

Three Characteristics of the New Generation in College: Spiritual and Classroom Implications

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ABSTRACT: Cultures change, and as cultures change, so do students. The students now entering college classrooms have a different worldview than the millennials did, and the differences have spiritual and classroom implications that professors should take note of. In this paper, we first explore three social forces that have imprinted the new iGeneration and contributed to its distinctives. We then discuss three main distinctives of the iGeneration and suggest spiritual and classroom techniques to successfully educate this generation.

INTRODUCTION

The generation of students now entering Christian universities is different than the millennials—and this matters. One of the distinctives of private universities, especially faith-based universities, is the creative instruction possibilities and personal relationships that faculty enjoy with students. A key tenant of most faith-based business schools is to use the classroom and relationships to teach successive generations of students how to apply Scripture to their lives and professions (Smith et al., 2016).

However, as the generations pass, culture changes and so do students. Twenty years ago, most students were different in their values, mores, and attitudes than students today. The GenX student who demanded that a professor justify each assignment is not the millennial student who drifted through classes scrolling through his phone nor is he the iGen student who cries “harassment” if a professor challenged his preconceptions.

In order to faithfully and excellently pursue the vocation of teaching, a professor must not only remain current in his or her academic disciplines, but also be aware of the worldview changes that influence students in the classroom. While characteristics of generations are necessarily generalizations, it is important to track those generalizations because professors who are from one generation can find

it difficult to connect emotionally or philosophically with people from other generations who have different cultural imprinting (Hawkins, 2019). The committed professor dares not remain stagnant in his or her attitudes, teaching methods, or thinking but must constantly adjust them in order to successfully teach a changing population of students. In many senses, professors teach across cultures.

The newest generation entering college classrooms in the United States is a generation born between 1995 and 2010 (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Twenge, 2017). This group is popularly called Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Stuckey, 2016) or pejoratively, the Snowflakes (Fox, 2017).¹ However the most accurate descriptive name for this generation is the iGeneration or iGen (Igel & Urquhart, 2012; Turner, 2015; Twenge, 2017). This is the first generation that has been raised completely with smartphones and tablets at home and in the classroom; they do not know a world without digital devices (Aguas, 2018). The members of this generation prefer the iGen designation (Stuckey, 2016) so for the purposes of this paper, we will use the descriptive term and call this generation the iGens.

The iGens currently make up about 25% of the U.S. population; they are currently a larger cohort than either the Baby Boomers, who are dying, or the millennials (Hope, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). This generation is, without

question, different from the millennials. The iGens grew up in a different time, and different significant events shaped their culture; these differences have had a profound impact on the values of this generation and how they approach education and spiritual things.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on three major characteristics of the iGeneration as suggested by a review of the literature: changes in anxiety and pessimism, a change in entitlement expectations, and a change in cognitive development. We will discuss modifications that professors may need to make in the classroom for teaching the iGens and also suggest spiritual interventions that caring mentors can utilize to enrich their spirits.

The paper will proceed as follows: The first section of the paper will describe the conditions in which this generation grew up, focusing on three significant social forces that scholars agree contributed to its generational culture. The second section will discuss the generational characteristics that resulted from these forces: an increase in anxiety, fear, and depression; adjustment in entitlement expectations; and slowing social and cognitive development. The final section will discuss spiritual and classroom implications and suggest possible interventions.

However, before proceeding, several cautions must be noted. First, this paper focuses mostly on people born in the United States. While much of the paper might be appropriately applied to iGens in other countries, most of the research is U.S.-based and the iGen characteristics are exhibited strongly in the U.S. (e.g., Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Twenge, 2017).

Secondly, we note that every generation exhibits both positive and negative characteristics and that every generation tends to be criticized by older generations. Further, some of the perceived generational characteristics of the iGens might simply be artifacts of their life stage. For example, it is not uncommon for people in their 20s to be perceived as immature and self-indulgent by older cohorts (Black et al., 2014). Lastly, it needs to be stressed that the traits discussed are generalizations and that individual members of the iGen generation may or may not exhibit these characteristics.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: THE GROWING YEARS

Sociologists observe that “generational imprinting” is the phenomenon in which a shared memory of significant events impact large numbers of a generation and predispose them to certain modes of thought and behaviors (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Stinchcombe, 2000). A well-known example

of this is the Great Depression in the United States, which inspired three generations to thrift (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Generational imprinting suggests that as a generation matures, the following generation acquires some of its characteristics and develops some unique characteristics of its own.

Many researchers agree that three key social trends that have imprinted the iGen: random violence, the Great Recession, and technology, specifically the smartphone.

Random Violence

The iGen grew up in an era where random shootings and violent attacks were a real and irregular threat. In a recent paper, Aguas (2018) presented an appendix that listed 23 significant shootings in the United States from 1995 to 2018; shootings, such as Columbine High School (April 4, 1999) where 13 people died and the Las Vegas concert shooting (October 1, 2017) where 58 people died. Because of random shootings in schools, school metal detectors, lockdown exercises, and guards have become a common protocol for the iGens.

