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## **Springfield Or Bust? A Qualitative Analysis Of The Organization Assimilation Of Young Professionals In Springfield, Missouri**

Nii Kpakpo Ekow Abrahams

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**SPRINGFIELD OR BUST? A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE  
ORGANIZATIONAL ASSIMILATION OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN  
SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Nii Kpakpo Ekow Abrahams

May 2016

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Communication

Missouri State University, May 2016

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield, Missouri's culture. Using organizational assimilation and sensemaking as the theoretical framework, this qualitative thesis research study utilized four focus groups (n=20) to draw its results. Based on a previous foundational study and additional research, five characteristics Millennials want in a city were identified—affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity. These characteristics also served as the criterion for the results. The findings revealed that Springfield young professionals, based on the five characteristics, have fully assimilated into Springfield's culture. The results and discussion can be used to serve the City of Springfield and the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce's strategic recruitment and retention efforts of young professionals and families.

**KEYWORDS:** Millennial, young professional, Springfield, organizational assimilation, sensemaking, recruitment, retention.

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Dr. Gloria Galanes  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
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I dedicate this thesis to my family: Nii Adote, Faustina, and Nii Addo Abrahams. I owe all my success to them.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

If individuals have not noticed the impact Millennials can have on the workplace, now is the time. “More than one in three American workers today are Millennials and this year they surpassed Generation X to become the largest share of the American workforce” (Fry, 2015a, p. 1). Millennials, defined as adults who in 2015 are between the ages 18 to 34, are officially the most populous generation in the United States with 53.5 million workers (Fry, 2015a). Because of their sheer number, Millennials—and specifically young professionals—have the power to fuel economic growth and urban revitalization back into the heart of cities (Black, 2015). With that being said, Millennials are also known as the generation *first* to pick a place to live, and *then* to find a job (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). It is for these reasons that it is important for Springfield to recruit and retain young professionals effectively. In order to do this, it is necessary to study first what Millennials are looking for in a city, then, use that knowledge to explore to what extent young professionals already in Springfield are assimilating into the culture of the city. This understanding is acquired by examining how young professionals make sense of their experiences in Springfield. When young professionals do not assimilate into Springfield’s culture, it is likely their needs are not being met. If their needs are not being met and they are not finding in Springfield what they are looking for in a city, they will move—they are the most transient generation to date (Palmer, 2015). In contrast, if young professionals *are* assimilating into Springfield’s working culture, this suggests that their needs are being met and Springfield can use that information to recruit and retain young professionals more effectively for the future.



This study adds to our understanding of organizational communication, which seeks to understand how communication functions within organizational structures, large or small (Goldhaber, 1993). Some practitioners seek to use this information to ignite change within a system to create more effective and efficient processes. The study of organizational communication can also generate ideas for creating solutions to real-life problems (Koschmann, 2012).

An organization can be defined as “an organized collection of individuals working interdependently within a relatively structured, organized, open system to achieve common goals” (Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 2009, p. 1). The foundation of this study is built on the premise that cities, like Springfield, are large and complex organizations and can be studied through the lens of organizational communication. This assertion is not evidenced in current organizational communication literature, but an argument can be made for it. This means that cities would become viable entities to study within the field of organizational communication. Support for the claim that cities are complex organizations comes from research found in other academic disciplines such as social sciences, physics, and ecology. For cities to be considered complex organizations by organizational communication scholars, three contentions must be found true: 1) cities are complex 2) complex structures can be classified as complex systems, and 3) complex systems can be recognized as complex organizations.

### **Cities As Complex Organizations**

In order to claim that cities are complex organizations, cities must be considered complex. White, Engelen, and Uljee (2015) believe that cities are constantly evolving as

they grow or decline. Cities transform themselves as they adapt to the environment around it. Therefore, identifying cities as complex, adaptive, and self-organizing systems, aids in the study of cities' structures (White, Engelen, Uljee, 2015). Cities have always been compared to structures like microorganisms and river networks, but German (2013) believes that those comparisons have been grossly understated. "It's an entirely new kind of complex system that humans have created (cities). We have intuitively invented the best way to create vast social networks embedded in space and time, and keep them growing and evolving without having to stop" (German, 2013, p.1). This evidence supports the contention that cities are complex. Since that has been established, it must be made true that complex structures can be classified as complex systems.

By defining what is complex, it can be reasonably established that complex structures are complex systems. Complexity is defined as a structure of interconnected and interdependent units. Examples of complex structures include government, an economy, the ecosystem, and even the human body (Kaiser & Madey, 2005). Systems are defined as intentional group of interrelated parts that work together to achieve a common goal or objective. Systems can be physical, social, biological, or political in nature (Kaiser & Madey, 2005). Linking the two concepts, a complex system is a system that involves a large number of interconnected parts and is structurally arranged to function on many scales while undergoing multifaceted changes (Kaiser & Madey, 2005). These complex systems are characterized by self-organization, non-linearity, order/chaos dynamic, and emergence. Complex structures are inherently complex systems (Kaiser & Madey, 2005). Now that it is understood that complex structures are also complex

systems, it is reasonable to make the claim that complex systems can be recognized as complex organizations.

Highsmith (2013) contends that complex adaptive systems are in and of themselves complex organizations and should be recognized as such based on the congruencies of systems and organization properties. For example, systems and organizations are both made up of individual, dynamic components. These components “interact to create an ecosystem, are defined by the exchange of information, based on some system of internal rules, self-organize in nonlinear ways to produce emergent results, exhibit characteristics of both order and chaos, and evolve over time” (Highsmith, 2013, p. 4). Highsmith (2013) concludes that there is no distinctive difference between complex systems and complex organizations—organizations and the individuals within them are complex adaptive systems. Recognizing that complex systems are also complex organizations leads us back to the original assertion and this study’s foundation: cities are complex organizations and can be studied through the lens of organizational communication.

Thus far it has been supported that cities are complex, complex structures are complex systems, and complex systems are recognized as complex organizations leading to the conclusion that cities are complex organizations. This claim, in fact, has been endorsed for years by physicists and mathematicians, who utilize cities as metaphors for complexity (Portugali, 2013). It was not until the early 1980s that the *complexity theory of cities* was developed to officially support the claim that cities are complex organizations (Portugali, 2013). The theory was developed by a small number of researchers who concluded that cities share the same properties as complex

systems/organizations. This theory is based on four principles. First, cities are built on components that interact and are interconnected, like organizational systems. Second, cities are large enough to be influenced by the external environment, while being environments themselves for the thousands who live within them. Third, cities produce artifacts that are byproducts of human interaction and media interaction in the same way that complex systems/organizations produce artifacts. Finally, cities are considered dual complex systems. The city as a whole, partly because of its size, is a complex system, with each of its individual components also being a complex systems (Portugali, 2013). This evidence supports this study's assertion that cities are complex organizations and can be studied from the perspective of organizational communication.

Understanding and acknowledging cities as organizations is crucial in the development of this study. Within the large, complex organization of a city, there is a sizeable cohort of newcomers, Millennials, who are discovering whether Springfield is the right city for them to live, work, and play. Studying this generation as a whole will help bring insight regarding Springfield's Millennials as they assimilate into Springfield's working culture. This chapter will provide a summary of the characteristics of a Millennial, explain why Millennials migrate towards urban cores of cities, and overview the organization in this study, Springfield.

### **Defining the Millennial**

Slaymaker and Fisher (2015) provide seven core characteristics of Millennials that are reflective of current research. Millennials can be described as special, protected, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.

Specialness refers to Millennials as self-absorbed, entitled, and recognition-seeking (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015). These characteristics may have been developed through individualized academic programs growing up. However, Millennials also view those around themselves as unique too. This mindset of kindness and inclusion benefits employers of young professionals because Millennial young professionals work well with all types of customers and clients.

To understand why Millennials are characterized as protected, it is important to remember that Millennials have grown up in the era marked by the events of September 11, increased child-safety regulations, and the regularity of school violence. Because of this, Millennials demonstrate a strong risk aversion and need for structure, safety, and protection (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015).

Being confident is a trait highly valued by Millennials. Being constantly praised for their intelligence and abilities at home and at school, Millennials have developed a strong sense of self-esteem. “Confidence is the foundation that produces one of the most sought after qualities in an emerging [young] professional: initiative. Millennials may present as more confident in requesting and negotiating their needs towards maintaining a healthy work-life balance” (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015, p.53).

Millennials are team-oriented and are more apt to be found working in groups than any other generation (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015). From an early age, Millennials have grown up in a school system that heavily utilizes group work and projects. This mindset has carried over into the workplace. Self-reporting by Millennials reveals that they believe working in semiautonomous and self-managed groups is more enjoyable

because not only do groups enhance motivation, increase productivity, and lower personnel costs, but they provide avenues for socialization (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

Conventionality is defined as “having a general trust in rules, systems, and the opinions of one’s own parents” (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015, p.54). This characteristic is a result of Millennials being told how special they are, receiving excessive parental protection, and consistently being part of family decision-making processes. Because of their general trust in rules and systems, young professionals in the workplace hold their employers in high regard (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015).

Research corroborates Slaymaker and Fisher’s (2015) characterization of Millennials as pressured. Empirical research has revealed that Millennial parents have high standards and expectations for their children and expect them to take advanced college preparatory courses, have high college placement exam scores, and apply to the best schools possible (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). “The emphasis on standardized testing, the overscheduling of abundant extracurricular activities, and the more competitive market in higher education, paired with an unstable economy, all contribute to Millennials’ increased sense of pressure to excel” (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015, p.55). This means that young professionals are more likely to meet deadlines, work longer hours, and hold themselves to high expectations.

Slaymaker and Fisher’s (2015) definition of achieving emphasizes the academic areas of math and science. However, Millennials’ goal-oriented nature and achievement translates to all areas of their life. High expectations and standards Millennials self-impose on themselves produce strong achievement in all facets of their life (Howe, 2005, p.22). Thus, Millennials expect to succeed and will work hard toward their success.

While these seven characteristics are not exhaustive, they provide a depiction of the collective personality and attitude of Millennial young professionals. These Millennial young professionals are changing the dynamics of the American workforce as well as the cities they choose to inhabit.

### **Millennial Generation Migration**

In 2014, the *New York Times* reported that there are 4.7 million 23-year-olds in the United States—more than any other age group (Searcy, 2014). The second most populous age group were 24-year-olds, with slightly fewer than 4.7 million, followed by 22-year-olds, at 4.6 million (Searcy, 2014). These census data demonstrate that young professionals are poised to make a substantial mark in the United States workforce. Nearly 10,000 Baby Boomers are retiring everyday, leaving ample room for young professionals to take their place (Kessler, 2014).

As Baby Boomers retire, Millennial young professionals are changing the dynamic of the workplace by entering as the most educated generation to date. According to a Nielsen (2014) report, over 23% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while 39% are still in school. Moreover, because young professional Millennials are highly educated and command high incomes, where they choose to live tends to boost the local economy (The White House, 2014). Emerging young professionals from across the country are making major decisions that will affect their professional long-term careers.

One of the major decisions that a young professional will have to make is where he or she will live. According to the *Pew Research Center* (2015), 33% of Millennials live with their parents, leaving 67% of Millennials having to make the difficult decision

of where to live (Fry, 2015b). For Millennials, this decision is significant to their transition into post graduate and professional life because they are the most mobile generation in the United States (Kitroeff, 2014). However, Millennial goals and desires for living look drastically different from those of the generations that preceded them (Kadlec, 2014). Prior generations sought to live outside of cities in big, suburban homes, complete with the iconic white picket fence in the stereotype of the American dream (Nielson, 2014). This American dream is symbolized by home ownership, a stable job, retirement security, and the promise of doing better than the previous generation (Kadlec, 2014). Millennials do not necessarily share those ideals. Only 16% of Millennials believe that the stereotypical American dream is still alive (Eshelman, 2015).

