

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH



Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/ Polimetrix
Coming of Age in America
Part I

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Executive Summary

Formative moments in the lives of each American generation shape how they will view the world around them. America's next generation of adults, Gen-Y, observed the Clinton Administration, the Columbine shooting and September 11th. These collective experiences, along with more personal life events, sculpt a distinct world-view in this generation. **The result: a generation that loudly asserts its individualism, yet shares common views of tolerance and community.** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, in conjunction with Polimetrix, present an ongoing series of studies designed to understand the lives of young Americans as they make the transition to adulthood. As this survey shows, the individualistic personal goals and dreams of Gen-Y often clash with their values and world-view, forcing them to negotiate their principles as they chart a path for their own future.

Generation Y's complex bargain between goals and reality can appear at times paradoxical. As the realities of life begin to test the values of Generation Y, they are forced to make compromises. They are individualistic, but still want to be completely connected. They want jobs with good money, but also want jobs they love. Gen-Yers believe college education is important to success, but not enough by itself. They describe themselves as patriotic, but their patriotism seems sometimes conditional, particularly when it comes to military service. With the internet, cell phones, and PDAs, this is the most inter-connected generation in history, but above all else, they value their privacy. As has often been the case, they present a more progressive political outlook than older generations, but we can also see conservative thinking beginning to choke back their idealism.

The study provides a pioneering snapshot of the growing process. In this and future surveys, we will explore the attributes and attitudes that make Generation Y the most unique in American society. As this generation becomes the face of America, GQR and Polimetrix plan to follow the process and present a series of findings on America's youth. Our first in the series is an

Internet survey of 1,292 Americans between 18 and 25 conducted between April 21st and 28th, 2005 with a margin of error of +/-2.7.¹

Getting Ahead in America

For now, Generation Y puts personal satisfaction over compensation

- **For young people, a good job means doing something you love...** For youth seeking work, the most important factor, by far, is finding a job they enjoy (60 percent). Others say the most important factors are making a good amount of money (17 percent) and having an opportunity to advance (11 percent). Despite a national discussion on health care and Social Security, youth do not worry about good health benefits (3 percent) or retirement benefits (1 percent) when looking for a job. For youth, a job they enjoy does not include traveling; in fact, a majority calls travel one of the *least* important factors in a good job (55 percent). This generation, at least for now, seems fairly well sheltered from the economic downturn of the past several years, *but...*
- **Money grows as a priority with maturity.** As financial responsibilities grow more pressing, Gen-Yers look for money. Young people who call themselves mature adults are a little less concerned about enjoying their job (48 percent) and more concerned about making good money (26 percent) than the rest of the population. Groups with pronounced economic concerns also prioritize a good salary in a job – married youth (28 percent), Hispanics (29 percent) and youth who did not finish high school (28 percent).

Generation Y Seeks More Education to Achieve Goals

- **A college education is not what it used to be.** Younger Americans overwhelmingly agree that a college education is not enough to guarantee a good living (72 percent); rather it is an essential step on a journey that may necessarily include post-graduate training. Only 31 percent agree that they have enough education to fulfill their goals. Clear majorities of youth feel they need to return to school for more training (82 percent). Even 89 percent of college graduates agree they want more education. But getting ahead is not solely about book smarts; it is about street smarts and attitude. Only 36 percent of Gen-Yers believe that a college education is the one thing that helps someone succeed. An equal number believe that a good work ethic is the most helpful attribute, while an additional 20 percent believe success is about knowing the right people.

¹ The survey sample was a nationally representative Internet sample, created by a matching technique in which Polimetrix panelists are matched to characteristics among randomly selected records of 18-25 year olds in the 2003 American Community Survey (ACS) dataset. The survey is not based on a probability sample. During the one-week field period three contacts were made with respondents. A total of 13,725 invitations were emailed and 1,292 respondents completed the Internet survey yielding an in-panel response rate of 9.4%. For further details, visit our website:

■ **Table 2:** Views on Education and Success

Views on Education and Success

	% Agree	% Disagree
One day, I would like to go back to school	82	16
A college education is no longer enough to guarantee a good living in this economy	72	28
Almost anyone who needs financial help to go to college can get loans or financial aid	66	34
I am not making nearly as much money as I thought I would at this point in my life	41	57
I have enough education to fulfill my goals	31	69
Thinking about the high cost of college these days, it is simply no longer worth it	26	73

Growing Up in America

Despite the legal definition of an adult being 18 years, many youth do not consider themselves “adults,” but those who do share a high self-esteem and financial independence.