Nor has violence in the iGen’s school life been restricted to random shootings from disaffected individuals; terrorism has also played a part. The 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York occurred when many iGen children were in their first weeks of kindergarten (noted by Aguas, 2018). Therefore, during the iGens’ first school experiences, the important adults in their life were focused on the attacks, which, arguably, subliminally connected the excitement of going to school with fear. The iGens do not feel safe at school.

Nor do the iGens feel safe in social places. Shootings at concerts and movie theaters continue. Nightclub shootings, for example, are becoming frequent; there was a shooting at a nightclub in Kansas City (January 20, 2020) as these authors worked on the paper (Haworth & Hutchinson, 2020).

Nor do the iGens feel safe in their familiar online environment where cyberbullying and trolling are common phenomena (Aguas, 2018; Twenge, 2017). For example, as early as 2012, a study of 2,000 middle and high school students reported that over 25% self-identified as being victims or perpetrators in cyberbullying during the previous three months (Mishua et al., 2012).

Nor was random violence or cyberbullying all the violence in the iGens lives. In the years they were growing up, there were many terrorist attacks, from the ISIS beheadings (beginning in 2015) that were posted on social media to the truck ramming through a Nice crowd at a celebration in 2016, killing 85 people. With its high use of technology and social media, this generation has not only experienced

the attacks in almost real time but receives instantaneous information about violence across the globe. This heightens their attention on violence, even when they may not directly experience it.

Nor do they feel safe with the recent coronavirus pandemic. While this group is not as concerned about contracting the virus themselves, they do have concerns it could impact older family members. The social isolation has led to this generation potentially experiencing major depression. They appear to have difficulty maintaining a positive mental outlook and, in addition, face the sadness of missing important life milestones, such as graduations, proms, and weddings. Many iGens experience daily mental health challenges (Perna, 2020).

Even parents add to the anxiety and fears of this generation. The last thing many parents say as a teenager leaves the house is, “Be safe,” an ambiguous command that is largely outside the control of the person. The authors contrast this with the common phrase their parents said to them as they left the house, “Have fun and be back by curfew.” Both of those things are under the control of the individual, while “Be safe” is, manifestly, not.

Without doubt, the random violence in the worlds the iGens inhabit has influenced them—to the extent that some researchers suggest that the generation is suffering from an effect called “secondhand terrorism” (Comer & Kendall, 2007). Secondhand terrorism is defined as when a culture disproportionately attends to the *possibilities* rather than *probabilities* of future terrorism. The evidence suggests that secondhand terrorism amplifies trauma and leads to numbness and a pervasive but unspecific fear (Comer & Kendall, 2007), which is the definition of anxiety (Chaplin, 1985). This is an anxious generation; indeed, employers, for example, report that this generation is more anxious than any they have seen before (Shellenbarger, 2019).

Possibly as a result of the constant emphasis on danger, many members of the iGens are obsessed with safety. They crave safe places; for example, trigger warnings appear on campuses, weighted blankets are best sellers, and in January 2020, HUD updated the Fair Housing Act to require that landlords accommodate emotional support animals (ESA Doctors, n.d.).

Safety, to many members of the iGen, includes emotional safety, which they define as preventing bad experiences, removing themselves from uncomfortable situations, and avoiding people with ideas different than theirs (Bethune, 2019; Twenge, 2017). For example, a recent debate where unpleasant ideas were presented did not bring angry rebuttal, it brought tears (Fox, 2017). This emphasis on safety has important classroom implications, which will be explored later in the paper.

The Great Recession

A second major influence on the iGen was the Great Recession, which officially occurred from 2007-2009 but whose effect is still reverberating in the U.S. economy. Unemployment reached 10% in 2009, one of the highest rates in a generation (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). What this meant for the iGens is that during their school and teen years, they saw their parents and relatives suffer significant financial reversals and have major losses, such as homes and jobs (Aguas, 2018). Bad practices on the parts of financial firms were a daily feature on the news, and the bail-outs by the government were highly publicized. According to the media of the time, capitalism was the bad guy. And this generation was not taught either history or economics, so they have no reason to think otherwise (Stonestreet, 2020).

As a result, many members of the iGen feel differently entitled than their millennial siblings, feel less optimistic than the millennials, and are both more and less likely to be realistic about the future (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They mistrust big business but trust big government and see government as a place to be “safe.” According to Knowles (2020), the coronavirus pandemic has only served to solidify this notion that the government’s responsibility is to create more social-welfare policies and programs. The majority believe the government should be doing more to solve the problems of the virus and economy.

Further, this generation sees the world as divided into the “haves” and “have nots”—and desire to become one of the “haves” but are worried they will become a “have not.” Many members of this generation possess an entrepreneurial spirit and want to work for themselves, but their projection is typically for the future, and they keep present safety firmly in mind (Aguas, 2018; Williams et al., 2010).

Smartphones

The event that probably had the greatest influence on the iGeneration occurred in June, 2007 when Steve Jobs announced the invention of the smartphone. By 2012, most middle school students and many elementary school children had their personal smartphones and were spending significant amounts of time on them (Barna Group, 2018). By 2015, 87% of high school girls and 77% of high school boys self-reported using social media sites almost every day (Twenge, 2017; Woo, 2018). The 10% of boys who were not on social media were largely playing video games; by 2016, the average daily time that boys spent playing video games was self-reported at about two hours a day, though over nine percent of the boys admitted they played more than 40 hours a week (Twenge, 2017).

