

From Traditionalists to Gen Z: Generational Differences in Psychology

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Hello everyone, and welcome to the From Traditionalists to Generation Z-- Generational Differences in Psychology webinar. My name is Kaitlin Hennessy, and I'm the program coordinator here at Global Connections. And our goal at Global Connections is providing engaging extra-curricular programming for students at a distance, anywhere they have an internet connection.

And presenting this evening will be Dr. Chris Barry. He is a professor here at Washington State University in the Department of Psychology. And as many of you are already doing, please use that chat box to submit questions to Dr. Barry, or you can discuss today's content. We will be doing more of a formal Q and A towards the end but really, put those questions whenever you would like.

And if you do have any technical difficulties, please do let me know in the chat. I will do my best to help you. Or if for some reason you can't access the chat, you can email me at Kaitlin.Hennessy@wsu.edu. OK. I'm going to turn it over to Chris, and thank you all so much for coming.

DR. CHRIS BARRY: Thank you, Kaitlin. I'm really excited to be talking about this topic with you all this evening. It's one that definitely captures the attention of psychologists and psychologists who focus on developmental issues or even clinical issues.

Myself, I'm a clinical child and adolescent psychologist. And so I deal a lot with questions about things that are perhaps changes in teens today versus previous generations, some developmental questions about whether behaviors, and attitudes, and personality characteristics that adolescents share are normal developmentally, or abnormal, or atypical developmentally.

And then, as a psychologist, I'm really interested in individual differences as well. And so that will be the shaping of the discussion this evening, is to talk about each of those components. But this topic, I think, really captures a lot of popular press attention that we'll talk about tonight as well. It captures the attention of individuals in other fields including sociology and medicine, and definitely business as well. There's a whole literature in business about how there may be some generational differences in new or prospective employees, and how to handle those, and how those work in a business environment.

So in terms of getting us started and thinking about how a typical classification system for generations works, the one that I have used is one that's used broadly in sociology. And you can see traditionalists-- and we also refer to this generation based on the Tom Brokaw book-- we refer to them as the Greatest Generation. And these are going to be individuals born before

1946. The baby boomers are from 1946 to 1964, so immediately after World War II. And then for the next 18 years, Generation X follows that, as you can see, from '65 to '84.

Millennials, which I'm sure you've heard a lot about millennials, are roughly from '85 to 2004. There's also a subgroup along with the millennials that are talked about in some of the literature called Generation Y, so coming directly after Generation X. And then the current generation is sort of to be determined in terms of a label and in terms of the time frame, but one of the terms that's popped quite a bit is Generation Z. So going from Generation X to Generation Y, now Generation Z. So that's the classification system that I would use in our discussions regarding some of the trends that we see and don't see.

So one thing I'm very interested in, in terms of understanding the audience and who I'm speaking with, is what generation you all would belong to, who are listening. And so we're going to pop up a quick poll for that, just to get a sense of the generations that are represented. So if you would take a moment and make a selection, that would be great.

OK. So a lot of millennials in the audience, and that's the audience I'm used to talking to in the classroom here at WSU, and then some other representation down the line. No Generation Z folks snuck in on us, so we can talk negatively about them behind their backs if we want to. So that's really helpful. And so we're thinking about millennials being represented, but then also having some audience members from the other generation. So thank you for those responses.

So in terms of the discussion and how it's going to be organized, I'll talk about the generational, or what's sometimes called a cohort, perspective on generational differences, how social events, and really belonging to a generation really influenced psychology or behaviors that people show, and the attitudes and relationship characteristics that they show. The second is going to be a developmental perspective. So thinking about how the stage of development that we're in, or our life stage, really influences our psychology. We'll also speak briefly about an individual differences perspective and then some concluding comments.

So from a generational or cohort perspective, as I mentioned earlier, it really does capture a lot of popular press attention. And so this Time Magazine cover from a few years ago really grabs our attention-- "The Me, Me, Me Generation." Millennials are lazy entitled narcissists who still live with their parents. So if you are part of that generation, or even if you're not, maybe you've heard the stereotype that we're becoming more and more narcissistic as each subsequent generation goes through. A lot of my research is on narcissism, so the examples I'll use this evening gravitate toward that.

But then that little sub-heading under that-- "why they'll save us all." So it gets our attention, works against that negative stereotype as well. So it illustrates, I think, a sensationalistic view of generations that tends to be negative, but there's a plot twist in there too, which is that there may be some adaptive aspects of this generation, or any generation for that matter.

So the generational or cohort perspective is really grounded in the idea that there are social events or trends that shape our behavior, our attitudes, and our life course-- just how things are going from a socioeconomic standpoint, from a stressor standpoint, from the types of media that we're exposed to, et cetera. So simply being born into different generations will shape us by our exposure to different social events as part of that generation.

