

**Essay  
by  
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**“Generation X”**

On a hot July Sunday afternoon, Shinsaibashi, a shopping area in Osaka crowded with fashion boutiques and popular American brand name stores, is jammed with high school students all dressed in distinct fashion. Girls wearing white lipsticks and eye shadow upon their tanned faces stroll down the street in four-inch heels; boys imitating hip-hop and rap musicians, purposely braid their hair like African American. These teenagers are known as the Generation X in Japan. They are generally perceived as rebellious and spoiled. But what exactly are the Xers' facing today? What kind of attitudes do they take on toward their problems and future? I interviewed three Japanese high school students Yusei, Rie, and Chika, to search for answers. Though they confront similar problems in families, schools, or among peers, these teenagers handle their issues with different approaches, and each holds various outlooks of future. The behaviors of the young adults are too diverse to be generalized under the title of Generation X.

Lacking communications with families, teenagers participate in different ways to deal with this problem. Fathers of these three teenagers are all busy salary men who come home late at night. "My father hardly eats dinner with me," says Rie whose father is an insurance agent. "I seldom talk to my dad even if he is home during the weekend," says Yusei. As a result, mothers hold most conversations with their children at home. Placing excessive concerns only on academic success, such as getting into prestigious universities, the mothers sometimes fail to address the feelings of the teenagers. Chika feels extremely frustrated whenever she talks to her mother because her mom does not share the same perspective as Chika does in most of the issues. "Talking to my mom is a boring business because it always leads to arguments. The punishments after a quarrel are often house chores or an early curfew," says Chika indifferently. Despite wide communication gap, Rie and Yusei still keep proper respect for their parents, hoping someday they can sit down and listen to each other. In the contrary, Chika sees the lack of interaction as an opportunity to become independent of her family. She works as a waitress in a restaurant every other day after school. "The money I made covers my cellular phone's monthly fee and other personal expenses," says Chika proudly. As for her parents, Chika prefers to retain silence with them because she likes to spend time with her friends instead. Chika is not alone. About twenty percent of Japanese high school students work part time because they feel independent of their families and in charge of themselves.

Teenagers find school to be stressful and the faculties difficult to associate. Some comply with the strict rules with much discontent while some choose to discharge their grievance through violent means. Since Yusei, Rie, and Chika are seniors, they have to attend numerous school tutoring sessions throughout the week to prepare for the rigorous college entrance exam. Chika and Rie dislike going to school because they have no interests in any of the subjects, which are required for the exam. Yusei simply views going to school as a torture that everyone must undergo in order to success in the competitive society. Moreover, most of the Japanese high school faculties concern about general appearance of students in uniforms and impose rigid regulations on details such as hairstyle, make up, piercing or accessories, the length of skirt, the way they wear their shirt, etc. Under stern control from schools over their personal appearances and the teachers' monotonous lectures, teenagers are unable to develop trust or bonding with the authorities. Bored and angry of the rigid rule and etiquette teachers strive to enforce, some radical teens release their aggressions by exerting violence on teachers. Though school violence seems prevalent, the three interviewees say that they will never consider such irrational idea of attacking teachers, no matter how much they may dislike school. In spite the fact that schools appear displeasing, the three try to perceive school positively as a place to socialize and meet friends, while wishing students can enjoy more freedom in school. Yusei and Rie, for example,

value school sport clubs and special school festivals because they can develop stronger bonding with their classmates.

When facing problems in family or in school, friends are often better consultants. Friends, to Rie and Chika, are not only good shopping partners but also sources of mental support when they are depressed. Talking to friends on the phone is a daily routine for these two girls. "They are my sisters," says Rie who treats her friends like her actual siblings. Entrenched in a groupism society, belonging to part of the crowd is important to teenagers. Rie and Chika reveal that their friends have greater power to alter their behaviors than their families. Even though a group of friends may share little similarities at the beginning, they start to absorb each other's points of view, such as the music preferences, hobbies, study habits, or even the moral of their friends.

Yusei, however, feels that sometimes friendship can be very misleading and superficial. "Having too much of so called 'friends' around telling me what to do distracts me from doing what I truly want sometimes," says Yusei who has been pressured by a group of friends to smoke cigarettes. After that experience, Yusei has become much more careful about choosing his true friends. Now, he prefers only several of close friends who tacitly understand him just by looking at his gestures and facial expressions without much talking. Besides following to his heart, Yusei resolves his loneliness by developing another type of friendship-dating--that is quite common among teenagers in Japan nowadays. "I can go to my girlfriend and be certain that she is going to be there for me," smiled Yusei who has gone out with his girlfriend for almost half a year. For the rest whose relationship has not yet matured to that stage, casual dating is just another way to meet friends of opposite sex and "a way to have fun."

Facing all these problems at home and school, what kind of future do the teenagers envision? The goals for many are still in the fog while some have more obvious targets. Yusei wants to study literature in university and become a writer or an editor someday. Since writer is not a very popular profession and generally do not make as much money in Japanese society, Yusei's parents discourage him from pursuing his dream. Uncertain and scared, Yusei realizes that he has only been busy fulfilling the expectations of parents and teachers rather than his true passion. "I have been following the appointed road from my parents for all my life and now I am afraid that my own decision will fail," says Yusei. As Yusei is struggling with his future, Rie is confident about her career plan. Incapable to cram the entrance exam, she plans to attend a technical school to study computer programming and work as a computer programmer. Even though working without a Bachelor Degree is risky, Rie is brave to face the upcoming challenges and difficulties in working in a male-dominated field. "Life is short and I want to try out what I want before I have a family," says Rie who is planning to get marry when she is twenty-seven, which is the universal marriage age among teenagers today. Chika, the most confused one out of the three, has no idea of what is she going to be. She does not want to move on from her present stage nor leave her friends behind. "I don't want to think about the future. What comes will come, too much worry is useless," says Chika, refusing to dive into the adult world just yet.

Even though I have only interviewed only three high school students, they already have such varying ways to cope with themselves and their problems. Their dissimilar attitudes, no matter how positive or negative, indicate that the stereotype about teenagers does not represent the entire population of young adults. Thus, they deserve more individual attentions before society attempts to make any judgments and put labels upon them.