



The Yale Classes of 1965 and 1970:

Different Then, Similar Now

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The Yale Classes of '65 and '70:

Different Then; Similar Now

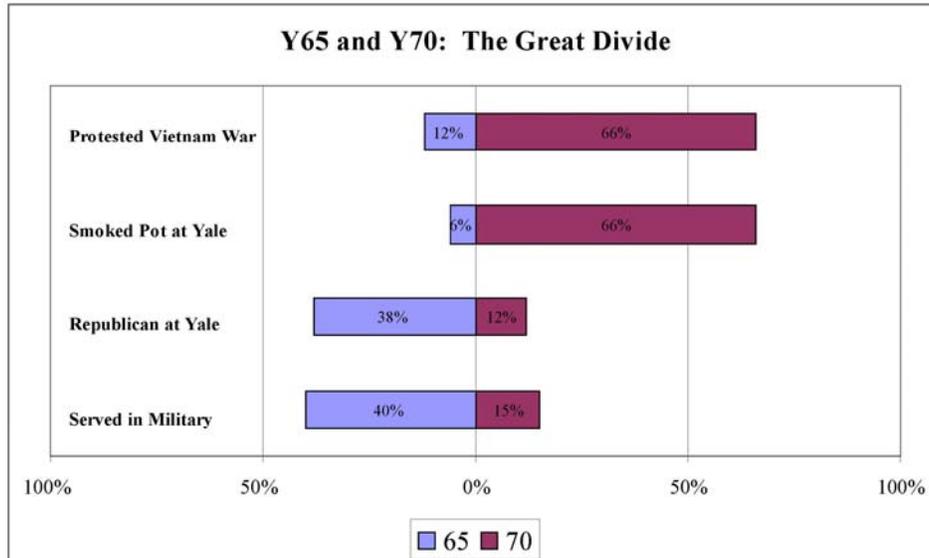
From their opposition to the Vietnam War to their support for civil rights and social justice, from their embrace of the sexual revolution to their fondness for pot, members of the Class of 1970 were far more liberal than the Class of 1965 during their undergraduate years, a gap driven by the growing influence of the counterculture in the latter half of the 1960s.

A half century later, however, the alumni of Y65 and Y70 have become much more alike, according to a first-of-its-kind joint survey of the two classes. This convergence is the result of a leftward shift in the social and political attitudes of the Class of 1965 over the course of their adult lives. The values of the Class of 1970 have remained essentially unchanged since college.

The survey was designed to address a question that has long piqued the curiosity of Yalies of a certain age: what impact did the turbulence of the 1960s have on our college experiences and on our lives since then? A total of 855 alumni – including 422 from the Class of 1965 and 433 from the Class of 1970 – took the online survey in February through April of 2020.

The years from 1965 to 1970 were among the most tumultuous in modern American history – marked by anti-war protests, urban riots, campus sit-ins, ongoing struggles for minority, women's and gay rights, and iconic countercultural moments such as the Summer of Love, Woodstock, and Earth Day. During this period, Yale changed its admissions procedures to enroll more public high school graduates and liberalized its grading policies, dress codes and parietal hours. In 1969, Yale admitted women as undergraduates for the first time in history.

As bookends to this breathtaking burst of change, Y65 and Y70 experienced their college years very differently. For example, the survey found that Y70 was more likely than Y65 to have taken part in an anti-war protest; to have smoked pot, to have been sexually active, and to have graduated from a public high school. Y65 was more likely to have been in a fraternity or secret society, to have played a varsity sport, to have enrolled in ROTC, to have believed in God and to have been a Republican.

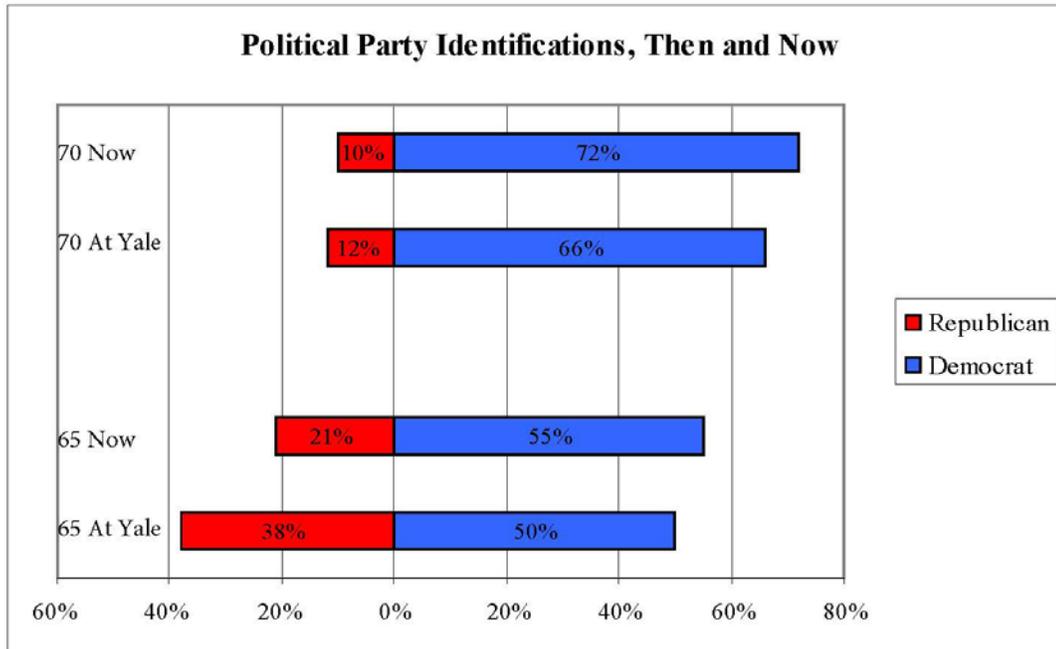


But for the most part, these behavioral and attitudinal differences have not persisted through adulthood. To the contrary, the survey found that the alumni of Y65 and Y70, in the aggregate, have become virtual clones of one another in their marriage and family patterns, parenting norms, career paths, economic circumstances, life priorities, retirement plans, volunteering activities, dieting and exercise regimens, musical tastes and attitudes about God, religion, spirituality, Yale, America, women and the Baby Boom generation.

Ideology and Partisanship

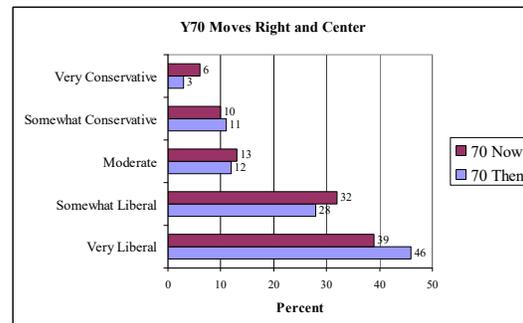
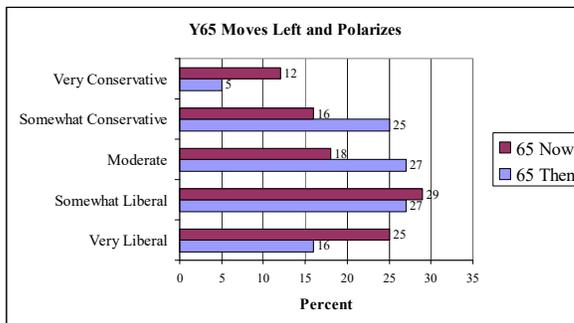
The only realm where any significant differences remain between the two classes is in their political ideologies and partisan affiliations. But these gaps are much smaller today than they had been half a century ago.

