

## DISCOURSE AND COUNTER-DISCOURSE ON THE “SNOWFLAKE-MILLENNIAL”/ “ME GENERATION”/ “EGOCENTRIC GENERATION”

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### ABSTRACT

*This material deals with the topic of the “millennial snowflake” generation, whose corollary in Romanian is “egocentric generation”. Specialized studies characterize them as lonely, hypersensitive, and fearful. In this article, I trace the lines of discourse and counter-discourse, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. The aim is to establish whether and to what extent the traits of this generation, are closer to the area of advantages or disadvantages.*

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

### INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a complementary approach to the discourse on “snowflake generation”. The term “snowflake generation” was originally used to refer to “millennials” or “generation y”, *i.e.*, those born between 1980–2000<sup>228</sup>, but later included “generation z”, or those born after 2000. Thus, we note that this paper refers to the category of young people born between 1980 and 2000, which we will understand at the conceptual end of “snowflake millennial” or “egocentric generation” (“snowflake” from Claire Fox, 2016 and 2018, and “millennials” from Neil Howe and William Strauss, 2000). In the recent literature, which appeared around 2010, this category of young people is also encountered as “GenMe” or “generation me”<sup>229</sup>. To temporally separate the generational categories I will be working with, I have used the most common division: Baby Boomers (circa 1943–1960), Generation X (1961–1981) and Millennials (1982–1999), who we also refer

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<sup>228</sup> Caitlin Fisher, *The Gaslighting of the Millennial Generation. How to Succeed in a Society That Blames You for Everything Gone Wrong*, Mango Publishing, p. 15, 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.

<sup>229</sup> Marie J. Twenge, *Generation Me – Revised and Updated: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, Atria Book, 2006, p. 22, 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.

to as “Generation Me”<sup>230</sup>. The corollary of this term in Romanian is the “egocentric” or “self-centred” generation.

In this paper, we address both the positive and critical aspects of these young people to obtain a more complete picture of how the public discourse around this generation is shaping up. It is well known that the most frequent remarks made about them refer to their individualism, which is exacerbated to the point of selfishness, and to their hypersensitive nature. These traits can be explained by the breakdown of community that has occurred in modern societies. At that time, the focus shifted from the collective to the individual. Thus, the individual becomes the centre of his own existence, giving up the idea of the other and even more the idea of sacrifice for the other.

Military service is a good example of self-sacrifice, duty, and collectivism. Pew Center data shows that this generation’s young people are 3 to 7 times less likely to join the military than previous generations: 2% of GenMe served in the military, compared to 6% of Gen X and 13% of Boomers. Department of Defence surveys of 16-to 24-year-olds show that the number of those considering joining the military has dropped considerably: 18% expressed interest in 2010, down from 26% in 1986. In a nationally representative sample of high school students, 2 of 3 (67%) said they “definitely will not join the military” in 2012, compared with 57% in 1976<sup>231</sup>. So, what we have here is a generation that has focused almost exclusively on itself. What we aim to do with this material is to identify the positive aspects of this reality. These aspects will be identified by drawing on the discourse and, where appropriate, the counter-discourse that has emerged around this generation.

### **DISCOURSE AND COUNTER-DISCOURSE ON THE “SNOWFLAKE-MILLENNIAL”**

Generalisations about “snowflake millennials” suffer the same fate as any generalisation: as soon as one is made, an exception appears. Therefore, conclusions about this group will not necessarily apply to every individual in the group. Young people born between 1980 and 2000 have mixed strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, in response to Joel Stein’s famous 2013 Time magazine article “Millennials are the ‘ME ME ME GENERATION’” which has generated much debate in the US and beyond about “millennials”, Elspeth Reeve makes a point that we agree with, namely that each generation has been the “me generation” in its own time<sup>232</sup>.

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>232</sup> Elspeth Reeve, “Every Every Every Generation Has Been the Me Me Me Generation”, May 9, 2013, in *The Atlantic*, Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/05/me-generation-time/315151/>, Accessed on May 15, 2023.

