

Appendix

Social Values Across Generations

Introduction

This study focused on the social values of Canada's Millennial generation, and how this can help us better understand these individuals as they navigate adulthood in such areas as life goals, careers and engagement with their community. What is also relevant is how the social values of Millennials as a whole compare with those of previous generations, and in particular their Boomer parents and the Gen-Xers just ahead of them, both today and when they were themselves young. Are the social values most prominent among Millennials today largely the same as those driving previous generations of youth (reflecting this particular life stage), or is there something distinctive about Millennials that marks them as new, which may provide important signals about how society is evolving?

This question was addressed through secondary analysis of existing data on the social values of Canadians from the ongoing research program conducted by the Environics research company. The data are drawn from:

- A national survey of Canadians conducted in 2016, from which a comparison of current social values can be made across generations (Millennials, Gen-Xers, Boomers, Elders); and
- Earlier surveys conducted over the past three decades which measured the social values of Boomers and Gen-Xers when they were themselves young adults.¹

Results

The analysis reveals that Millennials in many respects share much in common with the two previous generations of Canadians. There are predictable life cycle differences, as young adults tend to be more oriented toward exploration and risk taking, the pursuit of novelty, status recognition, and new technology. But in terms of life goals, career aspirations, and community engagement, Millennials do not appear to differ all that much from their parents and grandparents.

Where Canadian Millennials do stand out from previous generations when they were young is in their adaptability to complexity, having a flexible definition of family, embracing multiculturalism and a global consciousness (while also more xenophobic), and being more accepting of authority.

In the face of challenging economic climate, Millennials are notably optimistic about their lives generally and their long term financial prospects. At the same they are also more concerned about their finances than Gen-Xers were at their age (a legacy of the last financial crisis), and perhaps for this reason are also more focused on the principle of saving and being discriminating consumers. Finally, Millennials as a whole are more likely than the two previous generations to lack life goals and to feel alienated from society, an emerging social trend most clearly evident among Lone Wolves.

The results reveal three broad categories that show how the social values of Millennials compare with those of previous generations in different ways (definitions of the social values identified are provided below). This analysis identifies the notable differences in social values across generations based on the available data, but does not address the potential meaning or significance of these patterns (this may be the topic of future Environics publications).

¹ This analysis included only those social values constructs that have been measured consistently over the time periods covered, which is a subset of the constructs included in the 2016 research. As well, the comparisons are based on comparing each generation at ages 27 to 36 (a subset of the full cohort), based on what data are available.

1. Social values on which Millennials stand out that have consistently reflected young adulthood

There are a number of social values on which Millennials today are clearly stronger or weaker than older Canadians, which largely reflect their stage of life as being young adults establishing themselves in the world. That is, these values that also stood out for Boomers and Gen-Xers in a similar way when they were young adults.

This includes a number of social values on which Millennials are notably stronger than older generations that typify the coming-of-age of youth, such as *Pursuit of Intensity*, *Penchant for Risk*, *Pursuit of Novelty*, *Acceptance of Violence*, *Sexual Permissiveness*, *Pursuit of Originality*, and *Personal Creativity*.

Millennials are also weaker than older Canadians on the values of *Duty* and *Religiosity*, both today, and reflecting a generation difference that applied to Gen-Xers and Boomers when they themselves were young.

2. Social values on which Millennials stand out, but less so than for previous generations of youth

This category includes a number of values that in the past young adults have been stronger or weaker than older Canadians, but where Millennials appear to be less different than Gen-Xers and Boomers were when they were young. An example is *Rejection of Authority*: This is a value in which youth have typically been stronger than older Canadians, but Millennials do not stand out as much as Gen-Xers or Boomers (that is, there is a smaller gap than in the past between youth and older Canadians).

There is another set of social values that in the past have been weaker among young adults than older Canadians, but where the gap is now smaller when it comes to Millennials. This category includes the values *Financial Concern*, *Utilitarian Consumerism*, *Discriminating Consumerism* and *Saving on Principle*. These are values on which Millennials today are weaker than their elders, but where the gap between young and old is smaller than when Gen-Xers were young adults; this may well reflect the lasting impact of the 2008-09 financial crisis and resulting recession, when Millennials were coming of age.

A similar pattern can be observed with three other social values, *Fulfillment through Work*, *National Pride* and *Community Involvement*. These are values in which young Boomers and Gen-Xers were noticeably weaker than older Canadians, but today this generation gap is now smaller; that is, Millennials are more likely than the two previous generations of youth to be closer to their elders in the emphasis given to these values.

3. Social values on which Millennials stand out most clearly from previous generations

On some social values, Millennials clearly stand out from older Canadians in a way that is not a function of youth, and which reflects a departure from the pattern observed with Boomers and Gen-Xers when they were young adults.