- Partisanship:** Back at Yale, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by 66% to 12% among Y70 and by 50% to 38% among Y65. Today, Democrats outnumber Republicans by 72% to 10% among Y70 and by 55% to 21% among Y65. In other words, there are only about half as many Republicans in the Class of 1965 today as there had been at Yale. This leftward shift over time among members of Y65 runs in the opposite direction from trends among the rest of their generation, which has grown more conservative as it has grown older, according to surveys from Gallup, Pew and other polling organizations.



Self-identifying Independents are not shown.

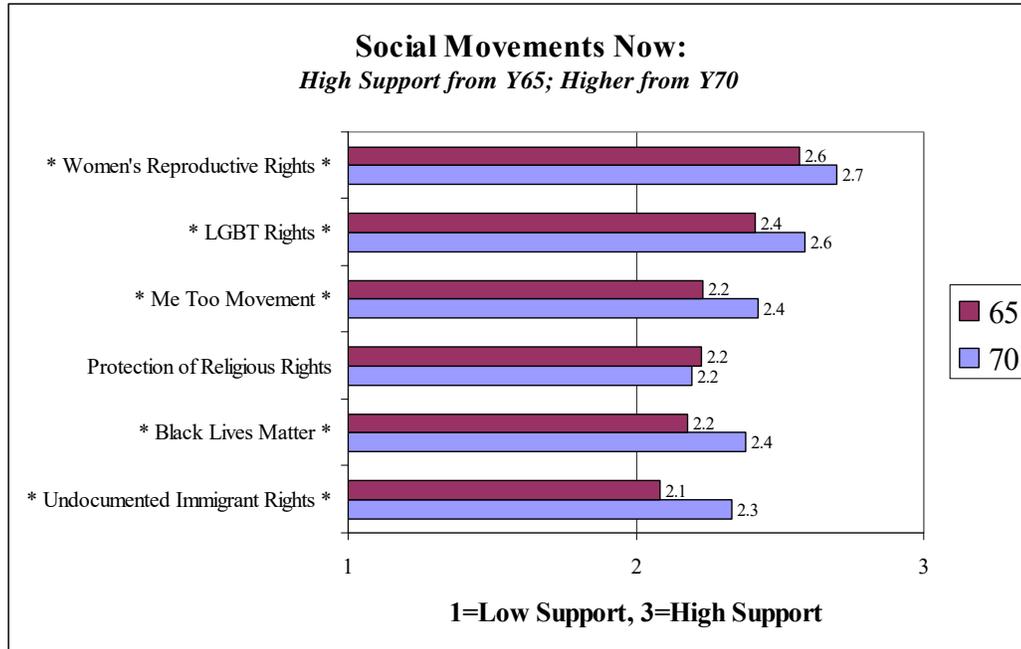
- Ideology:** Some 71% of members of Y70 self-identify as liberals today, compared with 55% of Y65, a gap of 16 percentage points. Looking back at their undergraduate years, 74% of Y70 say they were liberals then, compared with 42% of Y65, a gap of 32 percentage points.



- Polarization:** Within the class of 65, the overall changes have tended toward liberal views,¹ but the graph for Y65 above also shows a shift from the middle to both extremes. The percentages now calling themselves either “Very Conservative” or “Very Liberal” have increased sharply.
- Trump Disapproval:** Some 78% of Y65 disapprove of Trump’s handling of the presidency, as do 87% of Y70 – which makes both classes extreme outliers among all American adults of the same age -- the majority of whom approve of the Trump presidency.

¹ Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between Y65 and Y70. Taking the self-ratings of political philosophy as a scale from 1 (Very Liberal) to 5 (Very Conservative), Y65 shifted toward the left, from 2.76 to 2.59 (the 0.17 shift is statistically significant at $p < .001$). Y70 shifted rightward, from 2.12 to 1.97 (the 0.15 shift is also $p < .001$).

- Social Justice Movements Now:** Both classes express overwhelming support for Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, women’s reproductive rights, LGBT rights, undocumented immigrant rights and religious rights. Y70 supports these causes by levels ranging from 76% to 95%; Y65 supports them by levels ranging from 72% to 88%.²



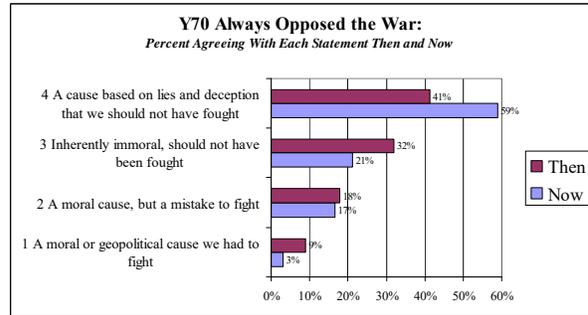
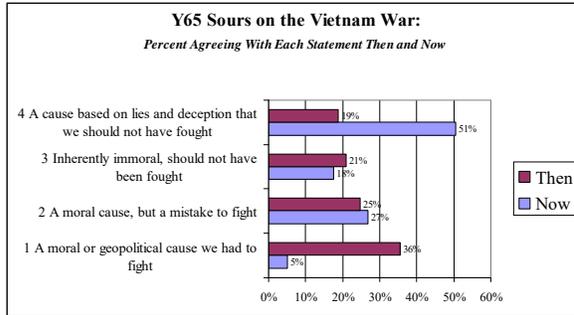
- Social Justice Movements Then:** As undergraduates, Y70 was significantly more supportive than Y65 of the movements for racial justice, women’s rights and LGBT rights. For example, 54% of Y70 say they supported women’s rights when they were undergraduates, compared with 20% of Y65. And 80% of Y70 supported the movement for racial justice, compared with 61% of Y65.

Vietnam War

Here, too, there has been a dramatic convergence over time in the views of the two classes.

- Worthy Cause?** Today just 3% of Y70 and 5% of Y65 say the Vietnam War was a moral or geopolitical cause we had to fight. As undergraduates, the two classes differed sharply over the war. Some 36% of Y65 saw it as worthy and necessary, compared with just 9% of Y70.

² The degree of support is significantly higher in Y70 than Y65 on all but religious rights, for which support is equal.