Nor is smartphone use limited by the iGen to social media and games. Streaming online videos and binge-watching internet and TV shows have largely replaced network TV. Indeed, more than 60% of iGens prefer to see movies at home rather than the theater so they can personalize the experience (Twenge, 2017). The use of cell phones has only increased since 2015. In 2018, Woo, for example, found that 95% of teens own a smartphone and go online at least six times an hour, or roughly every 10 minutes.

As a result of this enormous commitment of time, psychiatrists have become aware of what they call Social Media Anxiety Disorder (SMAD) (Hovitz, 2017). The “likes” and retweets on social media ignite the reward centers of the brain in a way similar to a drug habit (Bethune, 2019). Eventually, a person who is on social media multiple times an hour creates an endless feedback loop where more posting is needed to garner more likes in order to feel as good as he or she did initially. This rapidly becomes exponen-

tial, adding substantially to anxiety and depression (Barna Group, 2018; Hovitz, 2017).

In addition, the smartphone itself is addictive; people feel like it must always be on their person. A 2018 study, for example, found that many iGens (and their parents) experience monophobia, “a feeling of anxiety any time they are separated from their mobile phone” (Barna Group, 2018, p. 15). Addictions to cell phones are rising with increasing numbers of people feeling life-disrupting anxiety and inability to focus if they are separated physically from their cell phone for a period of time (Twenge, 2017).

**THREE CHARACTERISTICS
DEVELOPED BY SOCIAL TRENDS**

Growing up with these environmental conditions of random violence, economic struggles, and technology has

Chart A: Three Characteristics*

Growing Up Experiences		
Random Violence <i>Secondhand Terrorism</i>	The Great Recession <i>“Haves” and “Have Nots”</i> <i>Big Business is Bad,</i> <i>Big Government is Savior</i>	Smartphones <i>Social Media, Gaming</i>
Resulting iGen Characteristics		
High Levels of Anxiety and Depression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craving for safety • Inability to resolve problems • Physical stress symptoms • High suicide rate • Fear of new experiences, new people, new ideas • Criticism is “harassment” 	Skewed Entitlement Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-concept not linked to hard work • Expects to lead at work • Wants social purpose in employment • Expects to contribute by expertise in social media • Expect mentors to be like parents, ease workload • Expects firm to provide wi-fi, coffee bar, free time, remote work 	Slowed Social and Cognitive Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low EI levels • Diminished critical thinking ability • Shortened attention span • High levels of pornography use • God is irrelevant

*A special thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested these charts, offered insights on the contents, and gave us permission to use the ideas. That person displayed the best of Christian collegiality. We were touched and encouraged by his or her grace and kindness.

made a significant impact on the iGens. The environmental conditions have led to three generational characteristics frequently discussed in the literature; these will be the focus of this section. The research suggests that the people entering our universities have 1) high levels of anxiety and depression, which results in a diminished ability to cope with negative situations. 2) They have entitlement expectations different than the millennials, but possibly more damaging. 3) And they have delayed social and cognitive development.

All three of these characteristics have spiritual and classroom implications that need to be noted by professors. This will be the focus of the final section of the paper.

Anxiety and Depression

As discussed earlier, the unpredictable violence the iGen grew up with has created an anxious generation, leading to high levels of depression. Fear is a natural human response to a specific present danger, but anxiety is the response to anticipated danger. Anxiety is psychologically defined as fear that cannot be identified with any specific object or cause; a chronic condition of low-grade dread and apprehension (Chaplin, 1985). Some physical manifestations of high anxiety are palpitations of the heart, tightness of the chest, trembling, faintness, and so forth. Psychological symptoms include moodiness and delusional thinking (Minirth & Meier, 1978).

A common result of a high level of anxiety is that a person is unable to focus on anything but the delusional thinking track. He or she is unable to resolve problems because their unfocused fear does not seem to apply to the events happening around them. At extremes, the chronic condition becomes an anxiety neurosis and affects major areas of the person's life (Chaplin, 1985). People become frightened to leave their room, to try new experiences or ideas, or to meet new people.

Constant anxiety is usually linked with depression, a state of despondency that can lead, at the extreme, to delusions of inadequacy and hopelessness (Chaplin, 1985; Minirth & Meier, 1978). In social media, the iGeneration portrays itself as optimistic and self-confident, but behind the happy Instagram posts and pretty pictures, the truth is very different. The national surveys of High School and College graduates show that between 2012 and 2015, the symptoms of depression, anxiety, anger, and loneliness rose exponentially in young adults (Twenge, 2017). For example, 56% more teens reported a major depression in 2015 than in 2010, and suicide and self-harming is on the rise (Bethune, 2019). The number of college students who seriously considered suicide jumped 60% between 2011 and 2016 (Mojtabai et al., 2016).

This is the same time period in which smartphones gained popularity, and some speculate that teen vulnerability to, and addiction to, social media might be a factor in the increase in anxiety and depression (Barna Group, 2018; Hovitz, 2017; Mojtabai et al., 2016). For example, the emphasis on the perfect selfie has greatly amplified body image for girls; some take hundreds of pictures to get just the right "spontaneous" one to post (Twenge, 2017).