### **1. Trust versus vulnerability. From “safe spaces” to “brave spaces” and “community of dialog”**

Young people who fall into the category we call the “millennial snowflake” are, unlike previous generations, much more confident, which is beneficial as this is correlated by experts with the idea of success. “GenMe” high school students anticipate being great employees in the future: 68% of 2012 high school students said they will be “very good” as an employee (the highest percentage), compared to only 57% of high school students in the “Boomer” generation in 1976; 58% of 2012 students think they will be a “very good” spouse, compared to 41% in 1976; 59% are sure they will be a “very good” parent, compared to only 38% who were so sure in 1976. Twice as many high school students said in 2012, compared to their 1976 counterparts, that they are “completely” satisfied with themselves<sup>233</sup>. According to a study comparing over 11,000 teenagers aged 14 to 16 who completed a questionnaire in 1951 or 1989, out of over 400 items, the one that showed the greatest change over time was “I am a big person”. Only 12% of teenagers agreed with this statement in the 1950s, but by the late 1980s, more than 80% of girls and 77% of boys said they were important<sup>234</sup>.

The self-confidence of this generation is also evident when they compare themselves with those around them. Both high school and college students are more likely to believe that they are superior to their peers. When asked to compare themselves to others of their own age, 61% of 2012 GenMe college students said they were above average in terms of their ability to lead, compared to 41% of college students in 1966 (“Boomer generation”), and 76% considered themselves superior in terms of their desire to succeed in life, compared to 60% in 1966. 58% considered themselves above average in terms of intellectual ability, compared to only 39% in 1966, even though students in the 1960s scored higher on SAT intelligence tests<sup>235</sup>.

After 1980, with the last wave of Gen Xers, children’s self-esteem began to rise. Increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s, children said they were satisfied with themselves. They agreed that they “are easy to like” and “always do the right thing”<sup>236</sup>. In an analysis of the self-esteem self-assessments of 10,119 middle school students, 80% of “GenMe” students (in 2007) scored higher on self-esteem than their “Gen X” counterparts in 1988 (Ibid, p. 99). In a CBS News survey, high school graduates in 2000 (the first wave of “GenMe”) were asked: “What makes your generation feel positive about yourself?” The most popular response, at 33%, was the answer “self-esteem”<sup>237</sup>.

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<sup>233</sup> Marie J. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 96.

<sup>234</sup> Marie J. Twenge and Keith W. Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, Atria Books, 2009, p. 48, e- book, Available at: <https://ro.scribd.com/book/224283075/The-Narcissism-Epidemic-Living-in-the-Age-of-Entitlement>, Accessed on February 18, 2023.

<sup>235</sup> Marie J. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2006, pp. 96–97.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 109.

Increased self-confidence is an advantage validated by several researchers. Jean M. Twenge points out that it must be connected to reality, lest we end up in a situation where our expectations are unattainable. In a 2008 survey, 66% of university students agreed that “if I explained to my professor that I was trying hard, I think he or she should take my grade into account”. A third agreed that “if I have attended most of the classes for a course, I deserve at least a B grade”, 30% said that “professors who don’t let me take an exam at a different time because of my personal plans (e.g., a vacation or other trip that is important to me) are too strict”, and 32% complained that “professors often give me lower grades than I deserve on paperwork”. A LexisNexis search of the print media shows a six-fold increase from 1996 to 2006 in terms connected to a sense of entitlement<sup>238</sup>. There were some early indications that narcissism might be on the rise. The risk of turning from a confident person into a narcissistic one (narcissism, which Twenge considers the dark side of self-esteem) stems from not anchoring one’s desires in reality. In the early 1950s, only 12% of adolescents aged 14 to 16 agreed with the statement “I am an important person”. By the late 1980s, the percentage had risen to approximately 80%, which was almost seven times higher<sup>239</sup>.

When young people’s self-confidence is contradicted by the reality around them, they perceive the situation as aggressive toward them. Therefore, they feel the need to be protected from what they call “hate speech”, thus being the initiators of what has become, at least in the US, a real “safe spaces” movement. The exact origins of safe space movement are not known<sup>240</sup>. However, there is a view that it dates back to the 1940s, when corporations began requiring “awareness training” for their executives. Psychologist Vaughan Bell says it was psychosociologist Kurt Lewin who helped theorise the concept of safe spaces. According to Bell, Lewin’s workshops are based on the fundamental belief that honesty and change can only occur if people are honest and challenge others in a psychologically safe environment<sup>241</sup>.