A major reason why a majority of Millennials have rejected the stereotypical American dream in their search to move and live their desired lifestyle is because of the impact of the Great Recession, which had a significant impact across the nation, reducing consumer wealth by 30 to 40% (Nielsen, 2014). Millennials, however, bore the brunt of the hit. The damaged economy erected significant financial barriers to their success. (Nielsen, 2014). Coming of age during the Great Recession has caused Millennials to become more austere, more money-conscious, and more resourceful—tempering the American dream ideal (Nielsen, 2014).

In response to the Great Recession, Millennial young professionals are moving to places that are affordable. In fact, 80% of Millennials cite that cost of living and affordability of housing mattered most when choosing a place to live (Kitroeff, 2015). So where are Millennials choosing to live? They are moving to the urban core of cities. According to *Bloomberg Business* (2015), 37 of the top 50 cities in the United States are



affordable for Millennials. Millennials are migrating towards the urban cores of cities, which have become more affordable and accessible to offices, public transits, shopping, and entertainment right outside their doorstep (Nielsen, 2014).

This migration of Millennials to cities has caused cities to vie for this generation's attention. Young professionals bring considerable benefits to a city. For example, young professionals are having a significant impact on Washington D.C. (Chang, Neely, Goldstein, Yates, & Davis, 2013). Almost all of D.C.'s growth between 2000 and 2010 come from young adults ages 20 to 34. Between 2010 to 2012, half of the population growth came from Millennials (Chang et al., 2013). In the past 10 years, over 26,000 apartments and condos were developed, 709 new restaurants were built, more bike lanes were created, and there were increased opportunities in technology and the arts. "Along with the growth has come buzz. To longtime residents, the city feels different, in some places, almost unrecognizable. Once-dead streets are bustling, even after dark. High-rises are replacing aged structures and overgrown lots. Restaurants pop up overnight, like dandelions" (Chang et al., 2013, p. 1).

A city with a growing number of Millennials provides a stimulus to the local economy and culture. In contrast, if Millennials leave a city, there could be significant negative consequences. One such example is Vancouver, Canada, which is facing the threat of a serious economic crisis due to a mass exodus of Millennials (Alcober, 2015). Currently, Vancouver is the second least affordable city in the world, behind Hong Kong, according to the annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey (Alcober, 2015). Between 2001 and 2014, housing costs have rose 63% while salaries have only increased 36.2%, leaving 85 of 88 "high-demand job" wages below the

threshold to be able to afford a home in the city. In 2013, over 1500 Millennial residents left the city, up from the 770 the year before. If this trend continues, it could generate labor shortages, negatively affecting the future economic growth of the city. “In the end, it would look like a place where it would be hard for businesses to come. It wouldn’t be able to attract new business or startups. If they started, they would leave quickly because they couldn’t attract the talent they needed” (CBS News, 2015, p.1).

With the economic benefits Millennials can offer, cities are clamoring for young professionals to live, work, and play, developing strategies for recruitment and retention. Thus, understanding what Millennials are looking for in a city—Springfield in particular—is important, as is understanding how Springfield’s young professionals are making sense of their experiences.

### **Background of Springfield, Missouri**

Springfield, Missouri, also known as the Queen City of the Ozarks, is located in Southwest Missouri. It is currently the third largest city in Missouri, with a population of 162,000 within city limits and 118,000 additional people outside the city limits, bringing the total metropolitan area to approximately 280,000 people (Reynolds & Gilstrap, 2013). Since Springfield is the organization in this study, it is imperative understand how Springfield functions. The 2014 executive summary of *The Official Economic Development Site for the Springfield Metro Area* provides a reasonable assessment of the city.

Springfield is known for its diverse industries (SBDC, 2014). For example, it hosts headquarters for both Bass Pro Shops, one of the world’s largest hunting, fishing,

and outdoor retailers, and BKD, a national accounting and financial advising firm.

Springfield is also a medical hub for the region with two industry leading, comprehensive healthcare systems. Mercy Health System and CoxHealth are the two largest employers in Springfield. The healthcare industry alone has a 4.5 billion dollar impact on the city. Springfield Metro also has over 50,000 enrolled college students between 10 different colleges and universities, introducing hundreds of young professionals to the area each year. Regionally, Springfield is a major retail center with a \$4 to \$6 billion impact. The economic output of the city has grown approximately 40% in the past decade.

A major effort has been put into the redevelopment of Springfield's downtown (*Field Guide 2030*, 2013). The city's historic district has become the new heart of Springfield. Fine dining, trendy retail, a thriving art scene, multiple music and theater venues, and a boom in apartment/loft living has drastically improved downtown (SBDC, 2014). Over \$400 million has gone into historic renovations, cutting-edge technical research facilities, a nationally recognized AA baseball stadium, convention center, ice rink, green park space, and more (SBDC, 2014).

Springfield's commitment to growth, evidenced by its diverse industries and redevelopment of its downtown, has led to significant recognition. This recognition affirms Springfield's realistic potential to be a significant hub for Millennial young professionals in the Midwest. The city has won awards like "Top 12 Metros for Recruitment & Attraction" from *Expansion Management*, "Top 40 Best Quality of Life" from *The Business Journal*, and "Top 20 Mid-Sized City for Entrepreneurs" from *Inc. Magazine* (SBDC, 2014). One particular ranking from Next Generation Consulting stood out amongst the rest.

In 2009, Next Generation Consulting, a young professional marketing firm, ranked Springfield 17<sup>th</sup> in the “Mighty Micros” (cities with populations between 100,000-200,000) category of the U.S. Next Cities list (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Next Generation Consulting is the only company in the United States with a comprehensive system for evaluating cities according to what matters to young professionals. The ranked cities were evaluated on seven indexes: vitality, earning, learning, social capital, cost of lifestyle, after-hours, and around-town. Based on the cities’ scores on the seven indexes, the report divided the cities’ into four quartiles per index.

The vitality index assesses the health of a city with indicators like air and water quality, greenspace, life expectancy, and obesity (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Springfield scored in the second tier on the vitality index. Springfield has above average air and water quality, but is behind in life expectancy and access to state parks. Springfield also has a higher than average infant mortality and obesity rate.

The earning index measures a city’s future job growth, diversity of employment opportunities, and average household income (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Springfield scored in the second tier on the earning index. Springfield has a lower than average unemployment rate, with average job growth and diversity of employment opportunities. However, Springfield landed below average in household income and proportion of people in managerial and professional occupations.

The learning index asks how committed a city is to a quality education for all (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). The index analyzes indicators like educational opportunities, public library use, and Wi-Fi-hotspots. Springfield scored in the top tier on

the learning index. Springfield boasts several colleges and universities, multiple public libraries, and a low K-12 student to teacher ratio.

The social capital index accounts for the people within the city (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). The index measures diversity, crime rates, voter participation, and percentage of women and minority-owned businesses. Springfield scored in the fourth tier on the social capital index. While there is a higher than average voter participation and below average violent crime rate, there are significant concerns in regards to race/ethnic diversity. In addition, the number of women and minority-owned businesses is significantly lower than peer cities.

The cost of lifestyle index compares different variables in the national cost of living index like housing and food (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Springfield scored in the top tier on the cost of living index because Springfield hosts lower than average costs for food and groceries, utilities, and housing.

The after-hours index counts the places a community member can go after work and on the weekends for entertainment (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Springfield scored in the second tier on the after hours index. Compared to peer cities, Springfield facilitates a solid number of restaurants, drinking places/bars, and entertainment and recreation venues per capita. However, the number of specialty food stores is significantly below average.

The around-town index measures a city's walkability, airport traffic, average commute time, and public transit system (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Springfield scored in the top tier on the around town index. Springfield has lower than average commute times, fewer cars per household, and access to a regional hub airport.

The Network, Springfield's Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals group, created a task force to dive deeper into the Next Generation Consulting report (The Network, 2010). The task force's executive summary concluded that the best way to recruit and retain young professionals in Springfield is to show them that they can make a real difference in the community:

Highlighting the opportunities to “get in the game” is how Springfield can attract and retain “young talent”, and also how Springfield can lead the nation into a new economic age. This means that a successful Springfield won't be just a temporary stop for professionals working their way up the ladder; it will be a community that provides a total life experience with opportunities for both professional and personal fulfillment. (The Network, 2010, p. 4)

As evidenced, Springfield has positioned itself to be an attractive city for Millennials to live, work, and play.

### **Statement of Problem**

This chapter has provided the necessary context to better understand the living choices of post-graduate Millennials, the condition of Springfield as an organization, and how these two ideas intersect. Springfield has done a lot to create programs and facilitate opportunities for Millennial young professionals to be a part of Springfield. However, there has yet to be a study exploring to what extent these young professionals have assimilated into Springfield's culture. Knowing and understanding why young professionals are or are not assimilating is significant for recruitment and retention of new young professionals. According to Kim and Mauborgne (2009), when executives begin creating organizational strategies, they start by assessing the industry and environmental conditions in which they operate—which inherently includes an introspective analysis of their own companies. If Springfield wants to continue to grow

and cultivate an environment where young professionals can thrive, it is necessary to analyze how Millennials are functioning within Springfield as an organization. This study will use the theoretical lens of organizational assimilation to investigate if young professionals are, or are not, assimilating into Springfield. This knowledge can be exceptionally useful in creating strategic plans for the City of Springfield, Springfield's Chamber of Commerce, and other local entities.

This study is organized as follows: Chapter Two reviews current literature to set the theoretical and conceptual framework that will be the basis for study. It will first do an in-depth description of what Millennials are looking for in a city. The themes from that review will serve as the criteria for Springfield's young professional's needs. Chapter Two will review the literature of organizational assimilation to better understand the process of young professionals assimilating into Springfield. Organizational assimilation is defined as, "the process by which organizational members become a part of, or are absorbed into, the culture of an organization" (Jablin, 1982, p. 256). In the same way members enter an organization seeking to absorb into its culture, young professionals in Springfield seek to absorb into its working culture. Finally, a review on the properties of sensemaking is necessary as Springfield young professionals can only describe their assimilation process retrospectively. Organizational assimilation analyzes members' integration into an organization from an outside perspective. Sensemaking is a vital theoretical framework to this study because sensemaking allows the organizational assimilation process to be seen from the perspective of the young professional.

Chapter Three describes the methods used in this research, as well as how a previous study set a foundation and framework for the current study. This study uses

qualitative research and four focus groups to provide the main findings. Data were collected from observational and transcribed notes from the focus groups.

Chapter Four describes the main findings of the research utilizing the five characteristics that young professionals are looking for in a city, as described in Chapter Two. These five characteristics serve as the framework to analyze the participants' comments.

Chapter Five concludes the study. It presents a robust discussion, shares the theoretical and practical implications of the study, reveals the study's limitations, and garners ideas for future research.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter One, a case was made for the investigation of young professionals' assimilation into the Springfield community. Three different bodies of research are relevant to answering this question. First, an in-depth examination of Millennials will reveal what Millennial young professionals are looking for in a city. Researchers who study what Millennials want in a city come from outside academic disciplines. Therefore, this particular portion of research utilizes a large variety of credible, popular press pieces to support the claims. Second, a review of organizational assimilation literature will provide the lens to view the rest of the research—acknowledging the City of Springfield as the organization and Millennial young professionals as the members. Finally, a literature review on the theory of sensemaking will allow greater insight into how these young professionals describe their assimilation process retrospectively.

### **Understanding Millennials**

To understand why young professionals choose to live in cities across the country, it is imperative to study Millennial trends and Millennials' reason for selecting particular cities. A previous foundational project for this study, as well as a synthesis of research, reveals that the top five characteristics Millennials are looking for in a city are affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity, as described below.

**Affordability.** As previously mentioned, Millennials have been negatively affected by the effects of the Great Recession and are interested in living in a affordable

cities (Xu, Johnson, Bartholomae, O'Neill, & Gutter, 2015). Joblessness, stagnant income, and student loan debt plague Millennials (*U.S. Census*, 2014). The unemployment rate in March 2015 for Millennials, including those who dropped out of the workforce, was 13.9% (Notte, 2015). Millennials are having a difficult time saving because so much of their income is tied to other obligations such as student loan debt. High student loans negatively affect Millennials' home ownership because they are typically disqualified for mortgage debt and debt aversion (Xu et al., 2015). The average college student debt is over \$33,000 after graduation (Notte, 2015). Although 43% of college-educated Millennials want to buy a house, over half are waiting until they have a higher salary, are able to pay off debt, and can tie up other loose ends (Notte, 2015).