The view of this perspective, as I alluded to a moment ago, tends to be more and more negative of each subsequent generation. So we hear and maybe we even say, oh, kids these days. And so the generational perspective where there are sharp absolute differences between people born into different generations tends to be in the direction of viewing the next generation of young people as progressively getting more and more negative.

But we also know, from social events and social change, that really there are positive adaptations that occur across generations too. So if we think about things like social justice, and discrimination, and things that really deal with how we relate to the people around us, the world around us, in at least a broad sense, those things continue to improve or move forward.

This perspective, as you probably already realized, lends itself to really broad generalizations about members of a generation. So we lump millennials in together in a certain category. We lump baby boomers together into certain characteristics or descriptions just as easily as well. So in terms of some things that are out there that we'll see, the table in your left is a very common type of table, and it refers to Generation Y, in this example, where members of different generations are broken down into different characteristics in terms of how they relate to each other, what kind of communication strategies they use, what kind of feedback they're looking for, say, in an educational or work environment.

And there's no shortage of these kinds of tables. I picked one, but there are several that are supposed to convey to, say, potential employers how to relate to people of different generations. And you can start to see that there may be a kernel of truth to some of these, but they also tend to really capitalize on broad generalizations about generations.

We also saw a bestselling book from Tom Brokaw about the Greatest Generation to really describe the unique social experiences of the generation-- what we call the traditionalists-- who were born before World War II, and in many cases served in World War II, that went through the Great Depression. So we can think about what types of tendencies psychologically, behaviorally, socially we see in those individuals shaped largely by the kinds of things they went through.

A psychologist, a fellow psychologist, who studies narcissism has published a book and been on The Today Show many, many times touting the narcissism epidemic and that we're becoming more and more narcissistic, and really pinning that on millennials. And then you see popular TV shows and movies that depict the relationship tendencies of generations. And so there's no shortage of this in different forms of media.

I see a question that was really interesting too, about the dark triad. I'll get to that in a moment, so thank you for sending that question in. So this next slide depicts something that I do with my clinical child psychology course here at WSU-- it's an undergraduate course-- at the beginning of each semester. And so most recently, in August, I asked these folks, mostly 18 to 22-year-olds, to just fill in or complete this sentence-- "kids these days." So I want to walk through the different things that were said.

You'll see a lot of negative things, but not completely. They're not treated like they are the future. They're mistreated. They don't receive the adequate amount of stimulation for proper development, they need more interactive parents, they are attached to their phones and social media-- that's a very common theme in the responses I get. I often hear they're spoiled and entitled but I don't agree with that-- a student said that. They want the world handed to them gift wrapped with a pretty bow.

So those two comments back to back are contradictory. One says they don't agree that young people, kids these days, are entitled and another basically describes kids being entitled. They're very involved with technology, and there's a difference with the ideas of privacy, networking, acceptance compared to other generations, and technology starts to definitely play a role in how we might see the younger generation or folks who are younger than us.

Persons that are growing up very quickly, they're not thinking for themselves. They learn electronics at a young age where they know they can use Google-- and maybe I'll allude to that in an example later as well. So really, again, broad strokes. I kind of set them up for that-- "kids these days." It's a broad sentence for them to finish and they were able to oblige, but somewhat in a negative slant, certainly not completely.

In terms of events that shape generations-- and I want you to think for yourself about each of those generations that we talked about at the beginning-- and what social events might shape, just by going through those events, how they might shape our behavior, our attitudes, our world view. So with traditionalists, as we can readily recognize, the Great Depression, World War II. I remember my grandfather would literally drive across town to save a few cents on a can of beans and things like that, or definitely to save money on gas.

And one thought I had growing up, and as I got more and more interested in the field of psychology, I was thinking essentially, well, do we become more cheap, essentially, with our money as we get older? Maybe. But also a big factor in that-- I have to believe, and he's talked about this too-- is living through the Great Depression, growing up in that time. It was a really impactful event that really shaped his economic view and the importance of being thrifty. And so that, in and of itself, has an impact on how a lot of individuals in that generation would view the world as they grow up.

The baby boomers, and definitely technology and thinking about exposure to technology, communication really starts to advance with baby boomers, but not nearly to the extent that we see, of course, now. So the availability of television as a passive form of communication,

getting information in that way, the Vietnam War was certainly part of the events that shaped that generation as well. Generation X, my generation, the emergence of the internet. So this is something that was just emerging at the time that I was in college. It's sort of hard to imagine now, it's almost funny to think back on, but we're starting to see getting shaped into communication strategies that we see now.

And millennials, definitely the emergence of social media. It's not that millennials never had a life without social media-- they certainly did. It started to take hold as they were coming of age. 9/11, 2001-- certainly a social event that, as we continue to look back on our own growth and development, we may continue to realize the impact that that may have had. And then new communication technology in terms of more readily accessible internet, computers, et cetera.