A more widely held view is that the “safe spaces” movement is rooted in three other earlier activist movements: the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the black student activist movement on campuses around the same time<sup>242</sup>, and the LGBT movement of the early 1990s<sup>243</sup>. These movements have arisen because students have sought places where they feel “safe” when expressing views that are not in line with

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibidem*, 118.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

<sup>240</sup> Vinay Harpalani, “‘Safe Spaces’ and the Educational Benefits of Diversity”, in *DUKE J. CONST. L. & PUB. POL’Y* 117, 2017, pp. 126–127.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>243</sup> Michael Gold, “The ABCs of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+”, June 7, 2019, in *N.Y. TIMES*, Available at: <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2018%20/06/21/style/lgbtq-gender-language.html>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

the officially accepted discourse of the universities they study at<sup>244</sup>. In response to this growing demand, many high schools and universities have created centers dedicated to specific racial and ethnic minority groups, women, and, later, LGBTQIA+ students<sup>245</sup>. Eventually, these centers became known as “safe spaces”<sup>246</sup>.

In recent years, the term has been used mainly in higher education, after “safe space policies” were adopted in many universities to prevent discrimination, harassment, hate, and threats. The historical context of the concept is to protect marginalised groups from violations, threats and hatred and to provide them with a safe space. When the concept was transferred to school classrooms, its meaning partially changed because the framework and goals of cohabitation were different. In short, “safe space” in this educational setting refers to classrooms where students can speak freely without fear of their peers or teachers. On the one hand, “safe spaces” must be open enough to include all kinds of perspectives and positions from students. However, this “openness” must be structured with rules that everyone can agree to, so that the exchange of ideas is “safe” for both pupils and teachers<sup>247</sup>.

The emergence of “safe spaces” although initially well-intentioned, has subsequently created a climate of censorship. Intended as an inclusive space, they eventually become a means of promoting ideas that are perceived as correct. What is noticeable from this point of view is that although they militate against censorship, they end up becoming a means of propagating it. In other words, individuals end up offending the so-called protectors of freedom of expression simply because they express their opinions. In the book *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and non-religious world views in Intercultural Education*, published in 2014, “safe spaces” are defined as places where “students can express their views and positions openly, even if they differ from those of the teacher or their peers”<sup>248</sup>. This type of space becomes an essential precondition for exploring diversity. This ensures that students have the right to participate in open discussion and dialog. Developing and maintaining a “safe space” in educational environments depends on a few basic rules that all participants must accept<sup>249</sup>. These basic rules include using appropriate language, condemning “hate speech”, taking turns expressing points of view, respecting others’ right to hold different positions, the right to challenge the ideas expressed by others, and encouraging students to give reasons for their arguments<sup>250</sup>.

<sup>244</sup> Vinay Harpalani, “‘Safe Spaces’ and the Educational Benefits of Diversity”, in *DUKE J. CONST. L. & PUB. POL’Y* 117, 2017, p. 126.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 125–126.

<sup>246</sup> Leah Shafer, “More Than Safe. Creating a school where LGBTQ students thrive”, October 25, 2016, Available at: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/16/10/more-safe>, Accessed on May 15, 2023.

<sup>247</sup> Karin K. Flensner and Marie Von der Lippe, “Being safe from what and safe for whom? A critical discussion of the conceptual metaphor of ‘safe space’”, in *Intercultural Education*, 2019, 30:3, p. 276.

<sup>248</sup> Robert Jackson, *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 2014, p. 48.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.

In higher education, mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom, the emergence of “safe spaces” is a challenge for the educational space, as professors find themselves having to inform students in advance what topics they are going to tackle in class to avoid triggering traumas from the past. In other words, teachers must ensure a comfortable climate during their lessons. Boostrom argued in 1998 that education should not be safe and comfortable. On the contrary, students must be criticised and challenged to strengthen their own convictions but above all to prepare them for real life<sup>251</sup>. To develop critical thinking, imagination, and the ability to make individual decisions, Boostrom says students need to be exposed to viewpoints and positions that differ from their initial beliefs because this is how they will hone their skills in handling the stressful situations they encounter in life. Teachers play a crucial role in this equation because they are there to manage conflict and not to prohibit it. Boostrom sees the idea of a “safe space” as an obstacle to education in this respect<sup>252</sup>.

Barrett also argues that student and teacher interactions should be civil, but unobstructed by unnecessary conditions aimed at providing a “safe space”. She argues that students need to be challenged to develop critical thinking and that safe spaces are counterproductive because they provide students with expectations of safety and comfort that otherwise cannot be met<sup>253</sup>. She argues that providing safe spaces for students, especially minority groups and marginalised students, is not recommended because it over-sensitises young people. This sensitization can even be a danger for them because expectations cannot be met objectively speaking<sup>254</sup>. According to Barrett, there is an inherent ambiguity in the concept of safety, and it is not possible for teachers to be sure that what they perceive as a safe classroom is felt to be safe for all students. Instead, she suggests that common sense and seven years at home should be the foundation of classroom interactions. Therefore, the author distinguishes very clearly between the “safe classroom” and the “civilized classroom”, pointing out that a civilized classroom maintains a balance of discussion without restricting it in any way<sup>255</sup>.

