of it in the future if you delay it now.

He said that while some of this is helpful, it came become paralyzing:

Especially people who have been told all their lives you have all this potential...at some point you kind of want to see yourself starting to deliver on that and the urge or impetus to defer things, defer committing to a life or a meaningful job or an intellectual pursuit...feels like you may be compromising, you're almost scared to figure out what the actual potential is, you like to live in a world where you can still talk about the future rather than be in it.

Despite working for four to seven years before entering graduate school, many still don't feel ready to take on the problem that they most want to address. One interviewee described the "weird sense" that he came to graduate school to fill in the gaps and "I thought I would feel completely equipped coming and finishing these two programs and I still don't, and so it's kind of one last hurrah of trying to go and get all the analytical training that I feel that I

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<sup>1</sup> Taleb, Nassim Nicholas, "Fooled by Randomness."

need... there's still a sense of investing in my self a little bit more, even though I didn't think I would still feel that way but I do." Another subject reflected on his desire to keep options open in this way: "As long as any part of me is interested in the fast-paced corporate experience, it makes sense to do that now." He mentioned the appeal of the money, but also that "there is real value in learning how to operate effectively in that environment." Though he had spent time working for a bank in New York and didn't like it, he still felt that he lacked corporate experience. He admired the way people who have worked in corporate environments "have become pretty good communicators, to say things efficiently and know how to run meetings." He continued:

The downside though, how do I articulate this? Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, that's when I have the most strong sense of what I'm doing, there's a little bit of sense of dread attached with the finance jobs, though much less with the consulting jobs, a fear that you get sucked in.

Many interviewees mentioned "keeping doors open" as a factor in their decision in going into consulting or other careers that didn't match their passions. One interviewee talked about the timing issue:

I think the kind of metaphor I have in mind is that there's a time, primarily in terms of career, there's a time in your life where you're expanding, I have my arms wide, there's a time when you're kind of opening as many doors and avenues as you can to the world, at some point you have to start closing doors and walking through other doors otherwise you won't get anywhere. And I think the key for optionality is understanding when you are at that point, when you have to stop widening and start narrowing. And once you narrow, you can't widen again

Closing doors means making a commitment, and this cohort values its freedom not to do so.

The average age of marriage has gone up by five years in just one generation (from 23 to 28 for women; from 25 to 30 for men).<sup>2</sup> A number of respondents spoke of a fear of

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<sup>2</sup> Henig, Robin Marantz, "What Is It About 20-Somethings?" The New York Times Magazine, August 18, 2010. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html>.

commitment, applying the language and ethic of optionality to the sphere of matrimony: “I think ironically perhaps, on the personal side, there’s this fear of ‘am I committing to the right person? Am I setting up my adult life to be the way that it could optimally be?’”

Another subject talked about the downside of going into a job that is inherently instrumental in service of something more authentic down the road:

I’m afraid that something in how I’m making this career decision is not fully authentic to the whole of who I am and that I’m sort of losing something by doing something for narrower objectives than my whole perspective on the world. In this long-term view, I have this idealistic sense of how I can give back in various different ways. To not be doing that at the outset because I need to either gain a credential, or make a certain amount of money, or fill in this other sort of sense of what I’m supposed to do, that that’s inauthentic and I won’t enjoy it for that reason, that I’ll be unhappy with the decision that I’ve made.”

This is a group open to many things, with the talent for working across fields and positions. They favor experience that, as one subject said, “exposes us to experimentation that could lead to cool things. We’re not people who are so constrained in our thinking and our focus that we don’t entertain new people, ideas concepts, which can lead to huge things.” This same person went on to note the double-edged nature of this openness as prioritizing “depth over breadth.” He said:

If you keep your options open forever and not willing to close any doors, then the reality is you have 24 hours a day, and that’s a common thing among everybody whether you’re a joint degree or not, and so you can only physically go through all these other doors... So you can’t give it the depth of meaning, and so I think that’s the downside I see, it’s the same thing with all our ambition. The ambition is awesome because you think “it can always be better, and let’s go, let’s do something,” but the other side is that we’re ready to hop off whatever we’re on to the next thing because we’ll always have the feeling that it and we could be better... So you don’t give things that evolve to their full potential.

Different generations have different anxieties. What seems, from my interviews, to bother this cohort – more than the political longings or existential angst of earlier generations of elites – is a persistent anxiety about their might-have-been lives, about the

ones that got away. Life for this group is diminished by the presence of so many options one click, one job switch, one social connection away. In the culture, this tendency is already getting a name: FOMO, or the Fear of Missing Out. FOMO first popped up in the popular press in 2010, in *Business Week*,<sup>3</sup> and is usually discussed in the context of technology. Jenna Wortham, in a *New York Times* essay, described FOMO as a phenomenon tied to the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter, which alert one to all the much more exciting things that one's peers are doing: "Suddenly, my simple domestic pleasures paled in comparison with the things I could be doing."<sup>4</sup> And, in another *New York Times* article, Amy Harmon spoke of FOMO afflicting the attendees of a popular technology conference: "The sharp pang of envy that comes when someone they are following on the social networking site is clearly having a better time than they are — right now."<sup>5</sup> While there have been various references to this feeling, it is usually ascribed to social events and the broadcasting of what you're not experiencing, but could be, through social media. For example, one person described using Yelp to choose a restaurant, and the anxiety he feels as he sits and eats at the place he chose, while wondering if the other 5-star rating would have been a better fit.

This concept is big among the cohort I studied. When asked about FOMO, 95 percent of respondents were able to define it. While there were a handful of respondents who said that they don't suffer from it ("I'm probably, for better or worse, the opposite of that," one said), the vast majority knew it all too well. Another subject described the anxiety this way: as the experience of being part of "multiverses as opposed to universes." The possibility of making multiple different decisions increases the anxiety of making a wrong

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<sup>3</sup> Voboril, Kathleen, "FOMO: The Fear of Missing Out." See [http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/content/jan2010/bs20100128\\_021362.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/content/jan2010/bs20100128_021362.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Wortham, Jenna, "Feel Like a Wallflower? Maybe It's Your Facebook Wall." <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/10/business/10ping.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Harmon, Amy, "On Twitter, 'What a Party!' Brings an Envious 'Enough Already!'" <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/us/19twitter.html>.



decision. One person said, “It’s a concept that I find frustrating because everybody at HBS suffers from it, being unable to choose between two or three things and feeling regretful when you do make a choice between them because you feel that the known unknown other choice may have been the better choice to have made, therefore you have to try everything because you can’t possibly know what the right decision is or what the best option is.” Most people experienced it more at business school than at policy school, and it was especially pronounced at HBS. Another described it in this way: “It’s the fear of a missed opportunity, of a missed experience. I think it comes down to a fear of the fact that the world continues if you’re not there. So that if you stay home, people will go on talking and laughing and going to bars and making connections and networking and maybe succeeding or maybe not succeeding. But this fundamental discomfort that the world exists when you’re not there.” People aren’t only concerned about choosing between two options, but also about missing out on opportunities they didn’t even know they had.

It is important to note that this Fear of Missing Out, as I located it in my subjects’ lives, has gone far beyond a technological phenomenon. It is an anxiety that creeps into all realms of life. One respondent talked about how the feeling begins at the “micro level: if I went to this dinner, maybe there’s another party I can’t go to,” but slowly creeps into the macro level as well: “If I take this job or ask this person to be my wife, maybe there’s someone else better.” Another respondent discussed the “herd mentality” that FOMO creates when people start looking for jobs:

The number of people around me who come to the business school with some idea of what they want to do but [who] are constantly doubting that goal because someone else around them seems to be chasing things that for some reason or other seem more attractive or better pay-off in terms of monetary gain or career improvement. And I think, definitely at HBS, there’s a big herd mentality and the objective of that herd mentality changes I think from year to year. The last two years, for example, it’s been private equity. So anyone who didn’t think about private equity people are like, ‘Oh they’re just saying that it’s because they couldn’t get a

job in private equity because it was so competitive and they weren't good enough." And just that kind of sentiment pushed so many people to thinking about that particular current option even though they might not have had any interest in it whatsoever, and I just feel that it's because of the fear of missing out.

One subject introduced a related term: FOBO, or the Fear of Better Options: "FOBO is really different; Fear of Better Options is just that constantly looking over your shoulder or looking to your right and left, and saying 'oh maybe I'm doing great at McKinsey DC office but I really should've looked at McKinsey Johannesburg, and just taken the leap and lived abroad because now I see my classmate over there is having a great time and he's actually getting on more studies that I think I would have liked to get on.'" Most people first heard the term FOMO in business school. And, as one respondent noted, "Because once there's a term for it, you recognize you're doing it, and can make fun of yourself." It's often used somewhat "ironically" when you realize you're doing it. Another respondent said that she thinks FOMO is the "number one problem of our generation." Given the capabilities of this group, along with its range of interests and the pressure to do "prestigious" things, she worries that her peers "have made decisions that are going to make them hurt in the long run, or in the short run, because either they want to keep as many doors as open as possible or they're making decisions based on the wrong set of priorities, often externally-imposed priorities." She continued: "Most people, when push comes to shove, are pretty OK at articulating what really matters to them. So you often hear them say that these things matter and then make a choice that shows that they're not putting those things at the forefront of their lives. You can live with that disconnect: 'It's just a short-term thing, or it'll get me to this next level where I will be able to spend time with my family, find the person I want to be with, give back to the community, whatever it is.'" But, she said, "Once you get stuck in that rut, especially because a lot of these choices do require significant emotional,

psychological time commitment and it's very difficult to get yourself out of it unless something dramatic happens. And it makes me personally quite sad that so many wonderful high-achieving people who...make these choices that I think are pretty sub-optimal.”

