

**BARNES  
& NOBLE  
COLLEGE** | **COLLEGE  
INSIGHTS**

# CONVERSATIONS WITH GEN Z™



# GETTING TO KNOW GENERATION Z – LIKE NEVER BEFORE

---

## Candid Conversations with Gen Z

Generation Z, born 1996 or later is the generation that is 22 years old and younger. They account for 26% of the US population, wield \$143 billion in purchasing power and are certainly a force to be reckoned with.

Barnes & Noble College wanted to know what they are all about, especially the 18-22 year old segment, so we decided the best way to find out was to ask them – directly.

## Our Methodology

We spent dozens of hours speaking to college students from across the country, focusing on **who they are** as individuals; digging into their values, aspirations, struggles, and **how they look at life** and themselves.

Our conversations took place in informal settings on college campuses in Chicago and Los Angeles, and included an online quantitative survey among 1,500 Gen Z college students across the nation to dig even deeper into the comments we heard in our interviews.

[GettoKnowGenZ.com](https://www.gettoknowgenz.com) 

Watch highlights from countless hours of intimate, raw, and real conversations we had with some very candid Gen Zs.

# I KNOW (AND ACCEPT) WHO I AM

## GEN Z...

wants to chart their own path. Witnessing more of their peers being unique in their own right, rather than trying to conform, gives them the freedom to do the same. **They acknowledge that being different** seems to be a trend now which can create social pressure to find what sets them apart and want to **belong to their collective peer group**, while still being seen as individuals.

### EMPATHETIC

because of exposure to other people and their stories, often online, and as a bi-product of the environment they grew up in – witnessing mass shootings, suicides, uncertainty and change.

### KIND

and advocate this everyday through anti-bullying campaigns, support groups and compliment days.

## GEN Z VIEWS THEMSELVES AS:

### ACCEPTING

of everyone's differences and believe each person has the right to be whatever and whoever they choose.

### COMPASSIONATE

towards the poor and other disenfranchised groups and feel it is theirs and our government's obligation to help them.

91%

believe everyone is equal and should be treated that way

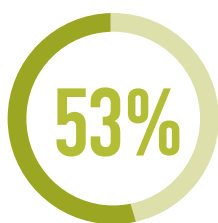
86%

believe people should have the freedom to be whoever they want

# GEN Z HAS A STRONG SENSE OF WHO THEY ARE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A GENERATION.

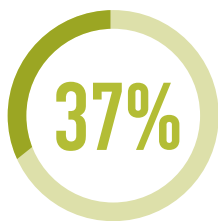
They define themselves by their individualism, kindness, empathy, and their belief in themselves and their potential to do anything.

## CHARACTERISTICS THAT BEST DESCRIBE THEMSELVES



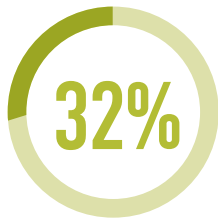
53%

Consider themselves open-minded



37%

Consider themselves driven



32%

Consider themselves a leader

## AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS



93%

Believe in standing up for and helping others



88%

Believe in their individual ability to be, do and achieve anything



80%

Have a lot of empathy for the issues and problems faced by others



# I AM AWARE. I AM INFORMED.

Gen Z college students have been most impacted by these world events:

**2008 Financial Collapse • Mass Shootings, Sandy Hook and Charlottesville • Obama Presidency and the Contrasting Trump Presidency • Same Sex Marriage Laws • Social Movements, #MeToo, #NeverAgain and #BlackLivesMatter • US Immigration Policies**