- **Only 17 percent consider themselves fully mature adults.** Asked to place themselves on a continuum of adulthood, 17 percent describe themselves as fully adult (10 on a scale of 0 to 10). Another 44 percent give themselves an eight or nine on the scale. Considering oneself an adult is not necessarily shaped by life cycle events. There is little statistical difference between the number of self-labeled adults who are married or have children and the rest of young people. Rather, financial independence drives self-professed maturity.
- **Adults are confident, engaged and financially independent.** Adults have a strong self-esteem; they are more likely to label themselves healthy and good-looking. Far more read about politics and technology, signaling that they connect with what’s going on in the world. Adults support themselves financially and are employed - many started their financial independence early. Adults were twice as likely to work through college to cover the majority their education costs.
- **Adults are more conservative.** Adults are also distinct ideologically. Adults are the only group for which a plurality calls itself conservative, while almost a majority of the least mature youth call themselves liberal. This ideological disposition may be linked to religion. Over half of all adults describe themselves as religious, while less mature youth are also less likely to call themselves religious. The data here suggests that political loyalties of this

generation may evolve as these voters mature. That Kerry won Generation Y voters in 2004 does not mean that progressives can count on their votes in the future.

- **Adults are focused and driven for work.** For adults, financial independence also brings a different attitude toward work. They are more likely to believe a good work ethic is the key to career success. Self-identified adults want a job that allows them to advance. Even their leisure time is more financially driven: they use the Internet for online banking, but not for gaming or blogging.

■ **Table 1:** Adults

Profile of Adults

	Adult (10)	Verge (8-9)	Close (6-7)	Nope (0-5)
% of total	17	44	25	14
Self-Ascribed Attributes				
Healthy Person	74	68	48	42
Support Self Financially	70	68	58	64
Patriotic	70	59	50	52
Read About Politics	70	57	54	44
Good Looking	57	56	36	24
Religious	51	38	34	30
Read About Technology	46	37	21	30
Own Too Much Stuff	28	23	19	17
Life Events				
Married	32	29	32	31
Parents	48	48	41	43
Work Status				
Student	43	47	65	58
Employed	57	54	32	18
Work Through School	20	11	1	0
Ideology				
Conservative	38	34	21	27
Moderate	25	19	22	17
Liberal	33	37	49	52
Important for Job				
Enjoying My Job	48	54	67	61
Making Good Money	26	26	10	19
Opportunity to Advance	14	11	7	7

Connected, But Unplugged

Gen Y enjoys the convenience that technology offers, but they want their privacy.

- **Youth take technology on the move.** Young people stay mobile with laptops, handheld wireless devices and MP3 players. Over 80 percent have cell phones and 22 percent use them as their only phone. They also use their phones for text messaging (38 percent) and taking pictures (16 percent). But youth also draw lines in their cell phone usage. Potential new uses for cell phones such as receiving news, coupons or checking movie listings do not appeal to them. Likewise, in the world of entertainment, youth will pay to download music, but they are not as interested in podcasting or paying to downloading movies...yet.
- **The most connected and exposed generation in history also wants its privacy.** Eight-in-ten are concerned about the privacy of the information they give out on the Internet. This concern seems more driven by identify theft than embarrassment alla Paris Hilton and her Sidekick. Fifty-eight percent of youth say they place a higher value on privacy on the Internet than on convenience (41 percent), attitudes that arguably stand in conflict with their voracious use of technology.