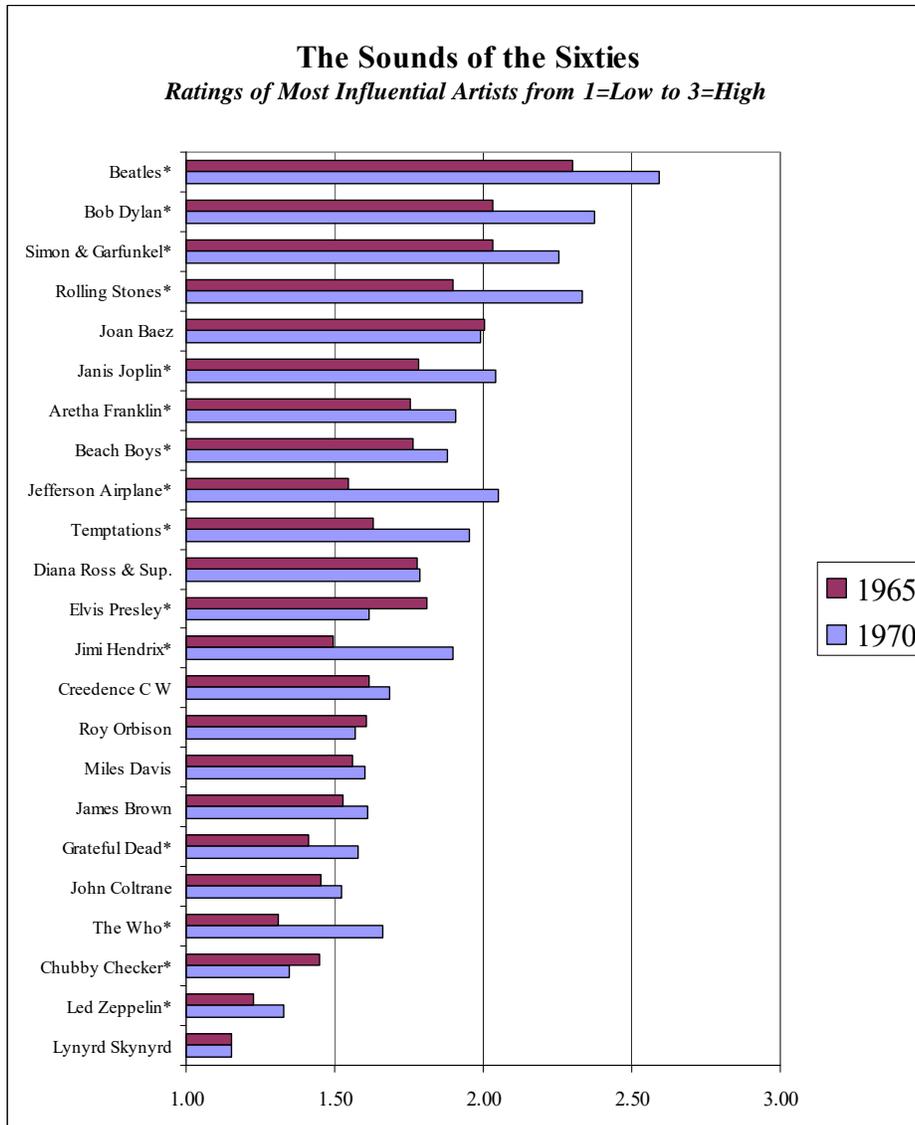
- Anti-war Activism:** For Y70, anti-war activism was the norm. Two-thirds of the class say they participated in marches or other organized forms of protest during their college years; just 12% of Y65 say the same.
- Military Service:** On the flip side of the same coin, 40% of Y65 served in the military (including National Guard or Reserves), compared with 14% of Y70. Of those who served, some 31% of Y65 were deployed to Vietnam, compared with 15% of Y70. (Members of Y65 were also more likely than Y70 to serve in the Peace Corps – 9% versus 6%.)
- Attitudes toward Vets:** Even as views about the war have grown more negative over the decades among both classes, attitudes about those who fought that war have grown more positive. Today more than nine-in-ten of both classes say that Vietnam era soldiers are either heroes or deserving of respect. As undergraduates, 81% of Y65 and 64% of Y70 felt this way – and 21% of Y70 say that when they were in college they had low esteem for soldiers.
- Yale Vets More Conservative:** In both Y65 and Y70, those who served in the military were more conservative then and remain more conservative now than those who did not serve. Using the 1 to 5 point self-rating scale from liberal to conservative, men who served averaged 3.0 when at Yale, and those who did not serve averaged 2.1.³ And their ideological stance has not changed, on the average, across 50 years. One sharp difference between the classes, emerged, though: men who served in the class of 65 maintained their conservatism across 50 years, but men who served in the class of 70 and went to Vietnam changed very significantly away from conservatism. In fact, they moved along the political spectrum twice as much as any other subgroup.
- Vets Changed Their View of the War:** When at Yale, men who had served in the military, or who served later, agreed at the 13% level with the statement that Vietnam was “A cause based on lies and deception that we should not have fought.” Now 42% agree with that statement. (Those who never served agreed at 36% back at Yale, and 59% now.) Similarly, about the statement “We shouldn’t have used napalm or carpet-bombing,” only 24% of veterans agreed back in their Yale days, but now 46% agree. (Non-veterans stayed with 64% agreed at Yale and 73% today.)

³ Highly significant difference at $p < .001$.

Sex, Pot, Booze, Rock n Roll

Once again, the differences were greater then than now.

- **Sex Then:** Y70 lost its virginity at a younger median age (18) than did Y65 (19). And they had more sex while at Yale. One third of Y65 say they had no sex at all during their college years, compared with one-fifth of Y70.
- **Sex Now:** Y70 is still having more sex, no doubt aided by being five years younger. Some 48% of Y65 say they no longer have sex, compared with 36% of Y70. Some 22% of Y65 say they have sex once a week or more, compared with 32% of Y70. Some 31% of Y65 say they use Viagra, Cialis or a similar medication, as do 27% of Y70.
- **Gay at Yale:** Asked about their social life at Yale if they were gay, 94% of Y65 and 93% of Y70 respondents said the question did not apply to them. Some 2% of both classes said that, at the time, they were in self-denial that they were gay. Another 3% of Y65 and 2% of Y70 responded that they "*thought they might be gay but did not go out in gay life.*"
- **Pot:** As undergraduates, Y70 was into pot; Y65 was not. Just 6% of Y65 say they used pot while at Yale, compared with 66% of Y70 (including 26% who say they used it often or heavily). Today pot usage (both recreational and medicinal) is way down among Y70 (to 19%) and up slightly among Y65 (to 10%).
- **Booze:** Some 31% of Y65 say they had bouts of heavy drinking at Yale, compared with 21% of Y70. The drinking habits of the two classes have since converged, with roughly three-quarters of each class describing themselves as moderate or occasional drinkers. Just 2% of Y65 and 3% of Y70 say they are heavy drinkers now.
- **Rock and Roll:** When it comes to the sounds of the Sixties, Y65 and Y70 are a band of brothers. Both say the Beatles were the most influential musical group of their youth. Rounding out the top five for Y65 are Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Joan Baez, and the Rolling Stones. For Y70, it's Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, Simon and Garfunkel, with Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane in a tie. Both classes are Sixties music chauvinists, with three quarters of each agreeing that the music of that decade was better than all the pop music produced since then.



Demographics

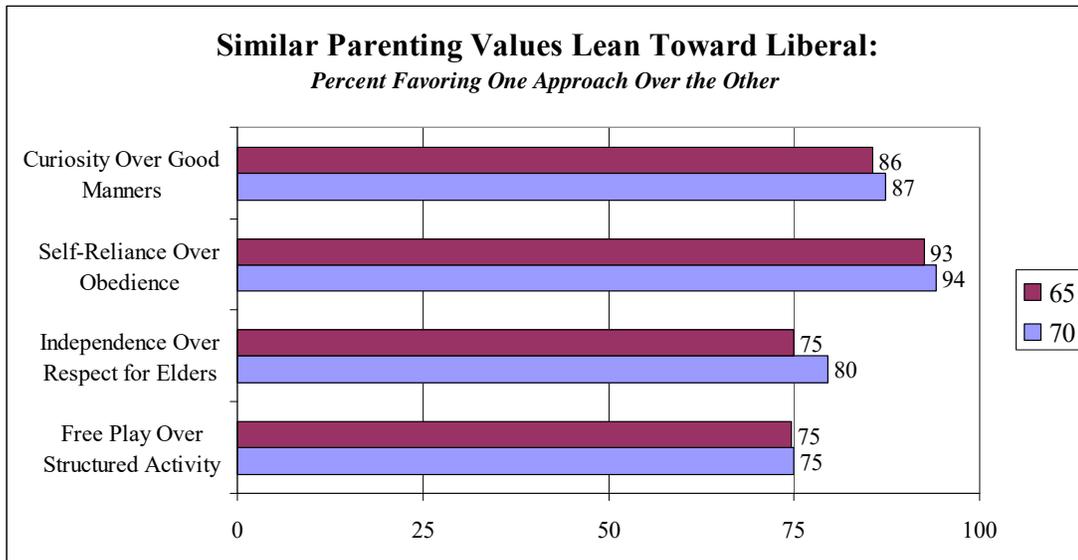
- Race:** Some 98% of respondents from Y65 and 93% from Y70 are white. Blacks account for 2% of Y70 respondents and 1% of Y65. Asian-Americans and Hispanics each account for 1% of Y70 respondents.
- Geography:** Half of both classes live in the Northeast or Mid-Atlantic. Some 19% of Y65 and 23% of Y70 live on the West Coast. Alumni of Y65 are about twice as likely as Y70 to live in Florida or the deep South – 11% versus 6%. The rest live elsewhere in the U.S., except for 2% of each class that live abroad.

