

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE “SNOWFLAKE- MILLENNIAL” / “ME GENERATION” / “EGOCENTRIC GENERATION”

Samira Cîrlig<sup>293</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*This material discusses some sociological and other theories that can explain the snowflake generation phenomenon. In this article, we focus only on the “millennial snowflake”, i.e., those young people born between 1980 and 2000 whose main problematic traits are: loneliness, hypersensitivity, and fear. Therefore, we address these issues by providing a theoretical explanation of the problem. The approach will be complementary and will consider both classical and modern/contemporary theories.*

**Keywords:** generation, millennial, snowflake, snowflake generation, snowflake millennial.

### SHORT INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a complementary approach to the discourse on the “snowflake generation”. The term “snowflake generation” was originally used to refer to “millennials” or “generation y”, i.e., those born between 1980 and 2000, but later included “generation z”, or those born after 2000. Thus, it should be noted that this paper refers to the category of young people born between 1980 and 2000, which we will understand by the conceptual term “snowflake millennial” or “self-generated generation” (“snowflake” from Claire Fox<sup>294</sup>, and “millennials” from Neil Howe and William Strauss<sup>295</sup>). In the recent literature, which appeared around 2010, this category of young people is also referred to as “GenMe” or “generation me”. To delimit in time the generational categories with which I will work, I have used the most common division: Baby Boomers (around 1943–1960), Generation X (1961–1981) and Millennials (1982–1999), who we also meet under the name of

---

<sup>293</sup> PhDc, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, E-mail contact: [oana.samira.cirlig@gmail.com](mailto:oana.samira.cirlig@gmail.com).

<sup>294</sup> See:

1. Claire Fox, *I find that offensive*, Great Britain, Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2016.
2. Claire Fox, *I still find that offensive*, Great Britain, Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2018.

<sup>295</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, New York, NY Vintage, 2000.

“Generation Me”. The corollary of this term in Romanian is “egocentric generation” or “self-centred”.

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES

### 1. Classic

#### ***1.1. Cooley and Mead – Symbolic interactionism: mirror self and generalized self. From complete personality to disaggregated personality***

Symbolic interactionism is a theory of sociology that addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated interactions between individuals. This perspective emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century from various influences, including Scottish moralist theory and American pragmatist philosophers. The greatest influence was the American philosopher George Herbert Mead (1932)<sup>296</sup>, and his theories of the relationship between the self and society. The emergence of symbolic interactionism was a response to the perspectives on society that dominated sociology at the time. These dominant, positivist approaches tend to examine society from the top down, focusing on the impact of institutions and social structures at the macro level and how they impose themselves on and constrain individuals<sup>297</sup>.

Symbolic interactionism also has its origins in Weberian sociology in that it attaches great importance to the meanings that actors attribute to the actions they perform. In symbolic interactionism, the self is the foundation of social phenomena, and society is a network of intersubjectivities, where each individual “projects his or herself in relation to a symbol and a significant Other”. The self is “causa movens” when it is the product of significant, *i.e.*, internalised, interactions with a significant Other, with the community and with the group<sup>298</sup>.

The great merit of symbolic interactionism lies in the idea that the self, or more precisely the self, is the result of interaction between people. In fact, social space is the result of mental interaction between individuals. These interactions are managed using symbols. Two major contributions of this field are the mirror self (Cooley) and the generalised self (Mead)<sup>299</sup>. The self is an insects image of the self and is made up of

“the image of our appearance at the level of the other; our perception of the others opinion of our image, feelings related to self-perception such as self-esteem (...)”<sup>300</sup>.

---

<sup>296</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Edited by Charles W. Morris, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1932.

<sup>297</sup> Michael J. Carter and Celene Fuller, “Symbolic interactionism”, in *Sociopedia*, 2015, pp. 1–17.

<sup>298</sup> 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, 2007, p. 80.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81.

<sup>300</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order (Revised edition)*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922, p. 184.

The social self is on the one hand ideation and on the other hand social:

“The social self is simply any idea, or ideational system, drawn from everyday interdependence which the mind cherishes as its own”<sup>301</sup>.

Charles Cooley<sup>302</sup> described the idea of the mirror self, which is now an accepted part of modern social psychology and symbolic interaction. This idea contains two fundamental points. Self-awareness involves continuous monitoring of the self from the viewpoint of others. As Cooley put it we “live in the minds of others without knowing it”. Second, living in the minds of others imaginatively causes real and powerful emotions, such as pride or shame<sup>303</sup>.

For Mead, social reality is both a mental product and the result of interactions between people, which are managed with symbols. Therefore, man (the mind) is the result of symbolic interactions. Society is the place where we receive responses from others, responses that are organised according to symbols and that include the perceived attitude of the other towards the social actor<sup>304</sup>. Bearing in mind the interactive nature of the genesis of the self, Mead points out that

“the level of development of the self depends as much on the native sensitivity of the insect as on its ability to perceive its reflections in the Other – the reflective intelligence”<sup>305</sup>.

From this point of view

“the self is simply the organization by the individual organism of the set of attitudes towards its social environment and those directed towards itself as a functional element in the broad framework of the social experience of which it is a part”<sup>306</sup>.

