

Millennials, people born between 1981 and 2000, have taken over our world. They have translated the physical world into a digital cyberspace. Being one of these innovative youngsters, I have experienced the transformation myself. I contribute greatly to the digital footprint. I own a computer, a smartphone, an iPod, a smart TV, and frequently use an iPad. Without these advances, much of what I know wouldn't exist. According to Dr. Paul Huray, one of the scientists to invent the Internet, as of November 2014, 7.2 billion wireless cell phones were connected to the Internet, almost outnumbering the amount of people in the world. Within the last 30 years, millennials have made a name for themselves in our world, so great that they will be remembered for generations to come.

Have you ever wondered why your parents are so different from you? Or why your grandparents have completely different feelings about things than most? It's all because of our generations constantly evolving due to inventions, disasters, war and social revolutions. Experiences affect our growth and these events and moments are constantly changing between decades. Between technological, social, cultural, and political advances, no two family members experience the same life. The generation's changes have had the biggest effect on adolescents. Since the teenage years are when one transitions from a child to an adult, this period of time has the most impact.

Today, there are five living generations in America. Four of them have or are going through adolescence. The silent generation (ages 69-87), Baby Boomers (ages 50-68), Generation X (ages 34-49), and Millennials (ages 14-33). Each generation has very different characteristics, and some they have in common. All have experienced completely different worlds.

The Silent Generation, born between 1927 and 1945, were accustomed to the more traditional living customs. Marriage was for life, divorce and having children out of wedlock was never an option or acceptable. Since it was before the feminist movement, women stayed home to cook and clean, and take care of the children. Once a man had a job, he kept it. The *silents* are very avid readers, especially of the printed news, and they have a very strong sense of their values and truths (The Six). World War II began around this time and all men were shipped off to war.

The Baby Boomers came shortly after, between 1946 and 1964. Women of this generation began to work outside the house while their husbands went to war. The first television began to be seen in households. This was considered to be the first divorce generation, as divorce was beginning to be tolerated. Since the men were away at war, whenever they returned, children were conceived. Which is why the name "Baby Boomers" was conjured up. It is one of the largest generations, with 77 million people (The Six). Generation X came next. Born between 1965 and 1980, Gen X is known for being the "Latchkey kids" and growing up street smart. They were eager to make relationships work, but were late to marry and quick to divorce. During this time, AIDS began to spread. Being very individualistic, these people have averaged seven careers each, and found themselves deep in credit card debt (The Six).

The current generations experiencing their adolescence are the Millennials. Known as the "9/11" generation, they were born between 1981 and 2000. Millennials are a very nurtured generation who respect authority. Academic pressures are very high but a world without computers is relatively foreign, as it is preferred (The Six).

One of the largest contributors to the change in generations was the innovation of technology and social media. These days, people can contact anyone in the world with one click

of a mouse. In recent years, people have become more comfortable with technology, inheriting the name “Digital Native”. The invention of the television, computer and cell phone in the 20’s, 40’s and 70’s, was only the beginning. Now, in the 21st century, youth navigate intimacy, imagination, and their identity all through social media. Since everything is accessed on the smartphone, invented around 2007, you can communicate no matter where you are (The Smartphone). Frequently used apps are: Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), and Snapchat (2011); all accessible almost anywhere in the world. This has made connecting with others a breeze.

Being a teenager today, I’m going through serious changes. Usually puberty hits us at around age thirteen and our bodies begin to change, but it isn’t until our later adolescent years that we experience an emotional change, also known the transition to adulthood. At this age, usually about eighteen, we have experienced many things. Enough, most of the time, to cause us to grow. Emotional growth is key to maturation. Since I am away at school, and experiencing adult responsibilities, I do feel myself evolving and becoming older. Many of the thoughts I’d had before I no longer have and I find myself challenging my own beliefs. Do I want the same things? Do I like the same people? These questions cause me to think a lot about the “growing up” process. When does it happen? Is it different for everyone? I have thought a lot about what it was like for other people in my family to grow up. When my parents were my age they experienced things that I can’t imagine going through, such as moving from city to city in a military family, or having twelve other siblings. Which is what led me to my topic, what experiences affect our growth and how has that changed between generations? With social and cultural advances, our society has evolved to a completely different one than generations before experienced. Unlike generations before, millennials are growing up faster, unattached to politics, linked to social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, optimistic about the future and in no rush to marry.

Scientists are noticing that children are maturing earlier. “Whereas we used to think and feel that childhood ended at age 16, over 70% of parents polled said that their child was no longer childlike by the age of 12.” (Tweens1). They have noticed this may be the result of the social pressures to act older. “Three in ten parents also cited exposure to the Internet and over half pointed the finger at the UK’s celebrity culture and obsession with sexualized and body conscious stars” (Tweens 2). Children have stopped playing outdoors and turned to technology. Their imaginations have been replaced with social media. At age 12, children begin to be bored with the games they grew up playing. Kids start to search for a new range of activities to challenge their motor and thinking skills (Basic). Computer games and mature television content gives these children what they are searching for.

One of the many differences between Millennials and other generations is their politics. “Not only do half of all Millennials choose not to identify with either political party, just 31% say there is a great deal of difference between the Republican and Democratic parties. More people in older generations, including 58% of Silents, say there are big differences between the parties.” (Millennials). The Millennials have stood out in the last two elections for supporting Barack Obama far more than older generations. Millennials are the only generation in which liberals do not outnumber conservatives. I believe that this is happening because most Millennials grew up with conservative parents and they’re willing to challenge the beliefs that they’re accustomed to.