Marriage and Family

- Spouses:** Nearly identical shares of Y65 (82%) and Y70 (83%) are currently married. Y65 is more likely than Y70 to have been married more than once (38% versus 29%). There are slightly more

widowers in Y65 than Y70 (5% versus 3%). And slightly more never-marrieds in Y70 than Y65 (4% versus 2%).

- **Offspring:** Members of Y65 have had an average of 2.4 children or step-children, compared with 2.0 among Y70. Y65 also has more grandkids, averaging 3.3, with Y70 averaging 2.2.
- **Parenting values:** By lopsided and nearly identical margins, members of both Y65 and Y70 say that for successful child-rearing, free play is more important than structured activity; independence is more important than respect for elders; self-reliance is more important than obedience; and curiosity is more important than good manners.

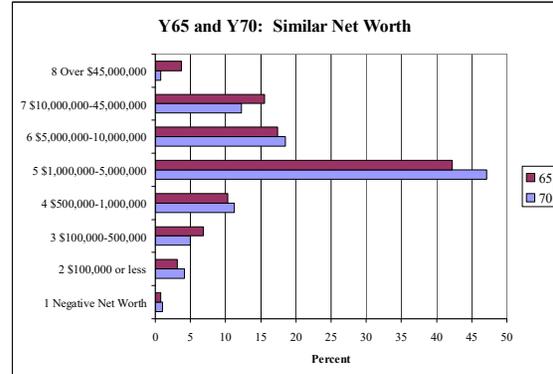
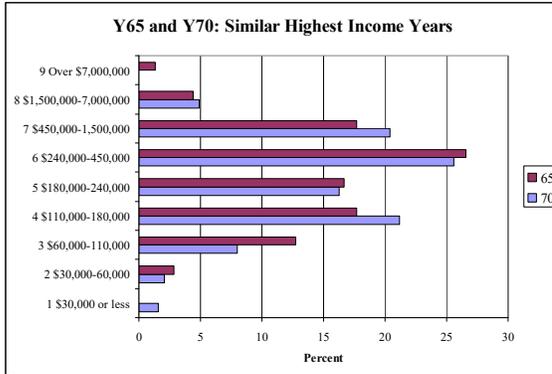


- **Parenting regrets:** Some 39% of Y65 say they didn't spend enough time with their children when they were growing up, compared with 32% of Y70.

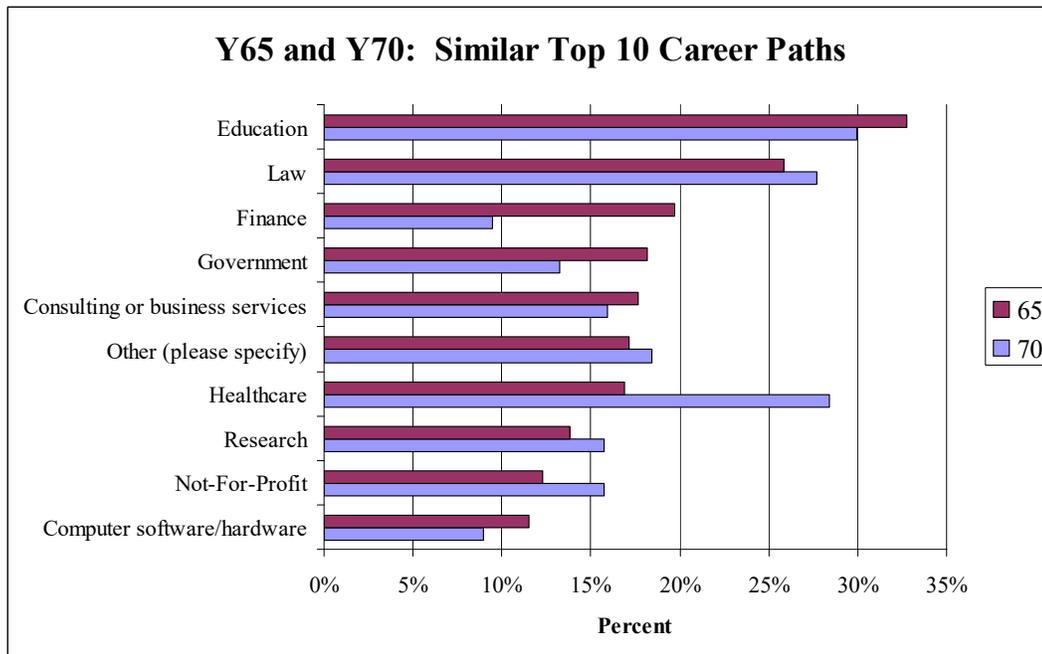
Income, Wealth, Career

The two classes are virtually identical in key measures of economic well-being. And they've both done very well indeed.

- **Income:** Y65 and Y70 both report a median annual income of \$240,000 during their highest-earning stretch of five years. (Among the full U.S. population, median household income is \$62,000)
- **Wealth:** Y65 and Y70 both report a median household net worth of about \$3.5 million. (Among all American households headed by someone over the age of 65, median net wealth is about \$265,000).



- Economic Well-being:** More than half of Y65 describe themselves as affluent (19%) or very comfortable (34%). The figures for Y70 are nearly identical: 18% affluent and 36% very comfortable. Some 9% of both classes say they are struggling or just getting by.
- Better off than Parents?** More than six-in-ten of both classes say their standard of living is higher than that of their parents; another quarter say it is about the same. In both classes, public high school graduates are more likely than those who attended a private high school to say they are better off than their parents.
- Career Fields:** The top fields that attracted the most graduates of Y70 for at least a portion of their careers are education (30%); healthcare (28%), law (28%). For Y65, the most popular fields have been education (33%), law (26%) and finance (20%). The class of 65 graduates chose finance twice as often as 70, and chose healthcare only about half as often as 70.



