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## Gen Y and Millennial moms having more kids and abandoning helicopter parenting



SARAH BOESVELD | April 24, 2014 6:44 PM ET  
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Brandy Mercredi with her husband Chris and two children.

Heart & Habit

A new generation of laid-back mothers is rewriting the playbook on parenting, ditching the hands-on helicoptering of older mothers

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The findings of BabyCenter's Canadian Millennial Mom Report show a nation of younger mothers who embrace imperfection, seek feedback openly, and view parenthood as a team sport.

It's an about-face from the angst-ridden, aspirational style of parenting so pilloried in the discourse about motherhood, observers say, and it signals a new optimism about achieving both a fulfilling career and rich family life that could eventually help to lift Canada's sinking fertility rate.

"There's this feeling of 'I don't want to do what my parents did' and I think every generation has a little bit of that," said Ann Elisabeth Samson, editor of BabyCenter Canada. "That's kind of a backlash against a coddling, enabling [approach] from their parents and the feeling that their parents didn't do right by them in some way."

Millennial moms were precisely 16% more relaxed about parenthood than Gen X moms, according to the survey of 1,633 Canadian mothers between the ages of 18 and 44. They were also 37% more likely than their Gen X counterparts to plan on having three or more children — a factor that partly speaks to age, but also outlook on parenthood as it pertains to social shifts: More flexible work, for example, or greater family support.

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“If you don’t envision yourself working full time you start to think more about ‘Well if I’m already having two I might as well have three,’” said Ms. Samson, adding that 58% of Gen Y moms said their spouse or partner was a very involved parent.

According to the survey, 77% of babies born in Canada this year will be to Millennials — people between the ages of 18 and 30.

Gen Y’s fondness for family may also come out of their stronger relationships with their parents, said David Coletto, the Ottawa-based CEO of market research firm Abacus Data which runs Canadian Millennials.ca.

On one of its recent surveys, 29% of Canadian Millennials aged 15-32 ranked being a good parent as their top goal in life. Having a successful marriage was top goal for 19% of those surveyed.

“It shows a generation that really does value good parenting,” he said. “I don’t think they’re traditional per se — it’s just a very family oriented outlook.” This bodes well, he said, for Canada’s future demographics, although it does nothing to reverse the trend of Canadians having children later in life.

Gen Y moms were also raised differently than their Gen X counterparts, the survey found. Millennials said that the words forgiving, involved and enabling most described their upbringings, while Gen Xers used words like ‘conservative,’ ‘strict’ and ‘traditional’ to explain the way their parents raised them.

First-time mother Alison Matthews always wanted a big family and, having had Charlotte 10 weeks ago at age 29, feels like that’s an achievable goal. The Toronto-based government relations consultant is even maintaining her career on mat leave by taking on a few easy clients.



Alison Matthews poses for a photo with her baby daughter Charlotte at Toronto Yoga Mamas in Toronto, Ontario, April 24, 2014. Tyler Anderson/National Post

“Unlike the generation before, we know we can’t ‘have it all’ in the traditional [sense],” said the Toronto woman. “But with technology and the availability and accessibility of options — there are a million ways to raise a baby — we can be an involved mother while still having a career on our own time.”

As a group, Gen Y women are “stepping out” of the work-life balance conversation and prefer flexibility over a perfect equilibrium, Ms. Samson said.

"It often feels like Millennial parents have taken the best of the Boomer and Gen-X generations," Brandy Mercredi, a Toronto mother of two and blogger at [Heart & Habit](#).

Still, one nagging feeling persists across generations and across borders, said Katherine Wintsch, the Richmond, Va.-based founder and CEO of consulting firm The Mom Complex. That feeling is doubt, specifically self-doubt about their performance as a mother.

This cohort of 18- to 32-year-old moms, addicted to feedback as the generational stereotype goes, will often ask their children how they're doing, Ms. Wintsch said, adding that many moms will give themselves a 'B' in parenting and consider that a good grade.

