

# The Star-Ledger / **Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Wednesday, August 25, 2004 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

## **NEW JERSEY GENERATIONS** **Part 4: SEX AND MARRIAGE** by Patrick Murray

This is the second of a special series of reports on *New Jersey Generations*, a joint project of the Eagleton Institute of Politics and Edward J. Bloustein School of Rutgers University, and the *Star-Ledger* of Newark. The series looks at generational differences in the political, social, and cultural life of the state. Stories will run in the paper and will be released on *The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* website concurrently. A chronology can be found on the background information page at the end of this report. The four generations we refer to are DotNets (18-27), GenerationX (28-39), Baby Boomers (40-58), and Matures (59+). Thumbnail sketches of each generation can also be found on the background information page as well.

### ***Girls Don't Always "Just Want to Have Fun"***

The recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* of New Jersey's generations found some predictable opinions. Matures are more conservative than younger adults – they are the least likely to approve of same-sex marriage and most likely to champion the view that sex is only acceptable within the bounds of wedlock. Generally, these changes in attitudes toward sex are more likely to occur among women rather than men as we progress through life.

### ***Views on Marriage***

There is a clear generational divide in opinions on who should be allowed to marry and what types of activities should be allowed outside of the bonds of marriage. The traditional view of marriage – as a union between a man and woman of the same race and religion – has changed, with younger generations showing greater acceptance for "non-traditional" relationships.

**The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics**

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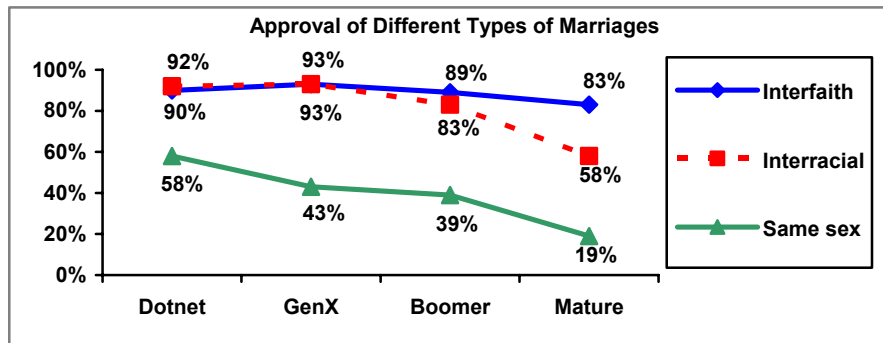
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While New Jerseyans of all ages approve of interfaith betrothals – about 9-in-10 across all generations, their support quickly diverges when it comes to marriages between inter-racial or same-sex couples. Overall, more than 9-in-10 Dotnets (92%) and GenXers (93%) along with 8-in-10 Boomers (83%) approve of people of different races tying the knot. However, fewer than 6-in-10 Matures (58%) feel the same.

The Dotnet generation is the most supportive of gay and lesbian marriages – 58 percent of this generation approve of such nuptials. But unlike interracial marriage, this type of coupling has not gained the approval of most adults in their 30s and 40s. Only 4-in-10 GenXers (43%) and Boomers (39%) approve of same-sex marriage. And this is still twice the number of Matures (19%) who also approve.



The generation gap persists when New Jersey adults consider unmarried couples living together and women having children out of wedlock. Dotnets and GenXers are clearly most approving of these behaviors. Baby Boomers are somewhat less approving and Matures are the least approving.

More than 8-in-10 Dotnets (84%) and GenXers (84%) approve of couples living together without being married. This level of approval drops slightly to 68 percent among Boomers. Only 41 percent of Matures approve of this type of behavior.

Smaller majorities of Dotnets (61%) and GenXers (63%) approve of having children outside of marriage. About half of Boomers (49%) feel the same, but only 1-in-4 Matures (26%) approves of this.

**Views on Sex**

The survey also asked New Jersey’s generations about their views on four types of sexual situations: extramarital sex, sexual relations among young teenagers, homosexual intercourse,

and casual sex among adults. While there are some predictable generation gaps in who thinks these activities are wrong, there are also some interesting gender differences that vary by generation.

Overall, 82 percent of New Jerseyans think extramarital affairs are always wrong, 15 percent say they are sometimes wrong and only 2 percent feel they are not wrong at all. A similar 77 percent of adults believe that sex between teenagers under 16 years old is always wrong, 17 percent say this is sometimes wrong and only 3 percent say it is not wrong at all. Just under half of all New Jersey adults – 47 percent – feel that sexual relations between people of the same sex is always wrong, 13 percent say it is sometimes wrong and 35 percent feel it is not wrong at all. Finally, only 1-in-5, or 21 percent, of New Jersey adults say that casual sex between adults is always wrong, 36 percent say it is sometimes wrong and 39 percent feel it is not wrong at all.

