

Psychosocial Aspects of Generation Z: A Review

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ABSTRACT

This review systematically examines the complex process of identity formation in Generation Z, focusing on the interplay between parental influence, societal stigma, emotional regulation, peer relationships, educational environments, digital culture, and mental health. Building upon foundational theories by Erikson and Marcia, and integrating Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective, the review highlights how Gen Z navigates identity amidst unprecedented digital connectivity, sociopolitical uncertainty, and evolving family dynamics. The findings indicate that authoritative parenting and secure attachment foster healthy identity exploration, whereas societal stigma and emotional suppression hinder self-growth and increase psychological distress. Inclusive educational settings and supportive peer networks enhance a sense of belonging, whereas digital platforms offer both opportunities for self-expression and risks such as cyberbullying and social comparison. The pervasive influence of mental health challenges on identity narratives is explored alongside emerging therapeutic cultures that promote self-awareness. This review identifies critical gaps in longitudinal, intersectional, and non-Western research, advocating for more nuanced studies to comprehensively understand and support the diverse identity experiences of Generation Z.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Identity formation, Stigma, Emotional regulation, parenting styles, peer relationships, digital culture, mental health*

Defining Identity Formation

Identity formation is a central developmental task spanning adolescence and emerging adulthood, involving the construction of a coherent sense of self, including personal values, beliefs, and aspirations, and the adoption of social roles (Monash University, n.d.). This process is characterized by exploration and commitment to various life domains (Monash University, n.d.).

Theoretical Foundations of Identity Development

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory: Erik Erikson believed that adolescence is a pivotal time when young people confront the challenge of "identity versus role confusion." Essentially, teenagers are trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. If they successfully

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explore and resolve this, they develop a clear and stable sense of self. However, if they struggle, they can end up feeling confused and uncertain about their identity and their place in the world. (Lumen Learning, n.d.). This model remains relevant as Gen Z youth continue to grapple with issues of belonging and purpose, albeit in a significantly altered contemporary context (Lumen Learning, n.d.). The digital age and sociopolitical landscape amplify the traditional "identity crisis" for Gen Z. The constant influx of information, diverse role models, and global events facilitated by digital connectivity can overwhelm adolescents, making the task of forming a coherent identity more challenging and potentially prolonging the period of role confusion (Lumen Learning, n.d.). This necessitates a more dynamic understanding of Erikson's stages, acknowledging the increased complexity of modern identity formation.

Marcia's Identity Status Model: Building on Erikson's work, James Marcia described identity formation through four statuses: diffusion (no exploration or commitment), foreclosure (commitment without exploration), moratorium (active exploration without commitment), and achievement (commitment after exploration) (Psychology Fanatic, n.d.). Contemporary studies suggest that Gen Z tends to fluctuate between moratorium and achievement, demonstrating the fluidity and uncertainty inherent in modern identity paths (ResearchGate, 2016a). Gen Z often cycles through periods of trying new things and then achieving their goals, which suggests that identity isn't a fixed destination but rather something that continues to evolve. This suggests that identity is a more iterative and less linear process for Gen Z, with individuals potentially revisiting exploration and commitment cycles multiple times throughout emerging adulthood (Crocetti et al., 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: This theory emphasizes that development is influenced by multiple, interconnected environmental systems: the microsystem (immediate environment, such as family and peers), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (indirect influences, such as institutions), macrosystem (cultural context), and chronosystem (historical time) (ResearchGate, 2023a). For Gen Z, online contexts and globalized culture have significantly extended the macrosystem, presenting both opportunities and challenges for identity formation (ResearchGate, 2023a). Digital environments are not merely tools but have become integral components of all ecological systems for Gen Z. Online platforms function as "virtual microsystems" for direct peer interactions and self-expression, while simultaneously shaping the "macrosystem" by fostering global youth cultures and new social norms (ResearchGate, 2023a). This pervasive digital integration means that identity development is influenced by a complex interplay of online and offline experiences, requiring an ecological perspective that accounts for these novel environmental factors.

