

## Gen Z Tendencies: A chapter review

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### Abstract

Teens today have an unusually high regard for physical and emotional safety. They tend to take the safe approach with respect to education, relationships and social life. The primary motivation comes from protecting themselves from risks and burdensome commitments that may distract or hinder them from achieving their goal of economic security. In this review of chapter 6, “Insulated but Not Intrinsic: More Safety and Less Community” of the book “iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us”, Jean Twenge tackles the overarching emphasis on emotional security by highlighting how the concept of ‘safe spaces’ has been distorted. Instead of engaging in healthy debate, today's iGen'ers are offended by simply hearing another point of view. Since teens today are less likely to face physical violence, unlike in the past, this review sheds light on how iGen views danger approaching from emotions and speech. Emotional violence has now upstaged physical violence.

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

### 1. Introduction

The chapter presents some controversial ideas about what the iGen prefers and disregards. Safety has always been important to all generations, but Twenge argues that the current generation (iGen'ers) are mostly strict regarding personal safety. Hence, iGen'ers, according to Twenge, do not drink because it is not safe, and they risk public humiliation on social media: “Some attribute the decline in binge drinking to iGen's fear that your slobbered self will end up ridiculed all over Instagram”. This shifts the conversation to how social media plays a major role in iGen's life (Razak et al., 2025).

### 2. Chapter review

Safety is a recurring theme all over the sixth chapter; furthermore, Helen, 18, argues that attending parties while drunk may put you at risk, but the greatest one is drunk driving, which threatens their lives and the lives of those around them. Throughout the chapter, the author, Twenge (2017), continues to debunk false assumptions about Gen Z (Habiballah et al., 2025).

With social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook gaining more traction, a new type of safety emerges among iGen'ers, emotional safety. Being safe on social media has become important to iGen because social media represents another facet of reality, and the two influence each other greatly. Teagen, an iGen'er, comments on the impact of social media on one's life with the following: “Drinking may lead to problems with law enforcement and embarrassment on social media, which leads to employers not hiring you because you are unreliable and an embarrassment”. iGen'ers drive

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less than previous generations; however, they are safer drivers: "iGen teens are safer drivers; fewer high school seniors get into car accidents, and fewer get tickets. This is a recent trend, beginning only in the early 2000s for tickets and in the mid-2000s for accidents" (Twenge, 2017: 147).

iGeneration, according to Twenge, believes that smoking is harmless compared to drinking. Hence, many high school and college students smoke marijuana for its 'medical' effects. "I consider marijuana to be a very safe substance. I have personally been using it for three years for chronic spinal pain, depression, anxiety, and psoriatic arthritis. The withdrawal from my pain medication was among the hardest times in my life, but I was able to use marijuana to curb both the withdrawal and the heightened pain. I have never experienced any detrimental side effects in years of heavy use" (Twenge, 2017: 152).

Today's young adults are labelled by many names, most commonly Gen Z and iGen (Schmitt, 2024). Throughout this chapter, the two terms are to be used interchangeably. Unlike boomers and Generation X, iGen'ers are less confrontational and believe that physical fights are meaningless. "In 1991, half of the 9th graders had been in a physical fight in the last twelve months, but by 2015, only one in four had" (Twenge, 2017: 154). Therefore, physical fighting is meaningless and risky for them. "There is no point to physical fighting, I hate to see myself get hurt, and I wish to see no one else be hurt either" (Twenge, 2017: 155). Statistics showed a drastic decrease in sexual assaults among young people, and the rate of rape incidents was nearly cut in half from the 90s to 2015, based on FBI and police reports.

Risk-taking among iGeneration is at an all-time low due to changes in iGen's mindset and behaviour. iGen risk aversion goes beyond their behaviours toward a general attitude of avoiding risk and danger. Eighth and 10th graders are less likely to agree with the statement that "I like to test myself now and then by doing something a little risky" (Twenge, 2017: 157). Nearly half of teens found that appealing in the early 1990s, but by 2015, less than 40% did. However, the lack of motivation to try new experiences may hinder their personal and professional achievements. Richard Goldstein, who is a professor at Hunter College, concluded that safety is important, but taking leaps of faith is a way for iGen to improve and invent; he then adds:

"Wanting to feel safe all of the time can also lead to wanting to protect against emotional upset —the concern with 'emotional safety' is somewhat unique to iGen. That can include preventing bad experiences, sidestepping situations that might be uncomfortable, and avoiding people with ideas different from your own. That's where things get dicey — both for iGen and for the older generations struggling to understand them" (Twenge, 2017: 159).

iGen students, according to Claire Fox, are "snowflakes". They avoid confrontations at all costs and seek emotional "safety" when they are met with arguments and called for a debate. iGen'ers are extremely fragile towards people who argue with them, hence creating the "safe space" concept. Twenge adds:

"In recent years, safe spaces have become popular on college campuses as responses to visits by controversial speakers: if students are upset by a speaker's message, they can come together in a separate location to console one another. Safe spaces echo not just iGen's interest in safety but their association of safety with childhood" (Twenge, 2017: 159).

Safe spaces also present a shelter for minorities and students who belong to the LGBTQ+ community to feel accepted among like-minded peers. The term also includes protecting anyone from any viewpoint that might offend them.

The concept of safe spaces emerges from power being in the hands of the marginalized population; it does not call for distorting reality, but it gives people, students in our case, the opportunity to find and seek refuge in like-minded students. iGen thinks of college as home, or at least as a second home, which highlights the emotional and psychological status of a generation that depends on a sense of belonging to survive in a new environment (Strayhorn, 2018).