It quickly becomes apparent that location and affordability are interdependent. Millennials seek cities that will give them the best option to save and build for a future—especially in the housing market. Millennials are looking for places that have housing market affordability. “As millennials gain more of a financial foothold and make their presence felt, they’re going to drive a whole chain of increased demand in the housing market” (Elboghdady & Badger, 2014, p. 1). Living in large metropolitan areas where rent and cost of living are high can become detrimental to Millennials' financial goals.

There is evidence that older Millennials are finding affordable locations. Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies reported that 46% of young people are burdened by their rental housing—meaning an average of 30% of their income goes to rent that “disappears” (Salisbury, 2015, p. 1). Because of this, Millennials are looking to buy homes as an investment. The National Association of Realtors (2015) report reveals the same thing. “Millennials, who are currently between ages 25 and 34, make up the

largest share of homebuyers at 32%. Even more striking, millennials now constitute 68% of first-time homebuyers. They are the most optimistic that their home purchase is a good investment” (Palmer, 2015, p. 1).

Millennials are willing to purchase a home that needs work—whatever helps to make to housing more affordable. In fact, 62% of Millennials have remodeled their homes and 58% said they have made repairs (Palmer, 2015). Cities are taking notice of the systematic barriers to housing affordability for Millennials and are responding.

Cities are learning to adapt to the changing needs of Millennials when it comes to housing. Housing affordability is outpacing income growth, which means Millennials are searching for locations that they can afford to live in that will not take up a large percentage of their monthly income (Xu et al., 2015). Cities are learning to build smaller and more affordable units for Millennials. Stockton Williams, executive director of the Urban Land Institute's Terwilliger Center for Housing in Washington, D.C, claims that Millennials are willing to give up space to have better access to a transit system and a walkable city infrastructure (National Association of Realtors, 2015). For example, in Austin, Texas, which has become a major hub for young professionals, builders are creating homes that are much smaller than the national average and closer to downtown city amenities (National Association of Realtors, 2015). The new styles of homes are proving to be successful because Millennials are quickly buying them. In other places like Seattle, micro-housing is becoming a popular style of living (Felder, 2015). New York and San Francisco are waving previous housing size requirements to accommodate the new change. “The country’s fastest-growing cities are now those where housing is more affordable than average. Among people who have moved long distances, the

number of those who cite housing as their primary motivation for doing so has more than doubled since 2007” (Felder, 2015, p. 2).

In short, housing affordability is a big factor for Millennials, and cities that have addressed housing affordability are succeeding in attracting Millennials.

**Community Engagement and Involvement.** *The Millennial Impact Report* defines engagement and involvement for Millennials as the ability to “connect, involve and give to and with causes about which they care [which] includes small actions, such as micro-volunteering, all the way up to board leadership” (Feldmann, 2014, p. 4). Early research on Millennials concluded that they are the most narcissistic generation to date (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011). However, new research indicates that Millennials are not narcissistic, rather misunderstood. In fact, most Millennials under the age of 30 say that community members (including themselves) have a very important obligation to volunteer (Cass, 2014). Millennials have a strong desire to seek opportunities to make a social impact where they live.

Millennials are positively changing the narrative of how they have been portrayed. “No other adult peer group possesses anything close to their upbeat, high-achieving, team-playing, and civic-minded reputation” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 1). This upbeat civic-minded reputation is indicative of Millennials’ outlook towards their local community. Millennials want to be active members in helping build and grow their communities. Millennials are inspired and stimulated by the chance to take on big challenges, develop strategies to alleviate problems, and cultivate concrete, long-term solutions (Feldmann, 2013). Millennials are “issue minded” and look for outlets to channel their individual passions to make their cities better places (Feldmann, 2014).

Moreover, Millennials want to make an impact through long-term, skills-based volunteering, not one-time volunteering experiences. They are much more inclined give their knowledge, expertise, and time to nonprofits. Millennials want to see the impact of their giving, whether they gave their time, money, or skills (Scott, 2015).

The top three reasons Millennials get involved with nonprofits include working with a community cause they are passionate about, meeting new people who are passionate about the same cause, and being able to lend their professional skills to benefit that cause (Feldmann, 2014). Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service elaborates: "We're on the crux of something big, because these Millennials are going to take this spirit of giving and wanting to change communities and they're going to become parents soon. I am very encouraged by what we're seeing" (Cass, 2014, p. 2). Millennials seek to make a positive impact on their communities.

**Millennial Collaboration.** A generation is defined as a group of "people of similar age in a similar location who experienced similar social, historical, and life events" (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014, p.176). The shared experiences Millennials have differentiates from other generations and shapes their attitudes, values, beliefs, and expectations (Becton et al., 2014). Because of the shared experiences, expectations, and attitudes, Millennials strongly value interacting with other Millennials. Also known as the "collaboration generation," Millennials do best when they are together (Brack & Kelly, 2012, p.4). Thus it is crucial for cities to facilitate opportunities for Millennials to interact. Millennials are attracted to move to where other Millennials are. In fact, 69% of Millennials value a night out with friends and family more than staying at home and 30% of Millennials now have a good friend they met through a live event,

revealing the importance of Millennial-to-Millennial friendships (Eventbrite, 2014). A strong Millennial community is a must for cities to recruit and retain young professionals.

The establishment of a Millennial community is vital because such community encourages collaboration about entrepreneurial endeavors. “Between 1977 and 2005, existing firms lost about 1 million jobs per year, while new firms—those in their first year—added an average of 3 million jobs. In 2007, young firms ages 1 to 5 years old—excluding startups—created 8 million of the 12 million new jobs added that year, or about two-thirds of the total job creation” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 1).

There is no question that startups play an integral role in the economic health of the local, state, and national economy (National Chamber Foundation, 2012). On a local level, startups bring vitality to a community that is unparalleled. In 2011, over 160,000 startups launched per month across the nation with 29% of them spearheaded by entrepreneurs ages 20-34 (National Chamber Foundation, 2012). What does this show? Millennials want to own their own businesses—and are looking for other Millennials to help.

Millennials seek locations that will allow them to jumpstart their business ventures within a community of entrepreneurs. A recent study in the *Harvard Business Review* stated that there is a 75% productivity increase when being a part of a co-working space (Waber, Magnolfi, & Lindsay, 2014, p. 4). A city that can offer collaboration with other young professionals to network and start businesses together becomes a major selling point for Millennials. Neumann (2015) states, “This new way of working, focused on collaboration and sharing, has long term benefits that today’s Millennials are starting to see. That is why we, and they, believe community is truly the future of work” (p. 1).

Thus, Millennials seek cities that help facilitate collaboration and entrepreneurial endeavors.

**Entertainment and Meaningful Experiences.** The significance of cities facilitating entertainment and meaningful social and recreational opportunities is because for Millennials, living a meaningful life is about creating, sharing, and capturing memories through vibrant experiences with other people (Eventbrite, 2014). Eventbrite, the world's largest self-service ticketing platform, conducted a nationwide research of Millennials and summarized Millennials' affinity toward entertainment and meaningful experiences:

This generation not only highly values experiences, but they are increasingly spending time and money on them: from concerts and social events to athletic pursuits, to cultural experiences and events of all kinds. For this group, happiness isn't as focused on possessions or career status. Living a meaningful, happy life is about creating, sharing and capturing memories earned through experiences that span the spectrum of life's opportunities. (Eventbrite, 2014, p. 1)

The importance of quality entertainment and meaningful experiences for Millennials is extremely important to their daily lifestyles. Millennials do not want to just live and work in a city—they want to *play*. In fact, 82% of Millennials attended or participated in an entertainment experience in the past year—whether it was live sports, concerts, parties, cultural events, or festivals (Eventbrite, 2014). This number is likely increase. For example, 72% of Millennials stated that would rather increase their spending on experiences than buying physical items next year (Eventbrite, 2014). Cities that can attract Millennials by providing a wide variety of rich experiences for them will benefit. In fact, 78% of Millennials would rather choose to spend money on an event rather than buying something for themselves (Eventbrite, 2014). This obviously can have powerful implications for a city's local economy. For example, Millennials spend \$21

more than non-Millennials per month eating out at local restaurants, which thrive on creating a culinary experience for their customers (Felder, 2015). Over time, those small experiences add up to help boost local economy.

Oklahoma City is an example of a city adapting to Millennials' expectation of providing quality experiences Millennials want. Since 2000, Oklahoma City's Millennial population has grown 21.3%, outpacing Austin, Denver, and Dallas (Felder, 2015). Oklahoma City increased the number of local shops, restaurants, and experiences Millennials could invest in (Felder, 2015). Oklahoma City's cultural experiences have taken off as well, with theater groups, art galleries, and the addition of the Oklahoma City Thunder, a professional basketball team (Felder, 2015). Local OKC Millennial Catherine Anadu asserted that "the diversity of things to do in New York is almost overwhelming. But when 30,000 people show up for a food truck [festival] here in Oklahoma City, clearly there is a thirst here for more stuff to do. But Oklahoma City has its own charm, and that's cool" (Felder, 2015, p.4).

In short, Millennials seek locations that can provide not just a place to work, but to experience life through diverse entertainment, food, and cultural expressions.

**Authenticity.** Finally, Millennials are seeking cities that have an authentic appeal. Authenticity "connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique" (Wang, 1999, p.350). Defining what makes a city authentic is difficult because the concept of authenticity is exceptionally ambiguous (Wang, 1999). However in tourism, criteria typically include ideas like local art, festivals, rituals, unique local food, style of clothing, and housing as a basis for determining what is authentic or inauthentic (Wang, 1999). Millennials are shying away from big market cities like San



Francisco, Seattle, and Portland and transitioning to cities like Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Baltimore (Taft, 2015). They are searching for the unique and nontraditional. Baltimore, for example, has seen a big spike in the number of 25 to 34 year-old individuals who come to live in their city (Litten, 2015). One resident cited that, compared to Washington D.C., it was the energy, arts, and culture that created feeling of authenticity that sets the city apart (Litten, 2015).

Principles of tourism can provide criteria for defining whether a city is or is not authentic, and one such feature is a city's local shops. As with most towns, there are generic, chain stores that occupy retail districts, but the extent to which there are local restaurants, boutiques, and shops make the difference between a generic community and an authentic one (Wang, 1999). In tourism, tourists value the unique over the generic:

It is suggested that providing a higher level of shopping experience for tourists and increasing the contribution of shopping to the regional economy requires supporting indigenous local people via various fiscal and educational instruments to continue producing and retailing authentic handicrafts and souvenir goods. It is believed that this not only is necessary for the achievement of higher levels of tourist satisfaction and greater economic benefits for the local economy but also for achieving the ultimate goal of sustained and sustainable tourism development. (Tosun, Temizkan, Timothy, & Fyall, 2007, abstract)

Tourists who frequent local shops, boutiques, and restaurants, tend to experience feelings of authenticity that are crucial to the success of tourism economically and in overall satisfaction. In the same way, Millennials seek those same feelings of authenticity provided by a city's local shops, boutiques, and restaurants.

From a marketing or branding perspective, authenticity for Millennials is important and, often times, the decisive element. "Genuine branding and imagery can be a powerful tool to help spread messages to all audiences, not just Millennials. But authenticity is key—Millennials can sniff out insincere messaging and forced trends"

(Tennerson, 2015, p. 1). There are four key identifiers to true authenticity from the marketing perspective: being vulnerable, being true to tradition, embracing simplicity, and being true to yourself (Granese, 2013). There is a visceral negative reaction from Millennials to brands, or in this case cities, that do not feel genuine.

Affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity are what Millennials expect in a city to begin their careers. These factors are also suitable measures for determining whether Millennials will thrive in a city. By recognizing cities as organizations and Millennials as members joining that organization, it is possible to use organizational communication concepts, such as stages of organizational assimilation, to determine to what extent Millennials are integrated into the Springfield community.

