HOW CHANGES IN THE ECONOMY ARE
RESHAPING AMERICAN VALUES

by Daniel Yankelovich

Major Changes in Values

Some of the clearest trend data on changing American attitudes and values depict a shift away from xenophobia and toward greater acceptance of diversity -- a striking manifestation of the live-and-let-live philosophy associated with the affluence effect.

Greater Tolerance and Acceptance of Pluralism

The early days of public opinion polling, in the 1930s and 1940s, portrayed an America openly and vigorously anti-black, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-foreigner, and opposed to equality for women.

The opinion polls of the 1930s focused on attitudes toward Jews, because of Hitler's persecution of the Jews. These polls showed that anti-Semitism was widespread throughout the country. In a 1939 Roper poll for Fortune magazine, Roper found that a majority of Americans (53 percent) felt that Jews were different from other Americans and should be restricted in various ways, including preventing Jews from "mingling socially where they are not wanted" and even deporting them to a "new homeland."

Almost forty years later, in January 1987, a Gallup poll asked Americans whom they would not like to have living next door to them as neighbors. Only 3 percent mentioned Jews.

One of the most compelling bits of evidence for declining xenophobia in America is a time-series question that Gallup and National Opinion Research Center (NORC) have been asking for many years: whether voters would or would not vote for a Jew for president, a black for president, or a woman for president (the presidency being the most universal symbol of social acceptance). On willingness to vote for a Jewish presidential candidate, the nation moved from an even split in 1937 (47 percent to 46 percent) to an 8:1 positive ratio fifty years later (82 percent to 10 percent).[7]

The question of attitudes toward African-Americans is more ambiguous. But even so, clear cut trends are discernible. When, in May 1944, an NORC survey asked a cross-section of Americans whether they felt "Negroes in their town" had the same chance as whites to get a good education, the overwhelming majority (84 percent) answered yes. When asked why they were not as well educated as whites, the majority (54 percent) cited lower intelligence or lack of ambition. When asked "Do you think Negroes are as intelligent as white people -- that is, can they learn just as well if they are given the same education?" more whites answered no than yes (47 percent to 44 percent). And when at the end of a long series of similar questions, white Americans were asked whether "most Negroes in the United States are being treated fairly or unfairly," only one out of four answered "unfairly."

As recently as 1968, a majority of white Americans (55 percent) endorsed the view that they had a right "to keep blacks out of their neighborhood if they wanted to, and that blacks should respect that right." NORC has asked this same question every year since 1968, and the trend line is unambiguous: by 1990, the 55 percent majority who felt they had a right to keep blacks out had dwindled to a 22 percent minority.

Even more dramatic is the trend line on whether Americans would vote for a black for president, rising sharply from a 38 percent minority as reported in a 1958 Gallup poll to a strong 84 percent majority in a 1990 NORC study.

Changing attitudes toward women show a similar pattern. In an April 1946 Roper survey for Fortune a cross-
section of Americans were asked about the comparative qualifications of men and women for various jobs "when men and women are given an equal chance." The results are wondrously one-sided. Men were selected as "making the best welders in a factory" (80 percent to 5 percent), the "best lawyers" (78 percent to 8 percent), the "best department store executives" (55 percent to 22 percent), the "best high school teachers of history" (41 percent to 33 percent), and the best baby doctors" (46 percent to 31 percent). Women were selected overwhelmingly for only one type of job -- as making the "best stenographers" (86 percent to 5 percent). The reason men were thought to enjoy such greater potential in the eyes of Americans was implicit in a Gallup poll conducted that same year: in answer to the question, "Generally speaking, which do you think are more intelligent, men or women?" men were chosen over women by two to one (40 percent to 20 percent).

The trend line on the acceptability of a woman for president could hardly be more dramatic: a 2:1 ratio of respondents saying they would not vote for a woman in a 1937 Gallup poll to a nearly 7:1 ratio (82 percent to 12 percent) in a 1987 Gallup poll saying they would.

What do these trends mean? Clearly, as the Los Angeles riots and similar events demonstrate, they do not mean enlightened race relations and easy acceptance of pluralism. There are many reasons for this unpleasant reality. Greater pluralism in society requires more skilled management; the institutions on which we depend for fair and effective management, especially the schools and the justice system, do not work well; and economic hard times exacerbate tensions. But knowing that the public has grown less xenophobic is important in considering policy solutions to the problem of rising racial tensions.

Consider the troubled question of affirmative action. In response to a Gallup/Newsweek question in April 1991 on whether affirmative action quotas are necessary to achieve fairness in education, hiring, and promotion, whites reject the use of quotas by two-to-one margins (59 percent to 29 percent), while the reverse pattern holds for blacks: by more than two to one (61 percent to 26 percent), blacks believe that quotas are necessary.