Intelligence, on the other hand, is the ability to solve problems, judging the situation mainly in terms of the possible consequences of adopting a certain behavior. Assessing the situation and determining solutions are based mainly on past experiences. From this perspective, an intelligent person draws on the past, on tradition, which we understand here as “social memory and foresight”<sup>307</sup>. In this sense, reflective intelligence is the foundation of rational thought. For Mead, rationality starts not only from imagination and internalization but also from interaction with the other<sup>308</sup>.

Man is concerned with unity and wholeness. This concern can be seen even at the level of the processes by which the self is constituted. Man is a social and sociable being only because of the social relationship he has with those around him: “The organized community or social group that provides the insect with the unity of the

---

<sup>301</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>303</sup> Thomas J. Scheff, “Looking-Glass Self: Goffman as Symbolic Interactionist”, in *Symbolic Interaction*, 2005, Vol. 28, Issue 2, p. 147.

<sup>304</sup> George Herbert Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 189, quoted by Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>305</sup> Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–84.

<sup>306</sup> George Herbert Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 100, quoted by Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>308</sup> Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

self is called the Generalized Other”<sup>309</sup>. In other words, the self is constructed by “taking the attitudes of others and crystallizing them into a single attitude or reference point that we call the generalized Other”<sup>310</sup>. Therefore, the self emerges through internalization and reflection of the attitudes of those around you. Notions once internalized become “meanings – symbols – realities with unitary meanings for all members of the community”<sup>311</sup>. The ability to operate with essentials is the ability to symbolize. This capacity is an essential process of consciousness and a premise of social interaction<sup>312</sup>.

Given that the self is the result of several social processes, there is a risk that it is an agglomeration of meanings. When these meanings are not unified and internalised, we may face a crisis of personality<sup>313</sup>. Thus

“to have a harmoniously developed personality, the self must be unified. The unification of the self is possible if the personal experiences are unified or is helped to perceive them as such”<sup>314</sup>.

The unified self of Meads’ sociology is

“perhaps the most significant acquisition of interactionism (...) because it warns us, among other things, of the fragility of this noological reality, which is the self and which, Mead observes, can be ‘unravelling’ (...) The unified self is the ‘complete self’, so that we can imagine persons not only with disaggregated selves but also with incomplete selves. This is a disturbing question that was not examined by Mead. However, it has been extensively and profoundly researched by C. Rădulescu Motru in his theory of two types of noological reality: the ‘incomplete’ one (semi-culture) and the ‘clear’ one (pseudo-culture). Semi-culture and pseudo-culture are great problems and dangers of modern societies. Their manifestation can amplify and indefinitely maintain the ills of the social body (‘young societies’)”<sup>315</sup>.

Therefore, the need for the other is a fundamental necessity for the harmonious development of the human personality. In the digital environment, this need is superficially satisfied because you never know exactly who or how the other person is (for example, the photos they post are happy, while their real state is sad). Interaction online is artificial as genuine relationships cannot be created very often. Young people’s disconnection from reality and their predominant, if not exclusive, socialisation online leads to a poorly developed ability to make connections, to memorise information and operate with it, but also to operate with symbols or to think in context, because these are all attributes of face-to-face human interaction. In

---

<sup>309</sup> George Herbert Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47, quoted by Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>312</sup> Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>313</sup> George Herbert Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 144, quoted by *Ibidem*, pp. 85–86.

<sup>314</sup> Radu Baltasiu, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>315</sup> Ilie Bădescu, *Noologia. Cunoașterea ordinii spirituale a lumii. Sistem de sociologie noologică [Noology. Knowledge of the spiritual order of the world. System of sociological noology]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing, 2002, p. 47.

this vein, the risk of those who sail a good part of the day of having an incomplete self is much higher.

In the online environment Mead's "generalised other" is artificial, which is why interaction between people can degrade. Moreover, the "unified self", which we have seen as the foundation of a harmonious personality, is distorted because in the virtual environment, it is much harder to unify experiences or to perceive them in this way. It can be said from a certain point of view that a certain illusion of unifying experiences is created that disappears the moment you are no longer online, hence the need to always be "connected". Moreover, the "mirror of the self" is not real and checking the veracity and distinguishing what is real from what is not can often be impossible, as the idea of control does not exist. Thus, the appearance and perception of the "mirror" is seriously altered. In the virtual environment, the conditions for the development of a disaggregated self are conducive as you only have access to fragments of experiences, only "pieces" of the other, and unification is very difficult, even impossible, to achieve.

### ***1.2. Vilfredo Pareto: the residues of sociability – the nostratic feeling***

Humans are social and sociable beings, which is why we cannot think of human society outside its members, just as man cannot exist outside society. Like the brain, society is a form of social interaction and inter-existence<sup>316</sup>. The human quality of being a social being and the property of society to constitute itself as a form of human interaction is called by Ion Ungureanu sociality<sup>317</sup>. Sociability, on the other hand, can be defined as the ability of a person or group of people to integrate into society<sup>318</sup>. The paradigm of residues of sociability has two major concepts at its core: residue and derivation. Derivation is a pseudological form of feelings, instincts, etc. that cannot be experimentally verified<sup>319</sup>. The residue, on the other hand, is a constant part of the derivations/roots of sociability, which is not seen<sup>320</sup>.

In Pareto's view, disciplined people are sociable beings, as he analyses sociability as a residual form of discipline<sup>321</sup>. Discipline is the source of social order, and order is a need of human collectivities. This is also made possible by nostratic feeling, which is a residue of sociability. This residue faces many challenges in contemporary society because of exacerbated individualism. For Vilfredo Pareto, nostratic feelings are

“(...) the residue that allows individuals to legitimise themselves collectively and thus maximise their personal power. ‘The utility’ for society of this feeling lies in the ‘horizontal’ discipline it imposes on individuals (...)”<sup>322</sup>.