Overview of Key Domains and Purpose

This review brings together contemporary research on the diverse elements that impact the process of identity formation in Generation Z. by exploring the interactive roles of parental influence, societal stigma, emotional regulation, peer relationships, educational environments, digital culture, and mental health. This review aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z develops their sense of self in a rapidly changing world. It does this by bringing together various viewpoints, highlighting key findings, exploring ongoing debates, and identifying critical gaps in the current research.

Rationale of the Study

In the contemporary landscape, understanding the intricate process of identity formation among Generation Z has emerged as a topic of critical significance. Identity formation is broadly defined as the development of a sense of self encompassing personal values, beliefs, social roles, and aspirations—a pivotal developmental task during adolescence and early adulthood. This process is uniquely pronounced for Gen Z. They navigate this journey amidst an unprecedented confluence of digital connectivity, pervasive sociopolitical uncertainty and rapidly changing family structures. Unlike previous cohorts, these contemporary challenges are not isolated factors but exhibit complex and synergistic interactions. For instance, widespread smartphone use and social media engagement amplify sociopolitical uncertainty through rapid information dissemination and constant exposure to global events, which can influence family dynamics and parental stress. These interconnected factors collectively create a unique and often challenging identity formation landscape, necessitating a departure from traditional and less complex developmental models.

Traditional theoretical foundations, such as Erikson's psychosocial model and Marcia's identity status theory, provide essential groundwork for understanding this developmental stage. However, contemporary research indicates that these models require modification and expansion to adequately address the multifaceted factors influencing Gen Z. The "particularly pronounced" nature of identity formation for Gen Z implies a highly dynamic and potentially more challenging process compared to their predecessors. Given the rapid pace of technological and social change, the identity of Gen Z is characterized by greater fluidity and uncertainty, potentially manifesting as a prolonged moratorium or frequent re-evaluations, which impact their mental well-being. This inherent dynamism underscores the necessity of a multidimensional review, as a single-axis analysis would fail to capture the intricate web of influences shaping Gen Z's sense of self. The decision to examine parental influence, societal stigma, emotional regulation, and interpersonal development is rooted in their interactive and mutual influences on identity formation, each of which can either promote or impede genuine self-growth. Thus, a holistic, multidimensional approach is essential for a comprehensive understanding, highlighting the need for such a study.

Search Strategies

This systematic literature review employed a narrative approach to identify, select, and evaluate studies on identity development in Generation Z. The search was conducted across academic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus. Key search terms and their combinations included "Generation Z," "identity formation," "parental influence," "stigma," "emotional regulation," "peer relationships," "digital culture," and "mental health." Priority was given to peer-reviewed research articles published since 2010 to ensure contemporary relevance, although foundational theoretical works were also included. The inclusion criteria encompassed empirical (qualitative and quantitative), theoretical, and review articles focusing on adolescents or emerging adults within the Gen Z cohort. Studies on older generations, clinical populations without a developmental context, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded. The appraisal process involved assessing methodological rigor, sample representativeness, and theoretical contribution, with findings thematically synthesized across the identified areas.

Results of these Studies

The development of identity is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, continuously shaped by a confluence of interwoven factors within various environmental settings. The

following sections detail the roles of parental influence, societal stigma, emotional regulation, peer relationships, educational environments, digital culture, and mental health in shaping identity, supported by both foundational and contemporary research.

Theoretical Foundations of Identity Development

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory and Gen Z: Erikson's theory posits that adolescence is a crucial period for resolving the conflict of identity versus role confusion, with successful resolution leading to a coherent sense of self (Lumen Learning, n.d.). For Gen Z, the core struggles of belongingness and purpose remain pertinent, although the contemporary context has shifted the nature of these concerns (Lumen Learning, n.d.). The digital age and sociopolitical landscape amplify the traditional "identity crisis" for Gen Z. The constant influx of information, diverse role models, and global events facilitated by digital connectivity (McLean Hospital, n.d.) can overwhelm adolescents, making the task of forming a coherent identity more challenging and potentially prolonging the period of role confusion (Lumen Learning, n.d.). This necessitates a more dynamic understanding of Erikson's stages, acknowledging the increased complexity of modern identity formation.

