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Different Perspectives of Generation Y

Różne ujęcia pokolenia Y

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Abstract

Aim. Generation Y will become the largest generation of seniors in 30 years. There are numerous articles in the marketing and labour market fields that seek to identify common characteristics of Generation Y. However, there is a lack of scientific sociological analyses concerning this generation. The aim of this article is to review the leading academic concepts related to Generation Y.

Methods and materials. The article employs a comparative analysis of concepts. It draws on the research of Neil Howe and William Strauss, Jean Twenge, Witold Wrzesień, and Wiesław Wątroba.

Results and conclusion. Contrary to the predictions of Howe and Strauss at the turn of the century, the Millennials (as the authors called *Generation Y*) did not succeed in renewing institutions. More than twenty years after the authors of the generational cycle, Jean Twenge defines Generation Y as an individualistic, self-focused generation that struggles to form lasting bonds. According to the Polish researcher Witold Wrzesień, those born

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in the 1980s constitute a separate generation, which he refers to as *European seekers*. Like Jean Twenge, Witold Wrzesień emphasises the individualistic nature of Generation Y. Wiesław Wątroba, similarly to Wrzesień and Twenge, points to the belief in one's uniqueness held by many members of Generation Y. However, Wątroba also observes strong peer bonds and a capacity for cooperation among the oldest representatives of Generation Y, born in the 1980s. These traits are consistent with the concept proposed by Howe and Strauss.

Keywords: Generation Y, millennials, generations concepts, Neil Howe, William Strauss, Witold Wrzesień, Wiesław Wątroba, Jean Twenge

Abstrakt

Cel. Pokolenie Y stanie się w perspektywie 30 lat liczną generacją seniorów. Nie brakuje artykułów z zakresu marketingu i rynku pracy poszukujących wspólnych cech pokolenia Y. Jednak brakuje naukowych analiz socjologicznych dotyczących tej generacji. Celem artykułu jest dokonanie przeglądu wiodących koncepcji naukowych dotyczących pokolenia Y.

Metody i materiały. W artykule zastosowano porównawczą analizę koncepcji. Wykorzystano badania: Neila Howe'a i Williama Straussa, Jean Twenge, Witolda Września, Wiesława Wątroby.

Wyniki i wnioski. Wbrew przewidywaniom Howe'a i Straussa z przełomu wieków milenialsi, (jak nazwali pokolenie Y autorzy) nie dokonali odnowy instytucji. Ponad dwadzieścia lat po autorach cyklu pokoleń Jean Twenge definiuje pokolenie Y jako generację indywidualistyczną skoncentrowaną na sobie, mającą problemy w formowaniu trwałych więzi. Według polskiego badacza Witolda Września roczniki urodzone w latach 80. tworzą osobne pokolenie nazwane przez polskiego badacza „europejskimi poszukiwaczami”. Witold Wrzesień podobnie jak Jean Twenge akcentuje indywidualistyczny wymiar pokolenia Y. Wiesław Wątroba podobnie jak Witold Wrzesień oraz Jean Twenge zwraca uwagę na przekonanie o swojej wyjątkowości wielu członków z pokolenia Y. Wątroba dostrzega jednak silne więzi rówieśnicze i zdolność do współpracy u najstarszych przedstawicieli pokolenia Y, urodzonych w latach 80. Te cechy są spójne z koncepcją Howe'a i Straussa.

Słowa kluczowe: pokolenie Y, milenialsi, koncepcje pokoleń, Neil Howe, William Strauss, Witold Wrzesień, Wiesław Wątroba, Jean Twenge

Introduction

Generation Y, or Millennials, were primarily born between 1981 and 2004, making them approximately 21 to 44 years old in late 2025. As Maria Ossowska emphasises,

a generation is not only a genetic link between parents and children within a family, but also a category through which cultural transmission occurs. Generation Y, also known as the *Echo Boomers* due to its size, is a significant focus in generational analysis. Having entered adulthood in the new millennium, Generation Y is expected to become a large senior generation in the next 30 years. Although numerous articles in marketing and labour market studies explore common traits of Generation Y, there remains a lack of strict sociological and scientific analysis of this cohort.

