

An Essay

by Hannah Lilly

In Lydia Millet's, *A Children's Bible*, Millet depicts the unfortunate reality of Generation Z (1997-2012) and what their future holds in store for them. Readers are walked through by narrator Evie who shares her and other character's twenty-first century reality. Evie's narration brings to light what millions of adolescents are going through in today's reality, climate change, generation divide, and children raising themselves. Although, these are the three large issues depicted there are several psychological issues that follow each one. The group of children that we come to know must put their childhood on the back burner as they have to tackle adult issues head on.

Climate change is "the long-term alteration of temperature and typical weather pattern in a place." (Nation Geographic) On June 23, 1988, is when the rising issue of climate change was brought forth to the U.S. Senate and Natural Resources Committee by Dr. James Hansen, who was the director of NASA's Institute for Space Studies. He was quoted saying, "Global warming has reached a level such that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause-and-effect relationship between the greenhouse effect and observed warming...In my opinion, the greenhouse effect has been detected, and it is changing our climate now." (Dr. James Hansen QTPD.) Throughout his testimony that was supported with scientific evidence he claimed that the rising temperatures were to blame on human uses of carbon energy sources. After three decades of combatting this issue the United States of America and 164 other countries sign the infamous United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This treaty states that the countries that are involved will dedicate themselves to lowering the carbon emissions into the Earth's atmosphere. Through the past twenty-five years of holding annual conferences countries

have developed plans and goals, timelines to slow the rates of climate change, and the 2015 Paris Agreement. The years of combatting climate change has created a divide between the generational divide between older and younger generation.

In Chapter Two, the audience is starting to get a clearer picture of Evie's adult like thinking when addressing the issues surrounding climate change. She expressed the reality she has to face as a child that would ultimately affect her life as an adult, just as the others will have to. "AT THAT TIME in my personal life, I was coming to grips with the end of the world. The familiar world, anyway. Many of us were," (Millet 27) Evie knows that if human behavior does not change it is just a matter of time before the Earth decides to give out on us. Although she has come to terms with the reality Evie is unsure how to deliver the news to her younger brother Jack. Jack is depicted as a small sensitive nature loving adolescent whose fascination is captivated by the Arctic. He has vast knowledge on the Arctic spread from polar bears to sea ice melting to his favorite, penguins, whose survival he was concerned with. Evie would not be able to give him the solid timeline she knows he would ask for because there were a wide range of answers that were being said. "Scientists said it was ending now, philosophers said it had always been ending. Historians said there'd been dark ages before...Politicians claimed everything would be fine." (Millet 27) Evie knew that she had to inform Jack, she did not want to turn out looking like a politician or their parents who refuse to face the harsh reality ahead of them.

The difficult part for Evie to come to terms with was her the parents' choice to deny the reality not the science. "The parents insisted on denial as a tactic. Not science denial exactly—they were liberals. It was more a denial of reality." (Millet 28) At the age of fifteen, Evie, Generation Z, shows a level of maturity her and the other parents, Generation X and Millennials,

do not want to take due to the fear that lies inside the reality of the health of the planet. The dialog we are given through pages twenty-seven and twenty-eight Millet clearly shows the level of maturity and solid mental state that Evie must address her fears for her adulthood. With her simple action of addressing an unpleasant reality distinguishes the older generations from the younger generations.

We have all heard the argument on generational divide growing up and how each generation has participated in the blame game when it comes to hot button topics. As of 2021, we have five generations living together trying to tackle the world's problems with different perspectives, motivations, and levels of importance.

Generation	Year
Traditionalists or Silent	Before 1945
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1976
Millennials or Generation Y	1977-1995
Generation Z	1996-2015

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Millet, showcases this divide between the parents, Generation x and Millennials, and their children, Generational Z. As our narrator, Evie, is educating the rest of the children about the issue of climate change while their parents focused is geared towards partying and day drinking. “They liked to drink it was their hobby, or- said one of us- maybe a form of worship. They drank wine and beer and whiskey and gin. Also, tequila, rum, and vodka. At midday they called it the hair of the dog.” (Millet 4) After witnessing their parents participate in juvenile actions rather

than focusing on very present reality of a world that is rapidly declining from a human behavior. Evie brings it upon herself to lead the rest of the children in educating them on the harsh reality that they will have to face if they do not step up and create a change. The stress that is placed upon the children to combat these global issues that will impact their life places a tremendous amount of stress that has the potential to cause psychological disruption.

According to an article written by psychologists published by Psychology Today state that the transitional period and adolescence naturally causes anxiety about themselves and other external factors. Although these are normal “symptoms” this developmental stage is when other mental health issues will start to manifest. In the case of the children, we are introduced to there are two specific disorders that might manifest due to their environmental factors, anxiety disorders and mood disorders. The DSM-5 separates the twelve anxiety disorders into three separate categories based on how they manifest themselves. “Anxiety disorders differ from normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness and involve excessive fear or anxiety.” (DSM-5) Mood disorders will vary based on one’s genetic predisposition and their environmental factors, it will affect one’s emotional state, mood, and interferes with one's ability to function everyday tasks.

