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# 1. Gen Z stereotypes

## Three myths about Generation Z

BY JOHN DELLA VOLPE, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 03/07/22 10:30 AM ET  
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Generations happen when a group of people coming of age share the experience of living through certain historical events. Values naturally emerge. They inform worldviews and ways of thinking that are carried for a lifetime. Along with these patterns, however, come generalizations and inaccurate stereotypes.

As I describe in my recent book about the values of Generation Z and how they will shape America for decades to come, here are some common myths about this unique generation:

### Myth #1 — They're snowflakes

Donald Trump's first attorney general once described Gen Z as a band of "sanctimonious, sensitive, supercilious snowflakes." Nothing could be farther from the truth.

While every generation has its share of angst and turmoil, no generation in at least eight decades has been confronted with more chaos more quickly than the 70 million Americans I refer to as "Zoomers." Born in the shadow of September 11, millions lost their homes to the financial crisis. Lockdown drills and school shootings made once safe places dangerous.

Next was the whiplash of Trump's election, white nationalism, an opioid epidemic, global warming, threats to our democracy, and COVID-19 — all of this accelerated through social media and landing on Zoomers' laps before their brains fully developed.

Rather than melting like snowflakes, they became stronger, more resilient, and determined to fight for better days. They took on the gun lobby after Parkland and made climate change a focal point of the 2020 presidential campaign. Their fight for racial justice, sparking anew after George Floyd's murder, created a national reckoning impacting every industry, from politics to the National Football League.

### **Myth #2 — They don't vote**

It was once fair to claim that young people talk a big game but rarely back it up at the polls. This take has been more or less borne out for most of the last 40 years. Then Generation Z entered the scene.

According to the U.S. Elections Project, in 2018, when Gen Z joined the electorate, youth turnout in the Congressional midterms doubled the historical average.

This trend continued in the 2020 election for president, where again, Gen Z shattered participation records. Generation Z outvoted every other generation when they were young, including millennials, Gen Xers, and baby boomers.

Without their record levels of participation and a strong preference for Joe Biden, Donald Trump would be serving a second term.

Former President Trump won the vote of Americans age 45 and older in every critical battleground state. Biden's victories in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin were powered by the double-digit margins of voters under 30.

### **Myth #3 — They're addicted to technology and can't handle face-to-face interactions**

Actually, most Zoomers believe life was better before social media, and only 17 percent strongly agree that they are addicted to platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram.

Of course, there are plenty of reasons to be concerned about the expansive and intrusive ways of technology, but this is not a zero-sum game. I am beginning to find a renewed sense of personal agency and an ability of Gen Zers to speak up for themselves, especially in defense of the vulnerable. For at least four years, I have been detecting Zoomers unafraid to use their voice for schoolyard justice, in their workplace, and in their personal lives.

Let's set aside our preconceived notions and stereotypes. Let's listen, engage, and be a positive force in the lives of what could well be America's next great generation. Generation Z will surely benefit, as will we all.

# Boss posts furious job ad asking for 'baby boomers' after Gen Z staff quit



Ellie Abraham

• Apr 22, 2022



A furious boss posted a sign in his shop window berating the Gen Z staff that quit and saying they were hiring “baby boomers only”.

The sign written by the small business owner has got people talking after it was posted on a Facebook group called *Useless, Unsuccessful, and/or Unpopular Signage*. It has been liked over 8,000 times.

According to the sign, two recently hired Gen Z cashiers both quit, allegedly because their boyfriends weren't allowed to stand there while they worked.

Dated 4/20, the sign read: “I apologise for us closing again. My two new cashiers quit because I said their boyfriends couldn't stand here for their entire shift.

“Don't hire Gen Z's. They don't know what work actually means. Now hiring! Baby boomers only. Thanks!”

Gen Z people were born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s. The oldest Gen Z's are around 27 years old while the youngest are around the age of 8.

With baby boomers born between 1946 to 1964, the furious boss was clearly looking for someone older who they believe may be more reliable.

The sign sparked a debate in the comments about ageism, stereotypes and whether the business owner was in the wrong.

One person wrote: “That's a pretty awful and agist sign. I'm pretty young and I work 48 hours a week and never sit once while I'm on the clock.

“There are people who are young and hard working. There are also many boomers I know of who don't do sh\*t. It's all about attitude, upbringing, and motivation.”

Another reasoned: “Yeah this is why we don't write a sign or note while we are angry. Wait a bit. Just place a closed due to lack of staff and now hiring.

“That note is wrong on many levels and gives a really bad reputation. No, boyfriends shouldn't hang out. But it doesn't need to be broadcasted.

“Also, a lot of Boomers officially retired during the pandemic. So good luck finding a few.”

Others think the note says more about the boss than it does his former employees.

A mother of Gen Z kids wrote: “Why yes, let's judge an entire generation based on 2 people. Both my kids are Gen Z and neither would expect this, however, they would expect to be treated with dignity, which I doubt would happen at this place.

“So best to avoid this type of boss, who obviously doesn't like young people.”

## 2. Zoomers vs Boomers

### 'You're not snowflakes': baby boomers answer gen Z's biggest questions



'Why do all boomers find windfarms so ugly?' Tayo Idowu (*centre*) and three other baby boomers take on young people's queries below. Composite: David Levene/The Guardian; Getty

We live in an era in which, for the most part, the generations do not mix frequently. Grandparents are visited occasionally; young people seek the freedom of independent living as early as possible. On social media, intergenerational warfare is commonplace, as members of gen Z (those born between the mid-90s and the early 10s) criticise older people for hoarding wealth, while baby boomers bemoan the perceived sensitivity of the younger generation.

