American Horror Story: College Crisis

Jessica Olaes

Abstract

In this essay, I will be discussing the struggle of what it means to be a young adult growing up in a post-modern society. I will be assuming the identity of a millennial, the collection of young minds born between the generation of AIDS and 9/11. We grew up in a toxic society that was not created for us, but rather destroyed. We exist in coffee libraries, coffee shops, the other end of the register, waiting, broken. We are the product formed by the generations before us. On behalf of all millennials, this is our struggle.
Myself

When asked about my occupations, my first instinct is to answer worker, then student, which is ludicrous considering that I am spending thousands of dollars a year to pursue a higher education. My financial situation is that I am given a generous sum of money that covers most of my tuition for the school year, but not enough to cover it in its entirety. At the beginning of each term, I am left to pay roughly $1000 out of pocket to cover the remainder of my uncovered tuition, books, and supplies, which between rent, bills, and eating expenses, is something that I do not have. As such, I am forced to work two jobs to make ends meet. There is not only a flaw in how our government assesses our need for financial aid as students, but also in how our society perceives the value of our education. On one hand, it's deemed as a social obligation to prove oneself as a valued member of the community, but on the other hand, it's far more expensive than many of us can afford, and while the government does give money to support financially strapped students, it seems that more often than not, they take more than we receive through back-crushing loans. I know several students, many of whom were my fellow seniors in high school, who took out loans to pay for college and are still paying them off several years later.

When I had originally filed my FAFSA under my mother's taxes for the previous school year, I was given a paltry sum of less than half of my tuition, as if the government assumed that my entire mom's financing would be solely dedicated to my education, when in reality I am the only one paying. This winter, I applied to FAFSA under my own taxes, and while I received a considerably larger amount of money, it was still not enough. As a result, I took out a second job at a large retail store so I could continue to go to school, as well as afford to eat and have a roof over my head. While I enjoyed the extra income, it was not enough to compensate for the stress that accompanied it: lack of free time, my hair falling out, as well as having nightmares about being at work. I can't help but feeling that needing to tirelessly work just to be able to go to school somehow undermines the value of my education.

Perhaps one of my greatest fears about the future upon graduating from college as an "expert of my field," is that I’ll be left jobless and out of thousands of dollars of possibly wasted tuition money. While I’d like to think that I’m a fresh and funky individual with
never before seen ideas, I shudder at the thought of the other hundreds and thousands of creative minds fighting for the bestseller shelves of bookstores across America. It’s a frighteningly competitive field, especially with the increasingly popular trend of turning Young Adult novels in to summer blockbusters: *The Maze Runner*, *Ender’s Game*, *The Hunger Games*, etc. I worry that my time pining way in the classrooms will be for naught, and I'll be stuck working retail for customers who can’t so much as smile when being greeted for the rest of my life. If the sound of retail isn’t nightmarish enough, then surely the weight of thousands of dollars of debt is. It’s funny to think that less than 100 years ago, a college degree was anything but standard, but now it seems as if it’s a societal necessity to guarantee even a shot at a happy life.

While I’m worried about the next 20 years of my life, there’s the seemingly endless chorus of jaded baby boomers nagging in my ears, College? Why don’t you get a real job, you yuppie! Or, Nijiya Market? Go back to school to get a real job! It seems like no matter what I do, I am always disappointing someone. My own uncle scoffs at my life choices, assuming just because I’m an English major, I want to be a teacher for the rest of my life, as if that’s something to be ashamed of. Well, it’s not my dream career; actually, I’d like to become a writer, but something tells me that wouldn’t land me any points with the red faced, conservative Republican, either. One of his favorite pastimes is telling a story of how his brother, who, born from a poor Polish/Czechoslovakian family, got through college solely on grants and scholarships and became the successful principal of two schools. While that’s very fine and dandy, what my dear uncle fails to recount is that while he was poor, his brother was the spitting image of a class-A All-American privileged and handsome white man in an era of racial and gender inequality, and that the economy then was far greater than what is it now. I do not mention this to debunk his brother’s credentials, but merely to add that his situation was very much different from what many college students across all spectrums of race and gender must face today. What he blissfully chooses to ignore is that the dollar is economically a farce of what it used to be, due to his generation’s rampant spending, and while that is not singularly his fault, the ignorance he portrays is mind-boggling, which brings to mind an iconic joke I found while scrolling on the social media website Tumblr:

“Me: *On my phone*
Olaes

AHS: College Crisis

Grandma: Do you ever put that thing down?
Me: *Puts down phone*
Me: Why did you ruin the economy?"