And then we go into Generation Z, even more of the same, more accessible technology and social media, and it's really, in many ways, hard to imagine a life without it, in some regards, for the people in that generation. So I have a son in that generation, and I wouldn't say that he's very attached to it, but it is second nature to him and his peers. They're very easily adaptable to that technology, whereas those of us who are older have a hard time figuring it out at first.

So in terms of generational differences, I don't want to lend the impression that it's all about social events and that it's overstated and it's only negative. There are things that we've been able to track over the course of decades in psychology that really do seem to point to generational differences. And so one of the best examples of that, as you see, is what's called the Flynn Effect.

The Flynn Effect is essentially that scores on IQ tests-- standardized, individually administered IQ tests-- have continued to increase since the 1930s. Now first of all, with the 1930s, it was really the first time we could actually compare cohorts or compare generations. Most of these standardized tests that are the root of the tests that we use today started being developed around World War I. So if we think about the 19-teens, or 1910s, 1920s, those were starting to be developed and scored.

And so around the 1930s, scientists could start to compare generations and cohorts. And so what we see almost over the course of the last 100 years is that scores on IQ tests, just the amount of items that people get right, have continued to increase over time. So for one, it obviously highlights the need to re-norm these tests and even revise these tests. When we're comparing scores to people in our cohort, we obviously need to give a representative samples different samples, et cetera.

But the other part of that is, why does this happen? So we do revise items, we do think about IQ differently, but we still see this trend. And so the prevailing theory-- and Flynn talks about this himself-- is that there are generational differences in terms of how we adapt to solving abstract problems, and it's also part of what we try to do educationally as well. So the example that he uses, and I think it becomes really salient in our day and age, is that prior to, say, the

advent of the internet and easily accessible information, a focus in instruction might have been on memorizing state capitals.

And so you might even have a case where someone in a previous generation was really adept at naming state capitals, and today's kids these days struggle naming state capitals. But what kids tend to be taught now is not so much about memorizing state capitals but perhaps understanding why state capitals might be placed where they are, so that they're not always necessarily in the largest city in a state. They might be relatively centrally located or there might be political reasons why-- say, urban vote went out, or a rural vote-- especially when states were being established-- a rural vote went out.

And so there are more abstract ways to think about state capitals when all we have to do is google a state capital. So that the adaptation, as much as it might be frustrating for parents or teachers in dealing with it sometimes, is not to memorize state capitals but to think more abstractly about the why and how.

And so those more abstract ways of solving problems actually start to map onto the way that IQ has been tested for 100 years, that IQ has been tested with things that are not involved in rote memorization but on solving novel problems or on abstract reasoning. And so, as much as we want to sometimes belittle the educational system or the things that kids don't know that we knew or that previous generations knew, a lot of what's happening is working with, or trying to work with, students on how to adapt to new ways of solving problems.

In terms of other generational differences, a really key concept in our field over the last 15 to 20 years has been this concept of emerging adulthood. It probably drives parents crazy, parents of adult age children. And it's the idea that-- and this is easy to track-- there are increasingly later ends to our formal education. We stay in school longer. We know that. It's an easily trackable trend, as I mentioned, and that we tend to begin a family and, or career later.

So if you go home to a holiday and you have parents or grandparents hounding you about when are you going to get married, their worldview of when those things tend to start is much earlier than what our successive generations tend to view. So if we think about-- and you may think about your own parents and grandparents-- it's likely, it's not always the case of course, it's likely that they may have gotten married earlier. They may have ended their formal education earlier. But society has changed in that way. And so our field has carved out this subgroup group of-- they're not adolescents, they're not adults in certain definitions of the term. And that's tricky too, in terms of who says an adult has to have a family or can't stay in school.

But there's this carved out term, a carved out sub-generation of emerging adulthood. And so roughly, that is viewed as being from 18 to 26. If you think about, even the laws have been shaped around that in terms of health insurance and being able to stay on our parents policy until age 26. So people get the message that it's becoming much more normal, much more typical, to stay in formal education and even to stay single well into one's 20s and maybe even 30s as well. The average age of marriage in the United States, at least the latest statistics I saw,

was 28 for men and 29 for women, versus in the early 1970s, it was 20 and 21. So big change in a relatively-- in terms of the big picture things-- a relatively short period of time.

And then we also see changes across generations in social and political attitudes. So you see a few examples on your screen as well. So in 1977, 2/3 of respondents in a large survey said it was better if the man works and the woman stays at home. In 2000, 35% did. I would suspect that if that were repeated in 2018 we'd see an even lower percentage agreeing with that.

In 1972, 48% said that sex before marriage is wrong. 2000, 36% did. We might see that continue downward trend in that as well. 1972, 39%-- four out of ten essentially-- responded said interracial marriage should be illegal, down to 12% in 2000. I would suspect-- hope-- that it's lower even now. And then in 1958, so going back quite a few decades, 78% said the government can be trusted, and 2000, 44% said. So I will leave it to your own conclusions whether you think that trend has gone up or down at this point.

