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Forty Years After Woodstock, A Gentler Generation Gap

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EXCERPT

Which Generation Has Better Values?

The generations agree that big differences exist between the values of the older and younger generations. But whose values are better? The survey asked that question of those who said the generations differed on any of four core values: work ethic, moral values, respect for others and tolerance of different races and other groups.

The public's judgment is unmistakable on three of the four values tested. Regardless of age, about two-thirds or more of the public believes that older Americans are superior in terms of their moral values, respect for others and work ethic. The younger generation is viewed as being more socially tolerant, though the verdict is less one-sided.

Overall, nearly three-quarters (74%) believe that older adults have the superior work ethic. Moreover, this belief bridges the generational divide: Young people agree with their parents' and grandparents' generations that older adults have a better work ethic (68% for those under 30 vs. 73% for those 50 and older). It's the 30-somethings and those in early middle age who appear to offer the harshest assessment of young people: About eight-in-ten of those ages 30 to 49 judge the older generation to have better attitudes toward work and a job.

Similarly, seven-in-ten adults say older people have better moral values than the younger generation, a judgment shared by 66% of all young adults and 69% of adults ages 50 and older.

About seven-in-ten adults also believe the older generation is more respectful of others (71%), an assessment that is made by 67% of respondents younger than 30 and 69% of those 50 and older. Again, early middle-aged adults and those slightly younger appear to offer the harshest assessment of young people: About three-quarters of those 30 to 49 say the older generation is more respectful.

The story is different on one value tested -- social tolerance. By a ratio of more than two-to-one, young people are viewed as being more tolerant of races and groups different from their own than the older generation (47% vs. 19%). Again, the generations are in general agreement: a 55% majority of young adults say their generation is more tolerant, while somewhat more than a third (37%) of all adults 50 and older share that view.