



Abstract

Generational conflict is, by no means, a new phenomenon. The historical record points to many instances where multi-generational relationships have been characterized by a pattern of intense differentiation. The American Counterculture of the 1960s and the Chinese Cultural Revolution constitute two such examples. On the surface, members of different generations seem to share many commonalities, but still tend towards an attitude of unfamiliarity and disdain. In an anecdotal sense, we are witnessing a rapid increase in cases of negative generational engagement, particularly between the Baby Boomer and Millennial cohorts. Paul Taylor (2016) of the Pew Research Center anticipates that America, in particular, is headed for a "showdown" between these two sizable groupings. Despite these trends, generational cooperation and understanding contains great potential for propelling societal growth and progress. The research included in the following report may serve as a starting point for recognizing the conditions and mechanisms at work within this broad and pervasive public issue. The project aims to identify, explain, and challenge these ideas by assessing economic, historical, educational, social, and political factors that influence the psychic, attitudinal, and moral outcomes of the members of each cohort. Areas for potential conflict, areas for potential cooperation, and recommendations for bridging the generational gap will also be discussed.

Methods

The strategies used to create *Generational Portraits: A Comparative Study of the Baby Boomer and Millennial Age Cohorts* consisted of a literature review, an information synthesis, and an expression formulation. Largely, the content of *Generational Portraits* is a unified version of existing material that serves to develop a baseline for further research. Peer-reviewed sources were scrutinized, sorted, analyzed, and compiled to articulate the information within Figures 1, 2, and 3 and to identify areas of potential conflict, areas of potential cooperation, potential theories/hypotheses, and opportunities for further inquisition. Additionally, less formal material (articles, anecdotes) was explored to uncover perceptual concepts and to supplement the academic citations. An expression was formulated to highlight possible causal pathways between extrinsic and intrinsic factors of generational cohorts.

Causal Pathways Between Extrinsic and Intrinsic Factors

The following expressions represent possible causal pathways between and amongst extrinsic and intrinsic factors of generational character. These expressions represent some of the concepts reflected in the peer-reviewed source material and are, in no way, meant to be exhaustive. Additionally, the expressions are merely exploratory. While some do have empirical backing from the peer-reviewed source material, no primary statistical analyses were conducted. See Figure 4 to interpret the expressions.

The Baby Boomers

Historical Context

Prosperous Childhood, Favorable Economic Situation > Expectancy^A, Naivety^P

Vietnam, Cold War > Pacifistic^M, Traditional Trauma^P

Civil Rights', Women's Movement > Civic^M, Egalitarian^M, Progressivism^A, Internal Locus of Control^A

Sexual Revolution, Counterculture, Woodstock > Open to Experience^P
Security (childhood) + Agency (adolescence) = Confidence^P

Social Context

Confidence^P, Open to Experience^P, Naivety^P + Egalitarian^M = New "Cornerstone" Marital Arrangements > Divorce > Pessimism^A, Regression^P

Progressivism^A, Confidence^P, Open to Experience^P + Egalitarian^M = "Helicopter" Parenting, Extensive Involvement, Cultivated Growth

Political Context

Direct Inequality > Surface Analytical Skills^P

Pessimism^A, Regression^P > Return to Conservatism

Surface Analytical Skills^P > Embrace of Political Labels

Educational Context

Limited Resources > Focus^P

Expanded Attendance > Civic^M, Awareness^P, Progressivism^A

Economic Context

Growing Up in "Age of Shared Prosperity" > Expectancy^A, Naivety^P

Expectancy^A, Naivety^P, Confidence^P, Internal Locus of Control^A > Economic Recklessness > Pessimism^A, Regression^P

The Millennials

Historical Context

War on Terror, 9/11, Radical Islamic Terrorism, Domestic Terrorism, Mass Shootings > Neuroticism^P, Atypical Trauma^P, Curiosity^A, External Locus of Control^A, Secular-Based Morality^M, Desensitization^P

The Internet Revolution, Technological Advancement, Social Media > Feedback Dependent^P, Curiosity^A, Neuroticism^P, Atypical Trauma^P, Narcissism^P, Detached from Reality^P, Awareness^P

Globalization > Progressivism^A, Tolerance^M

Social Context

Children of Divorce, Economic Uncertainty > "Capstone" Marital Arrangements, Deprioritizing Marriage

Children of "Helicopter" Parenting > Neuroticism^P, Progressivism^A, Tolerance^M > Natural Growth

Political Context

Indirect Inequality > Depth Analytical Skills^P, Neuroticism^P, Awareness^P

Depth Analytical Skills^P > Rejection of Political Labels

Educational Context

Wealth of Resources > Multitasking Ability^P, Distraction^P

Necessity of Higher Education and Skills > Neuroticism^P, Feedback Dependent^P

Economic Context

The Great Recession, "Age of Growing Inequality", Economic Uncertainty > Neuroticism^P, Progressivism^A, Tolerance^M, External Locus of Control^A

Areas of Potential Conflict

During this research process, it became abundantly clear that there is (at least, to some degree) generational conflict between the Baby Boomers and the Millennials. While our popular culture perpetuates and exaggerates this conflict, there is some truth to it. The following comprise a few very general assumptions gleaned from the literature regarding the sources of the current generational conflict:

Communication/Language Barrier:

Language evolves at a constant rate, especially with the prevalence of technology. The literature suggests that some disagreement is derived from generational differences in word meaning (i.e. socialism).

The Problem of Passing-the-Buck:

Both generations are guilty of blaming the other for just about everything. The literature points to Millennial resentment towards Baby Boomers for the economic and social burdens that plague our society, today. Likewise, Baby Boomers demonstrate tendencies to blame Millennials for perceived (and sometimes, untrue) character flaws.

Structural Differences:

On a macroscopic level, the worlds of the Baby Boomers and the Millennials are fundamentally different. Each generation possesses a very unique history and culture. Their defining moments are different, their collective traumas are different, their educations are different, their economic situations are different. The list goes on and on. It can be exceedingly difficult for two entities to interact productively when their existential contexts are so widely divergent.

Areas of Potential Cooperation/Recommendations

While generational conflict was an emergent theme during the research process, generational cooperation or the potential for generational cooperation was equally as vital. The following are a few cooperation potential points and suggestions to go along with them:

The Spirit of Progression:

Baby Boomers and Millennials share a spirit for social change and large-scale progress, even if the Baby Boomers' attitudes have changed. If society could foster a coming-together of these two groups, we may be able to see a relationship form where the experience of the Baby Boomers meshes with the endeavors of the Millennials to create a balanced, steadily progressing force for good (i.e. rising importance of education). Recommendation: Foster open, honest discussion with an intent to understand, not an intent to convince. Recognize and accept what society was, is, and will be. Work to play an active role in solidifying the past, accepting the present, and embracing the future.

Interdependence:

Economic times are hitting both Baby Boomers and Millennials hard. These shifts may drive the two cohorts together, which may indirectly cause a greater emphasis on family and relationships. Recommendation: Do not try to fight cohabitation. Analyze the feasibility and benefits of multi-generational living.

Similar, but Different Stories:

While the defining moments of the Baby Boomers and the Millennials are starkly different, both endured dynamic, unstable, terrifying, life-changing circumstances. Recommendation: Try to gain perspective from the other generation on their collective history and circumstance. Use this to inform worldview as much as personal experience. Use multi-generational perspectives and models to inform and prepare future generations for social life.

Continuing Generational Portraits: Questions for Further Research

Can the causal pathways be quantified and statistically proven?

How do other generations fit into this analytic model? Other societies?

*References Available Upon Request