The other thing to remember though is that attitudes will not necessarily always move in a more progressive or so-called liberal direction, but that attitudes do change. And so there are genuine generational differences across different attitudes about relationships, about economic standing, about appropriate, inappropriate behavior. And so we can definitely point to generational differences in some regards.

Another area of research that I'm personally interested in are social media and behavioral habits, risk behavior habits of adolescents. That's one of the areas in which I do a lot of research. So there is a researcher I alluded to earlier, who authored the narcissism epidemic book, has published some data recently focusing on teen trends and thinking about these from a generational standpoint. So I'm presenting these, but I would like to also present some caveats to this, and maybe some food for thought, and some arguments with this too.

So I hope that you can see these graphs really well. The vertical marker that's on each of the graphs presented in this piece focuses on 2007 when the iPhone was released. That's the critical social event that you would point to in the data, but what you would go on to further argue is that maybe it was about 2012 before these were universal or seemingly universal so that even teenagers, or high school students more specifically, had common access to these. And so in graph one, we see a downward trend starting with the data for 12th graders in 1976 and a downward trend in terms of the number of times that teens per week go out with their friends. So we see a downward trend there.

We also see that same pattern in driving. So still is the vast majority of teens are driving by the time that they're in 12th grade, but we see a downward trend, say, from the '70s to today. One issue, though, in terms of thinking about this generation, Generation Z, as being inherently different than all the previous generations is that these were downwardly trending anyway. So it's hard to point to something like iPhones being the cause. We really want to be hesitant to talk about a single cause. So it definitely gets our attention. The downward trend is continuing,

maybe it's even getting a little bit stronger, and so we want to think about why that is, but maybe all the reasons why there's, not necessarily a single one.

Another one is less dating. So a percentage of teens who ever go out on dates and we see, obviously, with the different colored lines we would expect that more 12th graders would endorse that than the 8th graders-- so the black line versus the red line-- so we see a downward trend there. We see less sex, but that's a fairly-- if you think about from the '90s to today-- fairly flat trend, maybe a slight downward trend as of late. So again, I think these are interesting. I'm not as convinced in terms of a sharp change.

But there are two more that really get my attention-- loneliness and not getting enough sleep. So being lonely and being more sleepy. These definitely start moving in a different direction from Generation Z. And so these are things I think we have to recognize as social scientists. There may be something here in terms of social events and in terms of well-being.

So no teen wants to feel lonely. It's a really important part of the adolescent experience is to feel connected to other people. And so we see a recent trend, say from 2010 to, the last point of the data were 2015, in terms of teens reporting feeling lonely.

Now that, on the surface, we might think, doesn't make sense. Well, social media, you can connect with people-- you don't even have to be in the same room with them. But I think also, if we're experiencing social media, we recognize pretty quickly that those connections may not be the same. And so that even having a lot of friends, or followers, or following a lot of people on social media for teens isn't providing the connection that we think of as important in our adolescent development or even adult development. And so, on the one hand, social media presumably keep us more connected, but do they really? And so this is something we want to pay attention to.

The other, the bottom graph there, graph number six, in terms of sleep. That's a pretty easy one for us to wrap our heads around too in terms of just turning the electronics off before going to bed and how many teens really do that. Especially as teens get older, parents are not monitoring those things as much. And so there are clear, in terms of being a psychologist and a clinical psychologist, clear behavioral intervention implications for that which, the first one is being, make sure the electronics are turned off at bedtime or even a little bit before bedtime so we can wind down. The loneliness is another issue as well in terms of really trying to connect with teens on what a meaningful connection with others would be. So these are things in terms of generational trends and especially for Generation Z, if you will, really get our attention.

So most of the research in terms of generational differences has, oddly enough, been done in business-- I've alluded to this a couple of times already-- in terms of employers or organizations wanting to know how do we reach potential employees. How do we market ourselves to potential customers as well? And that we have to have a different strategy to reach a certain age demographic versus another age demographic. So the vast majority of this research is really

not even in psychology at all. It's in terms of business and, more specifically, in terms of management and marketing.

And then also how generational differences shape our interactions. And so I think a fruitful area coming up in our field is going to be about, how do the technological advances that continue to happen, and that were essentially emerged, and influence how generations interact with each other. And how is that different for Generation Z which, really, essentially, is not having a life without social media versus the millennials, and Generation X, et cetera, who can't remember that. And does that shape their interactions as well?

When research tries to pinpoint generational differences, one of the things that we see is that the methodology tends to be really flawed. So we have to be extremely careful, first of all, in terms of generalizing certain characteristics to a whole generation of people. It's not really fair, it's not really accurate. The other part is that when generational differences are demonstrated from research, the methodology tends to actually not be very good. So we have a hard time measuring complex psychological constructs like motivation, like attitudes, like what things people value. Those are really abstract concepts and very personal concepts, so it is tricky to measure those and to measure those in ways where we can accurately compare generations across time.

