

SNOWFLAKE GENERATION: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION

Samira Cîrlig²¹²

ABSTRACT

The material answers two questions. First concerns who is the snowflake generation. To answer this question, I will clarify conceptually what I mean by the following: generation (based on the definition of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim), then give a brief history of the concept of snowflake, and then discuss the central concept of the paper, snowflake generation. The second question I set out to answer is “how are these young people like?”. To answer this question, I will start from the work of researchers Claire Fox (2016, 2018) and Jean Marie Twenge (2014) but not only and analyse the data that will help me shape the profile in question. My intention is to first identify the three main characteristics of this profile, and then to observe sociologically what their implications are. I am interested in the “snowflake generation” because, as Professor Ilie Bădescu states, generations are “identity vehicles”²¹³ and their study contributes to the understanding of social structures.

Key words: generation, snowflake generation, ego, loneliness, depression.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING

1. The concept of generation

The study of generations has over the years enjoyed increasing interest from the social sciences. A discussion involving the term generation requires first conceptual clarification. The German sociologist Karl Mannheim, in his *Essays on the sociology of knowledge* (1952, first published in 1923) points out that the study of generations is important because it contributes to understanding the concept of social change, the two being in an interdependent relationship. From his perspective, generations cannot be considered a concrete group (whereby concrete group we mean that its members are aware of each other's existence, and when the criterion of physical proximity disappears, so does the mental and spiritual unity of the group). Generations are also different from associations, such as organisations, because their foundation is based on a deliberate act of establishment, written regulations, etc.,

²¹²PhDc in Sociology, University of Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: oana.samira.cirlig@gmail.com

²¹³ Ilie Bădescu during the conference “Sincronism european și cultură critică românească: o lectură fundamentală”, [“European Synchronism and Romanian Critical Culture: a fundamental reading”], organized by the European Centre for Ethnic Studies of the Romanian Academy in collaboration with the Institute of Sociology of the Romanian Academy, the Institute of Legal Research “Acad. Andrei Rădulescu” of the Romanian Academy, the Association of Geopolitics, Geoeconomics and Geoculture and the Association “Lumea Nouă”, on February 24, 2022, at Bonachi House.

aspects that serve to hold the group together even if spatial proximity and community of life disappear²¹⁴. Moreover, he also distinguishes between the concept of class and that of generation, in that the former is more related to the socio-economic sphere, while the idea of generation belongs mainly to the socio-historical area. The social class:

“Brings together individuals with similar interests, with a relatively homogeneous level of wealth, in accordance with the properties (assets) held. The social class acts mainly according to economic interests”²¹⁵.

Another significant difference is that, unlike generation, the concept of class is socially mobile in the sense that it is possible to move from one class to another.

So, we have seen that generation is neither a concrete group, nor an organization, nor a social class, but the question remains how can we understand generation sociologically? To understand this concept as a social phenomenon Karl Mannheim considers that generation must be understood as “a particular time of social location”²¹⁶. In other words, according to him, generation refers to a certain type of locational identity. The location of generations is not determined by biological factors (birth, death, etc.), but by the possibility of experiencing certain events, at which point we refer to the idea of stratification of individuals’ experience. In other words, the principle of contemporaneity becomes relevant only insofar as it also implies participation in the same historical and social circumstances. This means that the generation includes persons who participate in the common destiny of a socio-historical unit²¹⁷. In this case, we can speak of a generational unit. This situation occurs when we talk about a community of people who share a common destiny, the outcome of which is directly influenced by the level of active involvement that members show.

It is important to point out that a generation can contain several differentiated generational units, together forming the “current generation”. For example: young people around 1810 in Germany formed a present generation, regardless of whether they were supporters of liberal or conservative ideas²¹⁸. I will conclude by pointing out that as far as the German sociologist is concerned, what is proper to the concept of generation is the idea of events, moments, actions, facts, which mark the destiny of a category. However, the level of involvement of the generation determines the

²¹⁴ Karl Mannheim, „The problem of generation”, pp. 276–320, in Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the sociology of knowledge*, London, RKP Publishing House, 1952, pp. 288–289.

²¹⁵ „reunește indivizi cu interese similare, cu un nivel relativ omogen de bunăstare, în concordanță cu proprietățile (bunurile) deținute. Clasa socială acționează în special după interese de natură economică”, in Radu Baltasiu, *Introducere în sociologie. Spiritualitate, națiune și capitalism. Considerații de sociologie românească și weberiană [Introduction to Sociology. Spirituality, nation, and capitalism. Considerations of Romanian and Weberian sociology]*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2007, p. 68.

²¹⁶ Karl Mannheim, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

degree of fulfilment of a generation's destiny. In this sense, he uses the term *generation entelechy* to describe the maximum of a generation's fulfilled potential. According to Constantin Schifirneț (1985):

“The entelechy of a generation expresses its unity and intimate purpose, its innate feelings of life”²¹⁹.

In connection with the idea of generational entelechy, Simion Mehedinți wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, in his work entitled *Toward the New Generation*, about “living times”, proper to generations that tend towards the fulfilment of destiny, towards what Mannheim called the maximum of potentialities. In this sense Mehedinți states that:

“Blessed are all those who, in their brief passage through life, happen to witness such living times. In contrast, worthy of pity are the generations, which through the superior rhythm of the life of a nation, or through the absurd chance, which in a moment mow down its most chosen geniuses and talents, spend their lives in languor, like the luntress who looks far into the distance, wondering whence the wind will rise (...)”²²⁰.

Beyond the living generations, Mehedinți identifies two other categories: those characteristic of the “dead time” and those who transition between the two extremes, which he calls “interim generations”, which in terms of generational ethos are closer to the “dead times” because of their attitudinal latency. Simion Mehedinți highlights in his work that while the “dead time” and interim generations are characterized by a mental immobility (because they are more concerned with “obtaining certificates”), the living generations are valuable individualities, characterized by mental independence (because their main concern is growth)²²¹.

Like Mannheim, Simion Mehedinți answers the question “why is the study of generations important?”. The answer can be summarized as follows:

“The true rebirth of a people begins with its youth; true decadence also begins there”²²².

In relation to generational entelechy, Mehedinți identifies three actors that he contributes directly to what Mannheim called the maximum of fulfilled potentiality, namely, the church, the school (through teachers) and the army. Why the church? Because:

²¹⁹ „entelechia unei generații exprimă unitatea și scopul ei intim, sentimentele de viață înăscute”, in Constantin Schifirneț, *Generație și cultură, [Generation and culture]*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing House, 1985, p. 18.

²²⁰ „Fericiți toți cei care, în scurta lor trecere prin viață, s-au întâmplat să fie martori ai unor astfel de timpuri vii. Dimpotrivă, vrednice de compătimire sunt generațiile care, prin ritmul superior al vieții unui neam, sau prin întâmplarea absurdă care seceră într-un moment geniile și talentele sale cele alese, își petrec viața în lăncezire, asemenea luntrașului care privește departe în zare, întrebându-se de unde se va ridica vântului (...)”, in Simion Mehedinți, *Către noua generație, [To the new generation]*, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1912, pp. 12–13.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²²² „Adevărata renaștere a unui popor începe cu tinerimea sa; adevărata decadentă tot de acolo începe”, in *Ibid.*, p. 1.

“The most comprehensive school is the church: it takes us by the hand from childhood and accompanies us to the grave. Every day at home, and at least once a week at church, she points our eyes to the ideal – points them to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear”²²³.

Why school and why through teachers? Because from Mehedinți’s perspective, the outcome of school is not how you learn but what and from whom you learn. In other words, school contributes to the achievement of maximum potential because it involves:

“The conscious or unconscious disciplining of life through daily contact with the one you took as a model of thought and feeling in your youth, as a model of ‘social attitude’. ‘Learning’ and ‘teaching’ therefore comes from the personality of the teacher”²²⁴.

