



## Editorial

## Generations X, Y, and Z



Interestingly, there is scant literature about the generational perspectives of children, youth and parents who belong to one of these generations: Generations X, Y and Z in the pediatric nursing literature. Each of these generational groups is described broadly by collective perspectives influenced greatly by societal changes, economic conditions and significant historic developments (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018a, 2018b). The generational designation corresponds roughly to a period of 20 years as illustrated by the age ranges of each of the following generational groups. Generation X, refers to those born between 1965 and 1979, ages 39 to 51; Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, born between 1980 and 1994, ages 24 to 38 years old; and Generation Z are individuals born between 1995 and 2015, ages 3 to 24 years old (Pew Research Center, 2018). Each of these generations is unique in their own right; however, each generation can be characterized by distinctive collective features that have been shaped by the world they entered into and lived in.

Generation X or as some have referred to as the “forgotten generation” grew up during the emergence of technology into their daily lives and the seismic shifts in global affairs (Woo, 2018). This generation has also been referred to as the “middle child” as this generation is situated between the earlier generation of the Baby Boomers and followed by Generation Y (Taylor & Gao, 2014). This middle generation is smaller in population size than its generational “bookends” (Fry, 2018; Taylor & Gao, 2014). Comparisons with the generations before and after Generation X reflect its midpoint status. Generation X is better educated than the preceding generation of Baby Boomers yet less well educated than those of the Millennial generation and Generation Z (Frey, Igielnik, & Patten, 2018). Generation X children and youth were more ethnically diverse than the preceding generations but far less so when compared to the later generations of Millennials and Generation Z. Other socio-economic metrics pertaining to rates of household income and timing of marriage reflect similar comparisons between generations (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Generation Y, or better known as the Millennial generation, was exposed to the digital world early in their lives. This generation and Generation Z have been referred to as the “Digital Natives” given their upbringing that has been intertwined with the digital world unlike the past generations of the “Digital Immigrants” (Prensky, 2001). The term “Digital Immigrants” refers to earlier generations of Baby Boomers, The Silent Generation (individuals born between 1925 and 1945) and Generation X whose exposure to the digital world were unlike later generations (Howe, 2014; Prensky, 2001). These differences in digital upbringing have affected generational attitudes with the use of technology. The generational trend lines of technology use whether a smartphone, tablet or use of social media have exceeded the previous

generations and have not been limited to higher socio-economic groups. For example, recent data indicate the more than 80 % of youth from lower socio-economic strata have cell phones (Lenhart & Pew Research Center, 2015). With the emergence of this pervasive world of technology, this generation and Generation Z have learned to multi-task by using technology while simultaneously involved with other activities (Shatto & Erwin, 2016, 2017). For this generation, learning is an active experience and no longer relegated to the passive learning approaches of the past (Kramer, 2017; Shatto & Erwin, 2016, 2017).

Generation Z is the first generation to grow up in an Internet world wherein their understanding of access to information and the world view has been shaped in a manner unlike previous generations (Adamson, Chen, Kackley, & Micheal, 2018; Prensky, 2001). Other labels have been ascribed to this newest generation—“Post-Millennials” (ages 6 to 21 years of age) (Pew Research Center, 2018), “iGen” (Twenge, 2017), and “Homelanders” (Howe, 2018). For example, the approach of Generation Z to learning shatters the instructional approaches of the past. This generation is accustomed to rapid diffusion of information presented in a graphically and technologically sophisticated style. As with the Millennials, learning is engaged and active, involving participatory actions (Kramer, 2017; Shatto & Erwin, 2016, 2017). “Growing up in a virtual cloud of technology with infinite sources of information and digital interactions has changed the way they think, communicate and learn” is an apt description of this newest generation (Adamson, p.29). Some experts have suggested that this heavy reliance on and immersion with technology is associated with shorter spans of attention (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018a, 2018b; Shatto & Erwin, 2016, 2017).

Other characteristics of Generation Z that distinguish them from previous generations is their diversity. Forty-eight percent of Generation Z are ethnically diverse compared to earlier generations; the ethnic composition of Millennials and Generation X is 39 and 30 percent, respectively. This generation is now pursuing postsecondary education at a higher rate than preceding generations (Pew Research Center, 2018).

As this compendium of generational differences illustrate, each successive generation is formed by and creates significantly important societal changes. The generational trends indicate the ongoing evolution of a populace that is better educated, increasing more diverse and immersed comfortably in the digital world. Therefore, what are the implications for pediatric nursing practice, education and research? This question cannot be answered so easily. However, it is incumbent upon our specialty field of practice, science and education to be responsive to these generational changes (Johanson, 2017; Sparks, 2012; Sudheimer, 2009). Our attention needs to be directed to being not only astute in our specialty areas of pediatric nursing expertise but to

be culturally and digitally competent, responsive and innovative to meet the generational needs of the children, youth and families we serve (Aguilar-Palacio, Gil-Lacruz, Sanchez-Recio, & Rabanaque, 2018; Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018a, 2018b; Johanson, 2017).

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