### **Organizational Assimilation**

Organizational assimilation is a crucial part of an organization's culture and development. An organization is defined as "an organized collection of individuals working interdependently within a relatively structured, organized, open system to achieve common goals" (Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 2009, p. 1). An organization can be a business, student organization, religious group, sports team, or even a city, as this study reinforces. Positive newcomer assimilation in an organization has important consequences like productivity, performance, and commitment—all characteristics cities want from their young professionals (Korte, 2007). To better understand organizational assimilation and the process by which individuals assimilate, it is important to define it and outline its four stages.

Organizational assimilation has been defined in several ways, but for this study Jablin's definition is most useful. Jablin (1982), who initially conceptualized this theory, defines organizational assimilation as the "process by which organizational members become a part of, or are absorbed into, the culture of an organization" (p. 256). In later writings he elaborated, describing organizational assimilation as the process an individual takes to become integrated into the real life, daily happenings of an organization (Jablin, 1987). Jablin's elaboration on his previous definition notes that an individual's assimilation into an organization does not stay at a macro, cultural level, but extends to a micro level, involving daily life and experiences. Studying organizational assimilation is important because how members assimilate can make the difference between a successful organization and an unsuccessful one. While contemporary research does not state this, it is reasonable to assume that if members of an organization do not feel welcome or lack a sense of belonging, they will leave.

Organizational assimilation involves two distinct participants. The first participant is the organization, which tries teaching, consciously or unconsciously, the new member the behaviors, values, and attitudes of the organization (Scott & Myers, 2010). These behaviors, values, and attitudes are intentionally taught in settings such as new employee orientation or unintentionally taught at epicenters of employee gathering such as the watercooler or the lunchroom. For example, a new young professional in Springfield is consistently being surrounded by and constantly reminded of the subtle nuances of culture, traditions, norms, and community values that Springfield holds. Springfield, the organization, is unconsciously teaching the young professional how to behave and act while living in the community.

The second participant is the newcomer. The new member attempts to figure out and personalize his or her role within the organization (Jablin, 1982). In this instance, the young professional may get involved in a local organization in order to participate in the community through mechanisms like community groups, Springfield cultural events, and interactions with local community members. There is a mutual, interactive relationship between newcomer and organization (Scott & Myers, 2010). Assimilation does not refer to an action of the organization on the person, but reflects a give-and-take between the organization and the person.

Assimilation distinguishes between *role-taking* and *role-making*. Assimilation acknowledges that the individual will negotiate and communicatively create a role (i.e., role-making) to function within the organization (Scott & Myers, 2010). Role-taking asserts that the organization picks and chooses what role an individual will play and fill. Organizational assimilation is a dynamic process requiring both the new member and the organization to be willing participants.

### **Stages of Assimilation**

Jablin (1982) identifies four stages of assimilation that organizational members typically experience in a natural progression. Although organizational assimilation literature does not explicitly state this, it is logical to assert that each stage needs to be completed in order to move to the next. If a stage is not completed, the newcomer will not be fully assimilated and has two options: stay but remain unsatisfied and unproductive, or leave the organization to join another that better meets the person's

needs. The stages are anticipatory socialization, encounter, metamorphosis, and communication-related outcomes.

**Anticipatory socialization.** Anticipatory socialization occurs before a person has entered the organization (Jablin, 1982). The goal of an organization at this phase is to make the organization appealing before newcomers step into the organization. There are two types of anticipatory socialization: anticipatory vocational socialization, and anticipatory organizational socialization, which is the main focus for this analysis. According to Jablin (1982), anticipatory organizational socialization is the “process by which the individual forms expectations of his or her job and organization prior to entering” (p. 264). Individuals try to anticipate the organizational culture and make preconceived judgments, based on past experiences, personal research, and testimonies from others, on whether or not they will belong. For example, a young professional may hear about a city through a friend already living in that city. The friend persuades the young professional to move to that city for work. Before even living there, the young professional has already built up expectations and desires about the city based the friend’s testimony and his or her own personal research. At this stage, attraction is crucial for the organization. How the organization looks, feels, and is portrayed externally makes a major difference entering the assimilation process. In the same way, how a city is portrayed externally with advertisements and citizen testimonials makes a difference for Millennials. The process of assimilation occurs concurrently with recruiting.

**Encounter.** Once an individual has entered into the organization, he or she begins the encounter phase. This is considered the “breaking-in” period where anticipatory organizational socialization and reality collide (Jablin 1982). Individuals are faced with

deconstructing what they *thought* the organization would be like compared to what it *actually* is. This phase, the normative, daily interactions with coworkers and peers, becomes the most important factor affecting an individual's assimilation (Jablin, 1987). During this encounter phase, what is communicated to newcomers by employees carries a big weight:

Organizations understand that effective communication at all levels of the organization improve organizational success and employee relations... Studies have shown that different aspects of effective organizational communication, such as high frequency, openness and accuracy, performance feedback, and adequacy of information about organizational policies and procedures are positively related to employees' feelings of happiness in the work place and job performance. (Proctor, 2014, p. i, 1)

The encounter phase serves four functions. The first function helps the newcomer learn the nuances of the organization, the rules, informal networks, and helps interpret and ascribe meaning to events that have already occurred (Feldman, 1981). It helps blend the anticipatory organizational assimilation expectations with the reality of the organization.

The second function of the encounter phase is to establishes interpersonal relationships (Feldman, 1976). During this phase, friendships and relationships are created. As a new member enters the organization, the established members help guide and navigate the individual, thus forming potentially long-lasting bonds. "Finding the right person or persons from whom to learn about the organization, work group, and job plays a pivotal role in socialization. These work relationships are typically shaped by work and nonwork-related individual characteristics of the organizational members" (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994, p. 2).

The third function of the encounter phase is to clarify roles (Feldman, 1976). Role clarification helps an individual understand where he or she fits into an organization. When there is role ambiguity, the sense of security weakens (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role ambiguity is the lack of “clarity in behavior requirements, often in terms of inputs from the environment, which would serve to guide behavior and provide knowledge that the behavior is appropriate” (Rizzo et al., 1970, p. 156). It is during this phase that an individual begins to make sense of his or her role in the organization. This role is created through negotiation between the individual and the organization. Every productive member of an organization has a role. In a workplace setting, role ambiguity has been consistently linked to high-stress levels and low job satisfaction (Quah & Campbell, 1994). If a newcomer does not feel needed or have a place within the organization, he or she will most likely going to leave to find a place to fit elsewhere.

The fourth and final function of the encounter phase is to discover the similarity between the individual and the organizational notion of performance evaluation (Feldman, 1976). This essentially means that the newcomer has to align him or herself to the organizational performance standards.

Other coworkers in the workplace largely influence the encounter phase in the organizational assimilation process. The organizational environment shapes newcomers’ behavior based on what their peers draw attention to and create meaning for throughout the course of both participants’ ongoing interactions (Jablin, 1987).

**Metamorphosis.** The third phase in the organizational assimilation process is metamorphosis, which Jablin (1987) defines as, “attempts to become an accepted, participating member of the organization by learning new attitudes and behaviors or

modifying existing ones to be consistent with the organization's expectations" (p. 705). Just as with a butterfly's metamorphosis phase, there is a complete transformation from one stage to the next. During this phase, the person adapts and participates in the organization's cultural norms. Where there are inconsistencies and incongruences, a person will modify his or her behavior to resolve them. For example, a young professional may be used to eating lunch at 1:00 p.m. However, if the rest of the office consistently eats at 11:30 a.m., the young professional will change his or her normal eating time to fit the rest of the group. Not only does this help the young professional fit into the new organization, but it also becomes a self-preservative action (Jablin, 1982). By conforming to the organization's culture, he or she does not risk alienation for not joining the group for lunch. If a person cannot make the metamorphosis from outsider to insider, he or she will likely leave the organization.

**Communication-related outcomes.** The fourth and final phase of organizational assimilation describes the communication-related outcomes that will develop as a result of successfully navigating through the first three phases. In other words, the communication-related outcomes phase reveals what an individual who has navigated through the anticipatory socialization, encounter, and metamorphosis should develop.

There are five measureable outcomes, described as follows:

- Feelings of organizational communication satisfaction- Newcomers will feel an affective and positive response from their environment (Jablin, 1982).
- Perceptions of organizational climate- Over time the newcomer's understanding of the organizational climate will align itself with their peers and other around them (Jablin, 1987).
- High degree of understanding in the organizational communication culture- When a newcomer shares and identifies with the organization's communication culture, it becomes an inherent and powerful tool of control. This is also a requisite for strategies in determining role organization (Jablin 1987).



- Participation in emergent organizational communication networks- When newcomers assimilate, they transition from becoming purely “links” in communication networks, to holding responsibility and performing functions within the communication network roles (Jablin, 1987).
- High levels of organizational competence- The newcomer will be able to gain specific social goals using socially acceptable means (defined by the organization) or writing the positive outcome with other peers (Jablin, 1987).

These outcomes are characteristics of a healthy, integrated member in an organization. In the context of this study, Springfield should strive for its young professionals to be satisfied, perceptive of Springfield’s climate, understanding and sharing in Springfield’s collective culture, participating within the community, and gaining social goals.

Understanding the process of organizational assimilation is valuable for all organizations, particularly cities seeking to assimilate Millennials. It allows for a greater maximization of organizations, including cities, to maximize member satisfaction and retention. These four phases are fundamentally similar to what Millennials encounter when trying to integrate into a new community. Therefore, cities should understand the role-making process and facilitate Millennials engagement in this process.

As previously described, there are two participants required in organizational assimilation—the organization and the newcomer. Chapter One presented a brief background on Springfield to gain a better understanding of Springfield as the organization in this study. The first portion of Chapter Two analyzed Millennials to gain a better understanding of what they value in a city, as the newcomer in the study. To be able to continue to investigate Springfield young professionals’ assimilation, Springfield Millennials have to retrospectively make sense of their experiences thus far. That is

achieved through sensemaking, which focuses on how individuals describe and understand their experiences.

### **Sensemaking**

Sensemaking “converts a world of experience into an intelligible world” (Weick, 2001, p. 9). As individuals employ sensemaking, they are able to extract concrete ideas from ambiguous recollections to make better sense of their experiences. Springfield Millennials have participated in experiences that are a part of the assimilation process in becoming members of Springfield’s community. The previous section outlined organizational assimilation and its stages from an outside perspective. Having a theoretical understanding of sensemaking is important because sensemaking allows the study to analyze the assimilation process of Springfield young professionals from their own perspectives. Both perspectives are crucial to fully understanding to what extent young professionals have assimilated into Springfield. This literature review on sensemaking first defines sensemaking, and then investigates its seven properties.

There are several interpretations and definitions of sensemaking. The originator of the concept of sensemaking was Weick (1995), who described the process by which individuals determine, retrospectively, what their experiences mean. Weick and his associates further developed the concept and defined it as “a sequence in which people are concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005 p. 409). Starbuck and Milliken (1988) discuss sensemaking as people placing stimuli into frameworks that help them understand, comprehend, explain,

extrapolate, and predict future events. Klein, Moon, and Hoffman (2006), use layman's terms to describe sensemaking as "a motivated continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) in order to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively" (p. 71). For this study, a created working definition of sensemaking is the act of retrospectively taking past experiences and ascribing meaning to them for the purposes of identifying, labeling, and studying. Discovering how young professionals are assimilating in Springfield requires analysis of how they describe, and make sense of their past experiences.

### **Properties of Sensemaking**

There are seven properties of sensemaking that serve as a framework for what sensemaking is, how it works, and where it can fail. These properties primarily create a theoretical boundary for sensemaking to occur and these properties are relevant as young professionals make sense of their location choices (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

**Grounded in identity construction.** When studying sensemaking, it is easy to conclude that sensemaking is entirely introspective. However, according to this property, identity is shaped through interactions and experiences with family, peers, religion, and school or workplace environments (Helms-Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Before an individual can begin the sensemaking process, it is important to remember that people's identities are rooted and established through interactions with other people.

