

## My Generation

Is Life a cake walk for Millennials

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October 25, 2005 3:34 PM

<http://xpress.sfsu.edu/archives/magazine/004715.html>

Researchers meticulously study, examine and compare generation after generation. They mark them with dates spanning 20 years and slap them with significant labels defined by unique trends and historic events such as the Great Depression, war or rock n roll. Some believe that once every four cycles, a generation appears that outshines the rest and restores hope for the future. Some say this generation has arrived.

High school and college campuses nationwide are flooded with this so-called special generation born between 1982 and 2002. Simultaneously known as Generation Y, Millennials and Echo Boomers, they are the largest generation of young people since their Baby Boomer parents. Nearly 80 million of them are more affluent, better educated and more ethnically diverse than past generations.

Experts and researchers of this generation like Neil Howe and William Strauss, who have written several books on the topic, describe this fresh group as a bunch of confident and optimistic team players with loads of computer smarts and money to burn on the latest pop culture trends. Much of the information on this generation is essentially predicted through polls and various data, raising questions of whether Howe and Strauss assumptions are true or if they gave Millennials a little too much credit.

Not only that, but it seems as though experts disregard the youth born in the early part of this generation who feel as if they are stuck in some transitional period between Generation X and Generation Y. This especially applies to college students who aren't quite fitting the characteristics they're supposed to have. But only time will tell.

Recently, the news program 60 Minutes described Echo Boomers as the most sophisticated generation when it comes to media because they create their own Web sites and make their own CDs and DVDs in a 500-channel universe.

True enough. It's not hard to see how technologically savvy today's youth are. They're a group of fast-paced, multi-taskers walking around with camera phones and iPod headphones in their ears. The minute they walk in the door, they open their laptops and hop on MySpace while watching a reality TV show, instant messaging friends and doing homework all at the same time.

But Andreana Clay, a sociology professor at San Francisco State University, thinks that Howe and Strauss views of Gen Y are off. She points out that not all youth in this age group have access to downloading music and instant messaging. This seems to be assuming that everyone

has equal access to technology, which isn't true," Clay says. "We leave out an entire population of youth and skirt over important questions and realities about access such as class, socioeconomic status and race."

Even Strauss and Howe's shortsighted view of Gen Y leaves out another major critique. With all the innovative gadgets and information at the click of a button, this generation is built on instant gratification. It's hard for them to think long-term and anything that doesn't produce immediate results bores them.

"I think we really value convenience and crave instant results," says Mallory Brown, a 16-year-old San Rafael High School student who believes Millennials like her don't have to do much to get what they want. "It's maximum results with minimum effort," Brown says.

Sheila Propheter, a psychotherapist and counselor in Marin County who works with several young adults, suggests immediate gratification is a problem. Propheter says there is a lot of confusion from kids who get out in the world and find that it's a lot harder than they thought it was going to be. They've been provided everything and can't accomplish anything on their own.

"It's a huge thing we're seeing in society, the inability to delay gratification," Propheter says. "I feel sad for these kids who have everything they want without something to look forward to or to work for."

It isn't seen as such a bad thing for Brown, who says she expects to be where she wants to be right away in her future career. "We have high expectations for ourselves," Brown says confidently.

This positive mentality and as-soon-as-possible approach to life stems from the structured schedule their parents implemented at birth. Moms have carted toddlers around to organized activities with play groups and child development programs like Gymboree and Mommy and Me from the very beginning. Pretty soon, a Millennial is juggling soccer practice, tutoring and piano lessons on top of their AP homework and community service for their college applications.

According to Howe and Strauss' book *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, these kids have been overscheduled and over pressured, not knowing how to relax or even do things on their own because adults have told them what to do their entire lives.

◆ When Baby on Board signs first appeared on car windows, social trends started shifting away from neglect and negativism and geared toward protection and support, ◆ Howe says of the obsessively sheltered group.

On top of trusting their parents, this generation also boasts a decrease in teen violence and pregnancy as well as lower tobacco and alcohol use compared to Generation X.

SF State student Jessica Fieger was born in 1981, right on the cusp of Generation Y, a sort of transient period between two distinctly different generations. Fieger has often wondered which generation she belongs to. She frequently hears Gen X described as selfish, lazy and apathetic.

◆ Apparently people of my generation don't care about politics, culture or society, ◆ Fieger says. ◆ We only care about ourselves. ◆

Hearing these characteristics linked to her generation makes her question if that fits her as an individual. ◆ I don't feel I am anything like what they say but I also don't feel like I am part of the other generation either, ◆ Fieger says.

Whether we identify with a particular generation or not, it's hard to ignore corporate America's obsession with Generation Y. People seem captivated with them. It's not just their ◆ goodie-two-shoes ◆ persona, but also because they hugely impact the economy, spending \$170 billion a year of their money and their parents' money, according to the ◆ 60 Minutes ◆ segment.

Big brands cater to them through flat screen TVs and disc jockeys inside stores as a form of advertisement instead of the average 30-second commercial that won't hold their attention. Millennials are also wary of public messages, but don't seem fazed by the tactics used to sell the latest technologies or fashion trends. Brown admits that she is skeptical of the news and other forms of media, but buys into commercialism and isn't sure why.

Sociologist Clay agrees that youth have tremendously impacted the economy and popular culture locally and globally, but doesn't think they are cynical of the media. Instead, they allow themselves to be beckoned by the ◆ cool ◆ factor.

◆ The media, religious institutions, youth organizations and political organizations have organized around hip-hop culture to engage young people, to sell their products and promote a particular ideology that is cool, ◆ Clay says about Gen Y.

Generational gurus like Howe and Strauss make some accurate points regarding Gen Y, but obviously fall short in thinking about the youth culture as a whole or whether the positive traits Millennials possess will impede on their future, causing conformity, a loss of creativity and limited imagination. It seems every generation has a mix of slackers and overachievers.

◆I◆m sure for every couch potato, there exists a brilliant scientist,◆ Fieger says. ◆For every high school drop-out, there◆s a child mentor. And for every lazy, mooching teen, there◆s a hard working soul making America a better place for us all. So who is anyone to really critique Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Whatever-Comes-Next?◆

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