




# **Pulling Back the Veil on the iGeneration: Tech Savvy, Yet Lonely & Unprepared**

WESTERN ASSOC. FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING (WACAC)  
OPENING SESSION: 3.14.2019

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## ***iGen: Why Today's Super Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy - and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood***, by Jean Twenge, Ph.D.

- Author is Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University
- University of Chicago: BA, MA; University of Michigan: Ph.D.
- Author of more than 140 scientific publications/books
- Research on generational differences for nearly 25 years
  - Around 2012, observed large, abrupt shifts in teens' behavior and emotional states. Pattern emerged: large changes began 2011-12, when majority of Americans started to own smartphones



# The Importance of Understanding iGen, and How This Book Contributes

In the Classroom and Beyond

- Whole new group of young people who act and think differently (even from Millennials) emerging into adulthood.
- Need to understand iGen - including friends/families looking out for them, businesses searching for new recruits, schools/universities educating students.
- iGen'ers need to understand themselves, as they explain to elders/older peers how they approach the world and what makes them different
- Whereas biggest difference between Millennials (born 1980-1999 ish) and predecessors was worldview (more focus on self, less on social rules), **iGen'ers differ most in how they spend their time.**



# iGen Basics

- Birth years: 1995-2012 (or so); first graduated high school in 2012; last will graduate 2030
- First generation for whom internet (commercialized 1995) access has been constantly available, in hand
- Grew up w/ cell phones: oldest were adolescents when iPhone introduced in 2007; as of 2015, 2 of 3 U.S. teens owned iPhone
- Teens from disadvantaged backgrounds now spend just as much time online as those w/more resources (another effect of smartphones, according to author)
- Average teen checks phone 80 times/day

# Numbers & Sense

To understand what's new about this generation, need to compare iGen to previous generations *at the same age* (need to look at data over time). This book primarily relies on these four databases:

- **Monitoring the Future (MtF)**: Surveys 12th graders annually since 1976 and 8th and 10th graders since 1991
- **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)**: Administered by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, surveys high school students since 1991
- **American Freshman Survey (AF)**: Administered by Higher Education Research Institute, surveys students entering 4 year colleges since 1966
- **General Social Survey (GSS)**: Surveys adults 18 and older since 1972





# Disclaimers

- Data from U.S. samples, though researchers worldwide documenting similar trends
- Surveys: Impacted by how questions asked; also averages (not everyone in a generation exactly same)
- Only providing a sampling of the statistics, see book for more
- Some generational changes are positive, some are negative, and many are both
- Many **causes** for trends observed, not just one (e.g. parents, technology, media, business, education)
  - Gold standard for determining cause is experimental design with random assignment, which isn't possible (can't randomly assign people to grow up in different eras). Next best is to determine 2 items are correlated, then if the change happens in the same direction (e.g. social media use and depression both increase in same years), one MIGHT cause the other. This method can rule OUT possible causes, but can't fully rule IN possible causes.

**Understanding iGen means  
understanding the future - and  
how it impacts all of us**





## iGen Demographics (born 1995-2012)

Most ethnically diverse generation in U.S. history; next generation will be 1st majority non-white generation

74 million — Americans

1 in 4 — Hispanic

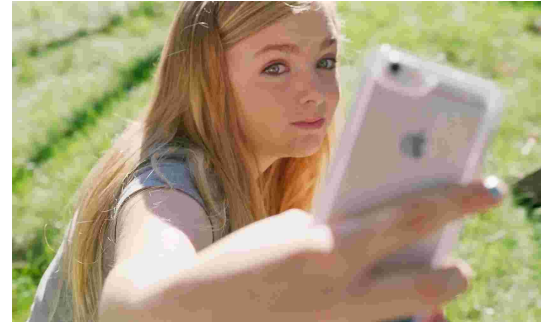
5% — Multiracial

53% — Non-Hispanic whites



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# Let Me Paint You A Picture...



- Busy Schedule balancing swim team, academics, and social life
- Dependence on parents to drive her everywhere, prepare meals, do her laundry, etc.
- Head in her phone, thinking she's multitasking
- Social media shows in real time that she has been left out
- This starts the downward spiral of her friendships, leading to even greater anxiety and a referral to therapy for depression
- She worries that a minor detention or B on an exam will keep her from getting into her dream college
- Because of the perfect facade Instagram creates, she thinks all of her peers are having a much easier time of high school, when in reality, most of them feel just like Jane does