Marcia's Identity Statures in a Contemporary Context: Marcia expanded on Erikson's theory by defining four identity statures: diffusion (lack of exploration and commitment), foreclosure (commitment without exploration), moratorium (active exploration without commitment), and achievement (commitment after exploration) (Psychology Fanatic, n.d.). Contemporary studies suggest that Gen Z frequently fluctuates between moratorium and achievement, reflecting the fluidity and uncertainty of modern identity pathways (ResearchGate, 2016a). Gen Z's frequent movement between identity moratorium (active exploration) and identity achievement (committed identity) calls into question the traditional view of identity achievement as a fixed, final state. This suggests that identity is a more iterative and less linear process for Gen Z, with individuals potentially revisiting exploration and commitment cycles multiple times throughout emerging adulthood (Crocetti, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Digital Age: Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the multilayered environmental systems influencing development, from the immediate microsystem (family, peers) to the broader macrosystem (culture, societal norms) and chronosystem (historical time) (ResearchGate, 2023a). For Gen Z, online contexts and globalized culture have significantly expanded the macrosystem, introducing new opportunities and challenges for identity formation (ResearchGate, 2023a). Digital environments are not merely tools but have become integral components of all ecological systems for Gen Z. Online platforms function as "virtual microsystems" for direct peer interactions and self-expression, while simultaneously shaping the "macrosystem" by fostering global youth cultures and new social norms (ResearchGate, 2023a). This pervasive digital integration means that identity development is influenced by a complex interplay of online and offline experiences, requiring an ecological perspective that accounts for these novel environmental layers.

Societal Stigma and Generational Stereotypes: Generation Z is frequently subjected to stereotypes in the media and intergenerational discourse, often labeled as overly sensitive, entitled, or tech-obsessed (Marlee, n.d.). These pervasive narratives contribute to societal invalidation, undermining self-concept, and promoting identity suppression through mechanisms such as stereotype threat (ResearchGate, 2014a). Research indicates that exposure to negative stereotypes can result in internalized stigma, lower self-esteem, and heightened psychological distress among Gen Z youth (ResearchGate, 2014b). The rapid

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dissemination of these social narratives via the Internet further amplifies their detrimental effects, as adolescents are continuously exposed to both empowering and stigmatizing messages about their generation (Marlee, n.d.).

The progression from societal stereotyping to internalized stigma and subsequent psychological distress is a critical pathway. When a generation is consistently portrayed negatively (Marlee, n.d.), these external messages can be internalized, leading to self-doubt and a damaged self-concept (ResearchGate, 2014b). This internalized stigma manifests as lower self-esteem and increased psychological distress (ResearchGate, 2014b). The ubiquitous nature of digital media accelerates this process, making it difficult for individuals to escape the reinforcing negative feedback loop, potentially leading to identity foreclosure as a protective albeit limiting response (WebMD, n.d.).

Stereotype threat not only impacts self-perception but also directly hinders performance and engagement (Oxford Bibliographies n.d.). The anxiety triggered by the awareness of negative stereotypes (e.g., "tech-obsessed" leading to assumptions of poor social skills) can consume working memory and narrow attention (ResearchGate, 2014a), leading to underperformance in stereotype-relevant domains (Oxford Bibliographies, n.d.). This creates a vicious cycle in which perceived underperformance reinforces negative stereotypes, further entrenching internalized stigma and psychological distress.

