# THE SNOWFLAKE GENERATION - THE IMPLICATIONS OF OVERDEVELOPED EGO ON SOCIAL REALITY

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**Abstract**. *This material deals with the effects of the main traits of the Snowflake generation, namely, exacerbated ego (hypersensitivity), overdeveloped individualism (selfishness) and fear. This typology of young people born between 1980 and 2000, known as the "Me Generation" has been approximated in the past by Constantin Rădulescu Motru by the concept of "anarchic personality", which is the opposite of "energetic personality". To understand whether the young people of the "Me Generation" belong to one of the two categories, I will first make some theoretical clarifications.*

**Keywords***:* snowflake generation, ego, fear, anarchic personality, cultural personality

## 1. Conceptual delimitations
### 1.1. Personality in Constantin Rădulescu Motru's vision

To be able to talk about anarchic and energetic personality, the term personality must first be clarified from a theoretical viewpoint. This term, Constantin Rădulescu Motru means "a set of skills that help you accomplish a task. This determination is impossible without ego-consciousness" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 552). In other words, personality is closely linked to the individual's ability to have a purpose in life. Vocation is from this viewpoint "the greatest lever of progress" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 521). The man who seeks to find and follow his vocation is "a transformer of energy. He is the prophet of energetic personalism, toward which the whole of reality is evolving." (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 521). Vocation plays a particularly important role in society because in it "the highest moral and intellectual qualities of the soul are embodied together. It is therefore no coincidence that the people who have had more men of vocation have progressed the most" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 521). This perspective is important because it raises the question of social change, which depends on how generations actively involve themselves, and implicitly in accordance with their vocation, in responding to the challenges of the times (the thesis of the generational entelechy of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim is taken up here) (Mannheim, 1952: 307). Returning to vocation, it can be said that its main merit lies in making man responsible for himself (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 521).

According to Rădulescu Motru, personality "crystallizes around the ego, but the structure of personality includes, besides the ego, many other soul elements. The ego is the flash of lightning that reveals where the soul's anticipation is leading! The personality is the solid machinery that mediates the realization of anticipation" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 557). In other words, alongside vocation, personality has a close relationship with the ego because when we have the correspondence between ego and personality, the result is vocation (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984.: 558). Here, a clear distinction must be made between ego and personality. The ego is "the permanent feeling, or rather the feeling of man's superiority in relation to his environment" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 559). Personality, on the other hand is "a systematization of varied and externally multi-linked soul acts. It begins having a structure through the impulse given by the self, but once the structure has begun, it continues to develop through the incorporation of many elements foreign to the self" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984). However, the link between the self and personality is so strong that the absence of the self leads to the disappearance of the personality: 'However rich and beautifully created the structure of

the personality may be, if the self were missing from it, life would be missing' (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 560).

The consequences of the absence of ego-consciousness in the composition of the personality are dreadful because they lead to an imitation of reality rather than to a real, organic existence: "When ego-consciousness is missing, the personality is an imitation or a biological composition of no importance for the life of the soul" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984). Since the ego is "an impulse in the crystallization of the person" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 561), when it is sick, the personality will be the first to reflect this problem: "If [the ego] is infirm, a strong personality cannot crystallize around it; and if it is strong, a weak or infirm personality cannot crystallize around it" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 561-562). Given the above, the ego is for the individual the "centre of his feelings" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 564).

The ego is also the basis of personality, it develops along with the nervous system (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 568–569). Initially, the ego was like an "emotional intuition", and later, because of cognitive processes, "self-consciousness" emerged, which is the rational part of the ego. However, its evolution does not imply a loss of intuition. The importance of this emotional intuition lies in the fact that it "constitutes the core of the self. It dictates the form of life that each person will take. It is the calling or vocation (...) In its small content lies the spring of all tensions of the soul" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 570–571). The role of the ego in the formation of personality is therefore definitive because it plays "the role of a crystallizing seed" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 571). However, it must be pointed out that "the ego is the ferment, but not the pattern of personality" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 572). In other words, the ego is only the beginning, it is the true beginning without which the rest would not be possible, but not the continuation. To the ego is due the beginning and direction of personality, but for the rest "i.e. for everything that concerns the material and the cohesive forces of this material, personality has its own organization" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984). Personality is therefore "a combination of soul factors that mediate a free activity according to social and ideal norms" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 574–575). In other words, through work, man manifests himself as a free social being, and therefore as a personality.