Callan argues that the “intellectual safety” that “safe spaces” create is at odds with the purpose of education. According to him, quality education requires teaching that makes students intellectually insecure. The author points out that challenging young people to think outside their own convictions in no way jeopardises the intellectual quality of discussions, nor does it damage the act of education<sup>256</sup>. In this

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<sup>251</sup> Robert Boostrom, “‘Safe Spaces’: Reflections on an Educational Metaphor”, in *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1998, 30 (4), p. 405.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 407.

<sup>253</sup> Betty J. Barrett, “Is ‘Safety’ Dangerous? A Critical Examination of the Classroom as Safe Space.”, in *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 2010, 1 (1), p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>256</sup> Eamonn Callan, “Education in Safe and Unsafe Spaces”, in *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 2016, 24 (1), p. 65.

sense, education, based on the principles of free expression of opinion, cannot harm any participant. Education is thus an active factor in eliminating stereotypes and prejudices and not a vector for their propagation. Ensuring dignity does not mean never encountering facts, ideas, or opinions that students consider wrong or offensive. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right in a democratic society, and within the institutional framework of public education, both students and teachers are entitled to benefit from these premises<sup>257</sup>.

Building on Boostrom's idea that it takes courage to let go of old ideas and inspired by the concept of "courageous conversations", Arao and Clemens developed the notion of "courageous space". Instead of giving students false ideas about safety, they argue that authentic learning about diversity and social justice requires students and teachers to be willing to take risks<sup>258</sup>. To prepare students to engage in challenging discussions and participate in their own learning processes, the conceptual shift from "safe space" to "brave space" may prove useful. Establishing "brave spaces" requires participants to be willing to go beyond their comfort zones to explore the issues at stake<sup>259</sup>.

Iversen proposes replacing "safe space" with the concept of "communities of dissent". A community of disagreement is defined as "a group with identity claims, made up of people with different opinions, who find themselves engaged in a common process in order to solve common problems or challenges"<sup>260</sup>. According to Iversen, a classroom defined as a "community of disagreement" can direct both teachers' and students' attention "to how these disagreements can be addressed, or even developed and transformed into learning"<sup>261</sup>. Iversen's "community of disagreement" has much in common with Bost Room's concepts of "classroom as agora" and "classroom as congress". Consistent with the concept of "brave space", these concepts share the idea that the classroom should be a place where students are intellectually challenged, where they try different perspectives and positions, where they dare to see things in new ways, and where they can eventually be transformed by learning processes. The concepts of "brave space" and "classroom of disagreement" allude to courage, boldness, and controversy, factors that are elementary in the teaching-learning process<sup>262</sup>.

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<sup>257</sup> Karin K. Flensner and Marie Von der Lippe, "Being safe from what and safe for whom? A critical discussion of the conceptual metaphor of 'safe space'", in *Intercultural Education*, 2019, 30:3, p. 279.

<sup>258</sup> Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice", in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, edited by Lisa M. Landreman, 2013, p. 139.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 143.

<sup>260</sup> Lars L. Iversen, "From Safe Spaces to Communities of Disagreement", in *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2018, p. 10.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>262</sup> Karin K. Flensner and Marie Von der Lippe, "Being safe from what and safe for whom? A critical discussion of the conceptual metaphor of 'safe space'", in *Intercultural Education*, 2019, 30:3, p. 284.

## 2. Tolerance as a form of social inclusion *versus* disregard as evidence of distancing from the community

Another aspect that differentiates the “snowflake millennials” from previous generations is that they are much more open to what they do not know and are more tolerant of issues that their “forefathers” used to consider “sensitive”. A survey by the Pew Research Center found that 47% of young people who are part of the “millennial generation” believe that allowing same-sex marriage is a good thing for our society. By comparison, only a third of “generation x” and about a quarter of “generation boomers” (27%) say that this is a good thing<sup>263</sup>.