Parental Influence on Identity Formation

Parenting Styles (Baumrind): Authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance of warmth and structure, is consistently associated with higher identity exploration, greater autonomy, and improved psychological health in Gen Z adolescents (Darcy & Roy Press, 2024). In contrast, authoritarian (high control, low warmth) and permissive (high warmth, low control) styles can restrict or confuse identity growth, leading to outcomes such as compliance or rebellion, respectively (ResearchGate, 2018a). The consistent link between authoritative parenting and positive identity outcomes is a fundamental causal relationship in developmental psychology. This parenting style provides a "secure base" for exploration (Psychology. Town, n.d.), fostering autonomy, self-acceptance, and psychological health (ResearchGate, 2025d). In the context of Gen Z's complex and uncertain world, this stable foundation is even more critical, equipping them with the internal resources needed to navigate identity challenges and build resilience against external pressures.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby): Secure attachment relationships provide a crucial "secure base" that fosters resilience and healthy identity formation (Psychology.Town, n.d.). This secure foundation allows adolescents to explore their individuality and navigate challenges with confidence. Conversely, insecure attachment (anxious or avoidant styles) can impede self-exploration and increase susceptibility to external pressures (FasterCapital, n.d.).

Intergenerational Trauma and Emotional Modeling: The interplay of familial control patterns, trauma exposure, and emotional expression plays a significant role in determining an individual's sense of self-boundaries and their strategies for managing stress (Natacha Godbout, n.d.). Gen Z youth from families with unresolved trauma may experience increased anxiety, emotional repression, and difficulty asserting their authentic selves (Natacha Godbout, n.d.). The influence of intergenerational trauma on identity boundaries and coping mechanisms represents a subtle yet profound causal relationship. Unresolved family trauma can lead to deeply ingrained patterns of emotional repression and difficulty in asserting one's true self (Godbout, n.d.), manifesting as identity diffusion or a fragmented

sense of self (Godbout, n.d.). This highlights that identity formation is not solely an individual process but is deeply influenced by inherited family dynamics and historical contexts of the family.

Cultural Parenting Expectations: Cultural norms regarding obedience, accomplishment, and emotional expression profoundly shape the extent to which young people are supported or constrained in their identity exploration (ResearchGate, 2018a). Cross-cultural research highlights significant differences in developmental outcomes based on cultural variations in parenting practices (ResearchGate, 2018a). The finding that the positive outcomes of authoritative parenting may not apply universally across all cultural contexts (EWA Direct, n.d.) is crucial. In collectivist cultures, for example, more controlling parenting styles might be adaptive (CARI Journals, n.d.), promoting a sense of security and belonging over individual exploration (ResearchGate, 2024b). This challenges Western-centric views of "healthy" parenting and underscores the imperative for culturally sensitive approaches to identity development, recognizing that what fosters identity in one cultural context may hinder it in another.

Emotional Regulation and Identity Dissociation

When a person's emotions are consistently dismissed, downplayed, or even punished—a pattern known as emotional invalidation—it can lead to serious, long-term harm. This can manifest as feeling disconnected from oneself (dissociation), developing a false sense of self (pseudo-identity) to meet others' expectations, and experiencing significant internal psychological conflict (ResearchGate, 2015b). Gen Z individuals who experience chronic invalidation often develop adaptive defense strategies, such as compliance and self-silencing, which can lead to emotional dysregulation and a disintegrated sense of self (ResearchGate, 2015b). Emotional suppression is strongly associated with an elevated risk of anxiety disorders, depression, and poor quality of relationships, highlighting the critical role of emotional validation in positive identity development (The International Journal of Indian Psychology 2024).

Emotional invalidation is a direct causal factor in the development of a "pseudo-identity" and identity fragmentation (ResearchGate, 2015b). When a young person's authentic emotional experiences are consistently dismissed or punished, they learn to suppress their emotions (The International Journal of Indian Psychology 2024). This suppression prevents the healthy processing and integration of experiences, leading to a disconnected sense of self and increased psychological distress (The International Journal of Indian Psychology 2024). The adoption of a "pseudo-identity" (ResearchGate, 2015b) becomes a maladaptive coping mechanism to navigate environments where genuine self-expression is not perceived as safe.