# In No Hurry: Growing up Slowly (Ch. 1)

- **Less likely to go out without their parents**  
(12th graders in 2015 are going out less often than 8th graders did as recently as 2009)
- **Fewer teens driving**  
(compared to Boomers who nearly all had licenses by hs graduation, by 2015 only 72% of iGen'ers did)
- **Fewer “latch-key” kids**  
(Despite more mothers working, whether through after school program, etc., fewer teens home by themselves in afternoon. Just as less likely to go out w/o parents, less likely to be at home w/o parents.)
- **Less likely to date**  
(In early 1990s, nearly three of four 10th graders sometimes dated, but by the 2010s only about half did)
- **Less likely to have sex than previous decades, waiting later, lowest teen birth rate in 2015**  
(drop largest for 9th graders, where number of sexually active teens cut in half since 1990s)



# In No Hurry: Growing up Slowly (Ch. 1)

- **Fewer teens have jobs**  
(In 1980, 70% of teens had summer job, which sank to 43% in 2010s; does not appear due to inability to find a job, since number who don't want a job has doubled). NOT due to extracurriculars, homework
- **Fewer receive allowance**  
(when they need money, ask parents-instead of managing own cash flow)
- **Fewer drink alcohol, trying alcohol later; but more smoke pot**  
In 2016, 40% of iGen hs seniors had never tried alcohol; number of 8th graders who have tried alcohol has been cut in half). Decline is largest in the youngest groups; waiting later to start drinking
- **Fight less with parents**  
(number who had serious fight w/parents more than 3 x per year fell from 66% in 2005 to 56% in 2015)

## Up Next:

If teens are working less, spending less time on homework, going out less, and drinking less, what *are* they doing? For iGen, answer is obvious: smartphones in their hands...



## Internet: Online Time - Other Media Too (Ch. 2)

- **Time Spent Online, Multi-Tasking (~6 hours a day)**  
(iGen hs seniors spend 2 ¼ hrs/day texting, 2 hrs/day internet, 1 ½ hrs/day gaming, ~6 hrs/day +2 hrs tv)
- **More Time Online**  
(12th graders in 2015 spent twice as much time online as 12th graders in 2006 )
- **More Social Media (Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter)**  
(Between 2008 and 2015, social media went from daily activity for half of teens to almost all of them, especially girls: 87% of 12th grade girls used social media every day in 2015, compared to 77% of boys)
- **Video Games (some a lot, some not at all)**  
(27% of teens said played less than hour/week, 9% said played more than 40 hours/week)



## Internet: Online Time - Other Media Too (Ch. 2)

- **Less Likely to Read Books, Magazines (for pleasure)**  
(In late 1970s, most teens read book or magazine nearly every day, by 2015, only 16% did)
- **Quantity of Homework, Extracurriculars Appear Consistent w/Previous Generations**  
(Hence decline in reading not due to HW, activities, but rather online/smartphones)
- **SAT Scores Have Slipped since mid-2000s**  
(B/C college enrollment late 2000s-2010s steady, author doesn't believe due to more students testing)
- **Doesn't appear texting/posting instead of reading are good for comprehension, academic writing**
  - How will students who rarely read books digest an 800 page college textbook?
  - Author argues shorter texts, more convo style, interactive activities, meet students where at

### Up Next

If teens are spending more time communicating with friends online, how much are they seeing them in person?



## In Person No More: Less in-person interact. (Ch.3)

- **Less Time at Parties, With Friends, On Dates, At the Mall, Movies**  
(# of teens who get together w/friends everyday cut in half in 15 years; ->communicating electronically)
- **More Leisure Time Alone**  
(presumably online, on social media, streaming video, and texting)
- **Teens Who Spend More Time On Screen More Likely to Be Unhappy**  
(Without exception, ALL screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all non screen activities are linked to more. E.g. 8th graders who spend ten or more hours/week on social media are 56% more likely to be unhappy than those who don't. Highest risk for youngest teens)
- **Teens Who Visit Social Media Sites Daily Report Higher Loneliness**  
(More likely to agree "I often feel lonely," "I often feel left out" and "I often wish I had more good friends")



## In Person No More: Less in-person interact. (Ch.3)

- **Teens Who Spend More Time On Screens More Likely to be Depressed**  
(8th graders who are heavy social media users increase risk of depression by 27%; while those who play sports, go to religious services, or do homework cut their risk significantly)
- **Increase Suicide Risk**  
(Teens who spend 3+ hours/day on electronic devices are 35% more likely to have at least one suicide risk factor; part of this may be due to cyberbullying; unlike in-person bullying, can't get away)
- **Since 2007, Homicide Rate Among Teens Has Declined, But Suicide Rate Increased**  
(46% more teens killed themselves in 2015 than in 2007. In 2011, for the first time in 24 years, the teen suicide rate was higher than the teen homicide rate)

### Up Next:

Will the decline of in-person social interaction lead to iGen having inferior social skills?



