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REVIEW

## Generations: Does When You Are Born Shape Who You Are?

**Bobby Duffy, Atlantic Books, London, 2021, 336 pp., hbk £20, ISBN 13: 9781786499721**

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*Generations* reviews the current debate surrounding intergenerational tensions, analysing mainstream stereotypes about generations through a compelling showcase of data and studies. First published by Atlantis Book in September 2021, this book aims to explore current intergenerational ageism and stereotyping, promoting thorough analyses of current societal issues. Intergenerational resentment has become potent propaganda in today's public discourse, particularly during an ongoing pandemic which has emphasised social discontent and stereotypical images of both old and young generations (*i.e.*, Meisner, 2021). The author produces a light-hearted challenge to this propaganda. The book's chapters are organised across 11 main topics where myths and stereotypes about generational divide in current social issues are discussed. Its themes range from classically individualistic issues such as wealth, employment and housing stagnation, to more collective concerns such as global warming and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The introduction presents the main framework of the book. Simplistic explanations for age group differences are replaced by objective accounts of the factors contributing to shape societal shifts between and within generations. In greater detail, changes in attitudes, behaviours and beliefs in our society are presented as a complex interaction between cohort, lifecycle and period effects. The book's 11 chapters and introduction can be theoretically organised depending on the scope of the social issue addressed, following how current societal concerns affect the individual and, consequently, our society as a whole. In its first three chapters, the book focuses on topics such as wealth distribution (Chapter One), housing crisis (Chapter Two), education and employability shifts across generations (Chapter Three). Chapters Four to Six include discussions of mental health concerns across the population, health behaviours, and decline of marriage and birth rate across new and old generations. Chapters Seven to Nine explore intergenerational tensions today and in previous years, changing political views as lifecycle events, and climate

change as a problem for the future. Finally, in its closing chapters (Chapters Ten and Eleven), the author reflects on the segregation between young and old, and on the human tendency to organise experience in a way that it is easy to comprehend, where cognitive shortcuts and shortcomings are often causes for biased views of our experience (Chapter Eleven). Compared to previous generations, today's older and younger generations tend to have fewer shared contacts and interests, living not only in two different physical spaces, but conducting separate virtual lives, too (Chapter Ten). This segregation between young and old (as analysed in Chapters One and Ten), has become particularly salient during the ongoing pandemic due to lockdowns and self-isolation measures. Although intergenerational tensions are considered a normal phenomenon of a developing society (Chapter Ten), generational propaganda can often feed on generational resentment and divide. Clear gestures of intergenerational solidarities and mutual empathy shown since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019 have openly highlighted how naive narrations surrounding intergenerational divide are unable to capture the true scope of this phenomenon (Chapter Ten).

This book offers a captivating report on intergenerational divides and misconceptions which are relevant today due to widespread ageist narrations surrounding both young and old adults (*i.e.*, Previtali *et al.*, 2020). Detailed data and references are provided throughout, addressing a more than exhaustive selection of topics in which the generation gap has gained meaningful relevance. *Generations* has clearly been conceived for a broad age range, providing valid examples and cases for all age groups. This book's approach towards a complex and multifaceted phenomenon represents its main strength. While approachable to a wider audience of readers, the book can be a valid resource for researchers and practitioners willing to engage in an informed debate about intergenerational divide. The book's aim is not to refuse generational thinking in its totality, but to inform its readers of the potential benefits coming from this discourse, once disentangled from current misperceptions surrounding it. As the author writes in his closing chapter (Chapter 11): 'In the end, the key reason why generational stories will continue to be important is the simplest: they help us figure out who we are' (p. 276).

## References

- Meisner BA (2021) Are you OK, Boomer? Intensification of ageism and intergenerational tensions on social media amid COVID-19. *Leisure Sciences* 43, 56–61.
- Previtali F, Allen LD and Varlamova M (2020) Not only virus spread: the diffusion of ageism during the outbreak of COVID-19. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 32, 506–514.

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