The other big problem in this research is that the research on generational differences tends to be conducted at one time point-- what we call cross-sectional research. So for example, I might want to do a study on generational differences in loneliness, and so I might get a group of 15-year-olds, and 20-year-olds, and 25-year-olds, and 30-year-olds, 35-year-olds, and so on, and study loneliness.

And then I see differences, and maybe I see that that 15-year-old group was the most lonely group in my whole entire study. That could be a generational difference, but it also could be a developmental difference. Maybe those things change as we grow older naturally. And so it's hard in that research design to tease apart generational and developmental influence. That's something really important to keep in mind.

So in terms of thinking about this with adolescents, and that's really where a lot of our attention focuses on, I certainly focus a lot of my research and attention on adolescent generational characteristics. In one quote that I came across, that I think really captures young people today is that, "the young in character are prone to desire, ready to carry any desire that they may have formed into action. Of bodily desires, desires is the sexual to which they are most disposed to give away, and in regard to sexual desire they exercise no self-restraint." So we start thinking about teenagers in that regard.

"They are changeful, too, and they are fickle in their desires. Their lives are lived principally in hope. They have high aspirations, for they had not yet been humiliated by the experience of life, they are unacquainted with the limiting force of circumstances. Youth is the age when people are most devoted to their friends," certainly rings true, "if the young commit a fault, it is

always on the side of excess and exaggeration, for they carry everything too far, whether it be their love or their hatred or anything else." Wow. What a nice description of teenagers today. These Generation Z teenagers, maybe even some of the millennials as well. Except it was said in 4th century BC by Aristotle.

So what that points to, at least for me, is that there are some almost universal truths, if you will, about that stage of development that applies across generation after generation after generation, apparently for 2,500 years. It is to really think about, OK, is what we're seeing really about kids these days and how each generation is really leading us down a path of self-destruction? Or is it really about that there are developmental influences on how we interact with the world around us?

And so that's the next broad perspective that I'll talk about this evening, is the developmental perspective. And then with this picture, "I'm so out of this house," a very common adolescent teenager things except, "when I turn 30," an ode the emerging adulthood idea. So with this perspective is the idea that not social events necessarily largely shape individuals and the generational perspective, but that development, or the stage of development, or period of development shapes individuals. And so what we're doing, in terms of comparing generations, is really keep in mind that what we're comparing are snapshots of where those cohorts, where those generations are developmentally at that moment in time.

So again, if we were to do a study right now where we may compare baby boomers to Generation Z, we have to recognize that part of what influences them is that they're at a different stage of life right now. And so that they actually may look more similar if we had studied the baby boomers when they themselves were teenagers. Certainly there are social differences in terms of communication, and fads, and fashion, and ways of conversing with other people. But that if we look at differences between them right now and take a snapshot, it's probably over-exaggerating generational differences because what we also have in the picture is developmental influences as well.

So in terms of adolescence, and focusing on them as one example, we know that adolescence, universally, cross-culturally, is marked by biological, cognitive, and social transitions that are unique to that period of development, that we don't see in such a short period of time in any other stage of our lives. If we think about all the rapid biological changes that are happening, certainly the cognitive changes that are happening-- if there are any parents in the audience, you know that your adolescents are speaking to you differently, and they're coming up with counterarguments and loopholes to everything you say. And that's by and large due to cognitive development and being able to reason in more abstract ways. It may not be that they're arguing more than when they were a three or four-year-old but they're trying to argue better than they used to.

And then social transitions-- that need for connection to peers, merely spending more time with peers than parents compared to when they were younger. So we've seen from this a universal, if you will, trend-- doesn't apply in every situation, of course. Pre-adolescence, we

see a relatively heightened period of conflict with authority figures, especially parents. We see more moodiness than we might have noticed when they were younger. We see more risk-taking behavior, and there are lots of things we think that drive that. And we see the increased influence of the peers. So it's not, when we see that kids these days are having a lot of conflict with authority figures, it's all about kids these days. It's about where kids these days, in some regards, are in terms of their development.

The other thing that we see that we have to keep in mind in terms of things like risk behavior is that a lot of older adults have the benefit of experience. They made mistakes and learned from them. We also see with older adults, they are dismissive of fads and fashion. They may get made fun of by younger generations but they also realize that these things come and go and they're temporary. And so our experience teaches us not to perhaps get caught up in that. Our experience teaches us to pick and choose the people we want to associate with. Our experience teaches us the potential real consequences of some risk-taking behavior.

In terms of the other developmental differences-- I'm just citing a few examples. This is certainly not an exhaustive list. It's also something I wouldn't say is necessarily the most important developmental trends in our field, but things that are food for thought. One is that we see some evidence of a downward trend in narcissism with age, so part of that generational idea of what the epidemic of narcissism might be is that there's sort of a natural developmental decline in narcissism and self-centeredness as we get older.