How should one interpret these findings in the light of the secular trend toward greater pluralism? Unlike the America of the 1930s, the American public today accepts a pluralistic society in which women and minorities have access to equal opportunities with white males. Various opinion polls show that some forms of affirmative action -- those that include outreach, remedial training, scholarships, and good faith efforts to find qualified candidates for schools or jobs -- are acceptable. But anything that smacks of preferential treatment, such as selecting candidates on the basis of race or gender (or giving these factors any weight), is so unacceptable to the public that it has grown into a divisive political issue.

A study conducted for the Democratic Leadership Council in May 1992 found that the main reason for the sharply divergent attitudes between blacks and whites on quotas reflects mistrust on both sides far more than it does racial prejudice. Whites fear that with quotas, less qualified minorities will get the good jobs; blacks fear that without quotas, less qualified whites will get the good jobs. Black Americans' fear reflects a deepening pessimism. Over the past several decades the optimism of black Americans about their progress has declined steadily and sharply. In 1970 almost two-thirds of blacks (64 percent) believed the situation of black people in this country was improving. A decade later in 1980, black optimism had slipped to 49 percent. By 1988 it had declined further to 33 percent, and by April 1991 had eroded still further to a mere 21 percent.[8] In sharp contrast, an October 1990 Gallup poll shows that 61 percent of the public overall believe the quality of life of blacks has improved over the past ten years.

In the debate over various forms of affirmative action, one of America's strongest core values is seen to be at risk. Traditionally, Americans balance the conflicting claims of freedom and equality through adherence to the concept of equality of opportunity. (See earlier inventory of core values.) The almost sacred principle of equality of opportunity depends utterly on rigid respect for people's qualifications. The idea that a less qualified person should get the job for whatever reason violates America's faith in individual effort and in merit. Forms of affirmative action that guarantee equality of opportunity receive strong majority support (at
the two-thirds level). Forms that seem to violate this core value are rejected vehemently.

Without denying that racial prejudice still exists, the practical ramifications of these findings on values and attitudes for public policy are important. They suggest that policy initiatives that threaten our core values will inevitably invite backlash and undermine the policymaker's good intentions. If the heart of the problem is mistrust, then the policy emphasis shifts from legalistic solutions to enforce "numerical targets" (that is, quotas) to efforts to engage and reduce mistrust, especially justified black mistrust that existing job qualifications are biased to favor white candidates because they emphasize formal education over ability to do the job.

Successful policies should reinforce core values, not undermine them. A review of current policies designed to strengthen pluralism will, I believe, show that more often than not they ride roughshod over American core values, thereby insuring their defeat and giving rise to the mistaken impression that popular prejudice not the obtuseness of policymakers is to blame.

In the examples that follow, the pattern is dialectic rather than linear -- a swing to the opposite extreme, followed by an effort at synthesis as people struggle to reconcile the old and the new.

**Marriage and Family**

The chief impact of the affluence effect in all of the advanced industrial democracies has probably been on family life and the role of women. The affluence effect causes a shift from traditional roles in marriage to personal relationships. In the past, roles in marriage were sharply differentiated: the men as breadwinners and providers and the women as caretakers and homemakers. Now these roles have grown blurred.

The shift is a difficult one for our societies. Historically, marriage has been so squarely based on sharply defined roles for husbands and wives that when these expectations blur people have to relearn how to behave. As a result, there is a great deal of confusion: marriage becomes a major source of tension.

The combined effect of greater individualism, greater independence and autonomy for women, more choice, less automatic sacrifice, and more questioning of traditional roles has been to place the family under great strain. Maintaining family life in the face of such strain has become the most important value of tens of millions of Western Europeans, Japanese, and American families.

Structural changes in American family composition have proved radical. The Bureau of the Census shows that in the 1950s, most households -- approximately 70 percent -- consisted of a male breadwinner, a female homemaker, and two or more children under the age of 18 living at home. When the word "family" is used, most Americans still conjure up this image. Today, however, a mere 8 percent of households fit this model. An additional 18 percent consist of dual-earner households with one or more children under 18 living at home. Thirty percent of families comprise married couples without children. Eight percent are single parents. Eleven percent are unmarried couples and others living together. And a whopping 25 percent (up from 17 percent in 1970) are people living alone -- one out of every four households.

These transformations are not solely because of shifts in values, but value changes contribute significantly to them. For example, in 1943 Gallup asked a cross-section of 25-35-year-old women to choose among three alternatives: being unmarried with a successful career; being married with a successful career; and being married and running a home. Three out of four (73 percent) chose the third alternative, and among those who did want a career and marriage, four out of five said that if they had to choose, they would drop the career -- a total of 87 percent choosing running a home over a career.

