

CLASS OF '09

What the graduates of ten schools think about the crazy world they just inherited.

Photographs by
Spencer Heyfron

EAST SIDE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL →



Gabrielle Jones, 18



Phellix Rodriguez, 18



Darleen Underwood, 18



Kevin Chik



Akaira Young, 17



David Mendez



Ammy Batista, 19



Franchesca Santos, 17



Nazia Kamruzzaman, 17



Jonathan Bach, 17



James Roberts, 18



Amanda Mayer



Joseph Cruz, 27



Jennifer Kunz, 25



Gregory Louis, 24



George A. Kottas, 26



Anu Sawkar, 30



Eric Mouchette, 21



Sarah Braasch, 34



Noah Liben, 26



Phoebe Stone, 27



Paul Isaachsen, 27



Paula Suárez, 32



Lindsey Davis Stover, 30



M. Gözde Alpaslan, 30



Roy Chan, 26



David Shlachter, 27



Sam Sanders, 24



Shireen Santoshani, 30



Dan Rakove, 26



Noorulain Masood, 26



Chris Trimble, 28



Betwa Sharma, 25



Simon Alam, 23



Jake Sherman, 23



Daarel Burnette II, 25



Khalil Jetha, 28



Meghan Berry, 28



Gregory M. White, 23



Kelly Senyei, 23

COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM →

DURING ITS LIMITED years on Earth, the Class of '09 has endured more than its share of insults from the older generation—condemned as MySpace narcissists and entitled lazy-asses, not to mention hookup addicts and/or rainbow-party attendees. Worse, having come of age traumatized by 9/11 and the ugly war that followed, they are graduating just as the economic bubble pops. Who could blame these new graduates if they were, as a demographic slice, feeling put-upon, even downright bitter?

So we asked them. We asked college graduates, grad-school matriculators, and a smattering of fifth-graders heading off to middle school. Among them were first-generation immigrants and wealthy suburbanites, artists and entrepreneurs. We asked more than 200 students in all, following up questionnaires with phone interviews. This wasn't a highly scientific survey: Among other things, the participants were largely self-selected—not to mention willing to be photographed and quoted. And as with any attempt to analyze across generational lines, the risk of misinterpretation is high. (I remember laughing out loud at Allan Bloom's 1987 best seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, which warned against my generation's enslavement to the dread Sony Walkman.)

Nonetheless, the results of this imperfect survey were revealing. We were startled by the fact that, circumstances be damned, we found very little bitterness at all—caution, yes; worry too—but judging from the responses to our questions, this is a reflexively optimistic cadre of graduates, feeling, if anything, existentially freed up by this era of radical change. They're nervous about the job market but figure it'll sort itself out. They describe their parents with shocking regularity as their "best friends." They've lived online for so long it's a default setting, one they believe lends them a more global-minded perspective than that of their elders. Their tone overall was more bemused than outraged: "I'm a mixture of excited and nervous for the future," says Forrest Petterson, a graduating senior at Friends Seminary. "But there's no point in getting upset, because it's not the end of the world."

It's tempting to chalk this up to the Obama effect: Would these graduates be feeling so sanguine under McCain? While No-Drama Obama is from a different generation, his iconic personality reflects the mood of this survey, from that cool and upbeat pragmatism to his wry emotional middle ground, not to mention a notable unwillingness to dwell on blame. It's an interesting mind-set to find in the midst of what might seem, to older observers, a time of apocalyptic change, of institutional collapse and chickens coming home to roost.

And yet there may be heartening advantages to such realism, which amounts to a kind of cognitive-behavioral therapy for the graduate's soul: If you can't change your circumstances, fix your thinking! Graduates tended to interpret in a positive light what might to earlier generations seem like worst-case scenarios (moving home, say) or terrifying environmental indicators ("This is a pivotal, transformational moment," says Brooklyn College grad Noam Rubinstein). Rather than rage against the machine, they prefer to hack their own futures. "I was pretty set on getting a conventional job and the usual climbing up the ladder thing," says Yale School of Architecture grad Dexter Ciprian. "Now I have to think about doing things on my own instead of waiting for things to come to me."

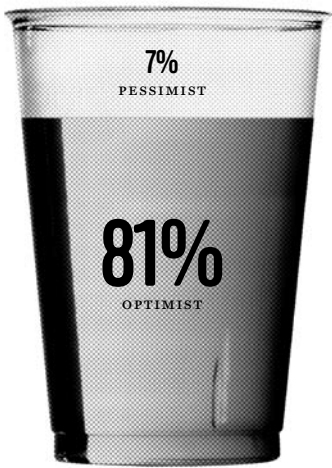
Perhaps there are downsides to such an even-keeled outlook. (Without outrage, is it possible to keep history from repeating itself?) And yet there is something powerful about the faith these graduates feel, even in the swirl of radical events, that this is not the final wave, and that they have the skills to surf the tumultuous tide instead of being sucked under.

