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## *Millennials: 'Adulthood' in a different way from generations before*



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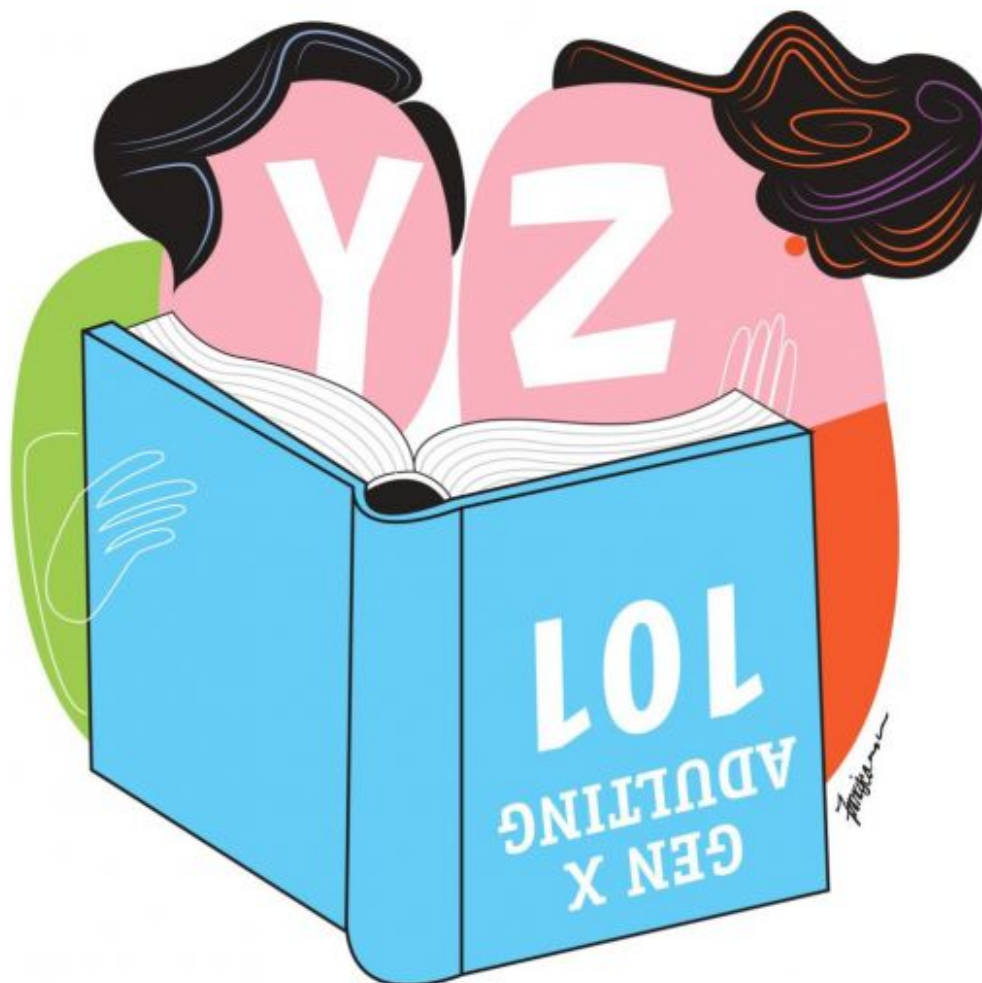


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SINGAPORE - Adulthood - I do not like the word. Even the sound of the lazy verb implies a desperate attempt at defining oneself as an adult.

The word turned hot back in 2008 on Twitter, used ironically mostly to make fun of the things adults have to do on a regular basis. Urban Dictionary defines adulthood as: "To carry out one or more duties and responsibilities expected of fully developed individuals (paying off credit card debt, settling beef without blasting social media, etc). Exclusively used by those who adult less than 50 per cent of the time."

Seems no one wants to grow up. As the lyrics on the Peter Pan soundtrack go: "Cause growing up is awfuller than all the awful things that ever were."