### 1.2. Energetic and anarchic personality

An energetic personality is the type of personality that involves "the power of the soul" and free activity, while the man with unfree activity is "only an organic individuality" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 579). From this perspective 'Generation I' risks becoming an organic individuality because it gives up freedom for security. According to Constantin Rădulescu Motru, the personality of the individual comes from above, from a certain ideal and from certain norms (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984.: 580). Energetic personalism is "forged by the school of work" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 622), which is why it is based on the idea of a fulfilled vocation, of seeking, finding and maximizing the calling that each individual has. What is important to say here is that this search for self-awareness also involves the people around you. For Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, the energetic person is the one who "succeeds in bringing into the souls of his fellow men, by encouragement and example, the desire for noble work" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 625). Ennobled work occurs when man no longer positions himself at the centre of the world and when he has begun to work in accordance with his competence. In other words, orderly ego produces order through work, while overdeveloped ego, chaotic as it is, creates all kinds of imbalances in the social corpus: "The gigantic, mystical and vagabond ego grows everywhere. Orderly ego at work is a rare plant. It is easier to have the whole universe in a sentimental self than to transform by work (...) the little corner of the country in which you were born" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984).

For energetic personalism "personality is a direction of energy" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 641), but for anarchic personalism, energy is wasted. Energetic personalism implies a human ability to anticipate certain things, which in turn is based on a consciousness of purpose. From this perspective, this type of personalism is built beyond a very clearly directed energy

and on the awareness of the purpose for which you do a certain thing. Thus, when anticipation is put into the service of work, personality develops, it is perfected. In other words, man is perfected by working (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984 642). It must be repeated that to be useful, work must be in accordance with man's vocation, and therefore, in accordance with the calling he has and the skills he has acquired in this regard.

Anarchic personalism is described by Constantin Rădulescu Motru as such: "In anarchic personalism, the ego dominates. The property of identification, not to say monkeyhood, knows no bounds; as in a dream, the ego is wasted. The people in whom this type of personalism throne is full of reformers, imitators of everything that is seen in foreigners. Tradition in it is not respected, nor is professional competition. Only one cult rules: the cult of incompetence (...) The ego is hypertrophied, the personality amorphous." (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 622). The problem is that overdeveloped ego creates anarchy both personally and socially. In this sense, Rădulescu Motru states that the more ordered the ego is, the more energetic the personality is, and vice versa (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 572). Moreover, when the ego directs man's judgment, he arrives at certain justifications, but fails to know things (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984). In other words, when the ego is overdeveloped, man no longer lives in truth.

If personalism is educated, it becomes energetic. If education is lacking or poor, it becomes anarchic. Education therefore plays a crucial role in the development of young people: "Education influences a person's development (usually from childhood) to bring out his spiritual dispositions for society. Education is hard work." (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 646). The two actors who play a principal role in the process of educating a young person are the family and school, and above or in addition to these two come to the Church. Why also the Church? Because "Personality is formed under the influence of religion (...) Whoever is refractory to religion is also refractory to morality, and is therefore an eccentric, an asocial" (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 575).

## 2. Secondary analysis on statistical data
### 2.1. Overdeveloped ego in the family relationship
### a) Relationship with parents

In the relationship with parents, the overdeveloped ego is reflected through two central indicators: the preference for the comfort of the parental home stemming from the need for security and the excessive involvement of parents in the lives of young adults. This over-involvement perpetuates their infantilisation. The immaturity of young people in this generation is becoming constant, and this is evidenced by the increasing percentages of individuals for whom the idea of independence, of detachment from the family, is becoming increasingly obliterated. Alongside comfort, another factor that counts is fear, the fear of knowing the unknown alone. This comes precisely from the exacerbation of the ego, which, being sensitive, does not know how to deal with failure.

The "Me Generation" shows new tendencies in terms of living with their own family (i.e., living with their spouse and/or children). A Pew Research Center study showed that young people's intention to live with their own family is the lowest of all generations studied in 2019, only 55% of "Generation Me" members were living with their own family. At the same age, the percentage for "Generation X" was 66% (in 2003), for "Baby Boomers 85% (in 1987), and for the "Silent Generation" 85% (in 1968) (Barroso, Parker and Bennett, 2020). It can be seen that the propensity to start and live with their own family is lowest for the "Me Generation".

About 30% of those who do not live in their own family live with their parents (14%) or other family members (14%), but in both cases the percentages are higher than for other generations when they were the same age (20 and 30 respectively). Moreover, previous studies have shown that even after the economy started to recover after the Great Recession, the average number of Snowflakes living in their parents' homes continued to rise. Compared to women, men are more likely to choose this option, which is why their percentage is almost double: 18% of men compared to 10% of women.

These percentages show that the need to feel permanently safe has weakened the ability of these young people to express themselves as autonomous, individual beings. In other words, the comfort of the safest space, the parental home, encourages them to indulge in living with their parents even in the age when the desire for independence is at its most effervescent. Of course, parents, and especially helicopter parents (i.e. over-protective parents), play a critical role in this problematic equation, as their actions contribute to the permanent infantilisation of young people.

