



جامعة الناصر
AL-NASSER UNIVERSITY

Gen X Myth vs. Reality

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جميع حقوق النشر محفوظة لمكتب البحوث والنشر بجامعة الناصر

ABSTRACT

While the dates that encompass Gen X vary by which source you use, they are generally identified as falling between the early 60's until the early 1980's, most commonly noted as 1961-1981 or 1964-1984. Regardless of the actual dates, Gen X is sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and the Millennials. Widely touted as lazy and selfish, the members of Gen X are the original "latchkey" kids, the ones who spent every day after school in child care because for the first time it was commonplace for children to be raised by a single parent after a divorce, or for both parents to work outside of the home. This meant that we had to be more independent than children in past generations and much more self-reliant.

Below are a few common myths about my generation and the realities as compiled by the authors of "The Generation X Report," an ongoing research project and report from the University of Michigan's Longitudinal Study of American Youth along with my interpretation and opinion on these myths and realities, followed by my own observations about Gen X and our influence on society, in particular pop culture and the arts.

Myth and Reality, AKA, Statistics Don't Lie:

Myth #1: Gen Xers are slackers.

Reality: Generation X devotes more hours to work than average and pursues continuing education.

-- Compared to a national sample of all U.S. adults, Gen Xers are more likely to be employed and are working significantly more hours above average, according to the study. In Generation X, 86% is employed and 70% devote 40 or more hours to work each week. For those holding a doctorate or professional degree, that number shoots up to 50 or more hours. Also, 79% of Gen X women work.

-- Kids from "The Breakfast Club" era weren't so strung out on emotional issues that they passed up learning: Half of Gen Xers have completed a post-secondary degree and 9% are enrolled in continuing education.

My take: As a member of Gen X, I can say that I have routinely witnessed those statistics for myself. Almost every one of the people I graduated high school with went on to attend college. I've worked in a variety of settings and fields and one constant that I have observed is that almost every Gen X'er I've worked with tends to hold a very strong work ethic, which I believe is a hold-over from our baby boomer parents and greatest generation grandparents. We are far from lazy employees, in fact, in my experience members of Gen X tend to take on a larger and more significant work load because we are capable and reliable workers. However, we do realize that there must be a balance between work and our personal lives. When we are at work, we are focused and valuable members of the team, but as a whole, we

choose not to make our lives solely about work. We work to live, we want to enjoy our time on earth, not spend all of our time working.

Myth #2: Generation X is hopelessly single and pessimistic about marriage.

Reality: A higher percentage of Gen Xers stay married than Boomers, and most want to be married.

-- Having spent their formative years in the era of growing divorce rates (divorce peaked in 1980) might lead to speculation that Gen X would run away from marriage en masse. In reality, two-thirds of Generation X is married and 71% report having children in the home. Additionally, divorce has been declining since 1996, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

-- 83% of Gen Xers said finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life is very important.

My Take: Growing up as a child of divorce did not affect my thoughts on marriage. I always intended to get married and have kids, as is expected in our society. The plan was to get married once and stay that way, it didn't work out that way, but I still believe in marriage and most of my Gen X friends have gotten married and a vast majority of them are still married to their original spouses.

Myth #3: Generation Xers are disengaged, existential isolationists.

Reality: Gen X is social.

--There's a reason Gen X is called the "Friends" generation. The report states that Gen X has extensive social, occupational and community networks outside of the immediate family. Two-thirds of respondents entertain friends for dinner or participate in group cooking at least once a month.

-- One in 3 Gen Xers is an active member of a church or religious organization, and 29% volunteer in their community.

-- 95% of Gen Xers report talking with friends or family on the telephone at least once a week, and 29% say they do so at least once a day.

My Take: I will admit, "Friends" was and remains my favorite television show, but in addition, Gen Xers are very engaged, we care about our communities and our friends are essentially viewed as extended family members. Personally, I'm not someone that likes to talk on the phone, but I text, email, or facebook message my friends and family nearly every day. This is another example of how our time spent in latchkey programs helped us to build relationships with peers, we were practically forced to be social from our elementary school days.

Myth #4: As former latch-key kids, Gen Xers are wimpy, neglectful parents.

Reality: About 84% of Gen X parents expect their children to earn at least a baccalaureate, and 39% expect their child to earn a graduate or professional degree.

-- 72% of parents of preschool children read to them three or more hours a week, and 83% of parents of secondary school students help with homework.