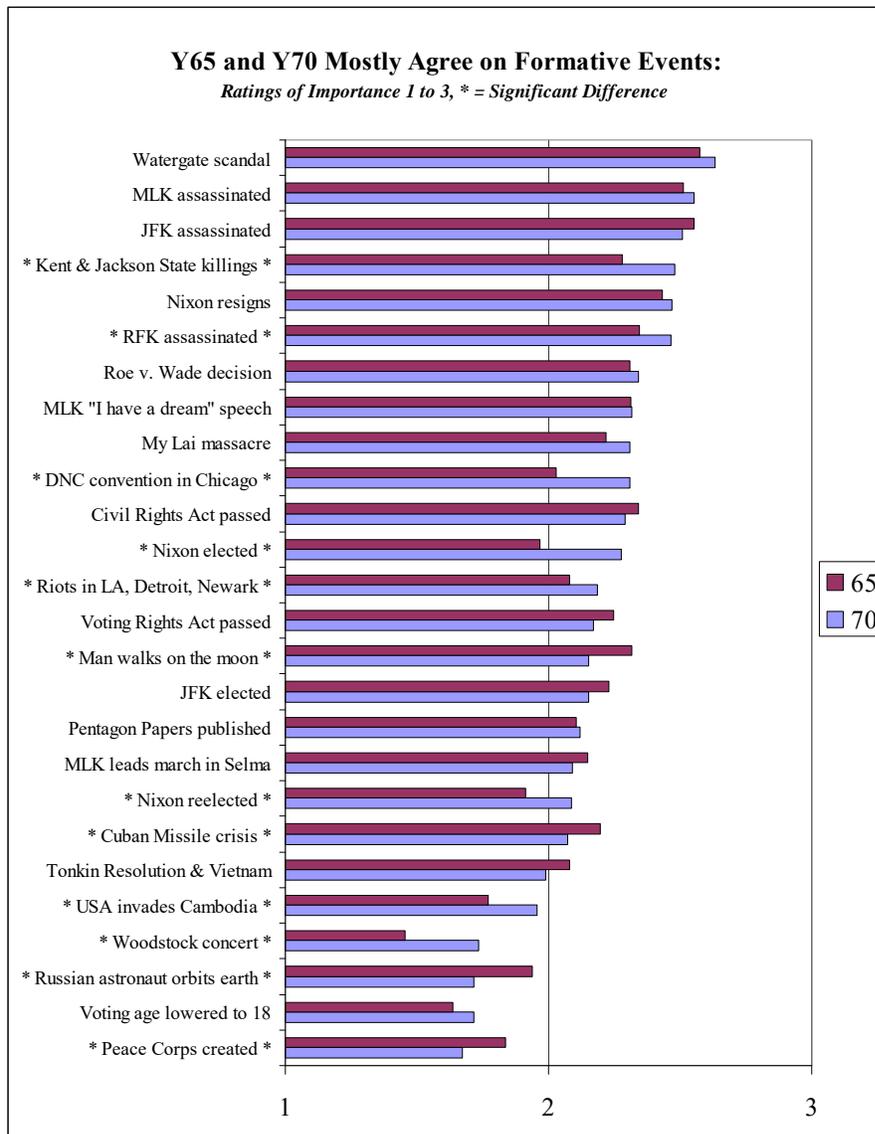
- Career Paths:** Just over half of both classes say they entered their chosen profession and stayed with it throughout their working lives. About a third of each class say they had one or more

major changes in their occupation. Just over four-in-ten of each class say that at some point in their working lives, they were fired or laid off.

- **Start-Ups; Board Service:** Just over four-in-ten in each class have started up a business or non-profit. About seven-in-ten in each class have served on a business or non-profit board.

Formative Influences

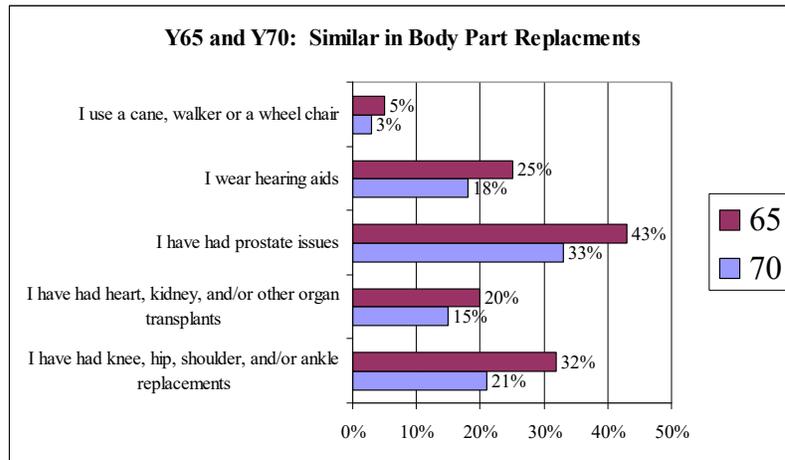
Historical Events: Asked to choose what they considered the most significant historical events of their coming of age years, Y65 and Y70 chose the same top three among 26 events tested: Watergate and the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. There were only minor disparities between the classes in ratings of other events. Y70 was more inclined to say that the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Woodstock, and Nixon’s election had a significant impact; Y65 said the same about space exploration and the Cuban missile crisis.



- **Yale Professors:** About four-in-ten of each class say they had one or two college professors who have had a lasting and formative influence on their lives. Just over a third of each class say they had more than two such professors.

Health, Body Parts, Diet, Exercise

- **Health:** Identical 73% shares of each class describe their health as excellent or very good, although more in Y70 than Y65 say excellent (35% versus 29%). Lots of us report having had “prostate issues”: 43% for Y65 and 33% for Y70. Fewer than 5% of Y70 and just 2% of Y65 currently smoke.
- **Bionic Bodies:** Fewer than one in 20 of us use devices for mobility. About 25% of Y65, and 18% of Y70, use a hearing aid. A surprising 20% of Y65 and 15% of Y70 report an organ transplant, which may seem high, but the wording of the question was very broad – e.g., cataract replacement might have been counted when we were responding. Nearly a third of Y65 and a fifth of Y70 say they’ve had a knee, hip, shoulder or ankle replaced.



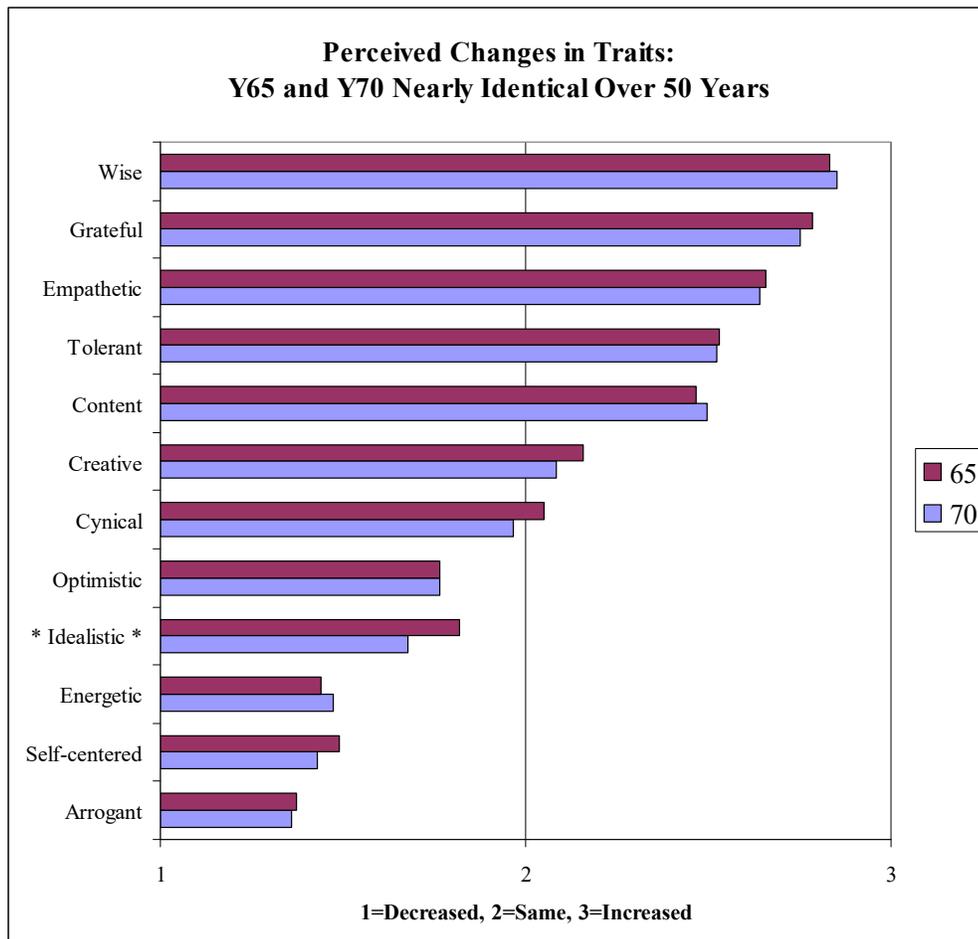
- **Diet:** Some 55% of Y65 and 58% of Y70 say they follow a diet of some kind. The Mediterranean diet is the most popular among both classes, followed by low-carb and low-fat diets.
- **Exercise:** More than nine-in-ten of each class say they get at least some exercise at least once a week. Y70 is slightly more inclined than Y65 to say they exercise more often and more vigorously.