But what would happen if baby boomers gave the TikToking young adults of today an insight into their thinking – and threw some life advice into the bargain? To that end, we assembled a panel of baby boomers – Tayo Idowu, 64, a marketing director from London; Liz Richards, 68, a retired nurse from Derby; Paul Gibson, 63, an accountant from Arundel, West Sussex; and Maggie Tata, 65, a carer from London – to answer gen Z's questions (even the tongue-in-cheek ones).

#### What do you admire in younger people today? (Caitlin, 22, Norwich)

**Idowu:** I admire them for their tenacity.

**Tata:** And also for their adaptability. I don't know how they do it. They can suck everything in and still manage to cope. And they're willing to take risks. Their courage is just amazing.

**Gibson:** I admire them for their confidence in IT. They're probably the first digital natives, aren't they? They've embraced all the possibilities of technology.

**Richards:** For me, it's how they've coped with the pandemic. I think they've had the worst time of any group, really. Obviously, not from the sickness and death point of view, but the fact that when you're young your life is going out, meeting other people, doing all of that. They've had to do without a lot of it.

#### Do you think young people are overly sensitive and privileged? (JD, 21, south Wales)

**Idowu:** It depends how you define sensitive or privileged. I know some young people and for them the thought of going out to work in the summer holiday is like: maybe after I've rested for a long time. In our day, the idea of getting a paper round was the norm. So, definitely in terms of privilege, for some of them I can feel that.

**Gibson:** I think they're much more aware and have a greater empathy and understanding of people's journeys. So I use words like sensitive in a positive way, not in a Piers Morgan snowflake way, because they're not snowflakes. They're resilient and adaptable and more aware of their world's issues.

### Why do you hate selfies? (Bethany, 22, London)

**Richards:** I don't hate selfies! I love them. Some of the best pictures I've got are selfies. But sometimes it's constant selfies – and then it gets a bit tedious.

**Idowu:** We don't hate selfies per se. It's the volume of them.

### Would you have chosen to live your life differently if you were born in our generation? (Diana, 19, Aberdeen)

**Gibson:** If I were starting over, I would take more risks. My early life was fairly risk-free. I wanted to go to Cambridge, which I did. My father was an accountant and it was expected that I would become an accountant, so I did. I would take more risks with my life and with my career, seek out more diversity. I think I lacked that in the earlier years. And perhaps I wouldn't have one linear career, which is what I've done, but several different careers. Because inside I feel like a writer, but on the outside I look like an accountant. If I were starting over, I'd give that writer a little bit more space and that accountant a little less space. I think I'd be a richer person for that.

### What is your best advice for how to achieve financial security? (Judith, 23, Barcelona)

**Tata:** Oh God, that's a good one. Invest, invest, invest! Multiple streams of income. That's it. You can't just have a nine-to-five job any more. You have to do lots and lots of different things.

**Idowu:** As early as you can, get a life insurance policy. Make sure it's a whole-life insurance policy, because that way, if something happens to you, you have something substantial to leave to your offspring. Also, look outside your main career for income. I think it's called a "side hustle" now, right? I used to go to police auctions – this was way before eBay – and buy things, then advertise them in the classified ads. If you can, get on the property ladder as soon as possible.

**Gibson:** For me, saving has always been very important, but I went to university at a time when there was no student debt and housing was affordable. But – and it's a huge "but" – if you can, start a pension early. It's called compounding. If you start a pension at 21 and retire at 65, that pension has been going for 45 years, and a very small sum can become a substantial sum. The state pension isn't enough to live on, sadly. But I recognise how that advice is just not practical for so many people who are paying eye-watering amounts of rent.

### What mistakes did your generation make – and what can gen Z learn from them? (Hayley, 23, Northampton)

**Richards:** When I was younger, the attitudes towards women who got pregnant out of marriage were awful. The world sort of fell in on them. It was also hypocritical, because there would often be illegitimate children in families, but everyone pretended that wasn't the case. Another big mistake I lived through was how we treated gay people. People had to pretend and it caused such pain and distress.

**Idowu:** Another mistake we made was listening to everything our teachers and parents told us and believing it. Because half the time they were saying things knowing full well they weren't going to happen. I think today's children are a lot more challenging of what adults tell them, which is a good thing.

**Tata:** Yes. We didn't have a choice, really. But they can find information out for themselves. I'm grateful for their free spirit, because we were just told that we had to do as we were told.

**Gibson:** For me, it's our generation's failure to act on climate change. We know what we need to do, but we lack the individual and political leadership to change the way we live and protect the environment. Our failure will be felt for generations to come.

### Why do all boomers find windfarms so ugly? (Louis, 23, Glasgow)

**Idowu:** Well, I wouldn't want to live next to one, put it like that. I wouldn't say I find them ugly. I think I find them intriguing. I actually prefer windfarms to solar panels. They look a bit more elegant, if I may say. Having these massive solar panels looks strange in the beautiful countryside.

### Have you changed opinion politically since you were a young adult? (Atila, 17, London)

**Richards:** I have definitely got more conservative, with a small C, as I've got older. [She laughs.] I had some fairly radical thoughts as a young person. You try not to, but you do harden your opinions on certain things – and sometimes that's a good thing, because you won't be swayed by other people. But some people think whatever they think is absolutely right and they sort of keep on at you, until you agree with them.

**Idowu:** I've softened. I've gone from more of a Marxist-Leninist stance to a soft-left stance.

**Gibson:** I've not changed. I was a great supporter of Jeremy Corbyn and I think I would have been as a young person. Obviously, it didn't go well, but a lot of the ideas he came up with were ahead of their time and, in the next five years, we might begin to follow them.

### Do you believe that gen Z aren't able to buy homes because we are lazy and don't work hard enough? (Rebecca, 21, Lincoln)

**Richards:** Absolutely not! [She looks horrified.] My sons aren't gen Z, they're in their 30s, but they can't buy homes. House prices have been crazy over the past 20 years.

**Idowu:** I bought my first house for £23,000. Nowadays, that would probably be £300,000 – and instead of finding a £3,000 deposit, you'd need £30,000.