The culture of optionality, of keeping doors open and of FOMO may well be corroding this young cohort's ability to make decisions about things that matter. A number of respondents discussed potential remedies: “I think becoming an adult is realizing that you can't do anything you want to do, or that there are costs to doing anything you want to do.” Another subject shared that, while “everyone from [her] parents to [her] teachers to professors in college” told her that she could be anything when she grew up, “after a while you stop really believing it because I think you start to understand your own limitations. When I was in college I realized that I probably wasn't going to go to the Olympics. I had that dream but it's not gonna happen. Maybe I wasn't going to win the Nobel Prize in Medicine because that's not the path I went down. But I think as each passing year went by it was clear what things weren't going to happen, that you become more comfortable with the path you've chosen.” Another respondent discussed the happiness she derived from choosing a topic area and said she would encourage her peers to do the same. I asked her what advice she would give to her cohort were she able, and she offered this:

I would say that you can get a lot more traction and feel a lot more fulfilled when you choose a point of focus even if it's the wrong point of focus. I think people try too hard to choose the right point of focus- the right one for the world and the right one for themselves. From my own experience, as soon as you pick anything, people start coming to you, you start becoming a hub of information, you start learning more, you start doing more...and you feel like you're making progress, in terms of your learning and what you're executing on, and, if you're passionate about it people are even more drawn to you...Even if you don't end up doing it for the rest of your life, for the period that you are, you're really doing something and that feels great.

And another noted, with a healthy sense of irony, that optionality is an option itself:

I keep coming back that optionality is itself an option...When you're young and you're scrappy, you're just pounding on doors for people to give you a shot. I think we're at an interesting point now where we're still super young and have so much more to learn, but we're in a position where we have opportunities available to us which is kind of a crazy realization, and closing doors becomes as hard as the work it takes to open some.

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The second observation, under the rubric of how this cohort makes its life plans, is that its members, despite a generous endowment of options, networks and resources, is highly risk-averse (and consciously so). As one subject put it:

I would say that maybe 75, 80 percent of the cohort is more risk averse than the average population, and then another 15-20 percent is more risk seeking. It's not a huge population. And the people that are risk seeking have awesome stories and that's what got them into this program and they continue to be risk seeking. The people who are risk averse I would say just have very solid credentials and are extremely reliable and smart people and then that's what got them in the program, and they sort of continue to be risk averse. I didn't see that change a lot in the course of the three years.

Though many of these young people described themselves and their cohort with words such as "passionate," a commonly cited fear was "not having my idealism match my choices" and "being too afraid to take the leap." A number of subjects said their decisions were based the

need to preserve stability and, as one young person put it, to ensure “fairly limited downside and upside, rather than swing for the fences with a very real chance of falling dramatically flat but also a very real chance of doing something important.” He added: “It just feels way too scary and it feels way too inconsistent with even the way I’ve gotten to this point.” This particular subject talked about how, thinking back, “it’s kind of ridiculous that I didn’t major in either Psych[ology] or Soc[iology],” but his “perception of those people was ‘oh it’s so cute they’re following their passion but I need to get a job.’” When asked what the worst decision he could have imagined having made in 40 years, he answered:

I think the bad outcome - so ironic since it’s what I’m doing right now - is to continue succumbing to the tyranny of stability-based decisions. So always saying ‘this next opportunity is not as exciting, but it’s a little different, it’s a little interesting, it doesn’t risk any income, it doesn’t risk any disruptions to my personal life and so on.’ And so you keep moving along that path. And then, to my earlier point, you realize actually you’ve built this box around yourself that you can’t easily break out of because other people have a very specific perception of those choices and that path you’ve taken. And I feel that some of the anxieties I’ve had during grad school at [x age] about feeling that some things are shut off to me, will be dramatically worse and more heart-rending in ten years.

Another subject cited his biggest fear as “the fear of negative consequences.” He continued: “I’ve always been very afraid of negative consequences. Any time I consider an action, as a kid growing up, I wouldn’t do something bad, not necessarily because it was ‘the wrong thing’ but because I was so afraid of getting caught for it. I remember having to put my nose up on the wall in elementary school in recess when I called a kid stupid and I got caught for it. And I don’t know if that has any resonance but I have this fear of negative consequences that I think drives me to do things still to this day.”

This cohort is highly self-aware, and its members will be the first to admit their risk aversion. In the teaching of economics in business school, “risk-seeking” and “risk-aversion” are introduced as opposite ends of a spectrum of tendencies, and students are encouraged to

identify where they would place themselves on it. And while there is an element of those who are “naturally” risk-averse and those who are more risk-seeking, the language of risk aversion begins to justify seeking safe options and pushing off “having our idealism be reflected in our choices.” A number of subjects talked about risk aversion rising with success. One subject said, “I’m probably unhealthily obsessed with making the right choices.” He added:

I think it comes from a fear of missing out on something bigger and better in whatever you do. So, I like to think of myself as someone who has made good choices up until now and I have enjoyed the kind of outcomes that I’ve been able to get from making those kind of choices. I think when you feel like you’ve made all the right choices and don’t feel like you’ve had any major failures, that kind of track record makes you always cautious about continuing to make good choices, and improving outcomes... whatever that means for you.

Another subject reflected on the paradox of more choices and more options creating the illusion of constraint: “There’s this weird paradox of the more rich some gets or the more successful someone gets, the more they have to lose, so they end up doing less.” He spoke about all his colleagues could do with their talents, but instead the ethic is often: “I think it stems from ‘I’ve already kind of made it, so I don’t really need to stretch anymore,’” he said, adding: “It’s not specific to industry or role, it’s more so just mindset of ‘now I’ve got something to lose, so then let me take a route where it’s harder for me to lose it.’” It’s a funny thing. Any economist would tell you that making \$150,000 over \$100,000 increases your happiness and your choices (perhaps at a slower rate than the first \$50,000). Yet a number of students feel burdened by success and money, as though it shrinks their choice set:

I know I’m going to go there and I would do my very best, which means that if that happens, then in all likelihood the next opportunity will be incrementally better than this one. And my lifestyle will evolve to where it becomes harder and harder to make a tradeoff between that sort of money and a startup with nothing. You know what I mean? And then who knows, by then you’ll have other commitments and kids and other

stuff, and the type of money we were talking about was significant, for me, it's not Wall Street crazy money, but for me, the kind of budget you could guarantee was well over \$300,000, which to me is a crazy amount of money. And I thought well, heck, maybe this is something I could do for 3 or 4 years and then go to a startup to have a cushion. But I realized the reality is that one, that sort of money, the difference is just between a 30-year mortgage and a 15-year mortgage...and second of all, once you get into that lifestyle, I make \$300,000 and then go buy a \$200,000 house. I'm going to buy a house that I can afford comfortably with my salary and then what happens is you're living paycheck to paycheck and you're screwed if you want to do a startup. If I make excuses now, this is the time to do it.

The term “golden handcuffs” came up half a dozen times as a fear for this cohort. There is a worry that the stability, high pay, and prestige of certain corporate jobs (the one cited most commonly is management consulting) would “handcuff” them much longer than they would promise themselves. One subject said, “I have a series of very strange conversations that occurs on a regular basis of people saying they can't take a pay cut...And in my mind, if you're earning more money that means you are empowered to do more things, but in so many cases, you find that if people earn more money they take this mindset that they're actually more limited in what they can do, which just doesn't compute with me.” He continued: “They talk as if their options are constrained, and it's like, ‘No, you're at Harvard, so, almost by definition your options are more plentiful than any other person's options, right? So why are you talking like ‘Oh, there's only so many jobs out there’ or ‘there's only so many things I can do?’” He noted that this tendency was much worse at HBS than HKS.

One joint degree student talked about an idea that she put forth to her class to hold themselves accountable. They make a pact with each other *now* as to how much money they need to live comfortably for a year (hers was \$100,000 a year) and then agree that any amount earned above that threshold amount would be given to charity. When I asked this cohort about what they expected to make annually, the self-reported average expected income was \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year on average (and higher among men), peaking in

their 40s and 50s and then declining as they entered into public and social service later in their careers.

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The third observation, in terms of how this cohort envisions its future, is a potential overemphasis on learning, grooming, layering with skills, at the expense of getting out into the world and doing. At an average age of 30, after a decade of work experience and three years of professional school, this cohort still, for the most part, feels inadequate in its knowledge and experience. “To learn” was the most commonly cited reason for going into consulting after graduation, for example. Even those who chose different career paths cited learning as a key reason for their decision. As they all noted in describing themselves, this is a “curious” bunch that wants to learn and, even when describing what kind of lifestyle they would like in ten years, a number of subjects answered: “one in which I am surrounded by interesting people and continue to learn.” This openness and curiosity is a wonderful trait of this group, and one that allows them to do things as varied as working in rural Africa and on Wall Street, enjoying (and succeeding at) both. And this focus on “learning” has become a key factor in their decisions, recruiters have caught on. One respondent said he suspected that the consulting firms knew this and were able to attract a lot of the best talent through promising the best learning experience:

I think they get on campus early and they wine and dine people and I think that is a huge part of it, it's just their recruiting strategy. The other things that they do: they convince you that it is a great place to *learn*, and that's a line you hear all the time from people that are going into it, 'I'm going to go *learn* for a couple of years.' And I think it speaks to a lack of self-confidence that these people need to learn more. They've been learning in a classroom for three years, and in my view, whatever job you're in you're going to be learning.”



A number of other respondents said that they didn't feel "ready" to take on the problems that most interested them. As one respondent noted, "Like many things, [learning about public education] left me feeling maybe more daunted than when I started." He continued, "You sort of understand more the complexity and the reality of what it actually means to try and move the needle on something so systemic." There is a sense of responsibility to make sure that they have every skill possible before addressing a big problem. There is also a humility in this group, a sense that they still don't know enough to make a difference. However, as many of them said themselves, their biggest fears are related to "getting to a semi-retirement point 30 years from now and having regrets that I didn't follow certain passions. And that doesn't have to just mean the social impact passions, it could also mean career-wise. I've very risk averse and I've definitely chosen a safer path and you only live once."