In 1938 Gallup showed that Americans disapproved of married women working outside the home by a ratio of almost 4:1 (78 percent to 22 percent). By February 1986, a study by NORC shows that the pattern had
totally reversed: almost 4:1 approved (77 percent to 22 percent).

In the mid-1950s I conducted a study among married women to learn how much choice they felt they had about whether or not to have children. When I raised the question, the women stared at me uncomprehendingly. The gist of their response was, "If you are married, you have children. It is not even a question, let alone a matter of choice. Having children is what being a married woman means."

In a series of studies on what it means to be "a real man," our research findings were equally unequivocal: until the late 1960s, being a real man meant being a good provider for the family. No other conception of what it means to be a real man came even close. Concepts of sexual potency, or physical strength, or strength of character (manliness), or even being handy around the house were relegated to the bottom of the list of traits associated with masculinity. By the late 1970s, however, the definition of a real man as a good provider had slipped from its number one spot (86 percent in 1968) to the number three position, at 67 percent. It has continued to erode.iii[9]

Family values have become the main arena for the showdown between the new expressive values of seeking greater choice for the self and the more traditional claims of family bonds, commitments, and obligations. At one and the same time, the majority of Americans profess that family values are the most important values in their lives and that they are satisfied with their own family life, and yet as soon as one probes, one encounters a wave of fault-finding and pessimism about the future of the family.

If anything, the importance of the family as a value has increased in the past two decades. In 1976, 83 percent of the public declared family life a very important value; by 1991, the number of Americans holding this point of view had increased to 93 percent.iv[10] A series of NORC studies over the past twenty years shows that three-quarters of all Americans say they are satisfied with their family life. v[11]

Yet the evidence is strong that Americans are worried about family and the prospects for the institution of marriage.

--By a ratio of more than 4:1 (62 percent to 14 percent), Americans believe family values have grown weaker in recent years, not stronger.vi[12]

--More than two out of five Americans (43 percent) feel that changes in the traditional family structure "severely threaten" the American Dream. vii[13]

--From the middle to the late 1980s, the number of Americans who believe that "the family is the place where most basic values are instilled" declined from 82 percent to 62 percent. viii[14]

--When asked in a July 1989 Roper poll for Virginia Slims whether or not marriages have improved since the 1970s, by a ratio of 45 percent to 35 percent, women say they have gotten worse (the ratio for men is similar - 43 percent to 33 percent).

--Even more tellingly, when people were asked whether the "kinds of marriages" people have today require change in order to make women's lives better, 78 percent of women said that change was needed, and almost the same number of men (70 percent) agreed.ix[15]

--Asked in a November 1989 Gallup poll whether they feel the divorce rate will get better or worse in the next ten years, by more than two to one (46 percent to 22 percent), Americans think it will get worse.

--Asked about the future prospects for family life in America, only 6 percent felt they were excellent, in sharp contrast to a 59 percent majority who feel they are "only fair" (30 percent) or "poor" (29 percent).x[16]

What underlies this pervasive feeling of pessimism? One factor that people cite in survey after survey is that
parents have less time to spend with their children. This is the number one answer to the question, "Which is the most important cause of family values having grown weaker?" When people are asked to list the ways in which family values should be strengthened, the top rated-answer (55 percent) is that parents should spend more time with the family.

Also high on the list are greater efforts to teach family values in churches, synagogues, and schools, and better role models on television. At the bottom of the list are such policy issues as having business allow workers to do more work at home, providing day care for children of working parents, and allowing more flexible work schedules. This does not mean these issues are unimportant to people; it does mean that people feel these social policies are not as important as the less tangible factors cited above partly because they do not make the connection between them and parents having more time with their children. (This is another example of the relevance of values to social policy.)

When we probe the question of what "family values" mean, we begin to see how Americans are attempting to meld the new expressive values with the traditional ones. When people are asked how they define family values, eleven meanings receive majority endorsement. Of these, six are clearly traditional:

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<th>Value</th>
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<td>--Respecting one's parents.</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>--Being responsible for one's actions</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Having faith in God.</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>--Respecting authority.</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>--Married to the same person for life.</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>--Leaving the world in better shape.</td>
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The other five are a blend of traditional and newer, more expressive values:

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<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>--Giving emotional support to the members of the family.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Respecting people for themselves.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Developing greater skill in communicating one's feelings.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Respecting one's children.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Living up to one's full potential as an individual.</td>
<td>54</td>
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Significantly, some important traditional family values of the 1950s fail to be endorsed by most Americans. Fewer than 50 percent cite "being married" (47 percent) as part of their definition of family values, or "having children" (45 percent). Fewer than 4 out of 10 include "earning a good living" (39 percent) or being financially secure" (37 percent). And a mere 20 percent include "having nice things" in their definition.[17]

Americans want very much to hold onto those intangible aspects of tradition that center on religion, respect, discipline, and responsibility. But they also want to graft onto these traditional values the newer emphases on freer communication of feelings and the opportunity to live up to one's full potential as an individual.