This article attempts to review leading academic concepts concerning Generation Y. It references both Polish studies by Witold Wrzesień and Wiesław Wątroba, and international works by Neil Howe, William Strauss, and Jean Twenge. The choice of Polish theories is driven by the formative events shaping the Polish counterpart of Generation Y, referred to as the *European Seekers*. The American research includes two well-known approaches – particularly the analyses of Neil Howe and William Strauss, who popularised the term *Millennials' for Generation Y*. The most recent framework addressing Generation Y is the concept developed by Jean Twenge.

Generational Concepts

The concept of generation originated in German social sciences and was also deeply rooted in German Romanticism¹. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) pioneered this discourse, but the most influential work in this area was by Karl Mannheim (1893–1947). For Dilthey, a generation refers to the simultaneity of individuals who grew up side by side, sharing common childhood and youth experiences (Dilthey, 2015). Mannheim linked the generational category to shifts in value systems. He distinguished between the concepts of *generation location*, *generation as actuality* and *generation unit*. Generation location is based on similar birth years. Generation as actuality occurs when individuals born around the same time form relationships, typically through shared actions.

A generation unit is a more cohesive group formed when individuals within a generation develop similar worldviews. This unity is based on shared ideas and experiences. Mannheim writes, “In reality, new engaged generational attitudes usually do not arise without personal contact between people, but rather in specific groups where individuals are close, psychologically and intellectually motivating each other, taking

¹ One cannot overlook the thinking of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (born 1744, died 1803) in this context. In his works, he emphasized the intergenerational transmission of culture. For the German thinker, the cultural cohesion of a nation is based on language, which is passed down through generations.

stances aligned with their generational context” (Mannheim, 2015, p. 114). Mannheim and Dilthey differ on when generational identity is formed². Mannheim believed it takes shape as youth enter adulthood—around age 17—while Dilthey argued that generational formation is also possible among mature individuals.

José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), although Spanish, significantly influenced German generational theory. He believed that generational transmission of historical knowledge is key to civilisation’s continuity. Ortega y Gasset stated: “A generation actively operates for about thirty years, divided into two phases: first, it propagates its ideas and values; second, it dominates public life. The next generation, raised under its influence, develops new ideas, often opposing the previous one’s extremism” (Ortega y Gasset, 2002, p. 29).

Polish social science also engaged with the concept of generation³, notably through Maria Ossowska (1896–1974). She distinguished between biological and cultural criteria in defining generations and proposed five definitions (Ossowska, 1983).

- Biological definition: Generation as genealogical links between parents and children.
- Cultural definition: Parents pass on values and traditions essential to society.
- Temporal definition: A generation spans about 33 years – the average age gap between parents and children.
- Conflict-based definition: Includes family disputes (parents vs. children) and differing goals due to biological ageing.
- Experiential definition: A generation as a group with shared attitudes shaped by formative experiences.

Generation Y in the Perspective of Neil Howe and William Strauss – The Millennials

Neil Howe and William Strauss⁴ popularised the term *Millennials* to refer to Generation Y. According to the authors of the generational cycle theory, this generation was a dominant, outward-focused type, referred to as the *civic generation*. The first birth year for Millennials was 1981, and the last was 2004. At the outset, it is important

² Adolescence is a key phase in Erik Erikson’s concept of psychosocial development. During this period, an identity crisis occurs, after which a mature structure of individual identity is formed.

³ It is worth mentioning the concept of generation formulated by Jan Garewicz (born 1921, died 2002). For the Polish philosopher, a generation is a group of people connected by a shared generational experience.

⁴ The creators of the generational cycle concept.

to note that researchers' voices regarding the Millennial generation were predictive in nature – projecting what the traits of this generation might be in adulthood, rather than providing diagnoses based on full adult behaviour. This is because Neil Howe and William Strauss published their works about this generation at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, just as the first Millennials were entering adulthood.