Organizationally, an individual's self-concept and identity are shaped and negotiated by how he or she relates to the organization for which he or she works (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Sensemaking takes those identities and experience to create a framework that can be used to retrospectively create meaning. The more selves one has access to, the number of possible meanings extracted and created in a given situation (Weick, 1995). Young professionals' identities are constructed through experiences with other young professionals, highlighting the significance of cities facilitating young professional interactions.

**Retrospective.** That sensemaking is retrospective is one of the most important properties of sensemaking. People can only know what they are doing after they have done it (Carter & Colville, 2003). In making sense of one's experiences, an individual has to extract experiences from the past because the past is when those experiences are apprehendable, distinguishable, and separate from each other (Carter & Colville, 2003). Young professionals cannot ascribe meaning to their experiences as it is happening. Sensemaking requires people to look back, analyze, and label their thoughts and behaviors. Those moments no longer become phases of the present, but become full-blown experiences. Experience always precedes meaning (Carter & Colville, 2003).

**Enactive of sensible environments.** Weick (1995) uses the term *enactment* to highlight the importance of people taking part in producing the environment they are a part of. "Thus, our sensemaking can be either constrained or created by the very environment that it has created. Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, this property maintains that the environment that has been created by the sensemaker reinforces his or her sense of credibility" (Helms-Mills et al., 2010, p.185).

This ties directly to the property of identity construction. Young professionals are shaping, and are being shaped, by their organizational environment. As acknowledged previously, Millennials seek opportunities to engage in the community and help shape their community's environment. In sensemaking, this property is important to understand because Millennials' identity being shaped through others is merely a reaction of how Millennials' respond to the identity construction—whether imagined or real (Carter & Colville, 2003).

**Social.** Weick (1995) asserted that the social influences in the sensemaking process do not have to be physically present. Symbolic interactions have a significant effect on sensemaking as well. Sensemaking is never an individual process because what individuals do is contingent on others. This property again stresses the significance of external individuals and their role in the sensemaking process. These shared meanings within an organization are a vital part in the sensemaking process. “As well, an organization's rules, routines, symbols, and language will all have an impact on an individual's sensemaking activities and provide routines or scripts for appropriate conduct. But when routines or scripts do not exist, the individual is left to fall back on his or her own ways of making sense” (Helms-Mills et al., 2010, p. 185).

Millennials are exceptionally social and connected via multiple outlets—constantly being molded by those around them, which influences their sensemaking development.

**Ongoing.** Sensemaking is a sequential process that does not have a beginning or end (Helms-Mills, et al., 2010). This seems contradictory in nature, since sensemaking relies on ascribing meaning to specific past experiences that do have a beginning and end.

However, individuals are always making sense of what goes on around them, but they isolate and pull past experiences from the stream of concurrent and constant sensemaking to relate back the present application, thus creating a start and stop effect (Helms-Mills et al., 2010). This is important to the present study because for young professionals, each meaning ascribed to an experience is linked to other experiences before it, while influencing experiences to come (Klatzke, 2008). So cities that can create and facilitate positive experiences for young professionals are actually creating a positive filter through which young professionals can ascribe future experiences.

**Focused on and by extracting clues.** The sensemaking process naturally causes the sensemaker to focus on certain elements, while ignoring others, to subconsciously support their interpretation of an event (Helms, et al., 2010). For example, suppose a young professional at a networking event with other young professionals was served terrible food, but made many connections and developed strong relationships. When asked about the event, the young professional is likely to ignore the element of being served terrible food to insist the experience was a positive one. Helms et al. (2010) elaborate:

By focusing on key elements of a strategic plan, for example, organizations may ignore other cues from the environment in order to stay on track. The sensemaking process may allow individuals to interpret cues, or features of a map, in ways that support their beliefs. (p. 185).

Starbuck and Milliken (1988) call this *noticing*. What people notice becomes information to spark the sensemaking process, which then dictates what people notice

later. Noticing is impacted by the sensemaker's habits, their beliefs about what is, and beliefs about what should be (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988).

**Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.** In the sensemaking process, the *sensible* does not have to be *sensable* (Weick, 1995). Accuracy in sensemaking is nice, but not always necessary. Weick (1995) states, "Plausible reasoning goes beyond the directly observable or at least consensual information to form ideas or understandings that provide enough certainty" (p. 56). In sensemaking, the individual looks for cues to make their meaning plausible, not accurate (Helms et al., 2010). This is where sensemaking can become problematic. Individuals may distort or ignore what is accurate and rely on faulty reasoning for determining what is right or wrong (Helms et al. 2010). This property, as Helms et al. (2010) elaborates, reflects situations where within an organization there are several different, yet plausible, explanations or reactions to a common action, policy, or event. Accuracy is not the main goal of sensemaking.

Sensemaking takes the experiences of individuals and ascribes meaning to them for the purposes of identifying, labeling, and studying. Springfield young professionals can utilize sensemaking to evaluate their experiences to what Millennials seek in a city: affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity. Springfield young professionals retrospectively recall their experiences to determine if Springfield facilitates what they are looking for in a city and if they have assimilated into Springfield's working culture.

### **Summary and Research Question**

Springfield, Missouri, in order to enhance its economic health, needs to understand how to better recruit and retain young professionals. Young professionals, a part of the Millennial generation, desire affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity in a city. Through the theoretical lens of organizational assimilation, young professionals function as organization members as they learn to become a part of their new living environment. The use of sensemaking allows Springfield young professionals to ascribe meaning to their past experiences. The results can then be used to determine whether Springfield Millennials have found the characteristics they are looking for in a city, and to what extent they have assimilated into Springfield's working culture. If Springfield young professionals have assimilated, Springfield can take what is already working to enhance recruitment. If Springfield young professionals have not assimilated and Springfield does not have the characteristics Millennials are looking for in a city, Springfield can use that information to pinpoint where improvements can be made to enhance the environment for young professionals to thrive. This study is significant and necessary to the development of cities for the next few years. This study can be used as a template to assess the needs of individual cities as they strategize to recruit and retain young professionals. Taking all these factors into account, to study how Springfield young professionals have assimilated into the city, the following question must be asked:

**RQ1: To what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield, Missouri's culture?**



Chapter Three will review the methods of the study that helped answer this research question—the rationale and justification, review of the pilot project, data collection method, procedures, and analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter will review the methods used to answer the research question: To what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield, Missouri culture? The first section details the rationale of using qualitative research through focus groups. The second section reviews a study, conducted as part of a graduate class, which prompted this present study. The third section will outline the data collection method including participants, site, procedure, and analysis. Finally, the fourth section will describe the procedure of the focus groups and the fifth section will outline the steps of the analysis.

### **Rationale and Justification**

As Griffin (2004) states, qualitative research is mainly concerned with meaning—specifically how people make sense of the world around them and how individuals experience events from their point of view. This is consistent with sensemaking as a theoretical framework. This study utilizes focus groups to gather data about participant experiences of assimilating into Springfield's working culture. Focus group interviewing is helpful in gaining an understanding of people's knowledge and experiences. Not only does it reveal what people think, but *how* they think, and *why* they think a particular way (Kitzinger, 1995). Using a semi-structured approach with focus groups provides rich conversation while allowing new themes to emerge more organically. The job of the researcher is to generate ideas and facilitate conversation, not control the direction of the focus group:

A focus group [is like] a soccer game. During a game, the coach is on the sideline, and the ball is in play among the players. The players move the ball around among themselves, and the coach encourages the action from the sideline. The coach may call different players into the game, or pull players out, but he is directing and not playing. This is consistent with a focus group in that the coach is moderating the game, and the players are dynamically interacting among themselves, with the ball. (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 80)

The study seeks to discover Millennials' experiences of assimilation into the Springfield community. Focus groups are an appropriate method for capturing insights into the assimilation process, which is why this method was selected for this study.

### **Foundational Project**

This study is an extension of a foundational project assigned in a graduate-level qualitative research methods course. This exploratory research served as the foundation and springboard for the present research study. The title of the project was: *Young Professionals Take Springfield: A Qualitative Analysis on Sensemaking and Career Choices*. The study specifically focused on the choices young professionals make early in their career. Using sensemaking as the primary communication theory, the research examined how young professionals in Springfield made sense of their career choices post college. The research question specifically asked, "How do young professionals in Springfield make sense of their career choices?" For the foundational project, this researcher conducted a single focus group with eight participants under the age of 30, who had completed their undergraduate work, lived and worked full-time within the Springfield city limits, single (not married), and held white collar jobs. The participants worked in a variety of industries including nonprofit, insurance, entrepreneurial and technology startups, student affairs, and business.

The single focus group was transcribed and the discourse was then coded into themes that emerged from the focus group. As the themes were being coded, an interesting development arose. Although location choice was not the initial focus of the investigation, for the participants, the fact that their location and career choices were intrinsically linked emerged from the data. The participants talked about their career choices within the context of where they were going to live. Location dictated their career choices significantly. Because of this, the focus group conversation did not get into detail as to why the participants chose their specific field, but rather how Springfield shaped their career choices. Three themes emerged from the focus group: (1) Springfield needs builders; (2) Springfield has substantial opportunities and (3) Springfield is the ideal city embodying the ‘big-city’ counter narrative. This reveals the strength of focus groups—they open up avenues of investigation that had not previously been considered.

**Springfield as builders.** A common ideal within the focus group was that Springfield is a community that has potential to be the next big city in the Midwest. The participants believed that their choice in building their careers in Springfield is the first step in creating a bigger, better, and brighter Springfield. They took ownership of Springfield and decided that if they want to see change, they had to be present to do so.

**Young professionals as opportunists.** The participants acknowledge the plethora of opportunities available within the community. Job opportunities, service opportunities, the ability to serve on nonprofit boards, and the chances to build strong social connections emerged as a strong reason for choosing to work in Springfield.

**Young professionals’ “big-city” counter narrative.** The final theme that emerged from the focus group was the adamant rejection of the trend of Millennials

migrating to the urban core of big metropolitan cities in favor of a smaller city like Springfield. The ability to be a “big fish in a smaller pond” was important for the participants. They felt the size of Springfield gave them opportunities to be more involved in the community and make a bigger impact. The Network noted this premise in the executive summary for recruiting and retaining young professionals.

This project highlighted several avenues for future research. One of those avenues revealed a need to intentionally study young professional assimilation experiences in Springfield. The current study is a response to that need.

## **Data Collection**

**Participants.** For this study, participants were eligible if they were Millennials (ages 18 to 34 in 2015), college graduates or in advanced schooling, living and working full-time within the Springfield city limits, single or married, and working in a ‘white-collar’ job. The researcher acknowledges that there are many other subpopulations within the Millennial generation (blue collar workers, dropouts, those still in school, etc.). However, this population made the most sense for the study for two reasons. First, the researcher himself fits the criteria and has the most interaction with this population, making it a convenient population to study. Second, educated full-time working young professionals are the most attractive subpopulation of Millennials to cities because of their disposable income and desire to volunteer within the community (Kurtzleben, 2013).

To provide a representative cross-section of participants, four focus groups were conducted over a span of one month. Each focus group was composed of participants

from a specific organization in Springfield. The first focus had six participants from Rotaract, which is a service-based young professional organization associated with Rotary International. The organization partners with Springfield's five Rotary Clubs to participate in service projects across the community, while providing professional and social opportunities (Rotaract, 2015). The second focus group had three participants from The Network (three participants cancelled the night before). The Network, an organization associated with the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, is considered the premiere young professional organization in the city. It provides monthly programming that focuses on professional development, community engagement, and social opportunities (The Network, 2015). The third focus group had four participants from 1 Million Cups (one participant cancelled the day of the scheduled interview). Housed in the Robert W. Plaster Free Enterprise Center at Missouri State University, 1 Million Cups is a community-wide weekly gathering designed to educate, engage, and connect local entrepreneurs (1 Million Cups, 2015). Each week local startup companies present to the 1 Million Cups community their various businesses, marketing plans, or products to an audience for collaboration, advice, and new business opportunities. Unlike Rotaract and The Network, 1 Million Cups is not exclusively young professional—however a large percentage of members are Millennial. The final focus group had seven participants who all work at the General Council of the Assemblies of God world headquarters. All seven participants graduated from Evangel University, the local Assemblies of God University. However, Evangel is a unique university with a majority of its enrolled students coming from outside Missouri. Only two of the seven participants claim Springfield as their original home.