Antisocial or, to be more specific, illegal behavior tends to peak at around age 17 to 18 and then declines throughout adulthood. So if we were to graph that, it would really look like a mountain peak where it progressively gets more common and more prevalent through the teenage years. It's at its highest lifetime prevalence, if you will, in the late teen years and then starts to drop off.

And that's across different decades, it's across different countries. So there's the developmental influence, we think, with a lot of illegal behavior, and you can think about social reasons for that too in terms of more opportunity to engage in that behavior. A lot of that behavior occurs in peer groups as well.

Depression rates. Maybe against some of our stereotypes, according to the CDC, rise from childhood a pretty rare disorder in young children, clinical depression. But it continues to increase from childhood to adolescence to adulthood up until age 60, and then declines. So prevalence rates of depression actually-- we might want to think about moody teens-- but it's pretty typical for the prevalence rate of depression to increase through adulthood.

Deaths of motor vehicle accidents-- this is one that, I think if we can wrap our heads around, peak in that age group of 15 to 29 and then start to decline and then start to rise again after age 16. And it probably has to do in terms of our reaction time behind the wheel et cetera, in terms of that later peak later on. And then risky driving behavior might be an explanatory factor for the younger group in that.

And then suicide rates are the highest in terms of an age group and age bracket in ages 45 to 64. We also see that the teen rate into the early 20s is actually lower than basically any adult group. So we certainly would be concerned about suicide at any time in development but we see developmental trends in terms of when is it most common, when is it most typical.

And when we see developmental trends across the slide, we want to start to understand what are the reasons for that. And it can't just be generational, because these things continue to replicate, at least in the general pattern, across decades, across generations. So again, developmental differences are going to shape a lot of what we see, and we might be too quick to point to as generational differences.

And then lastly, we'll talk about the individual differences perspective. So with all the different trends that I've talked about, including the last slide, and important thing to keep in mind is that there's going to be individual variability with everything I've already said. And so as a psychologist, I get really interested in that. So an example that I'll share is from my own work with narcissism.

So if we were to believe generational differences in narcissism, we would think that, from this 2005 to this 2014 data-- so I collected samples throughout this time period of 2005 to 2014. Each of these groups consisted of 16 to 19-year-olds, so across different cohorts. And we would expect it to just continue to rise. We would expect it to maybe rise really rapidly, especially whenever the iPhone was in there, or selfies were in there, for example. And we don't see that. We see a relatively flat profile.

When we look at the distribution of this group, and these data are 16 to 18-year-olds, we see a bell-shaped curve. We think of a lot of psychological constructs as being bell shaped in their distribution, or what's called a normal distribution. And so if we have the flat profile, and then we have a bell-shaped curve, that suggests that, OK, a lot of teens are in the middle on narcissism. And I had a colleague one time say, oh, you're studying adolescent narcissism? You're just studying adolescence-- they're all narcissistic.

This bell-shaped curve suggests otherwise-- that there really are individual differences that we should pay attention to, that it's not simply an aspect of being a teenager. It's not simply an aspect of being a Millennial or a member of Generation Z. There are individual differences in our personality, and that we should seek to understand that as well. So in terms of individual differences, this is our focus of psychology, our main focus, and would argue it should continue to be so we really don't fall into the trap of overgeneralizing trends. Those trends are important to understand, as I have emphasized, but we also have to break these questions down at the individual level.

So the individual is impacted by a complex interplay or interaction of biological factors. Our own biology is very unique. Psychological factors, which include cognitive factors, emotional factors, motivational factors, and social factors, those are going to include development, those are going to include the social events that shaped our generation, but they also are really

complicated at the individual level. So examples of that, just really quick, brief examples of that are the fact that we see psychological research, personality research more specifically, over the past several decades demonstrating this big five pattern of personality.

So conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and extroversion. So there are meaningful measurable individual differences on these broad personality constructs that don't seem to change a whole lot across generations, that don't seem to change a whole lot from adolescence to adulthood, and when we can start to measure these things reliably. So we want to pay attention to that. Where do people fall on these personality dimensions, and how is that related to their behavior? How is that related to their relationships?

We also see-- and you're probably familiar with this research-- that six universal facial expressions have been identified-- sadness, happiness, anger, surprise, disgust, and fear. And that's universal, cross-culturally. And so there are individual differences though in terms of what situations elicit those out of us. My fear might be someone else's happiness, for example. So there are individual differences in that even though there's some common human experiences there.

So there are core ways that we're different from each other and we also have to recognize that we each act differently in different situations or even act differently in the same situation. So it's complicated. That is hopefully one message that you've gotten tonight is that there are really interesting generational trends that we should pay attention to, there are really interesting developmental tendencies and influences on our psychology, but that we also differ from each other, and those things are important to understand as well.