In Howe and Strauss's theory, Millennials entering adulthood strive to establish a new social order. As a civic generation, they understand that without social order, society cannot respond effectively to crises. This generation seeks to increase community cohesion. Under such conditions, the demand for social order rises, though the availability of it remains low (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Civic generations are typically raised with consistent discipline during childhood – often as a corrective response to the perceived neglect of the preceding generation. Civic generations come of age during a period of social crisis. Thus, Millennials were expected to carry the hopes of society, aiming to successfully bring the crisis to an end. In middle age, members of such generations become skilled professionals with a strong work ethic. In old age, they are often challenged by younger generations, who may criticise the older generation's values as lacking in spirituality.

This period of critique does not necessarily imply a resurgence of church institutions or formal religiosity but rather signals a phase of increased inner sensitivity and, at times, a heightened desire for transcendence. In their later publication, *The Fourth Turning: An American prophecy* (1997), Strauss and Howe updated and systematised their framework of generational types, introducing the *hero archetype* in reference to Millennials. In generational cycle theory, the hero archetype is one of the most significant, often echoing myths of saviour-like figures. Examples include King Arthur, Hercules, or Superman.

According to Howe and Strauss, heroes are children raised under strict and protective parenting. In youth, particularly in times of crisis, they exhibit heroic behaviour. In middle age, they uphold strong institutions, and in old age, they must confront the questioning of the societal order they helped build. Howe and Strauss predicted that post-2000, Millennials would become a generation that renews family institutions – evidenced by lower divorce rates, fewer teen pregnancies, and a decline in abortion rates. They would also be less inclined to use drugs or commit crimes compared to Generation X during its youth (Howe & Strauss, 2000). However, this renewed family structure would differ from that of the 1950s. Children would not feel as deeply bonded with their mothers (Strauss & Howe, 1997). Millennials would, on one hand, understand the values of older generations, but on the other, struggle to implement them due to economic challenges.

In the new millennium, a new generation would be born – later referred to as *Generation Z* or the *Homeland Generation* (Strauss & Howe, 1997). Howe and Strauss noted

that Millennials were mostly born to Baby Boomers (born between 1943 and 1960). As Boomers were part of a demographic boom, the birth rate in the 1980s increased, hence the term Echo Boomers for Millennials. This demographic trend naturally occurs when large birth cohorts reach childbearing age. Many Boomers expressed joy when their children were born. Millennials symbolised a return to moral standards and spirituality, which led to a strong societal consensus around protecting this new generation. This manifested in improved prenatal and maternal care and longer postnatal hospital stays. The auto industry began to prioritise child safety, implementing innovations like child-monitoring mirrors.

The traditional family model, with one parent staying at home, was also re-popularised (McQueen, 2016). U.S. politicians competed with proposals to protect children. Child protection became a key topic during the 1996 presidential election⁵. There was a belief that another generation could not be neglected as Generation X had been. Society had high hopes for Gen X, but many believed the Boomers had neglected them due to their involvement in the counterculture of the late 1960s.

When Millennials entered high school, policies became more child-focused. Parents aimed to instil good habits; boys and girls were often segregated, and abstinence education became popular. Howe and Strauss predicted that in the face of a potential economic crisis (expected between 2008–2030), Millennials would not rebel but mobilise. They would accept hierarchical structures and enter the labour market as Boomers retired, boosting productivity. They would seek order and harmony in their work, accompanied by a strong work ethic. Self-sacrifice would be a defining Millennial trait, aligning with the hero archetype. If a crisis required war, Millennials would not shy away from military service. Violence would not be foreign to them. Howe and Strauss emphasised that this would be in stark contrast to the Boomers of the 1960s, who resisted the Vietnam War draft and protested violence.

Cooperation would also be a key trait. However, Millennials' desire for community and authority could make them susceptible to populist influence. They might follow leaders unquestioningly, regardless of whether it led to triumph or disaster. Millennials were expected to have a significant impact on popular culture, promoting positive themes like love and happiness. However, cultural messaging would become more subdued. Millennials would be deeply involved in any coming crisis. If it ended in disaster, they could be blamed; if resolved successfully, they would become celebrated heroes. In the future, they were expected to implement grand projects, establishing a new social order while meeting the needs of their children.