EMILY NUSSBAUM

Ten schools, 200-plus grads, more than 100 questions. What follows is a sampling of snapshots of the students we surveyed, and a compilation of their answers.

OUTLOOK ON THE FUTURE

Are you an optimist or a pessimist?*



Will the country be better off or worse off in five years?



"This crisis is forcing people to make difficult decisions about what they really want to do with their lives. But in ten years, my classmates will be doing incredible things."

—ANN KIM, 27, WHARTON

Will your life be better or worse in five years?



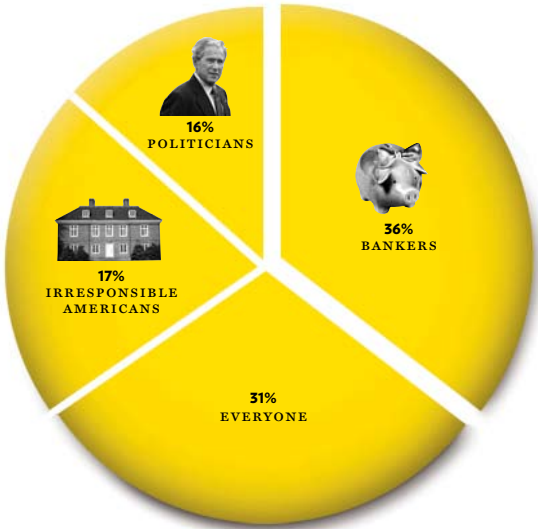
"I'm excited about the future—I've got even less to lose in this economy."

—ALEKSANDRA BOOKMAN, 21, NYU

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATAN FERNSTROM/GETTY IMAGES

WELCOME TO THE RECESSION

Who's most to blame for the economic downturn?



"Looking back, I think business schools deserve some blame for the economic downturn. Selling trash dressed up as gold is unethical, and they should be held accountable for stressing that we make money at the costs of others."

—DEVIN GRIFFIN, 28, WHARTON

How long do you think the recession will last?



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES (BUSH); GETTY IMAGES (TOY SOLDIER); H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES (HOUSE)

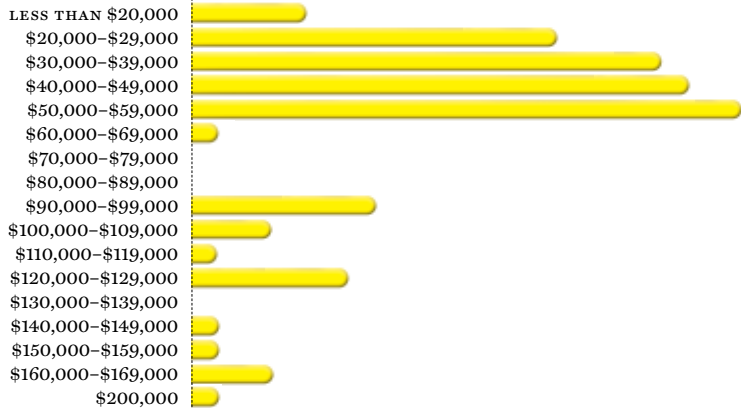
Do you have a job lined up?



"Two words: investment banking. The firm I interned with over the summer no longer exists."

—BRENDA TAYLOR, 30, WHARTON

If you have a job, what will your salary be?



Average starting salary:



Brooklyn College	\$40,000
Columbia School of Journalism	\$40,000
Fordham Law School	\$102,000
Kennedy School of Government	\$88,000
NYU	\$32,000
Wharton	\$113,000
Yale School of Architecture	\$44,000
NYPD Police Academy	\$42,000

Do you blame the previous generation?



"No, they were just pursuing a false sense of well-being through possessions they didn't actually need. It's pathetic, but that's how they were raised."

—TOMMY FAGIN, 18, FRIENDS SEMINARY

Backup plans:

The Army

No plans. Just winging it.

Office temp

Unpaid internships

Bartending

Teach English abroad

Grad school

Volunteer with disaster-relief programs

Move to New Hampshire and live off the land

Mom's house

"Both of my parents were well educated, but creative thought wasn't cultivated. They do a much better job of delayed gratification, and they have longer attention spans. But our generation has redefined what it means to be a good worker."

—SAM SANDERS, 24, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

72% OF GRADUATES WANT TO LIVE IN NEW YORK.

