

Cultural Evolution: Measuring Differences in Generational Values

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Abstract

Evidence has been accumulating for years that Millennials and Gen Zers are coming of age in the 21st century with unique attitudes and outlooks that differ from older age cohorts, but less is known about the deeper value orientations that underlie their attitudes and outlooks. This study fills a gap in the literature by drawing on Cultural Theory to study generational culture, and in particular, the value structure of Millennials and Gen Zers in comparison to older age cohorts. This analysis presents a cohort analysis of cross-sectional survey data collected in the spring of 2020 to measure how values differ by generation as well as how generational values may differ by demographic characteristic and ideology. Among the main findings, I find that Millennials/Gen Zers are descriptively more egalitarian and fatalistic than older age cohorts, with measurably elevated levels of fatalism in comparison to older generations. The analysis also uncovers notable generational differences by demographic, especially by race. I find that older cohorts of people of color are more likely to be egalitarian in comparison to their white counterparts, whereas younger generations are more individualistic and hierarchical in comparison to the white members of their generation. Lastly, the results show a surprising degree of ideological value polarization by generation, with the values of young adults from across the ideological spectrum more compressed than among the older age cohorts, whose values are much more polarized.

Acknowledgements

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Studies and popular polling increasingly show that Millennials and Gen Zers have distinct attitudes and outlooks that differ from older age cohorts. For example, researchers have found that young people are more tolerant and open-minded toward people from all backgrounds, regardless of race, class, or sexual orientation (Gregg, 2018, Twenge, 2014). Recent polls have also found that young people are more left leaning than older generations with progressive views on policy issues like climate change, universal health care, and the redistribution of wealth in society (Latifi, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2018). Yet recent polling has also uncovered other trends that speak to a more dire outlook among young people. Many Millennials and Gen Zers today think that much in their lives is outside of their control, are pessimistic about their own futures and the fate of the country, and are feeling pessimistic about the American Dream, believing that while it was once true, it is no longer within reach for younger generations (Change Research, 2022). While such research sheds light on particular attitudes and outlooks among Millennials and Gen Z, less is known about the deeper value orientations that underlie such trends.

This paper draws on Cultural Theory (CT) to systematically study generational culture, and in particular, the value structure of Millennials and Gen Zers in comparison to older age cohorts. While CT has not been leveraged previously to study generations, it offers a well-developed typology of culture that also has the benefit of long-established survey items to measure cultural or value typologies (Swedlow, Ripberger, Liu, Silva, Jenkins-Smith, & Johnson, 2020). This study is limited in that it does not attempt to disentangle the age, period, and cohort effects typically associated with the study of generations (for example, Neundorf & Niemi, 2014); however, it provides a first attempt to measure differences in generational values using Cultural Theory. In this paper, I present results from a survey administered in early 2020, which is part of a larger, mixed methods research project launched during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020 election to understand young people's values, attitudes toward government, and political behavior.

Overall, I find that Millennials and Gen Z are descriptively more fatalistic and egalitarian than older generations, and less individualistic. Elevated levels of fatalism among younger age cohorts is the most salient trend, with Millennials/Gen Zers measurably more fatalistic than older generations even after controlling for demographics, education level, and ideology. The analysis also uncovers notable generational differences by demographic. For example, older cohorts of people of color are more likely to be egalitarian in comparison to their white counterparts, whereas younger generations are more individualistic and hierarchical in comparison to the white members of their generation. Lastly, the results show across generations, those with egalitarian values are more likely to identify as liberal, and

those with individualistic and hierarchical values are more likely to identify as conservative. However, a surprising finding from this study is the degree to which different generations appear to be polarized ideologically. There is less of a spread of values for the Millennial/Gen Z generations than there is for older generations in relationship to liberal and conservative ideological orientations. In other words, among both young adults who identify as liberal and those who identify as conservative, their value types are more compressed than among the older age cohorts, whose values are much more polarized in relationship to ideology.

Literature review

Values are defined as “the criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events” (Schwartz, 1992, p.1). The study of human values are central to research across a variety of academic disciplines. Understanding how values are formed can be powerful since values may structure attitudes and beliefs alongside motivations and behavior (Feldman 2003; Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990). While values are held at the individual level, they are also core indicators of culture that can be reflected in a collective as small as a family-unit or as large as a nation (Hofstede, 2011; Inglehart, 2018; Schwartz, 2014). There are two competing frameworks for how individuals form their values. According to psychologists, values are deeply rooted personal orientations to the social and natural world that are typically acquired early in life during the process of socialization; over the life course, values solidify and may guide attitudes, norms, opinions and behaviors (Schwartz, 2012). Psychologists consider values to be formed at the level of the individual and to be relatively stable over one’s lifetime, except for the ‘impressionable years’ of young adulthood when people are going through major life transitions and more open to the influence of others and their value constructs. On the other hand, some anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists approach values as a social construction (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983; Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990). This school of thought considers values to be shaped by institutions and social relationships that may influence individual consciousness and actions at any point in the lifecycle.

While the study of human values is extensive across the fields of psychology (Schwartz, 2012; Strauss, 2017), political science (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983; Feldman, 2003; Inglehart, 2018), anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Ortner, 2006), and sociology (Bourdieu, 1984; Swidler, 2001), this literature review narrows in on the ways that *generational values* have been studied. After reviewing prevailing frameworks and findings, I make the case that Cultural Theory (CT)—a structuralist approach to studying values—provides a well-established theory of culture to support an investigation of generations. While

researchers have leveraged CT for decades to understand human cultures or ‘ways of life’, to the author’s knowledge, CT has not been used in the study of generations. This study leverages CT to study generations since it offers a well-established typology of values alongside survey measures that have been developed and tested by researchers over several decades (Swedlow et al., 2020).

The study of generational values

Two of the most prominent political scientists to study the evolution of generational values are Paul Abramson and Ronald Inglehart, who developed theories of modernization and cultural and political change (Abramson & Inglehart, 1987; Inglehart, 2018). The main thrust of their argument is that modern societies have experienced generational value change because of advances in technology and industries that have resulted in more economic security. Inglehart and Abramson argue that for most of human history, survival was insecure, with different societies struggling to meet the food supply and many people suffering from starvation, disease, and violence. In these cultures, ‘materialistic’ values were formed that emphasized economic and physical security. This changed with the economic growth brought on by industrialization in the mid-20th century, which created new wealth for many advanced societies, ushering in new generations that embraced ‘postmaterialist’ values that emphasized freedom, self-expression, and a greater emphasis on social solidarity.