### What is your view on TikTok? (Shriya, 24, India)

**Idowu:** I think it's a massive and amazing tool for creativity, because you have to encapsulate so much in such a short space of time.

### What do you think of the rising awareness of mental health – and do you wish you had the same awareness when you were younger? (Grace, 20, Exeter)

**Tata:** Definitely! Definitely. It was taboo for us growing up. We couldn't even talk about mental health. People would be locked up in what we used to term “mental homes” and that was it. It's so good that mental health is being addressed now and it's not a taboo.

### What is the one thing you wish you had known before you were 30? (Abbie, 22, Bristol)

**Idowu:** If I'd known before 30 that as you get older you have less energy, I would have had my children much earlier. Because what you don't want is when you take your son to school and people say: "Is that your grandad?"

**Richards:** Getting your foot on the property ladder if you possibly can is a good idea. Paying into a pension. It's awfully boring and, of course, when you're at that age, you never think you will need it, because you never think you will be old, but age does come. And travel. Meet new people, educate yourself about different cultures. That will set you up for being a decent, balanced person.

**Gibson:** I think I would say to an under-30, or myself at that age, to be bold. When you look back, failure isn't a terrible thing. It's actually quite often a positive thing. You can learn from it, you can grow from it. When I was under 30, I was very anxious about failing and I think I missed out on some of the things we've been talking about – travelling and meeting new people and getting new experiences. I wouldn't worry about failing. I would be bold.

## 'Do you blame us for house prices?' Gen Zers answer baby boomers' biggest questions



Patrick Baggaley is among the four gen Zers here to answer boomers' questions. Composite: David Levene, The Guardian/Getty

When interaction between the generations is interrupted – and there doesn't even have to be a pandemic; sometimes we just forget to call each other – it is easy for misunderstandings to flourish. Negative perceptions can build to such a pitch that, even if you had your grandchildren standing right in front of you, you possibly wouldn't want to tackle them head-on. Or perhaps your perceptions aren't negative – there are just pockets of puzzlement.

Four zoomers – Patrick Baggaley, Freya Scott-Turner, Rachel Ayo Ogunleye and Aidan Nylander, all born in 2000 – are here to clear up everything. Baggaley is a chef based in London; Scott-Turner is studying journalism and living in Cambridge; Ayo Ogunleye is studying medicine and based in Beckenham, south London; and Nylander is between two degrees and lives in Newcastle.

What are the things that every boomer should do? What changes are needed and what can they do about them? (Sue Ann, Colorado)



**Nylander:** I'd say one of the big things is empathy. If they put themselves in our shoes, our attitudes might get closer on climate change and other societal things – race, for example.

**Scott-Turner:** I've got a more specific one. I don't want to make generalisations, but we have a huge issue with disinformation and fake news and I feel as though the older generations are probably more susceptible to sharing and agreeing with stuff. We've grown up with the internet; if we see a viral page that's not trustworthy, we just know. They'll share anything from the University of WhatsApp: "Eat lemons and you won't get Covid."

**Why do many of you seem reluctant to vote? Is hedonism more important than politics?  
(Les Clensy, 63, London)**

**Baggaley:** I can understand why young people don't want to vote or don't engage in politics. I still see it as a bunch of 50-plus posh white men. So, for lots of people, that's quite difficult to relate to. But personally I do vote and I always will.

**Ayo Ogunleye:** I actually disagree with the statement. If anything, my friends feel more inclined to vote now than ever.

**Are you worried about the future? Do you see yourself finding a partner and making a life, perhaps with children? (Barbara Evans, 69, Ontario)**

**Scott-Turner:** It's funny, because my most important thing would be having kids, but I am quite pessimistic about the future. I genuinely don't know what the world will be like in 20 years. I don't know if I would want to bring a child into it. Monogamy for life is, I think, pretty unlikely. We're always told we can find someone better. You're not forming a nuclear household that you're gonna stick through to the bitter end.

**Baggaley:** I wouldn't say I was massively worried. I reckon I will probably end up in some form of quite traditional family, with a partner and children. I wouldn't necessarily need to get married.

**Are you anxious about climate change and the threat of having to live underground in the future? (Anna, 71, Blue Mountains, Australia)**

**Baggaley:** I have never heard of underground living as a possibility.

**Nylander:** I think all the scenarios seem pretty dark. I watched the most recent David Attenborough documentary on Netflix and he was talking about how we have passed so many environmental breaking points. What I took from it was that, for some things, it's a bit too late and what do my efforts actually do at this point? It is quite defeating. So maybe I don't worry about it as much because it's a situation that I don't think I can handle or I don't think we can handle.

**What will the next generation say about you? (Mark Saunders, 58, Forest of Dean)**

**Nylander:** I think we will always be remembered as the first generation to experience the internet. I was born in 2000 and I always find it so amazing – like, in 1998, what did they do?

**Ayo Ogunleye:** They'll probably see us as experiments. We have been through loads of different things and we are the first to do this, the first to do that.

**Baggaley:** Maybe we're all going to be messed up by the pandemic. That messed up generation, who were locked inside for two years.

## Do you believe identity politics is representative of how young people think? (Tim Jones, 69, Brighton)

**Baggaley:** My understanding of identity politics, originally, was that it was a particular group that feels discriminated against, campaigning for their rights – which I think is obviously a really great thing. But I think young people now aren't just sticking to the one identity. And people come out in support of each other. So I was going on Black Lives Matter demonstrations and women's marches and supporting LGBTQ+ things as well.

**Ayo Ogunleye:** I think the term identity politics is used to trivialise conversations that are actually important to have. It's an amazing thing that we're talking more about how people navigate the world they live in based on who they are. It shouldn't be something to make fun of.