In 2012, 93% of Americans who made up the “me generation” agreed with the statement, “I think it’s okay for blacks and whites to date each other”. The percentage of those who believed this in 1987 was 48%, or nearly half. Moreover, 60% of 20-year-olds said they had dated someone of a different race or ethnicity. On the other hand, in 2009, only 36% of “Generation Boomers” said that having more people of different races marry each other was a change for the better, compared to 60% of “GenMe”. Asked if they would accept someone in their family marrying someone of a different ethnicity/race, 55% of Boomers said yes, compared to 85% of “GenMe”<sup>264</sup>. In another survey, only 10% of young whites said marrying someone from their ethnic group was important. However, 45% said it was important to their parents, a more than four-fold increase<sup>265</sup>.

These figures show that the young “me generation” has significantly reduced cultural barriers that used to be insurmountable. By caring almost exclusively about themselves, external dynamics do not affect them as much as did their peers when they were the same age. The sense of community has diminished, which is why the power of the norm has diminished. Therefore, by moving away from the community, they also move away from its normative force. On the other hand, regarding direct references to their own person, those references that can easily fall into the realm of constructive criticism, young people react almost organically to those remarks. Criticism, which we have seen this generation perceive as “hate speech”, generates somatic reactions in their regard. For this reason, there are many cases in which this generation tends to develop predilections toward censoring others. This tendency is therefore the result of their criticism phobia that they have developed. The safest and most comfortable strategy is to limit the freedom of expression of others. According to a Pew Research Center poll, 40% of American millennials support censoring a governor’s speech on minorities, whether ethnic or sexual<sup>266</sup>.

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<sup>263</sup> Jasmine Andrea, “Are we the most tolerant or intolerant generation in history?”, November 19, 2020, Available at: <https://www.amadorvalleytoday.org/9884/news/are-we-the-most-tolerant-or-intolerant-generation-in-history/>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>264</sup> Marie J. Twenge, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 61.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>266</sup> Jacob Poushter, “40% of Millennials OK with limiting speech offensive to minorities”, November 20, 2015, in *Pew Research Center*, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/11/20/40-of-millennial-s-ok-with-limiting-speech-offensive-to-minorities/>, Accessed on May 12, 2023.



Young people who fall into the category we have agreed to call “millennial snowflakes” are tolerant of others as long as they do not perceive them as potential critics of themselves. From this perspective, these young people may be open to the new and willing to break down cultural barriers once considered unbeatable. The condition for this openness to last is the permanent assurance of the need for security and comfort in relation to oneself.

### 3. Virtuosity *versus* slow maturation

A range of data on several issues shows that young millennial snowflakes have higher rates of socially desirable behaviors than previous generations. David Finkelhor, professor of sociology and director of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire, says crime among these young people has declined. For example, arrests for serious crimes committed by young people fell by approximately 60% from 1994 to 2011. Juvenile arrests have declined faster over the past decade than adult arrests. Youth property crime is also at its lowest level in 30 years. Youth rape and other sexual offences have fallen. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, the number of sexual assaults against 12-to 17-year-olds has more than halved since the mid-1990s. The number of arrests for sex crimes has also declined. Three national and statewide surveys have confirmed these declines. Teen violence at school dropped 60% from 1992 to 2012, according to Justice Department data. School homicides, which rarely exceed a few dozen a year, were fewer in the 2000s than in the 1990s<sup>267</sup>.

Moreover, teen pregnancy has reached record lows in the United States, and the percentage of ninth graders who say they have had sex has dropped from 54% in 1991 to 47% in 2013. The percentage of high school students who say they have had four or more sexual partners has also dropped<sup>268</sup>. According to a study of a sample of 33,000 people published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior, “millennials” have less sex than their parents when they were the same age. In fact, they are twice as likely to be virgins compared with “Gen Xers” when they were their age<sup>269</sup>. Furthermore, the same study shows that almost half of twenty-somethings have not had sex at all in the past year<sup>270</sup>. Young people also show much more self-control regarding substances. Binge drinking by 12<sup>th</sup> graders is lower than at any time since surveys began in 1976. The number of teens who have been drinking in the past year is at a record low, and the drop for eighth-graders is remarkable. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the

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<sup>267</sup> David Finkelhor, “Are kids getting more virtuous?”, November 26, 2014, in *Washington Post*, Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-kids-are-all-right-after-all/2014/11/26/63b9e494-70fe-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-kids-are-all-right-after-all/2014/11/26/63b9e494-70fe-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html), Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>269</sup> Mandy Oaklander, “Millennials Are Having Way Less Sex Than Their Parents”, August 3, 2016, in *Time*, Available at: <https://time.com/4435058/millennials-virgins-sex/>, Accessed on June 30, 2023.