# Insecure: The New Mental Health Crisis (Ch. 4)

- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Heightened**  
(w/tech, see up-to-the minute pictures of what they're missing out on - >loneliness, exclusion; trend **esp. steep for girls**: 48% more girls felt left out in 2015 than 2010, compared to 27% increase for boys)
- **Teen Happiness Faltering; Reporting Lonelier Now than 5 Years Ago**  
(31% more 8th and 10th graders felt lonely in 2015 than in 2011, along with 22% more 12th graders. Teens lonelier now than since MTF survey began in 1991)
- **Symptoms of Depression Skyrocketing (esp. girls)**  
(Boys' depression increased by 21% between 2012 and 2015, and **girls' increased by 50%**; And, girls spend more time on social media)





# Insecure: The New Mental Health Crisis (Ch. 4)

- **Not Just Symptoms of Depression, Clinically Diagnosable Major Depression**  
(56% more teens experienced a major depressive episode in 2015 than 2010, and 60% more experienced severe impairment. Like depressive symptoms and loneliness, increase is far **steeper among girls**: by 2015, 1 in 5 teen girls had experienced a major episode in the last year)
- **Suicide Rates Increasing**  
(Rise is more pronounced in **girls**: though suicide rate still higher for boys (more lethal methods), 3x as many 12-14 year old girls killed themselves in 2015 than in 2007, compared to twice as many boys.)
- **Lack of Sleep May be Another Factor**  
(57% more teens were sleep deprived in 2015 than in 1991. Between 2012 and 2015, 22% more teens failed to get seven hours of sleep (experts advise on 9 hours of sleep for adolescents) Teens who spend 3+ hours/day on electronic devices were 28% more likely to get less than 7 hours of sleep.)



# Insecure: The New Mental Health Crisis (Ch. 4)

- **Smart Phones**

Sudden, sharp rise in depressive symptoms occurred almost the exact same time that smartphones became ubiquitous and in-person interaction plummeted.

- Anxiety (depression's precursor) over not getting desired response, "likes"?
- Girls vulnerable, as perfect selfies have amplified body image issues?

- **Screen Time**

Experiments with random assignment of subjects have found that more screen time causes more anxiety, depression, loneliness, and less emotional connection

- **Lacking Resilience**

With iGen'ers less likely to work, manage their own money, and drive in high school, perhaps they are not developing the resilience that may come from doing things on your own



# Irreligious: Losing Religion, Spirituality (Ch. 5)

- **Decline In Religious Affiliation & Attendance at Religious Services**  
(1980's, 90% of HS seniors identified with a religious group; by 2016, those affiliated with religious group dropped to 66%; 28% of 12th graders in 2015 attended weekly services, down from 40% in 1976.)
- **More Likely to Have Religiously Unaffiliated Parents**  
(In 2016, 17% of parents of college students did not belong to a religion, up from 5% in 1970s)
- **Less Spiritual As Well (Spirituality has not replaced Religion)**  
(college students described selves above avg in spirituality dropped from 45% in 2000 to 36% in 2016)
- **Disparity, Teens from Different Backgrounds w/Different Religious Experiences**  
(teens from higher-SES families are more likely to attend religious services than lower-SES families; yet drop in teens attending religious services has been far more prominent for white teens than black)



# Not Intrinsic, More Safety, Less Community (Ch.6)

- **iGen Teens Are Safer Drivers (at least, those that are driving)**  
(Fewer hs seniors in car accidents, fewer get tickets. Twice as many seniors said they “always” wore seat belts in 2015 than in 1989. Less likely to get in the car with a drunk driver: 40% in 1991 to 20% in 2015)
- **Fewer Likely to Try Alcohol, Teens Less Likely to Binge Drink, 20-21 Years the Same**  
(binge-drinking for 12th graders cut in half; binge-drinking among 21-22 year olds the same -> rapid increase in binge drinking between 18-21) College-bound = less likely to drink in HS than those who don't plan to attend, but once arrive at college are more likely to binge-drink than those not in college.