## Do you think boomers are causing the problems young people have in getting jobs, being paid low wages and buying houses? (Moira Sykes, 70, Manchester)

**Ayo Ogunleye:** I would never associate not being able to get a job or low wages with that generation. I think it's more to do with there being so much competition within our own generation.

**Scott-Turner:** For me, our problems are political issues. We're all going to be stuck paying rent to landlords who bought these houses outright because 15 years ago they could. I would never just view it as: "Everyone over 50 did this and we pay the price." These were policy decisions.

## I have been an ardent feminist since my late teens and am having real trouble coping with transgender issues. It seems to me zoomers are very hard on people who see shades of grey. I'm disappointed by reactions to JK Rowling and Martina Navratilova. (Clair, 69, London)

**Scott-Turner:** Trans people are some of the most oppressed people, so anyone adding to that I find really intolerable. But I think we need to be patient, because if we're going to make any progress you can't call people you disagree with stupid.

**Baggaley:** Being trans is such an important part of somebody's identity, so to say "I don't understand it" can be really horrible for somebody who, as this person sees it, is existing in the wrong body. Questioning somebody's whole identity and suggesting that they're not a real woman or a real man – I think that's really horrible, to suggest that you can determine how someone else identifies.

## Do you feel that we have failed to protect your future by refusing to act to stop the climate catastrophe sooner? (Desmond Bermingham, 58, London)

**Ayo Ogunleye:** I do agree with that statement to an extent. If they were aware of it then [in the 80s and 90s], if they were clued up and just decided to sit back, that was lazy.

**Nylander:** I don't necessarily blame them; the responses should have been far faster, but that's with hindsight.

## What would it take to turn off Facebook, Twitter and all the other social internet drugs you take? (Fred Hodges, 75, Algarve)

**Nylander:** I have tried spells of not being on social media, but fundamentally it's impractical. You're isolating yourself if you're not using them.

**Ayo Ogunleye:** I use probably every single form of social media there is. I would not delete all my social medias, I just wouldn't. For it to be gone, they would have to delete the whole site. When Blackberry Messenger got taken away, I stopped using it. That's what it takes.

### Is email really dead? (John Lee, 61, Dundee)

**Scott-Turner:** I have 10,000 unopened emails.

**Ayo Ogunleye:** If I emailed my friend saying: "Do you want to meet up?" they'd probably laugh. Phones are here for a reason.

**Baggaley:** The only people who email me are Uber Eats and Sainsbury's.

### 3. Work and/or Life

## Younger generation does not dream of labor

On TikTok and online, the youngest workers are rejecting work as we know it. How will that play out IRL?

By Terry Nguyen Updated Apr 22, 2022, 9:00am EDT

Illustration by Bea Hayward for Vox



“I don’t have goals. I don’t have ambition. I only want to be attractive.” This apathetic declaration is the start of a TikTok rant that went viral for its blatant message: to reject hard work and indulge in leisure. Thousands of young people have since remixed the sound on the app, providing commentary about their post-college plans, dream jobs, or ideal lifestyles as stay-at-home spouses.

Over the past two years, young millennials and members of Gen Z have created an abundance of memes and pithy commentary about their generational disillusionment toward work. The jokes, which correspond with the rise of anti-work ideology online, range from shallow and shameless (“Rich housewife is the goal”) to candid and pessimistic.

“I don’t want to be a girlboss. I don’t want to hustle,” declaimed another TikTok user. “I simply want to live my life slowly and lay down in a bed of moss with my lover and enjoy the rest of my existence reading books, creating art, and loving myself and the people in my life.”

Many have taken to declaring how they don’t have dream jobs since they “don’t dream of labor.” This buzzy phrase, popularized on social media in the pandemic, rejects work as a basis for identity. To quote the billionaire Kim Kardashian, it does seem like nobody wants to work these days. Nobody wants to work in jobs where they are underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked — especially not young people.

The reality is much more complicated. American workers across various ages, industries, and income brackets have experienced heightened levels of fatigue, burnout, and general dissatisfaction toward their jobs since the pandemic’s start. The difference is, more young people are airing these indignations and attitudes on the internet, often to viral acclaim.

Business Insider recently cited data claiming that emboldened Gen Z workers were more “likely to change jobs more often than any other generation,” and a recent Bloomberg poll found that millennials, followed by zoomers, are the most likely to leave their current position for a higher salary.

<...>

Many zoomers entered the workforce during the pandemic-affected economy, amid years of stagnant wages and, more recently, rising inflation. “My dad got a job straight out of high school, saved up, and bought a house in his 20s,” said Anne Dakota, a 21-year-old receptionist from Asheville, North Carolina, who earns minimum wage. “I don’t even think that’s possible for me, at least with the current money I make.”

Naturally, this has major consequences for social attitudes about work. What sets zoomers apart, according to common narratives, is their determination to be fulfilled and defined by other aspects of life. They expect employers to recognize that and promote policies and benefits that encourage work-life balance.

For decades, if not centuries, this was not the case. Work has been — and continues to be — a major aspect of the American identity. “Most people identify themselves as workers,” said Sarah Damaske, an associate professor of sociology and labor and employment relations at Penn State University. “It’s an identity that adults willingly take on.”

The pandemic changed that for everyone, not just the youngest workers. In addition to reassessing their relationship to work, people are reflecting upon their greater life purpose. One human resources manager called it the “Great Reflection,” wherein people are “taking stock of what they want out of a job, what they want out of employment, and what they want out of their life.” More often than not, workers are not content with labor that is unsatisfying, low-paying, and potentially harmful. And Gen Z has not been shy about detailing these expectations to employers and on social media.

“I think people are realizing that we just want better for ourselves,” said Jade Carson, 22, a content creator who shares career advice for Gen Z. “I want to be in a role where I can grow professionally and personally. I don’t want to be stressed, depressed, or always waiting to clock out.”

