

This Generation--Soc 7

Professor Douglas Goodman

We are always talking about generations... the lost generation, the greatest generation, the sixties generation, generation X, the hip-hop generation, the millennial generation and so on. But what is a generation?

The simplest definition of a generation is a group of people who were born at roughly the same time. When you think about it, that is a trivial fact. But it has powerful effects. The generation you are born into influences the childhood games you played, the education you are receiving, the career you will choose, when you will marry, how many children you will have and, really, the entire course of your life. But why? It is because people born around the same time are exposed to the same historical events and social trends at roughly the same age. Every human being has a childhood of some sort, but one generation's childhood was during the Great Depression (the greatest generation). Many young adults rebel against their elders, but one generation had their rebellion fueled by the widespread availability of LSD and a passionate movement against an unpopular war (the sixties generation). Many have been witness to political scandal, but one generation was exposed to a sex-drenched presidential scandal as they entered puberty. (You know who you are!)

Many of my students firmly believe that they are part of a distinct generation. A Millennial generation. This generation is more tolerant, less racist, less homophobic. Sociology has always had a lot to say about these issues. One thing sociology believes is that however "natural" and "right" these attitudes feel, they are probably derived from our society. Indeed these attitudes of tolerance have changed so quickly and so uniformly by age that most people can chart it in their own families by comparing their grandparents' tolerance on race and homosexuality to their own parents to their peers. We clearly see the powerful effects of a generation in this difference in matters of tolerance.

This class has four goals:

- 1) **To understand what is unique about this generation.** This generation is faced with new perils, new types of organizations and new ways of communicating. We will look at some of the most important changes, examine some potential disasters and investigate promising trends.
- 2) **To understand the Sociological Perspective.** Sociologists have a unique way of looking at things. Instead of focusing on individuals, we look at social systems and at interactions between people. For instance, when a problem emerges, instead of looking for someone to blame and punish, sociologists search for ways to fix the system that is at the root of the problem. This way of looking at things goes against the "common sense" of a society that is fixated on individualism, but it can be a very useful thing to know.

- 3) **To understand basic sociological concepts.** Sociology has a history of studying such things as gender, race, sexuality, inequality, organizations, groups and other social things. We will learn some of the basic concepts that sociology has developed to understand them.
- 4) **To understand society today.** Everything is changing, from the way we eat (fast food) to the way we relax (surfing the internet). In particular we will look at the changes in communication, culture, education, and politics.

Grades

Grades will be based on the following:

Reading Points.....	20%
3 Facts.....	5%
Annotated Bibliography.....	5%
Midterm Presentation.....	5%
Midterm Paper.....	25%
Rough Draft.....	5%
Final Presentation.....	5%
Final Paper.....	30%

Incompletes will only be given when the student is otherwise passing the course and cannot complete it due to circumstances that are unforeseen and beyond the student's control.

Reading Points: Reading points will be made available one week before the reading. You will be graded on your ability to provide a summary of the author on those points when called on in class. Extra credit will be awarded for your ability to spark a discussion in the class. Only students called on in class will be graded on that day. If you are absent the day that I call on you without a college defined excuse, you will receive an 'F'. Since each student is likely to be called on only 3 to 5 times, it is important that you be prepared for every class. I will give everyone two 'free passes' for the semester on reading points. In other words, you can let me know that you will be unprepared to answer the reading points for that day. However, **you must do this before class starts**, either in person, phone message or email. You will not be given a free pass after I have called on you.

Writing & Presentation Assignments: Fuller descriptions of these assignments will be posted.

Help

I will hold office hours Mon., Wed. & Fri. from 11:00 to 12:00 and from 3:00 to 4:00. I can also be reached by phone or email. I check my email often every day and it is my preferred mode of communication. Messages can also be left for me in the Sociology office.

Please let me know if you have any disabilities that will affect your participation in this class. I will make every effort to accommodate you. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability should contact The Center for Academic Achievement for a confidential discussion.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week 1: The Sociological Perspective

Reading: "The Sociological Perspective." Goodman. 2009.

Assignment: 3 Facts About This Generation & How You Know They Are Facts

Reading: "Theories of Society." Goodman. 2009.

Week 2: Generations

Assignment: Meet in Library for introduction to using the library for research.

Reading: "Generations" Goodman. 2009.

Reading: "Passages" Goodman. 2009.

Week 3: Society Today

Reading: "Society Today." Goodman. 2009.

Reading: Excerpts from *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* by Mark Penn. 2007.

Reading: The McDonaldization of Society by George Ritzer. 2007.

Assignment: Annotated Bibliography

Week 4: Presentations

Assignment: Generations Group Presentations

Assignment: Generations Paper

Week 5: Before and After the Baby Boom

Reading: Great Expectations: America & the Baby Boom Generation by Landon Jones. 1981.

Reading: Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture by Douglas Coupland. 1991.

Week 6: Changes in Communication

Reading: Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives by John Palfrey. 2008.

Reading: Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide by Henry Jenkins. 2008.

Week 7: Changes in Culture

Reading: *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* by Thomas Frank. 1998.

Reading: *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh* by Robert Goldman, Stephen Papson 1999.

Week 8: Changes in Politics

Reading: *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* by Richard Davis.

Reading: *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* by Morley Winograd. 2008.

Week 9: Changes in Education

Assignment: Rough Draft for Peer Feedback

Reading: *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School* by Tim Clydesdale. 2007.

Reading: "On the uses of a liberal education: I. As lite entertainment for bored college students" by Mark Edmundson. *Harper's Magazine*. 1997

Week 10: Presentations and Final Paper