



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Reflections on Gen Z: A chapter review

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Abstract

This book review examines the first chapter, "In No Hurry, growing up Slowly" of the book "i-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy, and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood" written by the author Jean M. Twenge in 2017. The chapter compares I Gen teens with teens of older generations and provides pertinent examples of the differences noted among generations, mainly in going out, acting like adults, driving, having jobs, using drugs, and being watched by parents. While the chapter illustrates how the invention of the iPhone altered teens' behaviors, it lacks an in-depth exploration of internal factors influencing i-Geners. Readers should also remember that these comparisons apply only to the American context. This chapter review highlights the chapter's contribution to understanding I Gen and provides reflections on the universality of the label "I Gen".

Keywords: I Gen; Generational Differences; Digital Generation; Gen Z

1. Introduction

In the first chapter, "In No Hurry, growing up Slowly" of the book "i-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy, and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood", the author Jean M. Twenge (2017) cited various elements that indicate how i-Gen teens (also known as Gen Z or Generation Z) are different from the teens of other generations (Boomers, Gen X and Millennials). She compared the generations using data collected from several surveys with nationally representative samples and high response rates and then presented it in charts.

Twenge introduces the chapter by addressing the assumption that today's teens and young adults are growing a lot faster thanks to their constant access to technology and smartphones. "[...] with porn on the Internet, sexy Halloween costumes for young girls, 7th-grade boys requesting nude pictures of their classmates, and other adults-too-soon trends gaining attention, many people believe that children and teens are instead growing up more quickly than in the past" (Twenge, 2017: 17). She, then, goes to debunk this supposition citing many examples from the American context.

2. Going out, dating, and having sex

The author states that I Gen kids are less likely to experience the freedom of being away from home without their parents. They have been deprived of those first enticing tastes of adulthood that lead them to make good or bad decisions. She found out that I Gen teens are less likely to go out without their parents: In 2015, 12th graders went out less frequently than 8th graders did in 2009. Therefore, 18-year-olds are now less likely to go out than 14-year-olds were just six years ago. They would rather stay on their phone browsing social media or watching Netflix shows. Consequently, I Gen teens are less likely to date. Compared to Boomers and Gen X of the same age, just around half of I

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Gen high school graduates ever go on dates. Nearly three out of four 10th graders occasionally dated in the early 1990s, but by the 2010s, just around half did. Even when they do, 1/3 of the relationship occurs on social media, where they exchange text and Snapchat messages. Sharma and Singh (2024) noted that young social media users abandon their real-life activities and focus, heavily, on the online ones. Accordingly, I Geners are less likely to have teen sex; "[...] teens are waiting longer to have sex and have babies just as they are waiting longer to go out without their parents and date" (Twenge, 2017: 25). This has, thankfully, caused teen pregnancy to decrease from one generation to another.

3. Acting less like adults

Twenge deduced that I Geners act less like adults. Life history theory is used to frame the "slowing" of the transition to adulthood in a broader culture that has slowed time to degrees, marriage, and adulthood in general. The literature indicates that Gen Z is much less likely than previous generations to have worked a part-time job, frequently attended religious services, or used cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana throughout at least some of their adolescent years (Cox et al, 2023). The premise of the theory is as follows: "Life history theory argues that how fast teens grow up depends on where and when they are raised. In more academic parlance, developmental speed is an adaptation to a cultural context" (Twenge, 2017: 25). Today's teenagers adhere to a "slow life strategy", which is prevalent in ages and locations when families have fewer children and develop each kid for a more extended and more intensive period of time. She contrasts this to how the Boomers used to live as teens in the "fast life strategy". Families, then, were bigger and parents prioritized survival above quality. This fast-paced lifestyle entails less planning for the future and more emphasis on getting through the day.

On whether teens' acting less like adults is considered good or bad, Twenge commented on this dichotomy. "Life history theory explicitly notes that slow or fast life strategies are not necessarily good or bad; they just are [...] in some cultures, dating in early high school is considered good—it means a young person is popular with the opposite sex and will have no trouble producing the grandchildren the parents want, and quickly. In other cultures, early dating is considered bad—if she dates too soon, the thinking goes, she might focus too much on relationships and won't finish college. So the "bad"-vs-"good" question depends a lot on one's cultural perspective. I suggest the same caution about seeing behaviors as "mature" or "immature." Is going out with your friends mature or immature? What about having sex? They are really neither—or both" (Twenge, 2017: 25).

4. Getting a driving licence and staying home alone

Although all Boomer high school students got their driver's license by the spring of their senior year, just 72% did by 2015. That implies that by the time they graduate high school, more than one out of every four I Geners will lack a driver's license. Notably, Wang (2024) deduced, based on nationwide analysis, that Gen Z are less "car-centric" than Millennials. Twenge (2017) also mentions a trend not so common among older generations, which is spending time at home with no adult present. I Geners happen not to be trusted with the key to open their house door and wait for their parents to come home, "[...] Thus, teens are not just less likely to go out without their parents; they are also less likely to be at home without their parents" (Twenge, 2017: 31).