And finally, why the army? Because, like school, it disciplines (we talk about discipline because it helps to control the overblown ego, which we will see that the young snowflake generation does not excel at).

Also from the series of factors contributing to what Mannheim called generational entelechy, Nichifor Crainic (pseudonym of Ion Dobre) points out in one of his articles published in 1934, entitled “Youth and Christianity”, that the three main factors contributing to the attainment of the maximum potential of a generation in relation to the socio-historical context are: the school (here he refers mainly to the university environment, because students are socio-culturally effervescent), the state and the church. The spiritual power that faith gave to the young people of that time did not let them remain indifferent to the challenges of the time²²⁵. From this perspective, I point out that Nichifor Crainic indirectly takes up the thesis of the German sociologist Mannheim on the study of generations from the perspective of social change. In other words, Nichifor Crainic warns that the generational entelechy is, as Mannheim also states, dependent on the ability of a generation to actively participate in certain events, facts, etc.

Another definition of the concept of generation that I have in mind is that of the Romanian sociologist Sorin Rădulescu (which includes the view of the German sociologist mentioned above). According to him, generation is made up of people who belong to the same demographic cohort (people who were born in the same period), which is why they have experienced together various moments of great significance (wars are a good example) that have had a significant impact on their

²²³ „școala cea mai cuprinzătoare este biserica: ea ne ia de mână din copilărie și ne însoțește până la mormânt. În fiecare zi acasă, și măcar o dată pe săptămână la biserică, ea ne îndreaptă ochii spre ideal – îi îndreaptă celor ce au ochi de văzut și urechi de auzit”, in *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²²⁴ „disciplinarea conștientă sau inconștientă a vieții prin contactul zilnic cu acela pe care ți l-ai luat în anii tinereții ca model de cugetare și simțire, ca pildă de «atitudine socială». «Învățățul» și «învățătura» izvorăște așadar din personalitatea profesorului”, in *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²²⁵ Crainic Nichifor, „Tineretul și creștinismul” [“Young people and Christianity”], in *Gândirea*, no. 3/1934, Available at: <http://www.miscarea.net/crainic-tineretul-si-crestinismul.htm>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

destiny. The concept of generation has a polysemantic character. I will briefly review some of these definitions, based on Sorin Rădulescu's ideas. From a biological point of view, generation includes individuals who share the same filiation. Demographically speaking, generation includes all individuals living at the same time. Historically, generation is the collective expression of an era, and from a sociological perspective, generation refers to individuals who were born around the same time and who have had similar experiences that have shaped their collective existence²²⁶.

Rodica Stăiculescu and Daniela Jitcov (2005) identify four major directions of use of the term generation in the social sciences: the first is statistical or demographic and refers to specific, measurable aspects of the concept in question. From this perspective, the term generation is synonymous with cohort and refers to the total number of people born on the same date or within the same time frame. The second perspective from which the term generation can be understood is ethnological or genealogical, where the definition of this concept is restricted to the idea of filiation but has the merit of helping to classify the different generations. In sociology, this concept is less precise in the researcher's view and refers to a community, which has certain spiritual characteristics, but which is distinct from the notion of age, since the latter is more a matter of ethnology. The two authors argue that currently, from a sociological perspective, the working definition of the concept of generation comes from Mannheim, who considers that generation is a group of people of the same age, which is distinguished from others by common historical experiences that have marked their existence in some way. From a historical perspective the generation is: "a period corresponding to the length of time people are renewed in public life and is measured by the time interval separating the age of the father from that of the son, generally evaluated at 30 years"²²⁷.

To clarify the universe of research, my study will focus on the generation that British writer Claire Fox calls the "snowflake generation". The young people included in this category were born between 1980–2000 (more precisely 1981–1996), and their main characteristics are: hypersensitivity and exacerbated ego, hence the name²²⁸.

2. The snowflake concepts

To talk about the snowflake generation, the concept of "snowflake" must first be clarified. So, I will take a brief historical foray into the use of this term. From the perspective of the use of this concept, three stages can be distinguished. The first

²²⁶ Sorin Rădulescu, *Sociologia vârstelor (societatea și ciclul uman de viață) [Sociology of ages (society and the human life cycle)]*, Bucharest, Hyperion Publishing House, 1994, p. 39.

²²⁷ „generația reprezintă o perioadă care corespunde duratei de reînnoire a oamenilor în viața publică și este măsurată prin intervalul de timp ce separă vârsta tatălui de cea a fiului, evaluată, în general, la 30 de ani” in *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²²⁸ Claire Fox, *I Find That Offensive*, United Kingdom, Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2016.

stage is identified in the 1960s and 1970s, when the term had racial connotations and was used derogatory against whites, but also against people of colour who were part of the “white” category. Also, during the same period, the term was used as a slang term for cocaine’. The use of the term in this sense, however, also appears in the 1860s in Missouri to refer to people who opposed the abolition of slavery for black people. The use of the concept in this direction, however, apparently did not go beyond the borders of the American state at that time²²⁹.

The second stage refers to the use of the term “snowflake”, also in a pejorative sense, only this time the references are not racial, but have generational connotations. The third stage of the use of this term can be identified in the run-up to the 2016 elections in America, when the term has negative connotations, only this time they are moved to the political sphere (the phrase being used in a negative sense by those on the right of the political spectrum against those on the left)²³⁰. The use in a (politically) pejorative sense of the term, however, continued after 2016 to refer to the opposition of young people in this category to the performance of former US President Donald Trump but also to the UK’s exit from the EU. According to a survey by the Pew Research Centre, in Donald Trump’s first year in office, only 27% of young people in the snowflake generation considered his performance worthy of praise²³¹, while in the Brexit referendum, around 75% of young people were in favour of remaining in the EU²³².

In this paper, I will start from the generational references of this concept. Before 2016, this concept was predominantly used to talk, also in a negative note about millennials. Famous in this regard is the use of the term snowflake in Chuck Palahniuk’s 1996 book *Fight Club*²³³, where one of Tyler Durden’s club members tells the others:

“You are not a beautiful, unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost heap”²³⁴.

This is considered by some to be the most representative moment in the history of the use of the term in this sense, because it marks the beginning of the criticism

²²⁹ Merriam Webster Dictionary, “No, ‘Snowflake’ as a Slang Term Did Not Begin with ‘Fight Club’”. The lost history of ‘snowflake’”, s.a., Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/the-less-lovely-side-of-snowflake>, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Pew Research Center, “The Generation Gap in American Politics”, March 1, 2018, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/01/the-generation-gap-in-american-politics/>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²³² Elena Cresci, “Meet the 75%: the young people who voted to remain in the EU”, in *The Guardian*, June 26, 2016, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/meet-the-75-young-people-who-voted-to-remain-in-eu>, Accessed on January 22, 2022.

²³³ The Week, “Where did the term snowflake come from?”, January 22, 2022, Available at: <https://www.theweek.co.uk/news/955539/where-did-the-term-snowflake-come-from>, Accessed on February 26, 2022.

²³⁴ „Nu sunteți un fulg de zăpadă frumos și unic. Sunteți aceeași materie organică în descompunere ca toată lumea, iar noi toți facem parte din aceeași grămadă de compost.”, in Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 1996, Available at: <https://media.oaipdf.com/pdf/4e2ee94e564c40ceb06dcd7692bbd276.pdf>, Accessed on February 22, 2022, p. 91.

of young people who had begun to think of themselves as belonging to a generation more special than others, which is why they deserve different treatment.