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*"I think when it came to my professional career, I was driven more by the first value of I'm going to be strong and I'm going to make it and I'm going to have a lot more than my parents had. My kids growing up won't have to think that getting a sweater from the Gap is expensive, they'll be able to have more." – subject*

Consulting has become the job of choice for this cohort. Upon graduation, over half of the class is going into consulting (some returning to it, others joining for the first time). This topic elicited the strongest opinions, emotions and commentary throughout my interviews. Management consulting, particularly at the "Big Three firms" has become a kind of seminary for this group, because of its exposure to many industries, its high pay, its

prestige value and because “none of your peers are going to laugh at you,” as one subject said. I asked respondents why they thought consulting has gained such a monopoly over Dual Degrees, and answers included “it’s safe,” “it gives you two more years to figure out what you want to do,” “it’s prestigious,” “it’s stable,” “it gives me skills,” “it’s a great place to learn,” and “you get to work with really smart people.” A number of people also said that it was the easiest way to get private-sector experience for those who haven’t had any. “I think a majority who are joining consulting for the first time, because they haven’t done private sector work before and have sort of a residual insecurity about not having worked for the private sector, and not having those skills, or having that credibility, or having that work ethic, or being trained sufficiently well. And so, to them, the consulting companies are kind of like the blue chip ways to get those credibility and skills and learn how to operate in the private sector.” There is also a desire “not to get pigeonholed” into one type of career or subject. Consulting firms have also, as previously noted, positioned themselves as the best place to “learn” and to have long-term impact in *other professions*. And that it’s a great way to work on a number of different types of problems. There is an understanding among the Dual Degrees that this is not supposed to be a long-term career. “No one goes in wanting to be a McKinsey partner; that’s understood,” a respondent said. Many respondents don’t know what they want to do and their career choices, despite placing a high value on impact, are shaped by the absence of compelling causes. One current consultant put it this way:

I think it buys people time, is a big factor. It’s very clear for most people that it’s a temporary job. I think a lot of people in our cohort did not have the dream job in mind, whether access to it or even clarity over what their dream job was, and I think consulting buys people time while giving people access to a tremendous amount of resources, a wide variety of experiences and an opportunity to surround yourself with some pretty smart folks.

He continued: “Some of them just didn’t feel ready to jump into whatever their long-term

ambition is. For me personally, it was lack of clarity of what that job is. I knew the types of jobs I wanted, but there wasn't something specific out there calling me at the time." And there is a strong peer effect that pushes people toward consulting. One subject explained it thus: "I think it's also a contributing factor that so many of us were coming from consulting and they saw the way that we talked or presented, and we all liked each other, and peers influence each other." One respondent talked about the desire for the group "to all want to have impact, and we see a lot of potential in the ability to apply what we've learned and know." But, he said, "The scariest thing for a lot of us is that we take a route that's not worthy of the opportunity set and potential that you have." He added: "Because all of our lives we've been validated, by being the good kid in school and being the good employee at work and doing what you're supposed to do, and you know how to do it, and you know how to operate within the rules, and treat people in the right way, and go beyond results expected to get to the next thing. That when you get to the point where you suddenly have a lot of choice, because you're at the end of that route of, you go to high school and a good undergrad, and then a good job, and then you go and pursue a good degree, and it's like, now what?" After that kind of life, he said, a career must pass what he called "the airplane test":

Which is if you're sitting next to someone on the airplane and they ask you what you do and you tell them, they're impressed. All our lives we've done things that not only pass that but they initiate intrigue and further questioning from the person and validation. And now suddenly you're in this world where a lot of things that you want to do, they don't pass the airplane test, right? That's why I think frankly a lot of people end up defaulting to consulting as a compromise, because they look at it to get the best of both worlds, because it not only passes the airplane test, and you don't have to sacrifice your social status, you can engage in all the activities, you're never left out of anything, because, it's the 70% solution.

He also noted that much of the cohort comes from middle-class backgrounds and are often second-generation immigrants striving to succeed and reflect well on the family: "All our

lives we've been validated by doing things that pass airplane tests. When being an immigrant and your Mom's friends and aunties are having tea, and as long as whatever I'm doing passes the 'tea test', and they say Harvard or Microsoft... You can't come back and say 'I'm finding myself.' Then the tea will spill!"

There is a sense among this cohort that management consulting is distorting the talent market. It is recruiting from the most capable pool of young people, who are spending their brain power and passion shaving 10 percent off a \$50,000 heart surgery rather than trying to figure out how to create a \$50 heart surgery. Its lifestyle of long workweeks and constant travel is influencing the norms of even non-consultants. Consulting firms have convinced people that working on oil and gas and the like for ten years is the wisest way to pursue one's eventual dream of fighting AIDS. And whether or not this proves true (and it may), people believe that they won't be as effective as they could be if they haven't done management consulting first. Consulting firms have positioned themselves successfully as having a monopoly on the desire to have impact. One subject shared the story of a highly-selective leadership summit they had attended for students with "non-traditional" backgrounds that weren't considering business at all. At the summit, they heard from various prominent political and social leaders and examined a study on HIV AIDS in Africa. And only at the very end of the summit, did the organizers that all of the speakers had started their careers as management consultants a specific firm and that it was a great training ground to leapfrog over the administrative entry path into NGOs.

The homepage of the BCG website says: "We seek to be agents of change – for our clients, our people, and society." The Bain Web site homepage flashes phrases such as "We navigate by our True North," and "Helping others is part of Bain's DNA." McKinsey & Co. recently launched a "What Matters" section in which they have convened the leading public

and social change agents in the United States (including New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, social entrepreneurs like Blake Mycoskie of Tom's Shoes and impact investors like the Omidyar Network and the Rockefeller Foundation) to discuss social change. The language of these firms reflects what young people today say they most care about. And yet the reality inside these consulting firms is that the focus is the private sector and the bottom line is profits, as one subject put it. Still, a number of people expressed hope that the vast numbers of purpose-driven young people going into consulting will change the profession from within. And yet, as one subject put it, "It's unlikely if there's not desire for it from the top."

A number of students expressed reservations about the influence consulting is having on their cohort. "We're not building anything," one said. And even though we "don't feel ready," there's a lot more we could be doing with our talents than giving them to McKinsey. One student reflected: "My issue with consulting is that, you might go learn, you might get to write some industry reports, do these 3-month, 6-month projects, but you have no actual responsibility at the end of the day. You're not hiring and firing people, until you get to be much more senior. You're not being held to a P&L. So what you're actually learning, these kind of nuggets of information, you're not actually learning to be a manager or a leader. And the other thing is, let's be honest, people get seduced by the money." Another subject who is currently a consultant worried that "It warps people's impressions of who's actually making decisions at the end of the day, and who's actually the operator in the institutions. Because consulting is very infrequently about execution and also are less often around people with varying levels of skill sets, so it gives a bit of a warped perspective of how the world really operates." One (colorfully speaking) subject said:

Very few of us who are at business school are subject matter experts. If we were, there's a good chance we wouldn't be at business school. We're

all generalists to some extent and we're all intellectually curious, otherwise we wouldn't have done as well in school as we have. So this idea that we are going to pigeonhole ourselves if we go into an industry I think is utter bullshit...And I don't really know where it comes from. Again, I think the consulting firms successfully sell it somehow, but I don't think that you learn enough about an industry in a consulting engagement or in a private equity engagement to then be an expert in it by any stretch. And the fact is, we've all spent the last couple of years looking at a huge number of industries and a huge number of firms. So what more are you really going to get to know about yourself or about companies at this stage in your life? Give me a fucking break, we're 30 years old, or close to it for most of us. We're adults, go get a real job.

This cohort has spent a lot of time thinking about what route they should take that will generate the most impact. They also watch each other's choices carefully. Because the majority of those who went into consulting framed it as a "compromise," I wanted to find out what those who didn't go into consulting had in common. I asked respondents to reflect on their peers who had not gone into consulting or who had made explicit choices to do work that more closely reflected their core passions and beliefs. There were six things that came up repeatedly:

First, they opted out of the formal recruiting process at the business schools. As one person put it, "The recruiting at HBS made me realize how much your institutional confines end up funneling you in one direction or another. I would like to think that I came in here and decided to do consulting, but it's amazing how powerful it is and how hard to resist being swept along with the herd to do the most prestigious or meaningful thing, but really with not as much certainty that that's right for you." Many of the students who ended up doing consulting, when asked, said that they thought "it couldn't hurt" to check it out, see if they could get an offer, and decide later. One person reflected on this strategy: "If you start interviewing for summer jobs with consulting, I think you're toast. You're going to get sucked in. Those of us who avoided it, just never even started down that path by-in-large. There might be one exception or two exceptions." Another student discussed why he made

the choice to launch a start-up rather than taking a very lucrative corporate offer. He had been working in the summer for a healthcare software company that had offered him a high-paying executive job, had just received \$120 million in an investment and gave him “amazing management responsibility.” The job offer “passed the brand test” but worried he was “using it that crutch.” He remembered thinking “In that environment you want to be able to say, ‘yeah, it’s legit.’” But he wanted to start his own business. He described his decision: “For me it came down to was, I thought if I’m making excuses now, then I’ll be making excuses for the rest of my life. Because I wasn’t married, I didn’t have kids, I didn’t have any major commitments, and from a financial standpoint, I’m fine. In my case, I was lucky enough to be walking out of school without any debt obligations. And I was like, if I make excuses now, I’ll be doing that for the rest of my life.” So he called the CEO of the company to decline the offer, and explained that he wanted to launch a startup:

What ended up happening was that I told him and he asked what are you going to do from a financial perspective... Then the CEO looked at me and said, ‘Look, I offered you a job because I believe in you, and so if this is what you want to do, I’m behind you. I’m going on a flight tomorrow out of Logan Airport.’ It was like a fairytale, ‘come to the airport and pick up a check.’ It was just surreal... I didn’t have a bank account, it wasn’t incorporated, I didn’t have a place to cash the check! ... So here’s this incredible story of someone believing in you... writing you a check for a company that doesn’t exist... So he became our first investor and it just snowballed from there.