The two main anxiety disorders that the children might experience are panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder that can be brought on by stressful situations that they are having to deal with by themselves. The audience can assume that Evie is experiencing mild symptoms of both of these anxiety disorders due to her constant worry on how to talk to Jack about the effects climate change is having on the planet and how it will affect their future as adults. She is having this internal debate with herself on whether or not she should tell Jack, on one hand she believes

she has an obligation as his older sister to protect him as much as possible from the harsh realities and truths of the world, while on the other hand she wants to tell him due to his love for the Arctic. If she tells Jack his favorite geographical landmark is rapidly decaying his innocents will be taken away and his passion for nature will vanish into thin air. Evie's internal thoughts take over and she becomes consumed by the idea of causing emotional distress to her younger brother who she cares for deeply.

Major Depressive Disorder or depression is the most common mood disorders that effect our population. According to Dr. Timothy J. Legg PsyD, a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner around seven percent or 16.2 million adults in the United States suffer from depression. Dr. Legg also states that not only does an individual's environment play a role in contributing to their depression so does their brain hormones, makeup, and genetics. The common triggers or stressors that can also manifest depression are family history, substance abuse disorders, and anxiety disorders which are highlighted through behaviors by the parents and children throughout the novel.

The first behavioral trait we see in the novel is displayed by the parents with their excessive partying and drinking. Evie mentions in the first chapter of the novel that has the nights go on and the alcohol keeps flowing the adult's flashback to their younger selves to relive their glory days as if they were in college again. "As the evenings wore on, some parents got it into their heads to dance. A flash of life would move their lumpen bodies. Sad spectacle. They flopped, blasting their old-time music. "Beat on the brat, beat on the brat, beat on the brat with a baseball bat, oh yeah.'" (Millet 5) According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration statics around forty-four percent or 61.6 million people in the United States

would be classified as binge drinkers and around twenty-nine or 17.7 million people in the United States are considered heavy drinkers.

Another psychological issue that the children will have to face in their adulthood that is brought on by their parents is their uninvolved parenting style. The American Psychological Association describes uninvolved parenting as being, "...unresponsive, unavailable, and rejecting to their children's needs." (APA 2017) Dr. Karen Gill pediatrician who specializes in childhood sleep and behavior issues states that children who are the product of uninvolved parents are able to be self-sufficient and learn to take care of basic needs as a young child. Although these are important skills to develop throughout your adolescents there is also a downfall to the psychological development of children. Later in life they will experience emotional neediness from other relationships, self-esteem issues and lack of social skills. In a study done by Karin S. Nijhof and Rutger C.M.E in 2007 show how children of different parenting styles cope with their homesickness. They found that children who were raised in a home with uninvolved parents experienced more difficulty coping and expressing their emotions.

In Millet's novel there are several occasions when the children bring up their parents extensive partying and how they have had to become a self-sufficient. In chapter one, it is first depicted to the audience that the children are planning to go camping on the beach but are soon questioned by the mothers in the group asking them how they will manage since they did not bring tents with them. "'But we didn't bring tents'" said a second mother... "We'll handle it," said Terry. "Handle it how? Asked a third mother. "Amazon Prime?" "We'll handle it," repeated Terry. "There are tarps in the tool shed. We'll be fine.'" (Millet 18) In this brief interaction we

witness between the parents and the children we can pick out several key aspects of how the children are having to take on adult roles.

Unlike most adolescents the children had a plan to deal with their tentless situation by using materials that were around them which shows maturity and high processing function. In this seen Millet, repeatedly has Terri say, “We’ll be fine” which shows that the children have had to learn how to handle difficult situations at the drop a hat before, learning to navigate and use materials they have around them. Although the children are considered to be minors and range from nine to seventeen years old Terry exhibits a level of competence in his abilities to watch over the younger children without adult supervision as if he has had practice in the past.

Throughout the novel, we see Evie shielding Jack from the realities he will have to grow up and face too one day. With climate change inclining as the days go by Jack does not let that stop him from sharing his passion and knowledge about the environment. It encourages him to keep pushing forward fighting the good fight. Although Jack is unwilling to accept the concept that one day, he will not be here to see new evolved creatures is still beyond him but in that moment him and Evie share a beautiful moment that will restore Jack’s faith in humanity. ““You’re right. It’s more like art. Poetry. But it sill comes from what they used to call God, doesn’t it?” “What they used to call God,” he murmured. He was happiest when I was there talking to him, but he was getting so tried in those days. So very tried.” (Millet 224)

Lydia Millet uses the harsh realities of the twenty-first century to write a relatable young adult novel. Within her novel Millet intertwines unorthodox families, social issues, and generational divides that will have several different impacts on the group of children we have come to know. The story is presented to us by our fifteen-year-old narrator, Evie, who has been

forced to come to terms with a dreadful reality for her future. Within the novel the immediate threat of climate change is addressed and discussed among the children who will have to harbor the consequences of the older generation's actions in failing to stop it sooner. The situations that the children have to tackle while their childhood is put on hold can potentially become triggers for future mental disorders. Millet was able to address very real social problems and maneuver them in a manner that can become related to several adolescents coming into adulthood having to face the fears of what their future holds in store for them.

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