⁵ Incumbent President Bill Clinton pursued re-election, contending in the electoral race against the Republican Party's candidate, Bob Dole.

In conclusion, Generation Y, according to Neil Howe and William Strauss, was a heroic generation characterised by cooperation and unity in the face of societal crisis. The authors of the generational cycle theory were also instrumental in popularising the term Millennials to describe Generation Y.

Generation Y in the Perspective of Jean Twenge

The American generational researcher, Jean Twenge, made a significant contribution to the discussion on Generation Z with her 2019 publication *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – And completely unprepared for adulthood: And what that means for the rest of us* (Twenge, 2019). This publication analysed the generation following Generation Y – Generation Z, also known as *iGen*. Her analysis of Generation Y was included in a later 2023 monograph. In this monograph⁶, the researcher provided a thorough characterisation of six living generations⁷.

Twenge uses the terminology of Howe and Strauss when referring to Generation Y, also known as Millennials. However, she adopts slightly different generational boundaries. According to Twenge, Millennials were born between 1980 and 1995, while Howe and Strauss place them between 1982 and 2004. Twenge highlights several formative events for American Millennials. The first was the commercialisation of the internet in 1995 and its widespread use in private homes by 2000. Another key event was the public launch of Facebook and the proliferation of smartphones by 2012, when most Americans owned one.

Twenge considers Millennials to be the first generation to fluently type on mobile devices. Text messages replaced traditional phone calls, which were common among Generation X. Millennials were also the first active users of social media, incorporating it into all aspects of life – from maintaining friendships to running businesses. Snapchat emerged during the youth of late Millennials (those born in the 1990s). The app, launched in 2011 by three Stanford students (Millennials themselves), allowed users to share photos with friends that were later deleted. This impermanence encouraged casual, private communication and reflected a generational value: authenticity.

⁶ It should be noted that the publication received positive reviews from another renowned American generational researcher, Mark Bauerlein.

⁷ In this publication, the author analyzed not only Generation Y but also included a detailed portrait of five other living generations: the Silent Generation (born 1925–1945), the Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1979), Generation Z/iGen (born 1995–2012), and the Alpha/Polar Generation (born 2013–2029).

As Twenge notes, “The childhood of Millennials – a generation of wanted and planned children – gave rise to a new category: parenting” (Twenge, 2024, p. 297). This concept describes a new form of competition: between parents striving to succeed in raising their children. It encompasses educational and extracurricular achievements as well as consumerist rivalry. According to Twenge, the overprotective parenting style of Millennials’ childhood translated into adult challenges such as household responsibilities and financial independence.

Twenge diverges from Howe and Strauss in her assessment of Millennials. While Howe and Strauss portray them as collectivist and cooperative, Twenge sees them as individualistic. She attributes this to the 1990s and early 2000s slogans encouraging self-focus and confidence regardless of external approval⁸. This mindset led to a self-centred early adulthood. Twenge’s claim is supported by fellow generational researcher Mark Bauerlein, who notes that Millennials, even as teens, created websites and games. However, email and internet use created an illusion of social connection with peers worldwide (Bauerlein, 2008).

Millennial parents promoted self-esteem by rewarding even average academic performance. This upbringing led to high adult ambition. Twenge notes that “[...] by the early 2000s, seven out of ten Millennials believed they would rank among the top 20% of workers in their field” (Twenge, 2024, p. 306). Such a belief may inflate self-worth, creating positive emotions but hindering relationships. This inflated self-image often led Millennials to disregard others’ needs and emotions. Twenge concludes that the generation tends toward narcissism and egocentrism.

Howe and Strauss cite the 2008 global financial crisis as the onset of a crisis era and a formative event for Millennials. Twenge points to a different moment of generational activity: the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement. Though lacking clear demands and structure, the movement drew attention to social inequality. Millennials shared personal financial struggles online—mainly via Tumblr—highlighting digital civic engagement on an unprecedented scale.