On TikTok, Carson has shared tips on negotiating salary, potential employer red flags to be wary of, and her workplace non-negotiables. Her goal is to help job applicants realize that they should not be afraid to ask for what they deserve, even if most of her audience is currently at the bottom of the career ladder. “There’s so much valuable free knowledge out there. More people are realizing that they can make career moves or requests they otherwise didn’t think they could.”

In some cases, workers are quitting without anything lined up. It’s a common rallying cry on #QuitTok, where users endorse and applaud those who’ve left demoralizing jobs.

“I’m here to tell you that you also have permission to quit a job that makes you miserable,” said one 28-year-old TikToker, who recently left teaching.

This was the case for Nikki Phillips, 27, who resigned from her role in warehousing and fulfillment services in October, after months of dealing with “a toxic work environment.” Though some of her work can be done remotely, Phillips was required to be in the office full time, and eventually she contracted Covid-19 (she was fully vaccinated). The final straw, she said, was when her boss made her feel guilty for being out sick. “Life is about so much more than working yourself to death,” Phillips said. “I don’t want to keep working 40 hours a week, coming home only to have four hours a night to spend with my kids and boyfriend, and do it all again the next day.”

Phillips, a self-described “struggling zillennial,” is a single mother of two who dropped out of community college to start working in her early 20s. She didn’t expect to leave her old job with nothing lined up, but the experience took “such a drastic toll on [her] happiness” that she felt better walking away: “My mental health and my happiness matters more than my salary, but at the same time, I can’t afford to not have a job because

I've got bills to pay and two kids to support." And it empowered her to know that so many workers seemed to be doing the same.

As a job seeker without a college degree, Phillips said she struggles to be considered for well-paying opportunities, even in roles she has experience in. Still, she'd rather take a lesser-paying job that allows her to work from home with respectful managers over a well-paid position with little flexibility and a poor work culture. "I want to work with people who understand that I'm a human being and don't expect me to be a corporate slave," Phillips said.

While younger workers have developed a reputation for "job hopping," Damaske believes employers are also to blame. "We really have seen an erosion in the employer-employee contract over the last 40 years," she said. "Why are young people being asked to make commitments to employers who no longer uphold their end of the bargain? Young workers don't get to work for a company until they retire. Those kinds of practices don't happen anymore."

Many young employees, especially those who've entered the workforce during the past two recessions, have job insecurity and might be more eager to jump ship if a better offer arises. According to a 2019 Harris poll, workers under 35 expressed more "layoff anxiety" than their older counterparts. Many, as a result, don't develop a work identity that is tied to their employer or their current field of work. In fact, more Americans than ever are looking to start their own businesses, and low-paying workers are trying to turn to higher-paying industries.

Carson doesn't think that most zoomers are actually anti-work, at least from a political perspective. In fact, she said, she thinks it's the opposite: She has noticed more young people publicly committing to quit an undesirable job so that they can devote more time to learning new skills, in the hopes of entering a field like tech, which promises high salaries and good benefits. Many have also left behind corporate roles to work as full-time content creators or freelancers.

What comes after #QuitTok, though, is mostly still work. There is work in figuring out how to pay next month's rent and qualify for health insurance. Some users make retrospective videos about how their lives have changed since quitting a toxic or unsatisfying job.

Instead of emphasizing leisure and personal fulfillment outside of work, these videos lean into a different kind of work identity. The #breakintotech TikTok trend, for example, has been criticized for romanticizing the benefits of a tech job without diving into its realities: long hours, heavy workload, and how developing certain skills, qualifications, and connections can't be done overnight.

"There are more people who are not laboring in a traditional sense, but the way I see it, they're still working for their dollar," Phillips said of content creators and independent entrepreneurs. "My dream job is to be a pastry chef. Still, the average pay for a cake decorator is \$16 an hour, and I'd rather baking be a hobby that brings me joy."

## 4. Influencers & Social Media

### Should influencers be expected to behave like role models?



Lauren Singer

Apr 21, 2021, 1:00 PM

When I think of the word “role model,” I think of my parents — the people I’ve looked up to my entire life, who’ve been by my side and who’ve cheered me on since the beginning. They taught me right from wrong, filling the spot of “best role models” by being both relatable and inspirational.



Photo by Brycehall / Instagram | From throwing parties during a pandemic to countless controversies, influencer Bryce Hall sets anything but a good example for his impressionable audience of millions.

But for the young people of today, there is a new group of people to look up to: social media influencers.

Influencers are people who can reach a large audience with the content that they put out due to their large followings. And since young people spend a large part of their free time online liking, watching and commenting on influencers’ content, they end up idolizing them.

As we've seen, social media has the power to influence entire generations, and this power of guidance shouldn't be taken lightly.

Let's take Bryce Hall, for instance, a social media “star” that has 7.9 million followers on Instagram, 19.7 million followers on TikTok and close to 3.6 million subscribers on YouTube.

Despite his major platform, his behavior has been nothing short of problematic. He’s been involved in an abundance of controversies, such as slut-shaming girls on the internet, getting arrested for drugs and continuously being charged for violating coronavirus disease (COVID-19) guidelines by throwing huge parties. And just recently, he was sued and charged by a Los Angeles restaurant owner for assault, battery and “violence motivated by race.”

What Hall fails to realize is that so many of his young followers actually look up to him, and when they see him doing things like this, it leads to normalizing really bad behavior.

Given the power of his influence, it's time he steps up and takes on the responsibility to be a better role model for his audience.

Sure, these influencers are young, and some might say their carelessness is a given. Partying isn't abnormal for high school or college-age kids. After all, when you start to make a living off of fans constantly viewing content of you living a reckless lifestyle, of course influencers like Hall are going to continue creating the same content.

And while people under 25, who aren't immunocompromised, will most likely be fine if they get COVID-19, this doesn't take away from the fact that he is still running around Los Angeles, exposing everyone he is in contact with to his reckless behavior throughout the entirety of this pandemic.