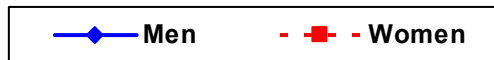
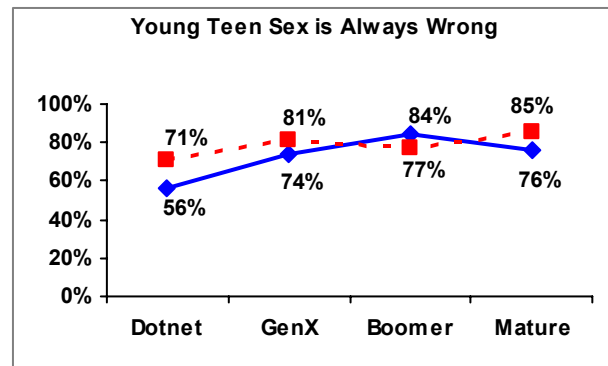
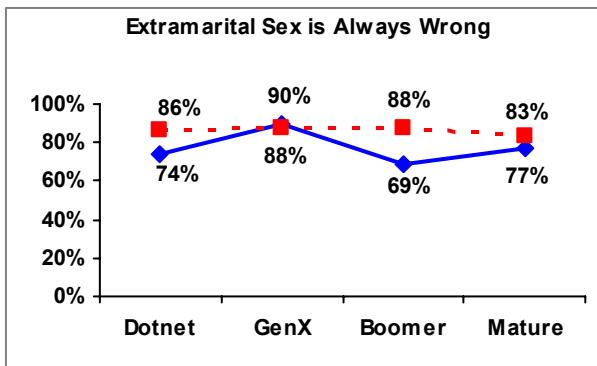
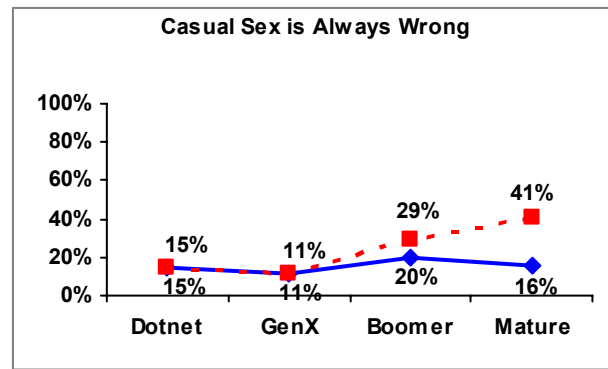
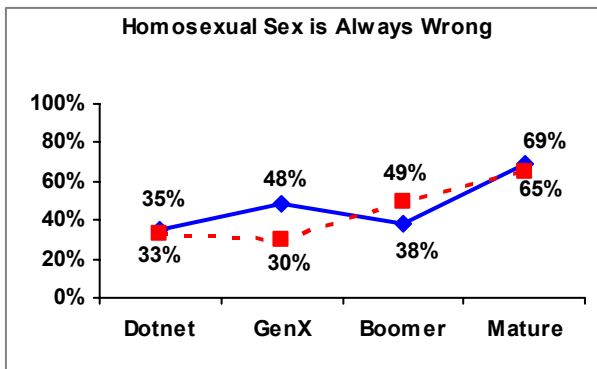
There are some small gender gaps in these findings, with Dotnets being the least conservative in their views of who should be able to have sex. Matures tend to be the most conservative, especially in their views of homosexual intercourse. GenXers tend to be less conservative than their older neighbors about casual sex and homosexual relations, but are the most conservative when it comes to extramarital affairs.

Specifically, GenXers, a generation that has only recently waded into the marriage pool, are slightly more likely than other adults to say extramarital sex is always wrong – 89 percent compared to 80 percent for Dotnets, 79 percent for Boomers and 81 percent for Matures.

Dotnets, some of whom are still in their teen years themselves, are the least likely to feel that sex among young teens is always wrong – 63 percent compared to 78 percent for GenXers, 80 percent for Boomers and 82 percent for Matures.

Matures (66%) are much more likely than Dotnets (34%), GenXers (39%) and Boomers (44%) to view sexual relations between people of the same sex as always wrong. And Matures (32%) and Boomers (24%) are somewhat more likely than GenXers (11%) and Dotnets (15%) to see casual sex between adults as always wrong.