---

<sup>316</sup> Ion Ungureanu, *Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății [Paradigms of Knowledge of Society]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1990, p. 22.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 30–31.

In other words, the source of individual power is collective. Therefore, in order not to be excluded from the collective, the individual obeys the rules of the group, disciplining himself.

Beyond the fact that the sense of us disciplines us, it stores memory, and there is an interdependent relationship between the sense of us, faith, and memory. For example, the “millennial snowflake” generation, with diminished faith and reduced nostalgic feeling, is strongly individualised, forgetting that the world did not begin with them precisely because they have no memory of their ancestors. But because man is a social and sociable being, and therefore cannot live outside the community except in precarious “forms”, as a victim of his own selfishness he “savages” himself, in the sense of aggressiveness. A curious hypostasis: victim and aggressor at the same time.

## 2. Modern

### 2.1. Howard Becker, labeling theory, and William I. Thomas' theorem

Social labeling theory was developed in 1960 by the sociologist Howard Becker. Several authors contributed to its development, including Emil Durkheim and George Herbert Mead, and later Frank Tannenbaum, Edwin Lemert, Albert Memmi, Erving Goffman, and David Matza. Becker's perspective explains the behavior of the deviant. In short, behaviors are considered deviant by those in charge who have the power to define what is and is not deviant. Applying this principle to young people it can be said that they are deviant because they have been labelled. However, this only denotes the weakness of today's young people who lack the strength to prove that what others argue about them is false.

On the other hand, Thomas' Theorem shows us that “if people define a situation as real, that situation is real by the consequences of defining it as real”<sup>323</sup>. With this idea, the American sociologist opposed the idea that the individual is only a social product and stated that he is also a creation of society, in the sense that man is the result of human interaction<sup>324</sup>. Thomas' theory shows that social structures exist because they are subjectively defined by the people who compose them. In this vein, the “millennial snowflake” generation would exist because we relate to them in this way. However, the fragility of the generation is again clear because it lacks the strength to resist labelling. The decrease in individual strength is directly related to the decrease in the sense of the nostratic because, as we have seen, the community is the source of individual strength.

However, studies show that young people believe that labelling themselves as “snowflakes” is damaging to their mental health. According to a survey of 2,022 Britons aged 16 to 24, almost three-quarters of young people in the sample think the label (snowflake) is unfair. The controversial term “snowflake” is also sometimes

---

<sup>323</sup> William I. Thomas, *The unadjusted girl*, Boston, Little Brown, 1923, p. 41.

<sup>324</sup> Ion Ungureanu, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

used to describe young adults. They are often seen as prone to offending and emotionally vulnerable<sup>325</sup>. These thoughts were shared by adults of all ages, with 58% saying the label was unfairly applied, according to the survey. Another 57% felt that the term “snowflake generation” could also be damaging to the mental health of young people. Another survey, published by Aviva, found that young people aged 16–24 years were the most affected by mental health problems. Approximately three in five have suffered from a mental health condition, compared with just under half of adults aged over 24. Approximately 46% of young adults say they have suffered from anxiety in the past 12 months, which is significantly higher than the 35% of adults<sup>326</sup>.

To reduce anxiety and mental disorders, high schools and universities have introduced measures that have created much debate. For example, one study revealed that first-year students are given Paddington Bear-style “safety bracelets” with their address and contact details in case of an emergency. The controversial scheme, implemented in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Exeter, has sparked backlash and been branded “immature” by academics. Oxford University’s principal criticised the “snowflake generation” and urged young students to be stronger. Professor Louise Richardson urged them to challenge views with which they disagree rather than take offense at petty comments<sup>327</sup>.

At a business initiative event called the “European Leaders Roundtable” held in 2018 as part of European Advertising Week, Karen Stacey, Executive Director of DCM, argued that the very term “millennial” prevents leaders from understanding young people entering their businesses. Stacey challenged the “snowflake” stereotype of 18–34-year-olds and said such labels can become self-fulfilling if not challenged early on. “I hate labels because I think they make young people end up becoming those labels”, Stacey said. Stuart Flint, vice president of EMEA at Oath, said many young people conform to the stereotype of having “low motivation and self-esteem” and needing “instant gratification”<sup>328</sup>.

According to labelling theory, the stigma of being labelled mentally ill will make a person mentally ill because of the effects described, functioning as a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to a modified version of the theory, assumptions about causality are omitted and only the negative impact on self-concept is

---

<sup>325</sup> Stephen Matthews, “Labelling millennials ‘snowflakes’ damages their mental health, reveals survey of 16–24 year olds”, December 6, 2017, in *Daily Mail*, Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5151733/Calling-youngsters-snowflakes-damages-mental-health.html>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>328</sup> Alex Brownsell, “Forget ‘generation snowflake’, such labels are an excuse for poor leadership, says DCM chief”, March 19, 2018, in *Campaign Live*, Available at: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/forget-generation-snowflake-labels-excuse-poor-leadership-says-dcm-chief/1459788>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

addressed. This impact is described in later research on stigma and self-stigma. Stigma can have negative consequences on self-concept by decreasing self-efficacy, which fosters dysfunctional coping styles and ultimately reduces quality of life<sup>329</sup>.