<sup>270</sup> Charlotte Alter, “Why Millennials Might Be Having Less Sex Than Their Parents”, May 8, 2015, in *Time*, Available at: <https://time.com/3852117/millennials-sex-parents-boomers/?iid=sr-link6>, Accessed on June 18, 2023.

number of high school students who reported driving a car after consuming alcohol in 2011 was reduced by half compared with 1991<sup>271</sup>.

Children are also much less likely to run away from home and are much more conscientious about finishing school. Compared with 1995, the number of young people who ran away from home fell by 56% in 2012. Dropout rates among 16-24-year-olds are at their lowest level ever, falling from 17% in 1968 to 6,6% in 2013. This performance may be due to more prevention and intervention programmes for parents, families and children using more effective strategies. In addition, more psychiatric medications have been offered to children and their parents. Although controversial, such drugs reduce aggression, depression, and hyperactivity, all of which contribute to conflict and risk-taking. Then there is the internet, electronic games, and related technology that have combined to alleviate boredom, one of the main drivers of teenage mischief. Mobile phones keep kids in touch with their parents and friends, making it easier to call for help or get advice when they get into trouble. Moreover, perhaps risk-taking has migrated, like everything else, into the electronic world<sup>272</sup>.

According to a federal survey conducted in the US, drug and alcohol use among teenagers has dropped considerably. The Monitoring the Future survey, conducted on a sample of approximately 50,000 high school students, found that far fewer teens reported using any illicit drug other than marijuana in the past 12 months – 5%, 10%, and 14% in grades 8, 10, and recording the lowest percentages since 1991. Alcohol and cigarette use among teens is also at historic lows. Of all students surveyed in 2016, just over 36% had consumed alcohol in the previous year. This figure is down by almost half from the peak in 1991, when 67% of high school students consumed alcohol. Similarly, in 1991, 63% of the 12<sup>th</sup> graders had smoked cigarettes at some point in their lives. As of this year, that number has dropped to 28%. Marijuana use declined among eighth – and 10<sup>th</sup> – graders and remained unchanged among 12<sup>th</sup>-graders, according to the survey. In 2016, 9.4% of eighth graders, 24% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 36% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders used marijuana in the past year. In all three grades combined, marijuana use declined for the third consecutive year in 2016<sup>273</sup>.

According to another study, teenagers are increasingly putting off activities that have long been seen as “rituals” of transition to adulthood. The study, published in the journal *Child Development*, found that the percentage of U.S. teens who have a driver’s license, have tried alcohol, date, and work for pay has declined since 1976, with the steepest decline in a decade. Declines have occurred in all racial,

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<sup>271</sup> David Finkelhor, “Are kids getting more virtuous?”, November 26, 2014, in *Washington Post*, Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-kids-are-all-right-after-all/2014/11/26/63b9e494-70fe-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-kids-are-all-right-after-all/2014/11/26/63b9e494-70fe-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html), Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>273</sup> Christopher Ingraham, “Today’s teens are way better behaved than you were”, December 13, 2016, in *Washington Post*, Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/12/13/todays-teens-are-way-better-behaved-than-you-were/>, Accessed on May 3, 2023.

geographic, and socioeconomic categories and in rural, urban, and suburban areas. More than half of the teens still engage in these activities, but the majority have shrunk considerably. Between 1976 and 1979, 86% of high school seniors dated; between 2010 and 2015, only 63% did, the study found. Over the same period, the proportion who had tried alcohol plummeted from 93% between 1976 and 1979 to 67% between 2010 and 2016<sup>274</sup>.

Psychologist Jean M. Twenge warns us that the maturation of young people is characterized by a process of slowing down, arising from the need for comfort and safety created both by schools through the “safe spaces” movement and by parents through overprotective policies (illustrated by “helicopter parents”). In other words, young people delay making decisions or experiencing experiences previously associated with maturation<sup>275</sup>.

