



# Are you keeping up with the GenJonesers

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**Do you have a generational identify crisis? Do you get your 'Matures' and 'Boomers' mixed up with your 'Xers' and 'Yers'? Not sure where your 'Pre-Boomers' and 'Millennials' fit into the hierarchy of age segmentation?**

Don't worry. There are other marketers, just like you, too embarrassed to share their generational doubts and questions. This is an article written for people who feel lost in the Sea of Silly Names that masquerades for a scientific method of age segmentation. I hope it helps.

I thought I had a pretty good grip on generational segments and then, just as I was least expecting it, another new one appeared. 'Generation Jones' or 'GenJonesers, as they apparently like to be called, are vying to become the latest generational group.

GenJonesers were born between 1954 and 1965. Like all of the other groupings, the dates are arbitrarily specified. For those of you who have mislaid your calculator, that makes them aged between 41 and 52. If you want to annoy a GenJoneser then refer to them as a Boomer (*now aged 42-60*), it has the same effect as mistaking a Canadian for an American. They get really grumpy. They get even grumpier if you think they are called Jones after Tom Jones or Zeta Jones or Indiana Jones. Apparently, it is because they feel they are the anonymous generation and wanted a matching nondescript name.

The biggest gripe of this group is about their identity; or to be more accurate lack of one. Are they really the last stages of the Boomers or the first gasps of Gen Xers? Come to that does it matter?

Well it matters to the sociologist Jonathan Pontell, who always felt he was trapped inside a Boomer's body. "I can remember first hearing the words 'baby boomer generation' as a high school student," muses Pontell ". "The whole class burst out laughing when the teacher told us we were baby boomers. It was so obvious we weren't..... I wasn't spending sleepless nights

obsessing over the fact that I'd been mislabelled, but in the back of my head, I never identified with the boom."

Let me come clean. I find all of this stuff a pile of sanctimonious rubbish, but clearly it does exercise the minds of lots of people and deserves to be investigated.

Determining where one generation stops and another starts seems to be as much an art as a science. How are us marketer supposed to categorize the poor souls who are born at the edge between one generation and another? Do we have millions of people, whose birthdays come at the boundaries of the generational divides, spending their life in a perpetual state of confusion about where they belong?

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Discovering a new generation is a bit like finding another planet in the solar system. Astronomers debate whether the thing is an asteroid, a planet, or spec of dust on the end of their telescope and then some bright spark comes along with 'new research' that proves categorically that it is a planet.

Well, some research, carried out by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is marketing's equivalent to proving a new generation has been discovered. We can officially declare that the GenJonesers are an age group in their own right.

UCLA has conducted an annual poll of 350,000 college freshmen since the mid-60s. One of the questions concerns students' ranking of two different life goals: "how important is it to develop a meaningful philosophy of life" and "being very well of financially".

The table shows the results between 1966 and 1990

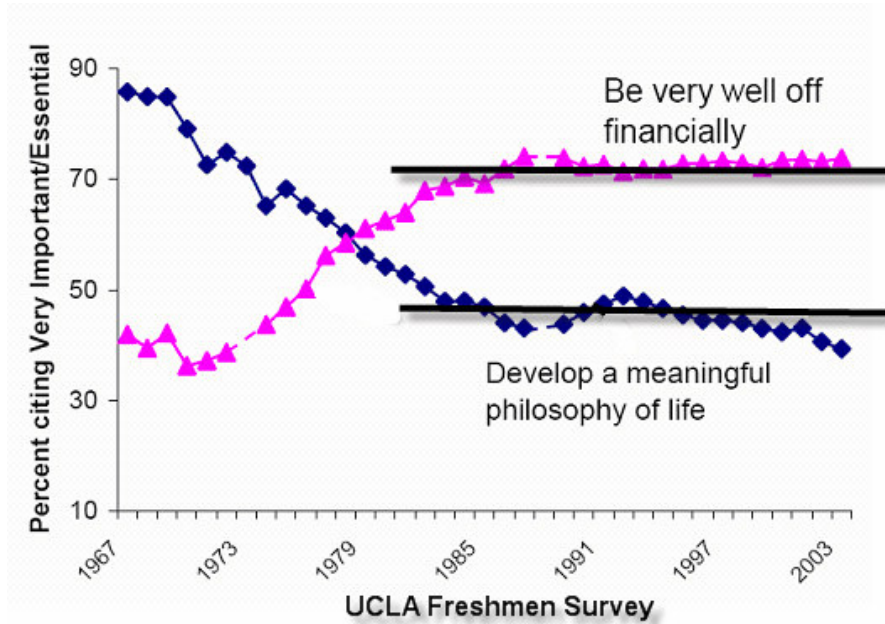
There can be no doubt about it, these Jonesers have a distinctly different view of life from generations on either side of their age divide.