# Not Intrinsic, More Safety, Less Community (Ch.6)

- **Money Is In, Meaning is Out**  
(82% of 2016 entering college students saying “becoming very well off financially” is important versus 47% saying “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” is important.)
- **Disengaged in School, College**  
(Teens’ interest in school took a sudden plunge around 2012, with fewer saying they found school interesting, enjoyable, or meaningful. More focused on getting better job, less on a general education)



# Income Insecurity, Working to Earn, Not Shop (Ch. 7)

- **More Practical; Many Just Want NOT to Hate Jobs; More Realistic Work-Life Balance**  
(Whereas Millennials more likely to want jobs w/more vacation time, easy pace, iGen'ers desire for balance back to level from 1990s-perhaps bc of Great Recession, more realistic about work, demands)
- **Seem to Have More Work Ethic, But Don't Want to Work Hard**  
(55% of high school seniors agree willing to work overtime, up from 44% in 2004, but continue trend of saying they don't want to work too hard. Seem to expect overtime, but believe desired jobs too much work)
- **Fewer Young Men Working**  
(by 2016, 1 in 4 men in early 20s not working-not due to more men in college, b/c this number steady)
- **Growing Number of Teens think success is Out of Reach**  
(more than Millennials, believe that women are discriminated in jobs-and getting a college education, which doesn't make sense since women make up 57% of college grads)



## Indefinite: Sex, Marriage, Children (Ch. 8)

- **Attitudes Towards Sex Between Unmarried Adults**  
(In 2006, about 50% of 18-29 year olds believed sex btw 2 unmarried adults “not wrong at all”, same as 1970’s. Then it shot up, with 65% of young people in 2016 declaring it “not wrong at all”)
- **Yet Less Likely to Have Sex as Teens/Young Adults**  
(As of 2007, avg high school boy had lost virginity, but after 2009 only a minority of boys (43%) had sex, along with 39% of girls. This is a reversal of previous trend toward sex at younger ages.)
- **Decrease In Infection rates for STDs Among Teens Beginning 2012**  
(Fewer teens having sex = fewer with STDs)
- **More Young Adults Not Having Sex at All**  
(More than twice as many iGen’ers and late Millennials (those born in 1990s) in their early twenties (16%) had not sex at all since age 18 compared to Genx’ers at same age (6%).)



## Indefinite: Sex, Marriage, Children (Ch. 8)

- **Accessibility of Pornography**  
(In 2005, 42% of 10-17 year olds said had seen online pornography in last year,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of them unwittingly.)
- **Just As Likely to Say They Want to Get Married**  
(77% of 12th graders said so in 2015, same as 1976. But more believe it's good to live together 1st)
- **Is Work More Important Than Family?**  
(In 1976, 12th graders rated "having a good marriage and family life" higher than any other life goal. By 2011, slipped to 4th behind steady work, being successful at work, giving children better opportunities.)
- **Waiting Longer to Marry, Fewer Getting Married, Later Motherhood**  
(In 1960, median age at first marriage for women was 20 (23 for men). As of 2015, it's 27.1 years old for women (29 for men). Fewer are getting married at all, w/ US marriage rate hitting all-time low in 2010s. Since 1990 birth rate for women in early 20s plunged 36%; meanwhile, birth rate for 35-39 year old women increased by 63%. )





## Inclusive: LGBT, Gender, Race Issues (Ch. 9)


- **Reporting\* Of Same-Sex Sexual Experience Is On The Rise\*; Also Bisexuality**  
(# of young women who've had sex w/at least one other woman tripled since 1990s. More men report male sexual partner as well. Adults w/ bisexual experience tripled btw 1990 and 2016, from 3% to 11%)
- **Gender Equality/Working Mothers**  
( $\frac{2}{3}$  of high school seniors in 2015 said mother worked all or most time growing up - double the Class of 1976. Still may view male-female partnerships in traditional terms: 12th graders who *disagreed* "husband should make all the important decisions in the family" peaked in 1990s at 70%, falling to 61% in 2015.
- **Racial Attitudes Shift Towards Equality; Tolerate Diversity**  
(% of whites who wouldn't want close relative to marry a black person plummeted from 54% in early 1990s to 10% in 2010s; 2016, 60% of white adults 18-30 supported Black Lives Matter, compared to 37% of 50-64 year olds )

\*Maybe more people willing to admit experiences, rather than more having, either way, reporting on the rise.



# Independent: Politics (Ch. 10)

- **Politically Independent, Rise in Conservatives, Decline of Moderate**  
(In 2016, 54% of 18-29 year olds identified independent - up from 1/3 in 1989; more iGen conservatives than among Millennials in hs; in contrast, those identifying liberal barely budged since 1990s, decreased slightly in 2010s; more students at extremes -“very” conservative or liberal- increase divisiveness?)
- **Disconnected, Dissatisfied, Distrustful of Government, Political Process**  
(Trend appears among adults of all ages: % who had “great deal of confidence” across 13 institutions (press, education, medicine, government) averaged 21% in 2014, lowest in history of survey since 1972)
- **Belief in Importance, Yet Less Likely to Take Political Action**  
(College students in 2016 rated importance of “keeping up with political affairs” at highest level since 1992, yet less likely to take political action-political participation reached all time lows in 2014 and 2015)
- **Less informed:** From GenX to Millennials to iGen, the number of 8th and 12th graders who got the news often and from several sources fell from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$ . (linked to the more extreme political views?)