Recreation, Hobbies

- **Screen Time:** The typical member of both classes spends 1-3 hours a day watching TV; 1-3 hours a day on the computer and about an hour or less using a cellphone or tablet. Fewer than 6% of each class plays video games.
- **Retirement activities:** Reading, travel, volunteer work, spending time with grandkids, and outdoor sports and activities are the top five retirement activities cited by both classes, in the same order.

How We've Changed

- Personal Traits:** Majorities in both classes say that since their time at Yale they've grown wiser, more empathetic, more tolerant, more grateful and more content; also, less energetic, less arrogant, less self-centered and less optimistic. About half say there's been no change in their creativity and idealism. The trait that draws the most mixed evaluations is cynicism. About a quarter of both classes say they're more cynical now, a quarter say less, the rest say there's been no change. The only statistical difference between Y65 and Y70 is that, while both have become less idealistic, Y70 decreased more than Y65 over the half-century (indicated by asterisks).

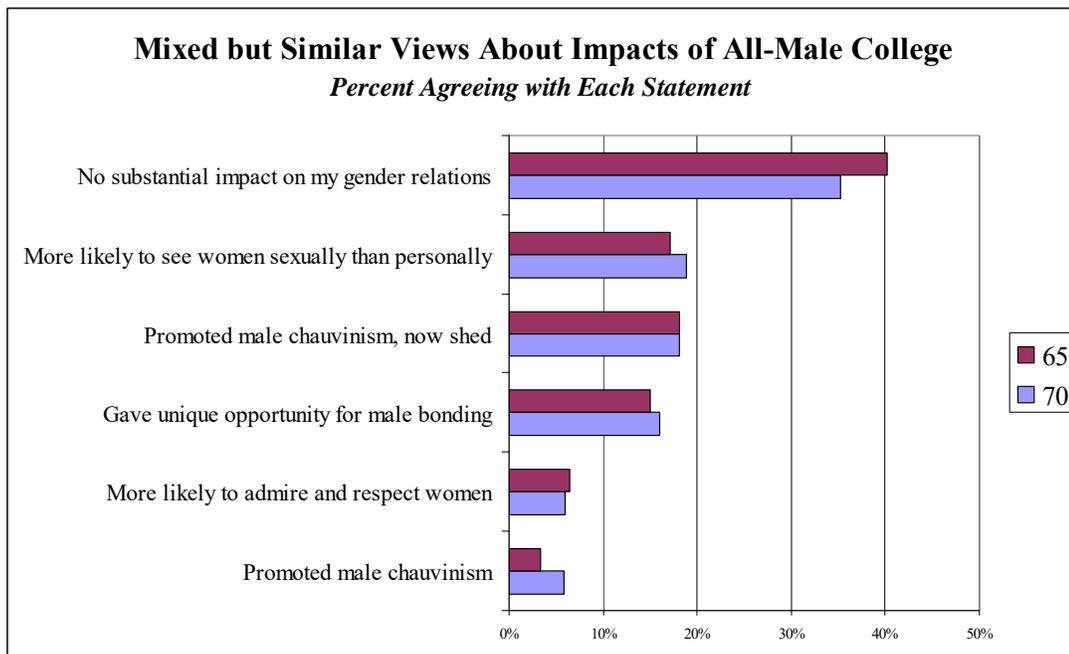


- Spirituality:** Both classes say they have become more spiritual since their days in college. For Y70, 60% say spirituality is important now, compared with 47% who say it had been important at Yale. For Y65, 57% say it is important now, compared with 39% who say it was important during their college years.
- God, Religion:** There has been little change over time in attitudes about God and religion. Among Y65, 42% say they believed in God when they were at Yale and 36% say they do now. Among Y70, 33% believed in God then; 33% believe now. Among Y65, 32% say that religion was

important back then, 31% say so now. Among Y70, 32% say religion was important at Yale, 36% say so now.

Yale Then

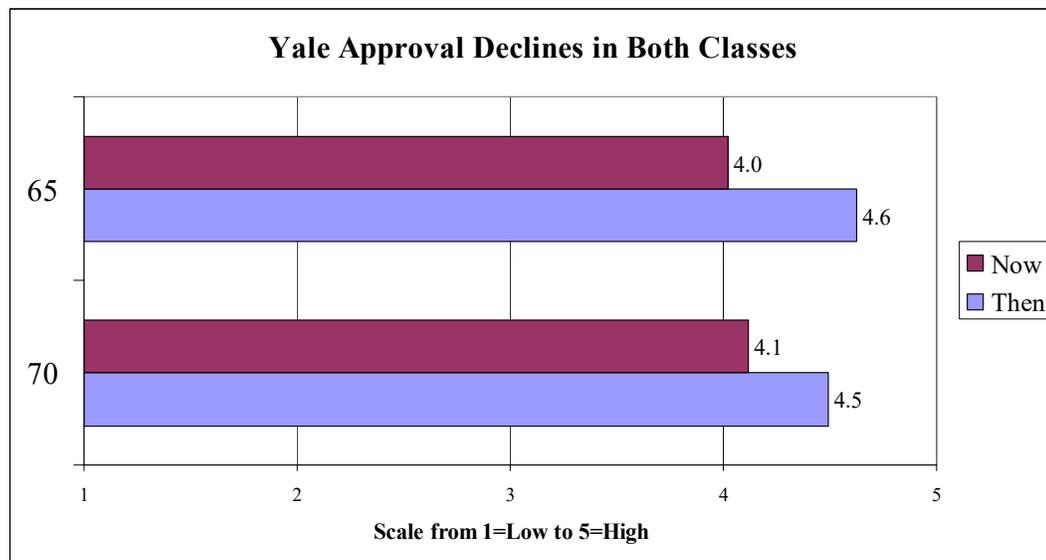
- Academic Majors:** Humanities was the most popular field of majors for each class, followed by social sciences and natural sciences. Y65 tilted more heavily than Y70 toward humanities -- 53% versus 42%. Y70 concentrated more in the social sciences, at 31% versus Y65's 25%, and the natural sciences (Y70 17% versus Y65 12%). Nearly nine in ten of both classes got an advanced degree after college, with a law degree the most popular with both Y65 (27%) and Y70 (29%).
- Activities:** Y65 was more likely than Y70 to have been in a fraternity (32% versus 17%), a secret society (38% versus 30%), to have played a varsity sport (29% versus 21%) or enrolled in ROTC or NROTC (15% versus 7%). Y70 was more likely to have been in the political union (15% versus 7%). Across both classes, students from private high schools were more likely than those from public high schools to have been in a fraternity – 39% versus 15%.
- Meeting Women:** For both classes the most common way to meet women were college mixers and road trips to women's colleges. Y65 relied more heavily on fraternity parties than did Y70 – 11% versus 3%.
- Impact of Attending an All-Male Campus:** About three in ten of both classes say that going to an all-male college engendered feelings of male chauvinism; about a fifth say it made them more likely to see women as sex objects rather than friends. On the positive side, about one in six say it gave them a chance for male bonding they otherwise would not have had. About a third of Y70 and 40% of Y65 say that attending Yale when it was all-male had no long term impact on their views of women or their gender relationships."