"Instead of promoting the idea of college as a transition from the shelter of the family to adult autonomy and responsibility, universities like Yale have given in to the implicit notion that they should provide the equivalent of the home environment" (Twenge, 2017: 162).

This problem of wanting to belong transforms college students into kids whose viewpoint is altered; they seek authority and parenthood from administrators, and they avoid taking responsibility for their actions, but they appeal to a higher figure when asked to make decisive decisions. The chapter extensively discusses the issue of iGen being less confrontational during moments of violence and bullying, "want college administrators to be like their parents, seen by children as all-powerful". The shift in how people deal with violent acts has also been altered. Previous generations used to deal with such matters on the spot, while iGen'ers prefer to hold the "Victim" title while avoiding confrontations.

The iGeneration is the first generation to live through a long childhood. Parents of this generation are more or less paranoid about physical safety; hence, children live more within the family's arms. The latter resulted in children spending more years fully aware that they are safe and protected, totally unprepared for the real world.

"When they go to college, they suddenly feel unprotected and vulnerable; therefore, they try to recreate that feeling of home and safety they were in just a few months before" (Twenge, 2017: 165).

The extreme safety measures have rendered iGen extremely fragile; they have stifled their natural habits of exploring and learning by doing. Hara Estroff, a journalist and educator, wrote in her book *Nation of Wimps*, "Behold the wholly sanitized childhood, without skinned knees and the occasional C in history!"

Generations come and go with differences in principles and priorities. Studies on previous generations found that they are interested in learning life skills, finding meaning in life and helping others. The iGen, however, is showing the contrary to previous generations. Its sole interest is material gain, such as financial safety, fame (virtual fame in this case), and public image (Twenge et al., 2010). From an economic perspective, inflation had its fair share in drastically increasing prices for all products. An iGen'er adds, "It's harder now to afford what our parents had. We've got student loans, and everything is so expensive" (Twenge, 2017: 168).

The glaring gap between what boomers and generationX wanted to accomplish in this life, which is developing a meaningful philosophy of life and what the current generation wants in becoming "well off" financially, says a lot about the change in mentality and priorities.

"The vast majority of this shift occurred between Boomers and GenX. Millennials' beliefs mostly stabilized at GenX levels in the 2000s, but then iGen continued the increase in the importance of being well off and the decrease in the importance of meaning. Even more than the Millennials just before them, iGen'ers think that making a lot of money—winning the economic race—is important" (Twenge, 2017: 169).

Another powerful instrument whose influence over the current generation is growing day after day is the irrational consumption of social media. Watching TV programs and surfing the Internet have made iGen'ers dream of wealth and a lavish lifestyle. The increasing need for wealth correlates with the decrease in reading books and consuming intellectually stimulating products. Vivian, 22, writes, "We have stopped looking at life and its deeper meaning and have instead immersed ourselves in a world where the big stuff people think about is how many likes they got on an Instagram post". Focusing on money, fame, and image is a common pattern among people high in narcissism. Unlike Millennials, however, iGen'ers do not score particularly high in narcissism; scores peaked around 2008 and have declined ever since. iGen'ers are not as overconfident, entitled, or grandiose as Millennials were at the same age, which is a positive development in many ways. However, some of that narcissism has been replaced with disengagement, which only appears in the classroom.

A change in attitudes and morals towards the classroom and school is one of iGen's many behaviours that embody rebelling against the system and the status quo. Today, more than ever before, students are less engaged in the classroom environment.

"Teens' interest in school took a sudden plunge beginning around 2012, with fewer students saying they found school interesting, enjoyable, or meaningful. The strong push for technology in the classroom seems to have assuaged students' boredom during the 2000s, but by the 2010s, little in the classroom could compete with the allure of the tempting smartphone" (Twenge, 2017: 170).

Schools try to keep up with technology, but the change happens so quickly that they will never be able to catch up. Books as educational tools are no longer viewed that way; in that matter, iGen'ers prefer to learn using phones, tablets and laptops. Athena, a high school student, adds: "They want us to learn everything out of a book, the same way they taught everybody fifty years ago, but that's not how we learn anymore. Books don't help us learn anything anymore, because they might not be true" (Twenge, 2017: 172).

Even in college, where students have the choice of being there, a similar pattern emerges: compared to previous generations, iGen'ers are more focused on getting a better job and less on getting a general education. iGen college students believe they are in class to get a better job, but learning becomes less important once they are out of class.

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, iGen'ers are more practical than the generations before them. Career advancement has always been an important reason to go to college, but its importance has grown recently. More iGen'ers find no joy in school, and more are cynical about its importance. High school students are not even sure it is the right means anymore. These attitudes have contributed to the college campus controversies of recent years. To Boomer, GenX'er, and even many Millennial faculty members and administrators, college is a place for learning and exploration, and that includes being exposed to ideas different from your own. That, they believe, is the whole point of going to College in the first place. However, College for iGen'ers is a place to prepare for a career in a safe environment. Not only are different ideas potentially upsetting and thus unsafe, but there is no point in studying them because getting a good job is much more important.

This "consumer mentality" in students arrived some time ago, during the GenX, but when iGen'ers combine it with their interest in safety, it intensifies to a different level. When exploring ideas was something Boomer professors wanted, GenX'ers and Millennials could go along with that. iGen's interest in safety leads them to hesitate at the idea that college should mean exploring new and different ideas in a safe environment. This generational gulf in values, with Boomers favouring ideas and iGen'ers safety and practicality, helps explain why the two generations struggle to understand each other's viewpoints when controversial ideas arrive on campus.

### Compliance with ethical standards

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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