Despite their pessimism about marriage and family, most people (78 percent) feel they are better off today than their parents were at a comparable stage in life. By three to one (44 percent to 15 percent), they feel their family life has turned out better than they expected, and, as they look to the future, 81 percent expect eventually to lead a more satisfactory life than their parents did.
Comparing their lives with those of their parents, people acknowledge that some things will be more difficult and others easier. By 49 percent to 30 percent, they think they will have more difficulty than their parents did in finding the money to put kids through college and by 41 percent to 32 percent they think owning a home will be more difficult. Conversely, however, by 47 percent to 14 percent, they believe it will be easier for them to be in good physical health. Of equal importance, by 44 percent to 16 percent they think it will be easier to have an interesting job and even easier (by 42 percent to 31 percent) to earn enough money for a good living. [18]

These findings show that Americans today realize that they are better off in many ways than their parents were. But at the same time, they are aware that many of the new values and lifestyles threaten the family -- an institution that has come to mean more to them now that it can no longer be taken for granted.

**The Meaning of Success**

One of the most sweeping changes in postwar American cultural values relates to the meaning of success. In the 1950s Americans shared a certain definition. Success meant getting married, raising children who would be better off than oneself, owning a home and an automobile, and working one's way up the ladder of social mobility. The trappings of success were largely external and material, a matter of keeping up with the Joneses.

When in November 1962 Gallup queried cross-sections of the public on the "formula for success in today's America," two answers dominated all others: get a good education (50 percent) and work hard (31 percent), followed by honesty and integrity (17 percent). Only 6 percent mentioned having a job that one enjoys doing, and a paltry 3 percent cited the importance of self-confidence and self esteem.

Then came the 1960s campus rebellion and its iconoclastic attitudes toward the 1950s. For millions of college students the shared meaning of success shifted from owning a Cadillac to fulfilling one's unique inner potential.

In the 1970s the majority of Americans were intrigued but still unconvinced of the virtues of the new outlook. A January 1971 Harris poll asked people, "Do you think the desire on the part of many young people to . . . turn their backs on economic gain and success . . . is a healthy or unhealthy thing?" Only 13 percent thought it healthy. In mid-decade (April 1974) the leading responses to a Gallup question about "what really matters in your own life," were a decent and better standard of living (31 percent), good health (25 percent), adequate opportunities for one's children (23 percent), a happy marriage and family life (15 percent), and owning one's own home (12 percent) -- all traditional, fifties-like conceptions.

By the 1980s, however, most Americans were attempting to graft the new values onto the old ones. In response to a May 1983 Gallup question about which factors are most important for "personal success in America today," the top ranking ones were good health (58 percent), a job one enjoys (49 percent), a happy family (45 percent), a good education (39 percent), peace of mind (35 percent), and good friends (25 percent). Note that the traditional emphasis on education and family remains an important part of the definition of success, but newer values such as having a job one enjoys, peace of mind, and good friends have now been elevated to a status equal to or higher than the traditional ones. It is characteristic of the 1980s that people wanted material well-being and the new forms of inner fulfillment extolled in the 1960s and 1970s.[19]

Now in the 1990s we are witnessing a further evolution of the shared meaning of success. Increasingly, Americans are coming to think of success as self-defined rather than conformity to the expectations of others. Over a five-year period, the DYGG SCANsm has measured a significant increase in the ratio of those embracing a conception of success as self-defined. By 1987 it had already reached a 5:1 ratio (63 percent to 12 percent), and by 1991 it had grown to more than a 7:1 ratio (68 percent to 9 percent).[20]

There are some modest demographic differences, mainly related to age and income. People between 40 and 60 with higher incomes (above $50,000 a year) lean slightly more often toward the self-defined measure of
success, while people younger than 40 with lower incomes lean slightly more often toward conformity to
group definitions of success. Some minor gender, education, geographic, and race differences also occur.
What is significant is not the differences but that all groups in the population follow the dominant pattern of
shifting away from older, more objective, conformist definitions of success to more subjective definitions.