- **Wishing it Had Been Coed:** By lopsided margins, both classes say Yale would have been a better experience had it been coed when they attended. Some 60% of Y65 say better; 7% say worse. For Y70, 61% say better and 3% say worse. The remainder say they don't know if it would have made a difference.

Yale Now

- **Lifetime Value:** Eight-in-ten of Y65 and three quarters of Y70 say Yale has made a positive or pivotal contribution to their lives. Y70 is more inclined than Y65 to say it played a pivotal role (35% versus 27%).
- **Lifelong friendships:** About half of both classes say they currently have two or more close friends who had been classmates at Yale.
- **Approval:** Both classes say they felt more positively about Yale while they attended than they do now, though approval ratings remain high. Among Y65, the drop in positive ratings has been from 93% then to 76% now. Among Y70, positive ratings have declined from 90% then to 80% now. With favorability ratings on a 1 to 5 point scale, the chart below shows that both classes have become less positive over the years.⁴



- **Reunions, contributions, legacies:** Four-in-ten in each class say they have attended more than two reunions. Two-thirds of each class say they have given money to Yale since graduating. Eight-in-ten in each class say they have no children who have attended Yale.

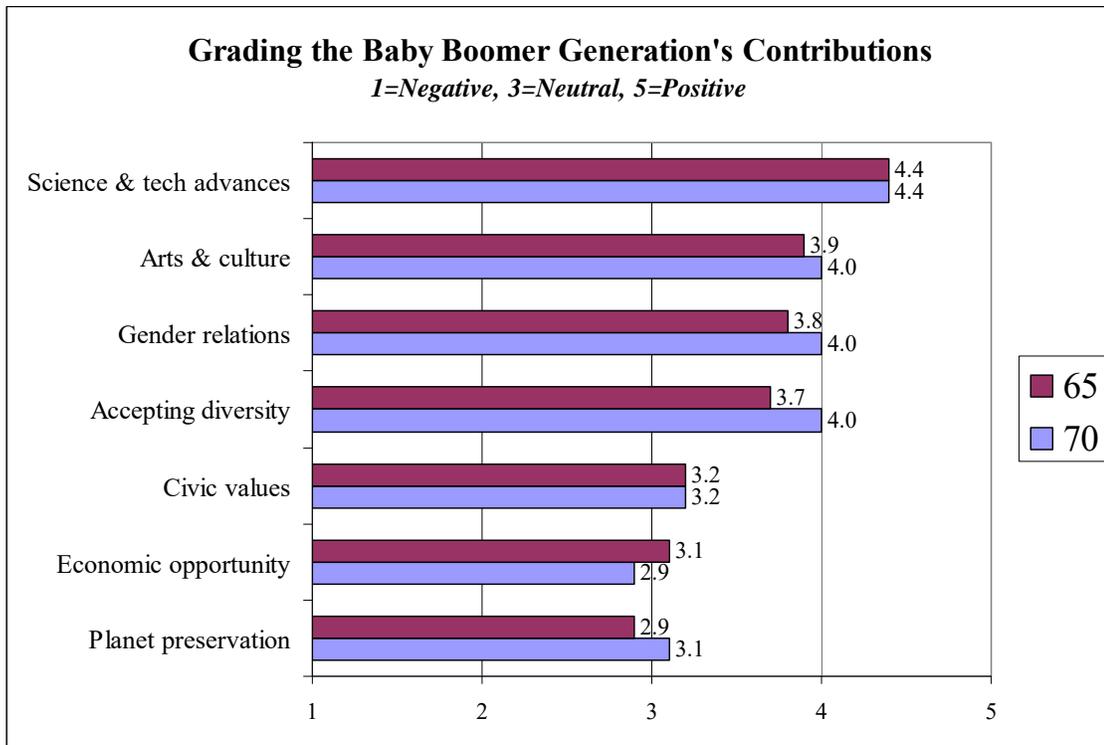
Men and Women, Boomers and Millennials

- **Gender traits.** Majorities in both classes say women have more compassion and empathy than men and are better at striking compromises. Majorities say men are better at taking risks. In

⁴ Both changes are statistically significant at $p < .001$ by paired t-test.

both classes, majorities say there are no differences between the genders in intelligence, honesty, ethics and willingness to stand on principle.

- OK Boomer:** Seven in ten in both classes say Baby Boomers have been good for America, with especially high marks going to the generation’s contributions to science, technology, culture and diversity. However, both classes give the generation mediocre marks for stewardship of the planet and providing equal opportunity for all. The chart below shows our self-reported grades on a 1 to 5 point scale.

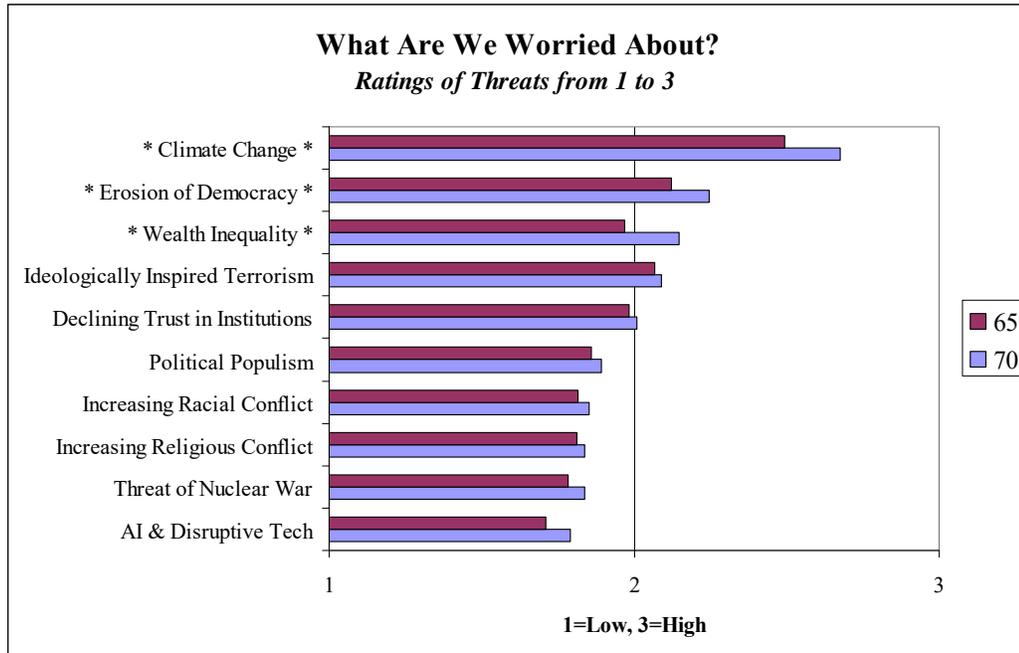


- The Kids Are Not Alright:** Just 36% of Y65 and 43% of Y70 say the Millennial generation has been good for America. About a third of both classes said their impact has been neutral; a quarter of Y65 and a fifth of Y70 say they have had a negative impact.

