

**GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH**



Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/ Polimetrix  
**Coming of Age in America**  
Part II

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## Coming of Age in America, Part II

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### Executive Summary

**America is changing profoundly.** In the 1950s, 80 percent of all Americans lived in a home where the head of household was married. Now, that number stands at 52 percent. The number of young people growing up in single-parent households has jumped from 10 percent in the boomer generation to the current figure of 26 percent.<sup>1</sup>

A majority of Generation Y will have seen one of their parents leave the household before they graduate high school, and many will only ever live with one, if any, of their parents. Even those who grew up in a two-parent household grew up in a new kind of family. Unlike middle and upper class boomers, this generation watched their mothers go to work in the morning. 87 percent of young people in this study remember their mothers working.

This is the second part of our on-going investigation into Gen-Y. In this study, we explore the family life of Generation Y: how they were raised, who they were raised by, their closeness to their parents, and the potential impact of this family life on their politics, world-view, and their perceptions of family and marriage.<sup>2</sup>

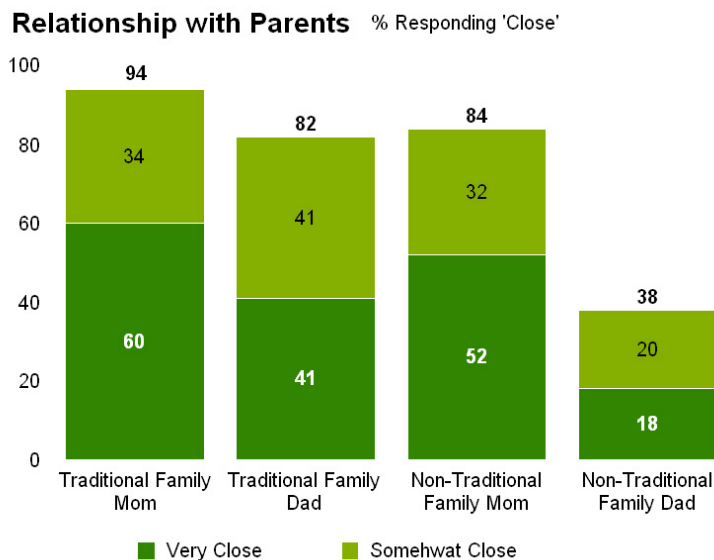
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<sup>1</sup> Based on U.S. Census data.

<sup>2</sup> The survey sample is a nationally representative Internet sample, created by matching Polimetrix panelists to demographic characteristics among randomly selected records of 18-24 year olds in the 2003 American Community Survey (ACS) dataset. During the one-week fielding period a total of three contacts were made with respondents. In all, 13,000 invitations were emailed and 892 respondents completed the Internet survey yielding an in-panel response rate of 6.9 percent. Internet surveys use, by necessity, non-probability based sampling methods and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.

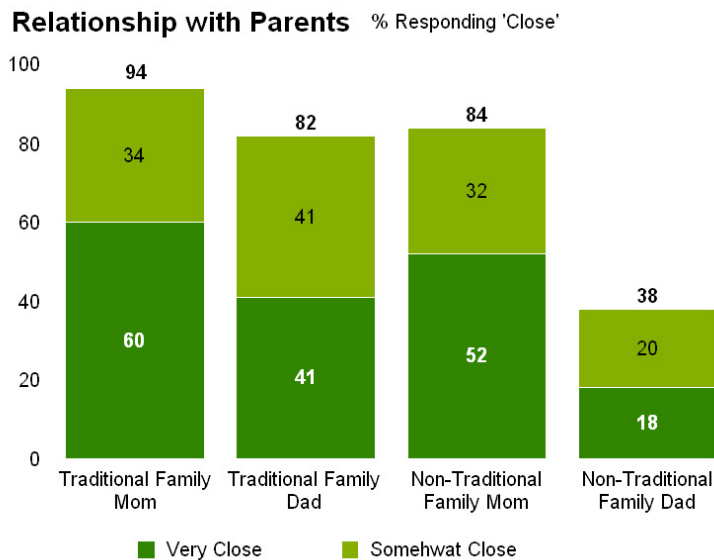
## The Kids Are All Right

- Most of Gen-Y recall a happy childhood and close relationship with their parents.** In contrast to the stereotypes of a generation brooding alone over their computers in dank basements, an overwhelming majority of Gen-Y (91 percent) report a happy childhood; four in ten (43 percent) describe their childhood as being very happy. Importantly, both young people in families with married parents (“traditional” families: 96 percent happy) and unmarried parents (“non-traditional” families<sup>3</sup>: 84 percent happy) describe their childhood in similar terms, but the disparity in intensity is significant. 54 percent very happy among traditionally raised Gen-Yers; just 28 percent among non-traditional Gen-Yers. In all likelihood, this outcome reflects the economic struggles of single-parent households.
- Gen-Y Closer to Mom than Dad, Even Among Traditional Families.** Overall, 90 percent of Generation Y describe their relationship with their mother as close and 65 percent describe their relationship with their father the same way. Among non-traditional families, 84 percent describe their relationship with their mother as close, but there is a wider gap between non-traditional and traditional youth when it comes to dads (surely this is related to the fact that most single headed households are headed by women<sup>4</sup>). But even among traditional households, we see a significant difference emerge in parental relationships with mothers and fathers.