Second, the non-consultants carved out time to think about what they enjoy, like, believe in, and want to spend their time on, as well as what they *don’t* want to spend their time on. One respondent noted: “I just kind of thought about the things that I’m most passionate about, I love doing, and I looked at my wall, I looked at my books, what kind of books had I been reading, what kind of magazines do I enjoy reading, what do I really pick up.”

Third, they had a strong area interest, such as agro-business or healthcare, and a compelling job that they'd spent time finding to get them there.

Fourth, they invested a lot of time in an individual job search and sought out networks of people rather than institutional career resources within their universities (which tended to funnel people into consulting and banking – a phenomenon that should be investigated in a separate study). One subject said:

I think one of the main reasons why I'm interested in it is because it's easy. Right? [Consulting] seems like a very easy next step. I like to think a lot of other opportunities are hidden. I think there is a lot of difficulty in searching out specific roles and responsibilities where perhaps you are able to work on development projects all the time, and you're able to gain the same set of skills, and you're able to be compensated at the same level. There might be those roles out there in industry, for example, with Visa in mobile banking in Rwanda, but I think those are much more difficult to come by, and because they're more difficult to come by, it's easier for people, like me, to go into consulting firms where opportunities are more readily available even if the downside of that is I don't necessarily work on those economic development projects all the time.

They also found their jobs or internships much later in the year than most and were able to handle the unknown, and as one person put it, even though it “stressed everyone else out” along the way. A number of subjects noted that finding a job that truly reflects the joint policy and business element is, in fact, quite challenging:

I think it's a challenge and an opportunity. I think the path we're pursuing is a little bit more in pioneer stage and so I think the idea of an integrated, not private or public, kind of a life that doesn't fit that neat of a dichotomy, ... I think it's still emerging. I think the exciting part is we have an opportunity to shape. I think the problems is that the current structures... isn't quite aligned to the career paths that we'll pursue, and so it becomes a bit more of a choose your own adventure story than a 'go to the informational interview in Aldrich 111 and sign up for company x, y, z'.. it's just not quite that way for a lot of us.

Fifth, the non-consultants had models of people ahead of them doing jobs that they loved (and jobs that the non-consultants themselves were interested in). “My father-in-law, I always thought about him and how much he loves his job. He's an independent consultant,



he's got his Ph.D. in industrial psychology, he's one of the best industrial psychologists in the world. He loves his job, he loves what he does. The guy lives, eats, breathes industrial psychology. And to him, it doesn't really seem so much like work. And so, the way I think about this is like, alright, if I can get to the point to figure out a place, a position, a job, where I'm as passionate about what I do as he is, then I think that puts you in a great place because you're doing something you love, you're making a difference and the money just kind of works itself out usually if you're doing that."

And sixth, in many cases, the non-consultants had a clearer sense of where they wanted to go in the long run. They had vision. These people were both less likely to go into consulting and reported feeling FOMO in much smaller levels. One respondent said, "I'm definitely guided long-term. I mean the issue about economic inequality, especially as it relates to African Americans, is something that really drives me longer term. That's huge to me. If I didn't have that, I don't think I could really see what I wanted to do in the near term. As long as I know where I want to be in the long term, everything else seems to just fall into place." Those who didn't go into consulting are not compromising on pay. They are not taking low-paying non-profit jobs. They have found jobs with comparable salaries or with high expected financial returns in the future.

That said, there were a number of people that, even after long and in-depth job searches, decided that consulting would be the best fit for them. There were a few people who expressed strong enthusiasm for going into or returning to consulting and for whom it fit well with the lifestyle they wanted, the city they wanted, and the type of work and analytics for which they were most suited. A number of respondents said that it was not consulting as a style of work that they found troubling, but rather that it has become the default option, along with the lifestyle it entails, for their peer set rather than one among a

variety of options. Subjects were also quick to note that if in certain cases consulting *was* a passion for someone, then “Who am I to judge?” and that they didn’t see anything wrong with that.

In conclusion, it is too early to tell what will happen to these young leaders or how they will make choices in the future. When asked what they thought the biggest challenge for their cohort was, the most common answer was “to match our ideals with our choices.” There was an acknowledgement of the desire to be prudent, to arm themselves with enough skills, and to make sure that whatever they end up deciding to do, they do so responsibly. But there was also, among a majority of the respondents, an acknowledgement that it wasn’t clear “when enough would be enough.” As one respondent put it:

I think the biggest obstacle I face is the same one I always face which is the tension between letting go and doing something I’m passionate about and following the stable American dream path. Because I know I’m fully capable of achieving. If I always put that ahead when am I going to have time for this other thing I want to do it - have the house, kids, etc. But the reality is you’re always going to want to know more, and always want to achieve. I think that’s the biggest obstacle, being able to say ‘OK that’s enough, let me cut and do this other thing.’

A number of other respondents touched on this question of how one sets aside all the reasons for preserving options and learning more and just decides, fate be damned, that the “time is now”:

We are constantly willing to endure this short-term pain with the sense that it’s in service of a long-term goal. But life is lived in the short term. We almost have this masochistic perspective, ‘I’m going to constantly eat vegetables and don’t worry about happiness. I’m going to put in all this time, it’s going to pay off.’ But some people I talk to are happy and successful. I’m not going to be all naïve to the fact that we’re all super ambitious and there are things we want to do in the world that are big and real, and system-changing. But it starts first with being personally satisfied and secure and personally at peace.

I asked each interviewee about the biggest challenge facing their cohort. The most common answer was complacency. As one respondent said, “I fear we’ll get complacent and

not live up to the potential that we all have,” and that comfort will override anything else. And the hopes for their cohort were the opposite: that they “utilize the potential to solve some big, crazy problems around the world and in the United States....And out of an idea that they have to impact the world in crazy ways- like Salman Khan, refreshing to see, the guy starts from something so small and simple to help his nieces learn math they don’t understand using technology and now 8 million people are watching 10-15 minutes lectures and being engaged they never have been before.”

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*“My core economic theory is pragmatism, figuring out what works.” - President Obama*

*“I look at things with a practical lens... That practical lens is almost the glue or the tension between the Kennedy and the business schools. At Kennedy, I’m frustrated with how things are working (that would be the efficiency lens) and when I’m at business schools I’m frustrated with why things are (and that would be the kind of ethical lens) - it can be hard to look through both of those lenses at the same time” – subject*

## **Part II. Pragmatism and Values: What does this generation believe and what drives them?**

Over the last decade, we have seen the rise to prominence of a new class of hybrid institutions of blended motivation. They are not companies that merely happen to do good or preach social responsibility on the margins. They are not NGOs that use the occasional spreadsheet or metric here and there. They are organizations whose DNA combines the corporate drive for measurable results and impact with the do-gooders’ determination to solve real and urgent human problems. It is perhaps no accident, then, that my second major finding is that, in tandem with this development, there is the emergence of a new psychology among the leadership class. This group is genuinely agnostic among the private, public and social sectors, imagining themselves working in all three over the course of a lifetime, and drawing on the lenses and tactics of all of them while standing in any.

The defining ideology of this cohort is pragmatism. The group values impact and “what works” and is not stuck on where it comes from or the means with which things are done. That said, one of the most common fears identified by this cohort is that it is “without values,” without mooring, without any firm non-negotiables. Perhaps then it is also not surprising that this cohort craves community and roots. And, still values marriage as

something that is “important” or “very important.” Furthermore, while there is a reduction in the role of ideology around the public and private sectors, the majority of the cohort expects to go into the private sector and later on weave in and out of the social sector. The public sector was lowest on the priority list, and while a few interviewees talked about running for office, they tended to be non-Americans planning on returning home. The majority only imagined joining the public sector at a high level, much later in life, and often only if they won a political appointment.

Philosophical pragmatism guides this generation in a number of ways. First, it is less beholden to ideology and more focused on impact and “what works.” Many subjects mentioned a desire to “move the needle” on a major issue and an interest in working on systemic change. When asked if they considered themselves “religious, or guided by a personal faith,” the majority of respondents said no. When asked what aspects of work they would most value over the course of their career, it was “impact.” And a number of participants also said it was very important to them that their impact be direct and tangible, “something they can see.” “I used to be really interested in health care but I never knew if what I was doing mattered.” Another made a similar point this way:

I think for me it's always been something where I can see a tangible result of helping someone, so whether it's being at work and doing something as simple as helping somebody with a Power Point presentation because they're not good with Power Point, or something even greater, working in a hospital and seeing that the work that I'm doing is helping people get better. Those sort of problems are the ones I'm most attracted to.

This cohort is, as a 2007 study of 2,000 young people aged 18 to 29, conducted by Gerstein Agne Strategic Communications, found, “post-ideological and post-partisan.” Most everyone wanted to make some kind of impact, even though, as one person put it, they “don’t know what big impact means.” Another person said, “I think everyone’s a little bit schizophrenic, everybody wants to be a do-gooder and everyone wants to have a big social impact but it’s

difficult to define what you actually want to do and it's difficult to actually feel deep down inside that you actually are doing something good and you're not just spinning your wheels."

