

Radio Head Gal Excerpt

The emergence of hearing loss amongst Millennials and Generation Z, who have been the driving force behind many cultural changes in recent years, is a significant shift. Youth represent a new and influential demographic in this area, like baby dinosaurs hatching: unthreatening at first but capable of transforming into powerful, snarling beasts. They don't romanticize their sense of hearing, don't view themselves as disabled, and don't feel they need to be fixed. Instead, they want cutting-edge technology, and they want it now.

I take great interest in knowing that hearing loss has expanded to the influencer generations. As changemakers, I believe they are well-positioned to advocate for a more inclusive society. I particularly admire twenty- and thirty-somethings as a political force because they can be somewhat self-centered, which is necessary to disrupt long-standing social stigmas. They reject the notion of shame and demand authenticity on issues that matter to them. They are also digital natives, unaware of life before mobile devices or accessibility features. They have high expectations for societal change but also presume that stuff will be given to them. These very traits are what give them a strategic advantage. They represent a large voting bloc and can wield their purchasing power to demand technological progress. Those of us who grew up before accommodation laws lack that sense of entitlement, which is our disadvantage, truly. We accepted the status quo because no other options existed.

The younger generations are also crucial allies in the fight against ableism. Their schools were/are diversity proponents, and they're not afraid to show their individuality. They see the world as nuanced and know the importance of inclusion.

Case in point: Recently, my friend Danica's preteen daughter quite matter-of-factly told her mother she was going to have three children, "A him/his, a her/hers, and a they/theirs." I did a double-take when Danica told me this story, but I loved it. Her daughter's mindset automatically defaulted to an inclusive state where traditional gender roles were not mandatory.

I'm also inspired by how readily younger generations accept diversity without judgment. Danica's daughter's class includes students who have bipolar disorder or experience panic attacks, and they openly discuss their stories and accommodation needs. This transparency normalizes these issues as visible and unremarkable. The other kids say, "That's just Paul or Ringo in the corner having a panic attack, and they need us to give them space." No stigma. Everyone belongs.

What if everyone thought that way?