Self-Perception and Internalized Identity Scripts

Gen Z's self-concept is significantly shaped by the internalization of positive and negative societal and parental feedback (ResearchGate, 2025k). A performance-based identity, in which self-esteem is contingent on accomplishments or external affirmation, often conflicts with genuine self-expression, leading to low self-esteem, impostor syndrome, and identity fragmentation (FasterCapital, n.d.). Research indicates that young people exposed to excessive criticism or undue expectations are more prone to self-doubt and inadequacy (ResearchGate, 2013), whereas supportive environments foster self-acceptance and resilience (ResearchGate, 2025d).

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The strong link between performance-based identity and impostor syndrome (FasterCapital, n.d.) is particularly salient for Gen Z, who often face intense academic and career pressure. When an individual's self-worth is primarily derived from external accomplishments and validation (FasterCapital, n.d.), it creates a fragile self-concept that is highly susceptible to impostor syndrome—the persistent feeling of being a fraud despite objective success (ResearchGate, 2020). This is further exacerbated by the constant social comparison inherent in digital culture (HSA Tutoring, n.d.), where idealized versions of others' lives are constantly presented.

Peer Relationships and Trust Dynamics

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental period where social relationships, particularly with peers, serve as both crucial buffers against stress and potential sources of stress (Number Analytics, n.d.). Disrupted trust patterns, often stemming from earlier family experiences, can significantly skew peer validation and inhibit the development of healthy, mutual relationships (FasterCapital, n.d.). While peer support can effectively buffer against negative influences, excessive dependence on external sources for validation can impede the formation of a stable, authentic identity and increase susceptibility to peer pressure and social anxiety (ResearchGate, 2024c).

Peer relationships are a "double-edged sword" for identity development, offering both crucial support and significant risks (Number Analytics, n.d.). While supportive peer networks provide validation and a safe space for identity exploration (Number Analytics, n.d.), an overreliance on peer approval can lead to conformity at the expense of authenticity (ResearchGate, 2024c). This highlights a causal relationship in which external social pressure can suppress the development of an individual's genuine self-concept, particularly for a generation navigating fluid identity paths.

Early family experiences, particularly regarding trust and attachment, profoundly influence how adolescents navigate and form peer relationships (Psychology Town, n.d.). If a young person has experienced insecure attachment (FasterCapital, n.d.) or emotional invalidation within their family (ResearchGate, 2025f), they may struggle to establish healthy and trusting peer bonds. This can lead to a greater dependence on external validation from peers, making them more vulnerable to peer pressure and hindering their ability to develop an authentic identity (ResearchGate, 2024c).

Education, Institutional Environment, and Identity Shaping

Schools serve as crucial environments for identity construction and, at times, resistance (ResearchGate, 2025b). Teacher expectations, peer pressure, and academic performance significantly influence students' self-concept (ECS, n.d.). Institutional invalidation, such as the dismissal of emotional or cultural identity, can create profound internal conflict, particularly within rigid academic settings that prioritize conformity over individuality (ResearchGate, 2025b). Studies emphasize the critical importance of inclusive, welcoming learning spaces that actively value and affirm diverse identities, as these environments foster a strong sense of belonging and participation among Gen Z students (ResearchGate, 2023a).

Educational institutions often reflect and reinforce broader societal norms and pressures, including those related to academic performance and conformity (ResearchGate, 2025b). When schools prioritize rigid adherence to norms over individual expression, they can engage in "institutional invalidation" (ResearchGate, 2025b), dismissing students' unique emotional or cultural identities. This directly contributes to internal conflict, feelings of

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alienation, and psychological distress, thereby hindering the development of an authentic identity.

Conversely, intentionally inclusive and supportive school environments (ResearchGate, 2023a) are powerful protective factors for identity development. When students feel genuinely accepted and valued for their diverse identities, it cultivates a sense of psychological safety and belonging (ResearchGate, 2023a). This supportive climate encourages genuine self-exploration, reduces the pressure to conform, and fosters resilience, directly counteracting the negative impacts of invalidation and promoting a more integrated sense of self among the youth.

