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BOOK REVIEW: TWENGE, JEAN M. GENERATIONS: THE REAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GEN Z, MILLENNIALS, GEN X, BOOMERS, AND SILENTS—AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR AMERICA’S FUTURE. SIMON AND SCHUSTER, ISBN13: 9781982181628, 2023, 560 PAGES <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2025-0008>

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Outbreaks of economic and coronavirus crises, spreading autocratization of political systems, the legitimization of aggression in international relations, and escalating tensions between superpowers have challenged the conviction in the triumph of liberal democracy and common cooperation among individuals. The latter issue has moved beyond well-known divisions: democrats vs. non-democrats, conservatives vs. liberals, etc. In the 21st century, we observed that another dividing line has re-emerged – age. This is not a new phenomenon, but today its significance is increasing on an unprecedented scale. At the same time and in the same place, people who grew up during World War II coexist with those who have never known a world without the Internet. By mid-2020, global society resembled a mosaic composed of different, often incompatible elements. How can we reconcile these perspectives on global challenges and meet such diverse demands? For these reasons, representatives of the social sciences have returned to the discussion about generations.

Jean M. Twenge, in her new book, continues the broad discussion on successive generations. Why have people changed their attitudes toward fundamental socio-political challenges such as raising a family, political activism, climate change, minority rights, and equality? Why do older individuals report better mental health than young people? Who is more engaged in public issues? What is the reason for these differences? The author of a publication about iGen (Twenge 2017) compared generations born from the interwar period to the present. Her field of analysis focuses on attitudes toward private life (marriage and parenthood), access to education, political activism and viewpoints, engagement in civil rights and freedom movements, economic status, mental health, dominant technologies, and other characteristics specific to each generation. Twenge once again joins the discussion on the differences between the young and older generations, especially regarding their mental condition and the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In recent years, this phenomenon has also been raised, among others, by Jonathan Haidt (2024), Greg Lukianoff (2018), Manfred Spitzer (2018), and Anna Lembke (2021).

At the beginning, Twenge explains the reasons for generational differences and offers a new perspective. She engages with the classical sociological perspective that differences between cohorts stem from unique experiences. Twenge proposes a modification of that assumption by emphasizing the role of technology. In her opinion, technology stimulates individualism and prolongs human lifespans. Moreover, she argues that technology has shaped generational experiences, as noted in previous studies. It is worth noting that the author does not present new research or primary data. Twenge refers to previous studies and publicly available (mostly quantitative) data on each generation.

Twenge analyzes each generation, from the Silents (born 1925–1945) to the Polars (born after 2012). She identifies key features and their significance for each cohort. She explains how the Silents' early parenthood and marriage, more conservative viewpoints, and stable mental health contributed to their future political leadership. In contrast, Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) are portrayed as more self-focused, with a heightened sense of exceptionalism. She attributes this to the shaping influence of capitalist logic (getting over giving) and rising economic inequalities. Twenge highlights the consequences of departing from previous norms in private life (premarital sex, fewer children, and more divorces), increased rates of depression, and broader access to drugs. Regarding civil rights and freedoms, she notes an asymmetry: inadequate equal rights for Black people but activism in the fight for women's rights (pre-#MeToo).

When analyzing Generation X (born 1965–1979), Twenge describes them as “in-between” and facing challenges stemming from shorter childhoods and prolonged adolescence, along with more flexible family and sexual norms. Unique to this cohort were higher levels of brutality, cynicism, and pessimism during adolescence, amplified by the reproduction of high self-esteem, egocentrism, and materialism inherited from Baby Boomers. Twenge notes that Generation X suffers from capitalism's drawbacks, such as higher incomes generating higher spending, political apathy, but also increased engagement in environmental issues and acceptance of non-heteronormativity.

In contrast, Millennials (born 1980–1994) are described by Twenge as beneficiaries of trends initiated by previous generations: self-confidence, high levels of education, and high salaries, yet also a sense of shared poverty. She emphasizes the role of ICT development in shaping the first generation of digital natives. Moreover, they are less active in areas such as religious practices, political participation (before age 26), sex, and parenthood. Twenge refers to the interpretation that these factors have led to Millennials' disillusionment with adulthood. Regarding political viewpoints, she provides data on their support for liberal democracy and race consciousness. However, the erosion of democracy since 2008 and the rise of populism have diminished their political activism and intensified polarization.

Twenge extends her previous studies about iGen (born 1995–2012) by highlighting their political activism (not necessarily conventional as slacktivism) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their early adulthood. Finally, she offers initial observations about the most recent generation, referred to as the Polars (born after 2013). Twenge characterizes them as multiracial, products of the collapse of political consensus and climate change, and as children who “have their nose in a tablet.”

The author of *Generations* contributes a new perspective to the ongoing research puzzle: what shapes generations? She emphasizes the role of technology in increasing individualism and extending average life expectancy. Thanks to her approach, we move beyond identifying generational divisions solely through major historical traumas. She also pro-

vides a comprehensive comparison of all the generations currently living, and more or less active, in global society.

However, some critical remarks should be noted. Firstly, her perspective is US-centric. Twenge refers only to data from the United States and draws conclusions about American society. For this reason, it is difficult to directly apply her classifications to other contexts. To address this issue, it is necessary to remain open to possible “generational shifts” caused by phenomena occurring at different times in different places. For example, common access to smartphones among youth was decisive in defining iGen, so the starting point depends on when mobile devices became widespread in a given region. In other words, it is worthwhile to confront explanations formulated on data from the US with a broad perspective (Europe, Asia, Africa). It will allow scholars to construct a global framework of generations. US-centrism is limited to 4.22% of the total world population. Therefore, it is a challenge to formulate any conclusions about population beyond the United States of America and familiar ones. Secondly, the essential features of generations are expressed in comparison to their predecessors. This means that labeling cohorts as more conservative or less politically active is relative to previous generations. In such cases, the solution lies in in-depth data mining across generations, taking into account other variables such as geographic location and economic circumstances. Thirdly, Twenge refers to other studies and analyses without delivering any new data. In effect, she proposes new explanations and interpretations, based on existing data. Moreover, she does not present criteria for selecting data. In effect, the lack of these criteria might provoke an allegation about selectivity in choosing sources.

Nevertheless, Twenge’s book is a very useful and inspiring source of knowledge for political scientists, sociologists, media scholars, and cultural scientists. The publication provides strong evidence of the differences between successive generations and the impact of these distinctions on socio-political realities, individual decisions, and societal demands. However, it is necessary to expand analysis outside data from the United States of America and deliver primary data as a foundation on new explanations and evidence about differences between generations. In spite of some critical points, Twenge has stimulated significant debate and delivered statements to a broad discussion about conditions of generations.

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