

Editor's Note

In his generational profile essay “Root of all Evil, Symbol of a Generation,” John Swanson offers a sarcastic yet thoughtful analysis of a cultural artifact—Axe Body Spray. He begins the essay discussing how we often define generations with “wars, movements, political shifts, musical trends, literary masterpieces and the like,” and then juxtaposes such weighty events with Axe Body Spray, a seemingly passé mass-produced product. How does this comparison set the tone for the essay? How does Swanson portray his generation (ex. lazy and sexualized)? As a member of the generation Swanson addresses, do you feel he accurately depicts you? This essay cannot be sufficiently examined without taking into account the influence of media. Can media tell us how to live, what is appropriate, what to buy? Do you have brand loyalty? Why? What factors contribute to brand loyalty?

What does original language such as, “The Man-Fumes of my generation” or “the real reason for the Great War on Guy Funk,” contribute to Swanson’s stylistic approach, and is such language appropriate for an argumentative profile? He uses quotations from interviews with his friends as evidence for his claim that the “Axe Effect” defines his generation. Is this evidence convincing? Why or why not? Though at first this essay may simply seem like a witty spin on generational typing, Swanson’s ideas have far-reaching and widespread implications about societal values and identity formation.

Root of All Evil, or Symbol of a Generation?

John Swanson

Generations are most often remembered for their significant events such as wars, movements, political shifts, musical trends, literary masterpieces, and the like. I have no doubts that such examples may one day be used to describe the generation in which I live. The last few years have been ones of significant shakeup: a major terrorist attack on our country, a war on terror began, and the beginning of a long-term overseas occupation. However, it was during these years that the Great War on Guy Funk began. An unsuspecting America was invaded in 2002 by a French-made body spray for men known as “Axe,” and the reverberations would be felt for years to come. As my friend Jennifer Garcia now observes, “Axe . . . is everywhere, I can’t seem to stop and smell the flowers anymore.” Although not every person in my generation uses or owns Axe Body Spray, the “Axe Effect,” as it is known, and its sudden widespread popularity speak great multitudes for both my generation and the values it will be remembered by.

Simply glancing at a can of Axe can reveal much about the generation to which it is marketed. The jet black, ergonomic cylinders are emblazoned with eye catching designs and colors and labeled with a mysterious font. Gone are the days of deodorants containing recognizable scents. The Man-Fumes of my generation are branded with exotic names like Clix, Touch, First Move, and All Nighter. The need for such extreme packaging does a wonderful job of symbolizing how impulsive my generation has become. We are more likely to sport a non-traditional tattoo or piercing than any generation before us, and we regularly purchase products without a second thought. A person is often defined by what decisions he makes, and a generation whose decision making ability is marred by impulsiveness will no doubt be remembered for it down the road.

Hand in hand with the impulsive nature of my generation walks our almost universal value of impatience. Mine is a generation of instant gratification reared on fast food and high-speed internet. Lucky for the Axe-Generation man, the body spray itself is both cheap and quick; for less than \$5.00 and the push of a button, any acrid Joe Schmo can blast himself with a scientifically formulated mist of faux-pheromones. The body spray has thus become a necessity to the modern, impatient teenage male. My friend Andrew Vongsady, a longtime user of Axe Body Spray, believes that "Axe is the new deodorant stick. You don't need to feel like you just put jelly or chalk in your armpits. If I can get it done within five seconds, I support it."

Andrew's statement leads into another value of my generation mirrored by Axe: laziness. Axe readily exploits this deadly sin in an effort to appease a much broader section of its target demographic. Nowadays, it is commonplace for young adults to spend hours surfing the internet, watching TV, and playing video games (Axe is coincidentally advertised in many video games, including *Ghost Recon* and *Splinter Cell*). Even the act of taking a shower is often shirked as being too difficult. Many guys douse themselves with body sprays after an intense workout to hide the smell, while others like Andrew "use Axe/TAG if I need to hide a three day no-shower-period." While it is doubtless that this is not the intended purpose of such body sprays, the willingness to forgo simple measures of personal hygiene is something that can be attributed to how lazy my generation has grown.

However, as significant as impatience and laziness are to a perception of my generation, they cannot hold a candle to our most widely held belief—the real reason for the Great War on Guy Funk: my generation's widespread acceptance of sexuality. As my friend Katelyn Cottle observes, "I believe the amount, if we were to measure, of attraction between boys and girls is the same as it's ever been; it's just more and more public and blatant now." I hold few doubts as to whether the male deodorant market would survive in a world without females to impress. The advertisements of such body sprays make no effort to hide this widespread opinion. According to

TIME magazine, Axe has spent more than \$100 million in advertisements since its launch five years ago. Many of these ads warn my generation of the “Axe Effect”—the tragic mauling of Axe-wearing men by ridiculously gorgeous women. The message sent out by the makers of modern body spray is that promiscuous sex is necessary for a complete life, and body spray is necessary for promiscuous sex.

While it would take someone of extreme stupidity to believe such messages as fact, there lies some kernel of truth behind these messages. “Women are attracted to hot guys who smell good. This is not over the top—it’s true. A million girls flocking to one man dousing himself in Axe, however over exaggerated, gets the point across,” says Katelyn. Axe Body Spray may be a product targeted at men, but the way women respond to such pleasant smelling men is something unique to my generation. According to *Marketwire*, 77% of women say body odor is the number one deal-breaker when considering a date, while 50% of women would consider a good smelling guy for a date, even if he isn’t her type. Sixty-two percent of women will admit to having stolen a man’s shirt because they loved how it smelled. Eighty percent of women would rather sleep with a sexually inexperienced partner who smells good than a well-experienced man who smells bad. With statistics and opinions like these, why would any man of my generation risk *not* owning a can?

It has always been true that men are willing to go great lengths to grab attention of the opposite sex, but the risks of wearing Axe also symbolize how far men of my generation are willing to venture in that pursuit. According to the *Natural Skincare Authority*, each time a man smothers himself in Axe Body Spray, he is also spraying himself with Butane, a chemical that has been scientifically linked to certain forms of cancer. To many this would seem bad enough, but Axe Body Spray also contains Denatured Alcohol. This wonderful drying agent has been known to cause birth defects and infertility. The irony of this fact is not lost on my longtime friend and body spray critic Keegan O’Mara, who told me, “I think it is wonderful to imagine a world where people who use Axe regularly cannot reproduce.”

Axe is both a product and a smell unique to my generation, and it won’t be going away any time soon. According to *TIME* magazine, Axe controls 83% of the lucrative \$180 million body spray industry, and sales just keep growing. While the exact number of those who fell victim to “the Axe Effect” may never truly be known, the cultural impact and significance of body sprays on the whole will forever be remembered to those who experienced them firsthand. Luckily, those values and traits symbolized in Axe Body Spray are not the only ones held by my generation. It’s always easier to remember someone for their negative qualities, but is it fair to label an entire generation in such terms? My generation’s legacy will hopefully depend on more than just our impulsiveness, impatience, laziness, and sexually overt behaviors. The sense of smell

may be the strongest one tied to memory, but as Katelyn mused, “how [has our generation] made this earth a better earth? That’s what will ultimately define us.”

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