



# NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - A SPECIAL THANKS!

DECEMBER 2020

WE ARE NOW  
ONLINE!



## YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED!

You were scientifically selected to be included in the follow-up sample so that your responses represent the views of thousands of people your age. If we lose contact with you, no substitution can be made, and the views of adults similar to you will not be as well represented by the study. The success of the study depends upon your willingness to continue to complete and return the questionnaire to Monitoring the Future. For this reason, we work hard to keep track of you and other participants around the country and the world. We are indeed grateful for your cooperation. Please know that your responses are kept completely confidential.

## THANKS TO OUR RESPONDENTS

Thank you! As a Monitoring the Future study participant, you have completed many questionnaires for us since you graduated from high school. Your participation has contributed to the success of this research project.

The transitions you have experienced from high school until now provide a unique perspective for us to see how behaviors and attitudes change as people progress through their adult years.

This newsletter represents our commitment to distributing results of the study to our participants. We are also committed to distributing the findings from this study to policymakers and the public.

This important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of younger Americans as they grow into their middle years. We believe that studying how adults change over time will tell us a lot about how early events and characteristics affect later health and wellbeing.



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## A Note from the Study Director



John Schulenberg, MTF Panel  
Study Director

### Dear Valued MTF Participants:

First, I hope you and yours are hanging in there with the current pandemic and all the challenges it has caused.

Second, I want to thank you for your continued participation in the U.S. national Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys. We could not do what we do without your continued involvement. Each of you represents about 10,000 same-aged people in the U.S., making your participation invaluable and irreplaceable. We are grateful for your time and dedication over the years.

**Why do we do what we do?** Good social policy regarding health and wellbeing depends on good science. Without valid and reliable national estimates of various health compromising and health enhancing behaviors, social policy is based on opinion, folklore, and guess-work. Thus, the group I work with started this national survey study way back in 1975 (when I was a senior in high school!) to begin to examine a variety of behaviors and attitudes among teens and adults in an effort to let the nation know what its population is experiencing. With continued funding from the National Institutes of Health, we have kept the study going, adding in new high school seniors each year and following many through young and middle adulthood. Our oldest respondents now in their 60s, with age 65 surveys coming soon.

**Why do you stay involved?** You may ask yourself this on occasion, and we appreciate that you continue to find it important among all else you are doing. We hear from many of you that you like the experience of staying involved and getting the new surveys, with some indicating that they look forward to it because it helps them learn more about themselves. Others let us know that they feel duty-bound to stay in this, their way of giving something back. Please know that your involvement has made a difference and will continue to do so.

**What is done with the data?** We report aggregate responses in annual publications and press releases, and use the aggregate data for scientific peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other reports, including these annual newsletters to you. Our findings, again always based on aggregate data, inform the National Institutes of Health and other government agencies. We want to make sure the findings are disseminated to inform the nation regarding trends in our population's health and wellbeing and to advance the science. We have well over a million people in our study now, and each and every participant's identity and personal information are always protected, and thus your confidentiality is assured. We never share your contact information with anyone outside of our study, and we only contact you regarding the study. We are in the midst of changing from mail to online surveys. Because we want to make sure that this change does not interfere with the understanding of historical and age trends in all that we monitor, some of you are now getting online surveys and others are still getting paper surveys in the mail. By 2021, all of you will be encouraged to take the survey online, although paper surveys will be mailed to you if you wish.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. We have learned much from you over the years, and we look forward with your help to continuing our efforts.

With Best Wishes,  
John Schulenberg, MTF Panel Study Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Schulenberg".

## Global Concerns: Our Role in the World, Part II

In these challenging times, where we should be focusing our attention? Should we concern ourselves mostly with our own country? Is it important to see ourselves as citizens of the world? We have asked our participants these questions over the years, and wanted to see if any important changes have happened over the past five years. We also wondered if answers to these questions differed between men and women, and between those living rural areas versus large cities, or by age.