### b) Relationship with partners

More than half of the "Me Generation" decided not to marry, and those who did marry later in life. Given that most of this generation is unmarried (around 60%) we are dealing with a significant change from previous generations. Ego manifests itself here through all sorts of fears that prevent them from engaging in serious relationships. Eva Illouz explains the influence of individualism through what she calls "cold ambivalence", which she in turn explains through the concept of abulia (Illouz, 2015: 127, 139). By abulia, she means "a more advanced stage of the culture of abundance, in which the capacity to will and to want is very low" (Illouz, 2015: 126). In other words, because this generation is egocentric, it is indecisive in its relationship with the other (Illouz, 2015: 139). This tendency is more present among men who develop what Illouz calls "commitment phobia", but it is not lacking among women either (Illouz, 2015: 126). Given these facts, these percentages are not so surprising: only 44% of "Millennials" were married in 2019, compared to 53% of "Generation X", 61% of "Baby Boomers" and 81% of "Baby Boomers" at a similar age (Barroso, Parker and Bennett, 2020).

For those who have decided to marry, the age at which they take this step has progressively increased over the years: "The median age at first marriage has gradually increased over the last decades. In 2019, men got married for the first time at the age of 30 and women were 28 when they got married. This is three years older - for both men and women - than in 2003, four years older than in 1987 and seven years later than in 1968" ((Barroso, Parker and Bennett, 2020). Thus, the overdevelopment of the ego causes Snowflakes to have lower rates of nuptiality and older ages at first marriage because the fear manifests itself in the family.

The fall in the birth rate and the postponement of the decision to have children is another important effect. According to a 2015 study by the Urban Institute, millennial mothers are delaying the decision to have children the longest in U.S. history (Astone, Martin and Peters, 2015: p.1). The "Generation Me" birth rate in the U.S. through 2012 was 948 births per 1,000 women, by far the lowest rate of any generation (Astone, Martin and Peters, 2015). It can therefore be seen that the "Snowflake Generation" is on track to have fewer children than their predecessors but also that the birth rates of women in this category are currently the lowest in history (Sturgeon, 2019).

### 2.2. Ego in the teacher-student relationship

Distancing from the social norm manifests itself in various areas. For example, in New York City in 1979, 29% of drivers did not stop when traffic signs indicated. Not 20 years later, the percentage has tripled (to 97%). Another example is cheating at school. According to one study, while in 1969 34% of pupils cheated, in 2002 the figure had risen to 74%. Another study conducted in 2012 on a sample of 25,000 high school students showed that about 60% of participants agreed with the statement thain the real world, successful people do what they must do to win, even if others consider it cheating" (Twenge, 2014a: 33). These data show that, unlike previous generations, 'Generation Me' not only questions authority, but contradicts it entirely. A good example of this is the disputes between pupils/students and their teachers. According to one survey, 61% of the teachers surveyed said that their authority was not recognized, about 25% had been threatened in various forms (messages, phone calls, emails, etc.), and about 30% said that students had shouted at them (Twenge, 2014a: 34–36).

In this equation, grades are the main "destabilizing factor" in the balance between student and teacher. Why? Because 'Generation Me' has a tendency, because of its exacerbated egos, to claim that it deserves more than it gets. Several studies have shown that there is a fracture between the notion of performance and the grades received. As evidence of this, according to a 2008 survey 66% of students agreed with the statement "if I explained to my professor that I was trying hard, I think he or she should take me into account in terms of my course grade", a third felt that "if I attended most of the courses, I deserve at least a B grade", and 32% complained that professors often gave them lower grades than they deserved on assignments (Twenge, 2014b: p.77).

What's interesting about this generation is that although they claim to be open-minded, the "Snowflake Generation" has a real problem with criticism. It is easy to see this when, right from school (high school, college), young people have a lack of concentration in classes, lectures. In America in 2012, nearly 40% of the first-year students in college said they were frequently bored in class in their senior year of high school (compared to 29% in 1985). Beyond this placid, apathetic attitude, which represents the first level of the problem, the second level concerns the type of reaction young persons have when teachers sanction this attitude. The transformation of constructive criticism, which is intended to repair, to help resolve certain shortcomings, into praise, is a reason why both teachers and managers have noticed young people's decreasing resilience to criticism.

### 2.3. Ego at work
#### a) Overdeveloped ego - a means of deprofessionalization?

The exacerbated ego of young people is reflected in their misplaced ambitions for professionalism. By professionalization, we mean those young people who work in the field for which they trained. When we talk about American society, in 2012, about 60% of teens expected to graduate from college or vocational school, which is almost twice as high as in 1976. Importantly, the number of those who actually got their degree remained unchanged (about 10%). Also in 2012, 84% of teens entering college expected to graduate in the next four years, but only half did. In the same year, three of the four college first year students said they intended to get a masters or doctoral degree. However, the number of doctoral degrees awarded accounts for only 4% of the number of degrees awarded, and the number of medical degrees awarded to graduate accounts for only 1% of the degrees awarded. This means that about 4 out of 5 aspiring doctors will be disappointed and 9 of 10 potential doctors will not be able to achieve their goals. A study by the Chronicle of Higher Education found that of the 4.3 million students who started the college in the fall of 2004, fewer than 1 in 4 graduated.

