

Could you address how Gen X is mistakenly perceived as "being negative" by Boomers and Millennials?

A: This is very clearly a value judgment by the parents and the children of the Gen X'ers. They have historically gotten a "bad rap" by society. However, their lives were very unique in American history. As stated in the seminar, this generation grew up in one of the most peaceful times in American history, meaning there were no major wars. The Boomers had Vietnam. The Millennials had the War on Terror. Generation X's major war was Operation Desert Storm and the conflict in Bosnia/Herzegovina, neither of which had substantial casualties. Beyond not having a definitive war, there was the influx of Cable television, which made the world a much smaller place. Suddenly there was a 24 hour news cycle, and music was being played on TV 24/7, back when MTV played music. Definitive issues of this generation included the controversies over birth control, abortion, and AIDS. Teenage pregnancy rates were higher than in any other generation, as well as high school drop-out rates. This generation was not raised before the "high self-esteem" movement that came with the Millennials. Rebelling against the hard working generation before them (Boomers), Generation X appreciated personal time much more than working. Being born before the dramatic impact of the computer was felt, this generation struggles with technology much more than the younger Millennials. This leads to many statistical realities, being that: 1) they were the most psychotherapeutically medicated generation in American history (Prozac generation is another name for this generation), 2) they have been the most incarcerated generation in American history (the war on drugs was fought against this generation primarily), 3) they had the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and related high school dropouts (also related that grade deflation was a large problem, meaning that this generation had grades lower than their standardized test scores indicated they should have had), and 4) they are not a politically active generation (they tend to be quite anti-establishment). Finally, it should be noted that this generation now makes up the largest segment of non-traditional college students today. They are returning to college at unprecedented levels, seeking out further education, often online. This generation has been looked at negatively since they were young children. However, this is not to say that they have not had a positive impact on America.

How many years each way do the "cuspers" span?

A: There is not a precise definition of how many years a cusper spans. But, generally speaking a cusper would be someone who has many of the life experiences of both the older and younger generation. These people may have a hard time identifying which generation they actually belong to. This issue is complicated by the fact that generational cut-offs are not hard and fast. They vary depending upon the author talking about them. So, cusper, although an important concept, does not have a precise generation. If made to give an answer, I would say that a cusper could be anyone born within 2-3 years of the cutoff year between generations.

Why are the Traditionalists called "Silent"?

This generation (those born roughly 1920's to 1944) are called the "Silent Generation" based primarily on their values, which include hard work and being soft spoken. This is the generation, however, that produced most of the outspoken Civil Rights heroes, including Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. So, it is not that they did not speak up, it was just a value, especially when compared to the generation that followed, the Baby Boomers, who believed in protesting and brought about much change. Also, this generation was raised in the aftermath of the depression, and grew up with parents who had survived extremely hard times in America. This generation popularized the term "speak softly and carry a big stick."

Also, generational names are a sort of funny thing. Who knows why a particular name sticks? This was, however, one of the more popular names for this generation.

I understand the differences in generational gaps are varied and large - as counselors - this may change our approach - but does it change the principles of change and recovery?

A: I think that the answer to this question is best suited with a German word: Jein. Jein is a German word that means “Yes and No.” To start with, I think that if our approach is changing, as you acknowledge, then by definition, the principles of change and recovery change with our approach. This can be illustrated by examining three examples of generational outputs discussed in the webinar that show how the principles of change and recovery can be very different, including: use of and comfort with technology; attitudes towards authority; and willingness to seek out and follow through with help-seeking.

Technology is drastically changing the experience of those in recovery. Programs like Moderation Management and SMART Recovery are addiction recovery mutual aid groups that have grown and live primarily online. The beliefs and practices of both of these programs vary quite drastically from those of the more traditional 12-step addiction recovery programs. These programs are more widely accessible to those more familiar with technology, primarily the younger generations. You need only look at AA’s own tri-annual survey to see how that 12-step program is aging and is not nearly as popular with younger generations, even if they are being court ordered to attend. So, technology can and is changing how recovery works and is accessed for many. For instance, smart phones and tablets now have apps that can help people track their progress towards goals without going to meetings and without sponsors, with promising and sometimes lifechanging results.

Other cultural outputs influenced by generation that may have an impact on the principles of change and recovery include attitudes towards authority and willingness to seek out and follow through with help-seeking. Generations have unique attitudes towards both of these, which have been mainstays in the recovery community (i.e. sponsors and “going to meetings.”).

Why are Gen X and Millennial shorter time periods instead of the twenty year span?

A: With the increase of technology, life changes faster. So, American culture is increasingly different faster and faster for younger generations. Birth rates also play a role here.

As a generation ages and gains more life experience, do you see them - even slightly - moving (beliefs & principles to live by) back towards the previous (parental) generation?

A: That is hard to say. As individuals age, this often happens. However, generations are defined by their formative years (ages 12-35). So, when we talk about their values, it is not just the values of their childhood. It is, actually, their early adulthood values. However, just in general there is a tendency in the normal lifespan of a human to become more conservative with age. This doesn’t always mean that they more back to their parents generation, however.