Technology, Culture, and Digital Selves

Social media and online platforms serve a dual purpose in Gen Z identity formation: providing spaces for self-expression, connection, and community, while simultaneously creating pressures for curated self-presentation and fostering social comparison (HSA Tutoring, n.d.). The emergence of a global youth culture, increasing gender fluidity, and new social norms, largely facilitated by digital connectivity, challenge classical identity categories and can create conflict between digital and familial expectations (Number Analytics n.d.).

Digital culture provides unparalleled spaces for self-expression and connectivity but also subjects young people to risks such as cyberbullying, unrealistic ideals, and identity confusion (Frontiers, 2025a). While online communities can empower marginalized youth to experiment with and validate their identities, they may also leave them vulnerable to cyberbullying, unattainable ideals, and confusion regarding their identities (Frontiers, 2025a). The complexity of digital selves requires a focus on helping Gen Z cohesively integrate their online and offline identities.

Mental Health as an Identity Dimension

Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and burnout are becoming more common among Gen Z and directly influence their identity and self-narratives (ResearchGate, 2025h). Mental health stigma within society and families can result in identity foreclosure, with young people internalizing pathologized labels and restricting their sense of self (WebMD, n.d.). The increased culture of self-diagnosis and self-therapy among Gen Z has opened up new fronts of self-awareness and activism but has also raised issues of over-pathologization and the equipoise of vulnerability and resilience (PubMed, 2025a).

The increasing prevalence of mental health disorders among Gen Z directly influences their identities and self-narratives (ResearchGate, 2025h). Addressing societal and familial mental health stigma is paramount, as it often leads to identity foreclosure and discourages help-seeking (WebMD, n.d.). While the emerging "therapy culture" among Gen Z promotes self-awareness and activism, professionals must navigate concerns about over-pathologization, ensuring that mental health labels do not inadvertently limit self-perception or reduce complex human experiences to clinical terms (PubMed 2025a).

DISCUSSION

The literature demonstrates that Gen Z's identity development is influenced by the dynamic interactions of individual, family, social, and technological factors. Authoritative parenting and secure attachment relationships form the basis of healthy exploration and psychological resilience, whereas harsh or inconsistent parenting can lead to identity confusion and

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emotional distress (Darcy & Roy Press, 2024). Societal stigma, especially in the form of stereotype threat and adverse generational narratives, deconstructs self-concept and can result in internalized stigma and heightened psychological symptoms (Oxford Bibliographies n.d.).

Emotional regulation techniques are at the heart of this process, since chronic emotional suppression and invalidation are associated with dissociation, pseudo-identity, and a higher risk of anxiety and depression (The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 2024). In contrast, contexts that affirm emotional expression foster coherent and resilient identity formation (ResearchGate, 2025c). Peer relationships are important social environments for identity exploration, and trust and support function as shields against stigma and stress (ResearchGate, 2023a). However, overreliance on peer approval hampers the growth of an honest self (ResearchGate, 2024c).

Educational environments have a double function: inclusive schools promote belonging and participation, whereas inflexible or invalidating schools might intensify internal discord and alienation (ResearchGate, 2025b). Digital culture, which provides unparalleled space for self-expression and connectivity, also subjects young people to the threat of cyberbullying, unrealistic ideals, and identity confusion (Frontiers, 2025a). Mental health is both a product and a facet of identity, with pathologization and stigma affecting self-narratives and help-seeking (WebMD, n.d.). The emergence of online mental health forums and the so-called therapy culture among Gen Z has opened new spaces for self-knowledge and activism but has also raised concerns about over-pathologization and the relationship between vulnerability and resilience (Bergstrand et al., 2014).

While current research offers a rich understanding of the topic, there remain significant lacunae that warrant further investigation. The majority of the literature is cross-sectional, Western, and concerned with romantic identity, with few studies targeting vocational, spiritual, and non-romantic areas (ResearchGate, 2025k). Additional intersectional, longitudinal, and qualitative studies are required to capture the changing richness of Gen Z's identity, especially among marginalized groups (ResearchGate, 2021c).