If Americans define success in their own terms, what do they mean by it? Money and tangible possessions are
still dominant. By a two-to-one margin (40 percent to 22 percent), Americans in 1991 gave priority to the
material over the intangible. Here the pattern has been markedly dialectic -- with a heavy emphasis on
tangibles in the 1950s, a swing toward intangibles in the following few decades, and an edging back toward
tangibles in the 1980s and 1990s. Demographic differences are pronounced and in the expected direction: the
less educated and lower-income segments of the population emphasize tangibles because they do not have
them. Those in the higher income brackets lean moderately toward intangibles because they have been better
able to satisfy their material needs.[21]

What are the intangibles that Americans associate with success? The current emphasis is on quality of life.
Glimpses of what Americans mean by quality of life can be seen in several studies:

--Having good family and personal relationships with loved ones.

--Getting one's time under control.

--Saving money and getting one's finances under control (for example, less debt, being a smarter consumer
by outfoxing the seller).

--Reducing other forms of stress.

--Doing more to enhance health and personal appearance.

--Becoming more "green" conscious about the environment.[22]

In the 1990s, Americans know they can not have everything, and they are adapting their definition of success
in life to this new reality. People's feelings about being squeezed in the 1990s go deeper than recession or
slowdown in economic growth. The affluence effect elevated the importance of expanded life choices and
self-expressive values. And people are struggling to hold onto those values in an affordable form even under
difficult economic conditions.

Work and Leisure

The emphasis on expressive values associated with the affluence effect also carries over to the world of work
and helps to shape a new work ethic. In the old work ethic, people were expected to postpone gratification: it
was not assumed that they would find their work interesting or enjoyable. Quite the contrary. It was assumed
that work would mean drudgery, fatigue, and sacrifice.

The new work ethic revolves around the idea that people have a right to derive personal satisfaction from
their work, which should be enjoyable, challenging, and fulfilling. In both instances the word ethic is
appropriate because work is being endowed with a moral value over and above its pure economic exchange
value -- in the old work ethic, the moral value of sacrifice for others; in the new work ethic, the moral value
of finding personal satisfaction in doing something useful and productive.

Research evidence shows that the meaning of work is changing not only in the United States but in all of the
advanced industrial democracies. An international survey documents the changing meaning of work in six
countries -- the United States, Japan, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Israel.[23] The study
identifies three basic motivations for working -- the ancient and traditional function of working for sustenance
and survival, working to improve one's standard of living and material well-being, and working as an expression of self-actualization.

The research found varying patterns among the working population of each of the six countries. Israel was the only country of the six where a majority say they work mainly for survival and sustenance (54 percent), the United Kingdom had the largest number of people who worked primarily for material success (65 percent), and Sweden, the largest number whose principal motivation for working is to realize expressive values (23 percent).

The Swedish study is particularly suggestive. The results show that working for sustenance and survival is the dominant motive for those born in the early years of this century when Sweden was still an agrarian society. As Sweden evolved into an industrial society, working for material success became more important, and it is the dominant motivation of middle-aged and older Swedes. Expressive values are strongest among those born around 1955.[24]

This international study and others show sharp erosion of the old Protestant work ethic with its view that work derives moral worthiness from the sacrifice required to make a living at an arduous, wearying, and uninteresting job.

The evolution of the shared meaning of work in the United States follows a fascinating dialectic pattern with many twists and turns over the past four decades that can only be hinted at here.

In the 1960s the affluent young were contemptuous of their father's work-driven, nose-to-the-grindstone way of life and in reaction turned the relationship of work to leisure upside down. Instead of work as the center of life with a little time left over for leisure, the pursuit of leisure was exalted and work was relegated to the sidelines as the enemy of self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment, it was assumed, would come through leisure time spent in cultivating friendships, communing with nature, finding suitable forms of artistic self-expression, and so on.

Then in the 1970s and 1980s, baby boomers made a great discovery that went largely unnoticed at the time. They learned that some types of work could serve self-fulfillment better than leisure. These were forms of work that offered challenge, autonomy, the development of new skills and ways of testing oneself, expressions of creativity, a satisfying social milieu, and a game to be won. Because it met both practical and expressive needs, work became a prime focus of baby boomer energy. In a mid-eighties study, a majority of 30- to 40-year-old men and women (54 percent) said they were deeply committed to their careers, and an even larger number (60 percent) said they placed much more emphasis on "pursuing satisfaction in a career" than their parents did (compared with 13 percent who gave their careers less emphasis).[25]

For the past decade, Americans have been attempting to find the proper balance between work and leisure, work and family, and inner satisfaction and economic productivity. The present state is one of ambivalence, confusion, and conflict. On the one hand, when people are asked whether they would welcome or reject "less emphasis on working hard," 70 percent say they would reject it. In response to this same question a decade earlier, only 45 percent rejected it. This is a very large swing.[26]