**iGen'ers are addicted to their phones, and they know it. Many also know it's not entirely a good thing...**

The key to phones is **moderation** (teens & adults):

- How much phone is in hand, eyes on screen, time spent communicating electronically instead of in-person
- Use for the cool stuff they can do, but put down and be present in the moment as much as possible



# In High Schools, Colleges

**Explore ways to train faculty and support students in the importance of growth mindset and grit, cultivating confidence and self-efficacy -> Social-Emotional Learning** (the beliefs, attitudes, personality traits and behaviors that students need to succeed in school and life)

- Develop common understanding of social emotional learning (SEL) and align to SEL activities
- Invest in relevant staff positions and adult professional development
- Measure social-emotional learning outcomes and provide support to use the data
- Integrate social-emotional learning and racial equity efforts
- Integrate social-emotional learning and subject area content

**[Enacting Social-Emotional Learning: Lessons from “Outlier Schools” in California’s CORE Districts](#)**  
(Policy Analysis for California Education, April 2018)



# In the College Search Process

Challenge Success, initiative of Stanford University, finds that research shows:

- **Rankings** are problematic
- **College selectivity is not a reliable predictor** of student learning, job satisfaction, well-being
- **Engagement in college is more important** than where you attend (e.g. taking a course from a prof. who makes learning exciting, working with profs, finding a mentor, working on a project across several semesters, participating in an internship that applies classroom learning, being active in extracurriculars)

Encourage students and families “to look beyond rankings and selectivity, instead seeking a good fit, where students can engage and participate fully in academic and social life in order to thrive both during college and years beyond”

[A “Fit” Over Rankings: Why College Engagement Matters More than Selectivity.](#) (Challenge Success, October 2018)



# Understanding and Working With iGen

## What Colleges Can Expect:

- Advising more **students who don't know how to manage life** by themselves (academically, socially, financially)
- More students will have **first drink of alcohol** and **sexual experience** on campus, away from home and support of parents/ longtime friends -> challenges of **sexual assault** (college freshman are two and a half times more likely than older students to be sexually assaulted)
- **Girls** are primary consumers of social media, primary sufferers of resulting **mental health** issues
- **More interaction with students' parents**, especially if on-campus resources are inadequate

# Understanding and Working With iGen

## What Colleges Can Do...

- **Advise students to put phones away when studying** - brain cannot multi-task; short breaks
- **Advise students not to sleep with phone** - stimulation and light interferes w/sleep
- **Have realistic conversations** about college parties, binge drinking, how to stay safe (both genders!)
- **Have realistic conversations** about social media, sending/receiving nude photos (both genders)
- **Encourage growth mindset** (learning from mistakes), **grit** (not giving up)





# Understanding and Working With iGen

## Countering anxiety/depression...

- In-person time, exercise, therapy, medication
- Eliminate limits for on-campus therapy sessions
- Make resources available after hours (counseling closes at 5pm; little avail in evening when needed)





# Understanding and Working With iGen

## What Faculty Can Expect...


- Students are **less confident; more hesitant to ask questions**, scared of saying wrong thing, not as sure of their opinions; requires more trust and reassurance to cultivate active participation in class
- They don't mind lectures as long as they convey information needed on the exam (they **focus more on the exam grade and less on the joy of learning**)
- **Less experience reading books** and longer articles
- More accepting of authority than Millennials but **just as likely to fall asleep in class if they don't participate or at least get to watch a few videos**



# Understanding and Working With iGen

## What Faculty Can Do....

- **Build trust** with students, to facilitate active participation in class, willingness to ask questions
- **Balance lecture with discussion**, relating student experiences to material (which will be on exam)
- **Keep class interesting**, address short attention spans by toggling lecture, discussion, videos, demos
- Consider covering **less content but more depth** (in light of less experience reading)
- **Update books/readings at least every 3 years**, lest students distrust because “out of date”
- **Teach how to judge content**, evaluating sources and evidence to determine what’s real vs not real



**Need to “strike a balance between solutions and acceptance. Cultural change is always a trade-off: with the good comes some bad”**

- On the plus side, fewer teens drinking alcohol, having sex, and getting into car accidents; generally safer
- On the flip side: growing up more slowly rather than shifting to responsibility; and experiencing anxiety, loneliness, depression



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