Fundamentally, I don't think a lot of these influencers are the best role models for high schoolers and college students. We can't forget that underneath all their social clout, these influencers are young adults, just like us, who are still trying to figure it out.

Their frontal lobes are still developing, and as they continue to learn about the world around them, they're going to make mistakes. The only difference is that they make these mistakes in front of millions of impressionable kids. The eagerness for fame and fortune that a lot of these young influencers have blinds them to all of the good possibilities that can come out of their immense platforms.

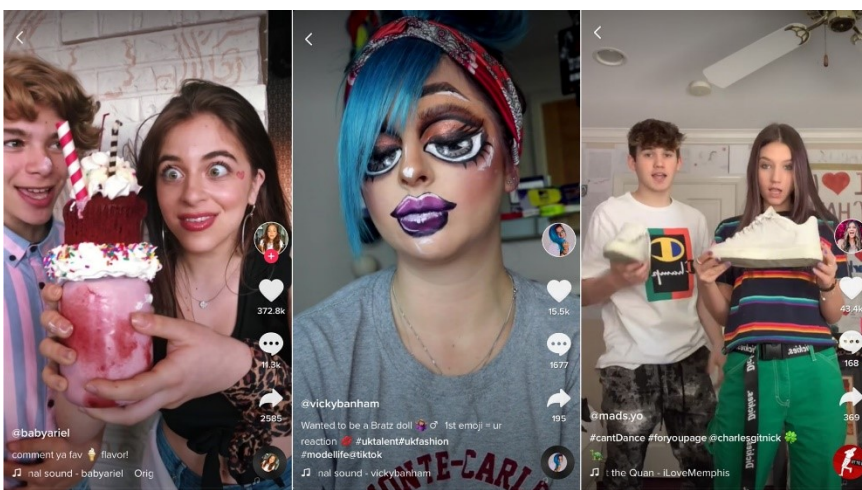
Regardless of whether influencers should be role models, they are. The stars of social media are just as likely to be role models as traditional celebrities — maybe even more so because it's so easy for children to access their content at any point during the day. They're not losing the followers that they have any time soon because these young people are looking up to them and enjoying the content they are putting out.

The followers of all popular influencers will be quick to follow any fad that the influencer advertises, so influencers should make it their responsibility to be good role models and display positive behavior through their posts to help create a more positive environment on social media.

So next time, before clicking the "follow" button on the latest influencer's account that's blowing up, make sure it's someone who embodies the values that you want to incorporate into your own lifestyle.

## The Fame Trap: Gen Z, TikTok and Influencer Culture

22/04/2022 Joe Gillespie





Many young people in the west spend most of their lives in the digital world, hooked up to a source of quick-hit dopamine. We carry the instrument that can help us achieve social notoriety around with us, in our pockets. Few young people can resist the urge to seek that fame, though only a tiny number will ever achieve it. For Gen Z, born after the year 2000, social media represents an essential part of the framework of a social life, promising to even eclipse the inherent human need for real-life companionship. But for the most mentally ill generation in recent US history, the price of online fame and status comes at a high cost.

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### *Yesterday's and Today's Teens*

In 2010, prior to the widespread adoption of mobile social media apps, only 29% of teens reported checking their social media multiple times a day. Most did so once a week or less. Now, Gen Z is always on their phones. A recent survey found that 45% of Gen Z teens say that they are online almost constantly, mostly browsing social media or YouTube. According to a 2019 report, which surveyed 1,600 8–18-year-olds, they spend an average of 7 hours a day on their phones (not including school work). According to the report, 53% of 11-year-olds have their own smartphones. By age 12, that number rises to 69%, having increased from 41% in 2015.

Though Gen Z's adoption of new social media platforms like TikTok may seem to simply mirror millennials' adoption of Myspace and Facebook 15 years ago, there is a huge difference between yesterday's and today's social media. Just look at the numbers. In less than a year, 17-year-old TikTok star Charli D'amelio amassed 24 million followers and became a multimillionaire by posting videos of herself lip syncing, swaying her shoulders and sometimes dancing to popular songs. Is she a revolutionary dancer? No. She's probably a better dancer than average but her fame isn't based on her extraordinary dance skills. Videos of incredible dancing abound online. She is an object of infatuation, an avatar of Gen Z ideals. She provides consistent, entertaining content, it's true, but the real reason for her popularity remains a mystery. Teen boys want her, and teen girls want to be her.

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Most Gen Z-ers will never become instant sensations like D'amelio—but not for want of trying. Demographic breakdowns of social media platforms show that Gen Z prefers to create content, while millennials prefer to consume it. While many Gen Z-ers see creating content as simply a fun way to express oneself, many also see it as a career opportunity. In a 2019 poll of 3,000 Gen Z tweens, the most popular future profession among respondents in the UK and US was YouTuber/vlogger (at 29%). The Chinese government, by contrast, curates social media and the algorithms are skewed towards more scientific topics. Among Chinese respondents, the most popular answer was astronaut (56%).

This strong desire for notoriety seems to be a new phenomenon among young people. According to a 2010 Pew poll, only 1% of millennials longed to be famous. A recent poll has found that 78% of Gen Z teens would be willing to share personally identifiable data in pursuit of online fame. Though Gen Z is just as aware of cybersecurity dangers as previous generations, the lure of online popularity is strong.

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### *The Effects of Being Online*

Studies have shown that teenage suicide, depression and anxiety have all risen drastically since 2010—a date that directly corresponds with the proliferation of social media apps on smartphones and other devices and the introduction of content-guiding algorithms.