3. The snowflake generation concept

British author Claire Fox, director of the think tank Institute for Ideas, is the one who established the concept of the “snowflake generation” in her works “I find that offensive” (2016) and “I still find that offensive” (2018) in which she outlines, based on her experience as a professor in American universities, a profile of the snowflake generation, which she says are proud and therefore very sensitive beings, hence the name. Claire Fox classifies this generation among the millennials, who are also known in the field of age sociology as “generation y”²³⁵. The hypersensitivity of this category of young people has multiple sources. One of these is the very name “snowflake generation”. Findings from a survey of a sample of 2,000 Britons aged 16 to 24 showed that three quarters of participants complained that the designation was abusive, affecting their mental health²³⁶.

The term snowflake generation is used in a derogatory sense to characterize the generation of young people born between 1981–1996 (some authors refer to the period 1980–1999), a category that is characterized by hypersensitivity and low resilience to criticism²³⁷. Collins English Dictionary included the term snowflake generation in early November 2016 which it defined as that category of young people who became adults in 2010 (whereby adults we mean those who turned 18 that year), and who are more prone to offending and less resilient than previous generations²³⁸. Liv Little, 22, who is the editor-in-chief of Gal-dem magazine, and who was recently selected by the BBC as one of the 100 most influential and inspirational women of 2016, argues that the idea that the hypersensitivity of this generation is problematic is unfounded. About this generation's hypersensitivity, Claire Fox notes in her work that what she calls “safe spaces” have emerged in American universities, places where young people are shielded from criticism, which makes them feel safer. But she argues that this only contributes to their heightened sensitivity. Liv Little, on the other hand, sees the initiative as beneficial because it contributes to the social

²³⁵ Arthur A. Berger, *Cultural Perspectives on Millennials*, San Francisco, Palgrave, Macmillan Publishing, 2018. p. 5.

²³⁶ Alexandra Constanda, Lizeta Oprea, Adelina Mărăcine, “Cum a apărut ‘generația fulgi de nea’, tinerii hipersensibili, veșnic nemulțumiți și ofensați de cele mai banale lucruri” [“How the ‘snowflake generation’ came to be, hypersensitive young people, eternally dissatisfied and offended by the most trivial things”], in *Adevărul*, February 7, 2018, Available at: https://adevarul.ro/life-style/parinti/cum-aparut-generatia-fulgi-nea-tinerii-hipersensibilivesnicnemultumitiofensaticelemai-banalelucruri1_5a79f5d2df52022f75426a9a/index.html, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

²³⁷ Hollie Gard, “Is it fair to label millennials the ‘snowflake’ generation?”, May 12 2021, Available at: <https://www.epsomcollege.org.uk/academic/academic-blogs/is-it-fair-to-label-millennials-the-snowflake-generation/>, Accessed February 28, 2022.

²³⁸ Collins English Dictionary, “Definition of ‘snowflake generation’”, Harper Collins Publishers, 2016, Available at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/snowflake-generation>, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

inclusion of people who are “excluded”. In other words, what Fox identifies as spaces of censorship, Little classifies as spaces of inclusion and social change²³⁹.

On “safe spaces”, Hollie Gard (2021) believes that although they have the merit of providing environments conducive to the development of all categories of young people, the censorship of discourse must be considered, in the sense that the idea of dialog, of debate, is increasingly diluted, for fear of offending anyone. Moreover, it points out that it is inevitable that at some point divergent opinions will emerge, which is why silencing is not the most effective way to confront divergent opinions. In other words, young people must learn to listen first and then try to argue against opinions that do not converge with their own beliefs, rather than rejecting and then feeling offended by them. It is clear from this perspective that the progress of a society is also due to dialog and debate, which are currently struggling with the tendency to be eliminated.

Listening to opposing views is the foundation of freedom of expression. Therefore, critics such as Theresa May classify attempts by these young people to limit the adversarial discussion, under the guise of avoiding what they see as “hate speech” directed against them, as a direct attack on freedom of expression itself²⁴⁰. In other words, debate is the hallmark of democracy, and attempting to limit it in any way can become a first step towards anarchy. Pointing to a paradoxical issue here, although they advocate acceptance of all ideas, these young people find it difficult when they must do the same, showing little tolerance for opinions that differ from their own²⁴¹. Of course, beyond everyone’s right to an opinion, those opinions must not discriminate in any way against the other, but that is not the subject that concerns me.

In the literature, this category of young people has several names. One of the most common names is millennials, when this concept refers to young people who were born between 1980–1990/2000²⁴². From the perspective of the characteristics

²³⁹ Nicholson Rebecca, “Poor little snowflake’ – the defining insult of 2016”, in *The Guardian*, November 28, 2016, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/28/snowflake-insult-disdain-young-people>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²⁴⁰ Jon Stone, “British Prime Minister Theresa May hits out at safe spaces”, in *The Independent*, September 14, 2016, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/safe-spaces-no-platform-theresa-maypmqs-british-prime-minister-uk-a7300336.html>, Accessed on February 2, 2022.

²⁴¹ Hollie Gard, “Is it fair to label millennials the ‘snowflake’ generation?”, May 12, 2021, Available at: <https://www.epsomcollege.org.uk/academic/academic-blogs/is-it-fair-to-label-millennials-the-snowflake-generation/>, Accessed February 28, 2022.

²⁴² See:

1. Joel Stein, “Millennials: The me me me generation”, in *Time*, May 9, 2013, Available at: <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>, Accessed on February 2, 2022.

2. Mariana Harjevschi, “Provocările generației millennials pentru biblioteca municipal «B.P. Hașdeu»” [“The challenges of the millennial generation for the ‘B.P. Hașdeu’ municipal library”], in *Biblio Polis Journal*, nr. 3/2015, pp.115–119, Available at: <http://ojs.hasdeu.md/index.php/bibliopolis/article/view/323/318>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

3. Amanda Ruggeri, “Maybe many of the assumptions we make about Gen Y aren’t unique to this generation. Maybe they’re specific to young people in general”, in *BBC*, October 3, 2017, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20171003-millennials-are-the-generation-thats-fun-to-hate>, Accessed on January 26, 2022.

of this category (*i.e.*, hypersensitivity and individualism taken to extremes), I also consider relevant the term “me generation” (“gen me”) that researcher Jean M. Twenge, professor at San Diego State University, has attributed to young people born in the period 1980–1990/2000²⁴³. In the second edition of *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-And More Miserable Than Ever Before*, the author establishes the following categories: baby boomers (1943–1960), generation x (1961–1981), and millennials, whom she also calls “generation me” (1982–1999/2000).

An interchangeable term that Jean M. Twenge uses when talking about this category is “igen”, a generation over-exposed to technology. The “I” in the name comes, according to specialists, both from “individualism” and from the internet (given the long time they spend online)²⁴⁴. These young people are therefore (despite being constantly connected on social networks) very lonely. Another classification, not much different, is offered by The National Chamber Foundation, which divides generations temporally into baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), generation x (1965–1979), the millennial generation, or generation y (1980–1999), and generation z (those born after 2000)²⁴⁵. There are several classifications in the literature, but based on the above, I will say that the generation I am interested in is the generation born between 1980–2000, whose main characteristics are exacerbated pride and increased individualism most often reflected in increasing tendencies of selfishness; throughout the paper it will be referred to as the snowflake generation or millennials.