The literature argues that labelling has a negative impact on self-concept. Self-concept is defined as everything a person knows and believes about themselves<sup>330</sup>. Two components of self-concept are particularly important: self-esteem (which is the evaluative aspect of self-concept)<sup>331</sup>, and self-efficacy (which is a person's subjective sense of competence – it is the idea that a person can exert control over their environment)<sup>332</sup>. In short, labelling theory describes the negative impact of labelling on self-esteem and self-efficacy<sup>333</sup>.

Sociologist T. J. Scheff says that people internalize stereotypes. For example, if a person is labelled mentally ill, the information once internalised becomes relevant because it dominates the person's self-concept. In other words, you behave as others expect you to behave. According to Scheff, the person has no choice but to act according to these role expectations: he mentally becomes ill<sup>334</sup>.

Two decades later, Link and his collaborators developed a modified version of the labelling theory. The most important difference between the updated version and Scheff's theory was the removal of causality connotations. Thus, the new theory makes no claim that labelling caused mental illness. Link modified Scheff's model and tested it. In Link's model, the negative consequences of labelling are mediated by maladaptive coping responses. People's self-efficacy is affected by the label that has been placed on them. Because people diagnosed with a mental illness expect rejection, Link and his colleagues have argued that they act in a way that fosters rejection, and this rejection affects self-esteem<sup>335</sup>.

In the modified labelling theory, diagnosis is assumed to have a negative influence on self-concept through stigma and stigma expectations. Recently, research has focused more on how these factors affect self-concept. A common expression in the Netherlands is that "it's better to have a broken leg than a depression". People have a hard time understanding mental disorders and do not openly talk about them. Those

---

<sup>329</sup> Joëlle Pasman, "The Consequences of Labeling Mental Illnesses on the Self-concept: A Review of the Literature and Future Directions", in *Social Cosmos Journal*, s.a., p. 122.

<sup>330</sup> Michael Gazzaniga *et al.*, *Psychological Science*, (3rd Ed.), New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2010, Available at: <https://mog.dog/files/Psychological%20Science%20%282015%29%20-%20Michael%20Gazzaniga%20et%20Al.pdf>, Accessed on June 20, 2023.

<sup>331</sup> Richard J. Shavelson and Roger Bolus, "Self-concept: The Interplay of Theory and Methods", in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1982, 74, pp. 3–17.

<sup>332</sup> Albert Bandura, *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*, New York, W. H. Freeman, 1997.

<sup>333</sup> Joëlle Pasman, "The Consequences of Labelling Mental Illnesses on the Self-concept: A Review of the Literature and Future Directions", in *Social Cosmos Journal*, s.a., p. 122.

<sup>334</sup> Thomas J. Scheff, *Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory*, Chicago, Aldine, 1966.

<sup>335</sup> Bruce G. Link *et al.*, "A Modified Labelling Theory Perspective to Mental Disorders: An Empirical Assessment", in *American Sociological Review*, 1989, 54, pp. 400–423.



who are diagnosed with a mental disorder often feel ashamed because of it<sup>336</sup>. According to Corrigan, labelling leads to a sense of “grouping” and “difference”<sup>337</sup>, creates a sense of “us” normal people and “them” mentally ill people<sup>338</sup>.

However, Jean M. Twenge points out that these findings do not “stereotype” generations, because the studies compare empirical data on generational differences, not the perceptions of others. However, these comparisons are based on averages. Not all members of a generation fit the average. However, generational studies are far from unique in this regard: every scientific study that examines differences between groups uses age averages. Sex differences are a good example. Some men cry more than some women, but these exceptions do not undermine the finding that, on average, women cry more often than men. Some GenMe people are extraordinarily humble, but this does not negate the finding that the average GenMe, compared to previous generations of the same age, is less humble. These findings do not seek to label all those of this generation; instead, they seek to uncover how, on average, cultural change has affected young people<sup>339</sup>.

### 3. Contemporary

#### 3.1. Social brain theory

Memory is stored collectively, or a highly individualised human will face cognitive challenges from this point of view (of memory and social intelligence). A national survey by Trending Machine contradicts the generally accepted notion that forgetting comes with age and shows that millennials aged 18–34 forget twice or even three times as much as those 55 and older: they forget what day it is (15% vs. 7%), where they put their keys (14% vs. 8%), to get their lunch (9% vs. 3%) or even to take a bath or shower (6% vs. 2%). Patricia Gutentag, a family and occupational therapist, said forgetfulness is an effect of the high levels of stress experienced by young people<sup>340</sup>. According to a new survey by the American Psychological Association “millennials” are more stressed than any previous generation<sup>341</sup>. The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2020 shows that 44% of millennials worldwide say they

---

<sup>336</sup> Joëlle Pasman, “The Consequences of Labeling Mental Illnesses on the Self-concept: A Review of the Literature and Future Directions”, in *Social Cosmos Journal*, s.a., p. 124.

<sup>337</sup> Patrick W. Corrigan *et al.*, “The Self-stigma of Mental Illness: Implications for Self-esteem and Self-efficacy”, in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2006, 25, pp. 875–884.

<sup>338</sup> Sue R. Noe, “Discrimination Against Individuals With Mental Illness”, in *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 1997, 63, pp. 20–27.