Tumbr, the social media website, gets a lot of flak for large amount of young adults wasting away in front of pug videos and satirical comics for hours on end. We have been labeled dryly as “Millennials” by the older generations, a generation of want-for-nothing ingrates who spend more on electronics and self-vanity than ever before. The identity of the Millennial is prevalent throughout pop culture in shows like American Horror Story: Coven. Madison, a character from AHS describes the millennial identity as such:

I am a millennial. Generation Y; born between the birth of AIDS and 9/11, give or take. They call us the global generation. We are known for our entitlement and narcissism. Some say it’s because we’re the first generation where every kid gets a trophy just for showing up. Others think it’s because social media allows us to post when we fart or have a sandwich for all the world to see. But it seems our one defining trait is a numbness to the world; an indifference to suffering. (Falchuk)

Tumbr is far from a credible source, and say what you will about its many faults — raging teenagers with facetious grammatical errors, lack of proper citations, biased opinions — but what Tumblr has done is raise a self and societal awareness amongst young adults that schools and parents leave otherwise unsaid. I have been an on and off Tumblr user for almost five years now and I can confidently say that I've learned more about the female body than any of my sex education teachers have bothered to mention, and more about the world and social problems occurring outside of America's rose tinted lenses. If I were to abandon my blog now, I would lose the part of me that's become a passionate young feminist and humanitarian. Yes, I too succumb to funny videos for hours on end, but there's more to the internet than funny pugs and cat videos galore.

The matter of the fact is that the economy is not what it used to be, good ole 'Murica with the gleaming dollar, which makes it even more perilous to take out a school loan if you're already having trouble with keeping up with payments. We all see this, online or in real life, and we're all very angry. I have friends, only three years older than me, who remember what UH tuition was like when it was only $2,000. There are teachers on campus, like Susan Schultz, who remember what UH tuition was like when it was only $500. Today, the average tuition for an instate student is a whopping $5,310 per semester and it will continue
to climb higher over the next couple of years. Oh, how the times have changed. I took a look at the University of Hawaii at Manoa tuition rates and how they’ve *ahem* risen over the years. According to Collegecalc, an online database created to improve the transparency of college campuses across the nation, the University of Hawaii at Manoa’s tuition has an average annual increase of 20.2%, whereas the national average is a paltry 5%. Below is a table illustrating the tuition increases over the last decade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>In-State</th>
<th>Out-of-State</th>
<th>Annual Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$7,167</td>
<td>$19,215</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$6,258</td>
<td>$16,914</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$5,390</td>
<td>$14,654</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$4,522</td>
<td>$12,394</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$3,696</td>
<td>$10,176</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>$3,580</td>
<td>$10,060</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$3,464</td>
<td>$9,944</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$3,349</td>
<td>$9,829</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$3,523</td>
<td>$9,733</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>$3,157</td>
<td>$9,636</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This semester, Fall 2014, I paid $5,310 for a full time schedule. 10 years ago, that would have almost been enough to pay for a whole year in college. There are protests on the UH Manoa campus happening as we speak in the Campus Center courtyard where students are pitching tents, gathering, educating, and speaking vehemently against the upcoming tuition hike, yet the numbers continue to rise higher and higher. I passed by the protesters recently, clad in their bold red shirts signaling warfare, which led me to think of my own precarious situation: I have already taken out a $3,000 loan to aid me in my quest for higher education and I fear that even that might be enough to pull me under.

As I sit back in my squeaky seat in Kuykendall Hall, I can't help but wonder where all of our tuition money is going to because it doesn't seem to be improving the quality of my
education. Don’t get me wrong, my teachers in the English department are as fantastic as they have always been, but I sometimes question the purpose of continual tuition hikes if we’re still supposed to be taking notes on desks from the 80’s in a dilapidated building resembling a post-apocalyptic haven. There are buildings across campus that look like they haven’t seen so much as a promise of renovation in over a decade. Having new amenities such as the brand new rec center is nice, but not so much when you have to pay despite never actually going. I secretly think it’s the football team’s fault. If they’re going to keep raising the tuition, then the least they could do for the school is to win a game.