PORTRAIT OF THE SNOWFLAKE GENERATION

1. On self-esteem, egocentrism, and hypersensitivity

Researcher Jean M. Twenge says (based on studies she and her collaborators have conducted with more than 40,000 students and about 12,000 children aged 9 to 17) that the millennial generation is more self-centred than previous generations. This situation is because the young people in question (1980–1999/2000) were born and raised in what Twenge generically called the “self-esteem movement”. In other words, young people were taught to believe that they should always put themselves first²⁴⁶. The self-esteem movement began in the United States in the 1970s with the

4. Berger A. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁴³ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-And More Miserable Than Ever Before (revised and updated)*, New York, Aria Paperback, 2014a, p. 5).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Arthur Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁴⁶ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-And More Miserable Than Ever Before (revised and updated)*, New York, Aria Paperback, 2014b (e-book).

publication of *Psychology of Self-Esteem* by psychologist Nathaniel Brandon in 1969. The book produced a major change because it associated self-esteem with the idea of success or failure. In other words, it started from the premise that a person with high self-esteem will have a better chance of success in life. This premise has led to a significant change in education in the sense that legislation in the field of education has been renewed so that self-esteem can be implemented through schools among pupils, students. Various working groups were set up to identify ways in which self-esteem could be improved among young people. The first such task force was created in California in 1986, when the authorities announced that the state would become a “state of esteem”, acting as a “social vaccine”²⁴⁷.

Regarding self-esteem in this paper, I refer to feelings of self-worth²⁴⁸. However, it is important to note here that self-appreciation must be based on reality, specifically personal effort, dedication, and perseverance²⁴⁹. The policy of developing self-esteem has extended from the educational environment into the family. Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, however, did a meta-analysis of the most recent parenting studies in the book *Nurture Shock* and concluded that the premise that increase self-confidence is directly proportional to increasing success is wrong. Several studies have shown that it is not self-esteem that influence performance, but individual effort, which the self-esteem movement has almost completely ignored. Moreover, researchers such as Kamins and Dweck (1999) have warned that when a child is valued for his intelligence and not for his effort, the level of anxiety he experiences when he fails is higher because he attributes failure to internal causes and not to the effort, he puts in. Following the results of the study, Carol Dweck, stated that there are two types of thinking one that holds that intelligence is fixed and one that focuses on the idea of accumulation (intelligence is “mobile” in the sense that it can be expanded by acquiring new skills)²⁵⁰.

Starting from the two types of thinking identified by Carol Dweck, Tim Urban argues that most of the young people we have agreed to call the “millennial generation”, “generation y”, or the “snowflake” generation, tend to have an inflexible thinking pattern due to the fact that they have been educated (by parents, school, media, etc.) to believe that they have exceptional natural abilities (back to the uniqueness of the snowflake) that will propel them to the heights of success simply because that is what naturally happens to gifted people (again, we see the

²⁴⁷ Alina Kartman, “The self-esteem movement and the unhappiness of a generation”, June 10, 2021, Available at: <https://st.network/analysis/top/the-self-esteem-movement-and-the-unhappiness-of-a-generation.html>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²⁴⁸ K. A. Ashwini, “Effect of Loneliness on Self Esteem of High School Boys and Girls”, in *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2017, Available at: <https://ijip.in/wpcontent/uploads/2019/02/18.01.121.20170501.pdf>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁴⁹ Alina Kartman, “The self-esteem movement and the unhappiness of a generation”, June 10, 2021, Available at: <https://st.network/analysis/top/the-self-esteem-movement-and-the-unhappiness-of-a-generation.html>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

absence of effort as a key element in achieving success). This is how we end up in a situation where, according to Paul Harvey, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, members of “generation y” have “unrealistic expectations and a strong opposition to negative feedback”²⁵¹.

Given their high levels of self-esteem, young people in this category have an “inflated sense” of self-worth, which is problematic because “a big source of frustration for people with a strong sense of entitlement is unmet expectations”, says Paul Harvey. In other words, the fact that young people have been taught to believe about themselves that they are the prettiest, the smartest, or the most talented has not only caused them to remain below their developmental potential²⁵², but also made them unhappy (because of their unmet expectations)²⁵³. The rigid model of thinking brings into question the idea of soul immobility described by Simion Mehedinți. We are interested in this correlation because the clarity of thought is directly related to the soul. Finally, the idea of underdevelopment of potential brings into question Karl Mannheim's concept of generational entelechy according to which generation can only be understood from the perspective of the fulfilment of the maximum potential in relation to the socio-historical context²⁵⁴.

I note a new paradox about the snowflake generation, this time about self-esteem. Studies on the subject show that loneliness is associated with low self-esteem²⁵⁵, but research in the field, show us the snowflake generation as a generation with high self-esteem²⁵⁶. In other words, we have a generation that while not struggling with self-confidence, is struggling with loneliness. The idea of loneliness is important because the moment relational beings become lonely, significant steps are taken toward depression and anxiety²⁵⁷. The over-developed ego of these young people is the main factor that generates a rejection of anything that does not agree with their opinions, which makes them isolate themselves (these considerations bring back to discussion the concept of “safe spaces” that we said have a strong limiting character, in the sense of censoring freedom of expression). In other words,

²⁵¹ Tim Urban, “Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy”, in *Huffington Post*, November 8, 2017, Available at: <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/generation-y-unhappyb3930620>, Accessed on March 3, 2022.

²⁵² Simon Oxenham, “How being called smart can actually make you stupid”, in *Big Think*, August 13, 2013, <https://bigthink.com/articles/how-being-called-smart-can-actually-make-you-stupid/>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁵³ Alina Kartman, “The self-esteem movement and the unhappiness of a generation”, June 10, 2021, Available at: <https://st.network/analysis/top/the-self-esteem-movement-and-the-unhappiness-of-a-generation.html>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²⁵⁴ Karl Mannheim, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁵ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, “A Sociological Approach to Self and Identity”, pp. 128–152, in Leary R. Mark, Tangney J. Price, *Handbook of Self and Identity*, s.l., Guilford Press, 2003, Available at: <http://rsp-lab11.ucr.edu/Papers/02a.pdf>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁵⁶ Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2014b.

²⁵⁷ Caitlin Cantor, “Too Much Self-Esteem May Be Keeping Millennials Single”, in *Psychology Today*, November 29, 2016, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-sex/201611/too-much-self-esteem-may-be-keeping-millennials-single>, Accessed February 22, 2022.

the belief that their views are more important than others lead millennials to isolate themselves from those who do not adhere to those beliefs. Studies conducted on this topic in America show a significant increase in students who say that they are important, and because of this, their opinions take precedence over others. Thus, whereas in the early 1950s, only 12% of adolescents aged 14–16 agreed with the statement “I am an important person”, by the late 1980s, the percentage had risen to 80%, almost seven times higher²⁵⁸.

The negative side of self-esteem is identified by Jean M. Twenge in the concept of narcissism, which he defines as “the dark side of self-esteem”²⁵⁹. Unlike self-esteem, narcissism, egocentrism, is based on the belief that they are more special and important than everyone else, without any tangible basis for this. The typical behavior of such people is characterized by self-centredness, dilution of generosity in relation to others, exaggerated expectations that are not in line with reality, diminished capacity for empathy, tendency to focus mainly on material matters²⁶⁰. According to the U.S. National Institutes of Health, in 2013, the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder was three times higher among people in their 20s at the time (born in approximately 1993) compared to 65-year-olds (born in approximately 1948)²⁶¹. I will conclude by saying that exacerbated individualism and over-emphasized self-esteem turned to ego have led to the emergence of a hypersensitive generation that encounters real difficulties when they encounter ideas that contradict their own beliefs. Difficulties arise because the snowflake generation perceives criticism or differing opinions as hate speech directed against them due to an overdeveloped ego.

2. About loneliness, anxiety, depression

As self-centred, highly individualised beings, young people born between 1980-1999/2000, whom we have agreed to understand conceptually as the snowflake generation, millennials, or the me generation, face loneliness. This idea is borne out by several studies, including one conducted by the company YouGov, which surveyed more than 1,200 Americans and found that millennials are most likely to report having no close friends (27%), no friends in general (22%), and no significant others (25%)²⁶². Another study, conducted in 2019 by one of the largest market research companies (Ipsos, commissioned by Cigna – one of the largest health insurance companies in the world), on a sample of 10,400 subjects in America

²⁵⁸ Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2014b, pp. 80–82.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

²⁶¹ Joel Stein, “Millennials: The me me me generation”, in *Time*, May 9, 2013, Available at: <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>, Accessed on February 2, 2022.