<sup>339</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>340</sup> Shelley Emling, “Study Shows Millennials Are More Forgetful Than Seniors”, August 2, 2013, in *The Huffington Post*, Available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennialforgetfulness\\_n\\_3695512](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennialforgetfulness_n_3695512), Accessed on August 8, 2023.

<sup>341</sup> Michelle Castillo, “Millennials are the most stressed generation, survey finds”, February 11, 2013, in *CBS News*, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/millennialsare-the-most-stressed-generation-survey-finds/>, Accessed on August 13, 2023.

are stressed all the time<sup>342</sup>. Incidentally, UK premium car and courier service Addison Lee surveyed a sample of over 7,000 people and found that “millennials”, not seniors, are the most forgetful generation in the UK: 62% of millennials describe themselves as forgetful, compared to just 43% of over-65s<sup>343</sup>.

Scientists at the US National Institute of Mental Health say that the maturation of the human brain continues until the age of 25, but when it is constantly assaulted by bright screens, the development process is impaired. Brain development varies depending on how it is used. Given that texting and surfing the internet use different parts of the brain than reading or talking, neuroscientists have hypothesized that those parts of the brain not used tend to lose functionality. To this end, researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing have shown that there are changes in the way the prefrontal cortex, cerebellum, and parietal lobe mature, in that their activity is slowed down<sup>344</sup>. In this case, it is no surprise that young people start forgetting things. Moreover, if we add to this the fact that this category of young people gets little sleep and most of the time it is not quality sleep, we can get a more accurate picture of the factors that influence memory.

Robin Dunbar established as long ago as 1998 that regarding cognitive activity, the part of the brain called the neocortex should be closely studied. The neocortex is generally regarded as the seat of cognitive processes associated with reasoning and consciousness. Therefore, careful selection of the activities that this part of the brain performs is needed to improve its activity<sup>345</sup>. This part of the brain correlates positively with the size of the group to which we belong<sup>346</sup>. In other words, the more sociable you are, the more developed your neocortex and the more intense your cognitive activity. The flip side is that the lonelier you are, the lower the activity of the neocortex. A study by the company YouGov, which surveyed more than 1.200 Americans, found that millennials are most likely to report having no close friends (27%), no friends in general (22%), and no acquaintances (25%)<sup>347</sup>. Another study

---

<sup>342</sup> Kelsey Johnson and Nicole Dienst, “Young people are stressed out all over the world, but don’t blame the pandemic”, June 25, 2020, in *CNBC*, Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/25/young-people-stressed-all-over-world-but-dont-blame-coronavirus.html>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>343</sup> Lisa Baker, “Tech-Savvy Millennials are ‘the most forgetful generation in the UK’”, August 8, 2018, in *Well Being News*, Available at: <https://wellbeingnews.co.uk/unusual-news/tech-savvy-millennials-are-the-most-forgetful-generation-in-the-uk/>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>344</sup> Elaina Zachos, “Technology is changing the Millennial brain”, November 14, 2015, in *Public Sources*, Available at: <https://www.publicsource.org/technology-is-changing-the-millennial-brain/>, Accessed on August 13, 2023.

<sup>345</sup> Robin I. M. Dunbar, “The Social Brain Hypothesis”, in *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, Vol. 6, Issue 5, 1998, p. 180.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 181.

<sup>347</sup> 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 August 3, 2023.

conducted in 2019 by one of the leading market research companies, Ipsos (at the request of Cigna – one of the largest health insurance companies in the world), on a sample of 10,400 subjects in America concluded that at that time, three out of five Americans (*i.e.*, 61%) indicated that they were single. In fact, while 50% of baby boomers said they were lonely, 71% of millennials said they were lonely<sup>348</sup>.

The social brain hypothesis shows that group size depends on information processing capacity, a function for which the neocortex is responsible. Group size is influenced by at least five factors: the ability to recognise and interpret visual cues, limited face recognition memory, the ability to remember who is related to whom, the ability to manipulate information about a set of relationships and the ability to emotionally process affective information. These aspects are essential in the processing of information by the cognitive mechanism<sup>349</sup>. Memory imposes a kind of upper limit on the number of relations a being can have for at least three reasons. First, at least in humans, the memory of faces is larger than that of the predicted cognitive group. Humans are said to be able to attach names to approximately 000 faces, but they have a cognitive group size of only about 150. Second, it is not memory per se that is the problem, but the ability to operate with the information you have memorized, since the social brain hypothesis is about the ability to manipulate information, not simply to remember it. Third, and perhaps most significantly, memories seem to be stored primarily in the temporal lobes, whereas recent memories are stored in the prefrontal neocortex, which is responsible for social skills<sup>350</sup>.

The size of the neocortex or social brain is directly determined by the socialization process:

“This suggests that what is most important in the development of a large neocortex in primates is not the embryological development of brain tissue per se, which is mainly associated with gestation duration, but rather the ‘software programming’ that occurs during socialization, of social learning between weaning and adulthood”<sup>351</sup>.

Therefore, the social brain is conditioned by the maximum number of relationships we have with others. From this perspective, communication is the source of our social intelligence. Dunbar mentioned in his paper that the maximum number of people we can interact with on a constant basis is approximately. This number is related to the idea of intentionality, a term used in the philosophy of mind to distinguish between communication as information and conscious communication with meaning and depth. Computers, for example, communicate without being aware

---

<sup>348</sup> 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 August 1, 2023.