#### 4. Digital natives versus digital addiction

In 2001, Prensky<sup>276</sup>, building on the concepts of “net generation” and “millennials” advocated by Tapscott (1998)<sup>277</sup>, and Howe and Strauss (2000)<sup>278</sup>, wrote about and popularised the idea of a “digital generation”, talking about “digital natives”. “Digital generation”, “digital natives”, “net generation”, “millennials” are experienced users of technology. Although the ideas of Prensky, Tapscott, Howe, and Strauss were picked up by the media fairly quickly and widely, it was not until 2005, with the publication of Oblinger’s paper *Educating the Net Generation*, that they began to gain ground in the academic communities<sup>279</sup>. Millennials are the generation reaping the benefits of technology the most. They are much more inclined to use technology than previous generations, such as baby boomers or Generation X,

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<sup>274</sup> Tara Bahrapour, “Not drinking or driving, teens increasingly put off traditional markers of adulthood”, September 19, 2017, in *Washington Post*, Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/ neither- drinking- nor- driving- more- teens- are- putting- off- traditional- markers- of- adulthood/2017/09/18/b46027a0-93f1-11e7-8754-d478688d23b4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/ neither- drinking- nor- driving- more- teens- are- putting- off- traditional- markers- of- adulthood/2017/09/18/b46027a0-93f1-11e7-8754-d478688d23b4_story.html), Accessed on May 3, 2023.

<sup>275</sup> Marie J. 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 young people are less rebellious, slightly more tolerant, definitely less happy and hardly ready for adulthood at all*], translated by Loredana Bucuroaia, Bucharest, Baroque & Arts Publishing, 2020, p. 36.

<sup>276</sup> See:

1. Marc Prensky, “Digital natives, digital immigrants: Part 1”, in *On the Horizon*, 2001a, 9(5), pp. 1–6.

2. Marc Prensky, “Digital natives, digital immigrants: Part 2. Do they really think differently?”, in *On the Horizon*, 2001b, 9(6), pp. 1–6.

<sup>277</sup> Don Tapscott, *Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation*, New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1998.

<sup>278</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, New York, NY Vintage, 2000.

<sup>279</sup> Diana G. Oblinger and James L. Oblinger (editors), *Educating the net generation*, Boulder, CO EDUCAUSE, 2005.

and are becoming good technology professionals<sup>280</sup>. Hershatter and Epstein stated that for “millennials” technology is like a “sixth sense”<sup>281</sup>.

Ones and Hosein define “digital natives” as people who have been immersed in technology since birth<sup>282</sup>. Because they were born with technology, “millennials” naturally operate with it. The other generations, compared to them, referring of course to the ability to use technology, can be considered “immigrants” in this field<sup>283</sup>. The affinity for technology has led Eastman *et al.* to consider their portable devices and gadgets as body parts. However, as a generation that uses computers a lot, millennials are becoming afflicted by what experts call “computer overload”<sup>284</sup>. From this viewpoint, technology is risky because it is addictive. In other words, by being constantly connected to the virtual world, young people risk forgetting how to behave in the real world.

Prensky said that students, as a result of using technology, were not only acting but also thinking differently<sup>285</sup>. This means that due to the frequent and repeated use of technology, the brain develops the ability to adapt to repeated stimuli. In other words, neural plasticity undergoes significant transformations. From Prensky’s perspective, these adaptations are largely positive, allowing digital natives to excel at online multitasking, information gathering, and corroboration. On the positive side, online multitasking improves multitasking performance on simple, repetitive tasks and in everyday life<sup>286</sup>.

However, multitasking has a negative impact on memory because the attention level decreases<sup>287</sup>, which is why students are advised to limit the use of PCs during study<sup>288</sup>. Similarly, brain imaging studies suggest that the use of and reliance on

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<sup>280</sup> Joseph C. Velasco and Jeremy De Chavez, “Millennial work ethic: A preliminary investigation of the work ethic profile of Filipino university students”, in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 2018, 9(6), pp. 121–130.

<sup>281</sup> Andrea Hershatter and Molly Epstein, “Millennials and the world of work: An organization and management perspective”, in *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 2010, 25(2), pp. 211–223.

<sup>282</sup> Chris Jones and Anesa Hosein, “Profiling university students’ use of technology: Where is the net generation divide?”, in *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, 2010, 6(3), pp. 43–58.

<sup>283</sup> Christopher S. Alexander and James M. Sysko, “I’m Gen Y, I love feeling entitled, and it shows”, in *Academy of Educational Leadership*, 2013, 17(4), pp. 127–131.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>285</sup> Marc Prensky, “Digital natives, digital immigrants: Part 2. Do they really think differently?”, in *On the Horizon*, 2001b, 9(6), pp. 1–6.

