

Let me start by saying...while I read and write for a living, public speaking --in this format-- isn't my thing. I write and tell other people's stories...they as subject guide where they go -- and where you, as a news consumer, will hopefully follow. While I often emcee events, they're scripts provided to me and I make appropriate adjustments, add my own flair, vamp and joke when appropriate. When I anchor the news...while we have thousands watching us from their homes, I'm in a studio with typically only about 4 other people...not addressing a room full of people...with eyes looking back at me. That being said, we'll give this a go and see if I should solely stick to news writing.

Ahhhh, Millennials. You were born into an electronic filled world. You are forever online, you're socially networked -- digitally engineered. You spend more time calculating likes, shares and re-tweets, than keeping eye contact and having a give-and-take conversation, face-to-face with someone. You've been raised under a "follow your dreams, you can do anything, everyone is a winner" mantra, most of you remember getting trophies for simply showing up. Your parents, in many cases, have involved themselves so much in your life that they've been tagged "helicopter parents". While the endless encouragement from your parents and others has been a vehicle to, not only raise you into an adult, but elevate your confidence...it might make you overconfident, entitled, narcissistic. You might enter the world, as adults, with unrealistic expectations....naive to its harsh reality. You'll jump from job to job and be viewed as lacking commitment. You'll get upset, thanks to the "everyone's a winner" attitude, when you aren't praised on the spot.

Before you give me the side eye or get up and walk out...hear me out.

Now let me tell you about me. I was born to a white mother and Black father. It was a "surprise". An unplanned and ill-timed pregnancy...considering I was conceived when my parents were months from graduating from college. Their relationship in the early 70s didn't sit well with many on both side of the family. It was "untraditional" but they forged ahead...for a while. By the 3rd grade they had divorced. While there was shared custody, my father was the primary parent. Two young girls being raised by a single father. You want to talk "bad hair days"? I remember "braids", that weren't at ALL braids, being cut out of my hair.

Let's take a look at what that means..."a child of divorce". We're doomed to fight this life-long struggle or constantly battle with "divorce-related" problems. Our happiness can only reach a certain point...because we don't have "a normal" family. In my case, an outburst was always connected to "she's going through a rough time--you know because of her parents splitting up"...not because I was 10 and just having a bad day or really wanted to wear socks that didn't match.

You've heard it...because we're from a "broken home" we didn't have good "models" as far as relationships...or appropriately learn what healthy communication looks like or is supposed to

be. And all this baggage...will ultimately affect how we behave in friendships and committed relationships. We'll fail at intimacy. It doesn't stop there...because we saw our parents "throw in the towel"....we might be more apt to adopt that attitude when it comes to jobs, career, if we don't like something...we'll move on...find something better rather than work it out or stay because we "made a commitment".

Put all that on top of living in the inner city...less than 7 minutes from downtown Minneapolis. Yeah, a city kid. By the time I was in 7th grade I had found what my dad described as a "rough crowd"...to prevent what likely seemed inevitable, he pulled me from the school I was in and gave me one option. "You'll go to private school and if after a year you are that unhappy we'll find you another school". Needless to say this didn't sit well with me. An inner-city biracial girl, with little financial means, divorced parents, dropped into Breck School...an Episcopalian private school, where the vast majority of the students certainly weren't minorities, they were suburban dwelling, name-brand clothes wearing, country club living, married parent having, rich kids. Where a uniform and dress code were strictly enforced. Where homework in my 7th grade public school year, went from maybe 30 minutes to a minimum of 90 minutes a night. I was, as I used to say, a chocolate chip in a bowl full of vanilla ice-cream. It didn't suit me. I was out of place.

Thankfully I made really good friends, was exposed to teachers who really cared and one person in the administrative office who made it her mission to make sure I was interested in staying. I decided to stay through high school...but it wasn't without challenges. I'm know some of it was external, but a lot of it was also internal. I was a "token" student, a minority a female (a "two-for") who, only by the grace of God and financial grants, was able to attend. Now, being an adult --and this far removed from those years-- I'm sure for "administrative purposes", my being there helped diversity numbers and recruitment efforts. I distinctly remember having to have several discussions to explain "No, my family isn't like the Cosby's...my dad isn't a doctor and my mom isn't a lawyer....my family isn't like most of yours".

One of the greatest benefits during those years, other than getting to see "that side" of life...Breck offered what's called May program, similar to J-term in many smaller colleges. During my sophomore year, I could pick a few options; I could travel abroad---my family didn't have the money to send me overseas, take alternative classes on campus---but who in their right mind wants to spend more hours in the final 5 weeks of school inside a building that you can't wait to escape from during summer recess?!, or do an internship. I chose the final option. I shadowed a family friend, who was an anchor at WCCO in Minneapolis. Day one; I was hooked, we were called to breaking news, the rush of adrenaline was like a drug...like nothing I experienced outside of being on the starting line during a track meet, on a soccer field when the whistle blew, or being on the center of a basketball court to jockey for the jump ball. So I knew THIS was the eventual life for me. Which also made me a bit of an oddity...knowing with that level of certainty at just 15 years old...being a reporter was what EXACTLY what I wanted, no needed, to do with the rest of my life.

At the end of my 5 weeks, I told my guidance counselor THIS is my path. I needed to get into Newhouse School of Journalism at Syracuse so that I could be an on-air reporter. I was met with a long stare, then the side-cocked head with a "excuse me" squint. I don't remember his exact wording, but I remember being told to "start smaller" and maybe a "state school"...which was, at that time, a bit of a slap in the face...because state schools were considered "backups" to private institutions. And trust me--there is a high probability that, in today's competitive acceptance structure, I wouldn't have gotten in here. Anyway, those were the words, he used, that stuck out...but what was ingrained in my head was the face...that expression that said "your dreaming a nearly impossible dream...you're a kid from the city, with divorced parents, very little financial means and grades that aren't going to get you into a school of that caliber"...which only strengthened my resolve.