Second, along with this focus on "what works," there are fewer boundaries among the public, private and social sectors. The majority of respondents expected to move in and out of all three over the course of a lifetime, but wanted to work wherever they thought they would have the most impact. "It's not as important as the question you asked," one subject said. "What is the process we're trying to solve, and what platform allows me to bring more resources to bear in order to do it affectively?" Another person put it thus: "For me, sectoral definitions are increasingly obsolete...most entities are a hybrid (whether they officially recognize it or not)." She continued, "I don't really care what sector my future work is in as long as I feel like that overall positive public impact is being had." There is a strong focus on the problem at hand and a desire to understand all the levers available to use in order to craft a solution: "I'm agnostic of whether it's private sector, public sector, I don't really care. It's more what are the things that I'm uniquely willing and able to do that can improve the lives of the poor?" This is a notable shift from earlier generations that tended to have stronger beliefs about the respective merits of the private and public sectors. A number of respondents acknowledged that this is a relatively new "lens" and that they have had trouble identifying jobs that straddle these multiple sectors. One interviewee said that finding jobs that reflect their values will be the hardest challenge for this cohort.

That said, despite a growing focus on cross-sector solutions, there are limits to the appetite for outright public service in this cohort. Despite being Dual Degrees, over 90 percent expect to work in the private sector, and only later turn to the social sector, and even less so, the public sector. Of the respondents, less than 20% professed a strong interest in turning to public service, with the majority citing rising polarization and a "disgust with

politics” as reasons they planned to stay away: “I think of private and social, more private than social, but not public.” She continued: “When I look at the people who have a high degree of influence, the vast majority of them are private sector people who have connections and money. I don’t think someone who chooses a career in non-profit ends up having as much influence as you would think they would, for example. As for the public sector? I just hate politics, I really hate it. It makes me sick, so I have no desire to be in the public sector.” The only students who said they planned on serving their country for the bulk of their careers were international students planning to return to their home country and run for elected office or serve in a ministry. And, there were of course exceptions to the rule. One respondent noted that he would “weave back and forth” between the sectors every few years, but saw the most potential in a public-sector role, because “I think we talk about government as this big abstract thing. But we are the government, we are the people who are our government. I think the scale and capacity is almost an overarching opportunity to create a lot of the changes we want to make. Ultimately I felt that that’s where I can my greatest contribution.” Yet, for the most part, there is a wariness of politics among these Dual Degrees, who are not entering into government and not planning to anytime soon.

Third, there has been a depoliticization of public problems in this cohort. Problems, for the most part, are treated as technical in nature. One recent article in the *New York Times* criticized the field of social enterprise and social entrepreneurs for finding workarounds and allowing itself to “take the holes of the system as a given and do their best to plug the leaks.”<sup>6</sup> Another piece talked about the way consultants view themselves and the impact that a “consultant nation” is having even on the presidential candidates, to frame themselves “as

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<sup>6</sup> Giridharadas, Anand, “Real Change Requires Politics.” *New York Times*, July 15, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/16/us/16iht-currents16.html>.

people who view the world as it really is and can devise win-win solutions for its problems.”<sup>7</sup> And yet a number of respondents reported having a lens of “justice” or “social justice” as another of their primary lenses.

Fourth, there is a growing belief that one can do “well and good” at the same time. There is much talk about the impact economy and social venture funds these days, and what we are seeing is perhaps an impact psychology to match the impact economy, in which people are less motivated by profit versus purpose, and are instead agnostically interested in both. They are looking for purpose, but they also want to make money and be intellectually challenged. The 2008 Student Poll and CIRP’s Freshman Survey found that it’s a myth that “student interest in ‘making a contribution to society’ is on the rise while interest in ‘having lots of money’ is declining.” Rather, it found that “being financially well off” remains high on the priority list and at levels comparable to previous generations. My interviews reflected the same phenomenon. These participants care both about making money and about having an impact and making a difference, and don’t see any contradiction. There is an expectation that you can work in different sectors at different points in your life, as well as a growing sense that places that focus on “doing good” need to pay well in order to get the best talent. One person described the dual values of “hard work and making it for yourself” and “justice and human rights.” She described how she had seen her parents “struggle” and “we were very much middle class.” She continued: “I always felt very strongly that in my generation, I would be better off than my parents and that’s always been very important to me.” She explained, “When it came to my professional career I was driven more by the first value, of I’m going to be strong and I’m going to make it and I’m going to have a lot more than my parents had.” And she chooses to express her passion for justice issues through heavy

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<sup>7</sup> Leonhardt, David, “Consultant Nation,” The New York Times, December 20, 2011.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/sunday-review/consultant-nation.html?pagewanted=all>



involvement in non-profit organizations on the side. She noted that a “a very high percentage” of this cohort are immigrants or children of immigrants and “a lot of them are the first in their family to really make it so to speak,” and tend to feel “this tension between following the traditional corporate path versus the social impact problem.” Most respondents expected they would make the most money (in the range of \$300,000 to 500,000 per year) in their thirties and forties, and then the amount would decrease as they entered the social and public sectors.

I wanted to understand the causes of this psychology of impact, and so I asked each subject “whether they felt pressure to make a difference in the world, and if so, whether they thought they felt more pressure than their parents or grandparents to do the same.” Ninety-five percent said they feel a pressure to “make a difference in the world,” but mostly said that it was an internal pressure, not one from the outside. The majority perceived themselves to feel more pressure than their parents or grandparents did. There were a few exceptions, including those whose parents’ were involved in the political activism of the 1960s and ’70s and another whose grandfather served in World War II. For the most part, this cohort feels a pressure to make a difference in the world, both as an “obligation” given how much has been invested in them, and because, as one person put it, “it’s just something you do.” She talked about her parents’ full belief in her and “the very empowering environments I’ve been in school.” She said: “Once you feel capable, it feels like a necessity. And ‘burden’ is kind of the wrong word for how I feel about it. It’s very similar to how my family treats family responsibilities - it’s just something you do. It’s like, how can you not?” She continued: “It’s something that matters, it’s part of living a full life. And so if I’m capable of doing it, it’s not just that I would feel guilty if I didn’t, it just doesn’t seem like the way to live.” She said her parents had a “very narrow view of what it meant to make a difference in the world, or

perhaps their view has narrowed over time. Their view has definitely narrowed to me – so that the way they make a positive difference in the world is through raising a child, who not only would make a difference, but who will live their life morally and rightly and will be a good human. It's not even about whether or not I would be successful or make a difference in the big wide world, but to be a good human being.” She said that both of her parents were family-focused and “just thinking about survival when you're one of eight” and “focused on doing what you need to do for the family, and the family was the unit of analysis.”

Another respondent spoke of the difference between his and his parents' ideas of making a difference in the world:

My grandparents moved from a young age from Lithuania to South Africa, and I think for them, making a difference in the world is about their family and securing their jobs and opportunities that can provide comforts to their families and maybe the people around them. And I think my parents were somewhat similar, in that the choice to move to America was very much a family-centric decision of wanting to ensure that their children lived in a safe environment that provided them with opportunities. I think my parents would like to think that my sister and I are now given the opportunity to make an impact in the world and I think that's very motivating to them by providing us an opportunity by something we wouldn't otherwise have.

He also described a differing scale of impact: “For my Dad, it would be his patients, for me it's providing health care to benefit the largest amount of people.”

Story after story, these young people talked about parents and grandparents who had made the decision to move across the world to make a home in a foreign land so that their children could have better opportunities:

My grandparents fled communist China and lost everything and started over, and my parents moved fairly poor to America and so I just don't think any of them had a conception of contributing to the public good because it was a lot of work for themselves to build what they wanted to build, and civic engagement and responsibility, beyond helping family and friends, beyond direct local community, wasn't something they talk about or thought about.

Answers to this question suggested another common feature of this cohort: not only

are many first or second-generation immigrants, but they have also come from lower- to middle-class backgrounds in many cases. A number of them talked about jobs they had in high school including “flipping burgers” at a snack bar, doing a paper route, working at McDonalds. Very few came from inherited wealth. Over 70% of respondents attended public school up until college and less than 10% attended private school for the entire length of their schooling. (However, the vast majority attended a private university). One person said: “I definitely feel pressure, much more than my parents. As a caveat, I think my parents had a lot more to worry about; my mom was raising five kids as a single mother making \$9/hour. I think it’s a privilege to care about the world, I don’t think that was the expectation of the generation before us.” Another thing that separates this generation of do-gooders from their parents is an “awareness of what’s going on in the world.” One respondent said: “I have taught in communities where I had students who were in fifth grade but couldn’t read, and I know that my privilege presents me with some kind of obligation to do something about the world.” Whereas with his parents, despite growing up in the 1960s and ’70s, “there still was a way to be insulated that I just don’t have.” He said that, especially because of the route he’s chosen, to live in low-income communities and go to the Kennedy School, “where some of these social problems are just ones you can’t ignore and so that places me in a position where if I do ignore them, I’m kind of deliberately denying something that I know is out there for me to solve.” He added, speaking of his parents: “I don’t think they were deliberately denying anything. I think they were just living their lives, doing the best they could for their families. These ideas weren’t presented to them in a way that they could even envision themselves solving. At least for me, I can envision myself solving some pieces of the problems that face our world today.”

A number of people told me about early moments of seeing “how my cousins lived”

so differently than they did, because of the seemingly trivial fact of money. Others shared experiences of seeing another country or way of interacting that heavily influenced their desire to work on the problems of others. One person described a moment in his life when he saw how people in Myanmar were risking their lives and wondered what he would do in the same position:

I got heavily involved in the human rights movement in Burma and through that learned about Aung San Suu Kyi, and because of my work, I traveled to Yangon, and it was a very small act, but I brought cell phones to the opposition, and met them at a bar to give a cell phone and that gave me an opportunity to chat with them, find out what was going on, how they saw their lives, the work they were doing. And I asked him, "Why do you continue to do what you do?" He'd been in prison for a dozen years, beaten severely. With a super straight face, he said, "What else would I do with my life?" It was a pretty impactful moment and it got me thinking about what would I do with my life and this guy was in the trenches, could I sit there and do civil disobedience, if someone was beating me with a whip? How would I think about it? Who would I serve, myself or my country? And these individuals were all about serving their country, it was pretty inspiring, and it was pretty impactful.

Finally, there was a sense among a number of students of, "Why would I put myself through all this education if I'm just going to collect a paycheck and stay home watch TV everyday?"