My take: Ok, I'll admit, I'm not very stern with my children, but my ex-husband, a fellow gen-x'er, is. I do look at and help them with their homework and I expect them to behave as polite and respectful people. I tend to be more of a helicopter mother, I hover and worry endlessly. I cannot stand to watch them on those skinny razor scooters that are all the rage, those things terrify me. I am afraid that they are going to fall and hurt themselves. I do encourage them to be independent; I don't want them to grow up to be whiny, lazy people who expect everything to be handed to them. Nothing in life has been handed to me on a silver platter, and I want them to understand the importance of earning your own things. I enjoy spoiling them from time to time, but not at the expense of teaching them a strong work ethic and an appreciation for what they have.

Myth #5: Generation X is depressed.

Reality: Generation X is actually pretty happy.

-Two-thirds of Generation X are satisfied with their job; 24% of these workers rated their job at 9 or 10 on the satisfaction scale.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning very happy, the median happiness score was 8, with 29% of Gen Xers saying they were very happy scoring a 9 or 10.

My Take: What's not to be happy about? We were encouraged as children to pursue careers we enjoyed and not to settle for unhappy relationships in our lives. We learned at an early age to be independent, self-reliant, and to adapt easily to change. We tend to lead balanced lives; often because we watched our single parents work themselves into the ground while we were growing up. We are less likely to idolize leaders because we recognize that they are people just like we are, who may do extraordinary things, but so could we if we really put our minds to it. We also don't have the burden of being saddled with intolerance or racism since as a generation are more likely to openly acknowledge and embrace people of different races, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations and those who have gone gender identity changes.

Obviously, there are exceptions to every rule and not every Gen X'er is a highly educated, socially accepting, happy go-lucky wonder person with a spouse, kids, and a hot-shot job. But, at least now we can statistically prove that most of us are, if not all, at least some of these things. We can finally look back at all of our critics and say "hey, I'm not a slacker" and be able to back it up.

In fact, not only can we statistically back it up, but if you continue reading, you will see why our generation is leaving a significant fingerprint on the world.

GEN X and Our Influence on Society and Pop Culture:

If you believe everything you hear, you'll believe that the slackers of Gen X haven't contributed much to modern culture, and we seem to have been somewhat buried and forgotten in between the boomers and the millenials. In reality, if you dig a little deeper and take note of what members of Gen X have accomplished, you will quickly see that we have had a tremendous impact on society, in particular the arts and pop culture in the United States. Only time will tell which Gen X'ers get recognized by history and the internet and who will continue to be viewed as icons. There are more than a couple of Gen X'ers who have risen to the top of their chosen fields from sports to politics and the performing arts, and several of them can't be forgotten because of their unbelievable accomplishments.

Literature

One Gen X'er who will undoubtedly be favorably remembered is a novelist who was born in South Gloucestershire, England in 1965. JK Rowling, grew up to create Harry Potter, and along with him the bestselling book series in history. In fact, the magical world she created with the young wizard became so popular that soon Hollywood wanted a piece of the action, and with Rowling's help, the books were made into a series of movies, which not only launched its young stars into the celebrity stratosphere, but it also became the highest grossing film series in history.

Not only is Harry Potter immortalized in books and movies, there is even a section of Universal Studios created "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter," which takes hundreds of visitors on a new adventure every day of the year.

Sports

Gen X also boasts some of the most legendary players in athletics. The record books will permanently display these players statistics and accolades and serve as numerical indicators of the influence these men and women had on their sports. My strength is not in spitting out numbers, but listed below are a just a few of the recognizable names that have been trailblazers.

- Wayne Gretzky - NHL Legend
- Michael Jordan - NBA Star
- Randy Johnson - MLB Pitcher
- Derek Jeter - MLB Shortstop
- Mike Tyson - Champion Boxer
- Brett Favre - NFL Quarterback
- Kristi Yamaguchi - Olympic Gold Medal Figure Skater
- Steffi Graff - Star tennis player

- Jeff Gordon - NASCAR driver
- Shaquille O'Neill - NBA superstar
- Mia Hamm - Olympic Gold Medalist Soccer star
- Tiger Woods - Professional Golfer
- David Beckham - International Soccer Star
- Tony Hawk - Skateboard legend
- Mary Lou Retton - Olympic Gold Medal Winning Gymnast

Music

Some members of Gen X changed the face of their musical genres and some created a whole new genre of their own. The "hair bands" of the 1980's and "grunge" bands of the 1990's ushered in a whole new era, pair that with up and coming hip-hop, rap (including gangster rap) and you have a very different climate than the generation before us. Many of the Gen X musicians would battle with drugs and alcohol, some who were considered among the most talented and influential, would succumb to their addictions before they'd had a chance to fully realize their potential or their success. In many cases Gen X'ers are responsible for blending genres or making genres more palatable to widespread audiences. Even though music has been around for centuries, Gen X proudly claims several pioneers, trendsetters, and spectacular artists. Many Gen X musicians are still creating, recording, perhaps even touring or mentoring younger artists. We proudly claim the artists below as our own (amongst others):