■ **Table 2:** Youth Using Technology

Technology Usage

	% Use
Cell phone	83
Discman or Walkman	65
Laptop computer	42
Handheld device that connects to the internet	37
MP3 player or iPod	32
Handheld videogame player	26
PDA	16
Pager	3

■ **Table 3:** Youth Using Technology (percent)

Technology Usage

	Everyday/Few Times a Week	Few times a month/year	Never
Use instant messaging	67	18	14
Read "blogs" on the Internet	43	35	22
Use online banking	43	23	33
Text message using a cellular phone	38	29	33
Play games on the Internet	34	44	23
Take a picture with a cellular phone	16	28	56
Use online dating services	3	10	86

Developing Progressive Values

Generation Y more tolerant and less judgmental than prior generations

- Tolerance and privacy trump “moral values” for Gen-Y.** While September 11th may have sparked an isolationist or anti-immigrant backlash among many Americans, Gen-Y adopts a different view. Our youngest citizens want a more connected world in the face of 9/11 (55 percent) instead of tighter borders (44 percent). In fact, these youth support a more open society. Clear majorities of younger Americans (58 percent) agree that the country needs “to work harder at accepting and tolerating people who are different, particularly gays” rather than “work harder at upholding traditional values” (42 percent). Along with their individualism and their desire for tolerance, youth also adamantly oppose a governmental role in personal decisions. Sixty-four percent agree that the President and Republicans are “going too far by invading peoples’ personal lives and family decisions.” Far fewer accept that Republicans are “trying to uphold moral values” (36 percent).
- Gen-Y no more supportive of abortion than other generations, but may be less judgmental.** Young Americans hold that abortion should remain legal by a 56 to 44 percent margin, statistically even with the national average of 55 to 42.² Personal exposure to abortion informs their belief (64 percent know someone who has had an abortion), which may not change their overall support for a woman’s right to choose, but may diminish the judgment about abortion. In fact, 65 percent of Gen-Yers say that a woman “has her reasons for having an abortion” and should not be judged for that decision. Only 22 percent call abortion “immoral.”

² Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool’s Exit Polls conducted on November 2, 2004.

■ **Table 4:** Abortion

Opinion on Abortion by Gender

	Total	Men	Women
Legal in All Cases	23	18	28
Legal in Most Cases	33	38	28
Illegal in Most Cases	28	28	28
Illegal in All Cases	16	17	16
Total Legal	56	55	56
Total Illegal	44	45	44

	Total	Men	Women
She has her reasons/ Cannot judge	65	58	71
She is acting immorally	22	24	19
She must have acted irresponsibly without birth control	14	17	10

- **Gen-Y offers conditional patriotism.** A majority of youth call themselves patriotic, but this generation does not define patriotism as a martial virtue. While 56 percent of 18 to 25 year olds call themselves patriotic, only 31 percent of this age group is willing to serve in the military and only 12 percent is very willing. They further argue that the most appropriate response for a stretched military is to scale back the number of deployed troops rather than to institute a draft.
- **Caution on military service and draft linked to the war in Iraq.** The Iraq War erodes the patriotic instincts of this generation. Sixty-three percent believe the Iraq War is “not worth the cost of U.S. lives and dollars” and 64 percent believe that it is not a part of the war on terrorism. This represents a sea change for Generation Y. When America first entered Iraq, younger people were some of the war’s biggest supporters and now they are among its biggest detractors.³ Over time, support for the war fell and their patriotism, as least defined by support for the military, fell with it. Revealingly, over 80 percent of young Americans who think the war is worth the cost or part of the war on terrorism are willing to join the service and would reinstitute the draft. The same number of youth who disagree with the war are unwilling to serve (85 percent) and want to cut back deployment (85 percent).
- **Youth prefer internationalism.** A majority of younger Americans prefer an interconnected world (55 percent) to isolationist goals (44 percent). Furthermore, a majority believes that

³ In Democracy Corps surveys conducted in June of 2003 and May of 2005, voters under 30 fell from 61 percent saying the war was worth the cost (39 percent war not worth it) to 46 percent who say it is worth the cost (47 percent say it is not worth it).

the “go it alone” agenda of the current administration has not made us safer from a terrorist attack.

■ **Table 5:** War in Iraq

Opinion on the War in Iraq

	%
The war in Iraq is NOT part of the war on terrorism	64
The war in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism	36
	%
The war in Iraq was NOT worth the cost of U.S. lives and dollars	63
The war in Iraq was worth the cost of U.S. lives and dollars	37