Digging into these generational differences further reveals that much of this disparity is driven by changing views among men and women as they age. For example, Dotnet men tend to be somewhat less disapproving of extramarital affairs than Dotnet women whereas GenX men and women tend to register similar levels of disapproval. However a sizable gender gap shows up among the Baby Boom generation – only 69 percent of men in this cohort compared to 88 percent of Boomer women believe that extramarital sex is always wrong. The gender gap narrows again in the Mature generation.



“Opinion on whether extramarital affairs are wrong provides an interesting commentary on the state of marriage in New Jersey,” observed Patrick Murray, acting director of the poll. “Women tend to have steady opinions on this issue no matter their age. However, if opinion on extramarital affairs is any guide, men seem to grow a bit more traditional as they enter marriage, become more freethinking during midlife, and then settle down again in their golden years.”

Other issues about sex covered in the survey also show some gender gaps for certain generations. Opinions on homosexual relations show no gender differences for the youngest and

oldest generations. However, among Generation X, men (48%) are much more disapproving than women (30%) of same sex intercourse. This reverses among Boomers, where women (49%) are somewhat more disapproving than men (38%).

Generational differences in opinions on casual sex are driven mainly by the changing views of women once they reach age 40. Among the Dotnet and GenX generations, identical percentages of women and men say that casual sex is always wrong. However, a gender gap in this view first appears among Boomers – 29 percent women to 20 percent men – and widens greatly among Matures – 41 percent women to 16 percent men.

### ***Teach Your Children Well***

State residents also differ in how sex should be presented to the next generation of New Jersey adults. Matures are slightly less likely than other Garden State adults to feel that children should learn that sex is only right in a committed relationship, but they are much more likely than younger adults to feel that we should teach young people that sex is only right within marriage. Overall, 62 percent of Matures feel that children should learn that sex is right in a committed relationship, compared to between 70 and 79 percent of adults in the younger generations. Conversely, 74 percent of Matures feel that young people should be instructed that sex is only right within the bonds of matrimony. Only 48 percent of Boomers, GenXers and Dotnets agree.

When asked whether children should be taught that sex is fun, the Dotnet generation join the Matures in holding a more conservative view than either GenXers or Boomers. About 6-in-10 GenXers (57%) and Boomers (62%) feel that young people should learn that sex can be fun, compared to only 45 percent of Dotnets and 42 percent of Matures who feel the same.

There is little variation in opinions on whether children should be taught that sex can be dangerous. Close to 6-in-10 Matures (58%), Boomers (54%), GenXers (61%) and Dotnets (55%) agree with this. Most adults in each of the four generations surveyed also agree that young people should be taught that sex is a very important part of a relationship. This includes 90 percent of Matures and Boomers, 82 percent of GenXers and 73 percent of Dotnets.

“When asked what types of things young people should learn about sex, there are some predictable generational divides with Matures being much more conservative in the type of information they feel should be shared,” remarked Murray. “But there are also some less

predictable gaps as well. We found that women in the youngest generation are much less liberal than their male counterparts.”

The survey results indicate that Dotnet women are more likely than Dotnet men to say children should learn that sex is right only in marriage – 61% women to 35% men – or only in a committed relationship – 81% women to 60% men. Moreover, women in this cohort are less likely than similarly aged men to feel children should learn that sex is important to a relationship – 65% women to 81% men – or that sex is fun – 33% women to 55% men. The magnitude of these gender gaps is not matched in any other generation.

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## Background Information on the *New Jersey Generations* Study

### *The Cast of Characters*

Ours is a story of four New Jersey generations and their attitudes and behaviors across seven areas of political, social and economic life. Here are four primary actors – generations or age cohorts – in the drama.

