

'OK Boomer' and the great generational stand-off

Earlier in November 2019, 25-year old Chlöe Swarbrick, of the New Zealand Green Party, gave a striking speech about climate change in parliament - urging the country to reduce its carbon emissions to zero by 2050 - but was interrupted by opposition spokesperson for climate change, Todd Muller. Swarbrick promptly dismissed his comment by saying: "OK boomer", sending the expression into social media viral superspace and offending quite a few Baby Boomers along the Twitter feed.



Image source: Gallo/Getty Images.

She later explained, "My 'OK boomer' comment in parliament was off-the-cuff, albeit symbolic of the collective exhaustion of multiple generations set to inherit ever-amplifying problems in an ever-diminishing window of time. It was a response – as is par-for-the-course – to a barrage of heckling in a parliamentary chamber that at present turns far too many regular folks off from engaging in politics."

She was followed a few weeks later by Matt Gaetz, one of President Donald Trump's loyal devotees, who used "OK boomer", in response to presidential counsellor Kellyanne Conway, who had mumbled her opposition to legalising marijuana.

Okay, people, everyone calm down now.



Baby Boomers vs Gen-X vs Millennials - how they find their homes

30 Nov 2016



In the latest *Daily Maverick* newsletter, they examine the generational face-off, or when grandpa and junior go head-to-head over which generation has it better (Mine. No, mine. No, MINE).

“ *“I will go down as the voice of this generation, of this decade, I will be the loudest voice.” - Kanye West* ”

Name drop **How do generations get their names?** [Matt Rosenberg](#), a professional geographer and writer, explains that “the naming of generations began in the 20th century”, with poet, author and salon hostess, Gertrude Stein, aka the generation

name-dropping pioneer.

Salon hostess? Yes! Sort of the ancestor of the socialite – Stein held salons when living in Paris, that brought together the crème de la crème of art and literature, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and E.E Cummings.

Say more. After World War I, she famously sent a letter to Hemingway after he published *The Sun Also Rises*, saying, “You are all a lost generation.”

Dismissive much? Ah well! But it wasn’t until the baby boomers that generation names made their way into demographic and consumer studies.

Who is credited for the ‘boomers’? The United States Census Bureau! Between 1946 and 1964, after the war, birthrates rocketed. It was called the post-war baby boom, which then led to the name baby boomers.

Got it. From then, each generation got a name (some retroactively), thanks no longer to government bodies, but to marketing agencies who found it handy to box people into catchy categories to sell them more pertinent products.

Oh. Generation X, millennials and Generation Z were born, baby.

Okay. How does it work? It’s not an exact science, but give or take, a generation spans over two decades.

Who gets to pick the name? It isn’t clear, but advertising agencies or historians, such as Neil Howe, who coined the term “millennial” in the 1991 book *Generations*. Demographic and consumer markets expert, Peter Francese, who explains in [MentalFloss](#) that, “They throw stuff at the wall and see what sticks. Generation Y was too difficult to say, too hard to brand, it didn’t have the cachet, it didn’t have the spark of millennials”.

Taxonomy of [generations](#)

(According to generational theorists Neil Howe and William Strauss and the US Census Bureau)



The generation gap - Who is who?

Belinda Kayton 31 Oct 2018



G.I Generation<!>

Born between 1900 to 1924? Welcome into the G.I Generation, also called the Greatest Generation, after journalist Tom Brokaw dedicated his book, *The Greatest Generation*, to the people who lived through the Great Depression and fought

World War II. Other names were the Hard Timers (born before 1908), or the Good Warriors (born between 1909 and 1928).

Silent Generation<!>

Said to have “discipline and strong work ethics”, the generation born during Communism, McCarthyism and World War II (between 1925 to 1945), is also called the Lucky Few or the Traditionalists because, apparently, of their strong family sense.

Baby Boomers<!>

Born between 1946 and 1964, the baby boomers are directly linked to the birthrate in the US that went from 2.4/2.8-million births per year to 3.47-million. Boomers are said to symbolize counter-culture, anti-Vietnam war movements, even bearing the name the Rock 'n Roll Generation for a while. Side effects: the dramatic rise in births also meant an increase in production and consumption ...

Generation X<!>

Coming on the heels of the Baby Boomers, babies born between 1965 and 1982 are part of Generation X. They are known, “for the sort of rise of a jaded cultural malaise”, says Vox reporter, Aja Romano, and to be more disillusioned than their generational predecessors (Generation X was also Billy Idol’s band).

Generation Y aka millennials<!>

Born between 1980/1982 and the late nineties (up to 2000), millennials are also referred to as eco-boomers (the babies of baby boomers). In her book *Generation Me*, psychologist Jean Twenge claimed that millennials showed more entitlement and narcissism than previous generations although that claim has been widely criticised.

Generation Z aka iGen aka Centennials<!>

Gen Z is the first generation to be born entirely in the era of the internet (and social media), between 2000 and next year, which sets them apart from other generations (especially the boomers).

Is it a thing, boomers vs millennials?

“OK boomer” did strike a sensitive chord with boomers, some even calling it “the N-word of ageism” (sigh). But as the dispute raged, mainly on Twitter (via TikTok), it became clearer that this was more about two generations that have seemingly opposing world perspectives, something that kind of repeats itself, with every generation.



From Boomers to snowflakes - can we all just get along?

18 Nov 2019



[Vox's](#) Brian Resnick talks about “presentism”: “Adults who are more authoritarian are more likely to say kids today are a lot less respectful of elders than they used to be. Adults who are more well-read say kids today are a lot less interested in reading than they used to be. And adults who are more intelligent (as approximated by a very short version of an IQ test) are more likely to say kids are less smart than they used to be.”

This article is by [Maverick Life](#), the life and culture section of the Daily Maverick. You can read the full article in the [Daily Maverick newsletter](#).

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