



# BENEATH THE TREND

## GENERATION NATION COMPANION REPORT

Gen Z and Stress



## WHAT WE DID

We set out to learn about what is happening with Gen Z, as far as the drivers of stress in their lives.



## HOW WE DID IT

We just asked! They told us, in their own words. In a 15-minute qualitative interview with 200 people. And we probed their responses in an AI-delivered conversation.



## WHAT WE ASKED

We talked about their lives, their stressors and what people don't understand about them.



*Confession: There is so much to dig into here - this report is longer than a typical Beneath the Trend – but it still feels like not enough.*



**WHAT WE FOUND ...**

# First, a little history ...

In 2019, Quester conducted a landmark project in conjunction with 747 Insights and Collaborata:

## **GENERATION NATION 2019: Defining America's Gen Z, Millennials, Generation X and Boomers**

This study provides a comparison of attitudes and behaviors across 4,012 respondents in these four cohorts, to expand upon current intelligence and cut to the core of what it means to be an American in 2019.

Aided by technology, media, politics, and more, we can see Generational values shifting at a faster pace than we've ever seen before.

The study is both insightful and actionable. Contact us to learn more about subscribing to Generation Nation.



We set out to not only collect information about each of these generations, but also to develop a deep understanding about who they are, and their experiences.



One area of focus was to deep dive into the way the generations see each other ... and themselves.

# One key finding – the reason we’re here – that sucked the air out of the room full of Millennials and Gen Xers:

## The top three ways Millennials, Gen X and Boomers describe Gen Z ...



**TECH-SAVVY**  
That’s fair.



**SELF-CENTERED**  
Oh ... well. Hmm. That’s interesting.



**LAZY**  
Are we getting mean spirited? Maybe? And 4 & 5 on the list are “materialistic” and “entitled” ...

## The top three ways Gen Z describes themselves ...



**TECH-SAVVY**  
Okay, so same page ...



**STRESSED OUT**  
Red flag. Red flag! What’s happening?



**DIVERSE**  
This is both accurate and self-aware.



**Language Nerd Note:** Presumably, older generations, we are supposed to be the mentors and support system for these stressed kids, who we are choosing to see as self-centered and lazy. Shame on us.

# Let's break these things down ...

As reported in Generation Nation:



*Gen Z is the most diverse American cohort ever; they're the most accepting of diversity and challenge deep-seeded social inequities. And because they're the first generation born entirely post-internet, they can't remember a time when content wasn't immediately available.*

So for sure this group is...



TECH-SAVVY



CHECK



DIVERSE



CHECK



In Generation Nation, we also learned a lot about how passionately they view diversity as a value ...



“ We no longer care for brands, fancy jewelry ... or family backgrounds. Racism and homophobia is dying out with older generations because the younger is being brought up with new morals. ”

“Race and gender equality are big trends today that I feel are taking up huge political uprisings and many protests to take place over those issues.”

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“Cultural shifts that I am noticing are how people are more open now then ever to diversity, either with gender or race. Just at the place I work I've seen many more interracial couples than ever and it's a good thing to see.”

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“Everyone seems to be more accepting and respectful of the identity and things that we mark ourselves as. It feels like people can be more open about who they are.”

But it's also important to remember that this generation is aged 13-21 so they have incredible developmental diversity ...

### They are young, and busy with school and activities ...

- *I am a student at a junior high school. I love video games. I am a big fan of Super Smash Bros. series and am quite good at their games. I love my Nintendo Switch and play on it every day. Sometimes I invite my friends over to my house and we play together.*
- *I am a 15-year-old student in high school. I am currently a freshman and besides school, I participate in a variety of extracurriculars, such as piano. My hobbies include reading on the internet and playing video games.*
- *I'm 18 and currently in high school. I'm taking AP Art and I enjoy creative things and crafting or painting.*
- *I'm a junior in a public high school in a Detroit suburb. I like hanging out with friends, playing tennis (I'm on varsity) and playing video games. I have a part time job as a child care specialist.*

### ... working on their future ...

- *I'm a college student in my second year at the University of California, Los Angeles. I'm studying philosophy and cognitive science in the hopes of going to law school in the future.*
- *I am a full time student studying economics and trying to go into commercial real estate.*
- *I'm a college senior studying French and Japanese!!! I love travelling and learning random facts. My goal someday is to open a tea store in Kyoto.*

### ... or already fully Into The Real World

- *I am married and have two sons. I work for a flower shop and live in Texas.*
- *I am a full-time employee and newly married. My life consists mostly of working 40 hours a week and spending time at home. I also spend quite a bit of my time volunteering at our church.*



“ *I'm Chinese and bisexual, both of which have shaped my identity largely. I go to an IB school. My whole life I have been considered 'gifted', but this has led to even more pressure than I usually get as an Asian woman. I have a couple mental illnesses that I'm currently receiving medical treatment for, and I have a bunch of creative hobbies.* ”

# Knowing this is an important foundation for understanding the huge variance in their sources of stress

As you look through their different life stages, you can link the stress to where they are ...