Using data from the World Values Survey—a longitudinal dataset that track how values change across different countries over time—Abramson and Inglehart (1992) find different value types among generations. They find a distinction between members of the WWII generation, who tend to embody values that prioritized materialistic values, and their children, the Baby Boomer generation, who were socialized in their pre-adult years under a very different cultural context and therefore emphasize postmaterialistic values. They argue that postmaterialistic values persist today in postindustrial society among young generations due to overall increased economic security, which is why there are cultural trends among young people toward declining deference to authority, declining religiosity, support for social issues such as environmental protection and gender equality, and tolerance of sexual identities (Dalton, 2014; Dalton & Welzel, 2014). Importantly, the authors do not view modernization as linear; their theory of cultural change is contingent on existential security. Therefore, declining security can reverse postmaterialistic values over time with generational replacement, as they argue may be happening within the U.S. today (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

These value types resonate with other researchers who have also found similar dual-values systems in modern societies (Hofstede, 2011; Putnam, 2000). In his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*, political scientist Robert Putnam argued that American society in recent decades has experienced a

significant decline in social capital—the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation in society—resulting in a rise of individualism and a decline of collectivism across society. In this new era of American individualism, Putnam documents that changes in work and the traditional family, alongside technological transformations, have reoriented many people to focus on personal interests and prioritize self-reliance over collective action and community engagement. He argues that this has weakened communal bonds and civic responsibilities. In other work, Putnam explores how this cultural shift is affecting younger generations, especially in light of growing economic inequality (Putnam, 2016). He emphasizes that the decline in social capital is disproportionately affecting disadvantaged young people, finding that young people from upper-class families are more likely to have higher levels of social capital and civic engagement than those from lower-class backgrounds (Sander & Putnam, 2010).

Authors William Strauss and Neil Howe developed a theory of generations by combining historical analysis with qualitative research to identify generational archetypes that they argue repeat throughout history with unique sets of values (Strauss & Howe, 1997). While their framework lacks empirical rigor, the body of work still offers insights into the values of different generational cohorts that is often cited throughout generational research. They find that each generational cohort is shaped by the specific historical context and social environment in which it comes of age, and propose that each generation belongs to one of four archetypes—the Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist. Prophets, such as the Baby Boomers, are typically born during or just after a crisis and grow up in a stable world, which provides the cultural context for them to have individualistic and self-expression values. Nomad generations, such as Gen X, grow up during an ‘awakening’ period led by Prophets, but also experience its institutional demise. They value personal freedom and autonomy and tend to be more skeptical of institutions and prevailing ideologies than the Prophets. Hero generations, like Millennials, come of age during a crisis and become the leaders during the aftermath to rebuild societal structures. Strauss and Howe find that Hero generations value security, connection, community, and collective action—values that culturally emerge from the conditions brought on by a crisis. Lastly, the Artist generation, such as Gen Z, grow up during a crisis and come of age during a time of societal rebuilding and solidarity. They express values of harmony, cooperation, diversity, inclusiveness, and collectivism.

There are also notable psychological approaches to studying generational values. Perhaps the most well-known is the work by Shalom Schwartz, who developed cultural value orientations that he argues guide all human behavior across cultures (Schwartz 1992, 2012, 2014). Schwartz used his measures to study cross-national patterns in value orientations and did not study generations. However, other notable researchers have applied his theory to the study of generations, including Ronald

Inglehart and Christian Welzel, who have integrated Schwartz's value model into the World Value Survey to understand cultural change and modernization across generations. Hofstede (2011) has also integrated Schwartz's value dimensions with his Hofstede cultural dimension model to explore generational differences within and across cultures. Several other scholars have also leveraged Schwartz's value model in the study of generations. The main findings from researchers using the Schwartz value model reveal that older generations tend to value security, stability, tradition and conformity, while younger generations emphasize collectivism and egalitarian values (see for example Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007).

In more recent research, psychologists Jean Twenge and Gary Gregg have narrowed in to study the unique values of the Millennial generation. In a landmark book, "Generation Me", Twenge (2014) finds that young Americans are more tolerant, assertive/confident and open-minded than older age cohorts, but also more entitled, individualistic, narcissistic, distrustful and civically disengaged than previous generations. However, this research is limited as its findings largely draw from the college-educated class of young people; the literature is also debated within the field of psychology, with some arguing for a cooperative and activist "Generation We" (see Greenberg & Weber, 2008; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). Gary Gregg (2018), in a qualitative study of young people's values, finds that Millennials embraced more culturally liberal or egalitarian views; for example, he finds that young people are more tolerant of other people regardless of religion, race, or sexual orientation, and are supportive of environmental protection and abortion rights.

Lastly, recent polling can provide indications of the cultural orientations of Millennials and Gen Z in comparison to older age cohorts. Recent polling has found that young people are more progressive than older generations with left-leaning views on policy issues like climate change and universal health care, as well as social issues like racial justice and LGBTQ+ rights (Latifi, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2018). Young people today are also more likely to identify as Independent rather than identify with one of the two major political parties (Jones, 2022). There is also evidence suggesting that young people's attitudes toward the role and scope of government differs greatly from older generations, with young people across ideologies more likely to think that government should do more to solve society's problems (Pew Research Center, 2018; Rouse & Ross, 2018), even if it means higher taxes for all (Heys, Swanbeck, & Hawkins, 2020). Yet polling has also uncovered trends that young people think that much in their lives is outside of their control, are pessimistic about their own futures and the fate of the country, and are feeling pessimistic about the American Dream, believing that while it was once true, it is no longer within reach for younger generations (Change Research, 2022).

Why use Cultural Theory to study generational values? An institutional approach to value change

This analysis draws from CT rather than the other frameworks described above because CT has a clear theoretical foundation for connecting the individual to the social and institutional structure. This is the primary reason for using CT over other frameworks for the study of values, such as postmaterialism (Inglehart, 2018), social capital theory (Putnam, 2000), generational theory (Strauss & Howe, 1997) or psychometric approaches (Schwartz, 2012). Postmaterialism is a socio-psychological theory focusing on how values are socialized and internalized by individuals during their formative, adolescent years. Its major shortcoming is that it does not take into consideration how values can also be influenced by institutional change. Social capital theory, on the other hand, does take an institutional approach, but it focuses on the construction of social relationships and lacks a clear understanding of how values are constructed through social bonds. While the generational theory put forth by Strauss and Howe is thought provoking, it is unsubstantiated by rigorous empirical evidence and the values associated with each archetype are loose and arbitrary. Like postmodernism, psychological approaches to values also disregard the institutional context individuals are embedded within and instead focus on how individuals process socialization through schemas and other cognitive processes.