<sup>286</sup> Paul E. Dux *et al.*, “Training improves multitasking performance by increasing the speed of information processing in human prefrontal cortex”, in *Neuron*, 2009, 16(1), pp. 127–138.

<sup>287</sup> See:

1. Kep K. Loh and Ryota Kanai, “How has the Internet reshaped human cognition?”, in *The Neuroscientist*, 2015, 22(5), pp. 506–520.

2. M. Moaisala *et al.*, “Media multitasking is associated with distractibility and increased prefrontal activity in adolescents and young adults”, in *NeuroImage*, 2016, 134, pp. 113–121.

<sup>288</sup> See:

1. Terry Judd, “Task selection, task switching and multitasking during computer-based independent study”, in *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 2015, 31(2), pp. 193–207.

2. Larry D. Rosen *et al.*, “Facebook and texting made me do it: Media-induced task-switching while studying”, in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2013, 29(3), pp. 1243–1254.

online information can lead to poor retention and shallowness in information processing<sup>289</sup>. Social media use is often linked to positive outcomes, such as helping users develop and maintain social capital and self-esteem<sup>290</sup>. However, it has also been associated with negative effects among younger users, such as poorer academic results<sup>291</sup>, and depression and anxiety among some users<sup>292</sup>. Therefore, such a deep penetration of technology into young people's lives has both positive and negative aspects. However, it is important to avoid over-abundance in the use of technology as a lack of measurement creates imbalances.

## CONCLUSIONS

The “millennial snowflake” generation, those young people born between 1980 and 2000, has generated much discussion on their behavior. Born and living in a society characterized by a culture of affluence, they no longer feel the pressure experienced by their predecessors. The discourse and counter-discourse that has emerged around this generation is paradoxical. Studies have shown that young people have the highest level of self-confidence among all generations. However, we can also speak of an exacerbated vulnerability, which brings us to the subject of “safe spaces”. Reflecting economic, social, and historical changes, the “snowflake millennials” want to extend their comfortable home environment into high school or even university environments out of a need for safety. However, the idea of a “safe space”, so as not to hinder the teaching–learning process by censoring ideas, can be replaced by the notion of “communities of dialogue”. In this way, both the free expression of ideas and the debate about them, with arguments for and against, are encouraged, which only strengthens the mental and intellectual resilience of young people.

On the other hand, this generation is proving to be the most tolerant yet on issues such as race and sexual orientation, etc., overcoming cultural barriers that their predecessors found intolerable. This is another paradoxical aspect of their situation as they are sensitive to criticism, which they label as “hate speech” against themselves, but at the same time they are particularly open to the idea of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and sexual diversity. This tolerance can be explained by an individual's distancing from the community. In other words, they are predominantly affected only by the social dynamics that directly affect them.

Statistics and studies show that young people born between 1980 and 2000 show more prosocial behaviour than their peers (fewer people drink alcohol, fewer

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<sup>289</sup> Kep K. Loh and Ryota Kanai, “How has the Internet reshaped human cognition?”, in *The Neuroscientist*, 2015, 22(5), pp. 506–520.

<sup>290</sup> Nicole B. Ellison *et al.*, “Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis”, in *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), pp. 434–445.

<sup>291</sup> Aryn C. Karpinski *et al.*, “An exploration of social networking site user, multitasking, and academic performance among United States and European university students”, in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2013, 29(3), pp. 1182–1192.

<sup>292</sup> Mark W. Becker *et al.*, “Media multitasking is associated with symptoms of depression and social anxiety”, in *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 2013, 16(2), pp. 132–135.

sex offenders, fewer homicides, fewer drug users, etc.). From this viewpoint, the remark about the virtuousness of young people among the “millennial snowflake” is legitimate. On the other hand, actions that we used to classify as typical of adulthood are being postponed because the maturing of young people is characterised by a slowing down process, arising from the need for comfort and safety created both by schools through the “safe spaces” movement and by parents through overprotective policies (illustrated by “helicopter parents”).

Moreover, being born and living in a digital age has turned young millennial snowflakes into what experts in the field call “digital natives”. They naturally operate with technology, are good at it, and have developed specific, multitasking skills. In other words, they can successfully manage multiple tasks if they do not involve complex tasks. However, this can also be a disadvantage in that it weakens the ability to concentrate, memorise, and think things through. Young people’s presence online can also contribute positively to “feeding” self-esteem by maintaining or developing social capital. However, exclusive online presence is addictive and leads to anxiety and depression in the long term because the foundation of social capital is face-to-face interaction.

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