In particular, Millennials are stronger on the values of *Adaptability to Complexity*, *Flexible Families* and *Anomie and Aimlessness* (this last case reflecting the emergence of the Lone Wolves tribe, which does not have a clear pedigree from Boomer or Gen-X tribes).

Not surprisingly, Millennials are somewhat more likely than their elders to be strong on the value *Enthusiasm for Technology*, although there is less of a generation gap on this value than one might expect (gender appears to play a stronger role, with men much more predominant on this value than women in each generation). At the same time, Millennials today are also more likely than Gen-Xers were as youth to be strong on the contrary value of *Technology Anxiety*, which measures concerns about the broader social and ethical implications of advancing technology, in comparison with the personal benefits.

Finally, Millennials stand out from older Canadians today in being stronger on the value of *Multiculturalism* (in part reflecting the ethnically diverse composition of this cohort), and much more so than Gen-Xers did when they were young (there is no data available for Boomers). At the same time, Millennials today are similar to older generations on the values of *Global Consciousness* and *Xenophobia*, and in both cases place comparatively greater emphasis on these values than previous generations did in their youth.

Social Values Definitions

- **Acceptance of Violence** – view violence as an inevitable fact of life that must be accepted with a certain degree of indifference; also believe violence can be both cathartic and persuasive.
- **Adaptability to Complexity** – tendency to adapt easily to the uncertainties of modern life, and not to feel threatened by the changes and complexities of society; view this complexity as a learning experience and source of opportunity.
- **Anomie and Aimlessness** – the feeling of having no goals in life, and alienation from society; having the impression of being cut off from what's happening.
- **Community Involvement** – interest in what's happening in one's neighbourhood, city, town or region; reflects activity ranging from reading weekly community newspapers to involvement in community organizations.
- **Discriminating Consumerism** – tendency to actively adopt defensive strategies to shield oneself from the artificial needs created the consumer society, and to see product information before making purchases.
- **Duty** – the belief that duties and obligations to others should be fulfilled before turning to one's personal pleasures and interests.
- **Enthusiasm for Technology** – a favourable bias toward technology. Fascination with the possibilities offered by modern technology, and confidence in the capacity of science and technology to better their lives.
- **Financial Concern** – the feeling of insecurity about one's financial future, particularly in old age, and of being personally responsible in this area.
- **Flexible Families** – willingness to accept nontraditional definitions of family (such as common law and same-sex marriages), and the belief that family is defined more by emotional links than legal or institutional formalities.
- **Fulfillment through Work** – a need to invest one's work life with meaning and to feel that one's work is useful to others and has some social value.
- **Global Consciousness** – considering oneself a "citizen of the world" first and foremost over being a citizen of one's country; feeling an affinity to peoples in all countries.
- **Multiculturalism** – openness toward diverse cultures, ethnic communities and immigrants; a belief that ethnic groups should maintain their culture identities, and that others should seek to learn about them
- **National Pride** – defining one's identity through national pride, and believing that Canada should hold a strong position in the world.
- **Penchant for risk** – the desire to take risks to get what one wants, and engaging in dangerous or forbidden activities because of the emotional high.
- **Personal creativity** – the desire to use one's imagination and creative talents in daily life, both at work and at play.
- **Personal Optimism** – general optimism about one's future personal outcomes (including financial well-being).
- **Pursuit of intensity** – the desire to live intensely and be guided less by reason and ideology than by one's emotions, feeling and intuition (and to continually experience new sensations).
- **Pursuit of novelty** – an active desire to discover new products, services and experiences, and to integrate them into the routine of daily life.
- **Pursuit of Originality** – need to feel different from others; a preoccupation with demonstrating one's individuality through original touches.
- **Rejection of Authority** – a belief in not playing by the rules, that persons or organizations in positions of authority should not be deferred to at all times; the view that young people should be taught to question rather than obey authority.
- **Religiosity** – placing great importance on religion as a guide to life, including affiliation with an organized religious faith.
- **Saving on Principle** – the tendency to save and accumulate money, motivated by a moral impulse for future security.
- **Sexual Permissiveness** – tendency to be sexually permissive regarding oneself and others; fidelity within marriage or between partners and the prohibition against premarital sex are of little importance.
- **Technology Anxiety** – threatened by technological changes and having concerns about the ethical and moral dimensions towards which science is advancing.
- **Utilitarian Consumerism** – tendency to base purchase decisions on utilitarian rather than aesthetic considerations.
- **Xenophobia** – the sense that too much immigration threatens the purity of the country; that immigrants should set aside their cultural backgrounds and blend into the dominant culture.