Lack of Sleep and Caffeine

There is a well-documented, significant link between depression and lack of sleep, yet many iGens are so addicted to social media that they find it difficult to put down their smartphone and go to sleep. Some people sleep with their phones under the pillow and periodically check them during the night. Indeed, teens who spend three or more hours a day on smartphones are 28% more likely to get less than seven hours of sleep per day (Twenge, 2017).

In order to stay functional, the iGens use designer drugs and caffeine—energy drinks, colas and, of course, coffee. However, high caffeine intake, particularly for less caffeine-tolerant individuals, increases anxiety and depression, not to mention leads to reduced sleep (Bergin and Kendler, 2012; Twenge, 2017). Researchers have found, for example, significant associations between high levels of caffeine intake, lack of sleep, and high anxiety/depression in secondary school students (Richards & Smith, 2015) and in nursing students (Gunes & Arslantas, 2017).

Shifts in Entitlement

Entitlement, the tendency for people to expect to achieve success without the personal commitment needed to create that success (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), is a frequently mentioned characteristic of the millennials (Black et al., 2014), and their iGen siblings have a similar tendency. But with the iGens the tendency has changed in subtle ways. The latest generation expects more, rather than fewer, things to be given to them—indeed many view Wi-Fi as an entitlement (Rickes, 2016)—but the giver is not assumed to be parents or family but rather is "society," meaning the firms they do some work for or, more likely, the government (Bethune, 2019; Rickes, 2016).

Like the millennials, the iGens trend towards elevated opinions of themselves but are even less likely to justify those expectations with hard work than the millennials. According to Jenkins (2017), the statistics are staggering. For example, 60% of current high school students believe they will get a graduate degree when less than 10% will actually do so. In women's collegiate basketball, 47% believe they will play on professional or Olympic teams, when less than 1% actually do. Jenkins (2017) further notes that in sports, the

unrealistic expectations of the iGens, put together with their emotional issues, means that coaches are finding this new generation hard to coach. Indeed, decorated coaches are leaving the profession because even constructive criticism of iGens results in an increasing number of athletes accusing coaches of abuse. University professors need to be aware of, and protect themselves against, this tendency.

The iGens, as mentioned before, are determined to be among the “haves,” but have interesting assumptions as to how they will achieve this. For example, the generation highly values education; 89% of iGens rate a college education as an experience that leads to a good career (Stucky, 2016). However, professors should note that this does not mean that they feel the need to work hard in individual classes or get good grades (Igel & Urquhart, 2012). The iGens assume that simply graduating from college is all that is needed for a lucrative career.

Nor does this generation particularly expect to work hard at their jobs. By 2020, the iGeneration will make up 20% of the workforce (Williams et al., 2010), and their choices of firms to work at will reflect their worldview. Purpose and significance are important to the iGens, and they seek careers that will provide what they perceive as meaningful work, such as medicine, education and government. They place effectiveness above efficiency and embrace organizations that are socially and environmentally conscious (Twenge, 2017). They see the government as providing much utility, as well as safety, to their generation. In pursuit of meaningful work, the members of the iGeneration are open to moving away from their home towns and leaving familiar social structures behind (Williams, et al., 2010). Moreover, they expect to switch employers multiple times.

However, this does not mean they expect to work hard at their places of employment. They assume that employers will provide them with social media access on the job and perks, such as coffee bars, music studios, gyms, and game rooms but that they, themselves, do not necessarily need to be loyal or highly productive (Woo, 2018). Over 73% place a high value on work-life balance and over half say they would be reluctant to take a job where they could not work remotely (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Turner, 2015). How do they expect to accomplish this? They expect to rely on mentors and social media.

Mentors and Social Media

When entering a new environment, whether college or work, the iGens like the safety of mentors (Stuckey, 2016). Their expectation is that mentor relationships will help them adjust to the new environment quickly, thereby reducing their stress. Said differently, they assume that mentors will be like parents.

However, more than just stress reducers, mentors and peer work groups are also expected to keep the iGens from having to work too hard. Cohorts are expected to help them through classes, and mentors are expected to find jobs for them and navigate the workplace. In fact, this generation largely assumes that the mentorship and cohort models will allow them to skip more mundane foundations, such as thoughtful preparation, hard work, and good grades (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Stuckey, 2016).

However, once a member of the iGen is comfortable in a classroom or firm, he or she wishes to contribute, and indeed, lead. It appears that iGens expect people to cater to them at work (Asfaha, 2018; Twenge, 2017). For example, they expect their ideas to be considered and implemented, though the boring work of implementation will be done by other people, of course (Aguas, 2018; Stuckey, 2016). They assume that older people do not understand technology and that their major contribution will be as the instructors in social media and current trends (Turner, 2015). This is problematic for many reasons but deeply so when an individual’s IT knowledge is shallow, as when, for example, he or she assumes that Wikipedia is to be believed or is enamored of a less than useful application. Studies suggest that the iGeneration vastly overestimates its knowledge, skills, and role within an organization, speaking out of turn and expecting rapid, relatively work-free promotions (Aguas, 2018) as well as plenty of free time for personal activities.

