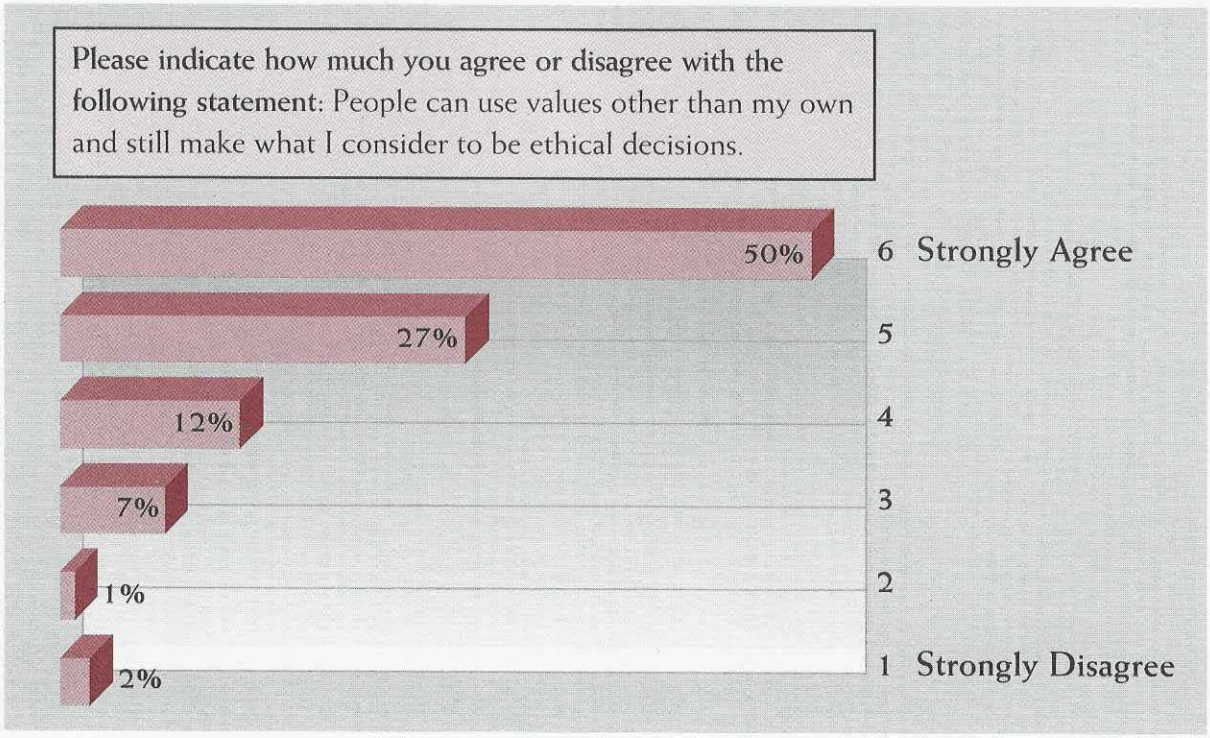
Moral Boundaries

A moral boundary defines the limits we draw regarding the other people in the world toward whom we feel obligated to act morally, or in accordance with our values. At its extreme, a small moral boundary might describe a bigot, who feels no obligation to provide charity, compassion, assistance, or any other measure of comfort to anyone of another ethnic or religious group. At the other extreme, an expansive moral boundary might be what most of the world's moral philosophers, from Buddha to Christ, encourage us to attain.

Several parts of the survey were designed to test the moral boundaries of respondents. One item asked respondents how much they agreed with the following statement: "People can use values other than my own and still make what I consider to be ethical decisions (statement B1)." There was overwhelming support for this statement (see Figure 4). More than half of the respondents chose the highest possible level of agreement, and another 25 percent chose the next highest. On a six-point scale, where six registered the most agreement, the average response was 5.1. Only 10 percent of the respondents answered three or below. This would seem to indicate a great deal of tolerance for other values among our respondents.

Figure 4
Acceptance of Different Values



A second set of items—six statements in all (statements B2–B7)—probed the degree to which respondents felt that their family, community, or nation made it difficult for them to live according to their values. Once again, more than 75 percent of the respondents tended to feel that they could provide for their families and be good citizens by living according to their values.