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. I personally knew key members in each organization from the pilot project. The key members then recruited from within their respective organizations. In total, there were nine male and 11 female participants. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 31, with the average age of 26. The participants represented a wide variety of Springfield's white-collar workforce. Industries such as finance, law, secondary education, nonprofit, restaurant administration, and technology startups were all represented (see Appendix A).

**Site.** The focus groups were conducted in a private conference room provided by the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, which provides a good, central meeting location with adequate space and sufficient for audio recording. Each focus group either met from 7:00am to 8:00am or 8:00am to 9:00am.

## **Procedure**

The Institutional Review Board application was submitted prior to the start of the research process (see Appendix B). The application was approved initially by the College of Arts and Letters IRB faculty representative, and subsequently by the full committee. Once on site, informed consent forms were passed out and explained by me, clarifying the various sections of the consent forms (see Appendix C). The importance of anonymity was addressed before the informed consent process was explained to the focus group. The forms were then signed and returned back to me. I followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) throughout the focus groups, which allowed for greater free-flowing discussion and more in-depth analysis. The interview protocol was influenced from the foundational study. The focus groups were recorded on a digital

recorder. The audio files were then transferred to a secure computer where they will be kept for one year. The audio files were deleted from the recorder to maintain confidentiality.

## **Analysis**

The four focus group interviews were transcribed through an online transcription service. Once received, the transcriptions were reviewed and edited to correct any mistakes made by the transcription service. I then read each transcript in its entirety, while marking and coding each comment that pertained to one of the five characteristics Millennials look for in a city. These characteristics, affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity, served as the structure within which the participants' comments were analyzed. Based on the foundational project for this particular study and additional research, young professional discourse centered on these characteristics. In order to get the most out of the participants' focus groups, it was imperative to come alongside the ongoing conversation and filter the focus groups' dialogue through those characteristics. The characteristics provide simple and effective criteria to explore the experiences of Springfield young professionals. However, themes that may emerge in addition to the five characteristics would also be important to address and discuss. Thus, I also looked for characteristics other than the five themes previously discovered.

I read each transcription five times, each time focusing on a different characteristic. A document was created to house all the coded participant comments—electronically cut and pasted and grouped by each characteristic. This allowed me to



study all the comments for each particular characteristic at one time to mark the similarities and annotate the unexpected themes that emerged. All other discourse not pertaining to the five characteristics were set aside unless used for further analysis. After the results were analyzed, as a validity check, three focus group participants (each from a different group) received a summary of the results to determine the accuracy of the results. All three participants strongly supported the results and claims made allowing the writing process to proceed.

Applied qualitative research provides, “the training or calibration of human judgment and the capacity for practical knowledge” (Tracy, 2012, p. 241). This applied qualitative study was developed to learn how young professionals in Springfield have assimilated into the city. By understanding Springfield’s young professionals, Springfield can use their experiences to better inform strategies to recruit and retain the best and brightest young professionals.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

The current study seeks to answer the research question, “To what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield, Missouri’s culture?” In Chapter Two, five characteristics were identified from a foundational study and synthesis of research, to describe what Millennials are looking for in a city—affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity. As addressed in Chapter Three, these characteristics serve as a criterion for the findings below. This section analyzes the thoughts, responses, and experiences of the participants, through the lens of the five characteristics, to determine whether young professionals have found the characteristics they are looking for in Springfield and to what extent they have assimilated into Springfield’s culture.

Participant quotes in this chapter are not edited for grammar and are from this current study unless otherwise noted. Pseudonyms were used and other obvious identifying characteristics were changed to protect the identity of the participants.

### **Affordability**

Contrary to the research presented in Chapter Two, Springfield young professionals did not directly view affordability as a main characteristic for what they are looking for in a city. For the participants, job opportunity was significantly more important. When asked the question, “What's the most important thing to you about the city where you live?” Baelin, an attorney, replied: “I would say professional

opportunities. Well, by that I mean the ability to have an impact on your profession. The ability to stand out.” Jennifer, the assistant editor of a national magazine published through a local nonprofit, also exclaimed:

I would say opportunity for growth and for exploration of careers because at this stage in life a lot of people, especially as a character trait of millennials who move jobs a lot, I would say that there's opportunity to have not necessarily entry level jobs but jobs where you can jump in having maybe two, three years experience and really use that as a launch pad to something else.

It became apparent throughout the four focus groups that the participants were more concerned with job opportunity and job variety than finding a city that was affordable. This interesting development may be influenced by the fact that Springfield already boasts a significantly low cost of living average compared to the national average. Geoff, a credit analyst at a local bank, and Charley, a small business owner, both lauded Springfield's low cost of living. “Affordability [wise], this is a great place to live. We all know that [because of] the cost of living, this is a nice little area”, said Geoff. Charley followed up his response with, “it's cheap to live here.” The participants already live in an area where living is cheap so affordability is not an issue. As long as these young professionals have the ability to find a job, they can be secure living here. This is noteworthy because it was also clearly expressed that while cost of living is cheap, pay wages and salaries are problematic. Lincoln, a local native who moved to Chicago for her undergraduate degree before returning for graduate school, was very candid about her thoughts about pay when asked what she did not like about Springfield: “Well the pay here isn't great. That's one reason we can't get people to stay here.” Baelin was just as passionate when asked the same question:

Yeah, [there are] two biggest challenges. Number one, I echo both of them [the other participants] on the wages. I mean, it's just the elephant in the room. We've

got to fix it. I don't know really what the solution is because I don't know what's putting the cart before the horse on the wages situation. You can't deny it. That's why most people leave.

Though pay wages and salaries are problematic, the cost of living allows Springfield young professionals to live the life they want. So while Springfield young professionals may not see affordability as a main incentive for moving to a city, they are able to reap the benefits here in Springfield. Amanda, a Wisconsin native, echoed this sentiment: “You can have so much [here]. Even apartment wise, compared to a city, it's so affordable. It's really easy for when you graduate from college and you're taking those first steps into your career to settle and be independent right away. That was really appealing to me.”

Jacoby and Katherine, a young married couple, have also taken advantage of Springfield's cost of living. Jacoby said, “Springfield's really cheap. It's a big deal because we own a house. We would not own a house if we didn't live in Springfield because the houses we would have wanted to own, we wouldn't have been able to afford it anywhere else.” Katherine followed up exclaiming: “It's nice to have my own place and furnish my own place and to know that I can save up for things and that it's not unreasonable. I can have a mortgage payment and a car payment and pay for home insurance and life insurance and all those different things and not be scared about how am I going to pay the bills.”

The participants' discourse revealed that, despite the pay wage problem, Springfield young professionals are able to enjoy the myriad of job opportunities Springfield has to offer.

## **Community Engagement and Involvement**

Research in Chapter Two stated that Millennials have a strong desire to seek opportunities to make a social impact where they live. The participants' discourse proved to be consistent with the research presented. For Springfield young professionals, community engagement and involvement is an important and vital part of their identity as a young professional. All 21 participants were engaged and involved in the community in some capacity. Carly, who has her own consulting business, had this to say when asked what was most important to her about the city she lived: "It's really important that there's an opportunity to be involved in the communities. So whether that's in board positions or volunteer opportunities I want to live in a place where our life outside of work and just our personal life is connected to other people in the community."

Joseph, a financial advisor, quickly reinforced what Carly said about the importance of being involved in the community through volunteerism:

[It's important to have a] broader mission than just be successful in the traditional sense, like [making] a lot of money. Kind of like Carly said, having a broader mission and being able to help those less fortunate because we are fortunate in our positions. Having a group of people that are like-minded in that and understand there's a bigger picture outside of, 'hey, my office and all those walls that contain they're in'. That's important.

Laken believes that this intrinsic motivation to become involved in the community is a byproduct of the conditioning Millennials received in high school. "I think growing up in high school or wherever, they push volunteer opportunities and you having to do that. To get into college, you needed to build up your resume. I think that that comes over into our mentality..." Laken's statement is consistent with previously presented research depicting Millennials as pressured because in order to get into the college, they have to fill their resumes with extracurricular activities and volunteerism.

One interesting finding about Springfield young professional community engagement and involvement culture is the fondness towards board service. Board service is a strong example of skills-based volunteering. It allows young professionals to be a consistent and contributing member of a nonprofit, while utilizing their professional skills to advance the organization. Many of the participants serve on nonprofit boards throughout Springfield. Eric, executive director of an arts group in Springfield, describes passionate about board service:

Truthfully, I really love talking about board service because it really is a job. You really have to make sure that you're ready because you'll have to be present at meetings. You really have to weigh in on the topics that the organization needs help with because A, you have a liability joining a board, but B, you should really want to lend your expertise because the organization obviously needs a board because they don't have the ability to have a marketing director and a finance director. They look to the board to do that.

While board service is a clear favorite amongst the participants, they are also engaged in a plethora of other volunteerism opportunities in Springfield. Molly, a staff accountant, helps plan a children's Halloween party and back to school night each year. Geoff was a former lunch buddy through Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Ozarks. Drummond, co-owner of a local urban food enterprise, teaches community members how to garden sustainably through a local gardening nonprofit. Danielle, a Spanish marketing strategist, gives her time to a nonprofit dedicated to rescue and counsel victims of sex-trafficking.

It is apparent that Springfield young professionals deeply value community engagement and seek to make it a vital part of their young professional experience. There is an overabundance of opportunities for young professionals to get involved in the community.

## **Millennial Collaboration**

Who are young professionals seeking to interact with in a new city? Katherine, program coordinator for a national nonprofit, accurately describes what Springfield young professionals are looking for in a city—the ability to connect and grow with others

People who, whether it be through your workplace or your church, or if you're involved in another activity, people who you feel connected to that you can share life with, and just friendly advice, ask for help with different things. If you're moving, someone who you could easily ask to come and help you move, who you trust their suggestions as far as like, 'Hey, I'm looking for someone to babysit,' or 'do you know of a good nanny place?' Anything like that.

Meg, an assistant director of a large entertainment venue, echoes Katherine's comments, "I think it's really important that the city have organizations like the young professional groups in order to network and make friendships outside of your work life so that you feel like you have family and friends here that you might not actually have." The social connection with other young professionals is an important one for the participants. Young professionals are notorious for going above and beyond in their work environments, often extending past the traditional 40-hour workweek. The ability for young professionals to detach from their jobs to relax and connect with other young professionals in social settings is crucial. How is that developed in a city? Through young, quasi-professional groups. There were four young professional-oriented groups specifically addressed throughout the focus groups in Springfield: Rotaract, The Network, 1 Millions Cups, and Springfield Creatives, a young professional group for those involved in a variety of art related fields. Easton, a financial advisor, says Rotaract has given him outlets outside of work.

For me, actually, it's been just that social relief. Right? We spend so much time in our employers, you know in the work place, growing professionally. Rotaract has been that opportunity to be that social release where you can just be around folks

who are also wanting to just hang out and provide a service or a charity and just socialize.

The value of a young professional community in a city is significant because it provides diversity of thought and it keeps people from moving away. Brenton, founder of his own marketing consulting firm, likes being a part of his young professional group because it allows him to interact with people with different backgrounds, experiences, schools of thought, and viewpoints. He believes those interactions sharpen the mind, even if the different perspectives are hard to understand. Kellie, a publishing associate and analyst, claims that the relationships and connections she built kept her from moving back to her hometown in Ohio. Jacoby, a local youth pastor, understands Kellie's decision to stay: "I think those community connections, that's what gets people jobs, especially post graduation. They stick around longer than they ever planned to, especially in Springfield. I think the community is that aspect of just friendships and family is the number one important thing to me."

Another reason the establishment of a Millennial community is vital is because such community encourages collaboration about entrepreneurial endeavors. Nearly 20% of this study's participants have their own business or startup. As the participants explicitly stated throughout the focus, relationships matter: Drummond provided beneficial insight into the entrepreneurial side of Springfield business relationships.