²⁶² Minda Zetlin, “Millennials Are the Loneliest Generation, a Survey Shows 22 percent say they have no friends at all”, in *Inc*, September 20, 2019, Available at: <https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/millennials-loneliness-no-friends-friendships-baby-boomers-yougov.html>, Accessed on March 3, 2022.

concluded that at that time three of five Americans (*i.e.*, 61%) indicated that they lived alone. Moreover, while 50% of baby boomers reported feeling lonely, millennials were as high as 71%²⁶³. This is problematic because loneliness is associated with various physical or mental illnesses, including depression²⁶⁴. Statistics in the field, show that in the early 1915s, a generation of which only 1–2% of young people experienced a major depressive episode, while by the 2000s, the rate of major depression among young people in America during their lifetime reached 15–20%, *i.e.*, 10 times higher²⁶⁵.

At Kansas State University's counseling centre, the number of young people who took treatment for depression doubled between 1988 and 2001, while the number who were suicidal tripled in the same time frame²⁶⁶. According to a 2010 survey of American college counselling centres, more students are suffering from serious mental health problems, which is why the number of students taking psychiatric medication in 2010 has doubled since 1997. In a 2011 national survey of American teens, 29% said they felt sad or helpless almost every day for the past few weeks, a common definition of depression²⁶⁷. To measure anxiety levels Jean M. Twenge and his collaborators collected data from over 40,000 students and about 12,000 children aged 9 to 17. The range studied was 1950–1990. Their study showed that the average number of anxious students in 1970 was 71%, and in 1990 percentage reached 85%. Among students who were nine years old, anxiety showed even more obvious upward trend because children in 1980 were more anxious than psychiatric patients in 1950²⁶⁸. Compared to 1982, in 2012, three times as many students reported having problems sleeping most nights and twice as many claimed to have been seen by a mental health professional²⁶⁹. We note that loneliness is problematic because according to studies, it is directly correlated with depression, which in turn is linked (also according to studies) to suicide.

In 2011, 16% of high school students admitted that they had seriously thought about committing suicide in the past year, and most of them also confessed that they had made a detailed plan on how they would kill themselves. Most of these suicidal

²⁶³ Cigna Report, "Loneliness and the workplace", 2020, Available at: <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/cigna-2020-loneliness-report.pdf>, Accessed on March 1, 2022, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ See:

1. John T. Cacioppo, Louise C. Hawkley, Ronald A. Thisted, "Perceived social isolation makes me sad: 5-year cross-lagged analyses of loneliness and depressive symptomatology in the Chicago Health, Aging, and Social Relations Study", in *Psychology and Aging Journal*, Vol. 25, no.2/2010, pp. 453–463.

2. Janne Vanhalst, Koen Luyckx, Eveline Teppers, Luc Goossens, "Disentangling the longitudinal relation between loneliness and depressive symptoms: prospective effects and the intervening role of coping", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 31, no.8/2012, pp. 810–832.

²⁶⁵ Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2014b, pp.117–118.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–120.

thoughts are associated with depression, and depression with loneliness²⁷⁰. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam demonstrates the decline of social relationships of all kinds. In other words, young people's relationships with others are on a downward trend (whether we are talking about relationships with friends, with neighbours, in clubs, etc.). An interesting aspect related to young people's interactions that Putnam notes is that social interaction is directly related to young people's happiness and contentment with life. Specifically, Putnam found that participation in social activities contributes as much to increased happiness as does earning a college degree or doubling one's income²⁷¹.

According to a 1985 study, the average American had three people they considered close and with whom they felt they could discuss important issues. In 2004, however, the number of people close to them had dropped to zero. Comparing the snowflake generation with previous generations, Jean M. Twenge concluded that "It's almost as if GenMe is starving for affection"²⁷². In 1950, in the population surveyed, only 9% of Americans lived alone, whereas in 2010 their percentage nearly tripled (to 28%). In 2014, nearly half of all households in Washington, DC and Manhattan were one-person households. Because of their studies, Jean M. Twenge and her colleagues concluded that isolation and loneliness alike are closely linked by anxiety and depression, the latter leading in many cases to suicide²⁷³.

Loretta Breuning, in her article "Why I Don't Believe Reports of a Mental Health Crisis", argues that the emotional problems that young people face are largely caused by what has begun to become dependency on services for mental health problems. One negative effect that the existence of such services produces is the disempowerment of young people to cope with natural emotional reactions on their own. In this connection, I note another paradoxical aspect of this category of young people: on the one hand, they show courage because they can talk openly about their problems and ask for specialist help²⁷⁴. But, a 2015 study by Marissa Lorusso and Sophia Barnes of a sample of over 900 young people shows that although 75% of young people claimed to be open to talking about their health problems²⁷⁵, fear of being labeled a "snowflake" prevented 58% of millennial employees in the UK from seeking support from their superiors, or to take a sick day so that they could deal with managing health issues on the register, this at a time when half of the UK

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–122.

²⁷¹ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, 2000, p. 84.

²⁷² Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2014b, pp. 122–123.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–129.

²⁷⁴ Loretta G. Breuning, "Why I Don't Believe Reports of a Mental Health Crisis. Crisis-mongering in the mental health world does no good", in *Psychology Today*, February 24, 2014, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-neurochemical-self/201402/why-i-dont-believe-reports-mental-health-crisis>, Accessed February 22, 2022.

²⁷⁵ Victoria Hoff, "Our State of Mind: 13 Important Statistics About Millennials and Mental Health", in *The Thirty*, February 14, 2020, Available at: <https://thethirty.whowhatwear.com/millennial-mental-healthstatistics>, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

employees experienced mental health problems²⁷⁶. From this perspective Holly Bourne warns that labelling this category of young people as “snowflakes” largely negates efforts to reduce the stigmatisation of those concerned, moreover it contributes to heightened feelings of anxiety²⁷⁷.

Returning to the idea of loneliness that the snowflake generation is experiencing, what’s interesting is that while millennials interact constantly, their interaction has moved almost entirely online. Because it’s conducted via a screen, according to studies, this type of interaction increases the sense of loneliness they experience. As evidence in 2019, more than seven in 10 (73%) of heavy social media users said they felt lonely, while only 52% of heavy users said they experienced loneliness²⁷⁸. This is a paradoxical issue because although young people are connected to each other through technology, the loneliness they experience is becoming increasingly present in their lives. According to a study by international public opinion company YouGov, data shows that the millennial generation is compared to previous generations the loneliest (while millennials reported feeling lonely always or often by 30%, only 20% of generation x and only 15% of baby boomers said this)²⁷⁹.

Josh McDowell argues that time spent on the internet is directly proportional to the level of loneliness millennials experience²⁸⁰. Approximately 70% of young Americans in this category check their phones every hour²⁸¹. The results of the “Consumer Report” study, conducted in 2019 by Starcom Romania, showed that half of the young Romanians spend an average of six hours on the internet²⁸². Statistics showing that internet use has become an increasingly common practice recently have made it possible to introduce a new concept into the scientific lexicon, that of nomophobia (it is an abbreviation for “no-mobile-phone phobia”), a term that according to the Cambridge dictionary can be explained by the fear of being without a mobile phone, a fear that generates stress and anxiety and untreated leads to

²⁷⁶ Rachel Moss, “Young Workers Are Scared Of Snowflake Label For Taking Mental Sick Days”, in *Huffington Post*, October 18, 2019, Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/young-workers-are-not-taking-mental-health-sick-days-through-fear-of-being-called-asnowflake_uk_5da865dde4b034f1d69e4eab, Accessed on February 28, 2022.