But two statements provided more variance in responses. Both concerned the extent to which the community rewarded a respondent for living in accordance with his or her values (statements B5 and B7). The first, "My community rewards me when I live according to my values," drew a positive response from only

The Ethical Basis for International Relations

Abba Eban (Israel), *foreign minister of Israel from 1966 to 1974, has been a major figure in world diplomacy since he began representing his country's interests to the world in 1947.*

I believe the moral and ethical basis of society is one of the conditions of its success or failure. It has really been proven that countries that deviate too much from the central, ethical discourse get themselves into very terrible trouble. Therefore, even on the basis of utilitarian self-interest, it would be wise to give much more weight to the question of ethics and morality.

That's especially true in international relations. In general, people who respond to international relations divide themselves into two camps: those who ask about political and international problems, "Am I doing what is morally right?," and those who ask the question, "Am I doing what is useful?" In other words, those who judge by the balance of the ethical truth and those who judge by the balance of advantage.

I've never met anybody who doesn't claim to represent both of these schools. I've never met somebody who says, "Oh, I'm so hardheaded that I give no weight whatever to morality." And I've never met people who say, "All I think about is ethics."

We come back to a Greek philosopher, Demosthenes, who once said that we must always do what is right, but we must make sure that it is also advantageous.

No country gives more weight than the United States to ethical, moral, and other aspects. [But] it's very difficult for anybody who has pragmatic duties to give sufficient weight to the question, "Is what I'm doing right?," as distinct from the question, "Is what I'm doing advantageous?" It's very, very hard. You get a distinction between rhetoric and implementation. In the end, every country makes its decisions in the name of national interest, and explains these decisions in the name of self-sacrificial altruism.

64 percent of the respondents. The second, "Living in my community makes it hard to live according to my values," brought agreement from 77 percent. To put it another way, more than one-third of the respondents did not agree with the statement that their community rewards them for putting their values into action, and nearly four-fifths agreed that the community makes it hard to live according to their values.

The responses to these statements are distinct from answers to the question regarding one's country, so there is no particular reason to expect that nationality would be related to these responses. In fact, there is no relationship between any of the demographic variables and responses to either of the statements regarding community support for one's values. Similarly, the value choices respondents made are not related to their beliefs that their values are not rewarded by their communities.

One wonders if there is not something about the impulse to take part in an organization such as the State of the World Forum that accounts for the concern about one's community's support for his or her values. Surely these participants are relatively unusual in their communities. Perhaps they feel the weight of that difference, and have that in common. In any event, none of the demographic variables we measured explains this, nor do the values they chose.

A more direct measure of the moral boundary concept was the response to a battery of statements regarding the willingness of respondents to interact, to varying degrees of intimacy, with people who do not share their values (statements C1–C8). The intention was to devise a scale such that most people would recognize the increased levels of intimacy and draw the line within which they felt most comfortable and would go no further.

From least to most intimate (where one indicates "least comfortable" and six indicates "most comfortable"), these statements explored whether, in the face of people with values fundamentally different from your own, you would want to attend school with them (average score 4.89), share a park bench with them (4.75), dance with them (4.13), live next door to them (3.97), be friends with them (3.49), invite them to dinner (3.31), or have your children marry them (2.88). But the idea of living in peace with them drew solid support (5.4). In fact, living in peace turned out to be a sort of "halo" question, since nearly 87 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they could do this (see Figure 5).