<sup>349</sup> Robin I. M. Dunbar, “The Social Brain Hypothesis”, in *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, Volume 6, Issue 5, 1998, p. 184.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185.

that they are doing so, which is why their level of intensionality is non-existent, whereas humans reach level IV of intensionality<sup>352</sup>.

Social brain theory shows that the size of the neocortex is influenced by the ability to make connections. In this endeavour, interpersonal relationships are vital because the more intense they are, the stronger the cognitive capacities of this part of the brain. In this sense, the tendency to be insular decreases mental capacity because mental connections mirror social connections. A Forbs analysis showed that more than 70% of 16–24-year-olds feel lonely<sup>353</sup>. In Romania, in mirror with these figures of insingestion, we can put the percentages of what specialists have called functional illiteracy, which are estimated at over 50%, where functional illiteracy means the inability to retain information or to make connections between the data you have memorized<sup>354</sup>. Therefore, we see that an inability to interact socially leads to an inability to make neural connections.

Therefore, the “millennial snowflake” generation is a category of young people who become victims of their own loneliness. Loneliness has particularly serious effects as it is directly linked to both the soul, the most important of which is faith, and cognitive aspects, the most important being intelligence and memory. The lonely young person behaves like a victim because he feels vulnerable; hence, his almost permanent need for protection is expressed in the appearance of “safe spaces”. Vulnerability is a result of being removed from the community. Victimization is all the greater the more developed the ego because the distance from the collective increases and the sense of ourselves decreases, or we have seen that the source of individual power is collective.

### 3.2. *Life history theory and slow maturation theory*

Jean M. Twenge draws from life history theory in the book *The Internet Generation, or iGen: why today’s children, teenagers, and young people are less rebellious, somewhat more tolerant, definitely less happy, and hardly ready for adulthood, a new perspective on young people (both “millennials” – those born between 1980–2000, and “iGen” – those born after 2000)* by stating that teenagers have adopted a slow life strategy<sup>355</sup>.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 188.

<sup>353</sup> Diana Zlătescu, „73% dintre tinerii generației Z suferă de singurătate. Ce spun experții” [“73% of Generation Z youth suffer from loneliness. What experts say”], August 4, 2023, in *Aleph News*, Available at: <https://alephnews.ro/lifestyle/73-dintre-tinerii-generatiei-z-sufer-a-singuratate-ce-spun-expertii/>, Accessed on August 3, 2023.

<sup>354</sup> Dacian Dolean, „Analfabetismul funcțional din România depășește 50% și aceasta nu este cea mai mare problemă a sistemului educațional din România”, [“Functional illiteracy in Romania exceeds 50% and this is not the biggest problem of the Romanian education system”], October 23, 2021, in *Edu Pedu*, Available at: <https://www.edupedu.ro/analfabetismul-funcional-din-romania-depaseste-50-si-aceasta-nu-este-cea-mai-mare-problema-a-sistemului-educational-din-romania-cercetatorul-dacian-dolean/>, Accessed on August 22, 2023.

<sup>355</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generația internetului, sau iGen: de ce copiii, adolescenții și tinerii din zilele noastre sunt mai puțin rebeli, ceva mai toleranți, categoric mai rar fericiți și aproape deloc pregătiți pentru maturitate*, [*The Internet Generation, or iGen: why today’s children, teenagers and*

Life history theory tells us that individuals mature according to where and when they live. Thus, the speed of maturation depends on the socio-historical context through which the person is passing. Academically speaking, “speed of development is a process of adaptation to cultural context”<sup>356</sup>. The second maturation strategy that this theory encompasses refers to the fast life strategy, which involves large families and biological survival over quality of life. In other words, this strategy emphasizes the idea of subsistence rather than preparing for the future<sup>357</sup>.

As a proof of the above, some statistics show that young people are postponing activities that used to be typical for adults: young people of the “iGen” generation hardly go out without their parents. However, this trend started with the “millennials” and has become more pronounced among young people born after 2000. For example, students who were in grade 12 in high school in 2015 were less likely to go out than were grade 8 students just six years earlier, in 2009. In other words, 18-year-olds were exiting less in 2015 than 14-year-olds<sup>358</sup>. Moreover, the young people of the two above-mentioned generations go out less often than their predecessors. Only half of high school seniors go out on dates. By comparison, in the early 1990s, 3 out of 4 Year 10 students sometimes went out on dates; in 2010, however, only half of them still did<sup>359</sup>. Moreover, in 2015, compared with 1991, the number of teenagers in grade 12 who had sexual intercourse was 15% lower<sup>360</sup>. Having a driving licence is another indication of the trend towards “maturing”. Statistics show that while almost all baby boomers had a driving licence in their last year of high school, in 2015, only about 70% had obtained a driving licence<sup>361</sup>.

This generation tends to wait longer to marry and start a family than previous generations, which can have both positive and negative effects. In fact, they wait until later to take out home mortgages and other loans. Living longer with parents and being reluctant to marry may be an economically wise choice, but it may also reflect a fear of obligations and responsibilities or a desire to keep all options open. Many “millennials” exhibit dependence on their parents, which can delay the maturation milestones associated with financial independence<sup>362</sup>.