Delayed Cognitive Development

Along with increased entitlement expectations, the iGens are also experiencing delayed cognitive development (Asfaha, 2018, Mojtabai et al., 2016). This affects their emotional intelligence (EI), length of attention span, and creates an increasing proclivity to engage in negative behaviors, such as pornography.

Low EI

Many researchers have noted that the iGeneration is spending enormous amounts of time on their phones and, as a direct result, have fewer in-person interactions than other generations at that age (Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Turner, 2015; Twenge, 2017). Food courts at malls, for example, have fewer teen eaters; teen attendance is down in theaters and clubs (Twenge, 2017).

This suggests that the iGen has lower levels of emotional intelligence than other generations at the same age (Twenge, 2017). Nor does the constant scrolling through social media habituate its adherents to deep thinking. The iGen are very willing to challenge leaders if they perceive an inconsistency, but much of their thinking is emotional rather than reasoned (Bethune, 2019). Many suffer from an “if it is on the internet it must be true” mentality and have

diminished ability to critique the validity of information (Shatto & Erwin, 2017).

Even Shorter Attention Spans

The constant bombardment of texting and posting encourages short attention spans. One study that installed a program to measure computer use found that students switched between tasks and websites on average every 19 seconds. More than 75% of the computer windows were open less than one minute (Yeykelis et al., 2014). Yet, according to Medina (2008), the brain cannot multitask if the task needs focus because it learns concepts one at a time, sequentially. Only those tasks that are more physical, such as walking, can be performed simultaneously with talking.

This results in the latest generation training their mind to jump from one task to the next without completing the first task, which makes them adept at switching tasks but not necessarily more efficient or effective in those tasks. This trend suggests that sustained reading or reasoning is not a strength of this generation, something professors need to take note of.

The Startling Role of Pornography

Though face-to-face interaction is down among the iGens, there is very little actual need for them to see each other in person. Even sexual needs have become virtual. According to Weir (2014), international studies show that 50–99% of men and 30–86% of women have consumed porn—and that includes Christians.

The result is weak churches, ashamed and guilty Christians, adults with no intention to get married and take on responsibility, broken families, and very insecure women. There is also a high level of promiscuity in our Christian colleges; more than 80% of unmarried young adult evangelical Christians admit to having had sex (Tyler, 2011).

God is Irrelevant

The iGens do not see God as relevant to their lives. From 1989 to 2000, the percentage of young adults who believed in God remained largely stable, but beginning in 2005, the percentage declined drastically. Recent polls show that 60% of young adults say they do not believe in God and that God and religion are not important in their life. More than 25% said they have never prayed, and 62% said they pray to the universe “occasionally” when they want something (Twenge, 2017). However, most of the iGens have continued religious *practices*, such as going to church, usually because they still live with their parents and do not want to bother with arguments and disputes. It is easier to be publicly compliant and keep one’s parents unaware of one’s atheism. These are frightening trends for Christian universities.

SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

It would be naïve to think that these trends would have no effects on the students sitting in our classrooms. But what can a caring professor do to assist these anxious, agnostic, and technology obsessed children of God?

The impacts of the smartphone and social trends are significant, but God is more powerful than either. Therefore, though these authors do not have definitive answers to the question of what to do, we are convinced that the first and most important thing is to intervene spiritually. What that might look like for the individual professor and situation we cannot say, so in the following section, we suggest spiritual interventions that we, personally, see as important and even vital.

The key spiritual interventions that professors can utilize are as follows: pray without ceasing, protect yourself, practice thankfulness, model peace, and pursue apologetics. As reported by the Barna Group (2018), “Perhaps what adults need first and foremost to remind ourselves is this: We were there once, too. *They are not so very different from us at that age*” (p. 103, emphasis added).

Pray Without Ceasing

God, who knows us and each member of the iGeneration and knows the social and technological forces at work, has instructed us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). As professors who have been placed by God into our vocations, we need to ceaselessly pray for ourselves and our attitudes, for the students, and for creative ways to interact with and help them. The Barna Group (2018) study reminds us that many in this generation do not carry negative attitudes from bad church experiences. With their lack of confidence in what “truth” is, this generation may be more open to a personal experience with God. As 1 Peter 3:15b–16 (NIV) states,

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

With the importance of prayer, Crawford (2018), a youth minister, gives us guidance on what to pray over this generation:

1. Purpose—that they find their unique purpose in this life (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Jeremiah 29:11; John 14:13; Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:20).
2. Friendships—that they have wisdom in choosing friends and that God will bring people into their lives to lead them to a stronger relationship with Christ (1

- Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:25).
3. Character—that their minds will constantly be transformed as they face the evils of the world and that they will become examples of strong characters in all their interactions with more Christ-like role models among their peers (Psalm 24:4; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:12).
 4. Purity—that they seek more of a sense of righteousness rather than giving in to sexual desires and develop the strength to flee from sexual immorality (John 8:32; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 13:4; James 1:12-14; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 4:4).
 5. Money—that they learn to view money as a resource for God’s purposes rather than a goal in and of itself (Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:24; Philippians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5).
 6. Submission—that they learn to be submissive to Christ and his authority over them (Mark 12:17; Ephesians 6:2-3; Hebrews 13:17).
 7. Discernment—that God would give them the ability to discern between God’s teachings and false gods or prophets (John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:14; 1 Timothy 3:9).
 8. Hope—that they experience the hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to protect them from hopelessness (Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 6:13; Philippians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 10:23; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

Protect Yourself

As with any new generation, professors are expected to make the adaptations in the classroom to accommodate the students rather than the other way around. With this latest generation, attention spans have diminished and technology expectations have grown. Professors who are not able to adjust may find themselves faced with criticism and backlash in what they have been successfully doing for many years.

