

Ref HC 110.C6 M545

A M E R I C A N GENERATIONS

Who they are. How they live. What they think.

B Y S U S A N M I T C H E L L



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Table 2.3 Opinion of Other People, 2000

"Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

"Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?"

"Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?"

(percent of people aged 18 or older responding by age and generation, 2000)

| | <i>can be trusted</i> | <i>you can't be too careful</i> | <i>try to be fair</i> | <i>would try to take advantage</i> | <i>try to be helpful</i> | <i>look out for themselves</i> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total people | 35% | 58% | 52% | 38% | 46% | 45% |
| Aged 18 to 24 | 25 | 72 | 33 | 53 | 26 | 64 |
| Aged 25 to 34 | 30 | 63 | 47 | 43 | 44 | 48 |
| Aged 35 to 44 | 38 | 55 | 51 | 39 | 44 | 47 |
| Aged 45 to 54 | 39 | 52 | 59 | 31 | 52 | 38 |
| Aged 55 to 64 | 40 | 56 | 57 | 34 | 52 | 42 |
| Aged 65 or older | 37 | 57 | 60 | 30 | 54 | 37 |
| Millennial | 24 | 72 | 34 | 49 | 26 | 62 |
| Generation X | 31 | 63 | 45 | 45 | 43 | 49 |
| Baby Boom | 38 | 54 | 55 | 35 | 47 | 43 |
| Swing | 40 | 55 | 58 | 34 | 52 | 41 |
| World War II | 36 | 57 | 59 | 30 | 54 | 37 |

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because "don't know" and "depends" (a volunteered response) are not shown.

Source: 2000 General Social Survey, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago; calculations by the author

Younger Generations Are Less Trusting

Regardless of age, however, most people do not think others can be trusted.

The younger the person, the more likely he or she is to be wary of the motives of other people. The Millennial generation is more likely than others to believe you can't be too careful when dealing with other people (72 percent) and that most of the time people are just looking out for themselves (62 percent). Millennials and Generation Xers are more likely than older generations to think most people will take advantage of them if they have the chance (49 and 45 percent, respectively).

Although younger generations are more likely to be wary of others, the majority of people, regardless of age, think you can't be too careful when dealing with others. But most people aged 35 or older believe others try to be fair, and the majority of those aged 45 or older think people try to be helpful. Whether or not younger adults will become more trusting as they get older remains to be seen.

■ Corporate crime, church scandals, Internet scams, and the like are making everyone more likely to think badly of others.

The youngest adults are the most wary

(percent who think other people try to be fair, by generation, 2000)