Life goal	Freshmen ranking goal as "essential" or "very important"		
	1966 (median yr. of Boomers)	1977 (median yr. of Jonesers)	1990 (median yr. of Xers)
"developing a meaningful philosophy of life"	85%	61%	42%
"being very well off financially"	44%	60%	76%

This is the only 'quantitative' evidence that the proponents of Jonesers offer to support their existence as a distinct group. Most of the justification is along the lines of "How could it make

sense that a 36 year old, who was raised during Watergate and who is now entering the work force after just finishing her doctorate, would be in the same cultural generation as her 55 year old father who was raised during the Fifties and who is now a member of Saga, considering his retirement years?"

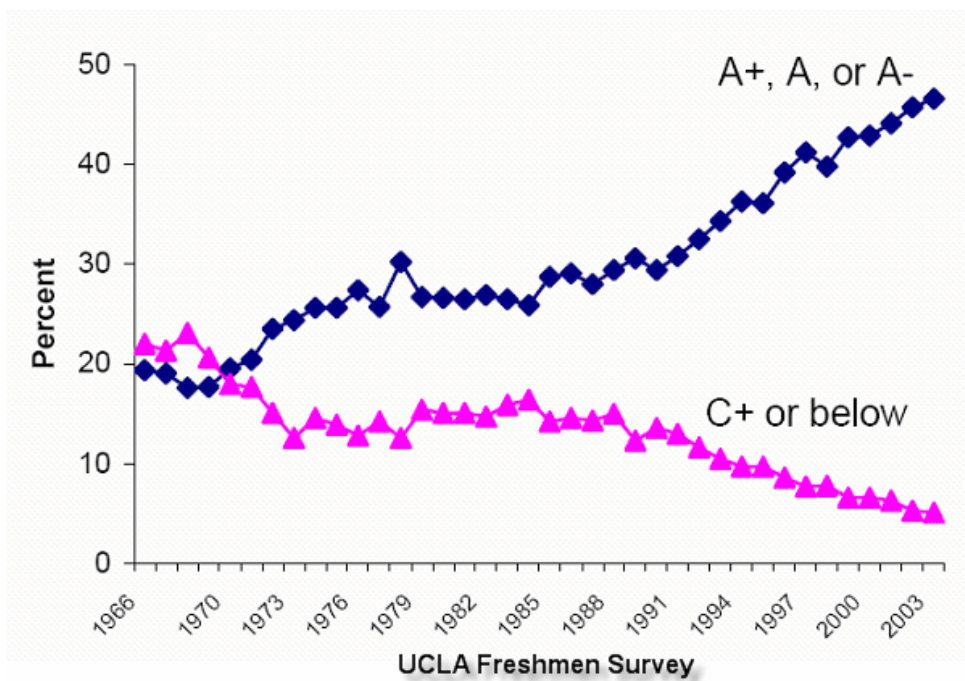
If UCLA's research is proof of a distinctive age cohort I wondered what other insights it could provide. The next figure shows a graph of the responses to the two life-goal questions since the research began.



The far more interesting conclusion from this analysis is that there has been very little change in attitudes since the early 1980s, shown by the horizontal lines I have added.

If the definition of a radical change in life-goals marks the birth or death of new generation then for the past quarter of a century we have had a single generation holding similar life goals. Perhaps I have accidentally discovered 'Generation Boring'?

Whilst looking through the other results from the UCLA study, I found the following analysis of freshmen's college grades.



I guess a conclusion from these results is that once the effects of the substance abuse of students in the 1960s abated, the intellect of following generations has always been higher than the one before. Perhaps we should re-christen the 'Baby Boomers' the 'Baby Dunces' generation? The cynic in me says the ever higher educational attainment might just have something to do with grade inflation. I digress.

The arguments for generational segments are predicated on the concept that we associate ourselves as belonging to one of these wretched groups. Since most people I talk to haven't the faintest idea if they are a Boomer, Xer, Yer or Zer it seems a totally false, and useless, concept.

There is an argument to support the idea of a 'Baby Boomer' generation, even though the US birth rate started to climb in 1940, not in 1945 as a result of a hoard of sex starved men returning from the war. The birth rate in the US then declined from 1957 onward - so why the official end date of the Boomer generation is 1964 beats the hell out of me and everybody who has studied the subject.

From there on, the generational divisions are totally artificial. The term, Generation X, (loosely referring to people born in the 60s and 70s), is a cultural idea, rather than a demographic term.

Generation Y, (loosely referring to people born in the 80s and 90s), beats all records for having lots of other silly names. Here are a few: the Millennial Generation; the Millennium Generation; the Net Generation; N-Gen; Generation NeXt; Generation 2000; Generation Y2K; the Sunshine Generation; the Digital Generation and the Explorers. The list goes on and on and on.

This brings us to Generation Z, those born from 2004 to 2025. Not too much is known about them yet. I wonder if it will be like car numbers and the next generation, the one starting in 2026, will be Generation A?

So, what is the value of all of these totally artificial age groupings? Not much is the simple and precise answer.

Since age is of very limited use to a marketer and continues to decline in importance, these artificial subdivisions of age are less than worthless.

So, you can sleep secure in the knowledge that not knowing a 'Boomer' from a 'Zer' will not make a jot of difference to your marketing career and your ability to keep up with the Joneses.