

Opinions & Papers

20-SOMETHING ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

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Recently, *The New York Times magazine* asked the question, “What is it about 20-somethings?” Current 20-somethings are far behind the natural time lines set in prior generations for school, work, and other milestones. Sociologists are finding that this group is focused on themselves, exploring their identity, and living in instability. Sounds like many generations of 20-somethings, right? But sociologists see the later-than-normal development as a significant enough change within this generation that they’re seeking to define it as a distinct stage.

These shifts aren’t simply academic. When adolescence was determined to be a distinct life stage in the early 1900s, societal changes ensued: in the areas of education, when the middle school came in to effect, healthcare and social services. Later, marketers adapted these stages to market segments: tweens, teens, young adults, the Millennial Generation, Generation Next or Net, Generation Z, Y and of course, Generation X.

What does it mean? Even if your target remains the same, it’s changed. Societal and economic changes and advancements in technology affect what we see as the ideal and what our needs are. Add the reality that different generations experience things differently and you get a lot of potential destabilization. There’s tremendous opportunity created by those changes if you know how to master them, and do it before competitors do. Mastering change requires constant inquiry, flexibility, and openness to something other than the way you’ve always looked at things; like looking at the 20-somethings as the new 20-somethings.