So an example of this, in terms of how these all go together perhaps, and how it points to a complicated but understandable message, is some research I've done with some of my own students here at the WSU where we looked at teen social media engagement and their mental health. And so for example, we asked simple questions about social media engagement-- just how many accounts they had, just how many applications they had active use on for social media. So we asked of the teens. We also asked the teens about their fear of missing out, or what's known as FOMO. So their fear of missing out on social activities or things that their group of friends are doing. So fear of missing out, or FOMO.

And then, along the y-axis, our anxiety symptoms. So we asked the parents to rate their teens' anxiety symptoms. And so what we found is that the number of social media accounts that teens were active on was related to more anxiety-- and this also helps for depression-- more anxiety but only for the teens who had a high fear of missing out. So it's not merely being social media that's related to anxiety, it's being on social media is related to anxiety, but for certain teens.

And the reason I bring this up in terms of thinking about the complexity of this is that first of all, I do think this is a generational thing we should pay attention to. The term FOMO didn't exist

when I was a teenager, when I was in this 14 to 17-year-old group that we studied. So there's a generational piece of this. I would argue there's also a developmental piece to this that perhaps FOMO is a bigger concern, a bigger source of distress for teens than it is, say, the current baby boomers or Generation X, for example.

But there's also an individual difference to this too, which is that it's not simply social media is bad for teens. It's not also necessarily that fear of missing out is always bad, but if that fear of missing out in addition to making the decision to be active in social media may have implications for emotional adjustment or mental health. And so this snapshot really gets our attention in terms of generational issues, gets our attention in terms of developmental needs that teens are having, and maybe how they're seeking those out, or fulfilling those, but then also the individual differences in terms of how social media and distress about missing out on social activities plays out.

So in terms of concluding, we know that development is influenced by historical context, generational influences based on the social events that we went through. So those are important to recognize. I think a lot of those big events-- the Great Depression, 9/11, the emergence of smartphones and the ubiquity of the internet-- are part of those social events. They're huge, they're obviously going to have an influence.

The other part of this is that not everyone in the same generation is going to have had the same social experiences. Those are going to be shaped by demographic factors, like socioeconomic status, race, or gender. So that may actually have a more direct influence on what our experience has been like growing up than just merely being in the generation, that it may vary based on these individual difference factors that are demographic in nature.

And then we also know that some universal trends in stages of development do appear to exist. Children differ from adolescents who differ from adults-- that tends to happen regardless of generation. That's something that we should continue to recognize. So we do want to be careful about making broad generalizations about generations and about developmental stages.

And so, with that, I'll be glad to address some of the questions that came through, and I was able to glance over and saw a really great group of questions that came through, and I really appreciate that.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Thank you. And for our first group question I want to go back to the initial question of, is there a downward or upward trend in the dark triad scores based on generations?

DR. CHRIS BARRY: Right. And I didn't speak to the dark triad overall. So I spoke to narcissism and then didn't allude to the parts of the dark triads. So for those in the audience who may not be familiar, narcissism is really a sense of superiority, being really preoccupied with being viewed as better than other people. Psychopathy is one part of the dark triad, which is lack of remorse,

lack of empathy toward others, callous disregard for others. And Machiavellianism is the third part of that triad, and so this is using both aggressive or coercive strategies and also charm and pro-social strategies to achieve a sense of dominance or leadership.

And so they call it dark triad because there's some overlap. They're also unique, and they definitely, as you can imagine, are connected to antisocial behavior and relationship problems. And so we do see that downward age trend is not a strong one, but we see a downward age trend in all three components with age. And I thank you for the question.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: This question came in when discussing the Twenge data. And is there a critical age range where these traits correlate to negative social outcomes that draws you towards adolescence?

DR. CHRIS BARRY: That draws me personally towards adolescence?

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Yes, I believe so.

DR. CHRIS BARRY: For me, and I hope that I'm understanding the question correctly, for me I think that what really draws me to adolescence is the complexity of that period of development, and really the pivotal nature of that period of development that-- it's going to sound sort of cheesy, I think-- but that young people are really full of potential but that some decisions we make, in terms of our own behavior or even our own education or employment route can have huge implications down the road.

And so it's this recipe, if we can make decisions that set us on a good path but sometimes aren't necessarily equipped to make those. I think adolescence as a developmental period gets a bad rap, but if we really think about it, most people do OK in adolescence because most people get through it. So we become adults, and we're by and large fairly predictive adults, so that even though there are stressful aspects to being an adolescent, most of us get through it OK. And so we want to figure out the get through it OK factors and promote those.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Thank you. And this next question came in during the discussion of developmental stages shaping behavior. Are these stages happening earlier in kids now?