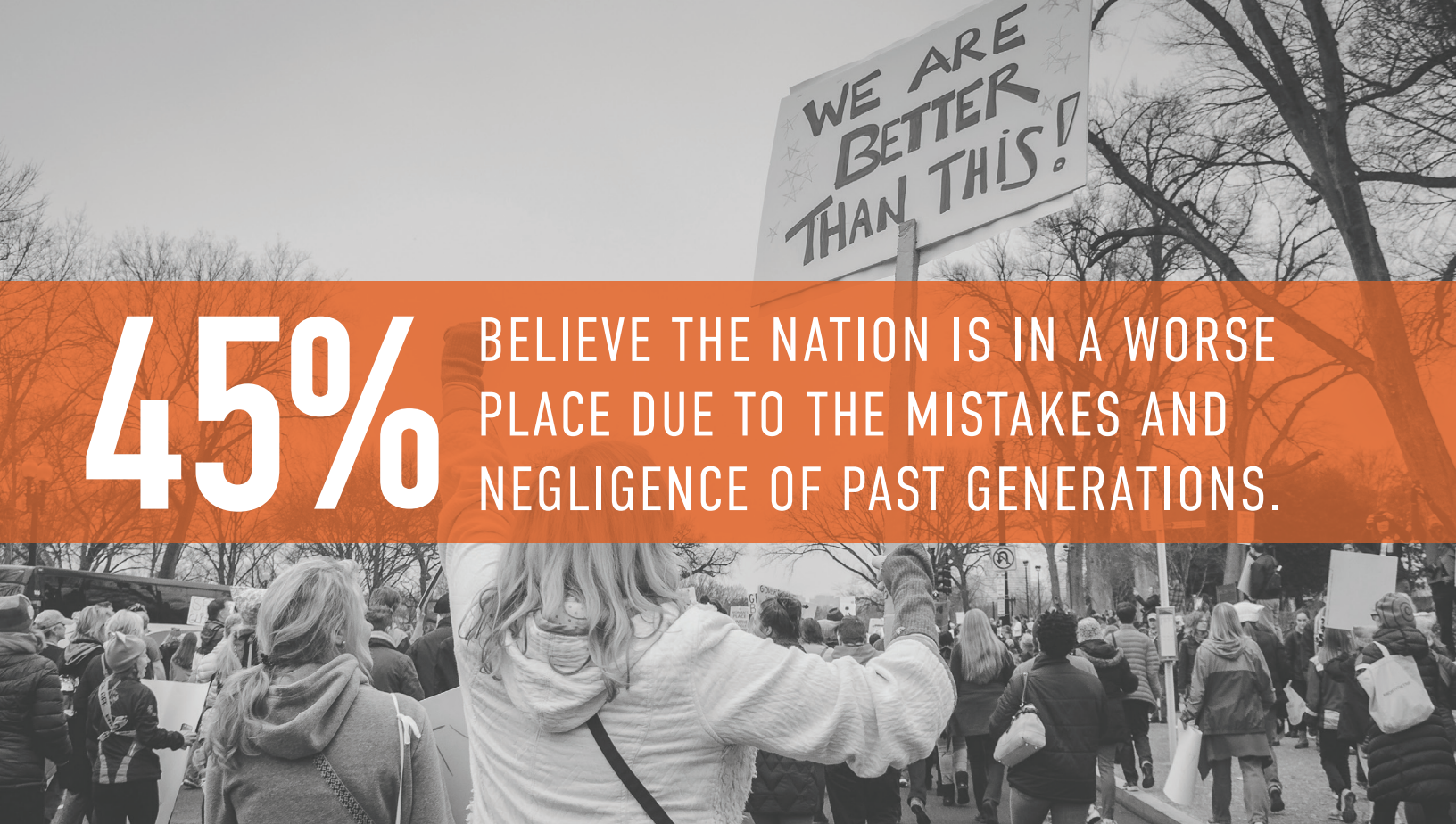
---

They're relying on themselves, the Internet and personal accounts to keep informed so they can develop their own world views. They tend to rely on multiple sources and their social media feeds, especially Twitter, for their news. They believe that major news networks are biased.

**“I am impacted by world events – past and present. I am in-tune with happenings because I have constant access to domestic and world news.”**

# I AM RESPONSIBLE.

Gen Z believes they've inherited world and societal problems, and they feel a responsibility to fix them for future generations.



**45%** BELIEVE THE NATION IS IN A WORSE PLACE DUE TO THE MISTAKES AND NEGLIGENCE OF PAST GENERATIONS.

## TOP ISSUES THEY BELIEVE THEIR GENERATION NEEDS TO ADDRESS:

### Racism and Prejudice

The historic and ongoing social and institutionalized racism and other prejudices is being felt more personally.



### Gun Control

is a pressing issue that they are paying the costs for in real lives.



### Cost of College

and its negative effects on student financial well-being — during college and post-graduation.



### Global Warming

will exact the greatest toll and the widespread sentiment that if they don't act now, it will be too late.





# I AM CHANGE.

Gen Z wants to be known as the generation that:

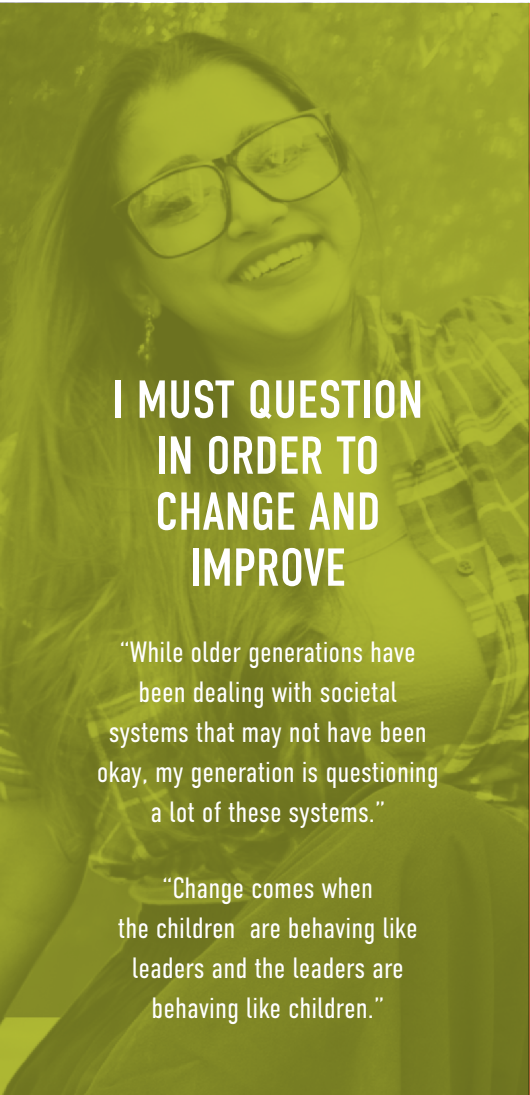
- **Stood together** and fought for what they believed in.
- Got their **voices heard** and were ambitious but resilient in the voice of opposition.
- **Inspired social change** for the better to create a society that reached more equality, acceptance and fairness.
- **Took risks**, were open-minded, and exposed to and accepting of differences.
- Was a progressive generation that **took on world problems** like pollution, racism and gun violence – maybe didn't finish them but got them to a place where the next generation could.

# GEN Zs

are active members of society who have shown their influence, power and commitment to the world they want to create.

**Activism** is rooted in their generational DNA. They are seeing and joining young activists in the fight for LBGQTQIA issues, women's rights, and those against white nationalism and gun violence, just to name a few. They **demand to see change** and will


**fight to protect their beliefs**, their rights and the rights of others. By **giving rise to their voices**, they believe they are developing as human beings and laying the foundation to create widespread change.



I MUST QUESTION  
IN ORDER TO  
CHANGE AND  
IMPROVE

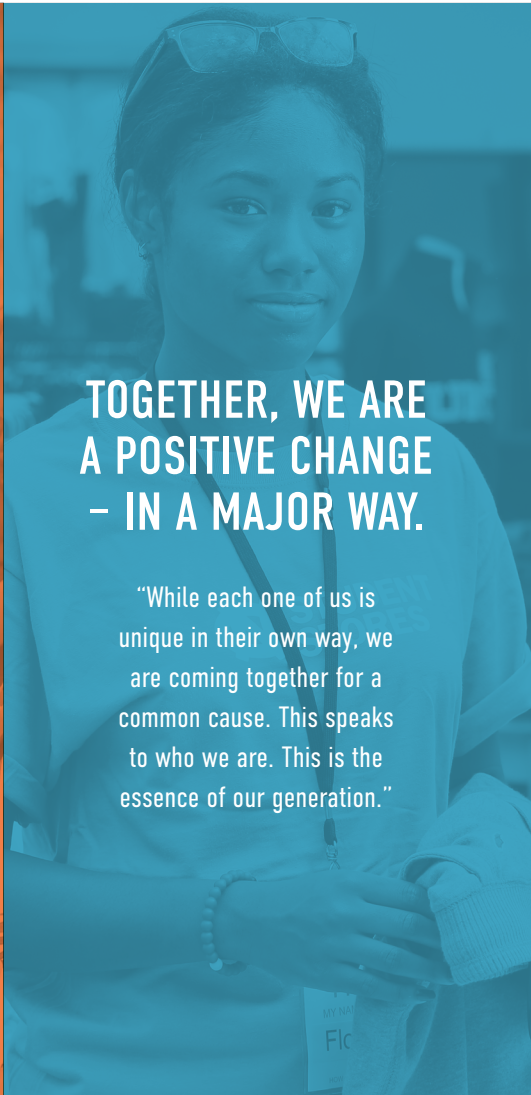
"While older generations have been dealing with societal systems that may not have been okay, my generation is questioning a lot of these systems."

"Change comes when the children are behaving like leaders and the leaders are behaving like children."



WE WILL ORGANIZE,  
MOBILIZE AND INSPIRE  
ONE ANOTHER TO  
CHANGE WHAT IS NOT  
RIGHT FOR OUR WORLD.

"The willingness of people to share their experiences or stories lets us into how people exist or live – waking up our own empathy, and in turn, a desire to create change. By being honest and open, it makes it easier to go forward and talk about the change we'd like to see."



TOGETHER, WE ARE  
A POSITIVE CHANGE  
– IN A MAJOR WAY.

"While each one of us is unique in their own way, we are coming together for a common cause. This speaks to who we are. This is the essence of our generation."



