

Millennials Are Selfish and Entitled, and Helicopter Parents Are to Blame

By Nick Gillespie

Nick Gillespie (b. 1963) is the editor-in-chief for Reason.com and Reason TV, which are online platforms for the libertarian periodical Reason. Gillespie, who holds a doctorate in literature from the State University of New York– Buffalo, is also the co-author of The Declaration of Independents: How Libertarian Politics Can Fix What’s Wrong with America (2011). This article was originally published in Time magazine as an opinion piece on parenting on August 21, 2014.

It’s natural to resent younger Americans — they’re younger! — but we’re on the verge of a new generation gap that may make the nasty old fights between baby boomers and their “Greatest Generation” parents look like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

Seventy-one percent of American adults think of 18-to-29-year-olds — millennials, basically — as “selfish,” and 65% of us think of them as “entitled.” That’s according to the latest Reason-Rupe Poll, a quarterly survey of 1,000 representative adult Americans.

If millennials are self-absorbed little monsters who expect the world to come to them and for their parents to clean up their rooms well into their 20s, we’ve got no one to blame but ourselves — especially the moms and dads among us.

Indeed, the same poll documents the ridiculous level of kid-coddling that has now become the new normal. More than two-thirds of us think there ought to be a law that kids as old as 9 should be supervised while playing at a public park, which helps explain (though not justify) the arrest of a South Carolina mother who let her phone-enabled daughter play in a busy park while she worked at a nearby McDonald’s. We think on average that kids should be 10 years old before they “are allowed to play in the front yard unsupervised.” Unless you live on a traffic island or a war zone, that’s just nuts.

It gets worse: We think that our precious bundles of joy should be 12 before they can wait alone in a car for five minutes on a cool day or walk to school without an adult, and that they should be 13 before they can be trusted to stay home alone. You’d think that kids raised on Baby Einstein DVDs should be a little more advanced than that.

Curiously, this sort of ridiculous hyperprotectiveness is playing out against a backdrop in which children are safer than ever. Students reporting bullying is one-third of what it was 20 years ago, and according to a study in JAMA Pediatrics, the past decade has seen massive declines in exposure to violence for kids. Out of 50 trends studied, summarize the authors, “there were 27 significant declines and no significant increases between 2003 and 2011. Declines were particularly large for assault victimization, bullying, and sexual victimization. There were also significant declines in the perpetration of violence and property crime.”

There are surely many causes for the mainstreaming of helicopter parenting. Kids cost a hell of a lot to raise. The U.S. Department of Agriculture figures a child born in 2013 will set back

middle-income parents about \$245,000 up to age 17 (and that's before college bills kick in). We're having fewer children, so we're putting fewer eggs in a smaller basket, so to speak. According to the Reason-Rupe poll, only 27% of adults thought the media were overestimating threats to the day-to-day safety of children, suggesting that 73% of us are suckers for sensationalistic news coverage that distorts reality (62% of us erroneously think that today's youth face greater dangers than previous generations). More kids are in institutional settings — whether preschool or school itself — at earlier ages, so maybe parents just assume someone will always be on call.

But whatever the reasons for our insistence that we childproof the world around us, this way madness lies. From *King Lear* to *Mildred Pierce*, classic literature (and basic common sense) suggests that coddling kids is no way to raise thriving, much less grateful, offspring. Indeed, quite the opposite. And with 58% of millennials calling themselves “entitled” and more than 70% saying they are “selfish,” older Americans may soon be learning that lesson the hard way.

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