Regardless of the minor struggles, adjustments, and hiccups in the road...the college preparatory school prepared me for what was to come...in the classroom. Plus, the opportunity to have had an internship like that, so early on, was THE reason I was somewhat prepared for college. I say "somewhat prepared" for a reason. My freshman year was a challenge. It wasn't that I ill-prepared or not accustomed to the general work load...much of what I did here my freshman year were things I had done, or at least started doing, in my later years of high school. To read 100 pages a night or crank out a 10-page paper was nothing outside of my wheelhouse. I understood the material...the expectations...I just chose to NOT do the work. I majored in "being social" my freshman year here...rather than following an academic path. By the end of freshman year, I had successfully failed out. Frantic, not knowing what to do, I was forced that summer, even after appealing the decision with school administration, I told my parents. It was awful. The worst.

Later that summer I moved back to Madison, intent on fixing what I had broken. I spent a semester working full time to gain residency to help lower the cost of tuition once I was allowed back into Madison. I spent the next semester at MATC with the maximum credit-class load, to show that I could, in fact, do the work. I then spent another semester working and saving money. Once I was FINALLY allowed back in, college was my JOB. I wasn't "going to school" I was WORKING. While I indulged a bit in social life -- getting in and out of here -- as quickly as possible -- was the goal. I felt like I was running out of time and most certainly didn't want to waste any more money spinning my wheels...especially since I knew what I wanted to do while still in high school.

I managed to bust my hump and "stay the course"...I still don't know how I did it. Truth be told, the following years are mostly a blur...not because of "extracurriculars", and you all know what I mean by that...because I crammed all that into my Freshman year. It's a blur because I took lighter course-loads to accommodate the 20-30-hour work weeks, mostly waiting tables, so that I could minimize the loans I had to take out to pay for tuition and other expenses. It wasn't a walk in the park. But it paid off again -- with an internship at channel 3 here in

Madison. A full time PAYING internship where after it was over-- I somehow managed to convince managers to allow me to extend my stay...until I was offered a job. My first professional job.

Choosing this industry came with its own set of challenges. So. Here we are. Again. However, this time, there was a shift in perception, reaction and behavior. I was still, let's be honest, a "diversity filler"...but this time the weight of that was different. It became clear that while being a Black female reporter had increased diversity, it's also with purpose; to better represent and reflect the community the station serves. People want to see people who look like them on TV.

But there's a different set of challenges that come with all of this. While viewers and consumers appreciate diversity...there can be situations where co-workers have their own opinion about that. The "she was hired to meet diversity quotas". And THAT translates to this...Being a Black female I instantly felt the weight of having to prove my worth, worker harder faster and better...to show that I wasn't JUST filling a quota. Still to this day...now nearly 20 years now in the business...this remains an issue.

And this experience, can happen in whatever field you choose. What people see on the outside...what labels that have been placed on you...what stereotypes that have been created for you...affects what people expect and believe you can achieve, what your potential will be, how they should act, behave, and react, to you. Or at least, PERCEIVE you to be.

So we'll recap,  
I'll lack an identity because I'm bi-racial.  
I'm broken, because my parents are divorced...  
I'm from the inner city...therefore I must be rough...  
I'm a black-female and "that's why she got the job"...

In all of this...I shifted what all these titles meant...from HOW I could allow them to define me...to how I would use them to my advantage, grow with them not shrink because of them...

I started this speech by defining or stereotyping what it is to be a "Millennial". Let me explain how I'm making the mental shift when it comes to "defining Millennials". While your generation is one that questions status-quo, many of you are harnessing the internet, social networking and your "digital being" to bring our global community together, you've found efficiencies that make life just plain damn easier. Thank you for that.

Many of you have, or have, plans to live a city or live and urban life...which, in my experience, brings a renewed pride in urban spaces that foster a different kind of community, a tighter community (mainly because you'll live on top of each other) but also because you'll find respect in shared spaces, which will bring you closer together as you live, work, and start a

family -- if that's what you choose.

You're using public transportation and ride-sharing and biking and walking like no other generation has before.

You place great value on reducing, reusing, recycling...you've helped revolutionize food consumption, helping to grow the farm-to-table mindset, the clean eating diet and on the cusp of really questioning WHY we waste so much food.

Your "job bouncing", in many respects, is a way to find and secure that "work-life" balance. That "immediate praise" is something we all look for in our work. I've been nominated and won many awards...but the pat on the back from my co-workers, or a thankful email, voicemail or Twitter or Facebook comment from a viewer is truly what goes a very long way. So in many ways, we aren't that much different.

Many of US have to change OUR mindset, to shift it from "coddling" Millennials to "coaching" Millennials.

I'm going to close with some words from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who is a Novelist, short story and nonfiction writer....this is from a Ted Talk she gave in 2009:

She said,

"I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this; It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar."

In the same talk she said; "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is NOT that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

Bottom line; my generation and the generations before ours are just trying to figure out how we effectively and happily coexist. Every generation is working to leave a better world for the next...so are you -- you're just doing it in a way, and writing your own story, that so many of us are still learning about.

Thank you for your time, for forcing me to really explore your generation, your history and revisiting my own history...

Congratulations class of 2016...On Wisconsin!