We just started here, and that getting to know everybody in the business scene has been a reason to stay, definitely. I think marketing now is trust marketing and building relationships anyway; Springfield is good at that. If you're not that and you're just being a salesman, you're not going to make it very far in this town, and that's what I like about Springfield. [In my business] the restaurants all know each other, so once you meet one, you get to know them all, which is awesome. Even if they don't like each other, they'll still introduce you to everybody.



The participants highlighted Springfield's strength in building collaborative relationships, making Springfield an attractive city for young professionals. In fact, Drummond observed that his young entrepreneur friends, many of who have their own media companies, often promote for each other! Multiple participants noted that collaboration and relationships are paramount in the Springfield business world.

All in all, Millennial collaboration for the purposes of social community and business entrepreneurship are important to young professionals when choosing a city to live. Springfield young professionals have several organizations and avenues by which they can get connected.

### **Entertainment and Meaningful Experiences**

Research asserts that Millennials more than any other generation value entertainment and meaningful experiences. Young professionals are looking for cities that can provide a myriad of culinary, athletic, artistic, and cultural experiences. Springfield young professionals have noticed an increase in the amount the city has to offer, but there is still room for great improvement. Meg elaborated:

I think in the last ten years this city has noticed that they bring in, with all the universities, that they bring in all these students that could become young professionals for the city, but there was nothing to keep them here. So I think they've done a really good job over the last few years of trying to appeal to the twenty-five to thirty year old to keep them year [through] you know, restaurants, shopping, bars things like that...

Laken left for Chicago in 2009 and returned in 2013. During that time she too noticed a strong increase in things to do. "I feel like downtown has really changed since I've come back. It's gotten a lot of definitely restaurants. We have a ton of sushi restaurants and all

that kind of stuff. Maybe even more diverse options... [And the arts], plays and that kind of stuff. They're bringing "Wicked" in. More stuff like that too."

Laken's comments reflect an interesting notion that was reflected throughout all four focus groups. The epicenter of entertainment and meaningful experiences is downtown. The participants repeatedly used downtown as the ideal hub of restaurants, bars, etc. "I will say that even the bar scene of downtown has really changed for the better" Eric exclaimed. While downtown may have improved, Bob believes there are improvements to be had:

I think our downtown needs continued improvement. It went through a boom there the last five, ten years, and it seems like it's starting to taper off now. You see bars, restaurants come and go so much. I would really like to see downtown cleaned up... we've got so many buildings with so much potential. I know there's a lot of environmental factors and stuff we can't really do anything about, but somebody needs to come in with some money. There's so much potential downtown that it'd be nice.

Not mentioned in earlier research but addressed in the focus groups, Springfield young professionals differentiate between college and young professional entertainment. Eric explicitly stated the distinction:

I will say that even the bar scene of downtown has really changed for the better. I mean, I think ten years ago it was nothing but college bars. Once you leave the college [scene], actually you want places to go out, and you want places, I guess, to hang out with your friends in either a professional or friend setting. Downtown's gotten a lot better at that. For a long time it was Finnegan's or bars like Finnegan's, and that was just about it. The rise of the cross between Scotch and Soda, those types of bars have really impacted for the better the big downtown scene and making it more friendly for young professionals.

Adeline, project implementer for a national nonprofit, and Easton both echoed Eric's comments. "This may be just where I am, but I feel like I go downtown and it's such and such pub crawl all the time," Adeline stated. Easton added, "On the social side of things, I mean, obviously for some people, there's the bar scene and that's not me right now, but I

enjoy nicer restaurants and being able to go out and do social things.” This suggests that for cities to truly engage in entertainment possibilities, they have to be strategic in creating attractive experiences that will appeal to young professionals specifically.

Based on the participants’ experiences, while there is a growing culture of providing entertainment and meaningful experiences in Springfield, there is ample room for improvement.

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity, as it relates to cities, is traditionally measured from a tourism perspective. As previously stated, authenticity “connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique” (Wang, 1999, p.350). And in Springfield, that is evident as Danielle expresses: “I feel like when it comes to the restaurants and coffee shops, and the farmers' markets, I feel like you can find a lot of authenticity.” However, for the participants, authenticity is measured by what separates Springfield from other cities—its unique ability to be a sizeable city in population, while maintaining a small community atmosphere. Springfield young professionals can make a bigger impact in this market. Carly acknowledged it was a strategic advantage:

I'm from St. Louis. I always say Springfield you can be... It's a smaller pond, so you can be a bigger fish as a young professional. That's really what's shaped our experience as young professionals... I think that's a really unique thing about Springfield is sort of how small that pond can feel which is a great thing in that sense.

The same sentiment was expressed in a dialogue between Laken, Baelin, and Eric:

[Laken]: Yeah. In bigger cities it's just harder to get things done.

[Baelin]: Exactly.

[Eric]: You definitely don't get the recognition that you do here for what you're doing. I mean, I think because it's smaller, there is a lot more leverage and the

ability to make whatever point you are about the arts or what it is. I do think a lot more people know about it just because it's smaller and it's easier to make that impact.

Adeline framed this idea in the context of a day-to-day life for a young professional:

I love the variety of Springfield. You can go from ... I know it's not a huge city, but you can go from city downtown to I'm out in the country starting at fields in 20 minutes or less. I'm able to meet Billy Bob at the grocery store who's got his overalls and just wants to shake my hand and tell me about his day, but I'm also able to see people that I would never normally meet in a country setting every single day. It's a wide variety of people. It's a wide variety of experiences. It's everything from third markets to going to a nicer store, and you can do it all in a day.

While Springfield's authenticity is not traditional, it is evident that it has been strongly embraced by its young professionals. Springfield is a large city with a small town feel.

Addressing the results holistically, using the five characteristics Millennials are looking for in a city, it is apparent that Springfield young professionals are finding each of those characteristics to some degree in Springfield. While some of the results were expected based on the foundational project, new developments emerged. The following chapter highlights those developments and its theoretical, practical, and future research implications.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to analyze to what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield's culture. Millennials are now the most populous generation in the United States and their impact both economically and civically are vital to the growth of local communities and cities. By reconceptualizing cities as complex organizations to be studied through the context of organizational communication, communication theories such as organizational assimilation and sensemaking can be used to investigate if a city has what young professionals are looking for—affordability, community engagement and involvement, Millennial collaboration, entertainment and meaningful experiences, and authenticity. Four focus groups were conducted to determine if Springfield had these characteristics for its young professionals. If Springfield has these characteristics and young professionals are active in them, then it can be reasonably assumed that the young professionals have a high degree of assimilation. If the participants report that Springfield does not have these characteristics, it can be reasonably assumed that the young professionals have a low degree of assimilation and are more likely to move.

Research highlights the significance of affordable cities for Millennials. In fact, location and affordability are interdependent. Due to the negative effects of the Great Recession, the stress of school debt, and the fickle condition of the job market, young professionals are seeking cities that allow them to make the most of their income (Notte, 2015). For the participants, however, affordability was not explicitly stated as a determining characteristic for what they are seeking in a city. Springfield young

professionals are more concerned with living in a city with ample job opportunities. This mindset may result from Springfield young professionals already living in a city where the cost of living is below the national average (Next Generation Consulting, 2009). Because of this, affordability, in and of itself, is not an issue. Even though the participants expressed their frustration with pay wages in Springfield, as long as young professionals are able to obtain a job in their desired field, they have the ability to live a stable lifestyle. It was clearly communicated that Springfield young professionals are able to live the life they want—own a house, pay off debt, or even start a business. Although affordability was not clearly articulated as a determining characteristic for the participants, Springfield gives young professionals the ability, through a low cost of living, to do more with their money. Young professionals have fully assimilated in this characteristic.

Research reveals that Millennials have a strong desire to seek opportunities to make a social impact where they live (Cass, 2014). Based on the results of the focus group, that could not be more true. In fact, it would be accurate to assert that young professionals not only seek opportunities to be involved and engaged in the community, but find those experiences to be a part of their identity as a Millennial and as a young professional. This corroborates Smith's (2013) declaration about the state of young professionals and community engagement: "No surprise there, as social consciousness and engagement is such a vital component of their personal identities. Well, now it's becoming an essential component of their professional identities and that is truly a breakthrough idea" (p. 1) These Springfield young professionals are highly involved in the community in a variety of ways. Many engage in skills-based volunteerism by serving

on boards of local nonprofits. Others participate in specific community events through their young professional organizations, while some are highly active in their church and other faith-based organizations.

Regardless of the type, there are significant opportunities for young professionals to get involved in Springfield. Springfield is the right size of city for young professionals to make a noticeable, community-wide impact. The boards young professionals can serve on are more prominent, the opportunities to give back are more significant, and the ability to see real change is more evident. The opportunity for a young professional to be a real leading influencer in the community is greater because of the city's size. Springfield young professionals have fully assimilated in this characteristic.

The participants' discourse only confirmed Brack and Kelly's (2012) assessment of Millennials as the "collaboration generation" (p. 4). Springfield young professionals value Millennial collaboration and community as a means of social interaction and stress release, as well as for business endeavors. The participants expressed their ability to make social connections through young professionals groups like Rotaract and The Network. Cities that facilitate healthy organizations like these are able to build strong young professional bases in their community. Conversely, Springfield young professionals understand and utilize relationships as a means to build their entrepreneurial undertakings. This is noteworthy because research states that the most important indicator of success for young entrepreneurs lies in the ability for them to develop relationships and collaborate with other entrepreneurs (Lichtenstein, 1992). As expressed in the results, the ability to form and build relationships is one of Springfield's strengths for young professionals. Through young professional and business

entrepreneurial groups, Springfield young professionals have several avenues to collaborate and build community making this characteristic fully assimilated.

Once Millennials have found their community, they seek to share entertainment and meaningful experiences with one another. In fact, 72% of Millennials would rather increase their spending on experiences than buying physical items (Eventbrite, 2014). These experiences include cultural events, restaurants, bars, sporting events, and more (Felder, 2015). For Springfield young professionals, finding entertainment and meaningful experiences in the city is very important to them. The participants have taken notice to Springfield's expansion of restaurants, bars, and cultural experiences, but noted there is still considerable work to be done. Unexpectedly, participants also expressed a need for more "young professional" atmospheres. Springfield young professionals are looking to distance themselves from the stereotypical loud and crazy college atmosphere. Therefore, it is not enough for Springfield to attract new bars and restaurants; the city has to be strategic in bringing in new experiences that are more mature in nature, providing a comfortable social context for young professionals. While there is work to be done, young professionals have options to find entertainment and create meaningful experiences in Springfield.

At its core, authenticity is what makes something, someone, or someplace unique. Literature typically frames authenticity in the context of tourism. In tourism, criteria for cities typically include ideas like local art, festivals, rituals, unique local food, style of clothing, and housing as a basis for determining what is authentic or inauthentic (Wang, 1999). Springfield is housed in the heart of the Ozarks providing a plethora of options for outdoor activities. This is usually a major marketing push for Springfield and the



Chamber of Commerce. However, not once did the focus groups allude to that. For Springfield young professionals, what makes Springfield unique is the ability to be a “big fish in a small pond” and to make a significant impact in the community while not becoming just another face. Numerous times the participants pitted Springfield against bigger cities like St. Louis and Kansas City boasting in Springfield’s opportunities to make a bigger mark. Springfield’s narrative of being a “big city with a small town feel” is Springfield young professionals’ greatest advantage. Springfield young professionals have completely bought into this mindset and have fully assimilated in this characteristic.

So to what extent have Millennial young professionals assimilated into Springfield’s culture? Based on the results, it is evident that this group of Springfield young professionals have nearly fully assimilated into Springfield’s culture. Based on the focus group discourse, the participants displayed all the communication-related outcomes associated with a high degree of assimilation—feelings of Springfield satisfaction, personal alignment and high degree of understanding of Springfield’s climate, strong participation and ownership of Springfield networks, and high levels of Springfield competence.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The foundation of this study is built on the premise that cities can and should be considered complex organizations. After a thorough investigation, very little organizational communication literature recognized or identified cities as organizations. But engaging in literature from other academic disciplines such as the social sciences, physics, and ecology, a case can be made. Chapter One found these three contentions to

be true, thus reasonably concluding that cities can be considered organizations: 1) cities are complex 2) complex structures can be classified as complex systems, and 3) complex systems can be recognized as complex organizations. The city as a whole, partly because of its size, is a complex system and organization, with each of its individual components also being a complex systems (Portugali, 2013). What does this study mean for organizational communication? This potentially opens up a whole new vein of research for organizational communication scholars to study. By viewing cities as organizations through the lens of communication, scholars can study the dyadic transactions between people and the cities they inhabit.