"I think it's coming more from places of curiosity, like 'How am I doing? I've never done this before. Is it going OK for you?' even if your child is five," she said. "But we do see literally an exhale in these moms after they ask these questions. A huge sigh of relief."

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**Theresa** • a month ago

It's nice to see the pendulum swinging back in the other direction. I've always thought that helicopter parents do their kids no favours.

39 | | • Share
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**jamesont** → Theresa • a month ago

I would tend to agree!

7 | | • Share
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**Avatar** → Theresa • a month ago

I think women are in total control of the whole process of making babies ...men are becoming sperm donors and a paychecks . Sad .

12 | | • Share
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**Jim\_Reno** → Avatar • a month ago

What world do you live in? If you feel that way, you're not in a healthy relationship.

3 | | • Share
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**MacMan156** → Jim\_Reno • a month ago

s/he's not wrong. If the mother doesn't want to abort and the father does, the mother is in control of everything and the man becomes a paycheque if he doesn't want to be there

1 | | • Share
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**crizm** • a month ago

All I see is kids running around yelling, screaming, throwing stuff while visiting other people's homes, stores, nice restaurants etc. being allowed to be as rude as possible because the excuse is that "they're just kids".

Sorry, it's only cute because they're your kids.


So let them be kids without consequence for bad behavior and then be surprised when they grow up to be adults that are exactly the same way.

Lets hear it for "hands off" parenting huh?

43 | | • Share
- 

**Kimberly Bishop Elmer** → crizm • a month ago

There is a difference between being a "hands-off" parent and a bad parent. I don't believe in helicoptering over my children, they need to learn how to do things for themselves - climb a bit too high and you just may fall, maybe even get hurt...you'll be more careful next time. I don't feel that I can prevent every disappointment or hurt for my children. However, if my kids act out in public, bother people in a restaurant, touch things in stores, that's just bad manners and will be dealt with swiftly.


35 | | • Share
- 

**Argh-Oh-Not** → crizm • a month ago

I find the kids of helicopter parents are the worst culprits, because they're incapable of conducting themselves appropriately as soon as their parents' eyes are off them.

Children of hands-off parents learn through consequence more than kids of helicopter parents. They learn that if you annoy a stranger at a restaurant, that stranger is going to tell you off, and your mother won't be hovering close by to shield you from that.

Hands-off parents have higher expectations for their kids than that.

8 | | • Share
- 

**crizm** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

And what adult is going to tell another parents 7 year-old to behave only for that parent to get mad at them for getting angry at their little precious.

Maybe I misunderstand what "hands-off" parenting is because I get the distinct impression that these kinds of parents are leaving it up to society to teach them right and wrong.

A kind of "cross your fingers" kind of parenting that hopes that society teaches them behavioural lessons so that they don't have to.

7 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → crizm • a month ago

Yeah, you're not understanding "hands-off" very well at all.

Children of helicopter parents don't learn right and wrong because their parents are always standing nearby to shield them from consequences.

I tell other people's kids to smarten up all the time and I expect my children to be considerate of others, whether or not I'm in the immediate vicinity. Healthy, well-adjusted children will learn to live up to the expectations their parents set for them.

5 ^ | v • Share ›



**crizm** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

Fair enough.

But you correcting other people's kids is a rare breed. I don't know of any other parent/adult that would dare to do that.

Too many times the parent of the misbehaving child would come to their child's defence and argue with the person that dared to tell their child what proper behaviour is.

If that's what you actually do and are okay with other people doing that when your kids act up then good on you but I have never seen it personally.

4 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → crizm • a month ago

In my experience, it's not rare at all.

^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

I wish more adults would tell other kids to smarten up.

2 ^ | v • Share ›



**Lola** → Nadia • a month ago

haha, don't you value your life. good luck telling any parent anything other than wonderful things about their children. trust me, it ends badly.

7 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → Lola • a month ago

Trying getting out of the trailer park once in a while.