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However, despite – or perhaps because of – this committed pragmatism, there is an anxiety among this cohort that they are without anchors, without fixed values to guide them. One respondent said, "I think my fear is that they're unmoored from a values perspective." He expanded thus: "I see a lot of people who are either doing what they're doing, but they wouldn't be able to answer why they're doing that. Obviously I'm more in tune with the joint degrees, and I'm a little bit scared of people who are ambitious but not knowing why

they're ambitious, so they want to be successful but don't know why. I think that's very dangerous. They've expended a lot of effort but to what end?" Building on the earlier point about "optimizing," a number of people mentioned that they were afraid that there were no arbiters to judge whether something was inherently right or wrong. They worried that they and their peers would choose the wrong variable to organize around. There was an acknowledgement that one should first determine what's important, and then organize your life around those priorities. But there was less confidence that their generation (or they) would end up choosing the right priorities if it was left completely to them. One subject said that we "just don't really understand what makes us happy." A number of respondents mentioned a case that they had read about the HBS Class of 1973 and a look back on its members' lives over 25 years. One subject said, "These people had focused too much on their jobs, who had lost track of their kids or had never decided what they wanted to do and sort of drifted between positions and never had a rationale." One person reflected on his classmates' reactions to the case with puzzlement:

It was amazing to me how many members of my class were defining their purpose and their values and their goals entirely around career and assuming that that would be the first thing that they then optimized against. And I am afraid about that because I think that it's not about personal satisfaction, it's about the breadth of your view on the world and what it blinds you to if you're only looking at your own career, the decisions that it prompts you to make, and collectively, if we're all making those decisions, what the quality of our society will be, what the quality of our lives our children's lives will be.

Some cited a fear that their generation would end up being too "individualistic." One person said, "There's a whole bunch of really serious problems that if we all are just kind of self-maximizing are going to lead to really really really big problems... and I think it's a very hard thing to do and I don't think other generations have been good at doing that and when those social fabrics fray it's hard to knit them back together...it does worry me that there's a lack

of sense of obligation to each other.” Another person said that their biggest fear for their generation, “since we grew up during a relatively peaceful time with abundance,” is that they “will not have the appetite to do the hard but necessary things, that they will shun their global responsibility and fall into hedonism and self-service.” He continues: “Increasingly, I see our generation withdrawing from the sphere of public responsibility and seeking the world of private privilege.” He wondered when his generation will take responsibility for the “major challenges we face” and seek to solve them.

While the majority of people reported not being religious or guided by a personal faith, a number talked about being “spiritual” and roughly 10 percent of respondents described themselves as practicing Christians. Those subjects cited faith as an important source of values. One respondent discussed the difficulty discussing things like purpose and values with classmates when they don’t share a common language or body of assumptions:

It is harder to have some of these conversations with people who don’t come from some sort of faith background, because you’re not always used to talking about issues of meaning, or if they are, they may be using a different vocabulary, or it’s just sometimes harder to get to that level. So I often find that outside of the religious people I talk to, I feel like the lens is much more of a kind of ‘humanist’, I don’t even know if I’m using that word appropriately, kind of ‘What do we have in front of us?’, the academic body of knowledge, the here and now, rather than kind of more, even stepping back further, we have all this knowledge, but who are we? Why are we here? What is the significance of all this?

A number of my subjects expressed fear about losing their own way at some point. When asked about the aspects of his life that he imagines will be most important to him in 40 years, one respondent said that he “makes a difference” and “don’t mess up – not in a professional sense, but in the sense of losing my way.” He added: “I’ve been fascinated by all this insider trading stuff where Rajat Gupta, the former head of McKinsey who was indicted, was very well regarded in the firm...and I gotta imagine he did a lot of good stuff in his professional life, and in listening to some of the tapes, at some point this guy lost his way,

and I can't be naïve enough to say that after 40 years, which is more than twice as much as I've lived before, that that couldn't happen to me."

Perhaps it is then not surprising that this cohort, despite a peripatetic lifestyle, craves communities and roots. Although it is typical for members to have traveled to an average of 20 countries or more and common to have lived outside their home countries for two years or more, when asked how often they expected to move and which countries they would spend the majority of their lives in, one answer came back again and again: America. For the American students particularly, despite being passionate about international development or other global issues, the world is something to dabble in, not commit to. The vast majority of these students, despite shifting geopolitics and having traveled to so many countries in their young lives, see the majority of their lives still working, living and raising a family in the United States. "Probably the majority of my life still will have been spent in the US, because that's where my family is, it's just harder with kids to move them around, and they can get a good education here, and I've sort of realized I'm American at the end of the day. This is my home where most of the people I love are." But he added that he could imagine having a few "five-year stints" abroad: "My guess is they would be in the Middle East or Africa, and any place I move I don't want to spend less than five years, because I don't think you make a great impact in less than five years because it takes so long to learn ropes." Another person said:

I will have spent I suspect majority of my life here in the US, I feel a strong sense of being American and care deeply about the country, and want to be part of remaking it and rebuilding it at a very difficult time that we're actually in. I hope to spend time traveling quite a bit and hopefully living abroad, and understanding and appreciating different ways of living life which hopefully strengthen America.

For the most part, those who differed were nationals of other countries who were planning on returning home – reflecting the same desire as the Americans to be home. For

those who spoke of remaining in America, the most common cities in their future plans were Washington D.C., New York and San Francisco. As one interviewee put it: “I think that I will probably work in densely populated areas, like meaning, on the coast...I will probably be in Seattle, San Francisco, LA, or like Boston, New York, DC-kinda person. I just don’t see myself going and living in like, Indianapolis, part of that is a cultural thing too for me. I think I totally feel like a guest in those environments.” Every respondent expressed a desire to live abroad for a short period of time, and despite being admittedly “opportunistic” in other realms of their lives, there was not an explicit desire to work in the fastest-growing economies or the BRIC countries specifically. The most common answer was Africa, and there were also a number of people who expressed an interest in living in Europe for a period of time (London, Rome, and Paris) – but, again, more to fulfill a craving rather than a lifestyle. A 2008 PriceWaterhouseCoopers study found that “Millennials expect job mobility and want the opportunity to experience overseas assignments – 80 percent would like to work abroad and 70 percent expect to use other languages during their career.” One thing I found, however, is that they want to work abroad for “stints” of time, and not make their lives somewhere else. This is an important distinction. Most of these people see themselves settling into one or two communities and raising a family: “I will have lived in the same place, that will be in the United States, maybe with a few stints overseas. I could see spending a year in the developing country a year or two, sure, but realistically over the course of 40 years, at least 35 hopefully will be in one community.” This cohort craves community and a number of respondents expressed the fear of a loss of place-based community and its effect on social impact:

I don’t know if this is clouded by where I am right now, I fear the loss of community, we all have this more global macro community. I fear the sense of an individual community, of laying down roots, of place-based community. I think place-based communities are important- the land that you’re from means a lot and I fear that we might lost some of that identity and what it



means to build in a place because there's no substitute for just being in person with someone. And I think we have so many ways to keep in touch and keep in contact and make a difference from afar. I can log on to my Kiva account and support a coffee grower in Nicaragua but I fear we might outsource change-making or break down the chain so much and make it so successful that we lose that real person-to-person interaction that is the underpinning of change.

Additionally, despite decreasing rates of marriage (only 44 percent of young adults aged 24 to 35 are married today), marriage and getting married are still important to this group. When asked how important "getting married" was to them, the vast majority said "somewhat important" or "very important" and over 80 percent of the respondents came from parents who were still married. Yet, a number of them said, in the words of one, that "the act of getting married, quite frankly, is not that important, but the act of having a family is important." There was a sense among a number of respondents that more than the legal status or the tradition of getting married, they are more focused on finding the right partner. One respondent said, "Traditionally getting married is not important to me," but that having a partner is. There were also some that said marriage is less important than partnership:

Finding a partner that I can share my life with is very important to me, getting married to that partner would be nice but is not the goal. Because of the types of friendships I have, I think I'm well-suited to a one-on-one partnership, but the fact of the partner is not as important as it being the *right* partner. So I would much rather find lots of partners, in my friends, in my family, in an adopted child, in a lot of different people in my life that were right, than to just find a partner. I'd much rather be alone than just with any partner, or even with a partner that's not just *right* for me.

And, finally, there were a number of women who said that while it was important to them, marriage was something that they couldn't control, and so they have "decoupled" it in their minds from having a child. One said that, when she realized she could decouple these categories, she "felt a lot less stressed." Another respondent said, "Children are very important for me. It's less important for me to give birth to children than to have children, and it's independent of marriage for me. So I would adopt a child if I came to a certain point, not even that far of a point, not even as a last resort, but if I came to a point where I really

wanted to have a child and I was ready for that, I would start the adoption process kind of independent of whether I had a husband or a male life partner to raise a child with me.” But, unlike the metaphorical bra-burners of the 1960s and 70s, these are not women who are questioning the fundamental institution of marriage. Rather, they are preparing themselves for the possibility that it may not happen for them.

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Members of this cohort see themselves as being able to move fluidly among the roles of regulator, producer, politician, inventor, activist, observer, consumer and citizen, and see no contradictions among those roles. The big fear was that they wouldn’t actually choose jobs that match their ideals. There was a lot of discussion about money, how much was enough, and whether or when they’ll ever feel that they have enough. One person shared that she had made a pact with one of her “jointee friends” that she thought she needed \$100,000 a year to live and that everything she made above that she would use for “societal gain.” She discussed her friends’ various responses to this idea, including a discussion about whether or not the amount she set was realistic. Her point was to set an amount now, so that you don’t get sucked in later.

