

The 'OK Boomer' Meme Comes From a Place of Insecurity

A friend of mine recently saw the new Joker movie. As he explained the plot to me, it was evident that he was unimpressed. Perhaps disturbed is a better word.

He found the treatment of older people, many of whom were portrayed as inept or disposable, particularly troubling.

Unfortunately, such disrespectful treatment seems to be spilling over from fiction into the real world. This is evidenced by the disdain of Generation Z and millennials toward those from the boomer era, whose contempt, *The Washington Post* [explains](#), recently grew more pronounced in the brouhaha over the phrase “OK boomer.”

Fed up with this snarky phrase uttered in response to boomer advice and actions, Bob Lonsberry, a boomer radio host, compared “boomer” to a racial slur. This comment only gave younger people further motivation to use their new-found phrase, the *Post* notes.

Stepping back from the fray, it's easy to see that there's reason for angst on both sides. It's normal for older generations to look down upon America's future leaders with a “kids these days” attitude. In like manner, it's not surprising that younger generations look at their own negative circumstances – [including lower earnings](#) – and feel they've been wronged by the decisions of those in their parents' and grandparents' generations.

But does such a feeling justify the increasing disrespect for older generations, not only evidenced in snarky catchphrases, but in violent movies like “Joker”? If not, then why are we seeing this burgeoning disrespect?

Christopher Lasch sheds some light on the topic in his classic work, [*The Culture of Narcissism*](#):

Our society notoriously finds little use for the elderly. It defines them as useless, forces them to retire before they have exhausted their capacity for work, and reinforces their sense of superfluity at every opportunity.

According to Lasch, a society that has abandoned religion, as ours has done, also fears death, which in turn leads to contempt for older generations. Furthermore, he notes, disrespect for aging “derive[s] from long-term social changes.” These changes “have redefined work, created a scarcity of jobs, devalued the wisdom of the ages, and brought all forms of authority (including the authority of experience) into disrepute.”

Beyond these social changes, however, a prevailing attitude of narcissism leads to disrespect for the elderly and a mass disinterest in the future:

Narcissism emerges as the typical form of character structure in a society that has lost interest in the future. Psychiatrists who tell parents not to live through their offspring; married couples who postpone or reject parenthood, often for good practical reasons; social reformers who urge zero population growth, all testify to a pervasive uneasiness about reproduction—to widespread doubts, indeed, about whether our society should reproduce itself at all. Under these conditions, the thought of our eventual supersession and death becomes utterly insupportable and gives rise to attempts to abolish old age and to extend life indefinitely. When men find themselves incapable of taking an interest in earthly life after their own death, they wish for eternal youth, for the same reason they no longer care to reproduce themselves. When the prospect of being superseded becomes intolerable, parenthood itself, which guarantees that it will

happen, appears almost as a form of self-destruction.

Such a statement seems to mirror recent headlines reporting on declining birth rates and fears of overpopulation. Given this, it seems probable that disrespect for both the elderly and the young will only accelerate in the coming years.

How can we change this? Lasch again supplies the answer: “Nothing short of a complete reordering of work, education, the family – of every important institution – will make old age more bearable.”

If we want to see respect for the elderly and a love for future generations restored, do we need to first reassess the paths we’ve taken regarding religion, family, and education?

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