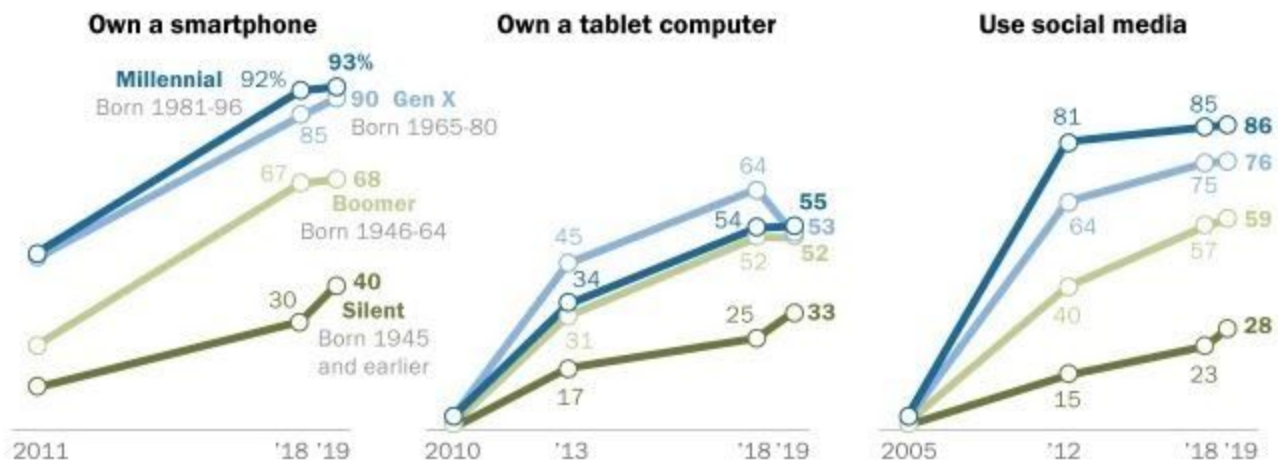Digital Sandwich Generation Part I

The Sandwich Generation is nothing new - people have been taking care of aging parents and growing children for centuries. The Digital Age adds extra emotional labor to care for your digital parents and connected kids. Librarians have been in "The Sandwich" for years - we may not have had a name for it, yet here we are. We serve babies to seniors in our libraries, and are trusted sources of information - especially now.

THE SANDWICH IN A NUTSHELL:

Millennials lead on some technology adoption measures, but Boomers and Gen Xers are also heavy adopters

% of U.S. adults in each generation who say they ...

Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8 - Feb. 7, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The "Traditional" Sandwich Generation - "a generation of people who are caring for their aging parents while supporting their own children." Merriam-Webster, 2019
https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sandwich%20generation

They go on to say the first known use of the term was in 1975, but this "generation" has been around since the beginning of civilization. Senior Living (2019) goes on to define 3 different "sandwiches" which are useful to librarians:

- **The Traditional Sandwich Generation** — Adults typically in their 40s or early 50s sandwiched between their elderly parents and their typically adult children who both need financial or **other** assistance.
- **The Club Sandwich Generation** — Older adults in their 50 or 60s who are wedged between aging parents, their adult children and possibly grandchildren. This term can also refer to younger adults in their 30s or 40s who have younger children, elderly parents and aging grandparents.
- **The Open Faced Sandwich Generation** — Anyone who's non-professionally involved in elder care, which is an estimated 25% of individuals at some point in their lives.

Financially, according to the Pew Research Center, "Nearly half (47%) of adults in their 40s and 50s have a parent age 65 or older and are either raising a young child or financially supporting a grown child (age 18 or older). And about one-in-seven middle-aged adults (15%) is providing financial support to both an aging parent and a child."

Also, Pew mentions, "Who is the sandwich generation? Its members are mostly middle-aged: 71% of this group is ages 40 to 59. An additional 19% are younger than 40 and 10% are age 60 or older. Men and women are equally likely to be members of the sandwich generation. Hispanics are more likely than whites or blacks to be in this situation. Three-in-ten Hispanic adults (31%) have a parent age 65 or older and a dependent child. This compares with 24% of whites and 21% of blacks."

The Digital Sandwich Generation - adults who are the computer/network/technical "specialist" in the family and **who have a vested interest in keeping people safe**.

By definition, this generation is NOT the 4-year-old of the family. They do not have the cognitive ability to be IN the sandwich, they ARE part of the sandwich.

Librarians, technically, best fit in the "Open Faced" Sandwich Generation, or OFSG. However, since we assist patrons of all ages, we also fit in the "Club" Sandwich Generation, too. We are constantly helping people with all sorts of issues, especially, of course, with information needs. As we have grown and incorporated everything from fiction books to newspapers and magazines, to movies in all their formats, we have moved into the Digital Sandwich as quietly as a mouse.

For this series, I'm going to explore my own history with this shift, and my career as a nontraditional librarian (is there really a "traditional librarian??"). I have not had to deal with cataloging or weeding a collection until very recently. I have, though, taught digital literacy since the turn of the century, and have managed a travelling training lab since 2009. It's been a wild ride!

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