Twenge evaluates Millennials within Howe and Strauss’s generational cycle. According to the theory, Millennials were expected to resemble the *Greatest Generation*⁹ (born 1900–1924), especially in terms of community spirit and crisis cooperation. Twenge argues that during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 (accurately predicted

⁸ To support her thesis, Twenge cites research on pronouns used in American books. After the year 2000, the popularity of first-person singular pronouns increased.

⁹ The Greatest Generation, also called the G.I. Generation in Howe and Strauss’s concept, was born between 1901 and 1924. They came of age during historical events such as the New Deal and World War II. These events demanded collective sacrifice from members of this generation. The shared sacrifices during their youth caused the G.I. Generation to become a lifetime generation characterized by ease of cooperation.

by the cycle), Millennials remained individualistic and passive, defying expectations. She believes technological advancement disrupted the cycle by fostering individualism and undermining social cohesion.

In summary, Jean Twenge's work provides a contemporary diagnosis of Generation Y as of 2023, emphasising the role of technological development in shaping this generation. Unlike Howe and Strauss, Twenge (along with Bauerlein) sees Generation Y as fundamentally individualistic.

Generation Y in the Perspective of Witold Wrzesień

Witold Wrzesień, a sociologist from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, in his research analysed the Polish counterparts of the American Generations X and Y, publishing a series of articles and monographs. The researcher did not stop at in-depth analyses but created his own typology of Polish generations born between 1964 and 1998.

Wrzesień draws attention to the overly strong transfer of the specifics of American generations (including Generation Y) to the Polish context. It is an oversimplification to claim the existence of universal generations whose traits are similar regardless of cultural differences and geographical distance. In his analyses, Wrzesień focuses on the Polish specificity of Generation Y, paying attention to formative events. Witold Wrzesień distinguished two Polish generations within Generation Y: The generation of *European seekers* (born between 1983 and 1989) and the generation of *children of the crisis* (born after 1989). This raises the question of what basis the researcher divides Generation Y into two smaller generations. According to Witold Wrzesień:

[...] the period of shaping social identity of a generation falls roughly between the ages of 19 and 26. It is the time of the strongest generation-forming activity when, besides our personality and individual identity, we also shape the social identity of our generation. (Wrzesień, 2016, p. 230)

Hence, the time frame of one generation is about 7 years.

According to Wrzesień, the European seekers are the first Polish generation deprived of experiences from the Polish People's Republic (PRL). Social memory begins no earlier than at the age of six, so even the oldest members of this generation do not remember the PRL. The generational formative period of this generation starts around 2002 and ends in 2015. A formative experience for this generation was Poland's accession to the European Union. This event allowed the generation entering adulthood to find work in other European countries. The mobility of this generation was driven

not only by labour market reasons but also by the desire to explore the world. The term *seekers* is meant to refer to the lack of distinct cultural traits with which this generation could identify. On the one hand, this generation is subjected to the process of globalisation (which affects cultural products) and the integration of European societies; on the other hand, there is a strong need to preserve distinctiveness and individuality.

A characteristic feature of the generation of European seekers is “[...] dependence on achievements – excessive reliance of self-worth on accomplishments, perfectionism, self-focus, selfishness and entitlement, the use of manipulation as the dominant control mechanism, and the objectification of others with whom interactions occur” (Wrzesień *et al.*, 2005 p. 126). Although work constitutes a very important element of identity for European seekers, fewer individuals in this generation invest comprehensively in their education (compared to the generation of the *stragglers* at the end of the century). The opening of labour markets in Western European countries gave young people a chance to find better-paid jobs than in Poland. It was also significant that at the time of entering adulthood, the number of available jobs in Poland for the numerous generations of European seekers was limited, and employment stability for young workers was low. The lack of employment stability contrasted with images promoted in the media – professional success translating into a comfortable consumer lifestyle. The 1990s transformations, which introduced consumer culture into child upbringing, were also a driving factor. European seekers are the first generation to grow up with a consumerist childhood. Parents, wanting good contact with their children, fulfilled their demands.

