

# Do(n't) Label Me: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF GENERATIONAL PERCEPTIONS AMONG HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANS

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## BACKGROUND

As a critical component of workforce diversity, differences of age and generational experience impact the working lives of librarians on a daily basis. As younger generations enter libraries and older generations are staying in the workforce longer, research shows that issues related to generational differences are a contributing factor to workplace conflict. (1, 2). In health sciences libraries, whether hospital or academic, solo- or team-staffed, these conflicts can be felt acutely due to a small knowledge pool, downsizing of library staffs, and the changing nature of library services (3).

Responding to a dearth in the published literature (4), the authors sought to explore the issue of intergenerational conflict in the health sciences library workforce from a variety of perspectives, including investigating the perceptions of generational labels amongst health sciences librarians. As the authors found during a poster presentation at MLA '18, generational labels can evoke strong feelings on both personal identity and the generational labels perceived of coworkers and peers. While the overall study sought to explore many dimensions of generational experiences, particularly in intergenerational communications, the aspects of self identification and beliefs regarding generational labels are important facets to highlight as they bring clarity as to the perceptions of generations that health sciences library peers bring into the workforce experience.

## METHOD

The authors developed a twenty three item survey sent via email to medical librarian listerves around the world. The questions explored a number of aspects of intergenerational issues and more specifically communication. The majority of the questions asked used a five point likert scale, however the authors wanted to ensure that participants were able to express their personal views regarding the nature of generational labels and how they interacted with their generational identity. The focus of this poster is on the issues of how generational labels were perceived by the participants and if those labels were embraced, rejected, or accepted by the participants in their own words, collected from comment sections of four multiple choice and from open two open ended questions in the survey itself.

## RESULTS



Generations are a social construct that needlessly separate out society but at least most millennials aren't hateful about it like people in other age groups I've seen in general



The cultural norms and ethos of the post-baby boomers most inform my identity



I relate but don't feel defined by it



Other than the date range, I don't feel like the generational title represents me accurately



I'm not a typical "millennial" I have a decent career, my own house, married, hate social media, and am not a SJW



There is an informal term - Xennials - that describes the late Generation X and early Millennials, created for those who don't feel they fit the typical description of either category. This description is the best fit I've found



Baby boomers' tail is too long. Gen X much more relevant to education, employment, and political environment we live in



Somewhat, I guess? I am typical of my generation in some ways and atypical in others



Yes and No -- about some things but not about technology



This is hard to answer, as millennials get a terrible rap in the media. It becomes something difficult to own. That being said, there are certainly traits of millennials I know i exhibit. I also rarely use social media, didn't get a smart phone until I was 26, and didn't have internet access in my home until i was 16



I am the quintessential baby boomer. My Dad served in WWII



Generation X is a book written by one of my favorite writers, Douglas Coupland. I agree with the portrayals of Generation X as cynical and somewhat world weary.



I identify with that title about as much as i identify with my astrological sign.



Gen X is a title that doesn't illustrate the contribution of my generation - instead it negates it. At the same time, it does illustrate the lost feelings a lot of us had in our youth.



Yes and no, I do call myself a Millennial, and I personify a few of the characteristics, but I consider myself a bit of an old soul. I have managed to purchase a house, get married, have a child, and follow a steady career path - many of which are things not very common in my generation. I believe in hard work, I avoid unwise debt, and I am steadfastly Christian. However, I am also a highly reliant on technology, and tend to be quite liberal / progressive / centre-leftist. I feel like I am a bit of a mix.



yes and no-- about some things but not about technology



## DISCUSSION

The qualitative results of the survey indicate that generational labels are a subject that still requires some investigation. As not all of the participants chose to leave a qualitative comment, it is difficult to make generalizations based on qualitative remarks, however the comments are wide ranging and indicate that further research into the identity aspects of generational labels could be beneficial for future exploration.

From the perspective of two working health sciences librarians, the differences in opinion on generations, and if generational labels can be used to group experiences, seems particularly pertinent when developing networks and collaboration opportunities both internal and external to one's institution. Even for those participants who responded with disbelief or negative connotations of generational labeling, the qualitative results of this study indicate that there is a likelihood that they will interact or work with an individual who has strong conceptions on generations at some point in their career, and understanding and appreciating that identity can help to improve communication in the workplace.

Further research, including developing continuing education or workshop opportunities for health sciences librarians, must be completed to ensure that all viewpoints and best practices on working in an intergenerational workforce are being recognized and utilized by health sciences libraries.

## REFERENCES

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