

▼ Fay Weldon has looked at the plight of 'baffled, indignant millennials' for her new book

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'Today's young grow up into a violent, angry, unstable environment, unlikely to reach their full potential'

Fay Weldon
Author and teacher

Don't be beastly to millennials: their parents are to blame, says Fay Weldon

Dalya Alberge

It is unfair to deride millennials as "snowflakes" or to criticise them as over-sensitive, self-centred and ignorant, because it is their parents who are at fault, says Fay Weldon.

Weldon became a top advertising copywriter before moving to television drama and writing classic novels including *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, her cautionary tale of adultery.

Her latest novel, *After the Peace*, is the story of a child of the new millennium, Rozzie, described in the book as a "sperm bank baby". In one passage, Weldon writes of "poor, baffled, indignant, work-deprived, renting-not-owning millennials" who have

been let down by their "careless, stupid, smug" parents.

In an interview ahead of the novel's publication next month, the author said: "We should stop being beastly to the snowflakes - since we, their

forebears, left them with such a mess to clear up and no tools to deal with it. Today's young grow up into a violent, angry, unstable environment, all too likely to end up jobless, homeless and childless, unlikely to reach their full potential. They are probably the most despairing generation ever conceived. The least we can do is not add to their burden by slagging them off."

She added: "If the new millennials - at best dependent on the bank of mum and dad, at worst on benefits in a shrinking job market - should despise and hate the old, it's not surprising.

"We brought the millennials into this rather extraordinary, slightly insane world, and then they turn out to be what they are. Through the drug and money culture of their parents, we're landed with the product of what

is our fault."

In her novel, she refers to "a millennial for whom the past was an irrelevancy". She blames both parents and the education system for what she sees as a lack of understanding of history, saying: "They're not taught it, so how can they know? Teachers don't teach history, or only certain bits of history which they approve of. They know about Hitler, but absolutely nothing about Charles I."

Weldon, 87, also criticised parents who constantly tell their children how beautiful and clever they are, to give them "high esteem". It is instead giving them "low esteem", she says, observing that, when children cannot live up to such ideals, "they get depressed". She fears that the obsession with social media and selfies is

encouraging an unhealthy focus on their own being: "They see themselves as the centre of the universe."

Weldon teaches creative writing at Bath Spa University and describes millennial students as "really nice and very sensitive", noting that "they look after each other". But she added: "I don't think they like old people. We don't move fast. We get in their way. We pay with cash. We don't have smartphones and we criticise them."

The very term snowflake is unkind, Weldon argued. "I really understand why they don't want to hear other people's views, because they're battered with them all the time, 'Do this, do that, think this, think that'. They just think, 'I can't bear anybody else telling me what to think'."

In the past, she added, the older generation deserved some respect: "Now I don't think they do."

She pointed to what she perceives as the lack of morality in today's older generation, with politicians caught fiddling their expenses but refusing to resign and bankers who caused the 2008 financial crash not going to prison. "There's no punishment for anybody provided they can talk well" she says. "They're building their own morality."

She also spoke of a society blighted by "general stupidity and the frivolity of everything".

In her new novel, which takes the reader through the sixties to the millennium and beyond, she writes that millennials "seem to be in denial of anything pre-computer age ... never learn anything 'by heart', as we used to call it. Perhaps they don't have hearts in the way we did?" She refers to them as "merciless", putting "feelings above facts" and being obsessed with their imperfections.

Asked whether readers can assume that her characters reflect her own views, she said: "Yes, I think you always can ... It's not actually anti-millennial. It's just that we deserve the millennials."