While extensive documentation of the institutional relationships that define each generation is beyond the scope of this review, one could argue that major institutional relationships in U.S. society have changed with each generation. This is especially so for the youngest generations due to an era of globalization and neoliberal public management that arose in the 1980s just as the first cohort of Millennials were born (Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2017; Rouse & Ross, 2018). Major institutional transformations to the administration of government programs and the marketplace (Harvey, 2007), alongside significant changes to the traditional family system (Esping-Anderson, 1999; Hacker, 2019), have resulted in new risks experienced by younger generations as they have come of age, defining a unique generational culture (Green, 2017). In addition, new existential risks—such as climate change and Artificial Intelligence—have evolved as a result of societal progress (Beck, 1992) and may have the power to uniquely influence the culture of younger generations in the years to come. These institutional transformations give rise to the hypothesis that such changes have profoundly affected younger generations coming of age in the 21st century and therefore have shaped their values and worldviews as part of a unique cohort effect.

Overview of Cultural Theory

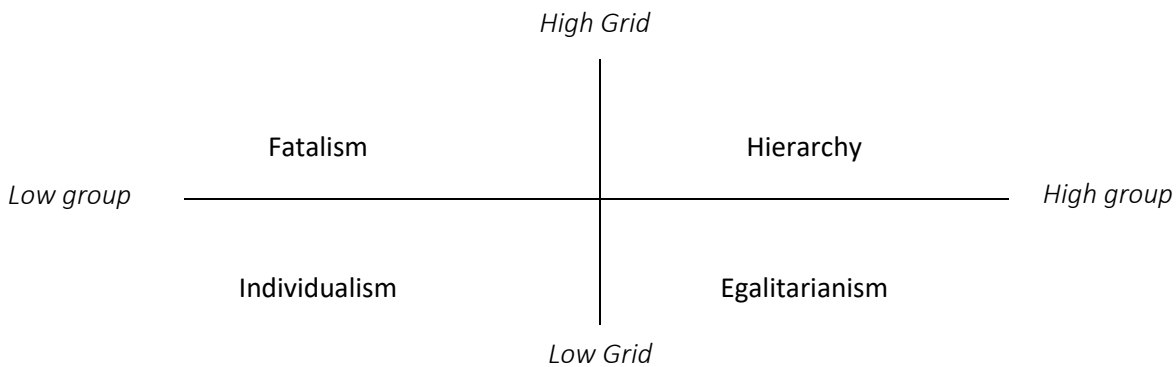
This study explores generational values using advances in Cultural Theory (Swedlow, et al., 2020). Cultural Theory (CT) makes it possible to study the shared worldviews, values and beliefs that develop among individuals engaged in specific patterns of social relationships. To elaborate: as argued by cultural theorists, individuals have different structural positions in society that are shaped by social relationships and institutions that both influence and reflect their cultural identities (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983; Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990; Thompson, Grendstad, & Per Selle, 1999). Depending on an individual's social position and the relationships they hold, the argument follows that different cultural contexts will shape an individual's worldviews, values, and beliefs, or rather, 'cultural biases'. Together, cultural biases and social relationships create 'cultural solidarities.' In turn, the theory posits that the cultural biases created within each cultural solidarity will influence (either consciously or unconsciously) individual norms, attitudes, and behaviors, perceptions of external risks, preferences for specific technologies, public policies, and ultimately will influence prevailing institutions in society (Siegrist & Árvai, 2020).

Researchers have developed a 'grid-group' typology of different cultural solidarities that can be used to explain the interaction of the individual and society (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983; Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990). The "group" dimension is the degree to which an individual acts as part of a group or alone; a "high group" way of life is a culture that exhibits a high degree of collective control, whereas a "low group" culture emphasizes individual self-sufficiency. The "grid" dimension is the degree to which individual behavior is regulated by external, socially constructed prescriptions. A "high grid" culture is characterized by strict, hierarchical and often authoritative social structures that classify individuals and regulates their interactions, whereas a "low grid" culture embraces equal positions in a social system with little to no external control.

With this grid-group typology, as shown in Figure 1, four primary cultural solidarities are established: hierarchical, individualistic, egalitarian, and fatalistic. Egalitarian cultural solidarities are low grid and high group, meaning that there tends to be high group involvement coupled with minimal external regulation. Hierarchical solidarities are high group, high grid, meaning that individuals are subject to both the control of others and the demands of socially imposed roles and restrictions. An individualistic solidarity is low group, low grid, and is characterized by individuals being relatively free from control by others. Lastly, the fatalistic solidarity is low group but high grid, indicating that the individual is isolated from group membership but constricted by external forces. Adherence to these social solidarities reflects an ongoing process of cultural conflict where culturally shared values and

beliefs act to either legitimate or change the social order, and will often be pitted against one another in political conflict (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990).

Figure 1 – CT’s grid and group dimensions of social relations/cultural types



Methods

Using CT, the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans (BIFYA) administered a national survey with YouGov from April 29 – May 13, 2020 to measure generational differences in value types. Findings from this paper are part of a larger mixed methods study to research in-depth new concepts about generational values, risk perceptions, attitudes, and political engagement that are not yet tested or well understood in the existing literature. The main research questions guiding this portion of the project ask:

1. Do different generations have unique values, and if so, how do values differ across generations?
2. What demographic characteristics are associated with different value types across generations?
3. Do different generations express different values across liberal, conservative, and moderate ideologies?

Survey sample – BIFYA contracted with YouGov, a company that has a proprietary opt-in survey panel of 1.8 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in web surveys. Since BIFYA is particularly interested in analyzing results by age or generation, the study was designed to oversample young people in the GenZ and Millennial age group (18-39-year-olds). In total, 2,270 participants completed the survey, with a 3 percent sampling margin of error for 18-39-year-olds, and a 4.9 percent sampling margin of error for those 40+. Demographic characteristics of the survey sample are listed in Table 1 of the Appendix, along with further description of the enrollment procedures and weighting of the data.