It should be noted that work was not the only motivation for leaving for this generation. Many members left within student exchange programs, allowing them not only to gain knowledge but also to form (sometimes lasting) contacts with students from Western Europe. This generation is very pragmatic in choosing studies. Completing studies should translate into greater attractiveness on the labour market. Members of the European seekers generation are aware that it is not worth following only their own interests or desire to deepen knowledge, but rather calculating which fields of study will result in higher earnings in the future.

European seekers, on the one hand, strive to be independent and willingly use technological novelties. This trait aligns with the characteristics of the American Generation Y. A differentiating feature is the strong tendency of the Polish generation of European seekers to rely on the support of older generations. Wrzesień points to the frequent postponement of independent life by many members of the European seekers generation. The Polish generation of European seekers is also strongly focused on material issues. “Young Poles are also impatient and want to succeed quickly, with the difference that, unlike Generation Y, success is largely identified with material status” (Wrzesień, 2009,

p. 146). Referring to the category of values (Inglehart, 2015), the generation of European seekers is more oriented towards materialistic values than post-materialistic ones¹⁰.

Witold Wrzesień points out that the next generation after the European seekers is the generation called *children of the crisis*, or the *crisis generation*. The formative period of this generation starts around 2009 and ends in 2024 (assuming the birth years of the children of the crisis generation are 1990–1998 and the formative period occurs between the ages of 19 and 26).

Children of the crisis are a generation shaped by the global crisis. It hindered social advancement for cohorts born in the mid-1990s due to a worse start in the labour market. As Wrzesień points out, “[...] today, another group is slowly appearing on the generational market; let’s call them the children of the crisis. The European seekers will give way to them. No one knows how this new group will develop and modify our global reality” (Pilawski, interview, 2012, March 11). Children of the crisis are a generation born after 1989 who do not remember the PRL period (similar to European seekers) and also did not live in it. Wrzesień notes:

Poland before 1989 is for them a distant history, which they treat as something almost unrealistically remote, not only in time. They clearly distance themselves from the past and often associate it with evaluative judgments. Today’s youth are basically completely cut off from the times before 1989 and treat their present (Poland after 1989) as the beginning of a new era, created not on the ruins of the past but in absolute detachment from it. (Wrzesień, 2016, p. 232)

In summary, the counterpart of Generation Y, according to Wrzesień, consists of two Polish generations – European seekers and children of the crisis. The specificity of the first generation results from events in Polish history – Poland’s accession to the EU and the mass migration of young people. Wrzesień emphasises the individualistic dimension of this generation in his analyses of Generation Y. A strong tendency among the Polish generation of European seekers to rely on support from older generations. The second generation included in the American Generation Y is the children of the crisis generation. The characteristics of this generation result from global events – the global economic crisis. The crisis children generation is more consistent in terms of traits with the American Generation Y.

¹⁰ Materialist values relate to economic security and the satisfaction of material needs. Post-materialist values are focused on quality of life and self-realization.

Generation Y in the Perspective of Wiesław Wątroba

Polish generational researcher Wiesław Wątroba focused on Generation Y in his two publications: *Transgressions of intergenerational relations in late capitalism* (2017) and *Generations in postcapitalist societies* (2022). The concept of transgressiveness in the context of generations is understood by the author as the differences occurring between generations. In his 2017 publication, Wątroba examines differences among four generations: Traditionalists (1918–1945), Baby Boomers (1945–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), and Millennials (born 1982–2001).

According to the author, due to advancing globalisation and integration of the Western world, the differences between Polish and American Millennials are diminishing. Wątroba emphasises that Polish sociology lacks comprehensive theoretical works addressing generational issues holistically; therefore, recourse to American publications is necessary.

In the 2017 publication, the researcher notes the popularity of the term Millennials in reference to Generation Y. Following the approach of Howe and Strauss, Wątroba considers the millennium shift a formative event for Generation Y. At the same time, he points out that the label Generation Y insufficiently distinguishes this generation from others. The term Generation Y, in the Polish scholar's view, implies a lack of a formative event within the Millennial generation; therefore, the naming convention of preceding Generation X, followed by the next letter of the alphabet, should be used. However, Wątroba notes that this reasoning was met with resistance from Generation Y members themselves, who did not wish to live in the shadow of older generations. Hence, members of Generation Y prefer to identify as Millennials. For the same reasons, the term *Generation M* did not gain traction.