DR. CHRIS BARRY: So that's a great question too. So in terms of going back before that even, those generational differences, there would be the argument that some at least social changes are happening later and later, so in terms of dating, in terms of marriage, in terms of end of formal education, the slight downward trend in terms of just driving. So some of those social behaviors are happening later, so perhaps one way that will be clear is that we sort of think of adolescence as getting longer. So it's getting longer on the back end in terms of achieving what society might think are adult level achievements, in terms of end of formal education, starting a family, et cetera. And, of course, recognize those are very individual decisions and pathways.

But it's also getting longer on the front end in terms of-- it's not a rapid change, but a change in terms of earlier onset of puberty. And so there are biological factors in terms of that too. So in terms of the question, there do seem to be, over time, slowly and progressively earlier starts to adolescence, at least from a biological sense. But you could also argue that those biological influences in terms of brain development, hormonal influences then start to influence relationships and attitudes, and getting or not getting along with other people. So the short answer to that, again, is that adolescence as a period of development seems to be getting longer on both ends-- starting earlier and ending later.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: While discussing the statistics on suicide, does the data include suicide attempts? Could it be that adults just have more completed suicide attempts.

DR. CHRIS BARRY: It is absolutely completely suicides. You're correct about that, and I'm glad you raised that. Attempts are a hard thing to actually study, and so the data that I've seen and, again, focusing on adolescence, will say that the prevalence of a suicide attempt is anywhere from 20% to 70%. That's a really huge difference.

And the reason for that is that attempts are hard to track in terms of whether someone is forthcoming about that, and then also harder to define. So different studies or different researchers will define what constitutes a suicide attempt very differently. But it definitely is the case that attempts are higher in adolescents than they are in adults, based on the best data that we have. The hard part of that is to really pinpoint what exactly is the prevalence rate of suicide attempts in adolescence because of definitional issues.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: And how do you measure a personality trait across a spectrum, as in how do you measure whether someone has a lot of narcissism or a little bit of narcissism.

DR. CHRIS BARRY: Yes, so we typically, in terms of a lot of the personality research and thinking about that bell-shaped curve, the slide with the bell-shaped curve with narcissism, we typically don't really think about personality types, even though it's an easy way to describe it. But we really do think about it on a continuum, so we say relatively higher or relatively lower. And a lot of the personality research, there's not really a concrete cut off where we can be really confident that this separates the high narcissists from the low narcissists.

We're often guilty of talking about it that way, almost for ease of expression or communication, but we really just think about this on a broad continuum. The challenge with that is that that continuum is going to be defined by our scale of measurement, like what characteristics we put into the measure and how sensitive that measure is, and how many items are on it. So we really, given those constraints, if we have a sample of 100 people, we say, OK, what happens when people are relatively high or relatively low on narcissism? But we don't have a clear-cut point for most of our personality dimensions. Hope that answers the question.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: And the next topic is on the topic of peer influence, so between the early aughts, and now social media has morphed into more of social advertising. Have you

researched into the way, or does exposure to sociopolitical and commercial bot and algorithm push content concern you, or have you researched into its effects?

DR. CHRIS BARRY: I've not done research on that, and I don't know of any studies that have looked at that. I imagine there are plenty in the works given social events and the increased emergence of those and recognition of those. Definitely it would concern me for no other reason than the idea for adolescents-- or adults for that matter-- that social media messages are coming from another person, just not someone that we can see or that is with us but that they're not. And so it really misshapes how we are viewing social media, and the interactions that happen, and the content that happen.

So it definitely concerns me just from getting false information. But I also think it is concerning from the standpoint of a person digesting the information, making sense of it. So another example of that, going back a few years, it's the catfish idea that someone can create a fake profile and engage in conversation with someone who is unsuspecting. And so we're dealing with relationships that, in a virtual sense, seem real but aren't.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Our next question asks, what's your opinion on the warrior gene and Adrian Raine's book, *The Anatomy of Violence*?

DR. CHRIS BARRY: I am familiar with Adrian Raine's work in general but unfortunately I'm not familiar with that specific text. In terms of the warrior gene, broadly speaking in terms of my understanding of it, I think there's plenty of evolutionary science to speak to the adaptiveness of that, and the-- in terms of my understanding-- the imperviousness to negative consequences or aggressive behavior, antisocial behavior.

So in a lot of ways, that make sense for a small subset of the population. The problem is in terms of the relationship fallout and the roles we're told that that takes. So on the one hand it's this adaptation, but on the other hand it obviously has social and behavioral consequences. So I think there's validity to the idea as I understand it, but obviously a concern to criminologists and psychologists.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Excellent. So I do believe that's all the questions we have for this evening. And thank you all so much for coming out, and I am going to put a link in the chat box. Please let us know what you thought of tonight's webinar, and what you'd like to see in the future, at connections.wsu.edu/eventsurvey. And thank you all for coming out and your wonderful discussion questions. And thank you, Dr. Barry, for presenting.

DR. CHRIS BARRY: Thank you. Thank you all.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Have a good evening.