According to Finch (2015), the attention span of this generation has shrunk to eight seconds. They do not have a capability to focus for any extended time period. When professors consider how to engage students, they need to consider how to keep students concentrating on the topic at hand. At the same time, this generation can sort through huge amounts of information in a short period of time. Even reading assignments may be difficult as this generation will quickly attempt to assess whether the assignment is worth their time (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017). However, once the topic or item has been deemed worthy of the time commitment, this generation can become extremely focused (Finch, 2015). Balancing between these paradigms, profes-

sors may need to rethink how to teach their discipline.

With technology always being a part of their life (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017; Preville, 2018; Singh, 2014), this generation has a greater expectation of technology in the classroom. They believe that everything for the class will be available on demand and adjusted to them personally (Preville, 2018). They have been raised in an environment of instant gratification, having access to volumes of information at their fingertips (Fromm, 2017). They have always had personal devices and most are capable of taking huge volumes of notes at a remarkable speed on their devices (Cameron & Pagnattaro, 2017). They have a preference to learn through video rather than do any reading.

While in the past many professors have tried to encourage students to put aside this distraction, for the iGens, the smartphone has become the platform for all interactions. With the use of devices, these students can research, join meetings, and schedule all of life’s events. Without the smartphone or other personal device, they have no way of structuring what they are trying to learn (Preville, 2018). While previous generations have reeducated professors to embrace the smartphone, this generation has perfected the demand. And coupled with their being raised as “mum or dad’s little prince or princess since birth” (Singh, 2014, p. 60), professors who try to engage learning without the devices will be challenged.

This generation is also considered more diverse than any other generation before, including diversity in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. These students entering our colleges and universities are arriving with diverse experiences, opportunities, and expectations (Johnson & Sveen, 2020). They have an expectation that the university will adapt to meet the needs of all who enter it, and all will be on an equal platform. According to Preville (2018), they assume that education will be personalized to meet everyone’s individual needs. They also believe professors should be available with online office hours where they can opt for video chats when they want access to the professor’s time. As professors have a greater demand for research and publications, this balancing act of serving students with trying to maintain a work-life balance will be a growing difficulty.

The challenges are set before all professors, and there will continue to be a growing need for faculty to protect themselves from harsh criticism and an increased demand on the professors’ time. These students have entitlement expectations combined with their fragile emotional state, and their resistance to criticism, along with diminished critical thinking ability, makes the college classroom a challenge. Therefore, there is reason to be careful and protect yourself from a possible backlash. Document your actions carefully

so there is a record of what was done by the faculty member, and use the armor of God to protect yourself against the darts of the enemy (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Preach and Practice Thankfulness

Acquainting students with some of the linkages above might help break the chains of anxiety and depression for some people. For example, physical antidotes to anxiety and depression include getting enough sleep; exercising, which is a natural antidepressant; and getting enough sunlight exposure (Vitamin D) (see for example, Ilardi, 2010). These behaviors also aid in adapting or modifying students' study habits. However, all of the remedies above take time to implement, and that time, presumably, would be time sent away from screens and smartphones. This is not an easy sell to many of the iGeneration.

But to get at the actual root of the problem of anxiety requires gratitude. A major, and clinically suggested antidote to anxiety, depression, and indifference is gratitude and thankfulness (Schimmel, 1997). This is very consistent with Scripture, which talks constantly about fear and anxiety and says that the way to destroy them is to praise God and trust in Him. The verses below make that point.

Proverbs 29:25-26 (NIV): "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV): "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV): "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Professors should model thankfulness to God. If attitudes are caught, and we think they are, a thankful and grateful professor will be a powerful and engaging example to people full of anxiety and depression.

However, thankfulness to God can also be an overt part of the classroom. For example, short classroom exercises along the lines of "What are you thankful to God for today?" can be inserted into classes several times a week. Ask students to think of things they are thankful for that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8-10). Be sure to define these terms. Thinking about good things, combined with praising God for these good things, will help students develop peace. The links between these are in the footnote at the end of the article.²

Pursue Apologetics

Though following scriptural commands by exhibiting and teaching praise and gratitude is vital, after thinking about it a little, we do not recommend that professors emphasize trust in the Lord. People in the iGeneration are privately less likely to believe in God than previous generations, which, given the vast power and constant bombardment of stimulation implicit in the smartphone, should not be unexpected. It is probable that our classroom is full of people who do not really believe in God. We suggest that emphasizing trust in God might not be helpful for these students and might even contribute to their general sense of guilt and anxiety.