On the other hand, when those with some college education were asked whether they would put more or less time on their job if they had their lives organized the way they "really wanted," only 9 percent would give their job more time, with three times as many saying they would give the job less time.[27] When a series of polls in the 1980s asked, "Which is more important in life: working hard . . . or doing the things that give you personal satisfaction?" the working hard response declined from 59 percent in 1980 to 49 percent in 1989, while the "personal satisfaction" response increased from 34 percent to 44 percent in this same period.[28] In May 1990, Gallup asked a cross-section of Americans whether they would be willing to work between twelve and fourteen hours a day if such effort were guaranteed to make them rich. Only one out of four (25 percent) said they would, and almost half (47 percent) rejected the idea.
Sooner or later, Americans will clarify their ambivalent attitudes. What seems abundantly clear, however, even from this confusing pattern of survey findings, is that the shared meaning of work has shifted markedly in the post-World War II era. In the 1950s, people valued their jobs primarily as a source of income. Today, however, Americans expect more from their jobs than just income. By margins of more than 4:1 (59 percent to 13 percent), people look to their jobs not only for income but also for personal satisfaction.

What about the relationship of leisure to work? In the 1950s there was precious little leisure for most Americans, and what there was came as a well-earned reward for hard work. In this spirit, women might give themselves a brief coffee break from housework and men might relax on Sunday after a week of exhausting work. These moments of leisure were seen as an unproductive but morally justifiable pause in the routine of work.

Today, there is more opportunity for leisure, but its uses have changed. The dominant view is no longer that leisure is a time for relaxation from work, but that leisure time ought to be used in a productive manner. This view is held among Americans today by a ratio of almost two to one (43 percent to 24 percent), a pattern that has remained constant for the past five years. xi

There are some striking age differences. The younger the person, the more committed he or she is to the leisure-as-a-time-for-productive-effort point of view. People who are 18 to 24 years old hold this view by a margin of 3:1, compared with those 60 and older, where the ratio is closer to 1:1.

Changing values in relation to work and leisure are good illustrations of the impact of the affluence effect. In the period of rising expectations, people came to feel that their work should serve their self-expressive needs as well as provide them with a living. As expectations now adapt themselves to slower growth, people refuse to abandon these new values, setting themselves up for a lot of tension.

Social Morality

The broad idea of social morality covers many domains of values. One of the most important is the conflict Americans feel between what might be called “market values” versus “communal values.” Market values reflect the view that the price mechanism should dominate the distribution of goods and services. Communal values reflect what sociologists call sacred values,” in the secular sense that one can not and should not put a price on them. The simplest way of thinking is that communal values are those that people regard as so important that they wish to exclude them wholly or partially from market forces.

Americans do not want market forces to prevail exclusively when it comes to such matters as health care, education, housing for the homeless, food for hungry children, and a helping hand for the blind, the mentally ill, and other Americans who cannot help themselves.

Survey data suggest the public is aware that the country’s value orientation has become less generous in outlook. When people between the ages of 18 and 44 are asked whether being “a concerned citizen involved in helping others in the community” is more descriptive of their own or their parents’ generation, a majority (53 percent) cite their parent’s generation. When asked whether this change is for the better or worse, an impressive 77 percent feel it is a change for the worse. xii When a cross-section of Americans are asked about the importance to themselves of helping their community, two out of three (65 percent) give this value top importance. xiii

Despite the harsher economic climate, Americans care deeply about reconciling communal with market values. Typically, Americans resolve the conflict by a compromise that makes room for both values. There are several forms such compromises can take. One of them, the food stamp model, subsidizes recipients in keeping with communal values but leaves market forces dominant for the providers of services. Medicare and Medicaid are variants of this model, but less pure because, especially in Medicaid, there is intervention in the price structure.
The form of compromise that most Americans favor is one in which market forces are given priority, but a safety net is provided to protect victims from excessive harm by the market. Public attitudes toward farm policy are a good example. An exclusive reliance on market values would lead to the elimination of farm subsidies and perhaps to the demise of most small farmers and the consolidation of farming in giant farm enterprises. The trend has moved in this direction for many years. But communal values resist this stark outcome.

Farmers in general, and small farmers in particular, elicit a strong response based on American communal values. A 1984 Roper poll shows that more than three out of four Americans (78 percent) believe that small farmers are so important to this country that special programs must be devised to insure their survival. In keeping with market values, Americans want to eliminate all subsidies to farmers. In keeping with communal values, however, they also want small family-owned farms to be protected and preserved.

A March 1985 Roper study shows how Americans would resolve these conflicting pulls. Fewer than half the public lines up on the extremes. Only 15 percent opt for the uncompromising market value that farmers should succeed or fail like any other business. At the other extreme, 28 percent believe the government should guarantee farmers a reasonable income. The compromise favored by most Americans tilts toward the market position: a free market for farm products but a safety net in case of disaster.