^ | v • Share ›



**Yvonne** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

Really? Well in my opinion, the parents of the child offending should be punished, not the child.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

I have to disagree there with one thing you said. That another adult would tell off a kid being a nuisance. THAT's the problem too, adults DON'T do that anymore out of fear of being told off themselves by the kid's parent. It definitely takes a village to raise a child, but in this day and age that adage has started to wither away. That's not a good thing.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**LeahYoung** → Nadia • a month ago

What often appears to be children misbehaving and/or poor parenting can be the result of Autism Spectrum disorder.

Asking if you can be of assistance - rather than sanctimoniously berating families in public - is the wiser course of action.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → LeahYoung • a month ago

Autism or not, if a parent chooses to take their child to a public place, it's the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child behaves appropriately.

4 ^ | v • Share ›



**LeahYoung** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

That is obvious - to me at least - maybe not others!

^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → LeahYoung • a month ago

Well, disability or no, if you know your child has a disorder and acts out in a very disturbing manner and is not able to calm down or not be a disturbance despite parent discipline, then you shouldn't be taking that child to, for example, a nice restaurant. Or, a movie theatre, etc.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**LeahYoung** → Nadia • a month ago

I agree.

No one should bring children who have a tendency to scream & run around (with or without autism) to a movie theatre, restaurant or on a plane etc.

I was referring to places like a local park or grocery store.

^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → LeahYoung • a month ago

Absolutely. A park is for ALL kids. Same goes for grocery store, malls, other retail stores, pools, community centres (and the list goes on). Buuuut....on a plane? I'd say yes. If a plane is the only mode of transport you can take, then so be it. That's when others need to be a little more understanding and show compassion.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → crizm • a month ago

Hands-off parenting and lack of discipline are not the same thing. Lack of discipline is what you're describing.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**agirl** • a month ago

I notice a lot of the younger people interviewed talked about their goals and what they "plan" to do. As a generation X parent who had "planned" a large family but ended up with only 2 kids - it is easy to think that you are going to live your life one way. But when reality intrudes and the sheer cost of raising children, especially in urban Canada, is discovered, those plans can change real fast. We will see whether those Millennials really do have the large families that they hope to have. Somehow that 3rd or 4th baby seems less doable when university tuitions are doubling every year, housing is increasing so much in cost that few families can help with down payments and increased taxes and low interest rates make personal saving for retirement so difficult. Time will tell.

19 ^ | v • Share ›



**Nesa Simon David** → agirl • a month ago

None of all those expensive things are necessary to leading a full life.

^ | v • Share ›



**agirl** → Nesa Simon David • a month ago

I knew someone would pipe up with that statement. Rent or mortgage, groceries and transportation are not exactly frivolous expenditures. As for tuition and retirement savings - also essential. Nowhere in my post did I refer to anything but necessary and unavoidable costs.

5 ^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → agirl • a month ago

Well, obscene rent, mortgages and car payments can indeed be frivolous. People keep trying to "one-up" each other, trying to keep up with the Jones'. A 500k house is frivolous if you can't afford it...but people do it anyways



because they want those gourmet kitchens and fancy bathrooms. Yes, that's frivolous and unnecessary.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**Jonathanrex1** → Nadia • a month ago

The problem is that most structures being built these days are either tiny condos or large McMansions. TownHomes have gone the way of the Dodo Bird.

^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → Jonathanrex1 • a month ago

It's not a problem at all. If people can't afford the brand new McMansion, settle for what you CAN afford. Easy. Banks are to blame too of course. Just because they are ready to give you the mortgage, doesn't mean you should go for that maximum amount.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**ADM64** • a month ago

It's interesting because it addresses something that orthodox feminism denies: namely that men and women are different and that, while the 1950's mom might not be the only pattern for women, there may well be a uniquely female way of life that combines work and family differently than that of men. Feminism, ironically, insisted that women adopt the male outlook - or what they took to be the male outlook - and associated behavior and simply tried to turn themselves into men, insisting also that men go along with it. The possibility of different balances was denied because it would imply that different behavior and different outcomes for the genders would always be with us.