Our recommendation, therefore, is to return to apologetics; have students study reasons for the Bible to be true, evidence for God, and so forth. This would strengthen students' faith in God before asking them to trust Him.

A book that is recommended for the busy professor who desires to bring apologetics to the devotional classroom life is the *Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Time Lines* (2015), which can be easily found in book outlets. Rose Publishing has gathered a group of important biblical scholars and has set out much of the biblical content in colorful chart and graphic form. Topics include "100 Proofs for the Bible," "100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus," "Four Views of the End Times," and so forth. Many of the charts or graphics could easily be adapted to the college classroom for devotions.

Model Personal Peace, Gentleness and Kindness³

An anxious generation responds to a gentle and kind classroom atmosphere. Techniques that worked for previous generations, such as spontaneous debates or in-class challenges, will frighten many risk-averse students, and scolding a class for not reading the assignment or for looking at their phones will simply be ignored as noise. Addictions are addictions.

Professors need to be gentle and kind (*hesed*, loving kindness). This involves being polite, gentle, and respectful of students (Schimmel, 1997). However, kindness (*hesed*, loving kindness) is not niceness. A professor need not "dumb down" a class or let students get away with sloppy work without consequences in order to be kind. That is merely niceness, and it typically backfires.

Rather, kindness involves being peaceful while remaining consistent to the standards and being calm in the face of irritating classroom habits, such as students' inability to leave cell phones alone. As we said before, addictions are addictions. For some professors, this is easier to learn to do than for others. The only way these authors know to model genuine attitudes of peace, gentleness, and kindness is to

daily ask the Holy Spirit to build these things in our lives. We are very imperfect in this and request your prayers.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

With the new generation entering college, it may be necessary for professors to adjust their pedagogy, syllabus, and classroom interactions in order to better teach these students. For example, several researchers have noted that this generation responds even more enthusiastically to hands-on learning and flipped classrooms (Fink, 2003) than did millennials (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The old jokes, the old examples, and the old lesson plans may need refreshing.

In this final section, the authors present a “grab bag” of suggestions on ways to adapt classrooms to help the sensibilities of the iGens. These ideas may not work for everyone nor are they put into this paper as definitive answers. They are merely techniques that at least one of the authors has used and that students seem to like. As the saying goes, “choose wisely.”

For the sake of readability, we clustered these ideas by utilizing the three iGen characteristics noted in this paper. This clustering is not definitive or scientific; we merely placed techniques under the column that, in our judgment, would most closely relate to that idea.

Techniques that Decrease Levels of Anxiety and Depression **Begin with the Big Picture, Let the Students Drill Down**

Because this generation grew up with YouTube, their general learning style is to want to see the process completed before they begin. In addition, many iGens tend to be impatient with details unless they are passionate about a topic. So, a professor should focus on the big picture and let students drill down on their own time. A familiar example of this is the typical web article, which is roughly one column long with links to other articles.

The advice of focusing on the big picture came to us from high school youth pastors (e.g., McDowell & Wallace, 2019), and has proven to be effective in practice. The “big picture” can take many forms, but both of us have found that, particularly with new ideas, initially shallow information and a focus on outcomes tends to be preferred by the current student. The details come later.

Rubrics and Examples for Major Assignments

This is a variation on the “big picture” idea. Posted rubrics for important assignments allow risk-averse students to know the level that is required to get a good grade. Examples of “A” papers from previous classes adds one more

level of comfort for the nervous perfectionist who sees that the example paper may not be perfect but did get an A.

Rubrics and example papers also save a professor from repeating instructions to inattentive students. “Look at the posted rubric and you will see what I require” is a fair thing to say. Another advantage is that creating rubrics requires that a professor think through precisely what the assignment is designed to do; this cuts down drastically on grading time. Once they are created, rubrics are golden.

Post the Test Questions Ahead of Time

A variation on the rubric idea is to post dozens of test questions and choose from them for the test, or post case questions and change the case from test to test. The point is for students to learn the material; this is one way to encourage that.

Be Gentle in the Classroom

Use language that suggests safety and relaxation. “If you follow the rubric, you will be fine.” “Take a deep breath, and here we go.” Use soothing music during class exercises. Coach gently; give “feedback” gently. Class competitions can make class livelier, but they should be mild, team-based, and result in rewards for all (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018). It should be noted, however, that the constant student pressure to inflate grades will only intensify with this generation, and it will take strength for professors to “resist in the evil day.”

Techniques for Skewed Entitlement Expectations **Experiential Learning**

This generation, even more strongly than others, is attracted by experiential and hands-on learning (McDowell & Wallace, 2019; Meyers, 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). This may make it necessary for professors who have not yet flipped their classroom to adjust pedagogy. A place to begin is with the work of D. Fink (2003), a pioneer in this methodology. From experience, we suggest first creating one experiential activity per class around a major assignment, adding more activities in subsequent semesters, than flipping an entire class when there are enough activities developed.

A Voice in the Process

Members of the iGeneration prefer to work at their own pace, and respond best to a friendly learning style that leverages technology and promotes both independence and collaboration. To them, collaboration does not mean group work. Rather they like to work with other people who are passionate about the same topics as they are, or else they prefer working alone (Rickes, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017). If the professor forms groups, many students assume other students will do the work and so become social loafers (Rickes, 2016).