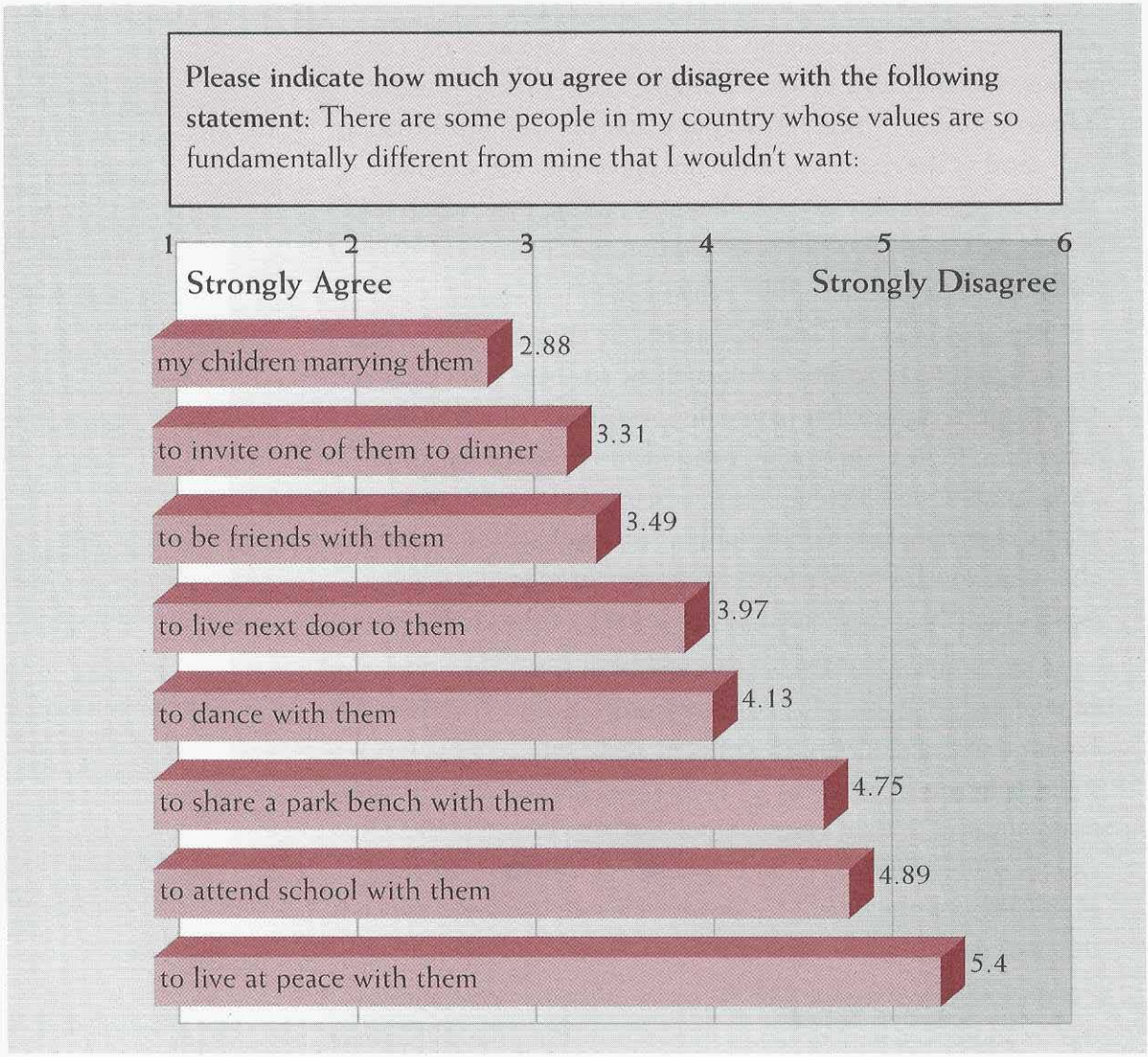


Figure 5
Measuring Moral Boundaries

The scores for these activities (if "living in peace" is not included) seem to form a fairly valid and reliable scale of the boundaries of our respondents. By adding together each respondent's scores on the seven separate items, we form a single measure of the size of his or her moral boundary: The higher the score, the larger the moral boundary. Scores could therefore range from a low of seven (responding "1" to each of seven items) to 42 (responding "6" to all seven items). The average moral boundary score for all respondents was 27.4, and the scores ranged from 7 to 42.

There is no relationship between the demographic variables and moral boundaries. Age and education are unrelated. One's home country is unrelated. Gender is unrelated. Occupational sector is unrelated. Of these findings, perhaps only that regarding education is at all surprising. After all, there is no reason to

believe that gender or occupation makes one more or less tolerant. But again, we must remember that the population we're studying is likely to transcend many of the differences that might be found in the general population. Education may not enhance their tolerance as it tends to do in the general public because they are already more tolerant than most people are.

But tolerance is close to the heart of this concept, at least as it's measured here, and it is therefore unsurprising that one of the few values significantly related to moral boundaries is

Science, Technology, and "Dignity Ethics"

Christine von Weizsäcker (Germany), *a molecular biologist and bioethicist based in Bonn, has contributed widely to the public debate on technology assessment and policy.*

I'm less concerned with a lack of ethics than with the artificial formation of ethics commissions. They do not represent a societal debate on values. In the field of science and technology assessment, we are getting ethics experts complementing the scientific and technological experts so as to keep the public out of the debate. [The result is] a prevalent type of ethics that fits global markets so well—a sort of "cost benefit" ethics as compared to a "dignity" ethics.

The access questions are crucial. One question is whether we consider our own genes as a natural resource for industry. And, linked to that, of course, is the whole patenting issue. My main concern is establishing the roundtable around which the people concerned can sit in decency [and] debate on what is the real reality. Is the real reality only technology and economics, or is it people and their lives, their judgments, their decisions, their communities?