- **Matures**, born before 1946, are about 1.6 million strong in the state today. Almost all were born before the explosion of the first nuclear weapon. Driven by duty and sculpted by sacrifice, this generation was forged by the experiences of the Depression and World War II, even though many experienced them indirectly through their parents while growing up. What is left in our definition of “Matures” is the last remnant of the WWII generation, along with the following cohort, often called the “Silent Generation,” who took their cues in working hard for a better life and upholding the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship.
- **Baby Boomers**, born between 1946 and 1964 constitute the largest age cohort — about 2.3 million. This group was parented by prosperity, sharing a presumption of entitlement to their world view. Shaping political experiences were the Civil Rights movement, Viet Nam, and Watergate, not to mention rock music, drugs and the sexual revolution. The Boomer cohort has always been big enough to force the culture to adapt to them. For years they have dictated politics and culture by their sheer numbers in a market-driven economy, and policy to the degree they have had a coherent outlook.
- **Generation X**, or GenXers, born between 1964 and 1976 also number about 1.6 million. This group’s formative experiences were framed by familial and financial insecurity. They grew up amidst rising rates of divorce and recession. Where the sexual revolution of the Boomers brought free expression and experimentation, the threat of AIDS brought Xers fear and caution. During adolescence and early adulthood, their political world view was shaped by, well, pretty much nothing. The biggest external disruption was the Persian Gulf War, which ended quickly and without many American casualties, with computer-aimed smart bombs falling on targets like a video arcade game. Described as “slackers,” and scorned for a world view that begins and ends with themselves, even their moniker is about something that never happened.
- **DotNets**, are the new kids in town. Born after 1976, they are the 1 million young adults now between 18 and 27 years of age. They go by many labels — Millennials, Generation NeXt, Generation Y. We call them DotNets because we think one of their defining characteristics will be having come of age along with the Internet. Information has always been virtually costless and universally available to them; technology cheap and easily mastered; community as much a digital place of common interest as a shared physical space. As of now, we know little about DotNets, except that they don’t vote. This is our first look at this cohort in New Jersey.

### ***The Study Design***

The survey questionnaire was designed by students in Professor Cliff Zukin's graduate class in Survey Research offered at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Policy in the spring, 2004 semester. Zukin was, until recently, director of the Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll. He was assisted by Patrick Murray, now the Poll's Acting Director. Rob Suls served as the project manager. Other graduate students working on the project were: Lauren Arnold, Marci Berger, Mary Ellen Cook, Tara Cullen, Allison Kopicki, Nick Martyniak, Angie McGuire, Sharon Pinnelas, Regina Podhorn, Rochelle Rudnick and Elizabeth Williamson.

Six general topic areas were identified for study. All data will be released by Eagleton; most will also be the subject of stories in the Star-Ledger. Here is the schedule of releases and stories:

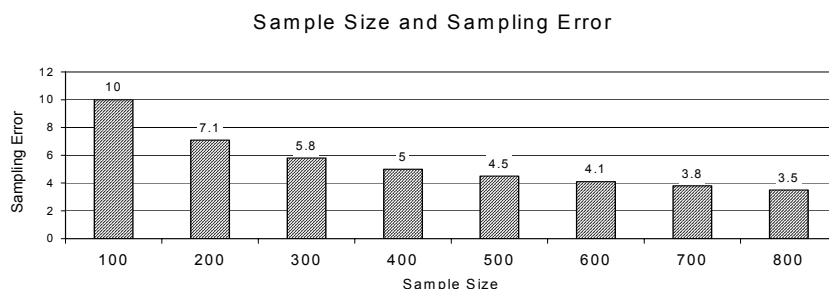
	<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Star-Ledger Story</i>	<i>Eagleton Release</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Politics and Government	Politically disconnected youth	Politically disconnected youth plus further partisan realignment	8/22
	Family & Leisure Time	The impact of "women's liberation"	Importance of family; how leisure time is spent	8/23
3	Money & Personal Finance	Materialistic youth	Money and employment concerns	8/24
4	Sex & Relationships	Children out of wedlock	Sexual practices, what's import in a relationship, what children should be taught; views of marriage	8/25
5	Religion & Spirituality	Ghosts, astrology and ESP	Variety of religious & para-normal beliefs and practices	8/26
6	Race & Immigration	<i>n/a</i>	Diversity & tolerance; views of societal change; race relations	8/27

The survey was conducted by telephone with a random sample of 819 New Jersey adults. The sample was stratified to include approximately equal numbers of residents (approximately 200 each) in each of four pre-defined generations, and the final results were weighted to represent the population as a whole. Interviewing took place between March 17 and 31, 2004. The sampling error associated with the generational sample sizes is  $\pm 7$  percentage points. Thus if we found that 50 percent of our *sample* of Baby Boomers agree with a particular statement, we would be pretty confident (95 percent sure) that the true value in the underlying *population* from which the sample was drawn is somewhere between 43 and 57 percent ( $50 \pm 7$ ).



