

Symbols of my generation

by James Commins

Values are described as “the regard that something is held to deserve or the importance, worth or usefulness of something”. Symbols are often used to describe and personify these values. My age group does this with numerous different images and objects, and we let them symbolise the values that we hold. In this essay, I intend to explain what values some of our symbols mean, what these values are, and why we believe in them.

The ‘Like Button;’ that little blue thumbs up that appears on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and the like. To you it might mean absolutely nothing. But to my generation it means everything. It symbolises one of our most important values, that being the need for validation from others to boost self-worth.

We value others’ opinions too much. When it comes to my age group, our opinion of ourselves can entirely come from others’ opinions of us. Others’ opinions of us are constant. This is because we can reach them and they can reach us every hour of the day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Since we are constantly posting about what we think or are doing, it hurts us if others don’t agree. With the ability to see others’ opinions of us, we become so invested that we come to value them to an enormous degree. No other object symbolises this more than a ‘Like button;’ this is because my generation only like what all the others like.

Apart from other people’s opinions of us, my age group also value connectivity very highly. No other symbol portrays this more than the ‘Wifi’ symbol. We are obsessed with staying in touch with each other. We always have our phones on and we have heart failure if we lose internet connection. Why is this? It is simple. It is because of how quick and constant news and other information is today.

Nowadays we have a twenty-four- hour news cycle. It used to be that you’d only get the news once a day from the newspaper. That’s not how it is any more with the advent of the internet. My generation are one of the first to grow up in this new paradigm, so it is only reasonable that we value information that’s fast and consistent as much as we do. However, there is another reason for this: it is our fear of being left out. With how fast information is spread now, our

topics of conversation can change very quickly as well. It's of the utmost importance to my peers now that they stay up to date and connected because if they don't then they will miss something important. We worry that we will be isolated from our friends and classmates, something we all fear. We obsess over staying connected and up to date and this is why the 'Wifi' symbol exemplifies this because wifi is what allowed for this to occur.

Of course, connectivity allows us to campaign for causes we value therefore activism is another value that is very important to us. An item that symbolises this for me is the 'Megaphone'. This is because it is used at protests as a common sign of activism. My generation is very drawn to activism; an example of this is the 'climate strike' that occurred last May and last week. There are numerous reasons for this as I will explain in my next paragraph.

One reason for this is that we are no longer children. We have our own thoughts, views and opinions and we want the adults in our lives to know this and listen to what we have to say. This is why if we believe that an issue is not being taken seriously by our government or parents we will tell them and ask them to take it more seriously.

Another reason why we will speak out more if we have a problem with how issues are being dealt with is because we no longer fear adults. This has to do with our age and our upbringing. We are almost adults which means that we are beginning to talk to adults as equals not superiors but we never had the same fear of them instilled in us as children. When we were being brought up our disobedience would not have earned as strong a punishment from our parents and teachers. Teachers would never have hit us and parents would have stopped with the wooden spoon at a young age. Without as drastic a punishment for misbehaving as previous generations, we as a result do not fear adults as much as previous generations, so the megaphone represents our confident voices.

To follow on from how we, age group, value activism and independence, my age group also values inclusivity and progressive ideas. A symbol that personifies this to me is the 'rainbow' the symbol of the LGBTQ+ community and a perfect example and reason for why my generation value inclusivity.

We value inclusivity because as I mentioned in the last section we were raised in a different time a more progressive time. When we were children, the LGBTQ rights movement had already begun and had achieved a high level of acceptance. We were raised to view them as equals. I remember when the gay marriage referendum was happening, me and my friends and my sister all urged our parents to vote yes for no other reason than we thought it was right. Now that we are older and wiser about these issues and how some people are treated, we value inclusivity highly because of how strongly we believe in it and because of the time we were raised.

The last value that I want to write about is that of Friendship. The symbol I have chosen is the 'Celtic Claddagh Ring' not only because it literally symbolises friendship but also because of its Irish origins. As this essay is about my age group in Ireland, I thought it was fitting.

I personally believe that the thing that my age group values the most is friendship. Whether this be from our family, friends, teachers, neighbours or even pets. Friendship is what sustains us. Every time I walk down the corridor in school all I see is herds of people talking and enjoying each other's company. I think we value friendship and family so much because of the support and stability it can give us. As teenagers, we are going through a very stressful period of our lives. However, our friends are what are able to get us through this period as their support and companionship is all we need. It is no wonder that friendship is valued so highly by my age group in Ireland.

In conclusion, there are five of the most important values to my age group in Ireland and the five symbols I think represents them the best.