# GEN Z IS CONFIDENT THAT THEIR COLLECTIVE VOICES CAN BE USED TO CATALYZE CHANGE.

56%

try to participate in or effect social change by getting the word out or actively engaging with issues that matter to them

68%

believe in the power of their individual voice to effect change

They have honed these skills on social media since they were very young and trust in themselves, even though they realize that older generations don't take them seriously. They want and expect their voices to be heard.

Social media has not only helped them form stronger opinions at a

much younger age than past generations, but also enabled them to uniquely and creatively express their ideas and themselves: editing videos, producing music, memes, and mastering Photoshop.

They make their voices heard and express themselves how, when and where they'd like to be seen.

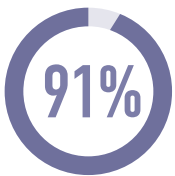
They want to openly speak about problems that were once considered taboo, like mental health or gun control, so those impacted are given a voice and support communities to turn to. They want to voice their own experiences while also giving voice to others' experiences.

## SOCIAL MEDIA IS THEIR PLATFORM AND HAS EMPOWERED THEM TO AMPLIFY THEIR VOICE.

“I think a defining characteristic of my generation is the accessibility to social media. We are able to share our opinions very readily. This gives us a lot of agency and I believe has helped us form strong opinions at a younger age about the state of the world.”

# SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CONNECTED AND ENABLED THIS GENERATION.

It has broadened their views and experiences and provided the means to extend their empathy – miles, even continents away with the same intensity as what they experience for neighbors and friends.



Believe that all people are equal and that they deserve to be treated as such



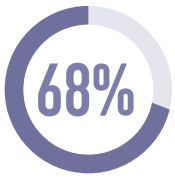
Said social media has helped them to learn from and be exposed to different kinds of people



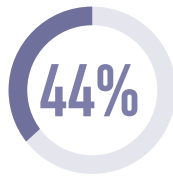
Believe people should have the freedom to be whatever or whoever they want to be



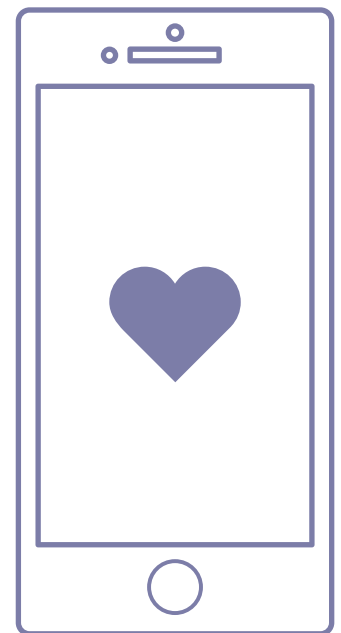
Said social media has helped form and shape their opinions of what matters to them



Believe that their generation is willing to embrace their own individualism more than older generations



Said social media has deepened their relationship and connection with friends and peers



# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER. TURNING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION.

As you build your brand's marketing strategies for the Gen Z demographic, these tips will get your brand well on its way to acquiring lifelong brand loyalists.

Use the following as a guide for your next Gen Z marketing program.

## Ask yourself:

**Does it** foster and celebrate individualism? Does it give them an outlet to express their creativity and unique sense of self? Does it provide an opportunity for them to applaud and encourage others' individuality?

**Does it** provide a platform for them to voice their opinions, concerns and ideas on issues that are important to them? This includes expressing their thoughts about your brand. They demand to be listened to and immediately recognize insincere efforts.

**Does it** align and support their responsibility to change the world and make it a better place for all groups? Also think about your corporate responsibility efforts. Do they need to be stepped up or revamped?

**Does it** respect and empower their ambitions, which are wide ranging from changing the world to starting their own business?

**Does it** fuel their need for unbiased information of all kinds — from world events to local news to friends' lives to product ingredients?

**Does it** connect with them on multiple levels, both digitally and in-person? While they have grown up with and rely heavily on social media, they respect and value in-person experiences.

## GEN Z

continues to evolve as they amass life experience and your marketing efforts must evolve too. Successful brands will regularly test, validate and refine every aspect of their Gen Z marketing programs. Messages, promotions, product concepts, charitable giving, and customer engagement are constantly being watched by this generation, so your brand needs to be aligned with what Gen Z wants.

READY TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR NEXT GENERATION OF LOYAL CUSTOMERS?

Visit [partnerships.bncollege.com](https://partnerships.bncollege.com) to learn more.

---

## ABOUT US

With over 768 on-campus retail stores, a proprietary influencer panel of 15K college students and a national email network of 6MM+, Barnes & Noble College Insights is the leading authority on Gen Z college consumers, their parents and alumni. Through our custom quantitative and qualitative methodologies, we deliver strategic insights for our University partners and full-service research capabilities for brand marketers. We aren't merely experts in the college market, we live the college experience everyday.

**[partnerships.bncollege.com](https://partnerships.bncollege.com)**

---