Wiesław Wątroba disagrees with the dating of the youngest Millennial cohorts as proposed by Howe and Strauss. For the researcher, the birth cohorts of Millennials end with the advent of the Internet in 1995 (Wątroba, 2017). The most crucial period for generational formation is adolescence and early adulthood. From this perspective, the development of the Internet indeed became a formative event for Generation Y. Wątroba cites another name for Generation Y proposed by American scholars: the *First Wired Generation*.

In his 2019 publication, Wątroba introduces his own terminology for Generation Y, dividing it into Echo Boomers (large birth cohorts of the 1980s) and Millennials (birth cohorts of the 1990s). The term Echo Boomers emphasises the demographic dimension of this generation. The parents of the Echo Boomers largely belonged to the large Golden Boomers generation born in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, in Poland, large birth cohorts in the 1950s resulted in increased births in the early 1980s. Demographers define this process as the second postwar baby boom. According to Wątroba, the term refers not only to demographic dependency (as noted by American scholars

Howe and Strauss) but also to similarities in the specifics of the Echo Boomers generation with the Boomers. These similarities include values and attitudes.

Wątroba notes that the Echo Boomers highly value teamwork, exhibit a strong instinct for group success, and maintain strong peer bonds, similar to the Boomers (Wątroba, 2019). However, it should not be assumed that these two generations are identical. Wątroba points out that the Echo Boomers question the meaning of the contestation characteristic of the youth of the Boomers. The Echo Boomers generation is more conformist, seeking compromise and collectivism not only declaratively but also behaviourally (community of actions).

In later publications, Wątroba highlights that Millennials born in the 1990s enter adulthood during a period of low social change dynamics. Therefore, the generational distinctiveness of this generation is low and mainly rests on the development of the Internet. Compared to the Echo Boomers, the 1990s Millennials show greater optimism regarding solving social problems and hold a respectful view of the achievements of their grandparents and great-grandparents. Wątroba notes that a characteristic feature of the Millennial generation born in the 1990s is a delay in leaving the parental home. In the literature, terms such as the Boomerang Generation or Peter Pan Generation appear (Wątroba, 2022). From the perspective of older generations, the reasons for this phenomenon are attributed to characteristics typical of most Millennials: lack of responsibility, hedonism, disinclination to make sacrifices, and reluctance to take charge of their own destiny (Wątroba, 2019). According to Millennials themselves, economic factors, especially the difficult access to housing, are responsible for this state of affairs. Difficult access to affordable housing constitutes a major division between the older Boomer generation and the younger Millennials.

Regarding intergenerational differences, Wątroba emphasises several aspects. First, intergenerational differences exist because people believe in them through generational myths. Wątroba refers here to the analyses of Jan Garewicz, noting that mythologised stories about the fate of generations create generational identity and thus the sense of distinctiveness from other generations. The second aspect concerns stereotypes shaped by the media, which deepen generational conflicts. Traditionalists are irritated by Millennials' entitlement mentality because they themselves achieved what they have only through hard work. Millennials blame the Baby Boomer generation for ecological damage, which Millennials see as a challenge for younger generations (Wątroba, 2017).

In summary, Generation Y, from the perspective of Wątroba, shares some characteristics of Howe and Strauss's Millennial generation (cooperation, strong peer bonds). These traits are evident among the oldest representatives of Generation Y born in the 1980s. Simultaneously, the Polish scholar criticises the very concept of the generational cycle created by American researchers, pointing out the insufficient empirical foundations of the theory.

Wątroba highlights housing problems faced by Generation Y, which contribute to delaying leaving the parental home. The source of the problem, according to him, lies not in external factors but internal ones – entitled attitudes of many Generation Y members. In these analytical categories, Wątroba's views align with the research of Wrzesień and the analyses of Jean Twenge concerning Generation Y.