Chart B: Spiritual and Classroom Interventions

iGen Characteristics		
<p>High Levels of Anxiety and Depression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craving for safety • Inability to resolve problems • Physical stress symptoms • High suicide rate • Fear of new experiences, new people, new ideas • Criticism is “harassment” 	<p>Skewed Entitlement Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-concept not linked to hard work • Expects to lead at work • Wants social purpose in employment • Expects to contribute by expertise in social media • Expect mentors to be like parents, ease workload • Expects firm to provide wi-fi, coffee bar, free time, remote work 	<p>Slowed Social and Cognitive Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low EI levels • Diminished critical thinking ability • Shortened attention span • High levels of pornography use • God is irrelevant
Spiritual Interventions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray without ceasing • Protect yourself - expect spiritual battles • Preach and practice thankfulness • Pursue apologetics in the classroom • Model peace, gentleness and kindness 		
Classroom Ideas		
<p>High Levels of Anxiety and Depression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with big picture, let students find details • Post rubrics and examples for major assignment • Post pre-test questions and choose test from them • Keep class competitions mild, team based • Use language that emphasizes safety and relaxation • Play soothing music during exercises • Coach gently and “give feedback” but do not inflate grades 	<p>Skewed Entitlement Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential learning: expect students to know the material, use classroom for experiences, practice • Allow students to choose between assignments • Allow students to choose partners or work alone • Give frequent (but mild) career ideas • Put several sessions online each term • Be teacher, not parent: do not give in to grade inflation pressure 	<p>Slowed Social and Cognitive Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose short, interactive textbooks • Show frequent short videos • Demonstrate how to do critical thinking in cases, exercises • Consider student video presentations • Use storytelling • Keep devotions short but theological: who God is

Responding to this, a professor might let the class choose their own groups for projects or work alone, let students choose between two similar assignments, and so forth. Opportunities for self-learning are also welcome. For example, after introducing a topic, students can choose from a list of details to report on. Another option is to break projects into individual components that are then combined into the group component of the project. This also simulates what may be expected of them in the workplace.

Techniques for Slowed Social and Cognitive Development **Create Interactive Classrooms**

Because students are entering college with shorter attention spans and less experience in reading and sustained thought (Twenge, 2017), professors need to develop interactive classrooms. According to Medina (2008), the classroom needs to be thought of in 10-minute increments, as the brain can only absorb 10 minutes of information without being recharged. Suggestions include using short videos, three-minute context lectures by the professor with embedded quizzes or exercises, classroom or partner problems to be solved in class, polls, images flashing on the screen, reference to the class website, spontaneous internet research from good websites, and so forth. Interactive classrooms take time to develop; as mentioned above, our recommendation is to begin by building interactions and activities around major assignments or topics and gradually filling in the blanks in subsequent semesters. Take advantage of any grants or time off for class development that the university offers.

Textbooks

Echoing the idea of the big ideas first, several researchers suggest that professors should choose textbooks that are shorter in length, conversational in style, and contain links to interactive activities that teach the detail (e.g., Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Twenge, 2017). There are now more options for online-only based texts (for example, see www.myeducator.com), which are designed with a broad overview that gives students access to “drill down” options for greater detail on many of the concepts presented. This design is similar to much of the writing on the internet.

Video Based Learning

The iGeneration is attracted by storytelling (Seemiller & Grace, 2017) and short videos; these can be used about every 10 minutes in interactive classrooms. Another suggestion is to have students hand in major projects or do presentations by creating videos. The benefit is the engagement of the creative side as well as the technical side of the brain. For a recent discussion of creative ways to use videos in the classroom, see Holbrook and Lean (2020).

Teach Theology

Research suggests that for many of the iGeneration, including students sitting in our classes, God is largely irrelevant (McDowell & Wallace, 2019; Twenge, 2017). Moving again to the idea of the “big picture first,” we, and others, suggest that for this generation, the biblical integration side of our teaching should first concentrate on theology, the doctrine of God (e.g., Schmidt, 2020). A first critical step for many of our students is understanding who God is (Snider, 2019). White and Kirkpatrick (2020), for example, present numerous examples of how this can be done effectively in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

As this paper notes, the newest generation, iGens, have grown up in a much different time than many of their professors, especially professors from the Baby Boomer generation. In order to best teach these students, we must consider their life experiences, which include violence, economic struggles, and smartphones. These societal conditions have added to their anxiety, shifted entitlement expectations, and changed their mental development.

All of these factors walk into our classrooms—both physical and virtual. Rather than over criticizing this generation, we need to focus on helping them bridge from adolescence to adulthood through prayer and thankfulness. There are classroom techniques that may help us develop best methods for teaching this newest generation. But always our understanding needs to be that these too are God’s children, that He is in control and has put them in our classrooms, and that we can be the catalyst that brings them to Him.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Because they are pretty, fragile and melt under the slightest heat (Fox, 2017).
- ² Philippians 4:8-10 (NIV). “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”
- ³ The Fruit of the Spirit, found in Galatians 5: 22-17.

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