²⁷⁷ Holly Bourne, “Jokes about snowflakes ignore the crisis in young mental health”, in *The Guardian*, September 20, 2018, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/20/jokes-about-snowflakes-ignore-the-crisis-in-young-mental-health>, Accessed February 22, 2022.

²⁷⁸ Cigna Report, “Loneliness and the workplace”, 2020, Available at: <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/cigna-2020-loneliness-report.pdf>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

²⁷⁹ Jamie Ballard, “Millennials are the loneliest generation”, July 30, 2019, Available at: <https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2019/07/30/loneliness-friendship-new-friends-poll-survey>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁸⁰ Josh McDowell, *Generația înstrăinată. Un pod peste prăpastia dintre generații [The alienated generation. A bridge across the generation gap]*, Oradea, Scriptum Publishing House, 2005.

²⁸¹ Joel Stein, “Millennials: The me me me generation”, in *Time*, May 9, 2013, Available at: <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>, Accessed on February 2, 2022.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

depression. The phenomenon was first studied in the UK (when the UK Post Office commissioned YouGov to research the anxiety experienced by mobile phone users) in 2010, at which point 53% of respondents (sample of over 2,000 people) suffered from nomophobia²⁸³. Two years later, the percentage had already reached 66%, according to a survey by SecurEnvoy (a mobile security service)²⁸⁴.

Nomophobia or digital addiction also has negative implications for physical health²⁸⁵. A good example of this is eyestrain. According to a 2015 study, 70% of millennials in America reported symptoms of digital eye fatigue at that time (more than Baby Boomers: 57% and Gen Xers: 63%). Named word of the year in 2018 by the Cambridge Dictionary, nomophobia affects more than 80% of teenagers in France, according to a survey by Ifop²⁸⁶. If we talk about Romania, our country is in second place in Europe in terms of hours spent online, with an average of 18.6 hours spent online per week, according to the most recent Mediascope study²⁸⁷, which leads me to believe that Romanian millennials also face a high level of digital eye strain.

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the loneliness of millennials (and beyond) by moving all interactions almost exclusively online. A UNICEF study in 2020 showed that globally 1.5 billion children and young people were affected by school closures worldwide. “The pandemic of coronavirus has caused an unprecedented increase in screen time”, said the Executive Director of the Global Partnership to Stop Violence Against Children, Dr Howard Taylor²⁸⁸. In the UK, according to figures released by Openreach (the leading internet provider), the number of people who surfed the internet during the pandemic doubled compared to the previous period (Openreach customers consumed 50,000 petabytes of data in 2020, compared to 22,000 in 2019)²⁸⁹. The proof that online interaction does not reduce, but in contrast contributes to the increased loneliness of millennials and beyond (I am referring to them, as this category is the subject of this study), are the

²⁸³ Tim Elmore, “Curing Students of Nomophobia”, in *Huffington Post*, October 26, 2014, Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/curing-students-of-nomoph_b_5710427, Accessed on January 22, 2022.

²⁸⁴ Mitroff Sarah, “66 percent of Brits are scared of being without their phone”, February 16, 2012, Available at: <https://venturebeat.com/2012/02/16/no-dont-take-my-phone/>, Accessed on March 2, 2022.

²⁸⁵ V. Notara, E. Vagka, C. Gnardellis, A. Lagiou, “The Emerging Phenomenon of Nomophobia in Young Adults: A Systematic Review Study”, in *Addict Health Journal*, 2021; 13(2), p. 120.

²⁸⁶ Marina Constantinoiu, “Tabără de dezintoxicare digitală pentru adulții dependenți de Internet și mobil” [“Digital detox camp for Internet and mobile addicted adults”], in *Jurnalul*, July 10, 2013, Available at: <https://jurnalul.ro/stiri/externe/dezintoxicare-dependenta-internet-mobil-647486.html>, Accessed on January 22, 2022.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ UNICEF, “Copiii sunt expuși unui risc crescut în mediul online în timpul pandemiei de COVID19” [“Children are at increased risk online during the COVID pandemic19”], April 15, 2020, Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/romania/ro/comunicate-de-presă/unicef-copiii-sunt-expuși-unui-risc-crescut-în-mediul-online-în-timpul>, Accessed on February 26, 2022.

²⁸⁹ BBC, “UK internet use doubles in 2020 due to pandemic”, December 30, 2020, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-55486157>, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

numerous statistics showing that during the coronavirus pandemic, when interaction was almost completely moved online, anxiety and depression increased. According to a cross-sectional online survey conducted from 2 June to November 16, 2020, which had over 20,000 respondents from 101 different countries, severe loneliness among participants almost tripled during the pandemic compared to before (reaching 21% from 6%)²⁹⁰.

According to another study (Household Pulse Survey – HPS), conducted in the US by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in partnership with the US Census Bureau, between August 19, 2020 and February 1, 2021, the percentage of adults who had symptoms of an anxiety disorder or depressive symptoms in the past 7 days increased from 36.4% to 41.5%, as did the percentage who reported needing mental health counseling or therapy but had not received it in the past 4 weeks (from 9.2% to 11.7%). What should be noted here is that the largest increases were among adults aged 18–29²⁹¹. I conclude by saying that loneliness has increased during the coronavirus pandemic because you understand who you are or what you can become and because of the interaction with the other, an aspect that has been strongly affected in the last period. In other words, the idea of connectedness suffered because of the policies adopted during the pandemic and implicitly contributed to a heightened sense of loneliness, anxiety and even depression, which we have already seen were among the traits of the snowflake generation. In concluding this sub-chapter, I want to point out that the second characteristic of this generation is loneliness, the implications of which we have seen are important because they affect health at a mental, emotional, and physical level.

3. Relationship skills and couple life

Relationship expert Caitlin Cantor argues that the weakening of relationship skills, because of individualization and therefore the selfishness of individuals, affects couple relationships because in their absence closeness, intimacy, connection, and vulnerability are real challenges²⁹². In other words, millennials have been so

²⁹⁰ Roger O’Sullivan, Annette Burns, Gerard Leavey, Iracema Leroi, Vanessa Burholt, James Lubben, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Christina Victor, Brian Lawlor, Mireya Vilar-Compte, Carla M. Perissinotto, Mark A. Tully, Mary P. Sullivan, Michael Rosato, Joanna M. Power, Elisa Tiilikainen, and Thomas R. Prohaska, “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Loneliness and Social Isolation: A Multi-Country Study”, in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, no. 18 (19)/2021, Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8508181/>, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁹¹ Anjel Vahratian, Stephen J. Blumberg, Emily P. Terlizzi, Jeannine S. Schiller, “Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder and Use of Mental Health Care Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, August 2020–February 2021, in *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021, pp. 490–494, Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e2.htm?s_cid=mm7013e2_w#suggestedcitation, Accessed on February 22, 2022.

²⁹² Caitlin Cantor, “Too Much Self-Esteem May Be Keeping Millennials Single”, in *Psychology Today*, 29 November 2016, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-sex/201611/too-much-self-esteem-may-be-keeping-millennials-single>, Accessed February 22, 2022.

persistently inoculated with the imperative of cultivating self-esteem that it has become more of an unintentional and often misunderstood selfishness, even for the “beneficiaries”. Eva Illouz (2015) explains the influence of individualism through what she calls “cold ambivalence”, which she in turn explains through the concept of abulia²⁹³. The latter concept is defined by the author as:

“a more advanced stage of the culture of abundance, in which the capacity to will and to want disappears”²⁹⁴.

In other words, since this generation is strongly egocentric, in its relationship with the other it shows indecision²⁹⁵. This tendency, the author argues, is more present among men who develop what she calls “commitment phobia”, but it is not lacking among women either²⁹⁶.