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### **Part III: Ambivalence and Empathy: What is the hallmark of this cohort's leadership style?**

My third area of investigation was the leadership style of this cohort. At a time of global transition, I wanted to explore the how members of this cohort think about what it means to be a leader. On this score, three themes stuck out: First, this cohort places a high value on the role of empathy as a leadership attribute. They value seeing both sides of an issue and trying to understand where the other person is coming from. Second, a majority talked about the power of being the engine behind the scenes, rather than right out front. Third, they crave community and roots. The majority identified getting married as being either “somewhat important” or “very important,” and despite having worked abroad and visited an average of 20 countries each (with the group low being 10 and high in the 50s), these young people, for the most part, expect to spend most of their lives in the United States.

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Globalization is elevating a new set of leadership attributes: from certitude and conviction to empathy and ability to see both sides (think President Obama rather than General Patton), with all the good and bad that it entails. There is a high value placed on empathy and being able to see things from another's perspective. The most common word that came up when they were asked to describe themselves was “empathetic” or having to do with “seeing from multiple perspectives.” They also value being fundamentally open and “curious.” One person described their first lens as seeing from someone else's lens. Another person described his primary lens as “trying to understand people's backgrounds and what's

going on in their lives...what kind of drives them and makes them tick.”

Another word that came up again and again was “multi-faceted.” As one person put it, “It leads to some confusion, even this late in life. At this point, I think I’m kind of confused about my identity because of all the facets, coming to the grips with the privileged kid I’ve been since I was 18 versus the underprivileged kid I was before.” And there’s a strong collective value in being multi-faceted. One respondent, after saying that his main lenses to see the world were “religious” and “economic,” continued: “Gosh, that makes me seem really non-dimensional. The first lens is quite multi-faceted, there’s definitely a poverty emphasis in the Bible, which helps me interpret a lot of what I see and how I engage with the world, and both professionally and personally how I engage with other people, there’s a family lens, most significantly, taking decisions or views in the world.” The majority of this cohort grew up in ways that required having many lenses: About 15 percent of the interviewees are bi-racial; close to two-thirds grew up in a place in which they were an ethnic minority in their school, including a white student who attended a majority African-American school; over 60% are immigrants or children of immigrants. When asked what lenses he sees with, one respondent said:

I mean, there’s so many selves that we have, anywhere from the biggest I used to was being on both sides of the track, the Hispanic side of me and the white side. In my hometown, I felt so much more white, definitely embraced my white family more. When I got to college, I felt so much more Hispanic and also felt the lens of a poor kid with, I guess you could say, a chip on my shoulder. I say it’s a weird question because it changes so much over time. Right now I don’t feel like the poor kid anymore, I feel like a fairly privileged kid, someone who knows what it was like, an empathetic lens, and not a lens that you’re going through it. I think I also look through the lens of someone who has seen a lot, having lived internationally and been a foreigner and known a lot of foreigners when I’m not the foreigners, whose worked with kids, worked with corporations, I guess it’s one lens but multi-faceted.

Another subject said that her lens is one that’s in “opposition to whatever lenses are around me.” When with her American side, she defends non-Americans, at the business school when someone says that government should stay out of business she talks about how

government does a lot; when working in the government, she sees the value of the way “things are done in the private sector.”

It is perhaps not surprising, given that these are all people that self-selected into a Dual Degree, that they would value multiple lenses. As one respondent said, “The approach in business towards government is often ‘oh the regulations’ or ‘oh the taxes,’ and you don’t see the benefits...how it actually works or impacts people. I didn’t want that kind of false cacophony but have both in the same head.” Another person described how he was “always frustrated when one side would misunderstand the motives of the other side and assume they had all the answers or solutions.” This sense of being multi-faceted also attracts this cohort to being most interested in problems that are “complex.” “Complexity” was the most cited word among this cohort when asked to describe problems that they were interested in. As one subject put it: “I’d say problems that have multiple aspects to them, so complex problems,” that require multiple disciplines to solve.

The majority of respondents talked about problems that most interested them as being “ones without easy answers,” requiring multiple lenses and viewpoints to address. One respondent described the most attractive problems as involving certain kinds of human feelings:

It comes down to people often. I was going to start by having some sort of set of problems like education, or war, and I don't know, I think a lot of those problems that take the form of different industry buckets I could set up are actually rooted in much deeper things. So, how people feel: the feeling of marginalization, the feeling of hopelessness, or conversely, what creates the feeling of self-worth? if there are instances when we have an empathy gap, and this could be on the most micro-level of just me and another person or it could be on an entire world-level. I think those core feelings are the types of, if you could call them problems, that I find most interesting.

Now, the flip side of this focus on empathy is that while they are seeking to understand, to listen and learn, this cohort is also less likely to draw lines in the sand, to stand clearly for what they believe or don't. One respondent reflected on the Occupy Wall Street protest:

I see it in a lot of Dual Degrees. I don't think you get through a program where you're forced to look at a number of different perspectives and come out of that as a grand unifying perspective. You have to recognize that different people are fundamentally opposed to each other because of this or that value or interest that they hold at a particular time. For example, on Facebook now, I'm getting a lot of the 99 percent and 1 percent stuff, I have friends from Sloan on Wall Street who post "stupid lazy 99 percent sitting on the street on my tax bill" and I have the other friends who are totally supportive of it, studying it, finding ways to help it. It's a very divisive thing, and I don't think you can reconcile them, I see both and I'm not necessarily either one. I find myself not being able to pick a side because I know both sides. It makes it difficult to see black or white.

Another noted, "It comes down to an over-analysis of things, you can look at things from so many angles, and yet I have friends who look at things through narrow lens but move faster."

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Second, influence increasingly comes from behind. There is a rising popularity of the role of the coach or the engine, instead of being the one right in front. When asked what they thought was the best way to have influence, a number of people mentioned "trust" and

having the ear of a decision maker. To be sure, these answers may have changed were the question framed around “impact” rather than influence. As one respondent put it, she thinks of influence more as “shaping debates and ideas” and impact as “actually changing things that are happening in the real world.” That said, there was an increasing focus on the role of a manager transforming from “someone who manages five people” to more of a coach – someone who brings out the best in others. One person said that they thought their most successful moments in their career would be “inspiring somebody that I worked for, an individual, you know, like the moment of looking into a mentee’s eyes and seeing them inspired, seeing them find what’s right for them and feeling like I played a role in that.” A number of others mentioned the power wielded behind the scenes, and mentioned Barack Obama’s transition leader John Podesta as an example of a “shadow force.” One subject said, “I think there are a lot of ways to have influence. Suited to my personality is behind the scenes.” Her experience was that there is a great amount of power wielded behind the scenes “if you know who to talk to and how to build consensus.” There was also a strong focus on informal authority. One respondent identified that as one of the things she most learned from consulting: “In the capacity of an analyst you don’t have formal authority... all the impact you have is based on the ability of how much you can persuade someone else to do it.” And it was that experience that gave her courage to go to Africa and do the same work in a very different context. She said, “because you don’t really have informal authority (in Africa) someone knows you’re going to go away, and it wouldn’t have happened if we couldn’t get the government to give approval to the factory.” Finally, a number of people discussed the importance of influencing and mentoring others: “I would like, at the end of those 40 years, to be able to point to three to five other individuals who have done extraordinary things and say I played a fundamental role in getting them there.”

In an age of intractable common problems, there was a focus on the importance of well-developed emotional intelligence and the growing power to persuade (with technical skills being a basic threshold). The words “convener,” “curator,” and “facilitator” came up a number of times. One person said, “The primary role [of a manager] will be much more of a convener and an interpreter than a ‘manager’ in the classic sense of the word.” He described the future of influence thus: “being able to bring together disparate parties that are relevant for that particular question and guiding their creative friction and interpreting it in ways that are not apparent to any of the individual parties.” There was a focus on the power of inspiring, helping and motivating others as the best form of success.

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This cohort is a responsible group. They are a combination of earnest and optimistic, and truly want to do not only what works, but what makes sense and aligns from multiple (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives. For the most part, they want to move beyond politics, and despite a stated interest in global issues and a transition into a multipolar world, they have deep ties to the United States and want to settle into one community. Despite the tendency to move away from the political, they want to lead and to do so by bringing together different people and playing roles of conveners, facilitators and bridges. They also, compared to their parents’ generation, are relatively conservative from the perspective of lifestyle: they have no doubts about wanting marriage and children. Despite being relatively more ambitious than their parents and wanting to pursue things on a



“different scale,” they also want to have an intact home and family life. In fact, this duality is one of the biggest challenges that a number of the interviewees identified for their cohort. But, as one person put it, “I’m hoping to optimize on my career, and that the rest will just work itself out.”

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*“We’ve been given these great opportunities, these great fellowships, wonderful access to learning, and the motto of both the Kennedy School and the Business School is around what change you can make and what sort of a difference you make in the world, and...you kind of are publically stating your commitment to do something more than just leading your life.” - subject*

We can choose our cities, our jobs, our lifestyles, without doing any harm to others. We can pick up and move to Beijing, or New Delhi, or, for the latest thrill, Nairobi. More of us are bi-racial or tri-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious, highly educated, and more mobile than any generation of our ancestors. We are increasingly the generation of freedom, of “multiple truths,” of non-judgment, of both-and. Many in the rising global elite come from solidly middle class backgrounds and are the first generation in their families to have the luxury to chase their dreams with themselves in mind, rather than the immediate need to raise a family. The most privileged of our generation have benefited from excellent educations, involved parents, and ambitious spirits. We’ve been called Meritocrats, Organization Kids, and Tribal Workers. Our larger demographic has been called Generation Me, Generation Y, Millennials, the Boomerang Generation and Trophy Kids. We have

endless choice and opportunity and are terrified of closing doors or missing an opportunity. We're plugged in, overprogrammed, and adrenaline-packed. We're maintainers. For the most part, we want to be on the inside of powerful organizations, not overthrow them.