Survey items - BIFYA first measured differences in generational values in the 2020 survey using survey items developed by Jenkins-Smith and colleagues, as shown in Table 1 below (Jenkins-Smith & Smith, 1994; Ripberger, Jenkins-Smith, & Herron, 2011). Researchers have developed several survey items in recent years to measure the four cultural solidarities identified by Cultural Theory (Swedlow, et al., 2020). Other researchers have conducted Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the survey items to test whether the items are measuring the concepts identified by theory and find that the CT measures cluster as expected into four discrete concepts, with each of the three questions uniquely loading onto a single factor with no confounding (Johnson, Swedlow, & Mayorga, 2019; Johnson & Swedlow, 2024). A factor analysis of the survey items used in the BIFYA survey was conducted to measure the internal consistency of the questions associated with each value type. Results shared in the Appendix show that each of the measures clustered as expected into four discrete concepts, with each of the three questions uniquely loading onto a single factor (Table A3 provides factor loading and Chronbach's Alpha for all value types).

I used the Jenkins-Smith CT worldview measures since I was most interested in measuring differences in cultural biases, or rather, generational worldviews, values, and beliefs. According to Swedlow and colleagues (2020), the strength of the Jenkins-Smith indices is that they emphasize measuring the cultural biases side of CT rather than the social relationship side of CT. Other questions in our survey included questions related to the 2018 and 2020 election and attitudes toward the safety net during the COVID-19 pandemic (results from the election and safety net questions will be documented in separate papers). The research team also had access to background characteristics of the sample from the YouGov panel. The CT questions served as the foundation for this analysis, and the questions were used to explore correlations with the other questions asked in the survey or provided as background information on the participants.

Naïve CT index construction – Other studies using the Jenkins-Smith measures use the 12 CT survey items shown in Table 1 below to construct a naïve index by calculating the average score respondents assigned to each of the three items associated with each value type (Swedlow et al., 2020). I replicate this process by taking the average score respondents assigned to each of the three items associated with each value type; each of the 12 CT items in our survey used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Next, to make the index easier to interpret in figures showing regression analysis results, the naïve indexes were used to create a binary variable that was assigned a “1” if the index score associated with a given respondent was greater than three, and

assigned a “0” if the mean value index score was less than or equal to three. If a respondent had an average index score greater than three, this indicated that the respondent had answered at least neutral to two questions associated with a given value type, and agreed or strongly agreed with at least one question (answered either a 4 or 5 on the survey question).

Table 1. Jenkins-Smith worldview indices questions, as reported in Swedlow et al. (2020)

Egalitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Society works better if power is shared equally ● What society needs is a fairness revolution to make the distribution of goods more equal ● It is our responsibility to reduce differences in income between the rich and the poor
Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We are better off when we compete as individuals ● Even the disadvantaged should have to make their own way in the world ● Even if some people are at a disadvantage, it is best for society to let people succeed or fail on their own
Hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Society would be much better off if the people in charge imposed strict and swift punishment on those who break the rules ● Society is in trouble because people do not obey those in authority ● The best way to get ahead in life is to work hard and do what you are told
Fatalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No matter how hard we try, the course of our lives is largely determined by forces beyond our control ● It would be pointless to make serious plans in such an uncertain world ● The most important things that take place in life happen by chance

Defining generations for analysis

This analysis uses the definition of generations provided by the PEW research center (Pew, 2015). Gen Z is defined as those born after 1996 (but who were at least 18 at the time of the study recruitment); Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, and Gen X members were born between 1965 and 1980. Members of the Boomer generation were born between 1946 and 1964, whereas members of the Silent generation were born between 1928 and 1945 and those from the Greatest generation were born before 1928. In our analysis, I combine Millennials and Gen Z, and also combine members of the Silent and Greatest generation to address small sample sizes among the Gen Z and Greatest generations.

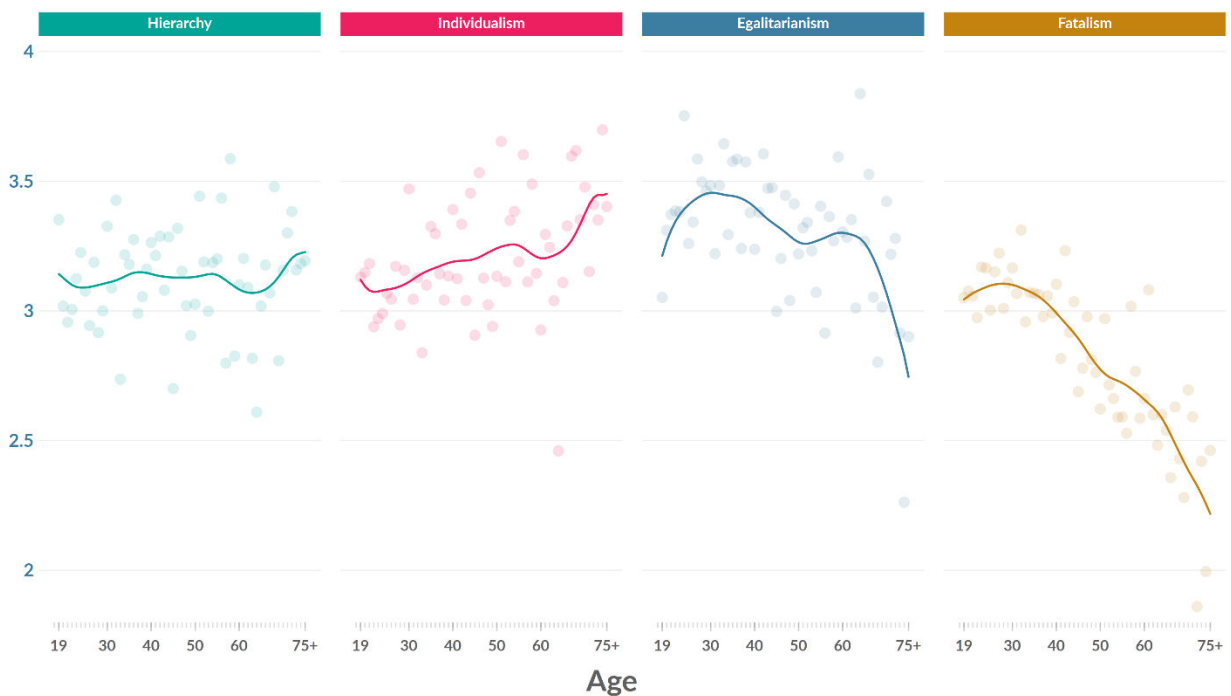
Findings

Figure 2 uses the LOWESS function in Stata to smooth the descriptive trends of the four value indexes by age.¹ Overall, 25-to-40 year olds reported higher average levels of fatalism and egalitarianism than other age groups. In fact, after a slight initial increase of fatalism between ages 19 to 30, fatalism decreases steadily until 75 years old. Support for egalitarianism also tends to be higher among young adults, peaking at age 30 at about 3.5-points on a 5-point Likert scale, and then declining until age 50 when there is a slight uptick for 50-60-year-olds. On average, individualism on the LOWESS plot is also lowest among the youngest adults in our sample, and individualism steadily increases by age (with the exception of an average decrease from ages 50-60). There is no notable pattern of changes in hierarchy by age. See Appendix Figure A1-A4 for a kernel density estimation of the value indexes by generation.