A 2019 study of UK teens showed that rates of depression increased with every added hour of social media use throughout the day. Of those teen girls who spent more than five hours a day on social media, 40% reported feeling depressed, compared with only 15% of those who used social media for one and a half

hours. Social media use has even given rise to new forms of mental illness. In 2021, psychiatrists in Germany documented a new mass sociogenic illness associated with social media use, as many teens began presenting with Tourette-like symptoms identical to those of one of the country's most popular young YouTube stars—even though they did not suffer from Tourette's syndrome.

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The expansion of cancel culture has exacerbated these problems. Data show that Gen Z are more supportive than previous generations of cancelling people on the basis of their political opinions, even though most of them also fear being cancelled for their own statements, especially if these are misinterpreted or taken out of context.

## 5. Mental Well-being

# Why American Teens Are So Sad

Four forces are propelling the rising rates of depression among young people.

By Derek Thompson

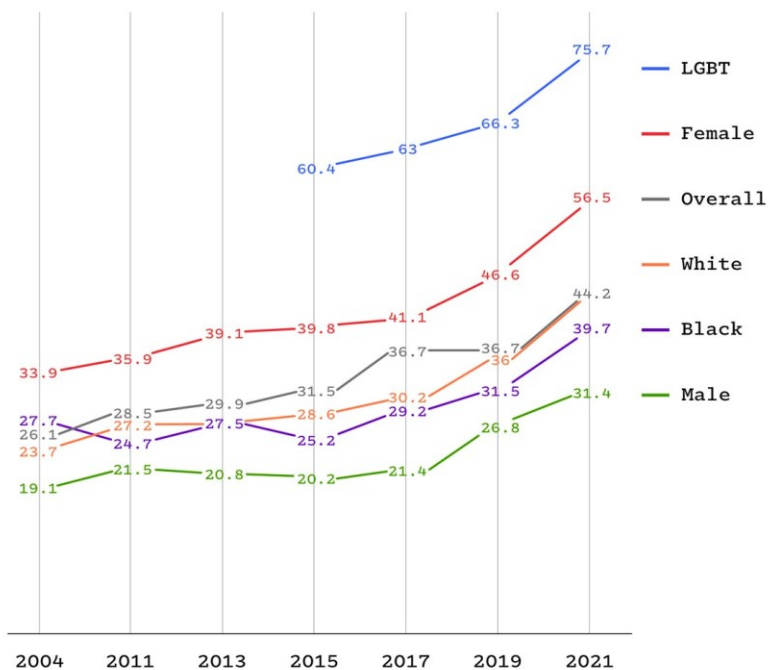


April 11, 2022

The United States is experiencing an extreme teenage mental-health crisis. From 2009 to 2021, the share of American high-school students who say they feel “persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” rose from 26 percent to 44 percent, according to a new CDC study. This is the highest level of teenage sadness ever recorded.

The government survey of almost 8,000 high-school students, which was conducted in the first six months of 2021, found a great deal of variation in mental health among different groups. More than one in four girls reported that they had seriously contemplated attempting suicide during the pandemic, which was twice the rate of boys. Nearly half of LGBTQ teens said they had contemplated suicide during the pandemic, compared with 14 percent of their heterosexual peers. Sadness among white teens seems to be rising faster than among other groups.

## Percent of High-School Students Feeling Persistently Sad or Hopeless



So why is this happening?

Here are four forces propelling that increase.

### 1. Social-media use

Five years ago, the psychologist Jean Twenge wrote an influential and controversial feature in *The Atlantic* titled “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” based on her book *iGen*. Around 2012, Twenge wrote, she had noticed that teen sadness and anxiety began to steadily rise in the U.S. and other rich developed countries. She looked for explanations and realized that 2012 was precisely when the share of Americans who owned a smartphone surpassed 50 percent and mobile social-media use spiked.

In the past few years, scientists have disputed the idea that social-media use itself makes teenagers miserable. “There’s been absolutely hundreds of [social-media and mental-health] studies, almost all showing pretty small effects,” Jeff Hancock, a behavioral psychologist at Stanford University who has conducted a meta-analysis of 226 such studies, told *The New York Times* recently.

But I think Twenge’s strongest point is misunderstood. Social media isn’t like rat poison, which is toxic to almost everyone. It’s more like alcohol: a mildly addictive substance that can enhance social situations but can also lead to dependency and depression among a minority of users.

This is very close to the conclusion reached by none other than Instagram. The company’s internal research from 2020 found that, while most users had a positive relationship with the app, one-third of teen girls said “Instagram made them feel worse,” even though these girls “feel unable to stop themselves” from logging on. And if you don’t believe a company owned by Facebook, believe a big new study from Cambridge University, in which researchers looked at 84,000 people of all ages and found that social media was strongly associated with worse mental health during certain sensitive life periods, including for girls ages 11 to 13.

Why would social media affect teenage mental health in this way? One explanation is that teenagers (and teenage girls in particular) are uniquely sensitive to the judgment of friends, teachers, and the digital crowd.

As I've written, social media seems to hijack this keen peer sensitivity and drive obsessive thinking about body image and popularity. The problem isn't just that social media fuels anxiety but also that—as we'll see—it makes it harder for today's young people to cope with the pressures of growing up.

## 2. Sociality is down

Both Steinberg and Twenge stress that the biggest problem with social media might be not social media itself, but rather the activities that it replaces.

“I tell parents all the time that if Instagram is merely displacing TV, I'm not concerned about it,” Steinberg told me. But today's teens spend more than five hours daily on social media, and that habit seems to be displacing quite a lot of *beneficial* activity. The share of high-school students who got eight or more hours of sleep declined 30 percent from 2007 to 2019. Compared with their counterparts in the 2000s, today's teens are less likely to go out with their friends, get their driver's license, or play youth sports.

The pandemic and the closure of schools likely exacerbated teen loneliness and sadness. A 2020 survey from Harvard's Graduate School of Education found that loneliness spiked in the first year of the pandemic for everyone, but it rose most significantly for young people. “It's well established that what protects teens from stress is close social relationships,” Steinberg said. “When kids can't go to school to see their friends and peers and mentors, that social isolation could lead to sadness and depression, particularly for those predisposed to feeling sad or depressed.”

