



Most wired generation prepares to take the reigns

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A major demographic shift is coming, and it promises to shake up almost every aspect of Canadian society. Millions of Canadians born in the years immediately following the Second World War, also known as the baby boomers, will retire in the next few years.

Statistics Canada says more than 6.7 million Canadians were born between 1980 and 1995. They make up what's known as generation

Y. Their lives are a hyped-up world of multi-media, multi-tasking and constant change. Technology has made communication and gratification are nearly instant and has made gen-Yers the most wired generation ever.

Sporting a cell phone, an iPod and a laptop, 23-year-old Sarah Wenglensky says technology is part of every aspect of her life, especially her studies. "It's stereotypical, but it's also true. We've become so accustomed, become so dependent on technology," said the University of Ottawa management student. "Even if you don't like it, you don't have a choice. You have to become familiar with it."

Events define Gen-Yers

Sociologist Diane Pacom says several factors, from the divorce rate to the near-constant information flow, influence who gen-Yers are and what they will become. Pacom says the events of 9/11 may ultimately define the group. "This ultra-consumer society, with its flakiness and also its superficiality, came to an end with this event. Because people saw there was fear ... Death was there. The possibility of losing something from one minute to the other," she said. Pacom says gen-Yers are not the apathetic, depressed group they're often made out to be. Rather, she calls them passionate about various causes, and more globally aware than any other generation before them.

Need to make the connection

However, University of Ottawa professor Joel Westheimer, who teaches many of these gen-Ys, is concerned that this awareness doesn't necessarily translate into action. "They are interested in issues. What they're missing is the full spectrum of ways to address those issues," he said.

For example, plenty of young people volunteer, but he says schools don't encourage them to get interested and involved in the political process to truly affect change. "What I'm more concerned about is their readiness to take on the responsibilities of participating in a democratic society," Westheimer said. "It's not just going out and bringing the homeless person a coat. It's asking the tough questions about what can you do about the conditions that lead to so many homeless people."

Sense of entitlement

But one thing the younger generation is doing to prepare themselves to lead the country is going to university in record numbers. Wenglensky is one of the many young Canadians currently enrolled in a University program. While that is certainly a good thing, she says the path of higher learning leads some people her age to develop a sense of entitlement.

"I definitely know people that expect to come out and just have everything be handed to them because their resume is nice. I think that that's also an influence of what society has put on us," she said.

"They have an infinite world of possibilities and of objects and options. But there is no cohesion at any level of their lives," said Pacom.

With a report from CTV's Chris Day