Figure 2

How do values differ by age?

Mean of value measures, Likert scale (1-5)



Source: Authors' analysis of YouGov data, administered April 29 - May 13, 2020.
 Notes: This figure visualizes the average values for ages 19-75+ using a LOWESS function with a bandwidth of .4. Age is imputed based on the year of the survey and self-reported birth year; therefore, it may be subject to error at the margin depending on if a respondent's birth date had passed by the time of the survey.
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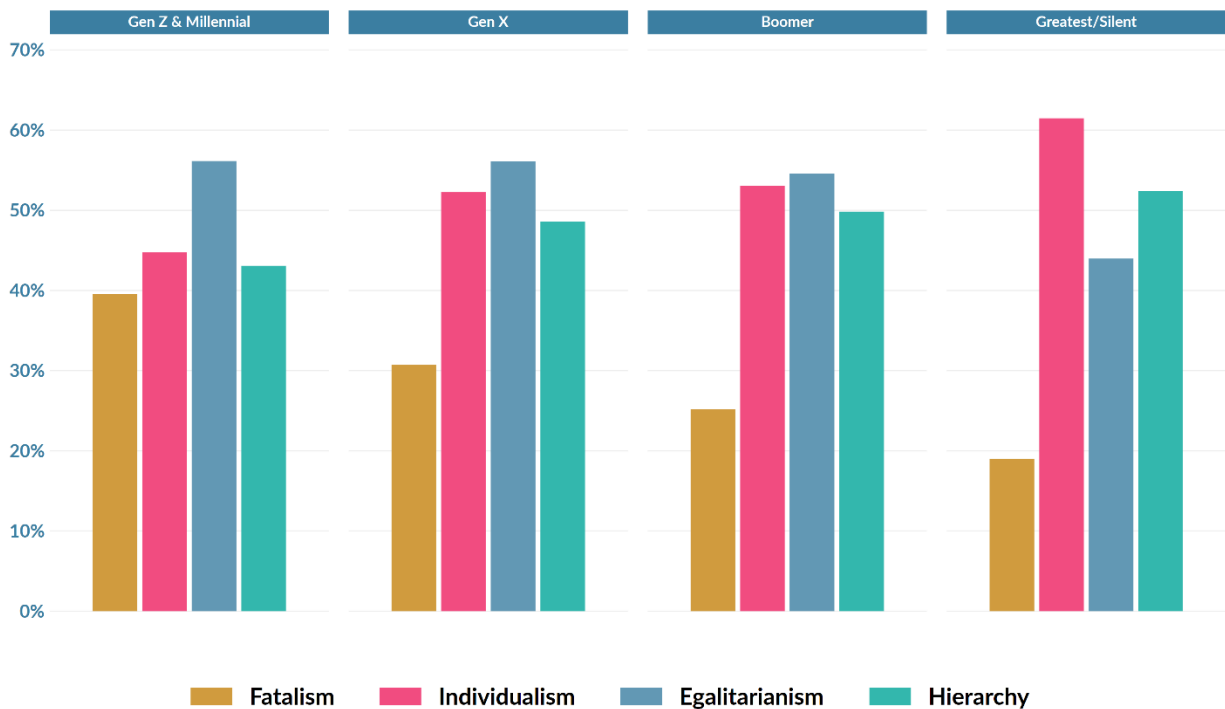
Figure 3 presents a grouped version of Figure 2, with mean value types grouped by generation instead of age. As shown, about 40% of the survey sample who were Millennials and Gen Zers expressed fatalistic values, and each subsequent older generation shows proportionately less—about

¹ This figure uses a .4 bandwidth.

30% of Gen Xers reported fatalistic values, 25% of Baby Boomers, and roughly 20% of the Greatest/Silent generation. On the other hand, a larger proportion of the Greatest/Silent generation expressed individualistic values, at just over 60% of the sample. Just over 60% of the sample of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers expressed individualistic values, and about 45% of the Millennial/Gen Z generation expressed individualistic values. Roughly 55% of Millennials/Gen Z, Gen X, and the Baby Boomers expressed egalitarian values, compared to about 43% of the Greatest/Silent generation. About 50% of the Gen X, Baby Boomer, and Greatest/Silent generations expressed hierarchical values, whereas just 43% of the Millennial/Gen Z generation did.

Figure 3

Percent of sample expressing each value type by generation



Source: Authors' analysis of YouGov data, administered April 29 - May 13, 2020.
 Notes: This figure visualizes the average values for ages 19-75+ using a LOWESS function with a bandwidth of .4. Age is imputed based on the year of the survey and self-reported birth year; therefore, it may be subject to error at the margin depending on if a respondent's birth date had passed by the time of the survey.
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Figure 4 below displays two regression models. The first 'base model' displays the coefficients of a regression of each of the four value types on generation, using the Greatest/Silent generation as the base case. The 'full model' adds controls for poverty, college education, gender, race, and conservative ideology. The most notable generational differences in value type is fatalism—in both models, Millennials & Gen Zers with fatalistic values are nearly 20 percentage points more likely to express fatalistic values than members of the Greatest/Silent generation. Among Gen Xers, those with fatalistic

values are 9-12 percentage points more likely to express fatalistic values than members of the Greatest/Silent generation, depending on the model. These results are not statistically significant for Baby Boomers, who have positive point estimates for fatalism relative to the Greatest/Silent generation in either the base or full models. The base model for egalitarianism shows interesting results as well. Millennial & Gen Z generations as well as Gen X were about 12 percentage points more likely to express egalitarian values than those in the Greatest/Silent generation; Baby Boomers were about 10 percentage points more likely. The effect diminishes in the full model, however, for all three generations, leading to statistically insignificant results. The base model for individualism shows that Millennials & Gen Zers were about 16 percentage points less likely to express individualistic values than members of the Greatest/Silent generation, and members of Gen X and the Baby Boomer generations were about 8-9 percentage points less likely. The effects diminish once again when controls are added in the full model. The results for hierarchy show no statistically significant difference for any generation in either model, except for Millennials/Gen Z in the base model who are about 10 percentage points less likely to express hierarchical values than members of the Greatest/Silent generation.