BROOKLYN COLLEGE



Kenisha Clarke, 22

Noam Rubinstein, 30

Shoshana Schwartz, 21

Farhana Ahmed, 21

Sergei Smirnov, 25

“Companies are looking for inexpensive talent. If you work hard and think less about compensation, there’s no telling the possibilities.” —**Kenisha Clarke**



Jim Kuerschner, 22

Emily Hughes, 21

Jesús Adam Esparza, 21

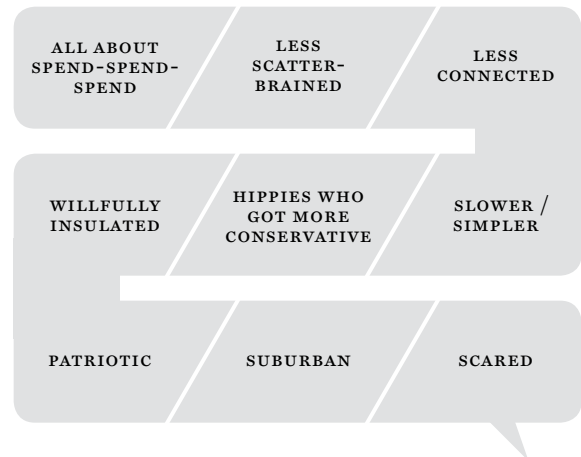
Lauren Davenport

Aleksandra Bookman, 21

“Growing up, we were told ‘You can be an astronaut, president—anything you want.’ And that’s just turning out to not be the case. Some friends are still in denial, and maybe it would have been better if their parents had been a little less idealistic.” —**Emily Hughes**

WHAT PARENTS GET ... AND WHAT THEY DON'T

How is your parents' generation different from yours?



What do your parents not understand about you?

THAT I LIKE TO GET DRUNK SOMETIMES.

I'M GAY.

WHAT I DO ON FACEBOOK.

THAT GETTING A JOB IS NOT SO SIMPLE.

86% SHARE THEIR PARENTS' POLITICAL VIEWS.

Are you more or less religious than your parents?



Do you discuss sex with your parents?



Do you discuss money with your parents?



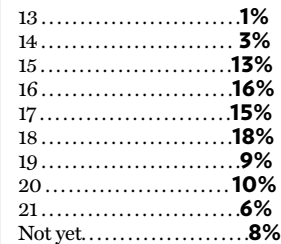
Do you discuss politics with your parents?



PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS SPREAD, SPENCER HEYFRON FOR NEW YORK MAGAZINE (STUDENTS); DAVIES + STARR/GETTY IMAGES (LEAF)

MEETING AND MATING

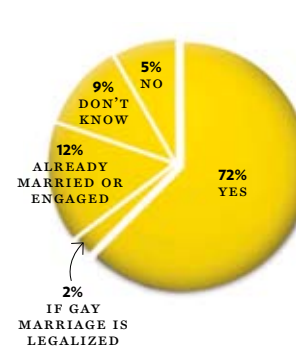
At what age did you first have sex?



What does *hooking up* mean?

Making out.
More than making out, less than sex.
From making out to a BJ.
It used to mean just a kiss, now the whole deal.
When the clothes come off.
Genitalia need to be touched.
The stage before a relationship.
Alcohol-induced one-night stand.
No strings attached.
Spending the night.
Anything that doesn't involve dinner first.

Do you want to get married?



Where did you meet your most recent sexual partner?

A friend's birthday.
The library.
He delivered my pizza.
Match.com.
A spandex-themed dance party.
Walking down the street.
He was my moving man.
Family friend.
Craigslist.
The lunch line.
Through a roommate.
The laundry in our building.

25% HAVE TRIED ONLINE DATING

58% HAVE HAD UNPROTECTED SEX

8% HAVE GOTTEN AN STD

25% HAVE TAKEN A NAKED PHOTO OF THEMSELVES

"I took naked photos of myself to see how I looked outside the mirror. Then I immediately deleted them."

DRUGS OF CHOICE



What recreational drugs have you taken?*

MARIJUANA
COCAINE
MUSHROOMS
ECSTASY

LSD

SALVIA
VICODIN
ADDERALL

*Answers scaled by number of responses.

"Most kids my age are very judgmental, even if they don't consider themselves to be. People are constantly putting up pictures of you on Facebook: what you're wearing, what you're doing, who you're hanging out with."

FRIENDS SEMINARY



Tommy Fagin, 18

Mardet Holmans, 17

D'Meca Homer, 17

Forrest Petterson, 18

Travis Bogosian, 18

"My mom is one of my best friends and knows everything about me and my life."



Sarah Vogelman, 18

Nicholas Kokkinis, 17

Marielle Rose Torres, 17

Faye Tsakas, 18

Zaid Attise, 18



POLITICAL PERSUASIONS

What is the single most important political issue to you?*

- ECONOMY
- HEALTH CARE
- ENVIRONMENT
- EDUCATION
- FOREIGN POLICY
- GAY RIGHTS
- JOBS
- THE WAR
- ENERGY POLICY
- THE MIDDLE EAST
- BAILOUTS
- IMMIGRATION
- IRAQ
- AFGHANISTAN
- DARFUR
- ENTITLEMENT REFORM
- HUMAN RIGHTS
- FARMING
- ISRAEL
- HOMELESSNESS
- ARTS FUNDING
- ENDING THE WAR
- PAKISTAN
- WOMEN'S RIGHTS
- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
- TORTURE
- ECONOMIC INEQUALITY
- IRAN
- ELECTRIC VEHICLES
- DIPLOMACY

*Answers scaled by number of responses.