**Jessica Mizoguchi**

My financial situation is by no means unique; I am but one out of the millions of struggling college students in America hustling to make ends meet. In my happy collective of close friends, there is a specific friend whose back has been figuratively destroyed beneath the immense burden of having to balance between pursuing higher education, and working a part time job. My close friend, Jessica Mizoguchi, has worked for Charley’s Taxi since 8th grade, nearly ten years now. We are close in age, yet I feel as if the burdens of adulthood have separated us and has forced her to view life differently than most her age.

At the age of 13, Jessica started with simple tasks, such as filing paperwork in the Charley’s Taxi office before being upgraded to a call taker, and then finally to a taxi dispatcher. Since then, she struggled to balance her school work, high positions in extracurricular activities like Symphonic Wind Ensemble band, and as a co-event coordinator in our high school’s Japanese club, as well as her career. As we moved on from high school into college, the company demanded more and more of her time until she was working over 40 hours a week regularly, whilst trying to uphold her standing in community college. When asked how the stress levels have changed for her, she replied thusly, “The stress definitely changed. I now have a set time to come into work instead of coming in on my own free time. Being in charge of the whole board is like leading a group of people. Everyone looks to you for answers."

I remember watching my dear friend from the perspective of the outsider, watching as the pressure of maintaining school and work slowly deteriorated her spirit and health. Due to her increasingly hectic schedule, we (our mutual friend Kelly and I) saw less and less of her, and relied on twitter for any updates pertaining to her physical, mental, and
emotional health. Some tweets carried her usual optimistic tone, while others were more foreboding and worrisome.

There would be long periods of time where she was either too tired or forgetful to tweet, and without so much as a text to say, “Hey! I’m doing fine,” we worried about her condition. Her tweets came in sporadically, adding to the pile of stress already felt by her close friends and me.

I learned from Kelly that Jessica had been going to school less and less, first coming to class late, skipping, and then stopping coming to school altogether. Jessica originally applied to KCC to study nursing, but eventually had to drop out of school due to her demanding work life. When asked about her school life, Jessica sighs and looks back and says:

School and work was a good balance in the beginning, but after switching to call taker and dispatcher, I’ve had to work graveyard shifts for about two years and that was really cutting into school time. In the end, I eventually stopped going to school to keep up with work. It was stressful. At times, I ended up going to school to fall asleep, or end up oversleeping and missing classes. At the time, work was important to me because it was to help the family due to financial problems.

In the end, Jessica gave up her dream to become a nurse to pursue a full time career working at Charley’s Taxi so that she could help her mother pay rent, as well as support her older brother in his pursuit of an engineering degree. What was meant to be a part time job, a supplement to her school career, ended up swallowing nearly her entire life. Jessica looks back and thinks how nice it would have been to continue going to school with her friends, but looks to the future with a positive outlook. “I did have thoughts about it [school] time to time, but I also realized that it is good to keep your options open and to explore other areas while I am still at a young age.”
When I think about Jessica’s situation, I am sad and conflicted. Her situation was much like my own, burdened with financial distress, yet she was ultimately unable to cope and was forced to choose between the two. While I am happy that she now has more time and more money, I am sad that she had to give up her dream in the process. Often we hear tales of parents sacrificing for their children so they can grow up to lead better lives, but there’s something so tainted about someone who is barely an adult having to make that kind of sacrifice. Though she may not have enjoyed school at times, to withdraw from school under the pressure of familial piety seems barbaric, like some kind of form of castration. The bright side, which Jessica would have wanted me to look at, would be that although she didn’t get to become a nurse, or a travels industry manager, at least she has a sustaining job that can support her and her family, as well as her own personal whimsies, which I guess is pretty much the next best scenario.