As life expectancy increases, the age of adulthood creeps upwards too. Last year, Property Guru reported that almost 70 per cent of Singaporeans between the ages of 21 and 37 live with their parents.

Massive student debt, inflation, a tough job market, not being married (therefore unable to apply for an HDB flat) and a culture here of children caring for their parents contribute to this high number.

In the United States, that figure is at a record high of 23 per cent.

So how in the world can an adult learn to adult when he is under a parent's roof - with rent paid, laundry sorted and, more often than not, meals prepared?

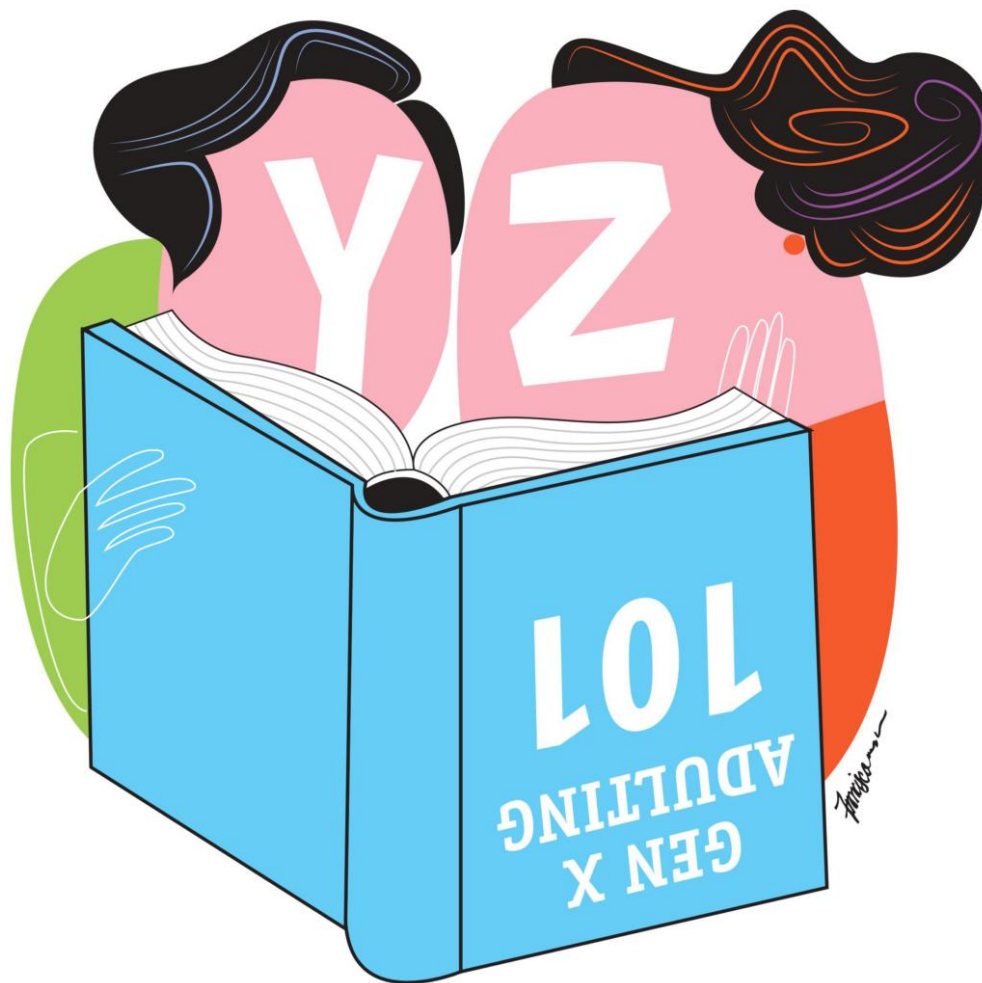


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We old dinosaurs - Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers - believed one became an adult after graduating from university, technical school or maybe after obtaining our first job. But for many millennials, adulthood begins only after having children, likely in their 30s, almost a full decade later than "in the old days".