"We all thought we had a ticket to New York, but now we worry we won't be able to practice at all."

RELIGION

Do you believe in God?
Yes 35%
No 16%
Agnostic 8%
I believe in something . 6%

"I believe in God sometimes, but I'm definitely less religious than my parents. The Bible never mentions dinosaurs, and it contradicts itself so much."

—PHELLIX RODRIGUEZ, 18, EAST SIDE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

How important (on a scale of 1 to 5) is religion in choosing your life partner?
1.....38%
2.....14%
3.....17%
4.....11%
5.....19%

Which of the following policy positions do you agree with?
Institute cap-and-trade energy policies 95%
Legalize gay marriage . 93%
Defend Roe v. Wade . . 89%
Institute universal health care 86%
Deport illegal immigrants 8%

Are we safer now or before 9/11?
Now 29%
Before 23%
Same 41%

How often do you worry about a terrorist attack?
Often 9%
Occasionally 13%
Rarely 39%
Never 44%



SUPPORTED OBAMA IN THE LAST ELECTION

"I'd definitely be more excited to work for Obama than I would have been for Bush, but working in the White House is such the 'in' thing right now, and I like to think of myself as a nonconformist."

—SAM SANDERS, 24, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



"Everyone used to talk about what lavish things they wanted to buy with their future bonuses. Now some friends with jobs paying more than \$100,000 have mentioned living with parents and commuting to work."



RACE

How important (on a scale of 1 to 5) is your racial identity to you?
1.....29%
2.....16%
3.....19%
4.....14%
5.....20%



HAVE HAD AN INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIP

Do we live in a postracial society?
Yes 18%
No 79%

ASKED THEIR RACIAL IDENTITY, RESPONDENTS GAVE MORE THAN 30 DIFFERENT ANSWERS.

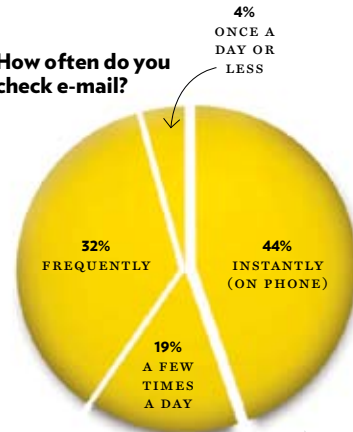
NYPD POLICE ACADEMY



Alex Ramos, 24 Fady Azmy, 27 Christopher Benson, 23

KEEPING CONTACT

How often do you check e-mail?



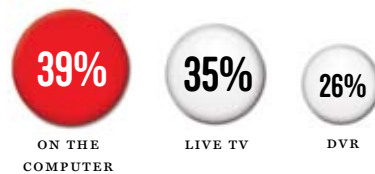
"I can tell when I get an e-mail from an older person: They refer to the date when we had the conversation and identify what they're following up about. Younger people never give context."
—NOAM RUBINSTEIN, 30, BROOKLYN COLLEGE



"Facebook is a crutch. People post 'Hey, I'm engaged.' If you really want people to know about it, then be a decent person and at least text them."
—SHOSHANA SCHWARTZ, 21, BROOKLYN COLLEGE

"My fiancée got annoyed with me the other night for tweeting from the dinner table. I actually feel jittery if I'm offline for too long."
—DAVID SHLACHTER, 27, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Where do you watch TV?



How often do you read the newspaper?
Daily 50%
A few times a week 13%
Once a week 14%
Occasionally 17%
Never 2%

THE NEXT GENERATION

(For fun, we visited a class of fifth-graders too.)



"But I don't remember my number!"
—ANTOINE ESGUERRA, 12



"My big brother has one, and I don't want to copy."
—NICOLE AMARAL, 10

Do you ever use Twitter?

"Sometimes."

Do you know what Twitter is?

"Yes, it means that you sometimes shake when you're nervous."
—SAMIR NIKOCEVIC, 10

What do your parents not understand about you?

How cool I am.
I'm sensitive.
I can't always be perfect.
I'm more independent than they think.
That I need to grow up sometimes.
That they are embarrassing when they talk to my friends.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

A baker in Paris.
CEO.
Biologist.
Probably an FBI agent or designing clothes.
Basketball player.
Singer-dancer.
President of a stocks company.
Famous actress, writer, architect.

P.S. 59



Antoine Esguerra, 12 Charles Shehan, 10 Sierra Davis, 10