Mental Healthcare Approaches for Gen Z

Given the significant mental health challenges faced by Generation Z, various care approaches and strategies have emerged, focusing on accessibility, destigmatization, and tailored interventions.

Therapeutic Models and Techniques: Traditional and modern therapeutic models are being adapted to meet the unique needs of Gen Z. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is frequently employed to help clients learn healthier coping strategies, particularly for managing painful emotions (ResearchGate, 2010). DBT techniques are valuable for teaching interpersonal effectiveness, conflict resolution skills, and effective communication, such as the DEAR MAN acronym (ResearchGate, 2010). Role-playing in sessions is also used to help clients practice these skills in a safe environment before real-life application (ResearchGate 2010).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is another foundational approach used to help Gen Z identify, challenge, and replace negative automatic thoughts with healthier alternatives (Fiveable, n.d.). This is particularly useful for addressing anxieties stemming from social media comments or other stressors (Fiveable n.d.). Mindfulness-based therapy and Eye

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Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) are also preferred by some Gen Z clients for their ability to provide in-the-moment relief and target specific issues (ResearchGate, 2008; Child Mind Institute, n.d.). Mindfulness-based therapy, often delivered via apps, helps users stay present, encouraging practices such as deep breathing and guided meditation to mitigate stress and enhance quality of life (ResearchGate, 2008). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is increasingly being integrated into digital tools, helping users accept difficult thoughts and emotions while promoting mental flexibility and alignment with core values (TherapywithCT, n.d.). Beyond formal therapy, practical coping strategies are emphasized, including limiting social media consumption, practicing mindfulness and meditation, creating supportive routines, setting boundaries with school and work, engaging in physical activity, avoiding perfectionism, openly discussing feelings, focusing on controllable aspects, and prioritizing sleep.

Digital Mental Health Interventions (DMHIs)

Digital Mental Health Interventions (DMHIs) have emerged as a promising solution to address the persistent need for mental health services among youth, offering accessible, low-cost, and private options (ResearchGate, 2025m). Given that over 95% of teenagers use smartphones, these technologies are highly accessible (ResearchGate, 2025m). Various types of DMHIs cater to a range of mental health needs.

Mobile Applications: Apps such as 'Headspace' and 'Calm' foster mindfulness and help manage stress, with Headspace showing improvements in depression symptoms in a significant percentage of cases (ResearchGate, 2025n). These apps often provide tools for self-monitoring emotions and therapeutic exercises (ResearchGate, 2025n).

Online Counseling Platforms: Services such as BetterHelp or Talkspace allow young people to connect with licensed therapists via messaging or video calls, combining traditional therapy structures with digital flexibility (Emora Health, n.d.).

Virtual Reality (VR): VR creates immersive environments for users to confront anxiety or phobias in controlled settings, with programs such as Limbix pioneering this space for severe anxiety or trauma (ResearchGate, 2015c). While effective, high dropout rates can occur due to the absence of personal connections (ResearchGate, 2015c).

Chatbots: Conversational agents, such as Woebot, simulate therapy by guiding users through techniques and providing support (ResearchGate, 2025o).

Teletherapy: Live therapy sessions via video or phone calls, which became prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, are comparable in efficacy to in-person psychotherapy (Emora Health, n.d.).

Social Media Platforms: Although not formal interventions, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok host mental health influencers and advocacy pages, providing digestible advice and coping strategies for younger users (Frontiers, 2025a).

Despite their potential, the effectiveness of DMHIs is mixed, and challenges persist. Computerized CBT has been effective for anxiety and depression, but the efficacy of other digital interventions, such as therapeutic video games or social networking sites, for a range of mental health outcomes remains inconclusive (ResearchGate, 2025m). Dropout rates for DMHIs are common, with adherence often being weak, particularly for self-guided

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programs (ResearchGate, 2025m). Engagement is strengthened when a health professional, peer, or parent is involved (ResearchGate, 2025m). Furthermore, most research on DMHIs has been conducted in high-income countries, limiting generalizability to diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (ResearchGate, 2025m). Privacy and security concerns, along with a lack of youth-centered design, also pose significant obstacles to broader adoption and long-term engagement (ResearchGate, 2025m).