Growing up in the US, with two working parents and no helper, I was a latchkey kid, with a big pile of chores that included washing and folding laundry, tidying my room, helping with dinner, and pulling the weeds in the garden, which I abhorred more than anything. When I left for university, my father bought an electric weed-eater.

My parents touted hard work, loyalty and dedication to their jobs. I recall my mother sitting at her desk monthly "to reconcile the bank statement". I can still hear the sound of the paper as she methodically tore out cheques while saying: "Always keep tabs of your debits and deposits. Too many people never balance their books and have no idea how much money's in the bank."

Her mantra stuck. After starting my first job, I, too, sat down (on my bed, with no money or space for a desk in the rental I shared with two other women) once a month to pay bills and balance my account.

I learnt to adult by example. My generation understood once we left college, we had to get a job, pay the bills and authentically adult. We never expected the responsibilities of being an adult to be fulfilling 24/7. Shopping for groceries and sending the car for a tune-up were givens that came with life as an adult.

We recognised mundane work would get the adulthood minutiae done. We were not coddled and I never imagined going home to live with my parents after university. No trending books or classes were offered to teach us how to adult.

We simply adulted.



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Today, a slew of blogs, websites and courses exist for millennials to learn to budget, buy insurance and even cook. Were their parents too busy to teach them? Were the children too preoccupied to be attentive? Did we over-parent and over-indulge to their detriment?

As society reached a higher level of sophistication and wealth, and life evolved, we reared our children differently, wanting to pass along comforts and dreams.

The mindset shift we face with millennials is a direct result of the parenting we used to shape them - along with cultural and societal shifts.

Millennials, all 80 million estimated today, have grown up with parents pushing them "to have a purpose and make dreams come true. Anything is possible".

As a result, millennials value relationships, need a bigger goal and will drop "work-life balance" in an interview right after the initial handshake and hello.

They fret over having the right job and the right status, and worry about what people think of their position versus the prior generations who wanted a decent job to pay the bills.

Steadfastness and staying on course are too safe for millennials, and Gen Y and Z.

For sure, the stereotypical view that I and many others hold of millennials as entitled, selfish and narcissistic is flawed.

The old-fashioned notion I carry of nose to the grind is best tossed aside. Millennials are in a better place - they value life over money, purpose over money, contentment over money. Heck, they believe they can change the world, socially and politically.

I find myself nodding in agreement. The old days of that superhuman, perfect leader - think former Ford and Chrysler president Lee Iacocca - are over. Young people want to see the effort and flaws, and understand how the chief executive failed, yet rallied. Think Apple's Steve Jobs, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg and Razer's Tan Min-Liang.

More than ever, the world is the oyster of young, educated and hard-working millennials (not the slackers). With the war for talent, where every company wants the best and brightest, today's millennials have companies actively working to retain the finest.

At Singapore's Apple headquarters, my friend talks of their wellness centre, complete with a doctor, dentist, chiropractor and physiotherapist; a cafe with delicious, subsidised food, baristas and a gelato bar; and a concierge to make plans for employees' lives out of the office.

Long hours? "Rarely. They encourage us to work a regular day, then head home to our families," she says. I'm like, "I want a job there."



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Because they are self-focused and well-educated (and have a parent's home to crash), millennials are waiting longer to marry and start a family. Putting off marriage until they are more financially independent encourages a smarter choice in a partner for adulthood.

I have been steering my Gen Z daughters, since they were wee ones, not to marry before they turn 26. My husband Jim insists 28 is the "correct" age.

This generation leads in social entrepreneurship, where business drives social change. They refuse to be cogs in machines. Millennials want a role in something bigger: They yearn to help build the product, paint the picture, design the prototype, save the planet.

Since they are tech-savvy, their (short) attention spans mean we long-winded Gen-Xers, who grew up with meeting after meeting, have to adult differently and get to the point.

As a word, "adulthood" still annoys me. However, I do realise why this generation adults later, differently, and, perhaps, better than any generation before it.

We created millennials. The need for those how-to-adult classes rests upon our shoulders.

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