Figure 4

How do generational values differ relative to the Greatest/Silent generation?

Percentage point (ppt) difference in each generation expressing value preference



Source: Authors' analysis of YouGov data, administered April 29 - May 13, 2020.
 Notes: This figure illustrates the generational (percentage point) differences in the value preferences of each generation relative to Greatest/Silent generations for our base model (no controls) and full model with controls for poverty status, college attainment, gender, race, and political ideology. Value preferences are based on a binary indicator for each value, with respondents coded as holding a particular value if the mean of their index value is greater than three.
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Next, Figure 5 displays a series of regression models showing the relationship between education level and value type, as well as demographics and value type with controls in each of the regression models.² There are a few notable trends among the association of a college degree with different value types within the Millennial/Gen Z, Baby Boomer, and Greatest/Silent generations. Respondents from the Millennial/Gen Z generation with a 4-year college degree were about 8 percentage points more likely to express egalitarian values than those in their age cohort with less than a 4-year degree. Respondents from the Baby Boomer generation with at least a 4-year college degree were 23 percentage points less likely to express hierarchical values and about 18 percentage points less likely to express fatalistic values than those from their generation without a 4-year degree. Members of the Greatest/Silent generation with a college degree were about 18 percentage points less likely to express fatalistic values than those without a 4-year degree. There were no statistically significant patterns between demographics and value type for Gen X.

Poverty level appears to have a positive association with fatalism for the Millennial/Gen Z generations; those living in poverty were about 9 percentage points more likely to express fatalistic values than Millennials/Gen Zers not living in poverty. Gen Xers living in poverty were about 12 percentage points more likely to have egalitarian values than those in their generation not living in poverty. Baby Boomers living in poverty were more likely to express egalitarian and fatalistic views than those from their generation not living in poverty. There were no statistically significant differences for those living in poverty from the Greatest/Silent generations.

The relationship between gender and value type also shows a few notable patterns. Millennial/Gen Z men are about 8 percentage points more likely to be individualistic and 9 percentage points more likely to be egalitarian than women in this generation. Gen X men are about 18 percentage points more likely to be individualistic than women in their generation. Baby Boomer men are 10 percentage points less likely to express egalitarian values than women in their generation. Lastly, male members of the Greatest/Silent generation are 12 percentage points more likely to have individualistic values than women in their generation.

One of the most striking results shown in Figure 4 is the way that value types shift among people of color across generations. Overall, young people of color are more hierarchical and individualistic than

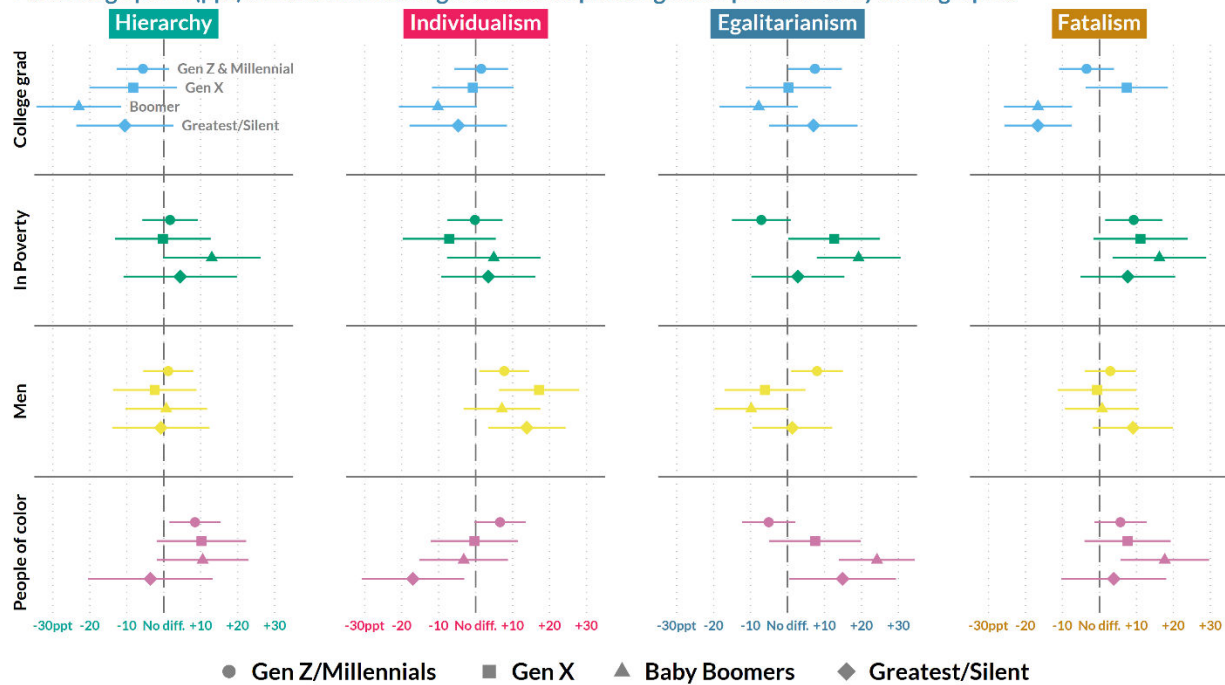
² To interpret statistical significance on Figures 5 & 6, if the standard error bars do not cross the vertical dotted line that means the result was statistically significant. Note that the error bar must cross entirely through the statistical significance line to have a null effect.

white people in their generation, whereas Baby Boomers of color are more egalitarian and fatalistic than their white counterparts, and members of the Greatest/Silent generation who are people of color are less individualistic and more egalitarian than whites in their generation. Looking at the pattern of individualism across generations, it is clear that respondents from the Greatest/Silent generation are about 18 percentage points less likely to have individualistic values than white people in their generation, but this decreases for each subsequent generation. People of color from the youngest generation actually show a positive association with individualistic values and are about 8 percentage points more likely to express individualistic values than their white counterparts. Likewise, members of the Greatest/Silent generation and Baby Boomers are more likely to express egalitarian values than white people in their respective generations, but this pattern diminishes for each subsequent younger generation.