Summary

This article provides a synthesised review of scholarly concepts concerning Generation Y. The starting point for the review was the analyses by Howe and Strauss, American creators of the generational cycle theory and popularisers of the term Millennials in reference to Generation Y. The authors of the generational cycle viewed Generation Y as a heroic generation, possessing traits akin to the Greatest Generation born in the first decade of the 20th century. Just as the Greatest Generation came of age during World War II, Generation Y was expected to demonstrate heroic characteristics during times of crisis – cooperation, confronting challenges, and renewing family institutions.

Contrary to Howe and Strauss's predictions, Millennials have not renewed these institutions. It is difficult today to identify factors supporting the thesis of a strengthening family institution. The marriage rate in the U.S. has been declining since the early 1980s, with no indication of reversal. While the late 1990s saw a slight decrease in the average age at first marriage, the early 21st century witnessed an increase again. The tendency of Generation Y members to delay entry into adulthood aligns with statistical data from Poland. According to 2023 data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the average age of women entering marriage is 29 years, compared to 23 years in 1990. For men, the average marriage age in 2023 is 31 years, whereas in 1990 it was 25 years. In recent years, the median age of women having their first child has also risen, while birth rates have declined.

These data corroborate the characterisation of Generation Y presented in Jean Twenge's research. According to the American scholar, Generation Y is an individualistic generation focused on the self, experiencing difficulties in forming lasting bonds. Twenge characterises Generation Y by a *slow life strategy*, delaying leaving the parental home, formalising relationships, and deciding to have children.

A similar perspective on Generation Y is offered by Polish generational researcher Witold Wrzesień. Wrzesień emphasises that especially cohorts born in the 1980s constitute a distinct generation, which he terms the European Seekers. The formative event for this generation was Poland's accession to the EU and the resulting mass migration of youth after 2004. Like Twenge's characterisation of American Generation Y, Wrzesień highlights the individualistic dimension of the European Seekers generation.

This individualism manifests in orientation toward materialist values and a tendency to rely — sometimes without justification — on economic support from older generations.

Wiesław Wątroba, similarly to Wrzesień, divides Generation Y into two sub-generations: Echo Boomers (the large cohorts born in the 1980s) and Millennials (cohorts born in the 1990s). However, the axis of division differs from Wrzesień's conception. For Wrzesień, historical events are key to generational differentiation, whereas Wątroba attributes the division to demographic factors – namely, birth cohort sizes. Like Wrzesień and Twenge, Wątroba notes the strong belief among many Generation Y members in their own uniqueness. This trait contrasts with the generational specificity of Millennials as presented in Howe and Strauss's framework.

Table 1

Comparison of Generation Y Concepts

Comparison of Generation Y Concepts			
	Cultural dimension	Shaping elements	Characteristics
Generation Y from the perspective of Neil Howe and William Strauss – Millennials	Collectivism	Historical events – facing crisis challenges, heroic attitudes. The authors did not specify precise formative events.	Cooperation, resilience in the face of crises, striving to establish social order, strengthening institutions, and acceptance of hierarchy.
Generation Y from the perspective of Jean Twenge	Individualism	Historical events – commercialisation of the Internet in private households, the emergence of Facebook, the popularisation of smartphones.	Strong sense of self-worth, belief in their uniqueness, difficulties in forming lasting bonds, and delaying the moment of moving out of the family home.
Generation Y from the perspective of Witold Wrzesień – “European Seekers”	Individualism	Historical events – the first Polish generation without the experiences of the communist era (PRL), Poland’s accession to the European Union.	Orientation toward materialistic values, dependence of self-worth on achievements, and a tendency to rely on economic support from older generations.

Comparison of Generation Y Concepts

	Cultural dimension	Shaping elements	Characteristics
Generation Y from the perspective of Wiesław Wątroba	Individualism / Collectivism ¹¹	Historical events (the millennium breakthrough, Internet development) and demographic factors (children of the first post-war baby boom, high birth rates).	Strong motivation for group success and strong peer bonds (those born in the 1980s), belief in their uniqueness, and delaying the moment of leaving the parental home

¹¹ Collectivism applies to the early cohorts of Generation Y (born in the 1980s).

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