Role of Government

Attitudes toward the role of government lie at the center of the conflict between market and communal values, with government seen as the principal vehicle for implementing communal values.

The broadest set of communal values relates to concern with the poor and the victimized (people who are unemployed through no fault of their own, victims of storms, floods, earthquakes, and so on). But communal values also extend more broadly, for example, to the role of government in strengthening the economy, a central issue in today’s politics.

The public’s attitude here is strikingly pragmatic and nonideological. Do whatever works. If intervention in the economy works, then the government should intervene. If hands off works, then hands off it is. The public’s values come into play in relation to partisan and sectarian interests. People’s sense of social morality is violated when partisan bickering or business-government or business-labor adversarial interests stand in the way of the public interest. Overall, attitudes at present favor active government, on the grounds that only government can represent the national interest.

Over the past half century, attitudes toward government have followed a marked dialectic pattern. Strong progovernment attitudes prevailed in the fifties and sixties, and an antigovernment mood dominated the seventies, and particularly the eighties. In the 1990s, however, sentiment has swung away from a minimal role for government, and today an almost 2:1 ratio of Americans say that government should play a major role in the country’s economic and social affairs, partly to strengthen the economy but partly to implement the compromises that people feel are needed to balance market and communal values in other arenas. There are marked differences in these views, with women, young people, low-income people, and the less well educated taking a stronger progovernment stance than men, the college educated, and the well-to-do. Those whom the market has rewarded most favor it; those who have received lesser rewards prefer more government intervention.

Beating the System

An important aspect of social morality is the extent to which people are willing to observe the rules over and above legal requirements, rather than finding ingenious ways to beat the system. Currently, only about four out of ten Americans (41 percent) hold strong moral convictions about respecting the system and following the rules even when the law does not force one to, with almost three out of ten adhering strongly to the
opposite "beat the system" morality.

The most noteworthy aspect of this dimension of social morality is a remarkable set of age-related differences. Americans 60 years of age and older favor "respecting the system" by more than 2:1 margins (55 percent to 22 percent), while younger Americans (aged 18 to 24) favor trying to "beat the system" by almost 2:1 (39 percent to 24 percent).

This is one of the few instances of changing social values where subgroup variations are obscured by aggregate responses. On virtually all other value changes, subgroup differences reflect mere nuances, with all groups moving in the same overall direction. Here, however, the aggregate masks a sharp age-related split in our society.

No doubt the split is partly due to the traditional rebelliousness of youth. But, based on other data, I believe that something more complicated is at issue. As young people receive pervasive messages of unfairness, injustice, nonresponsiveness, greed, and institutional self-interest, they become cynical and more convinced that manipulation of the system is a more adaptive response to today's America than obeying the rules.

**Sexual Morality**

The most frequently measured aspects of sexual morality are moral approval (or disapproval) of premarital sexual relations, married people having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner, and people who are not married living together.

A fifty-year-old Roper survey in March 1943 asked, "Do you consider it all right, unfortunate or wicked when young men have sexual relations before marriage?" Only 14 percent felt it was "all right," 42 percent thought it "unfortunate," and 37 percent condemned it as "wicked." When the same question was asked about women, a mere 5 percent found it acceptable, 43 percent thought it was "unfortunate," and 46 percent "wicked." Almost twenty years later, in June 1962, the Gallup poll asked a cross-section of women whether in their opinion it was acceptable for a woman to have sexual relations before marriage with "a man she knows she is going to marry." An overwhelming 87 percent of women, married and unmarried, said it was emphatically not acceptable. As recently as July 1969, a 68 percent majority of the public continued to condemn sexual relations before marriage as morally wrong. But shortly thereafter, the pattern began to change year by year until by 1990 it had totally reversed, with only one out of three now condemning premarital sex as morally wrong (33 percent), and 60 percent saying it is not morally wrong.xiv[32] (An exception is made for young teens (14 to 16 years old). The overwhelming majority of Americans condemn premarital sex for these youngsters as morally wrong.

In sharp contrast, moral condemnation of extramarital sex has not budged for many years. An 84 percent majority rejected it as "morally wrong" in the early 1970s; in 1990 an 84 percent majority continued to condemn it, an unchanging pattern of public response to extramarital sex over a nearly twenty-year period.xv[33]

On the question of people living together without benefit of marriage, Americans are divided and no clear-cut pattern emerges. In the 1970s a majority (52 percent) had come to feel that cohabitation was not a moral issue but merely a question of individual lifestyles.xvi[34] A decade's experience, however, has revealed some hesitancy and reservations, with the majority (54 percent) now expressing doubts about its morality.xvii[35]

Many other aspects of our changing social morality are worthy of discussion, for example, values regarding strict punishment for crime versus leniency and compassion, tolerance for diverse lifestyles, orientation toward the present versus the future, absolutism in moral norms versus situational ethics, and so on. All are relevant to our concerns but cannot be covered in this chapter.
Health

The concern of Americans with their health and fitness has grown into one of the nation's top priorities. But health-related values have shifted a great deal in recent years.