My personal experience is that, contrary to [the thinking of] all those people talking about the difficulty of intercultural interaction, if it comes down to topics of real concern to people, I don't find difficulty in working together with people who have a fundamental decency rooted in their own communities.

But we have to have a long discussion about the congruence between ethical decisions and rationality. [One kind of] rationality cuts down the things you have to consider to a very few, in order to be fast and efficient. And there is the other rationality, taking in as much as you can at the moment, taking it more slowly, getting a more stable basis for your decision. This [latter] has a very strong interface with ethics. So ethics has the difficulty that it is slow in a very fast world. But it also has the *advantage* of being slow and sustainable in a very fast world.

that of Tolerance. Those who chose Tolerance had a higher average moral boundary score (28.9) than those who did not choose Tolerance (26.6).

Fairness once again served to distinguish respondents. In the case of moral boundaries, those who chose Fairness tended to have lower moral boundary scores (25.6) than those who did not choose Fairness (28.4). Perhaps a concern with fairness encourages one to guard one's privacy and personal space.

The only other value to be significantly related to moral boundaries was Respect for Elders. The 18 respondents who chose Respect for Elders had an average moral boundary score of 34.8, much higher than the average of those who did not choose Respect for Elders (26.8).

Are people who feel little encouragement from their communities to live according to their values less likely to share with people of different value systems? When the two items described above regarding the community's encouragement (or discouragement) of living in accordance with one's values were analyzed for their correlation with moral boundary scores, no significant relationship was observed. That is somewhat reassuring: One's perception that the community does not encourage living according to one's values does not seem to encourage one to shrink into a smaller perimeter of moral concern.

A third approach to the concept of moral boundaries (see Figure 6) was a battery of items asking the extent to which one finds one's values important while making decisions about raising children, choosing television programs, meeting religious obligations, accepting jobs, spending money, and voting (questions F1–F6). It appears that respondents felt that there were two distinct kinds of activities involved in these questions: Raising children, accepting jobs, and voting seemed to be one cluster of activities that might be described as "social," while choosing TV shows, meeting religious obligations, and spending money formed another cluster that might be thought of as "personal."

The average scores on these six items were quite high. Given a six-point scale, from one (not at all important) to six (very important), most people thought that raising children deeply implicated their values (5.8). Even people with no children of their own overwhelmingly endorsed the importance of their values in this area of life. The least important of the six