Despite these statistics, young people's expectations of the workplace are high. According to a 2011 survey, young people aged 16–18 expected their starting salary to reach $73,000 and then rise to $150,000. Compared to these expectations, the median household income in 2009 for all adults was $50,000, about one-third of young people's aspirations Overestimation comes with high expectations, which in turn implies high materialism. Official statistics show that in American society in 1967, when "Generation Boomers" were in college, 42% of first-year students said it was important to be financially well-off, while in 2013, the percentage of young people agreeing with this statement nearly doubled to 82%, the highest in history. Interest in materialism is closely correlated with young people's consumerist outlook. A study by Christian Smith on a sample of 18–23-year-olds found that 65% of participants in that survey said that shopping gave them particular pleasure, while only 9% felt that there were some problems with consumerism.

#### b) The emergence of incompetence or the "Dunning-Kruger" effect

The "Dunning-Kruger effect" was introduced into the literature around 1999 by Professors David Dunning and Justin Kruger of Cornell University, who defined it as an error of judgment in which less prepared people misjudge their capabilities. In other words, they judge themselves to be more competent than they actually are. This behavior is caused by the fact

that these individuals are unable to recognize their level precisely because of their lack of competence in the field (Crangan, 2020). In other words, "incompetent individuals lack the metacognitive skills necessary for accurate self-assessment" (Dunning and Kruger, 1999: 1122). The authors liken this phenomenon to what, in the lexicon of neuroscience is called anosognosia. This not only causes paralysis but also generates the inability to realize that one is paralyzed (D'Amasio, 1994, in Dunning and Kruger, 1999: 1130). Incompetence, therefore, in addition to leading to poor performance, also involves an inability to recognize that one's performance, specifically your own, is poor (Dunning and Kruger, 1999: 1130). The Dunning-Kruger effect therefore refers to the lack of cognitive impartiality that leads people to believe that they are smarter and more competent than they really are. This is possibly because people of lower ability lack the ability to recognize their own incompetence. Thus, the mixture of low awareness and low intellectual abilities causes people to overestimate themselves (Cherry, 2021).

Given the figures showing how many young people have career expectations, salaries, etc. that are not in line with their training, questions about the emergence of this effect among the "Me Generation" are legitimate. A study led by San Diego State University psychology professor Jean Twenge found that young people in this generation want more money than previous generations but are willing to work less than their predecessors for it. The findings emerged from a national survey of more than 350,000 young people in the US. More than 60% of those surveyed said it was important to be rich, while only 48% of the "Baby Boomers" who graduated from high school between 1976 and 1978 held the same belief. What's interesting is that when the topic of "work ethic" was brought up, nearly 40% of the "Me Generation" said they didn't want to work hard, compared to just 25% in the 1970s. The author argued that the unfounded materialism of these young people deserves attention because this materialism is linked to depression and anxiety, two traits that are not missing from the behavioral mosaic of the "Me Generation" (Bielski, 2013). Therefore, the exaggerated demands of these young people are an indicator of the Dunning-Kruger effect that seems to be spreading among them.

### 3. Conclusions

Generation Me', 'Snowflake', 'Millennial', 'Generation Y' or 'Self-centred Generation are those young people who were born between 1980 and 2000. Their main problematic characteristics are hypersensitivity, increased loneliness and a propensity to develop certain fears. We have talked about the transition from an energetic personality, which arises because of a work culture involving a high degree of professionalism, to an anarchic one, in which the ego dominates. I have used these two concepts because the 'Me Generation' is theoretically approximated by the anarchic one. This approximation is given by the central role that the ego plays in the lives of those in question.

Once the two concepts were clarified from a theoretical perspective, I wanted to discover how the ego manifests itself among the three central dimensions of social reality: family, school and workplace. Concerning the family, the studies consulted showed a reluctance of the "Snowflake Generation" to start their own families and a strong tendency to live with their parents. This confirms the hypothesis of a permanent search for "safe spaces" and avoidance of autonomous actions. In the teacher-student relationship, as I said, ego creates imbalances and affects the educational process because young people only receive what they feel is useful to them, and these assessments are often subjective. In the working environment, the ego leads on the one hand to an increase in deprofessionalisation and on the other to the emergence of a new cult of incompetence (the Dunning-Kruger effect), because the expectations that these young people have do not reflect reality.

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