**Adverse Health Effects**

I recently left my job at Macy’s because the stress of it all was far too overbearing. For a company that claimed to support its student workers, I felt more often than not trapped into working far more hours than my schedule, and more importantly my body, could support. I worked every day between my two jobs, sometimes closing one night at one place, then opening at the other the next morning. When the dreaded “One Day Sale,” rolled around, I knew that I would be at Macy’s either opening at 8:45 am, or closing at 11:00pm, which meant that I was either waking up at 6:00 am to get ready, or getting to sleep at 1:00am the next morning. On a specific occasion, I had planned my schedule out perfectly so that I would not have to work on the “One Day Sale.” Unfortunately, an elderly sales associate then approached me from Lancôme. She had gotten her schedule, due to having a permanent counter position, but did not want to close that evening, so she wanted me to close for her. Her name was Eileen. Even after several weeks of not working at Macy’s, I still see her image burned into my mind’s eye. She’s a frail, shrunken old thing, with a kind, yet eerie sort of demeanor. Her mouth never quite shuts all the way, and her teeth are orange and uneven, as if she’s wasted them away by chewing on betel nuts. Judging by the grayness of her hair and the overall sagginess of her skin, I’d say Eileen is at least 60 years old. Pity washed over me, I was absolutely helpless. There was no way I could tell an old woman ‘no.’
That night, I got home at approximately 12:20 AM. At 11:15 PM, I rushed out of Macy’s to the bus stop on Kapi‘olani Boulevard to wait for my bus. It didn’t arrive until 11:40. I sat under the paltry shelter of the bus stop, which did nothing to block the evening chill. I thought to myself bitterly, “If Eileen worked tonight, she’d probably be home by now. I bet she has a car.” I stepped onto the bus, my eyes burning with want of sleep, but I didn’t dare shut them. I was clad in a black dress, the standard of the cosmetics attire, but I was wary of whose eyes might be watching me, how every action could be interpreted as ‘asking for it.’ My skin prickled with anticipation. It is said that the freaks come at night, and after witnessing the strange crowd that haunts the bus in the late hours, I’d be the last one to argue. I held my pocketknife in my hand tightly, praying that tonight wouldn’t be the night I’d have to use it. At each bus stop, my head lolled around mindlessly. It was all I could do to keep myself awake.

After surviving the distressing bus ride home, I fought against my sleepy eyelids so that I could finish my homework. Every night I did this. As a result, my hair began to fall out in large clumps due to stress; my legs and feet were swollen from standing during long hours daily. When I lay down in bed, I suddenly became painfully aware of my legs which would throb endlessly throughout the night. I often had nightmares where I was working in stressful situations, causing me to sleepwalk around my apartment. On one specific night, I dreamt that I was helping a customer find something, only to wake up and find that I was not in Macy’s, but rather in my apartment in Salt Lake, attempting to open my sock drawer. I immediately went back to bed, but I remember getting up again, still half asleep, looking for merchandise. This happened several times throughout the night. “This is a dream, Jessica, it’s not real.” I said this to myself over, and over, but nevertheless, my body refused to listen.

Eileen was only one of the problems on porcelain plate of fuckery that was Macy’s. One thing that I had prided myself on while working at Macy’s was that I had established a good name for myself as a hard worker at each of the counters that I had worked at, so much so that it was not uncommon for someone to approach me needing a shift covered. Despite there being other flex members available, I was an A-lister.

By the time I had reached my 3rd month working at Macy’s, I knew that I wanted to work permanently at Impulse Cosmetics, the “mini Sephora,” of the east wing. I picked up
as many shifts there as possible, but due to circumstances out of my hands, three counters suddenly needed coverage and I was prime picking during duck hunting season, so to say. Despite having already chosen my schedule, I would log in to my online account to find that someone higher than me had given the “ok” and had gone into the system and edited my schedule so that shifts I had originally chosen were replaced. This continued for several weeks, being tossed from Bare Escentuals, to the Benefit Brow Bar, to Clinique, etc. My position, which was a floater, became meaningless as I no longer had to power to control what days and hours I worked. It was during this point in my career at Macy’s when things really started to take a turn for the worst.

Out of nowhere, I would suddenly get terrible, crippling migraines. I knew they were migraines because before they struck, there was a patch of time preceding it called an “aura,” where my vision would become increasingly blurry, until I could no longer stand. The buzzing fluorescent lights overhead made my eyes burn as they seared in like white hot knives. Towards the end of my term, they increased in frequency. I went home once while business was slow, but never again after that out of fear that it would jeopardize my position.