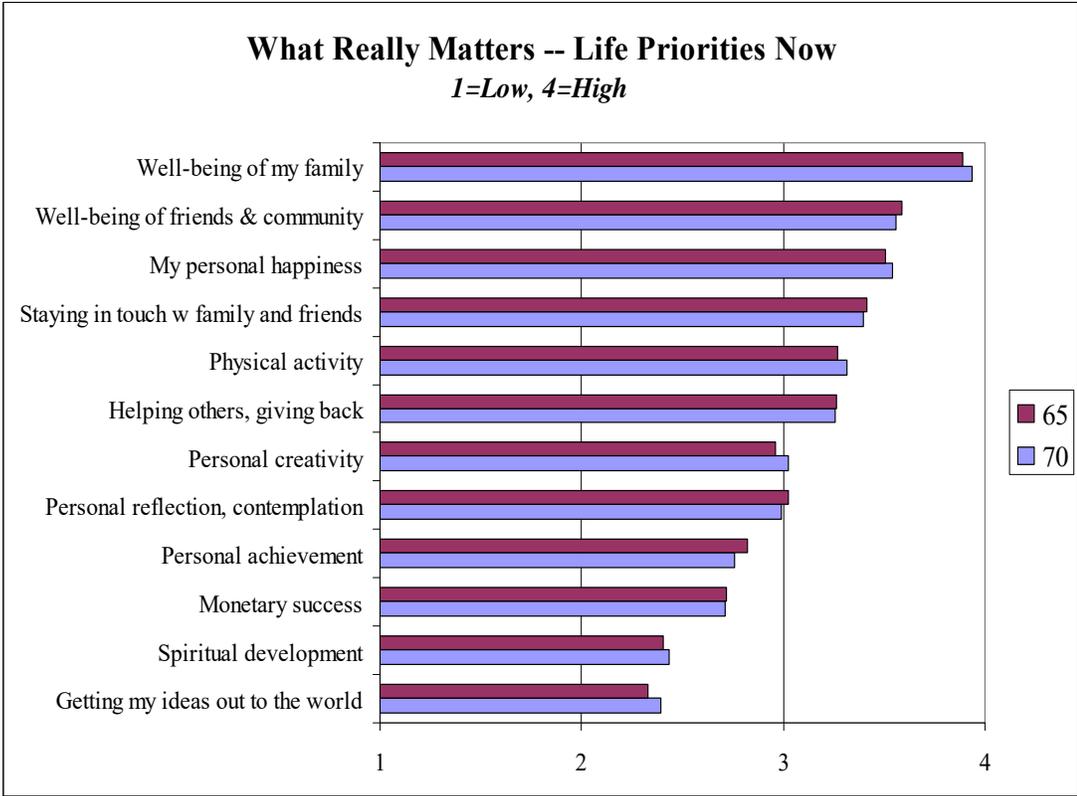
Looking ahead

- Retirement:** Some 70% of Y65 and 61% of Y70 say they are already retired. Another 19% of Y65 and 23% of Y70 say they plan to keep on working as long as they can. Eight-in-ten in both classes say they have no desire to live in a retirement community or to move out of their current home.
- Life and death:** A large majority of Y65 is either very satisfied (36%) or pretty content (47%) with their lives. The numbers are nearly identical for Y70 – 36% very satisfied 44% pretty content. Attitudes about death are also nearly identical. One-in-ten in each class say they are afraid of dying, a third say they are slightly afraid, more than four-in-ten say they are not afraid, and the rest say they don’t think about it.

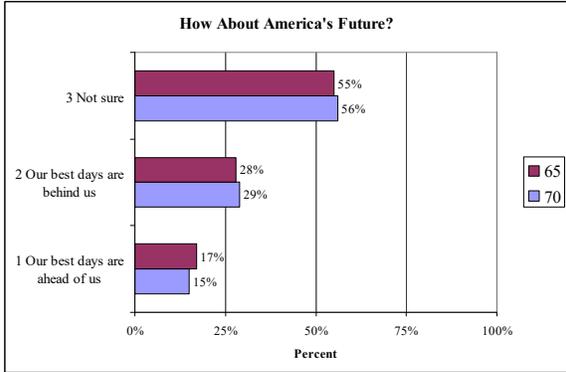
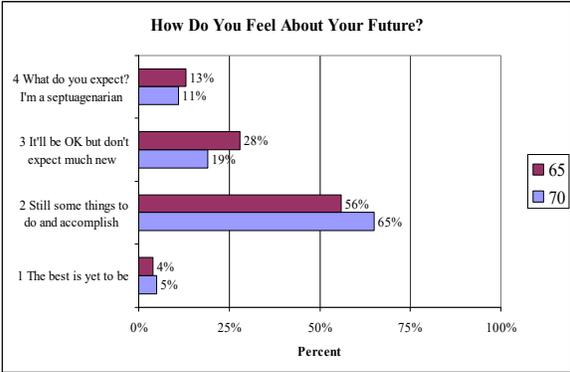
- Existential worries:** About six in ten of both classes say climate change is an existential threat to humanity, far more than say the same about any of eight other potential threats tested. Three questions showed Y70 to be significantly more alarmed than Y65: climate change, erosion of democracy, and wealth inequality. (The questionnaire, alas, was drafted in February and did not include a question about pandemics).



- Life Priorities Now:** More than nine-in-ten in both classes say that the well-being of their family is a very important priority in life, by far the highest-ranked priority among 12 tested. Next came the well-being of friends and community and personal happiness. At the bottom of the list were monetary success, spiritual development and “getting my ideas out to the world.”



- The future:** Just 4% of Y65 and 5% of Y70 say that the best is yet to be in their own lives, but 56% of Y65 and 65% of Y70 say that they still have some things left to do and accomplish. As for America’s future, the verdict is dour. Just 17% of Y65 and 15% of Y70 say America’s best days are ahead; some 28% of Y65 and 29% of Y70 say America’s best days are behind. The remainder – just over half of both classes – say they are unsure.



The survey was in the field during the first two months of the COVID-19 outbreak, so these high levels of uncertainty and pessimism are hardly surprising. However, it's worth noting that anxiety about America's future long pre-dated the pandemic. The last time a majority of Americans told pollsters that their country is headed in the right direction was in 2004, making these past 16 years the longest stretch of national discontent in the eight-plus decade history of public opinion survey research.

All of which raises a question: When was America more troubled -- in the 1960s, or now?

Discuss.

About the survey: The survey was administered online from February 27 through April 22, 2020 by the University of Virginia Center for Survey Research under the leadership of its Academic Director, Thomas Guterbock (Y69). The questionnaire was drafted by a committee that included James Conroy (Y70), David Roscoe (Y65), Paul Taylor (Y70), Robert Hammond (Y65), Benjamin Slotznick (Y70) and Joshua Shapiro (Y70). Several dozen questions were drawn from a similar survey conducted in 2019 by the Class of 1969. (Findings from that survey align closely with findings from this one).

The survey invitations and multiple reminders were sent to all members of the class by email and postal mail, potentially reaching them whether or not they had email accounts, and including those living overseas. Non-respondents for whom we had valid U.S. phone numbers also received phone calls or voicemail reminders from CSR interviewers. Just over half of the alumni of Y65 and Y70 contacted in these ways chose to take the survey. Although that is certainly a respectable rate of response, there is always the possibility of non-response bias (meaning that those who responded might be different from those who did not). It is thus impossible to be certain that the respondents are representative of their full classes. On at least one key metric – the share who graduated from a public high school – the survey sample closely tracks with Yale's official records. Among survey respondents, 49% of Y65 and 64% of Y70 graduated from a public high school. Yale admissions records indicate that 47% of the freshman class of Y65 came from a public high school, as did 58% of Y70. On the other hand, it is likely that survey respondents as a group are more active or engaged alumni than non-respondents, so findings on questions about Yale, in particular, should be viewed through that lens.⁵

⁵ The statistical margin of error for results from each class separately is ± 3.3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. For comparisons between the two classes, any difference of ± 4.7 percentage points or more is statistically significant. These margins apply to 50-50 questions and are smaller for questions in which a small percentage chose a given response. These statistics do not take into account possible non-response bias or possible bias from the wording of questions, which may happen in any survey.