Therefore, the chances of snowflake millennials going out without parents, having a driver’s license, dating or having sex, and consuming alcohol are lower than those of previous generations. These activities are associated with the idea of

---

*young people are less rebellious, somewhat more tolerant, definitely less happy and hardly ready for adulthood*], translation by Loredana Bucuroaia, Bucharest, Baroque & Arts Publishing, 2020, p. 59.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>362</sup> Jim Raymo and Judy Raymo, *Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge*, William Carey Library, 2014, p. 126, e-book, Available at: <https://ro.scribd.com/read/566434256/Millennials-and-Mission-A-Generation-Faces-a-Global-Challenge>, Accessed on June 12, 2023.

maturity, which is postponed as long as possible by these young people. In this case, 18-year-olds behave like 14-year-olds and 14-year-olds behave like 12-year-olds<sup>363</sup>. Starting with the “millennial generation” and continuing with the “iGen” the teenage period has shrunk considerably. Thus, childhood has taken on new dimensions. Because they are treated like children, teenagers behave like children, losing their independence and almost permanently orbiting their parents. The whole journey from childhood to adolescence and then to adulthood has slowed down. Eighteen-year-olds no longer want to spend their time as adults, but are inclined to be treated like children, not because they are immature and put off adult activities. This behavior shows that adolescence is no longer the beginning of adulthood<sup>364</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

From a theoretical point of view, the classical sociological perspective, constituted in our case by two of the leading representatives of symbolic interactionism, Mead through the idea of the generalized other and Cooley through the concept of the mirror self, explains that the self is the result of social interaction. Construction and monitoring of the self is achieved through meaningful interactions with the other. The appropriately socialized self is a unified self. In the absence of interaction with the other, the self can remain disaggregated and incomplete. In other words, the need for the other is fundamental to the harmonious development of the human personality, and this need is satisfied through meaningful interaction, which often occurs face-to-face. From this perspective, interaction in the online environment does not adequately satisfy this need, which is why the development of the self is disrupted. Vilfredo Pareto reinforces this idea through the residue of sociability called the nostratic feeling, which shows us that an incomplete self arises in the absence of integration in society because the source of individual power is collective. Thus, young people of the “millennial snowflake” generation also need in-person interactions to develop harmoniously.

The modern perspective on this generation questions the influence that labelling has on the individual and their ability to fight stereotypes and prejudices. More than half of the young people in this generation claim that the label “snowflake”, which denotes their overdeveloped sensitivity, affects their mental health. However, these figures may also show the weakness of this generation in fighting stereotypes. There are several reasons for this weakness, including the fact that the process of unifying the self is not yet complete and is also disrupted by the long time spent in the virtual environment. Moreover, labelling directly influences self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy as people internalise stereotypes. This brings us back to the exercise of argument and counter-argument that the emergence of

---

<sup>363</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2020, p. 56.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 57–58.

“safe spaces” jeopardises. A person who does not exercise this ability to constructively discuss in adversarial debate will be seriously affected by the stereotypes and prejudices that have arisen around the generation to which they belong, whereas one who possesses this ability will find the strength to fight against them and, if not, to prove the contrary.

Last but not least, the contemporary perspective on this generation reiterates the importance of social interaction in the development of cognitive abilities. Dunbar demonstrated that the size of the neocortex, or social brain, is directly determined by the socialization process. Interpersonal relationships are vital because the more intense they are, the more the cognitive capacities of this part of the brain develop. In this sense, the tendency to be insular decreases mental capacity because mental connections mirror social connections. Slow maturation theory, on the other hand, explains the strategy adopted by young people of this generation because of the culture of abundance that is typical of a consumerist society. They delay the idea of maturity, gradually abandoning what was once considered the affirmation of freedom and the acquisition of independence.

## REFERENCES

- Bădescu Ilie, *Noologia. Cunoașterea ordinii spirituale a lumii. Sistem de sociologie noologică [Noology. Knowledge of the spiritual order of the world. System of sociological noology]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing, 2002.
- Baker Lisa, “Tech- Savvy Millennials are ‘the most forgetful generation in the UK’”, August 8, 2018, in *Well Being News*, Available at: <https://wellbeingnews.co.uk/unusual-news/tech-savvy-millennials-are-the-most-forgetful-generation-in-the-uk/>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.
- Baltasiu Radu, *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, 2007.
- Bandura Albert, *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*, New York, W. H. Freeman, 1997.
- Brownsell Alex, “Forget ‘generation snowflake’, such labels are an excuse for poor leadership, says DCM chief”, March 19, 2018, in *Campaign Live*, Available at: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/forget-generation-snowflake-labels-excuse-poor-leadership-says-dcm-chief/1459788>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.
- Carter J. Michael and Fuller Celene, “Symbolic interactionism”, in *Sociopedia*, 2015, pp. 1–17.
- Castillo Michelle, “Millennials are the most stressed generation, survey finds”, February 11, 2013, in *CBS News*, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/millennials-are-the-most-stressed-generation-survey-finds/>, Accessed on August 13, 2023.
- 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 August 1, 2023.
- Cooley Charles Horton, *Human Nature and the Social Order (Revised edition)*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922.
- Corrigan W. Patrick, Watson C. Amy and Barr Leah, “The Self-stigma of Mental Illness: Implications for Self-esteem and Self-efficacy”, in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2006, 25, pp. 875–884.
- Dolean Dacian, „Analfabetismul funcțional din România depășește 50% și aceasta nu este cea mai mare problemă a sistemului educațional din România” [“Functional illiteracy in Romania exceeds