We try not to risk too much of ourselves. The first of the Millennials turn 30 this year, and they have a distinct new ethos. But don't expect to see this specific cohort for another decade or two. They aren't in front right now and don't want to be. Despite a more global mindset, they are distinctly wanting to nest and stay in their home country, with a hesitant foot in the world. Ambivalence defines this cohort, and it's unclear where that leaves us in the future. In a time of crises around the world, this cohort values seeing things from multiple perspectives, and they are less likely to focus on a future direction, but rather to lead from the back and hope that technical solutions can solve the major problems. So what does this all mean?

We don't suffer from a talent deficit. But we might well suffer from a vision deficit with this group. In a time when we need vision urgently, we don't seem to have enough of it. My interviews with this group suggested that the reason they're not coming up with deep and bold visions is their desire to preserve optionality. We can see in front of us, but we're not spending time doing so. We are asking the wrong questions. Rather than "What do you want to achieve?" we should be asking "What kind of world do you want to create?" Fear of not being successful makes us more risk-averse, and so we're going into consulting as the default option. The most common fear among this cohort was "not being able to fulfill the full potential that I have" and "not doing enough." And this cohort is highly self-aware, and will be the first to admit that they are not going straight into finding solutions:

I would say a consistent challenge that faces us, is how to authentically deliver on our idealism to whatever degree we have it. How to make this choice that I'm talking about well, in terms of, if you're not doing immediately and always the thing that you passionately feel is the best

thing you could be doing, how you value whatever you've lost there, how you value that trade-off is a real challenge

Most individuals admitted to suffering from this question themselves:

It's more something that comes up every now and again, it's an internal demon I face when something doesn't go well. I think a lot of it is perhaps insecurity when I feel what have I actually accomplished with my life so far. I'm almost 30, time is running out. Do I have time to use my knowledge and resources spent on me? If I aggregate everything, it's probably going to be millions of dollars that everyone is going to spend on me. Have I been able to turn that into something productive? Thus far no.

Another person shared that his biggest fear was that "I've done all this training so far, ten years from now I haven't made much of an impact on finance at all." A number of people also mentioned personal fears (not having enough time with family and friends being among the principal anxieties).

A danger, and an opportunity, for this cohort and this generation more generally is that its members are highly peer-motivated. One recent study found that 54 percent of Millennials prefer to make decisions at work by consensus. Another 2010 study conducted by Edelman, a global public relations firm, based on interviews with 3,000 millennial women, found that they are "revising the traditional mentorship model to better fit their needs and lives, and to reflect the current realities of technology. Their focus is on trading advice and learning from their peers rather than the traditional figure of an older, wiser, more experienced mentor." As one of my respondents explained it:

In my life, I think [peer-group mentors] are huge because there's a big gap between the world I live in and the world my parents live in, and so my parents can't actually offer me advice, or don't feel that they can offer me advice... and they feel I live in a different world. And they're proud that I live in a different world, they've worked really hard to give me that broader horizon, but they also feel ill-equipped to give me advice about it now. And so a huge amount of my advice, council, even mentorship comes from other people my own age. And some of it is the blind leading the blind and kind of figuring it out together, because a lot of the things that our generation is dealing with in terms of our career and flexibility and mobility feels very new, feels like that there's not a model out there,

especially for women. And the group of peers that I have have a huge range of life experience and I feel comfortable turning to them to ask advice.

This cohort, more than most, lives staring in a social mirror. I was struck by how similar the experiences and decision-making processes were among this cohort. They share many of the same ambitions and many of the same fears. As one of the respondents reflected as he thought about the common challenges facing himself and his cohort: “It all kind of rhymes.” This so called “peer effect” is dangerous because behavior is contagious. They are each keeping close tabs on decisions of the others and have a strong respect for one another. Many of them talked about how much they value their cohort and feel a sense of belonging because of the common experience and values:

Even now among this sea of people, it's kind of like seeing your brother and sister, it's kind of like the look, even though I've met a lot of people, there's something here, we chose to be both programs because there's certain values that we share, I think my value alignment is stronger as a set of people in a program, that's a really cool feeling,

Another said: “It’s genuinely a common thing at their core that they’re good people... it’s so hard to look at anyone in our cohort and be like, ‘That’s just not a good person,’ you know? Someone I would trust with anything from the keys to my house to the people in my family...maybe it’s the combination of the optimism and wanting to have impact, you just know they’re coming from the right place.”

And, if they all continue to be risk-averse and hedge their bets, it’s likely to continue. However, they are also each other’s best forms of accountability. One respondent, as described earlier, proposed a pact to keep her peers focused on meaningful work; a number of others mentioned a Leadership Development Group they created that speaks on the phone once a month to “ask the tough questions” and “hold each other accountable.” As one person leaps out to make a courageous choice, it’s likely she will have an effect on the

rest of the cohort.

When you've always done the right thing, and we talked about this a lot in our leadership development group, the weighted expectations on what you are to achieve only get bigger and bigger with each success, and so meeting those expectations becomes a negative burden. And so altering from your stated goals or doing something a lot more risky, and if you're the kind of person who's always followed the rules and gone to good universities, you're likely the kind of person who is risk averse and who likes structure and you've gotten ahead by playing by the rules. And so I know I've found it challenging to not play by the rules, and I think that's something we're all working on, to now suddenly allow ourselves to take risks knowing that we have these huge safety nets. And that if we don't actually take risks, then who really does?

## APPENDIX I

### Background questions:

1. Where were you born?
2. What nationality are you? What's your citizenship?
3. What is your racial/ethnic background?
4. What year were you born in?
5. Please list all the places you've lived, and the length of time and ages for which you were there
6. Please describe all the jobs you've held and what location
7. How did your parents meet? Are they still married to each other or divorced?
8. What languages do you speak?
9. How many countries have you been to in your life?
10. Growing up, did you go to public school, private school, or a mix?
12. What is your religious background? Do you consider yourself religious or guided by a personal faith?
13. Growing up, how did you learn your values? If not a personal faith, what guides you? How do you make decisions?

### Questions on identity/lenses:

1. Where do you consider yourself being "from"?
2. What "lenses" do you consider yourself to see with?
3. What kinds of problems most interest you?
4. If somebody asked you to use three words to describe yourself, what would they be?
5. If somebody asked you to use three words to describe your cohort of dual degrees, what would they be?

### Choice-making

1. How have you decided what jobs to do in the past?
2. How are you going to decide about your future job? Immediately after graduation?
3. Why did you go into consulting? What else did you consider? [OR] Why didn't you go into consulting? Why do you think so many of your peers did?
4. If someone asked you to describe your decision-making process in steps, what would you say?
5. When is a time your decision-making process broke down?
6. On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being easy and 10 being excruciatingly difficult), how would you rate your ability to make decisions about things that are important to you?
7. Have you heard of the term FOMO? Describe it to me. Do you experience it?
8. If they mention keeping doors open, ask a follow-up question
9. Would you consider yourself to have a vision for yourself? Or for the world?
10. What are your biggest fears?
11. If you were to define what the biggest challenges are that are facing your class, what would you say they were?

### **Dual motivations**

1. Why did you choose to do the dual degree?
2. Please describe two stories that for you are quintessential dual degree moments or experiences.
3. Do you feel pressure to make a difference in the world? Do you think you feel more or less pressure than your parents to do the same? What about grandparents?
4. How do you think about what you want to do in the future?
5. When you think about the next forty years of your prime working life, what aspects are most important to you?
6. Do you think you'll work in the public sector, private sector, or social sector? In what order?
7. What do you think is the best way to have influence?
8. Rank these 12 things in order of importance to you in your work:  
Work-life balance  
Control over time  
High prestige  
High income  
Passion  
Purpose  
Security  
Stability  
Flexibility  
Ownership  
Recognition  
Impact

### **Visioning about the future**

1. When you imagine yourself ten years out, what kind of life and lifestyle do you see yourself having?
2. How important is getting married to you? (not important, somewhat, very important, number one priority)
3. Imagine you're 70 years old looking back on the last 40 years of working life, where all will you have lived? How often did you move? Which countries did you spend the majority of your life in?
4. How many employers will you have had?
5. How many jobs will you have had?
6. What percentage of your working life did you work for yourself?
7. On average, how much money did you make annually? What were the patterns?
8. What are your fears about your generation, what are your hopes?

## APPENDIX II

### Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study, I interviewed 30 Dual Degree students to understand what drives and motivates them. Because I was asking a number of personal questions, I wanted to find students who would be willing to share with me candidly their thoughts, opinions and experiences. I began by inviting an entire class of Dual Degree students of the formal Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Business School Joint Degree Class to participate in these interviews. Because these questions are personal in nature, after conducting an interview with a participant I asked him or her if they would be willing to put me in touch with three or four other Dual Degrees whom they thought would be willing to participate in the interview. To the credit of these Dual Degrees, 90% of those asked agreed to be interviewed. From this initial base, I began to interview other classes and the Dual Degrees at the Kennedy School and MIT Sloan. Though I stopped at 30, there were dozens more dual degrees who had agreed to be interviewed.

I conducted 95% of these interviews over the phone or Skype. For the first few interviews, I met the interviewee in person, but realized that the phone provided an extra sphere of privacy, better recording quality and more flexibility for the respondents in terms of schedule. Before conducting each interview, I first obtained their oral consent to voluntarily participate in the interview and to record the interview. I audio recorded every interview through Evernote, with a backup of a Skype recording.

To conduct the interviews, I used the attached list of questions as a guide, and asked follow-up questions as seemed appropriate. The majority of interviews lasted 90 minutes. I took detailed notes during the interviews, capturing 60-80% of the verbal transcript. When interviewees said something particularly relevant, honest, or surprising, I highlighted it in



yellow during the interview to return to it later.

To analyze the interviews, I first read through all of my notes to look for themes. I wrote a list of a dozen or so recurring themes based on the transcripts and combed through the interviews to find quotes that illustrated these themes. Later, I went back through each audio recording to verify quotes and fill in holes.

### APPENDIX III

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