Figure 5

Value type by demographic and generation

Percentage point (ppt) difference in each generation expressing value preference by demographic



Source: Authors' analysis of YouGov data, administered April 29 - May 13, 2020.
 Notes: This model includes controls for poverty status, college attainment, gender, race, and political ideology. Value preferences are based on a binary indicator for each value, with respondents coded as holding a particular value if the mean of their index value is greater than three.
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Next, given that values are closely associated with ideology, Figure 6 explores whether there are patterns in how generational values are associated with ideology (see Appendix Figure A5 for results by political party identification, which are nearly aligned with the results presented here for ideology). Note

that in this model I ran a series of interactions between the subgroup and generation (with the rest of the controls remaining the same). Starting with liberalism, it appears that those who ascribe to a liberal ideology are more likely to have egalitarian values and less likely to have individualistic or hierarchical values, which holds across generations. There are a few notable generational differences. Members of the Greatest/Silent generation and Baby Boomers that identify as liberal are about 50 percentage points less likely to express individualistic values. This contrasts with younger generations, where the percentage point difference is less extreme. Millennials/Gen Z who identify as liberal are about 25 percentage points less likely to hold individualistic values than counterparts within their generation who do not identify as liberal, and Gen X is about 18 percentage points less likely. This pattern replicated within the hierarchy value type, with the older generations identifying as liberal being about 30 percentage points less likely to express hierarchical values, whereas for the younger generations, it is only about a 20 percentage point difference. Lastly, Gen Xers who identify as liberal are about 12 percentage points more likely to hold fatalistic values than those within their generation who do not identify as liberal.

Conservatives show an inverse pattern. Across generations, those with individualistic and hierarchical values are more likely to identify as conservative, whereas those who express egalitarian values share a negative association with conservatism. Again, there are generational differences across value type, particularly individualism and egalitarianism. Older generations that identify as conservatives are far less likely to express egalitarian values than those in their generation who identify with other ideologies, but that is not the case for younger generations. Millennials/Gen Zers who identify as conservative are about 20 percentage points less likely to have egalitarian values than others in their generation identifying with another ideology. Moreover, members of the Millennial/Gen Z and Gen X generations who identify as conservatives are nearly 40 percentage points more likely to express individualistic values than those in their generation that ascribe to a non-conservative ideology. The difference increases for older generations by about 10 percentage points—Baby Boomers and members of the Greatest/Silent generation with a conservative ideology are more likely to identify as individualistic by nearly 50 percentage points.

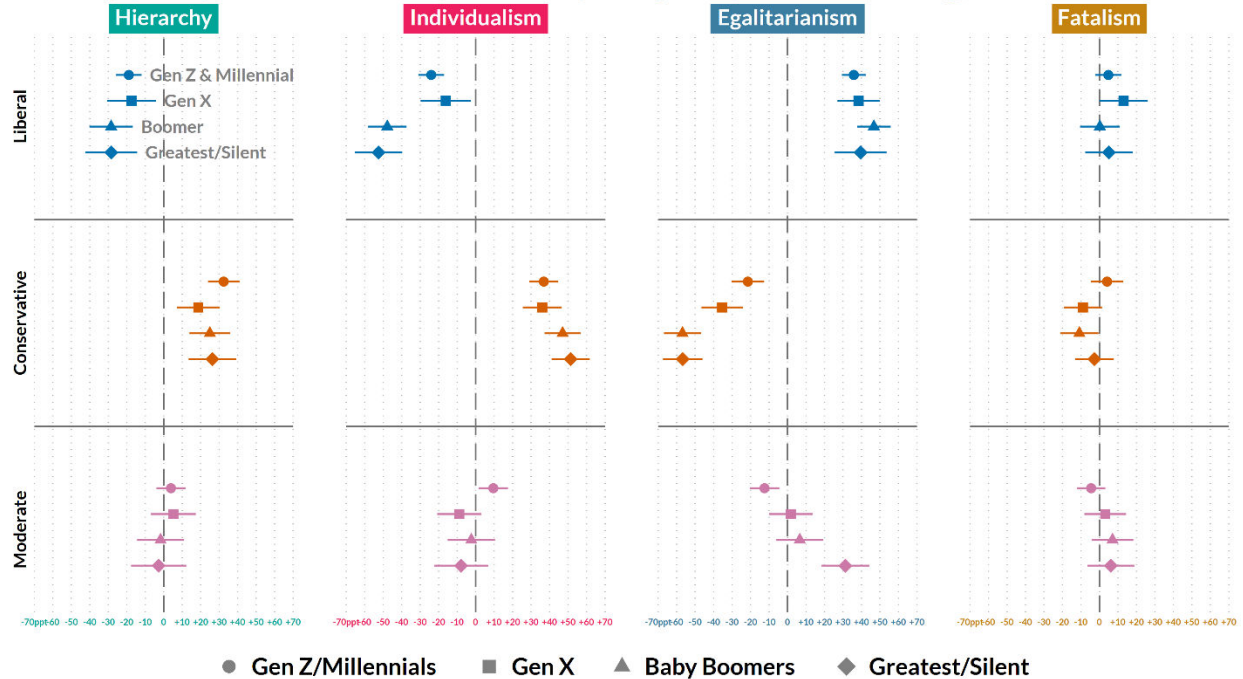
Among moderates, it appears that Millennials/Gen Zers who identify as moderate are more likely to express individualistic values and slightly less likely to express egalitarian values. There are no distinguishable and statistically significant patterns among Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. Among

respondents from the Greatest/Silent generation, those identifying as moderate are more likely to express egalitarian values than those in their generation who do not embrace egalitarianism.

Figure 6

Value type by ideology and generation

Percentage point (ppt) difference in each generation expressing value preference by ideology



Source: Authors' analysis of YouGov data, administered April 29 - May 13, 2020.
 Notes: This model includes controls for poverty status, college attainment, gender, race, and political ideology. Value preferences are based on a binary indicator for each value, with respondents coded as holding a particular value if the mean of their index value is greater than three.
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Discussion

One of the main descriptive findings of this study is that on average, young adults in the BIFYA survey sample were more egalitarian and fatalistic and less individualistic than older age cohorts. There is no precedent for understanding these results in the field of Cultural Theory since this is the first attempt to use CT in the study of generations. However, our descriptive findings resonate with other generational scholars, such as Abramson and Inglehart (1987), Gregg (2018), and Strauss & Howe (1997). The general consensus from these researchers is that younger generations express more collectivist or community-oriented values and are more likely to accept diversity and embrace social justice. This stands in contrast to older generations, who this group of scholars posits embrace conformity and tradition, economic and physical security, as well as stability and order. The generational effects for individualism and egalitarianism found in this study diminish, however, in the regression models comparing each generation to the Greatest/Silent generation, which suggests that demographic

characteristics and education levels may influence degrees of individualism and egalitarianism across generations.