When she talks about abulia, Eva Illouz refers to the fact that the ability to will or to want disappears, which generates a reluctant attitude toward commitment. This reluctance stems from the fact that commitment is a limitation of the self, which for an egocentric generation is a real challenge. The author warns that love and sympathy automatically lead to commitment²⁹⁷. In this logic, love and implicitly commitment are

“a component or dimension of the will; a cognitive, moral structure that gives people the opportunity to bind themselves to a future and give up the possibility of maximizing their choices (...)”²⁹⁸.

Eva Illouz states that the modern generation is no longer characterized by will but by abulia, i.e., indecision, lack of will or at least a considerable reduction in it. But to understand the importance of this transition, it is necessary specify a few aspects of the idea of the will.

The will is the element that confers individuality to man, but it does not “isolate” him from the other, but in contrast, it becomes “the binder and expression of their social action”²⁹⁹. The egocentric man is the opposite of the man with social will, because the latter manifests himself as an energetic personality. By energetic personality we mean “the result of the cultivation and manifestation of the self through vocation”³⁰⁰. According to C-tin Rădulescu Motru, vocation implies “the will of man to be himself”³⁰¹. In other words, while the egocentric becomes self-

²⁹³ Eva Illouz, *De ce iubirea doare: o explicație sociologică*, [Why love hurts: a sociological explanation], translation by Virgil Stanciu, Bucharest, Art Publishing House, 2015, p. 139.

²⁹⁴ „un stadiu mai avansat al culturii abundenței, în care capacitatea de a voi și de a dori se risipește”, in *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁹⁷ Frankfurt, 2004, p. 46 apud Eva Illouz, 2015, p. 129.

²⁹⁸ „o componentă ori o dimensiune a voinței; o structură cognitivă, morală care dă oamenilor prilejul să se lege de un viitor și să renunța la posibilitatea de a-și maximiza alegerile (...)”, in Illouz, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

²⁹⁹ Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

consuming, the energetic personality becomes. In the absence of a social will, nationhood is not possible³⁰². Here, we can discuss anarchic society. The anarchic man is the one who cannot differentiate between ends and means, and this difference is possible only when you manifest your social will. While the energetic personality acts in relation to the highest values, the egocentric acts in relation to his own interests.

The will is a good “relative” of determination. Vulcănescu tells us in this regard that:

“Man’s will is made up of three particular acts, which come together in three moments of the act of will: – the first moment is deliberation, advice, the weighing of reasons in judgment, which determines you to choose; – the last moment – the third – is the command, the decree, the order to be executed, the decision already taken; – between the two stands, like a scale in the balance of being the determination. The determination is the second act of the will, placed between the other two. It follows the deliberation and precedes the execution. It binds them together and makes them a unity”³⁰³.

Determination generates responsibility because it has the power to separate destinies, to separate a long string of possible events³⁰⁴. In other words, the will has the power to change destinies because it makes becoming possible (the sum of all possibilities that may be but are not yet). It generates responsibility because through it you can be free, or a permanent prisoner of petty, personal interests. The “snowflake” generation thus achieves a minimum of social will because subjugated to its own ego, it cannot act in relation to the highest values (in this case love), because these are established only in relation to the other.

Returning to the relationship in the lives of millennials, Eva Illouz points out that the romantic will has changed in that its characteristic feature is “the dissociation between emotional-sexual experience and commitment”³⁰⁵. In other words, in modern romance, the notion of commitment is one towards which both sexes develop a phobia because they see commitment as a limitation of the self. The idea of commitment is seen from this point of view as “a burden on the self”³⁰⁶. Self-realisation is therefore considered in contradiction with commitment. The transformation of the structure of the will and commitment has led to the emergence

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰³ „Voința omului se constituie din trei acte deosebite, care se înlănțuiesc în trei momente ale actului de a voi: - primul moment este deliberarea, sfatul, cumpănirea motivelor în judecată, care te determină să alegi; - ultimul moment - al treilea - este porunca, decretul, ordinul de executat, hotărârea deja luată; - între amândouă stă, ca o limbă de cântar în cumpăna ființei: hotărârea. Hotărârea este actul al doilea al voinței, așezat între celelalte două. El urmează deliberarea și precede execuția. Le leagă și face din ele o unitate. Este momentul unic, în care motivele de a voi se adună în unitatea cugetătoare a ființei, pentru a face această alegere a viitorului de înfăptuit, din care va rezulta porunca”, in Mircea Vulcănescu, *Ultimul cuvânt [The last word]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1992, p. 52.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Eva Illouz, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

of a new type of relationship such as “hooking up” or PTP (friend-type person) or “friends with benefits”³⁰⁷, relationships that institutionalise ambivalence and demonstrate the achievement of a historical minimum of will from the perspective of commitment. Self-realisation is understood here as

“Not committing to any fixed identity and especially not committing to a single project of the self. In other words, the ideal of self-actualization affects the ability and desire to project the self along a continuous straight line”³⁰⁸.

This type of relationship is possible because of serial sexuality, which requires emotional detachment from the partners. This detachment was possible when self-realisation became the individual's primary goal. However, note that serial sexuality has led to emotional inequality because men are “less willing than women to engage in a single relationship because they have more choices”³⁰⁹. Paraphrasing Bourdieu's idea of “symbolic domination”, Eva Illouz states that when a partner has a greater capacity to control the symbolic interaction, we can speak of “emotional domination”³¹⁰. In other words, through the liberalization of the sexual market, more options have been created for men, giving them such emotional dominance. Through this liberalization, the transition from romantic love for cumulative sexuality (body counting) is made, which becomes erotic capital.

According to Eva Illouz, there is an interdependent relationship between the self and sexuality because “in the circumstances of late modernity, the erotic question best articulates the problem of self-assurance”³¹¹. In other words, cumulative sexuality becomes from this perspective a way of securing or more precisely, submissively feeding the individual ego. From this perspective, serial sexuality becomes a method for reconfirming the self. The accumulation of erotic capital becomes a new form of recognition that is closely linked to the idea of self-performance, hence its value. In this sense, the fear of rejection threatens the idea of the value of the self. In other words, the ego is fuelled by the need for social validation. Therefore, the lack of reciprocity is an annihilation of the self. In this sense, Eva Illouz states:

“What is truly modern about romantic suffering is that the object of love is closely tied to the sense of self-worth and that suffering has become the mark of an imperfect self (...)”³¹².

From the perspective of the snowflake generation, we can notice a certain detachment from the idea of marriage: according to a study by the Pew Research

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁰⁸ „a nu te angaja la nicio identitate fixă și în special a nu te angaja la un unic proiect al sinelui. Altfel spus, idealul autorealizării afectează însăși capacitatea și dorința de a proiecta sinele de-a lungul unei linii drepte continue”, in *Ibid.*, p.143.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³¹² „Ceea ce este cu adevărat modern în privința suferinței romantice este faptul că obiectul iubirii este strâns împletit cu sentimentul de valoare a sinelui și că suferința a devenit marca unui sine imperfect (...)”, in *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Centre, only 44% of millennials were married in 2019, compared to 53% of Gen Xers, 61% of Boomers³¹³. Moreover, when they do decide to get married, the age at which they do so is on an upward trend: for example, in 1965 the average age of marriage for women was 21 and for men, 23. Today, the average age for marriage is 29.2 for women and 30.9 for men³¹⁴. In fact, studies show that a significant number of millennials will remain unmarried past the age of 40³¹⁵. More recent data show that the lowest marriage rate recently is among millennials: 26%, compared to 36% for Generation X and 48% for Baby Boomers³¹⁶. However, there is, an overall decline in sexual activity. While the data for marriage is not very surprising, the decline in serial sexuality is a new, unexpected trend. Given that we are talking about egocentric generation, and that serial sexuality, following Eva Illouz's ideas, is a way of reconfirming the value of the self, the detachment from this tendency is a surprise element that millennials explain by the fear of being hurt. In this regard, a survey conducted on the online dating site eHarmony shows that 38% of single Brits avoid commitment for fear of being hurt again³¹⁷.