This study provides new insight into how cities and its people develop symbiotic relationships. Young professionals take and grow from the city while the city benefits from young professionals economically and civically. As Scott and Meyers (2010) asserted, assimilation involved a mutual, interactive relationship between the newcomer and the organization. This study confirms the need for cities to be more proactive and intentional in its transactions between themselves and its people. The role-making process with young professionals begins not when their address changes, but when they are researching a particular city to live in.

### **Practical Implications**

The purpose of this applied research study was to create a project that had real-life application. That is why this study is focused on a subject matter that Springfield and cities across the country are facing—the recruitment and retention of young professionals. Springfield is a unique position. As the third largest city in the state of

Missouri, Springfield is competing against Kansas City and St. Louis for young professionals. Although Springfield is large, it simply cannot compete with the amenities and entertainment options that bigger cities can offer. Therefore, the city has to be especially strategic in how they communicate externally to young professionals. The results of this study pinpoint specific characteristics that need to be improved for the young professional community, as well as highlights areas where Springfield excels and can capitalize on to enhance the living experience of young professionals. Since it is the job of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce to “act as the primary catalyst in promoting the economic health of the Springfield area, stimulating jobs and improving the quality of life” (SACC, 2016), the following presents, from the five characteristics, recommendations on what the chamber can do recruit and retain young professionals. The recommendations are not exhaustive and are reflective of the results of the study.

To highlight affordability and the ability for young professionals and married couples to live the life they want because of the low cost of living, it would be beneficial to capture stories from young professionals who have gotten out of debt faster, to young married couples who are able to buy a home easier. Stories like these make the appeal to prospective young professionals and young families that living and working in Springfield can be financially prudent long-term, while not giving up on enjoying nice amenities. Their money goes farther in Springfield than anywhere else.

It is evident that the city and the chamber do an excellent job of internally providing opportunities for young professionals to make a substantial difference in the community. These opportunities for community engagement and involvement are strong recruitment tools to attract high-achieving young professionals and college-aged students

from bigger cities. Giving high-caliber individuals the go-ahead to be a part of building a community, along with access to prominent mentors in their desired field, is mutually beneficial. Those individuals can make a significant difference in less time than if they stayed in their respective larger cities. This also ties into the characteristic of authenticity.

Authenticity research mainly addresses concepts related to tourism. For example, local shops, cuisine, commerce, or anything consumers find special and unique. For Springfield, “the Ozarks”, the embodiment of hiking, trails, rivers, and other outdoor activities, has been the symbol of authenticity in a plethora of marketing pieces.

However, not a single participant alluded to a single outdoor activity as a draw towards living in Springfield. It would be unreasonable to say that those outdoor activities have not had an impact on the overall living experience for young professionals, but it was not mentioned throughout the focus groups. Authenticity was interpreted much differently for the participants. For Springfield young professionals, being a “big fish in a small pond” is what makes Springfield authentic. Many participants emphasized how unique that was for a city of Springfield’s caliber. Because of Springfield’s unique “big city, small town feel” culture, young professionals attain all the amenities of a bigger city while enjoying a slower-paced, and relationally built community that is not found in larger cities. This is what Springfield young professionals defined as authentic: The ability in a short amount of time, in comparison to larger cities, to be a significant influencer in Springfield.

With a low cost of living, a growing young professional community, and the emphasis on relationship building, Springfield is poised to be *the* place in the Midwest for young entrepreneurs to build their startups. I recommend that the city and chamber continue to prioritize economic infrastructure that benefits and incentivizes small

businesses. Based on the results, it is evident the startup and collaboration culture is already established and continuing to grow. It would also be advantageous to create more collaborative spaces around the city for young professionals to rent space to grow their business.

Finally, the results indicate that the entertainment and meaningful experience options for Springfield young professionals have increased significantly over the years. As referenced by the participants, downtown should be *the* hub for these meaningful experiences and entertainment options. Organizations like the Downtown Springfield Association have made marketed improvements. I would recommend continued collaborative relationships with young professionals to gain better insights on what young professional-cultured retail options they would like to see. How can the city negotiate the tension to create spaces for the thousands of college students that inhabit the city, as well as the emerging young professional community that is looking for their own unique experiences? It begins with creating opportunities and spaces for young professionals to voice their opinions.

The city, the Chamber of Commerce, and other businesses can take this information to aid in their strategic plans for recruitment and retention. This study can also be replicated by other cities that are interested in better serving the young professionals in their communities as well as those who want to grow their young professional population.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

There were three major limitations in this study. First, this study is a thesis project. Therefore time and financial resources were limited. As a master's student, my experience writing and conducting full research projects is marginal compared to other scholars in the field. Second, as a Master's student who works full-time in a professional setting, I too am a Springfield young professional. Researching a population you belong to have its advantages, but also has its disadvantages. I naturally brought my own bias and experiences to the focus group and the writing. Finally, the size and scope of the project was limited. I conducted four focus groups with 20 participants total. With approximately eight area colleges and universities feeding young professionals into the city, the young professional community is in the thousands. Due to time and financial constraints, I was not able to conduct more focus groups to obtain a larger sample size. However, the 21 participants represented a wide variety of industries and hometowns (see table 1). On that same note, it is important to acknowledge that the participants used in this study come from advantaged background. All of the participants have at least a Bachelor's degree, are socioeconomically privileged, and have copious amounts of valuable social capital, or "networks of social relationships characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity" (Stout, Knapp & Harms, 2008, p.2). This undoubtedly shaped the results of the study. Stout et al. (2008) found that those with social capital, such as the participants interviewed for this study, tend to trust the institutions of government, participate in the nonprofit sector, and seek to make significant impacts in their communities. However, those without the type of privilege possessed by the focus group participants in this study do not have, or seek, such social capital. Thus, it is highly likely

that individuals from working class or poorer backgrounds would have completely different experiences and perceptions related to Springfield.

There are two clear future research opportunities. First, based on the privileged nature of the participants, to get a more holistic understanding of Millennials in Springfield, it would be beneficial to research Millennial blue-collar workers and their experiences in Springfield. Typically an overlooked population, that study could potentially provide all new insights for the Springfield. Secondly, it would be intriguing to conduct focus groups with young professionals who either grew up in Springfield or went to school in the Springfield metropolitan area and then left. Their experiences and reasons for leaving would provide another invaluable research tool to aid in the strategic recruitment and retention plan for the city of Springfield.

## **Conclusion**

The Millennial generation is a significant force in the workplace and in the communities they inhabit. Understanding and acting on what young professionals want in a city can reap positive benefits for a city economically and civically. This applied research study sought to study to what extent Springfield young professionals have assimilated into Springfield's culture. Based on the results, Springfield has the makings to be a vibrant location for young professionals to make an impact in the present and the future.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Participant Demographic List

**Sex:**

Male: 9

Female: 11

**Age:**

Average Age 26

Age Spread: 22-31

**Marital Status:**

Single: 15

Married: 5

**Industries Represented:**

Finance: 5

Business Owner: 4

Higher Ed: 1

Law: 2

Nonprofit: 8

**Hometowns Represented**

Springfield, Missouri: 10

Concordia, Missouri: 1

St. Louis, Missouri: 1

Jefferson City, Missouri: 1

West Plains, Missouri: 1

Campbell, Missouri: 1

Chicago, Illinois: 1

Omaha, Nebraska: 1

Springboro, Ohio: 1

Birchwood, Wisconsin: 1

Pella, Iowa: 1



## **Appendix B: Human Subjects IRB Approval**

To: Gloria Galanes  
College of Arts and Letters  
CRAG 363 901 S National Ave Springfield MO 65897-0027

From: MSU IRB

Date: 11/09/2015

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption  
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation  
Study #: 16-0211

Study Title: Springfield or Bust? How a Qualitative Analysis of the Organizational Assimilation of Young Professionals to Springfield Shapes Millennial Recruitment and Retention

This submission has been reviewed by the Missouri State University IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Investigator's Responsibilities:

If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes.

CC:  
Nii Kpakpo Abrahams, Communications

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

*Please read the following explanation of this study. Signing this form will indicate you have been informed about the study and that you consent to participate. I want to ensure you understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether you want to participate.*

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Nii Abrahams, Communication Masters student under the supervision and direction of Dr. Gloria Galanes. You may contact us:

Nii Abrahams

Phone: 417.529.5240

Email: niikpakpo330@live.missouristate.edu

Dr. Gloria Galanes

Phone: 417-836-5247

Email: gloriagalanes@missouristate.edu

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**Project Description:** This study is looking at how young professionals in Springfield, Missouri have assimilated into the working fabric of the city. This research will better aid Springfield in the recruitment and retention of young professionals, like yourself. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time.

**Procedures:** If you agree to take part in the study, you will be interviewed with a small group of peers lasting between 1 to 1 ½ hours. Furthermore, here are some examples of questions I may ask you during the interview:

- As a Millennial young professional, what's most important to you living in a city?
- What attracted you to Springfield? If you're a native to Springfield, why did you stay?
- Are the same things that attracted you the same things that have kept you here?
- In what ways do you connect yourself to Springfield?

**Participant Profile:** Males and females under the age of 30 | Currently out of college or in advanced schooling | Live and work full-time in the Springfield city limits | Single (not married) preferred | Hold white collar jobs |

The interview will occur at a time and place that is most convenient for you. Interviews will be audio-recorded and recordings will only be used for research purposes. Pseudonyms will be given instead of your real name during the research process.

**Risks and Discomfort:** Risks for participating in this study are minimal. You will be participating in an interview that may elicit feelings about your identity and live/work life. The only risk of the study is the possibility of experiencing stress from discussing aspects of identity and live/work life as a young professional. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may choose to skip questions, or you may ask to be withdrawn.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits for participating in this study other than the possibility of gaining more insight into young professional life in Springfield, MO and getting to know other young professionals in the city. Refreshments will be available during the interview.

**Study Withdrawal:** You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time, for any reason. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to maintain the privacy of your data. To protect confidentiality no personally identifying information will be used. The results may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used. To reduce concerns about confidentiality, you will choose or be assigned a pseudonym, and none of your information will be kept under your real name. All electronic files of the observation notes, interview transcripts, and audio files will be kept in physically secured locations by using password-protected files and locked drawers.

**Invitation for Questions:** If you have any questions about this study, you should ask the researcher (Nii Abrahams) before you sign this consent form. If you have any questions following this study, please feel free to contact **Nii Abrahams at niikpakpo330@live.missouristate.edu**.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them—confidentially, if you wish—to the Arts and Letters Institutional Review Board Communication representative Samuel Dyer at 836-6612

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**Authorization:**

I have read this paper about the study, or it was read to me. I know and understand the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date of the signature, a copy of this document. I realize that I will be audio recorded.

Name of Participant  
(printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol**

*Springfield or Bust? How a Qualitative Analysis of the Organizational Assimilation of Young Professionals to Springfield Shapes Millennial Recruitment and Retention.*

1. As a Millennial young professional, what's most important to you about the city where you live?
2. What attracted you to Springfield?
  - a. Alternative: If you're a native to Springfield, why did you stay?
3. Are the same things that attracted you the same things that have kept you here?
4. In what ways have you become involved in activities in Springfield? (follow up)
5. If you had to leave Springfield, why would you leave?
6. To what extent do you feel like you are a part of Springfield? (because it's not a yes/no question) Can you provide examples to illustrate?
7. To what extent do you feel disconnected from Springfield? Are there things that have made you feel NOT a part of the city?
8. Do you see yourself staying in Springfield long-term? Raise a family?