16 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → ADM64 • a month ago

Most maintream feminists insist that men and women determine, as individuals, how they want to live their lives. Parenthood can be a rewarding, amazing experience for both women and men. I think we'll find, with this new generation of parents, that there will be more stay at home parents, but they're not all going to be women. Kids benefit most when they have good connections with both of their parents. Dads can be nurturers too.

11 ^ | v • Share ›



**RK55** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

"Most maintream feminists insist that men and women determine, as individuals, how they want to live their lives."

Fail.

6 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → RK55 • a month ago

Yeah, it really sucks when people choose occupations that make them happy instead of letting others assign them to things based on genitalia.

2 ^ | v • Share ›



**RK55** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

Yeah. Where do you see that happening?

3 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → RK55 • a month ago

Every time someone insists that all women should stay home with children, and that all men should be breadwinners.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**RK55** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

You see a lot of that do you? More to the point, does it make you feel more powerful to spit that awful feminist rhetoric at people?

4 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → RK55 • a month ago

What awful rhetoric? Why is it awful to want children to have good relationships with both parents when possible?

4 ^ | v • Share ›



**RK55** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

It isn't. What has this statement got to do with feminism? The only connection feminism has with healthy families

is the extent to which they express their disdain for them. As for not-all-feminists-are-like-that, they wouldn't be feminists, they'd be something more akin to egalitarians. It's ludicrous to still be imagining feminism somehow fights for equality of something. It's beyond pfffft. It's hah! Because it's Rot!

Feminism attracts hucksters to pander the way televangelism, or ponzi schemes, or the marketing of beer or softdrink lifestyles do. See a sucker; get him to trust you; get his money.

Feminism's icon ought to be Nero fiddling.

3 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → RK55 • a month ago

Oh, okay then.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**RK55** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

Uh huh. Anybody can roll his eyes.

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**ADM64** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

I would tend to disagree with your characterization of mainstream feminists. Betty Friedan was about as mainstream as they come and yet she insisted women were not fully human if they stayed home. There have been a number of more recent ones like Linda Hirshman who have been even more adamant on this point. That said, I would agree that men and women should determine as individuals how they wish to live their lives, and the rest of your comment is fair enough. The only thing I would note is that the sexes are not completely blank slates and if a far larger majority of women make choices consistent with "traditional" norms and expectations than do not, and a minority of men opt to stay home, generalizing about this is not unreasonable.

5 ^ | v • Share ›



**Argh-Oh-Not** → ADM64 • a month ago

Friedan was actually quite critical of that line of thinking. Have you read The Second Stage?

1 ^ | v • Share ›



**Nesa Simon David** → Argh-Oh-Not • a month ago

Unfortunately first impressions are really all that matter. I doubt anyone, least of all feminists have read the second stage. Her "first stage" is what we'll forever be stuck with.

^ | v • Share ›



**Nadia** → ADM64 • a month ago

Don't get me started on feminism and motherhood. Those feminists have ruined a good thing.

6 ^ | v • Share ›



**rackl3r** • a month ago

I am a millennial. I plan to have exactly zero children. What a waste of time and money.

16 ^ | v • Share ›



**David Lynch** → rackl3r • a month ago

And you are not, of course.

31 ^ | v • Share ›



**TSowell Fan** → rackl3r • a month ago

Stop the presses. rackl3r is not planning to have children. Change the headline. Change the entire thrust of this article to a profile of rackl3r's life, his clothing and makeup preferences and favorite TV shows. Shut down Statistics Canada or, at least, abandon the census and simply consult with this oracle among us. Direct the savings to critical thinking courses in our elementary schools. And do it now so that rackl3r can benefit.

18 ^ | v • Share ›



**Sephernoose** → TSowell Fan • a month ago

Best comment ever.

8 ^ | v • Share ›





**TSowell Fan**  Sephernoose • a month ago

I could have added that it's not clear whether his third sentence refers back to his first or second sentence. Of course, I'm going with the first. We should all, nevertheless, be grateful for the second sentence.

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