The decline in serial sexuality among millennials has been documented in the *Journal of Sex Research*, which found that only 31.9% of college students from 1988–1996 reported having had more than one sexual partner in the past year, a percentage that remains almost unchanged for 2002–2010 (even dropping slightly to 31.6%). According to another study, millennials have fewer sexual partners than any generation since our grandparents, who at the same age had an average of only two partners each³¹⁸. In other words, the fear of commitment, which is mainly generated by the fear of being hurt (we saw in Eva Illouz that disappointment in love means devaluing the self, the self which for an egocentric generation is essential) generates what Illouz called cold ambivalence (lack of commitment). What's interesting from this point of view is that while avoiding commitment, millennials seek romantic love:

³¹³ Amanda Barroso, Kim Parker and Jesse Bennett, "As Millennials Near 40, They're Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations", May 27, 2020, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/27/as-millennials-near-40-theyre-approaching-family-life-differently-than-previous-generations/>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

³¹⁴ Marissa Hermanson, "How Millennials Are Redefining Marriage", s.a., Available at: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/millennials-redefining-marriage/>, Accessed on March 2, 2022.

³¹⁵ Urban Institute Report: Martin P. Steven, Astone N. Marie, Peters H. Elizabeth, "Fewer Marriages, More Divergence: Marriage Projections for Millennials to Age 40", 2014, Available at: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/22586/413110-Fewer-Marriages-More-Divergence-Marriage-Projections-for-Millennials-to-Age-.PDF>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

³¹⁶ Jones Goldberg, "Breaking down divorce rates by generation", December 2, 2020, Available at: <https://www.goldbergjones-or.com/divorce/divorce-by-generation/>, Accessed on March 2, 2022.

³¹⁷ Almara Abgarian, "Commitmentphobia: Why millennials don't want to settle for one person", August 3, 2018, Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2018/08/03/commitmentphobia-why-millennials-dont-want-to-settle-for-one-person-7687257/>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

³¹⁸ Caroline Beaton, "Why Millennials Are Failing to Shack Up", in *Psychology Today*, October 31, 2015, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-gen-y-guide/201510/why-millennials-are-failing-shack>, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

according to a survey by the Pew Research Centre (2014)³¹⁹ 69% of unmarried millennials said they would like to get married someday, a percentage that has remained unchanged since 1970³²⁰. Fear of commitment but also fear of suffering from love have led experts in the field to talk about philophobia (fear of falling in love, loving/being loved)³²¹.

The Polish-born British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues from the perspective of inter-human dynamics (such as the shift from romantic love to that based on the accumulation of erotic capital – specifically serial sexuality), but not only, that we are witnessing the transition from “solid societies” (characterized by consistency, repetition, stability, etc.) to “liquid” ones (where we are dealing with individual and inter-human mobility, professional, religious, etc.)³²². Based on this premise, Bauman argues that the competitive world, almost exclusively oriented toward consumption, has led to the extension of the “disposable” mentality applied to things in the affective sphere, in interpersonal relationships. In other words, in the “liquid modern world”, which considers most of what is durable and stable as obsolete, romantic love is transformed into “liquid love”³²³. Conceptually, liquid modernity refers to an ever-changing world in which inter-human relationships are also fluid. In this vein, Bauman argues that the one constant of today’s generations is liquidity, in the sense that individuals place the self in a continuous work of self-actualization. The cult of competitiveness and short-term projects have contributed to the weakening of inter-human solidarity, which has led to the creation of frightened individuals, because of the feelings of insecurity they experience in many spheres of life, including the emotional one³²⁴.

Therefore, in this sub-chapter I wanted to show that beyond the two great characteristics of the snowflake generation, *i.e.*, hypersensitivity (as a result of overdeveloped ego) and loneliness (as a result of exacerbated individuality), young people in this category have a number of fears that other generations have not faced, including nomophobia (fear of being without a mobile phone), commitment phobia or philophobia (fear of falling in love, or of loving/being loved). So, in addition to

³¹⁹ Pew Research Centre Report, “Millennials in Adulthood. Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends”, March 7, 2014, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

³²⁰ Caroline Beaton, “Why Millennials Are Failing to Shack Up”, in *Psychology Today*, October 31, 2015, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-gen-y-guide/201510/why-millennials-are-failing-shack>, Accessed on January 12, 2022.

³²¹ Brennan Dan, “What Is Philophobia?”, October 25, 2021, Available at: <https://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic/what-is-philophobia>, Accessed on March 1, 2022.

³²² Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernitatea lichidă. Poate mintea umana stăpâni ceea ce a creat mintea umană?* [*Liquid modernity. Can the human mind master what the human mind has created?*], Bucharest, Antet XX Press Publishing House, 2000, p. 41.

³²³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge, Polity Press Publishing House, 2003, p. 48.

³²⁴ Andreea Catrinela Lazăr, “Modernitate lichidă, viață lichidă” [“Liquid modernity, liquid life”], in *Petrol-Gas University of Ploiesti Bulletin*, no.3/2010, pp. 109–116.

the two terms which, according to specialists, characterise the snowflake generation, because of the above arguments, I add the term fear.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of generations is relevant because it helps us understand the dynamics of social structure. The definition we have used in this paper comes from German sociology, from Karl Mannheim, who considers that generation is the group of individuals who are born in the same time interval and who participate in different socio-historical events that mark their existence. Participation, but not of any kind, but active participation, is in fact the key term in understanding the concept in question, because it leads to the emergence of responses to the challenges of the time, responses that Mannheim calls generational entelechy, which represents the realization of the maximum potential available to the members of the generation. Beyond conceptually clarifying the idea of generation, we have looked at the use of the term “snowflake” and identified three stages: the first has racial connotations, the second stage is generational, and the third stage is political. In this paper we have considered the generational connotations of the term.

The snowflake generation refers to young people born between 1980 and 2000, who consider themselves part of a special, unique generation, and because of this they feel entitled to special treatment. When they do not receive it, they label opinions contrary to their beliefs as hate speech, directed particularly against them, which is why they isolate themselves in what Claire Fox called “safe spaces”, where there is strong censorship of free speech (for fear of offending anyone), which only aggravates the sensitivity of those targeted. This category of people has several names in the literature (generation y, millennials), which is why throughout the paper the terms are interchangeable. Also relevant is the name of the author Jean M. Twenge, who, due to the characteristics she identified as specific to this generation, namely hypersensitivity and exacerbated ego, called it the “me generation”.

Regarding the question “how can this generation be characterized” we have determined from the studies reviewed that the three main characteristics are: hypersensitivity, insensitivity, and fear. Hypersensitivity because of being taught to have an overdeveloped self-esteem, often detached from reality, they do not deal with criticism, and fail to notice its constructive nature, developing a rejection reaction to it and therefore a low capacity to resist challenges. Millennials are isolating themselves in “safe spaces”, which is a first step toward isolation. This is proving to be a real challenge as studies link it directly to anxiety, depression and even suicide. Technology has been a contributing factor in accelerating loneliness because it has moved face-to-face interaction online. The third trait, namely, fear, is important because the generation in question, because of the overdeveloped ego, acquires all sorts of new fears which at the level of social action block the capacity

to act/adapt. A good example of this is the commitment phobia that arises from the fear of a rejection, rejection that means the cancelation of the self, which for the snowflake generation is the focal point of existence. Therefore, I consider the concept of “snowflake generation” in Romanian to be the “ego generation”.

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