A generation ago, people felt their health was the responsibility of the doctor rather than their own. Health was defined as the absence of disease, and disease was visualized as caused by germs, viruses, infections, and other invasive entities that physicians were trained to diagnose and banish. It was not unusual to hear people wax eloquent on the importance of good health while actively pursuing the couch potato way of life, demolishing fat-marbled steaks, and smoking several packs of cigarettes a day. As long as the definition of health as the absence of disease prevailed, people did not see how their behavior made much difference to their health one way or another.

Today, Americans endow health with a much more positive meaning, and they have come to accept much greater personal responsibility for their health, while appreciating how their behavior (and the behavior of others) affects their health. Americans are increasingly conscious of the importance of prevention, of acting prudently with respect to the environment, and of taking a long-run perspective in recognition of the new possibility of living a long, vital life. People have expanded their definition of health to include their emotional well-being, the importance of loving relationships, of enjoying a sense of achievement, and of reducing the stress in their life.

Today, the focus on fitness and a healthy, vibrant appearance is being reinforced in several ways: by its connotations of pleasure, because it is a morally justifiable way to be preoccupied with oneself, and because one does not need a lot of money to be physically fit.

Leaders concerned with health policy are constrained by health related values that limit their flexibility. Health care is regarded as a maximum entitlement. An April 1987 Harris poll shows that a whopping 91 percent endorse the view that "everybody should have the right to the best possible health care -- as good as the treatment a millionaire gets." More than seven out of ten Americans believe that "health insurance should pay for any treatment that will save lives, even if it costs one million dollars to save a life." Fewer than one out of four political leaders (23 percent) agree with this statement.

People have odd ideas about health insurance. If people are covered by insurance, they do not see health care as costing them money. The only costs people clearly associate with health care are the out-of-pocket costs they themselves incur. The old attitude, "When it comes to my health (or my spouse's or parents' or children's health), money is no object," remains as potent as ever.

There is a huge gap between the experts and the public on the burning issue of how to control health care costs. To explain rising health care costs, experts emphasize the increasing number of older people in the population (the average person over 65 costs our health care system more than three times the amount spent on a person between the ages of 19 and 64) and the explosive costs of technological innovations in medicine. When average Americans are confronted with this reasoning, they find these ideas new and shocking. In their view, technology should reduce costs, not raise them, and most people have never considered the idea that a price tag is associated with the graying of America.xviii[36]

People have their own well-formed convictions about why health care costs are rising: experts see technology and the aging of America, but the public sees greed, high doctors' fees, corruption, drug company profiteering, unnecessary testing, malpractice, overbilling, duplication, and waste. The common view is that too many people are skimming vast amounts of money from the reservoir of dollars flowing through the health care system. Everyone has a horror story to tell, and all the horror stories are vivid, concrete, personal, and persuasive to those who experience them. The experts see skyrocketing health care costs as essentially a new problem caused by factors the system has not dealt with before. The public sees the problem as a very old one, the age-old human failing of greed and failure to resist temptation.xix[37]
The Sacredness of Human Life

Changes in attitudes toward the value of human life are directly relevant to public policy on health care. The DYG SCANSM measures the prevalence of the belief that human life is so sacred that anything and everything should be done to keep individuals alive for as long as possible, regardless of circumstances, in contrast to the belief that circumstances must be taken into account and that heroic measures to keep people alive may not always be appropriate. Significantly, over a five-year period, those holding the latter point of view have increased from a 48 percent minority to a 60 percent majority, a large shift in a brief time. The shift is particularly marked among older Americans. People over 60 years of age have shifted from a 40 percent endorsement of the circumstantial view in 1988 to 64 percent currently.xx[38]

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xxxiii[19] For further discussion see Yankelovich, New Rules.

xxxiv[20] DYG SCANSM, 1991, pp. 3.112-13. Numbers do not add to 100 percent because they reflect the two ends of a spectrum of intensity. The reader can assume a third category of people who fall in between and who are not reported here. This note applies to all subsequent citations of SCAN data.


xli[27] Louis Harris and Associates for Pier 1 Imports, college educated, August 1987.


lii[38] DYG SCAN\textsuperscript{SM}, 1991, pp. 3.158-59.