<sup>3</sup> We define traditional as young people who report that their parents are “still married” and non-traditional as young people who report parents either divorced, separated or never married. This terminology is not intended to be normative, only to note that the model of households with married parents with young children are less prevalent than in the past.

<sup>4</sup> Ninety percent (90 percent) of Gen-Y raised in a non-traditional household were raised by their mothers.



## Gen Y on Marriage: Triumph of Hope over Experience?

- Gen-Y's Approach to Marriage Reflects Some Idealism.** More cynical views surface when we raise the *institution* of marriage. A 57 percent majority recognize a demographic reality: "The institution of marriage is dying in this country." Just 25 percent disagree with this statement. Only half agree that marriage is one of the most important institutions in this country. Notably, both traditionally raised and non-traditionally raised young people draw the same conclusion. Less than half disagree with the argument, "You see so few happy marriages today that you begin to question it as a way of life," (35 percent agree, 45 percent disagree), though here we see a significant difference among traditionally raised (28 percent agree, 52 percent disagree) and non-traditionally raised (45 percent agree, 34 percent disagree) young people.

The end result not only suggests a more cynical approach to marriage but, importantly, a generation that suspends judgment about other people's choices regarding family and marriage. A 58 percent majority of Gen-Y supports gay marriage. Similarly, 59 percent agree (68 percent among non-traditionally raised young people) with the statement, "It is alright for a couple to live together without intending to get married."

- When it Comes to Marriage, Gen-Y Women Are Less Conventional and More Cynical Than Men** Most interesting, the women of Gen-Y lead the generation's redefinition of marriage. While more eager to get married themselves (55 percent in the next five years, compared to 42 percent among men), they are less likely to believe parents must be married (50 percent, compared to 63 percent among men), much more likely to question marriage as a way of life (45 percent, compared to 26 percent among men) and more discouraged about prospects in their peer group (49 percent believe most of the men they know are not responsible enough to get married, compared to 38 percent of men who hold the same view of women they know).

■ **Table 1:** Views on Marriage (percent agreeing)

### Views on Marriage

	% Agree	
	Men	Women
It is alright for a couple to live together without intending to get married	56	63
People who want children ought to get married	63	50
Most of the single men/women I know are not responsible enough to get married	38	49
You see so many unhappy marriages that you begin to question it as a way of life	26	45

## Progressive World View Ascendant in Generation Y

- Socially Tolerant Generation Distinguished from Parents and Grandparents.**  
 Generation Y leans Democratic in its political worldview (John Kerry won 56 percent of Generation Y). Part of the explanation lies in the greater racial diversity among this age cohort. But it is also possible that the conservative emphasis on cultural conflict – especially around the issues of family and marriage – has something to do with this trend. The GOP may simply just not speak to young people who are more open to different kinds of partnerships and family arrangements.

Certainly, Gen-Y's approach to "social" issues, generally speaking, reflects a progressive bias and this disposition is more intense among young people emerging from non-traditional upbringings. Their upbringing may have rendered this population less judgmental and more tolerant than other young people and Americans of older generations.

We see this most vividly illustrated in this generations' approach to gay marriage (58 percent favor, compared to roughly 30 percent of the rest of the nation).<sup>5</sup> Among non-traditional households, support grows to 66 percent. Even more striking, 82 percent of these young people know at least one gay individual and a third counts a gay or lesbian as a "close friend." Support for gay marriage grows symmetrically with the number of gay or lesbian friends and associates in an individual's life.

■ **Table 2:** Views on Gay Marriage (percent agreeing)

<sup>5</sup> The 30 percent figure reflects multiple studies including Gallup, Pew, CBS among others. The precise number changes depending on the wording of the question and the population in the sample (voter versus general population), but in the most recent polling, gay marriage consistently finds support in the low thirties.

### Views on Gay Marriage

<i>Number of gay people respondent knows</i>	<b>% Favor</b>
More than 10	75
7-10	69
3-6	57
2 or less	35
None	55