Another huge factor in the Millennial generation is the use of technology and social media. Millennials are powered by the Internet and wireless browsing. Millennials have taken

lead with the social phenomenon. “They are ‘digital natives’—the only generation for which these new technologies are not something they’ve had to adapt to. Not surprisingly, they are the most avid users. For example, 81% of Millennials are on Facebook, where their generation’s median friend count is 250, far higher than that of older age groups (these digital generation gaps have narrowed somewhat in recent years)” (Millennials). Millennials are now beginning to regret what they put online. Some even saying they’ve put too much. A common change for teenagers applying to college is altering their name on Facebook. Many universities and colleges look potential students up and to hide their profiles, students have begun to change their names.

Millennials struggle more than any other generation with debt, especially student loans, burdened by unemployment and poverty. “Not surprisingly, the new Pew Research survey finds that about seven-in-ten Americans, spanning all generations, say that today’s young adults face more economic challenges than their elders did when they were first starting out” (Millennials). Millennials are living in a time where food, housing, and education is much more expensive. Cities are populated by far more people, and since companies are expanding, more people are moving into cities. Food, homes and education continue to grow faster. “However, the new generation of college graduates also have their own economic burdens. They are entering adulthood with record levels of student debt. Two-thirds of recent bachelor’s degree recipients have outstanding student loans, with an average debt of about \$27,000. Two decades ago, only half of recent graduates had college debt, and the average was \$15,000” (Millennials). Fortunately, Millennials are also the generation most optimistic about their financial futures. None of the other generations are as confident in their future success. “More than eight-in-ten say they either currently have enough money to lead the lives they want (32%) or expect to in the future (53%).” (Millennials). Scientists assume that some of this optimism is a result of being young.

A strange characteristic about the Millennial generation is that they are supposedly distrustful of others. When asked if they could trust people in general or if it was wise to be more careful with their trust, they responded that “just 19% of Millennials say most people can be trusted, compared with 31% of Gen Xers, 37% of Silents and 40% of Boomers” (Millennials). Since Millennials are the most racially diverse generation, this may have some to do with it. Research conducted in 2007 states that lower-income and minorities find people less trusting. The reason Millennials are so distrustful may be a result of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers. Since the attack was conducted by Middle Eastern men hijacking three planes, Millennials may be less eager to board a plane or socialize with someone looking similar to the terrorists. Social media may be behind this as well. Tabloids completely dramatize situations and cause people to look completely different than they actually are. Personally, I am a trustful and trustworthy person, but understand why my fellow Millennials might not be.

In the *Silent* and *Baby Boomer* generations, when you turned a certain age it was custom for a person to get married, get a job, move out, and become an adult. This usually happened around the age of 18. In the Millennial generation, this no longer happens. Millennials are in absolutely no rush to marry. “Just 26% of this generation is married. When they were the age that Millennials are now, 36% of Generation X, 48% of Baby Boomers and 65% of the members of the Silent Generation were married” (Millennials). Kay Hymowitz, author of *Manning up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men Into Boys*, states, “My students today ... they’re going to live, if demographers are right, into their mid-90s,” says Hymowitz. “So they look at me and they say, ‘Now wait, get married at age 20? I’m not sure I want to be married to the same person for 76 years.’ And they have a point” (Pre-adulthood). In today’s society, marriage isn’t a

required tradition. More people believe that it's completely ridiculous to commit to one person for the rest of your life. Marriages between sexes has also become normal, something that was completely outrageous only 20 years ago. When my parents who were in their 20's were dating, it was seen as a sin by my grandmother and her friends that they lived together. Today, it is bizarre if a couple hasn't lived together before they are married. This is a perfect example of how generations are changing because of different experiences and contrasting beliefs.

So, why we should start taking Millennials seriously? We may be young, but we are extremely intelligent and powerful. Many Millennials are known as Digital Natives, "a person who was born during or after the general introduction of digital technologies and through interacting with digital technology from an early age has a greater comfort level using it" (Digital), therefore, we are ahead of many generations before us. Millennials aren't simply users of social media. We invented it. Mark Zuckerberg, along with the inventors of Instagram and Tumblr and Snapchat, are all millennials and all millionaires.

"They've led the way in terms of same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization — majorities favor both " Patten says. "They support granting citizenship to unauthorized immigrants — about half do — compared with lower shares among the older generations" (Why). Millennials have already steered the country to a place where diplomats tweet, gay marriage is turning mainstream, and running a blog can be more financially secure than a company job.

How do we do more from here? We listen to Millennials. They are obviously leading the path to future success. We adjust to a new society. It's no longer reasonable to go back in time. The new culture and traditions will stay until a new generation changes them. We encourage growth and childhood. Too many are just skipping over it completely. Every child deserves a form of childhood. We allow children to choose their own paths and support creativity. They are thrown into an education where they can't decide anything. Everyone learns the same thing and at the same time, when in reality this is completely unrealistic (RSA). We eliminate social pressures. The influential people today are in no way helping. We need strong independent women and men to show children how they should act and treat others. We offer a positive image for children to look up to. Generation Z is counting on the leadership of Generation Y/ Millennials.

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