**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP146-4) August 25, 2004**

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted by telephone from March 17 to March 31 with a scientifically selected random sample of 819 New Jersey adults. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error is  $\pm 3.4$  percent for the full sample at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to be less likely to agree with a statement, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.6 and 53.4 percent ( $50 \pm 3.4$ ) had all New Jersey residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for different generational groups, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The margin of error for any of the four generations is  $\pm 7.1$  percent. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“[INTRO: Now I’d like to ask you some questions about marriage and relationships.] Different people have different views of what marriage should be about. Please just tell me if you personally approve or disapprove of each of the following: [RANDOMIZE LIST; S1E ALWAYS LAST] (A) people from different religions marrying; (B) people of the same sex marrying; (C) couples who are not married living together; (D) someone having a child out of wedlock; (E) people from different races marrying.” [S1A-E]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Marriage between different faiths</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<u>Generation</u>						
--Dot-Net	90	9	--	--	99	(203)
--Gen X	93	6	1	1	101	(204)
--Boomer	89	5	2	4	100	(206)
--Mature	83	8	4	4	99	(206)
<b>Same sex marriages</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<u>Generation</u>						
--Dot-Net	58	39	--	3	100	(203)
--Gen X	43	51	1	5	100	(204)
--Boomer	39	47	4	10	100	(206)
--Mature	19	73	3	5	100	(206)
<b>Couples not married living together</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<u>Generation</u>						
--Dot-Net	84	11	2	2	99	(203)
--Gen X	84	14	1	1	100	(204)
--Boomer	68	23	4	5	100	(206)
--Mature	41	47	5	6	99	(206)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Having a child out of wedlock</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	61	29	3	7	100	(203)
--Gen X	63	30	4	2	99	(204)
--Boomer	49	41	3	7	100	(206)
--Mature	26	62	4	9	101	(206)
<b>Interracial marriages</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	92	7	--	1	100	(203)
--Gen X	93	5	1	1	100	(204)
--Boomer	83	10	1	6	100	(206)
--Mature	58	33	6	3	100	(206)

**“[INTRO: Recently, there’s been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing.]** What do you think about [READ ITEM]? Do you think this is always wrong, wrong sometimes or not wrong at all? [RANDOMIZE LIST] (A) Casual sex between two adults; (B) people in their early teens, say under 16 years old, having sexual relations; (C) a married person having sexual relations with someone outside of marriage; (D) two adults of the same sex having sexual relations.” [S2A-D]

	<u>Always wrong</u>	<u>Wrong sometimes</u>	<u>Not wrong at all</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Casual sex between two adults</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	15	35	47	3	100	(203)
--Gen X	11	40	47	3	101	(204)
--Boomer	24	38	36	2	100	(206)
--Mature	32	31	31	6	100	(206)
<b>Teen sex</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	63	24	11	2	100	(203)
--Gen X	78	19	3	--	100	(204)
--Boomer	80	17	2	1	100	(206)
--Mature	82	13	2	3	100	(206)
<b>Extramarital sex</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	80	16	3	2	101	(203)
--Gen X	89	10	--	1	100	(204)
--Boomer	79	17	4	--	100	(206)
--Mature	81	16	1	3	101	(206)
<b>Homosexual relations</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>						
--Dot-Net	34	11	49	6	100	(203)
--Gen X	39	15	41	5	100	(204)
--Boomer	44	15	37	3	99	(206)
--Mature	66	8	17	9	100	(206)

“I’d like to know which of the following attitudes about sex you think young people today should be taught. Just answer each as yes or no. First, should they be taught that sex is dangerous: yes or no? Should they be taught that sex is a very important part of a relationship? How about that sex is right only within marriage? Sex is right only in a committed relationship? Should they be taught that sex is fun?”  
[S3A-E]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Sex is dangerous</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>					
--Dot-Net	55	44	1	100	(203)
--Gen X	61	37	3	101	(204)
--Boomer	54	44	2	100	(206)
--Mature	58	39	3	100	(206)
<b>Sex is important in a relationship</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>					
--Dot-Net	73	26	1	100	(203)
--Gen X	82	16	2	100	(204)
--Boomer	90	10	--	100	(206)
--Mature	90	8	1	99	(206)
<b>Sex is right only in marriage</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>					
--Dot-Net	48	50	2	100	(203)
--Gen X	48	51	1	100	(204)
--Boomer	48	50	2	100	(206)
--Mature	74	23	3	100	(206)
<b>Sex is right only in a committed relationship</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>					
--Dot-Net	70	28	2	100	(203)
--Gen X	79	20	1	100	(204)
--Boomer	73	26	1	100	(206)
--Mature	62	31	6	99	(206)
<b>Sex is fun</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(819)</b>
<i>Generation</i>					
--Dot-Net	45	53	2	100	(203)
--Gen X	57	40	3	100	(204)
--Boomer	62	36	2	100	(206)
--Mature	42	52	7	101	(206)