Notably, CT provides a 'grid' dimension that shows the degree to which individual behavior is regulated by external structures; therefore, the CT typology includes the value types of 'fatalism' and 'hierarchy' that are not provided by other frameworks. The finding that young people are more likely to express fatalistic views than older age groups is the most consistent finding across our models with and without controls, as shown in Figure 3. This finding also picks up on an important yet overlooked cultural insight into younger generations that may explain the more dire outlook that has emerged in recent polling (Change Research, 2022; Harvard Institute of Politics, 2023; Latifi, 2022). This finding has important implications for young people's attitudes and behaviors—especially their political behaviors—that are theorized to be associated with deeper value orientations.

For example, in a separate working paper that follows-up with participants who completed this initial survey, I find evidence of young people's fatalistic outlook in relationship to their voting behavior (Heys, forthcoming). Qualitative interviews reveal that young people who chose not to vote in the 2020 election were disillusioned with the political system and thought it had been taken over by special interests. They were especially distrustful of political institutions and did not think that the political system represented their interests or responded to the economic, social, and environmental risks they faced in their everyday lives. Moreover, this fatalistic outlook toward voting was even shared among some young people who chose to vote, with many young people pointing to a corrupt political system that only represented the interests of the economic elite and other powerful actors in society. Such findings lend important insights into how younger generations' fatalistic values play out in other facets of life but much more research is needed to understand this dire outlook among the youngest generations and how it might influence their capacity for collective action and other forms of political behavior.

Important nuances emerge in the data by demographic. Starting with education level, there is evidence that Millennials/Gen Zers with 4-year college degrees are more likely to express egalitarian values than those within their generation without 4-year degrees. A college degree is negatively associated with hierarchy among Baby Boomers, and negatively correlated with fatalism among Baby Boomers and the Greatest/Silent generation. Those living in poverty among Millennials/Gen Zers and Baby Boomers are more likely to express fatalistic values, while those living in poverty among the Gen X and Baby Boomer generations are more likely to embrace egalitarian values.

While there are no clear generational patterns that emerge from education level and poverty, clearer patterns by demographic emerged by gender. Across nearly every generation, being male was associated with an increased likelihood of having individualistic values (results for Baby Boomers were not significantly different). This resonates with research literature finding that men tend to be more individualistic while women are collectivist oriented (Hofstede 2011; Triandis, 1995). There is a notable anomaly among Millennial and Gen Z men, who were found to be more likely to embrace egalitarian values than women in their generation. More research is needed to unpack this trend to identify the type of young men who are more likely to be egalitarian.

Among the most striking findings from this study is the way that generational values appear to be changing among people of color. Members of the Greatest/Silent generation were less likely to be individualistic and more likely to be egalitarian than the white counterparts within their generation. This pattern generally decreases with each subsequent younger generation, with people of color in the youngest generation of Millennials and Gen Zers being more individualistic and less egalitarian than older age cohorts. Again, much more research is needed to understand this generational reversal among people of color, and whether this trend can be explained by a cohort effect.

Lastly, this analysis identified the generational values associated with ideological identification, showing that respondents who identified as liberal were more likely to have egalitarian values, and those who identified as conservative tended to have individualistic and hierarchical values. These findings resonate with other literature leveraging Cultural Theory that shows the relationship between value type and ideology and political party identification (Swedlow, Ripberger, & Yuan, 2024). Specifically, other researchers have found that egalitarians and fatalists tend to identify as liberals and Democrats and individualists and hierarchists tend to identify as conservatives and Republicans. Findings from this study confirm this pattern, and also confirm that the pattern generally holds across generational lines. However, a surprising finding from this study is the degree to which different generations' value beliefs appear to be polarized across ideology. There was less of a spread of values for the Millennial/Gen Z generation than there was for older generations in relationship to liberal and conservative ideological orientations. In other words, among both young adults who identified as liberal or conservative, their values differed less from members of their generations who ascribed to other ideologies than among the older age cohorts, whose values were much more polarized in relationship to ideology. This finding resonates with other recent research that has found that younger generations tend to be less polarized than older generations, and that polarization may increase with age (Jocker et al., 2024; Phillips, 2022).

There are important limitations to this study. This paper presents an analysis of generational values using cross-sectional survey data collected prior to the 2020 election and does not attempt to disentangle the age, period, and cohort effects commonly associated with the study of generations (Neundorf & Niemi, 2014). Given that much is unknown about differences in generational values, especially among the Millennial and Gen Z generations, the survey findings provide an indicator of how values may be changing within different generations to build theory and guide future areas of research. Another limitation is that the survey was taken during a time of major social disruption with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, recent surveys from leading pollsters such as Pew and the Harvard Institution of Politics show that the generational values captured in the BIFYA survey are reflected in many of the prevailing attitudes and behaviors measured since 2020 (Change Research, 2022; Harvard Institute of Politics, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2018).

In conclusion, analysis of survey data collected in 2020 using CT found measurable differences of the values held by people of different age groups, suggesting that young adults of the Gen Z and Millennial generations tend to be more egalitarian, fatalistic, and less individualistic than older age groups. Elevated levels of fatalism among younger age cohorts was the most salient trend, with Millennials/Gen Zers measurably more fatalistic than older generations even after controlling for demographics, education level, and ideology. The analysis also uncovered notable differences in how values have changed generationally among people of color, and more research is needed to determine if this is a cohort effect, and why the cohort effect has taken place. There also needs to be more research about the changing ideology of young adults, especially as young adults appear to be less polarized than older age cohorts who identify with traditional liberal and conservative ideologies. While this study offers a first attempt to systematically measure differences in generational values, much more research is needed to understand the values, attitudes, and behaviors of one of the most egalitarian yet fatalistic generation in U.S. history. As generational replacement takes place in the upcoming years, it will be even more important to understand the values of younger generation since their outlook and preferences will have the power to shape prevailing institutions across society in the years to come.

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