School-Based Mental Health Services and Community Partnerships

Schools are increasingly recognized as critical settings for addressing youth mental health, with comprehensive services ranging from prevention to treatment being offered in educational environments (ResearchGate, 2001). These services include upstream services and support promoting wellness, prevention, and education (e.g., brief screenings for depression and education on safe social media use), early identification and intervention (e.g., brief interventions for anxiety and bullying), and treatment, potentially involving community partners for higher-acuity needs (ResearchGate, 2001). Family support is also provided to caregivers for the benefit of the child (DHCS, 2022). Proactively identifying students with mental health needs before intervention can improve outcomes, reduce costs, and increase school attendance (DHCS 2022). Effective school-based programs often involve comprehensive, research- and evidence-based practices, such as universal mental health screenings and social-emotional learning (ResearchGate, 2001).

Cultivating strong community partnerships is crucial for comprehensive mental health support (DHCS 2022). Schools can collaborate with local communities to understand their needs and leverage existing assets, thereby creating a holistic wraparound support system (DHCS, 2022). These partnerships can include family- and youth-based organizations, faith-based or recreational groups offering mentorship, and physical health providers, such as clinics and hospitals (DHCS, 2022). Telehealth-based partnerships can also provide accessible remote services in areas where transportation is a barrier (DHCS, 2022).

Parental and Workplace Support Strategies

Parents and caregivers play a vital role in supporting Gen Z's mental well-being. A supportive and healthy home environment, with caregivers who offer encouragement and understanding, is crucial for nurturing a young person's mental and spiritual well-being (Springtide Research n.d.). Resources such as "Nurturing Mental Health for Gen Z: A Handbook for Parents" provide guidance for establishing lasting foundations for families (Springtide Research, n.d.). Spending more time with family and friends has also been identified as a helpful method for improving Gen Z's mental health.

Employers can implement various strategies to create a supportive and mental health-friendly workplace for Gen Z in the workforce (ResearchGate, 2025p). Companies can improve employees' mental well-being by promoting open discussions to help reduce the stigma associated with mental health. This also includes offering mental health resources and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), allowing flexible work options and time off for mental health, and promoting a healthy work-life balance through clear boundaries (ResearchGate, 2025). Providing training for managers to support employees in disclosing mental health challenges, fostering a culture of belonging, leading by example (senior leaders openly discussing mental health and modeling healthy work-life balance), normalizing mental health conversations and fostering connections among young workers, providing targeted support for historically underserved communities, and continuously evaluating and improving mental health initiatives are also crucial (ResearchGate, 2025p).

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Gen Z places a high priority on well-being, with a significant portion of employed individuals from this generation—specifically 41%—viewing remote work flexibility as a valuable mental health benefit. This highlights their desire for work arrangements that support their psychological well-being. This generation is taking proactive steps to manage their mental health, including therapy, lifestyle changes, and rethinking traditional career paths, which could reshape the future of work and well-being.

CONCLUSION

The evolving identity of Generation Z is influenced by a dynamic, multidimensional matrix of parental, social, emotional, and interpersonal factors that intersect within a fast-changing sociocultural context. Supportive parents, emotional validation, affirming educational settings, and supportive peer relationships are essential for facilitating genuine identity development and psychological health in adolescents. Stigma, emotional constraints, and institutional invalidation, on the other hand, can impair healthy identity development and increase the risk of mental health problems (Oxford Bibliographies, n.d.).

Understanding these multifaceted processes requires inclusive, empathetic, and interdisciplinary approaches that bridge theory, research, and practice. Addressing these issues requires intersectional strategies that connect research, policy, education, parenting, and youth mental health services to create environments conducive to authentic identity development and well-being. Future studies should prioritize longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to capture the dynamic and diverse nature of Gen Z's identity across different contexts and over time (ResearchGate, 2025).

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