This is important to say clearly: Aloneness isn't the same as loneliness, and loneliness isn't the same as depression. But more aloneness (including from heavy smartphone use) and more loneliness (including from school closures) might have combined to push up sadness among teenagers who need sociality to protect them from the pressures of a stressful world.

## 3. The world is stressful—and there is more news about the world's stressors

Lisa Damour, a clinical psychologist and author, told me that no single factor can account for the rise of teenage sadness. But she believes a part of the answer is that the world has become more stressful. Or, at least, teenagers' perception of the world seems to be causing them more stress.

“In the last decade teenagers have become increasingly stressed by concerns about gun violence, climate change, and the political environment,” she wrote in an email. “Increased stress among young people is linked to increasing levels of sadness. Girls, more than boys, are socialized to internalize distress, meaning that they tend to collapse in on themselves by becoming depressed or anxious.”

Fears about finances, climate change, and viral pandemics are smashing into local concerns about social approval and setting oneself up for success. “I think of it as a pile-on effect,” Steinberg said. “We're coming out of the pandemic, and then suddenly Russia goes to war. Every day, it feels like there's something else. It creates a very gloomy narrative about the world.”

This sense of doom doesn't just come from teenagers. It comes from *us*, the news media, and from the social-media channels through which our work is distributed. News sources have never been more abundant, or more accessible. But journalism also has a famous bad-news bias, which flows from an unfortunate but accurate understanding that negativity generally gets more attention. When we plug our brain into a news feed, we are usually choosing to deluge ourselves with negative representations of reality. A well-known 2019 experiment randomly forced people to stop using Facebook for four weeks before a midterm election. The study found that those who logged off spent more time hanging out with family and friends, consistent with the idea that social-media use displaces pro-social behaviors. It also found that deactivating Facebook “reduced factual news knowledge” while “increasing subjective well-being.” We cannot rule out the possibility that teens are sad about the world, not only because the world contains sadness, but also because young people have 24/7 access to sites that are constantly telling them they should be depressed about it.

#### 4. Modern parenting strategies

In the past 40 years, American parents—especially those with a college degree—have nearly doubled the amount of time they spend coaching, chauffeuring, tutoring, and otherwise helping their teenage children. The economist Valerie Ramey has labeled this the “rug rat race.” High-income parents in particular are spending much more time preparing their kids for a competitive college admissions process. When I interviewed Ramey about her work in 2019, she told me that she “couldn’t believe the amount of pressure our friends were putting on their kids to get ready for college.”

The “rug rat race” is an upper-class phenomenon that can’t explain a generalized increase in teenage sadness. But it could well explain *part* of what’s going on. And in the 2020 *Atlantic* feature “What Happened to American Childhood?,” Kate Julian described a related phenomenon that affects families a bit more broadly: Anxious parents, in seeking to insulate their children from risk and danger, are unintentionally transferring their anxiety to their kids.

I want to pull out two points from Julian’s complex essay. First, children are growing up slower than they used to. Today’s children are less likely to drive, get a summer job, or be asked to do chores. The problem isn’t that kids are lazy (homework time has risen), or that scrubbing dishes magically dispels anxiety disorders. Rather, Julian wrote, these activities “provide children with two very important things”: tolerating discomfort and having a sense of personal competence.

Second, researchers have noted a broad increase in an “accommodative” parenting style. If a girl is afraid of dogs, an “accommodation” would be keeping her away from every friend’s house with a dog, or if a boy won’t eat vegetables, feeding him nothing but turkey loaf for four years (an actual story from the article). These behaviors come from love. But part of growing up is learning how to release negative emotions in the face of inevitable stress. If kids never figure out how to do that, they’re more likely to experience severe anxiety as teenagers.

Julian highlighted a new treatment out of Yale University’s Child Study Center called SPACE, or Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions. Put simply, SPACE forces parents to be less accommodating. If the girl is afraid of dogs, encourage her to play with young puppies. If the boy hates vegetables, caramelize the hell out of some broccoli. This sort of advice is infinitely easier to type than to put into practice. But folding a bit of exposure therapy into modern parenting and childhood might help teenagers grapple with a complex and stressful world.

Other explanations don’t fit neatly into the above categories. Maybe drugs are a big factor: One study found that a sixth of the increase in teen suicides was associated with parental opioid addiction. Maybe the authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt are right that college campuses and internet culture have come to celebrate fragility. Maybe political polarization is fueling anxiety, not only by creating mutual hatred but also by encouraging people to reject opposing views, which over time reduces their capacity to handle cognitive dissonance in a confusing world.

The truth is I’m not satisfied by any of the above explanations, on their own. But I see no reason to keep them alone. They interact, amplify, and compound. And together they paint a powerful picture.

The world is overwhelming, and an inescapably negative news cycle creates an atmosphere of existential gloom, not just for teens but also for their moms and dads. The more overwhelming the world feels to parents, the more they may try to bubble-wrap their kids with accommodations. Over time, this protective parenting style deprives children of the emotional resilience they need to handle the world’s stresses. Childhood becomes more insular: Time spent with friends, driving, dating, and working summer jobs all decline. College pressures skyrocket. Outwardly, teens are growing up slower; but online, they’re growing up faster. The internet exposes teenagers not only to supportive friendships but also to bullying, threats, despairing conversations about mental health, and a slurry of unsolvable global problems—a carnival of negativity. Social media places in every teen’s pocket a quantified battle royal for scarce popularity that can displace hours of sleep and makes many teens, especially girls, feel worse about their body and life. Amplify

these existing trends with a global pandemic and an unprecedented period of social isolation, and suddenly, the remarkable rise of teenage sadness doesn't feel all that mysterious, does it?