

CLASH OF COMMENT: Are we a generation of Snowflakes?

By [Kit Taylor](#) and [Claire Geller](#)

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YES – Claire Geller

I would argue that there's truth in the claim that our generation are so called 'snowflakes'. As young people in the UK, we live in a time of relative prosperity. We've succeeded the wartime generation of the 1940s and the upheaval caused by the labour reforms of the 80s. While there's still a lot to be done to maximise our wellbeing, to complain that we as a generation suffer more than previous generations is objectively incorrect and is symptomatic of the Snowflake Generation.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a snowflake as a young person who is "too easily upset and offended" and this definition rings true with how some young people respond to insults in the 21st century. Social media has allowed the snowflake culture to spread like a blizzard. Distanced from the person or idea that offended them, rants that go viral blow everyday problems out of proportion while the weight of popular opinion combined with the malignancy of trolls taints what could have been a productive discussion. Indeed, I believe a lack of debate characterises the snowflake problem.

We must always oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, but there exists a hypersensitivity to tackling these issues head on. The very existence of NUS' no-platforming policy (banning groups such as the British National Party from speaking publicly at events) limits students' exposure to these problematic viewpoints. Unheard, these views go unchallenged and we are denied the opportunity to overturn misinformed views with rational arguments. At the end of the day, we are legally adults and as such have a right to engage with or debate alternate views, unfettered by the no-platforming policy.

I see the student body as becoming increasingly enveloped in censorial bubble wrap and while tools such as trigger warnings (statements forewarning listeners of sensitive material) are fine in lecture theatres, in the real world upsetting material doesn't come with a warning. Moreover, the triggers that affect students are not predictable or generalised. Like snowflakes, we are individuals that interact with the world around us in different ways. I think that while our individual right to be offended or upset should be respected, we must never lose sight of our potential for resilience.

However, it must be said that the term 'snowflake' is regularly misused. There are many young people who, when raising a genuine issue, are silenced and mislabelled as over-sensitive by the media. Furthermore, Claire Fox argues in *The Spectator* that the "132 per cent increase" in students reporting "severe symptoms of mental health" is a sign that we as a generation lack resilience and cannot cope. I disagree, and instead believe this increase to be the result of improved education in recognising the signs of depression and reporting it. We're starting to talk about our problems like never before and if this is synonymous with the 'Snowflake Generation' then let's encourage this introspection but let's not avoid debate and controversy. What's needed is for us to take back the term 'snowflake' and be the debaters

providing an icy opposition.

NO- Kit Taylor

The term 'Generation Snow-flake' has been used to brand all young people as emotionally vulnerable and unable to hear views and opinions which challenge their own. I would like to state the case that this term is ludicrous. But I will do so by first suggesting some of the 'cases' for Generation Snowflake.

The phrase 'Generation Snow-flake' is an umbrella neologism; which aims to symbolize every young person as having the exact same characteristics. Call me particular, but the Office for National Statistics states an estimate of 65 000 16-24 year olds in the UK. We should recognise that 65 000 individuals cannot easily be categorised under an umbrella term. The 'Generation Snowflake' accusation marks us all as incompetent in the minds of other generations, and that is not something we want to be promoting. If anything, we ought to work against this notion, and the idea that our generation can be summed up by negative terminology.

Secondly, this case states that we will not stand for views that challenge our own. Not only do studies show that more and more young people are getting involved with politics, but the University it-self is an example of a place where a wide range of opinions and ideas are pursued by different groups of people. We have societies to represent every major political party, and these do not hold back from contesting ideas held by their respective parties. Furthermore, we have a society which is literally founded upon debate, and any young person knows how many intellectual debates crop up in conversation on a daily basis. Are you for or against the strikes? Did you vote to re-open nominations? Do you like geese? The list goes on. So if anything, we embrace views which challenge our own, and we yearn to make our own voices heard in response.

Thirdly, the case states that we are all emotionally vulnerable and easily offended. Is it not a possibility that, in fact, recent work promoting mental health care and awareness might have encouraged more people to be open about their feelings? I accept the old understanding of the 'stiff upper lip', but what does that achieve in the modern day? Except bottled-up emotions and the inability to express how we really feel? Perhaps it isn't a vulnerability we've developed, but a new way of learning about coping with emotions. Trigger warnings are incredibly misunderstood, but put it this way: if we can make someone feel more comfortable in a situation, then why should we demand not to? Trigger warnings aren't always difficult to include, nor are they only helpful for young people. And regarding being easily offended, this does not mean that every person is offended in every instance, just that we speak up about it. Moreover, it does not mean that views and opinions ought to be restricted, or free speech eliminated, but that there are more definable, root issues to the responses.

Maybe calling each and every young person out on having emotions could cause deeper problems. In that case, who is actually sparking the issue - the young people, or those who have labelled us 'snow-flakes' because we are different to them



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