## 64% School

*Those in high school and college are experiencing academic pressures*



## 36% Work

*For some, it's a balance of work and classes – for others, employment is a primary stress source*



## 18% Finances

*Older Gen Zs are working through finances and facing real-world pressures*

But there are also common themes that resonate across these groups:

### 42% Relationships

*We see that as a consistent struggle with this generation – interactions and relationships are a struggle – both with family and friends*

### 11% The Future

*It's scary. They see so many choices – which can be paralyzing – and the unknowns cause pressure*



### 9% Mental Health

*Struggles with anxiety and depression link to daily stress*

## In their own words...



*“ Most of the time I feel down and I don’t want to start the day. I get bullied a lot at school and people exclude me out of lunch tables. I don’t really have anywhere to go to lunch so I go to the library.*



*“ I get stressed out from lots of school work, sports practices and games, personal relationships and thinking about my future.*



*“ Pressure to do well in academics from parents and teachers leads to stress and competition among peers in both schoolwork and socially creates more stress.*

# So what don't we understand, older generations?

We flat out asked them to tell us what we don't get about what it's like to be Gen Z today ...



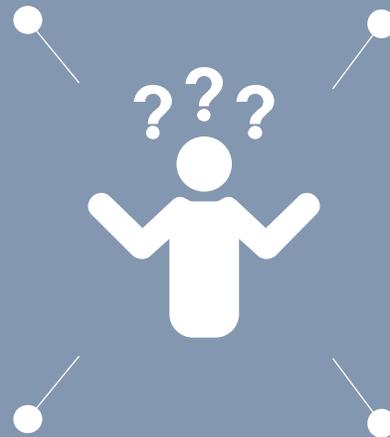
“

*They don't understand how much harder and more competitive it is today compared to how it used to be.*

”

Everyone has stress – it's part of life. Being young doesn't take it away.

They are inexperienced and learning how to live their lives – starting out is stressful – they have to figure everything out.



They don't know how different the world is – it's not the same as when older generations were this age; technology and competition have changed expectations.

Remember high school? And also puberty? How could they NOT be stressed?



“

*We have a lot of important, life changing decisions to make. We are just becoming adults and have to decide what we want to do with our lives ... that can be an extremely stressful decision.*

”

But – even with all of the stress, there is good news...

They have both hope and self-awareness for the future:

Less Stressed



38%

They think things will level out as they age, learn, and get past their current life stage – they also think maturity will help them better handle stress.

The Same



11%

They think the level will stay the same, even as the pressures change.

More Stressed



24%

They can reflect themselves into the realization that jobs, bills, kids, families, etc. will be more intense than what they are realistically facing right now.

# Good news #2...these guys are smart and stress-savvy

It's possible that, while we older generations are being jerks about how we view them, we've also equipped them with the tools they need to deal with stress ...



37%  
Hobbies  
(Music, Art, etc.)



23%  
Proactive Health  
(Rest, Exercise,  
Self-care)



17%  
Talk to/Spending time  
with  
Friends/Family



12% Prayer/meditation  
4% Self-Talk  
4% Therapy

9% do admit to unhealthy coping mechanisms (drugs, alcohol, overeating)

## In summary...



Every generation thinks younger people have it easier, right? Human nature. (And, obviously, no generation has it tougher than Gen X.)\*

But the goal here is empathy. The whole point of developing generational understanding – and not just life stage – is to think about the circumstances that different generations are living under.

Their experiences must be viewed through THEIR generational cultural lens, not our own. Gen Z is living in a different and complex world.

And while studying Gen Z tugs at the heartstrings, they also offer a lot of hope for what this group can do as they grow into whatever comes next for them.



\*Language Nerd Note: Just a little researcher humor about generational bias! Kidding about the Gen X thing, obviously! Kind of.

# In the Weeds – Conversation & Detail



## WHO WE TALKED TO

- Gen Zers – young people aged 13-21



200 Online interviews with AI moderator



## TECHNIQUES APPLIED

- ✓ Customized probing
- ✓ In-depth language review
- ✓ Quantified qualitative language analysis

1

Today I really just want to hear about you, and what your life is like. So just tell me a little about yourself.

2

One of the things that I hear about from people your age is stress. I'm curious, on a scale from 1 to 7, how would you best describe your level of stress, with 1 meaning you feel extremely stressed, and 7 meaning you feel not at all stressed. Please just enter the number below.

3

Tell me about what leads you to say that. Describe your stress level to me.

4

Now talk to me about all of the things that cause you stress. I want to hear about them in detail.

5

What do you do to deal with stress?

6

I think that sometimes older people believe that younger people (like, your age), don't have as much to feel stressed about. \*\* What would you tell those people? Tell me what you would say to them to help them understand.

7

I'd like to hear about a specific situation that you would consider stressful. Please set the stage for me and tell me a story about a recent situation that made you feel really stressed out.

8

Just out of curiosity, as you think about your stress level now, what do you think things will be like when you're older?

# A final thought...

In the upfront, it was noted that we interviewed these young people through a software moderator.

We ask an interview satisfaction question at the end of every engagement, and felt like we inadvertently stumbled across a need that highlights the double-edged technology sword that Gen Z is living with.

Going back to that whole thing about how they need support – **This is what they said about the interview experience:**

*“It was very therapeutic. I got some things off of my chest that I had previously only said to myself.”*

*“I got to open up a little bit without hearing someone's unwanted advice or comparison to their lifestyle and situation.”*

*“I got to let some things off my chest and it's kinda like talking to someone who doesn't snap at you for saying your beliefs.”*

*“I feel relieved after answering the questions because I had someone to talk to about my problems.”*

*“I just feel like I was able to get a couple of things off of my chest and was able to explain to something that I think may or may not understand but felt like they were actually listening.”*



If you're like us, you're obsessively curious about interesting trends. That's why we launched *Beneath the Trend*.

*Beneath the Trend* reports demonstrate the depth of information that can be gleaned from QuickQUESTs — Quester's abbreviated, customized solution that delivers rich, qualitative insights on tight deadlines.

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