5. Having teen jobs

The decline in the percentage of teens working is alarming: in the late 1970s, only 22% of high school seniors did not work for pay during the school year, but by the early 2010s, twice as many (44%) did not. That also applies to summer jobs, and that is not because they engage in extracurricular activities or homework as one may guess. Twenge believes that having a job holds various benefits:

"One study found that disadvantaged teens randomly assigned to a summer jobs program were 43% less likely to be involved in violence. Most of the effect occurred after the eight-week job period was over, suggesting that employment had a longer-term beneficial effect than simply filling time. For teens bound for college, a part-time job can provide badly needed funds, especially in the current era of rising tuition costs and the large debt burden many students find themselves with after college graduation" (Twenge, 2017: 35).

However, I Geners' joblessness does not guarantee that they will get an allowance for their parents. "When they need money, they must [...] ask for it from their parents. It is yet another example of 18-year-olds now being like 15-year-olds: just like children and young adolescents, one out of five I Gen high school seniors asks their parents for what they want instead of managing their own cash flow" (Twenge, 2017: 35).

6. Consuming alcohol and drugs

Alcohol consumption has been declining among teens and young adults since the year 1995 (the start of I Gen). Generally, I Geners have put off drinking until the spring of the 10th grade or later. While these results can be encouraging, they may let I Geners grow up inexperienced in the drinking domain, which can lead them to binge drinking on college campuses. Nevertheless, I Geners do indulge in drug use, especially Marijuana, a lot more than Millennials did.

Some might argue that with decreased alcohol usage, lower crime rates, and more constrained sexuality, I Geners are being more responsible and better behaved than the past generations. Nevertheless, it is also important to keep in mind that I Geners are also less likely to work, get a driver's license, stay home alone, or manage their own money. According to Twenge, this may be due to two factors, the first one being the cultural shift toward individualism:

"[...] childhood and adolescence are uniquely self-focused stages, so staying in them longer allows more cultivation of the individual self. With fewer children and more time spent with each, each child is noticed and celebrated. Sure enough, cultural individualism is connected to slower developmental speeds across both countries and time. Around the world, young adults grow up more slowly in individualistic countries than collectivistic ones. And as American culture has grown more individualistic from 1965 to the present, young adults have taken longer and longer to enter adult work and family roles" (Twenge, 2017: 46).

The second factor has to do with the human's brain development. She explains: "[...] several well-publicized studies of brain development have shown that the frontal cortex, the brain area responsible for judgment and decision making, does not complete its development until age 25. This has spawned the idea that teens are not quite ready to grow up and thus need more protection for a longer time" (Twenge, 2017: 46).

7. Being watched by parents

Though always being watched by parents, as I Gen parents always know where they are and whom they are with when they go out at night, I Gen teens fight less with their parents despite the teen tendency to rebel against constrictions. They embrace the overprotection that their parents give them because they enjoy being treated as kids. Even as university students, I Geners feel the need to be sheltered. Twenge explains: "Some suggest that this cocoon mentality is behind recent campus trends such as "trigger warnings" to alert students that a reading or lecture material might be disturbing and "safe spaces" where students can go if they are upset by a campus speaker's message" (Twenge, 2017: 51).

It has been clear that compared to their predecessors, I Gen teens are less likely to go out without their parents, date, have sex, drive, work, or drink alcohol. They opted to extend their childhood by being less independent, as they associate that time of their lives with less stress, and they are often afraid of adult responsibilities. The author explains the I Gen's growing up slowly:

"Childhood has lengthened, with teens treated more like children, less independent and more protected by parents than they once were. The entire developmental trajectory, from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, has slowed. Adolescence—the time when teens begin to do things adults do—now happens later. Thirteen-year-olds—and even 18-year-olds—are less likely to act like adults and spend their time like adults. They are more likely, instead, to act like children—not by being immature, necessarily, but by postponing the usual activities of adults. Adolescence is now an extension of childhood rather than the beginning of adulthood" (Twenge, 2017: 45).

Conclusively, the author adds: "No matter what the reason, teens are growing up more slowly, eschewing adult activities until they are older. This creates a logical question: If teens are working less, spending less time on homework, going out less, and drinking less, what are they doing? For a generation called I Gen, the answer is obvious: look no further than the smartphones in their hands" (Twenge, 2017: 51).

8. Conclusion

Jean Twenge contributed to a better understanding of young people's needs, dreams and problems that she calls 'iGen'. In this chapter, she blames smartphones for the teens' changed behaviour. While this claim is convincing, there, definitely, has to be other factors affecting behavioural changes in iGeners. Furthermore, the book deals with American iGeners, solely. Therefore, to generalize Twenge's findings among the youth of other nationalities would be a fallacy

(although she doesn't say so herself in the introduction of the book). Finally, some might even find what she says quite farfetched. According to Twenge, many fall under the age categorization of iGeners, yet they grew up in the late 90's, and the internet was not even a thing back then. Also, the first iPhone was released in 2007, so the name "iGen" is misleading given that those who were born in the late 90's and early 2000's did not grow up owning an iPhone.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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