- Jon Bon Jovi - Bon Jovi
- Kurt Cobain - Nirvana
- Axl Rose - Guns n Roses
- Eddie Vedder - Pearl Jam
- Dr. Dre
- Garth Brooks
- Easy-E
- Enya
- Melissa Etheridge
- Whitney Houston
- Lenny Kravitz
- Dave Matthews - Dave Matthews Band
- Flea - Red Hot Chili Peppers
- Will Smith
- David Grohl - Nirvana, Foo Fighters
- Gwen Stefani - No Doubt
- Eminem
- Tupac Shakur
- Usher
- Beyonce Knowles

Television and Movies

Many of our most likely personalities to be remembered are the actors and actresses that graced our television and movie theater screens. There are so many personalities whom I believe will become just as iconic as Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne, Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, or Elvis. There is our generation's version of Bogey and Bacall, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, or as we are so used to calling them Brangelina. Johnny Depp, George Clooney, Kate Winslet, Leonardo DiCaprio, Sandra Bullock, Robert Downey Jr, Drew Barrymore, Gwyneth Paltrow. These names are Hollywood royalty and they are just a few of the most recognizable names.

Our generation will probably be especially remembered for our comedic actors and actresses, many of whom often worked on projects together, for example the Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, David Spade group, or the Ben Stiller, Luke/Owen Wilson, Will Ferrell, Paul Rudd gang. Our generation graduated from angst-y John Hughes films starring the Brat Pack, for example "The Breakfast Club," to dark comedies filled with angst, "Heathers," to downright goofy endeavors such as "Billy Madison".

We also perfected the political satire thanks to the intelligence and perfect timing and delivery of a man named Jon Stewart on a show called "The Daily Show" which presents us with, what I consider, sheer genius on an (almost nightly) basis. Stewart presents us with what he calls the "fake" news, but in reality it is real news presented as it should be which just happens to highlight the sheer ridiculousness of what currently passes for a portion of our "news media" and political "leaders". Stewart has the ability to vacillate between the ridiculous and the serious. He is comedic enough to draw and retain the viewership of the general public, yet he is respected enough to be able to secure guests up to and including the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, on his show. In and of itself, this shows just how much Gen X has changed the face of entertainment, the media, and its stature. Can you imagine Richard Nixon going on an equivalent of "The Daily Show" and having a serious conversation with a comedian, who in all likelihood would have to poke fun at him within a couple nights? No way. I think this is a dynamic that has been brought into existence through the ability of members of Gen X to respect leaders, but also view them as just another person, like us, just doing something extraordinary. After all, the President of the United States may be the "leader of the free world" but he is also a man, a husband, a father, a son, and in all likelihood, a fan of many of the celebrities I mentioned above and probably a huge fan of "The Daily Show".

The People's Princess

There is one member of Gen X, born in the earlier years of our allotted span, so special; she deserves a heading all to herself. Diana, Princess of Wales. Lady Diana Spencer would go from being a normal teacher to a fairy-tale princess whose every move was watched by people all over the world. Of course, we didn't know it at the time, but her fairytale wasn't very happy and the paparazzi that would help broadcast her every move to the world would also be largely responsible for her untimely and tragic death. There are moments in every generation where people will be able to tell you where they were, what they were doing, who they were with when an event occurred. There may even be several events we recall like this.

For Gen X, and me in particular, two such events are the day that Diana married Prince Charles and the day that Diana died in that tunnel in Paris. I have a horrible memory. Truly, it is pitiful, there is so much that I have forgotten about my own life it is comical. However, I can vividly remember being a small child (since I was born toward the end of the Gen X time span) and waking up very early in the morning to watch Diana become Princess Diana. I watched all those moments on her wedding day that have been replayed over and over again throughout the years. One of my favorite moments as an adult was being able to be in the very same room as her wedding gown during a traveling exhibit honoring her. I could have stood in that room and stared at that gown all day. For memories of her to be that vivid and memorable, is an example of how much of an impact Diana had on our world. Sadly, I also vividly remember the night she was killed, and seeing the alert come across the news and then being horrified when the media confirmed her death. She was the epitome of a cultural icon, she wasn't just a princess, she was an advocate, a mother, a woman. She was human, she wasn't always happy, she definitely wasn't a slacker, but she was a member of Gen X.

Conclusion

No generation is perfect, of course we have members in our ranks that do fit the stereotypes, our forgotten/slacker generation has already contributed so much and the oldest of us are just beginning to hit middle age, so we have so much more to do before we are done. Don't underestimate us, or forget about us, we're just getting started!

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