

New survey on eve of Woodstock anniversary shows 'generation gap' has widened but softened

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Lee Houskeeper remembers sitting on the stage at Woodstock 40 years ago this week, thinking that the sea of young people represented a generation coming into its own.

And its values were very different from those of his father's generation. "If your parents didn't like it, you loved it," said Houskeeper, who helped coordinate artists for the legendary festival in an upstate New York field and is now a 61-year-old publicist in San Francisco.

As America marks the 40th anniversary of a moment when youth culture crystallized in the 1960s, a flash point in "the generation gap," a surprising national survey suggests that the divide between how young people and their elders view the world has actually grown since Woodstock.

Yet the new survey from the Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project finds a far "gentler" generation gap today, with fewer people seeing those differences as cause for angst. The survey of 1,815 people found that the strongest divides in society aren't between the generations, but between immigrants and the native-born, the poor and rich, and blacks and whites.

And where the young baby boomers of the 1960s saw themselves as a moral force, ready to restore the ideals their parents' generation had "sold out," the Pew survey found the mantle of moral authority has flipped. Younger and older adults agree: A generation that once warned against trusting anyone over age 30 has moral values superior to today's youth.

"In effect, that younger generation was saying, 'We've got a better way,' " Paul Taylor, director of the Pew project, said of the friction between generations in the Woodstock era. "Today's youth are saying, 'Yeah, we're different than mom and dad, but no reason to get upset about it.' "

Another Pew study this year found 79 percent of Americans feel there are major divides in the viewpoints of younger and older adults — up from 74 percent in 1969. But while most people surveyed see "big differences" in terms of the use of technology, work ethic and moral values, Taylor added, "what we have here is a portrait of generations that have found a way to disagree, without being disagreeable."

Stronger moral values

Pablo Lopez, 14, of San Jose, says that while his parents don't know how to text or download music, they have stronger moral values, both because of their age and the times in which they grew up.

"I think because older people are more mature than us and understand situations more than us, we don't see the value in life, because we are just teenagers," he said. "We are more into ourselves than other people."

Nearly half of those under 30 don't even know what Woodstock was, the survey found, but the baby boomers' music — rock — has gone mainstream. An anthem of rebellion once vilified by many Americans — rock was the least-liked musical genre in 1966 — has become America's most popular music, according to the Pew survey, a telephone sample taken between July 20 and Aug. 2.

Nathanael Fairchild, a 20-year-old college student from San Jose, sees irony in what has become of the Woodstock generation.

"Woodstock was kind of like an anarchy thing. It's kind of funny: Most people who were at Woodstock are now 'the Man,'" Fairchild said.

Youth, then and now

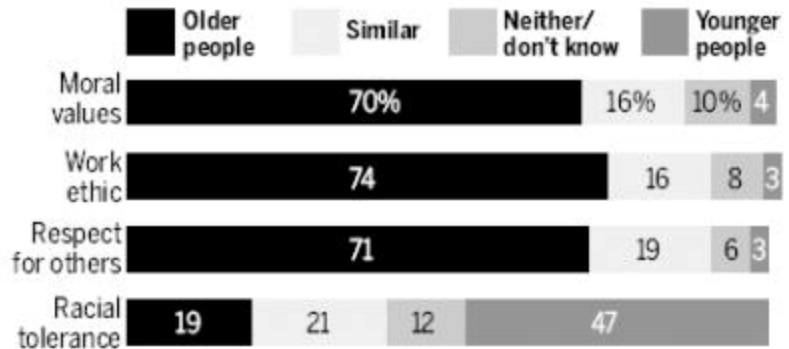
The 1960s was a time when there was a literal "youth explosion." Nearly 1 in 3 three Americans were in their 20s at the time of Woodstock; just one in seven Americans are now. The number of young adults between age 20 and 25 had surged by 52 percent between 1960 and 1970, as those born in the post-World War II boom came of age.

Forty years after Woodstock

How attitudes between older and younger people have changed since the late 1960s.

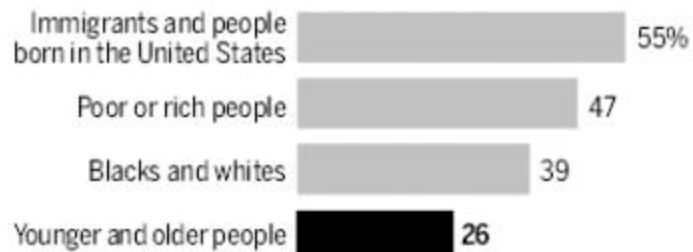
Older generation more moral, younger more racially tolerant

Respondents from all age groups were asked who had the better of the following values: Young people or older people?



Generation gap not a strong issue

The conflict between the older and younger generation during the time of Woodstock is not the main conflict today. Percentage from all age groups saying there are "very strong" or "strong" conflicts between...



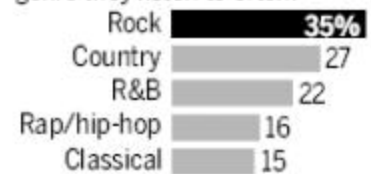
What's Woodstock?

About 46% of people 16-29 years old do not know what Woodstock was. Percent giving correct answers.



Rock on

Back in 1966, 44% of adults said they disliked rock. Today, it is the most often listened-to genre. Percent of all adults saying genre they listen to often:



Source: Pew Research Center poll of 1,815 adults ages 16 and older on July 20-Aug. 2. Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 5.3 percentage points.

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But despite their commitment to change, the youth of the Woodstock era were a far more homogeneous group in terms of race and national origin than today's young.

Nearly 90 percent of 20- to 24-year-olds were white at the time of the 1970 census, which was released about half a year after Woodstock. Today, the figure is closer to 60 percent. Then, less than 5 percent of the nation's population was foreign-born, less than half the rate today.

With so many of today's young people growing up with people from other races and cultures, it's tougher to have the same monolithic values that can generate conflict between generations, said Maddy Dychtwald, co-founder of San Francisco-based Age Wave, a think tank that focuses on the demographics of generations.

"My class pretty much all looked like I did," said Dychtwald, a baby boomer. But things had changed tremendously when her kids went to high school and college. "I think that is a huge difference."

Dychtwald said there also was a sharp difference in levels of education between the baby boomers and their parents — particularly for women. That gap is much less significant between the boomers and their children.

Gathering of 'hippies'

Houskeeper was a kid who saw his life take a "hard left turn" when he came to California and met a singer and poet named Jim Morrison, who formed The Doors and for whom Housekeeper would become an agent.

Wednesday, Houskeeper will gather in San Francisco with a dozen "old hippies" and musicians who were at Woodstock, including Barry Melton of Country Joe & The Fish and Lester Chambers of the Chambers Brothers band, to promote a 40th anniversary Woodstock concert planned in Golden Gate Park for Oct. 25.

Somebody else will be there: 28-year-old Catherine Hill, a Canadian writer and musician who will be taking notes for a book she is writing about the values and experiences of the Woodstock generation. The book is not being written for nostalgia, Hill said this week, but with a critical eye to what her generation might learn from the failures and successes of the boomers.

With Housekeeper, who has become a friend, as a source for meeting '60s musicians, Hill said the Pew survey rings true about the strength of the moral values of many old hippies she's met. She sometimes feels she was born 30 years too late.

"I didn't identify with my generation," she said, "because I didn't feel like there was anything really meaningful for me to grasp onto."

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