Sleep is for the Dead

While I have been enjoying the free time from work, and being able to catch my breath, I miss having enough money to eat three solid meals a day. I feel like a bum, always watching my coin purse in case I go over my budget. I am once again on the search for a second job so I can continue to pay my rent and go to school. I have planned it so that for the next three months or so, as long as I purchase only one meal a day, I can survive off what meager pay I receive from my first job, Nijiya Market. I’m actually running a deficit; each month I spend more money on rent and bills than I make. I’m currently surviving off of savings and a carefully calculated return reward from my phone bill company. It won’t last though; every day brings me closer to the beginning of the spring semester, which means more money for me to shell out – more money that I don’t have. Every day that I come home in my plain school attire is a paycheck lost. I think my mom knows, but we don’t talk about it. After school, I come home and check Craigslist, adapting my resume so that I sound better than the next guy.
Every week, I continue to go to school and work at my part time job at Nijiya Market. Despite only being scheduled to work eight hours a week, I have proven my worth to my managers to allow me to sneak in a couple more hours before and after my regular shifts. One of the perks of my many odd jobs at Nijiya is that after managing and auditing the credits for expired or damaged items, I get to take my pick and take them home, which actually makes up a large portion of the food I eat daily. This includes candies, sodas, groceries, etc. If you see me eating some kind of foreign cookie in class during discussion, there’s a high chance that it’s already “expired.” And yet, I don’t care, because it’s one less meal I have to worry about. Working there is nice; I do everything at my own pace, and when I’m done, my traditional Japanese boss bows his head at me and says, “Thank you for your hard work.” If he finishes early and decides to go home, I get a fist bump instead.

The difference between working at Nijiya and working at Macy’s is the level of respect I receive as an employee. At Macy’s, I was subject to verbal abuse by customers who didn’t understand policy, who threw fits if things didn’t go their way. I was dressed head to toe like a doll: polished shoes, make up, little black dress, the works, but just like a doll, I was a play thing to the consumer, a generic nobody in the menagerie of consumerism. Whereas at Nijiya, I am a valued employee, my existence counts. Despite making little to nothing, it’s the pride and support that I receive from my peers that keeps me going. If the opportunity permits, I’d like to pick up another shift, but unfortunately there are no other days available, otherwise I’d be listening to catchy bubblegum J-POP music more often. Sometimes while signing in before my shift, I look at the weekly schedules in the break room and hope that one of the new kids either quits, or gets fired so I can take their hours. It’s terrible, I know. This is the life I currently live, and although it is not glamorous, it is something I must do to survive.

**Moving Forward**

These days, I spend a lot of my free time at home. It’s odd really, after so many months of not having so much as a moment to reflect, I suddenly have all the time in the world. It’s a strange equation really, when you have time, you don’t have money, and when you have money, you never have enough time to enjoy spending it. Ideally, I’d like to lie in bed after doing homework, curling up to a nice book, maybe Game of Thrones, or some other cult classic. Unfortunately this is not an option. One of the first things I do after
shrugging my backpack off is to open my laptop, Google “Craigslist jobs,” keyword: Ala Moana, Ward, Ke‘eaumoku, or McCully, playing the sifting game. Each day I send a new application out, hoping to hear from the Lego Store, Sephora, Walgreens, but to no avail. The ones who do respond, however, are the lower end minimum wage jobs such as bussing, or flipping burgers at McDonalds. I imagine their turnover rate to be terrible, since they reply so quickly. I check my phone constantly, hoping for that little red flag in the corner of my Gmail app signaling, “You got mail!” The wait, however, has been fruitless. Each day that passes makes me nervous, keener on subjecting myself to flipping patties in a less-than-desirable venue. How much can a person take before they are broken? I have yet to find out.

A Collective Identity

Sometimes when I’m stressed, I retreat into Tumblr for an hour or two, just until I’ve watched enough cat videos to fill up my strength meter for the day. There are a plethora of interesting things on Tumblr, such as comics, artwork, social critique, etc. There was one post, however, that stuck with me. White font on a background read something along the lines of “High School students are more stressed than asylum patients from the 1950’s, for more interesting facts, follow Did-You-Know.tumblr.com” Something like that. I remembering sitting hunched over like a gargoyle in my office chair, processing the words. It clicked in my head with an audible ding! Throughout my pursuit of higher education, that quote stayed with me. As I grew older, I became skeptical, yet never actually looking into the background of that quote, but when I did, I found that it was actually a quote from a psychologist named Robert Leahy, which read, “The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s.” The idea of having the same anxiety levels as someone diagnosed as mentally unbalanced is mind-boggling, especially when the mental health of children is at stake.