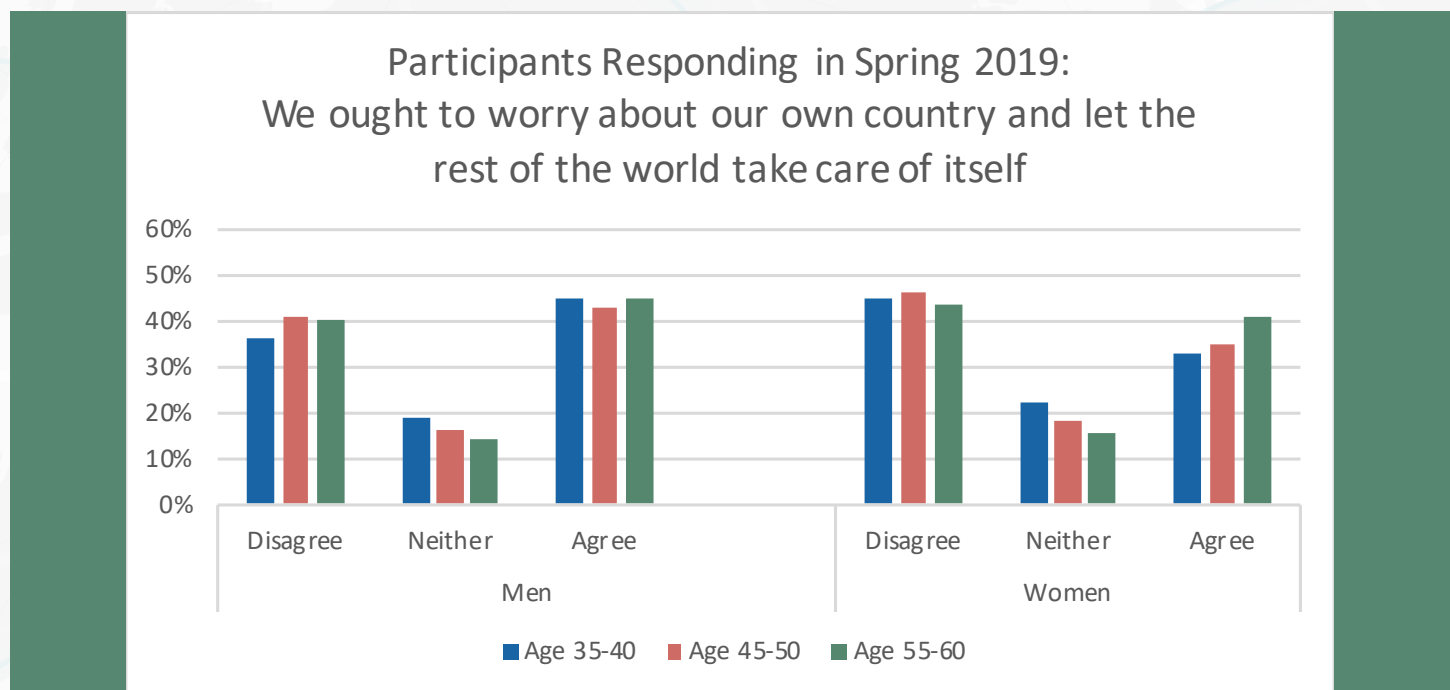
To find the answers, we looked at the data for participants at ages 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60 who completed the surveys in the Spring of 2019—before the COVID-19 pandemic began. We analyzed responses to two questions: “We ought to worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself,” and “It would be better if we all felt more like citizens of the world than of any particular country.” We then compared the results with answers given by participants five years earlier in 2014.

### Concerned About Our Own Country

In Spring 2019, 40% of our participants (ages 35 through 60) agreed or mostly agreed that we should be more concerned about our own country and let other countries take care of themselves. Figure 1 shows that men agreed with this more than women. In general, the degree to which men agreed did not change much across age groups (ranging from 43% to 45%); however, there was age variation among women, with 33% of women agreeing at ages 35-40 and 41% agreeing at ages

55-60. Differences between men and women were strongest at younger ages. Among both men and women, the percentage who expressed no opinion (neither agreed nor disagreed) grew smaller as age increased.

In looking back to 2014, overall agreement was higher at 46%, but differences between men and women were similar to those seen in 2019. No strong age differences were seen in 2014.



**In considering** the second question, whether it would be better if we thought of ourselves as

citizens of the world rather than of any particular country, overall, 45% agreed in 2019.

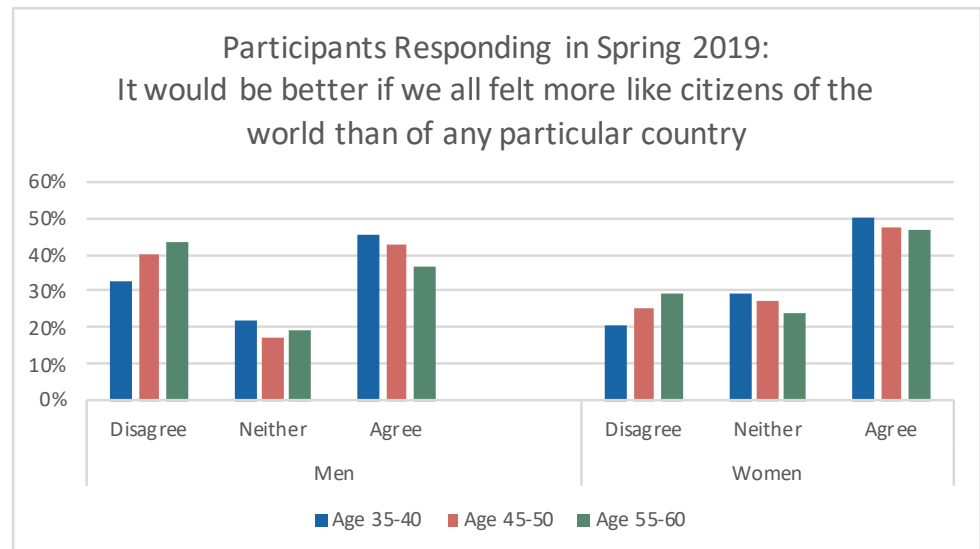


## Citizens of the World

For both men and women, agreement with this statement decreased with age, while disagreement with the statement increased with age (see Figure 2). More women than men agreed that it would be better if we thought of ourselves as citizens of the world rather than of any particular country, and this gender difference grew across age groups. At ages 35-40, 50% of women and 45% of men agreed; by ages 55-60, 47% of women agreed, but only 37% of men agreed.

In looking back at 2014, overall

agreement was lower at 42%, no strong age differences were seen in responses to this item, but there was a large gender difference: 50% of women agreed compared with only 39% of men.



## Type of Community

The type of community our participants report living in is strongly related to how they feel about these two statements. Participants report living in one of the following: farm/country, a small/medium city, suburb, or large city. As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of our participants who agreed with the statement “We should worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself” was highest in low-density areas (48% in farm/coun-

try areas) and then dropped as population density increased (down to 37% in large cities). This means that almost half of participants living in farm/country areas agreed, compared with roughly one-third of those living in large cities. In 2014, agreement was also highest for those living on farms or in the country, but suburban dwellers’ level of agreement was identical to that of large city residents.

Participants in 2019 Who "Agreed" or "Mostly Agreed:"  
We Should Worry About Our Own Country & It Would be Better  
If We All Felt Like Citizens of the World