- 50% and this is not the biggest problem of the Romanian education system”], October 23, 2021, in *Edu Pedu*, Available at: <https://www.edupedu.ro/analfabetismul-funcional-din-romania-depaseste-50-si-aceasta-nu-este-cea-mai-mare-problema-a-sistemului-educational-din-romania-cercetatorul-dacian-dolean/>, Accessed on August 22, 2023.
- Dunbar I. M. Robin, “The Social Brain Hypothesis”, in *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, Vol. 6, Issue 5, 1998, pp. 178–190.
- Emling Shelley, “Study Shows Millennials Are More Forgetful Than Seniors”, August 2, 2013, in *The Huffington Post*, Available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennial-forgetfulness\\_n\\_3695512](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennial-forgetfulness_n_3695512), Accessed on August 8, 2023.
- Fisher Caitlin, *The Gaslighting of the Millennial Generation. How to Succeed in a Society That Blames You for Everything Gone Wrong*, Mango Publishing, 2019, e-book, Available at: <https://ro.scribd.com/book/489771198/The-Gaslighting-of-the-Millennial-Generation-How-to-Succeed-in-a-Society-That-Blames-You-for-Everything-Gone-Wrong>, Accessed on June 20, 2023.
- Fox Claire, *I find that offensive*, Great Britain, Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2016.
- Fox Claire, *I still find that offensive*, Great Britain, Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2018.
- Gazzaniga Michael, Heatherton Todd and Halpern Diane, *Psychological Science*, (3rd Ed.), New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2010, Available at: <https://mog.dog/files/Psychological%20Science%20%282015%29%20-%20Michael%20Gazzaniga%20et%20Al.pdf>, Accessed on June 20, 2023.
- Howe Neil and Strauss William, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, New York, NY Vintage, 2000.
- Johnson Kelsey and Dienst Nicole, “Young people are stressed out all over the world, but don’t blame the pandemic”, June 25, 2020, in *CNBC*, Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/25/youngpeople-stressed-all-over-world-but-dont-blame-coronavirus.html>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.
- Link G. Bruce, Struening Elmer, Cullen T. Francis, Shrout E. Patrik and Dohrenwend P. Bruce, “A Modified Labeling Theory Perspective to Mental Disorders: An Empirical Assessment”, in *American Sociological Review*, 1989, 54, pp. 400–423.
- Matthews Stephen, “Labelling millennials ‘snowflakes’ damages their mental health, reveals survey of 16–24 year olds”, December 6, 2017, in *Daily Mail*, Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5151733/Calling-youngsters-snowflakes-damages-mental-health.html>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.
- Mead George Herbert, *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Edited by Morris W. Charles, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1932.
- Noe R. Sue, “Discrimination Against Individuals With Mental Illness”, in *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 1997, 63, pp. 20–27.
- Pasman Joëlle, “The Consequences of Labeling Mental Illnesses on the Self-concept: A Review of the Literature and Future Directions”, in *Social Cosmos Journal*, s.a., pp. 122–126.
- Raymo Jim and Raymo Judy, *Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge*, William Carey Library, 2014, e-book, Available at: <https://ro.scribd.com/read/566434256/Millennials-and-Mission-A-Generation-Faces-a-Global-Challenge>, Accessed on June 12, 2023.
- Scheff J. Thomas, *Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory*, Chicago, Aldine, 1966.
- Scheff J. Thomas, “Looking-Glass Self: Goffman as Symbolic Interactionist”, in *Symbolic Interaction*, 2005, Vol. 28, Issue 2, pp. 147–166.
- Shavelson J. Richard and Bolus Roger, “Self-concept: The Interplay of Theory and Methods”, in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1982, 74, pp. 3–17.
- Thomas I. William, *The unadjusted girl*, Boston, Little Brown, 1923.
- Twenge M. Jean, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, Atria Book, 2006, e-book, Available at: <https://ro.scribd.com/book/225091623/Generation-Me-Revised-and-Updated-Why-Today-s-Young-Americans-Are-More-Confident-Assertive-Entitled-and-More-Miserable-Than-Ever-Before>, Accessed on February 11, 2023.



- 
- Twenge M. Jean, *Generația internetului, sau iGen: de ce copiii, adolescenții și tinerii din zilele noastre sunt mai puțini rebeli, ceva mai toleranți, categoric mai rar fericiți și aproape deloc pregătiți pentru maturitate*, [*The Internet Generation, or iGen: why today's children, teenagers and young people are less rebellious, somewhat more tolerant, definitely less happy and hardly ready for adulthood*], translation by Loredana Bucuroaia, Bucharest, Baroque & Arts Publishing, 2020.
- Ungureanu Ion, *Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății [Paradigms of Knowledge of Society]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1990.
- Zachos Elaina, "Technology is changing the Millennial brain", November 14, 2015, in *Public Sources*, Available at: <https://www.publicsource.org/technology-is-changing-the-millennial-brain/>, Accessed on August 13, 2023.
- Zetlin Minda, "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 August 3, 2023.
- Zlătescu Diana, „73% dintre tinerii generației Z suferă de singurătate. Ce spun experții” [“73% of Generation Z youth suffer from loneliness. What experts say”], August 4, 2023, in *Aleph News*, Available at: <https://alephnews.ro/lifestyle/73-dintre-tinerii-generatiei-z-sufera-de-singuratate-ce-spun-expertii/>, Accessed on August 3, 2023.