Children – yes, sometimes I still see myself as a child, though I constantly switch between referring to myself as an adult or a child. If Dandy Mott, this AHS season’s antagonist, is a man-child, then I supposed I’m a sort of woman child then. I am still able to do things normal adults can do like making critical decisions and processing abstract concepts, but more often than not, I find myself mentally crashing before simple tasks like
what to eat for dinner. I think I’m in a weird liminal space between childhood and adulthood and sometimes the boundaries get a little blurred so I’m lost in the dark.

I looked a little more into the statistics of mentally unbalanced young adults and found that in addition to being overly anxious, children and young adults are far more stressed than their counterpart generations before them. Studies by Harries Interactive for the American Psychological Association show that there is a high percentage of young adults who are suffering due outside influences such as work, money, relationships, family responsibilities, and the economy. Many of the aforementioned factors are directly related to the Baby Boomer generation, work opportunities, money, and the economy having been spoiled by their past deeds. As a millennial, I feel that I am unjustly undermined and overly stressed in my efforts to secure a stable future, and by the looks of the graphs provided below, it appears that I am not alone.
**YOUNG ADULT STRESS**

Higher percentages of Millennials say they have been diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders than other generations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERATION</th>
<th>DEPRESSION</th>
<th>ANXIETY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MILLENNIALS (AGES 18-33)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN X (AGES 34-47)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABY BOOMERS (AGES 48-66)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATURES (AGES 67+)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COPING WITH STRESS**

Millennials are more likely than other generations to use sedentary behaviors to cope with stress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERATION</th>
<th>EATING</th>
<th>LISTENING TO MUSIC</th>
<th>PLAYING VIDEO GAMES/SURFING INTERNET</th>
<th>SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MILLENNIALS (AGES 18-33)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN X (AGES 34-47)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABY BOOMERS (AGES 48-66)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATURES (AGES 67+)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflecting Back

It seems unfair I think to be so young, but in so much shit, metaphorically speaking. It does not make me feel better knowing that they are many people who are my age that are suffering this same dilemma, if not worse. It's a sobering experience to know that I'm one of the many young adults suffering. I am only 21. When I think of what it means to be 21 years old, I think of careless days with friends and having fun. The hardest thing I should have to face as a college student is a 15-page essay, but it isn't. In this American society, students my age are expected to strive for more, to exceed the standards, yet I feel like this is some kind of cruel joke, a sort of never ending vicious cycle to weed out the poor and cultivate only the wealthy. Am I imagining things? Maybe I am, maybe I’m not, but it seems to me that the US government is more concerned with filling our pockets with sandbags and capitalizing on our inability to pay tuition, as opposed to helping us reach our goals. More often than not, a student will eventually have to choose to fill their stomach and survive for another day in contrast to pursuing an education. Fortunately, I am not at that state – yet. In regards to age, I don't think it really matters anymore. I have been alive for 21 years now, but I feel
so much older, more tired. Perhaps that is the result from a generation’s jaded perception on life. Age doesn’t define us, but rather the scars and experiences we sustain.

**Finding Strength**

In the wake of all the stress and anguish, this experience of being a student worker has taught me the meaning of hard work and how to be strong. Five years ago, I would have balked if somebody told me that I would only get six hours of sleep daily for a pittance of a paycheck. Sadly enough, it has become a reality, but I have learned to face it, tired and weary as I am. From each of my jobs, I have learned a valuable asset, from money handling, to confidence upon speaking on the phone, to overall customer service. As a side bonus, I have also learned how to sleep in odd places, such as the back of the bus, something that I had never been able to do before. Each of these experiences has contributed to my overall growth of character and in turn has given me more experiences to write about. It may be presumptuous of me to say this, but I feel that my generation, the generation of the so-called “spoiled millennials,” are the plantation workers of our time. We are opposed with harrowing conditions, yet we persevere and push through so that we can achieve a better life for ourselves. Our callouses are different, mine and tutu’s; hers formed from working long hours in the plantations, while mine bubbled from the friction of writing thousands of seemingly nonsensical sentences. Our struggles differ, yet despite the generation disconnect, there is something that connects us both in our struggles. Seeing the faces of elderly gives me hope: it's a whole other generation of people who overcame trials and tribulations in order to survive. It gives me hope to know that Jessica and I can and will survive, but whether we live our lives happy and fulfilled is something dreary and left to be foreseen.

**Works Cited**


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