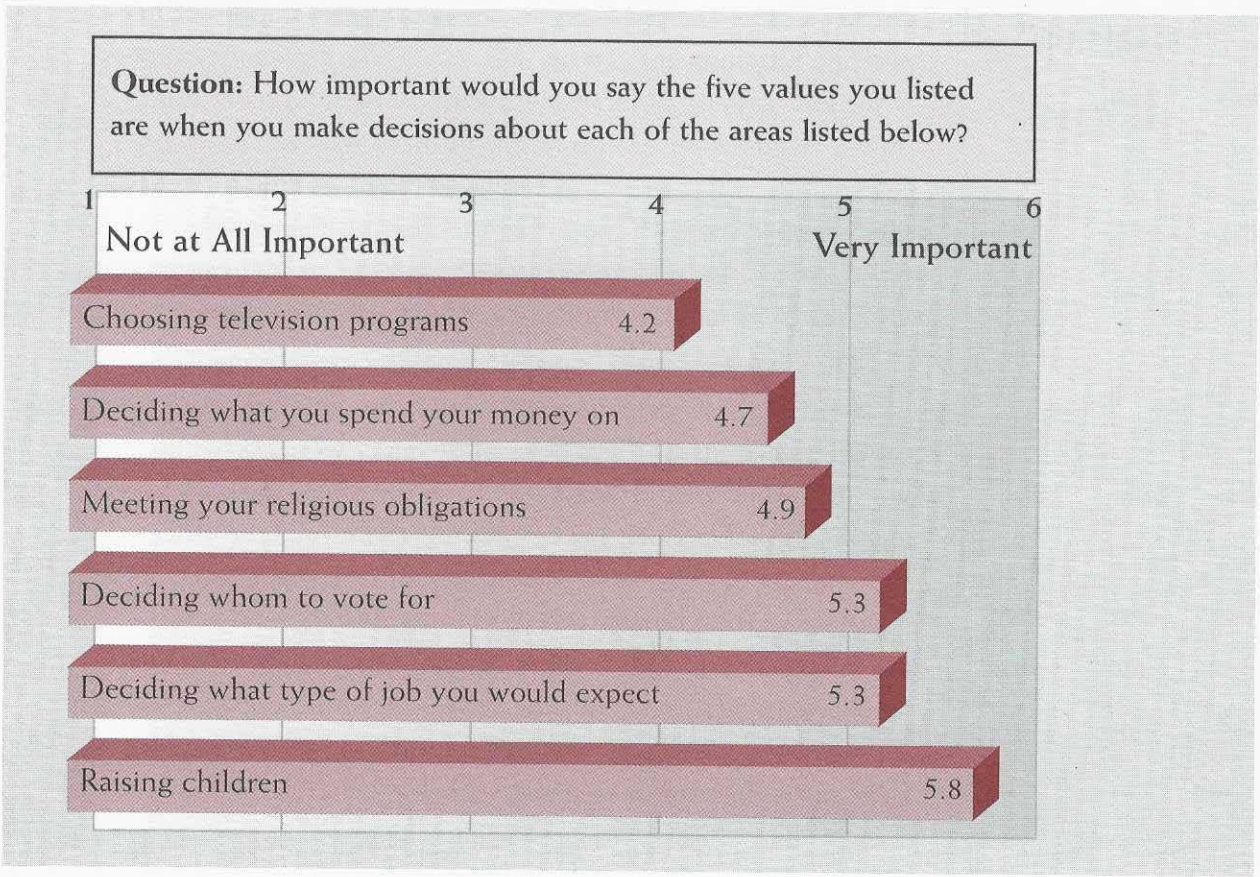
areas was choosing TV programs (4.2), but even here the average is higher than the midpoint of the scale. Otherwise, respondents felt values were important in deciding whom to vote for (5.3), deciding what type of job you would accept (5.3), meeting your religious obligations (4.9), and deciding what you spend your money on (4.7).

None of the items about decisions correlated with the moral boundary scale. That is, having a wide or narrow moral boundary did not seem related to whether one considers one's values particularly important when making decisions in these aspects of life.

Living in the United States, however, was associated with greater emphasis on using one's values when deciding which job to accept. It could be that greater economic opportunity in the United States makes this a more reasonable priority than it does elsewhere. However, those living outside the United States still placed great importance on their own values in choosing jobs: Where the average response for U.S. residents was 5.4, those outside the United States averaged 5.1.

In using their values to choose TV programs, women placed a higher priority (at 4.5) than men (at 4.0) on making

Figure 6
Applying Values



values-based decisions. If women are more likely to govern the programs children watch, this may be a consideration they added to this item that men did not.

Choosing Compassion . . . is associated with considering one's values more important in a variety of areas. Perhaps this is part of what our respondents understand "compassion" to mean.

There were some small but interesting patterns observable in the relationships between the values chosen by respondents and the importance of values in decision making. First, people who chose Compassion for a value scored higher on the following items: raising children, choosing TV programs, meeting religious obligations, and accepting jobs (that is, on all but spending and voting, two items for which compassion may not be as particularly relevant a consideration). Choosing Compassion, then, is associated with considering one's values more important in a variety of areas. Perhaps this is part of what our respondents understand "compassion" to mean.

Second, those who were especially willing to consider their values in making decisions regarding religious obligations were apt to have chosen three specific values from the list of 15: Compassion, Humility, and Reverence for Life. Each of these values, of course, is related to the world's great religions. There is, however, a countercurrent here, reinforcing our earlier observation that Fairness seems to play an important role in distinguishing among respondents. In this case, those who chose Fairness are *least* likely to consider values important in meeting religious obligations. Moreover, the choice of Fairness is the *most* striking difference between those who score high on the religious obligation item and those who do not. Considering our observations in earlier analyses, in which Fairness seems associated with the irreligious and businesspeople, this trend, too, is not surprising. Is Fairness, then, as inconsistent with religious faith as these respondents seem to believe?

The final part of the inquiry into moral boundaries involved our respondents' appraisals of the decisions made by others (questions E1–E7). How often (they were asked) do you feel that decisions made by family members, educators, clergy, businesspeople, government officials, military officers, or members of the media (including journalists) are based on a set of values that correspond to your own? When ranked according to the average scores for all respondents, on a scale from one (never) to six (all the time), the results showed family members as being closest to, and military officers furthest from, their own set of values (see Figure 7).

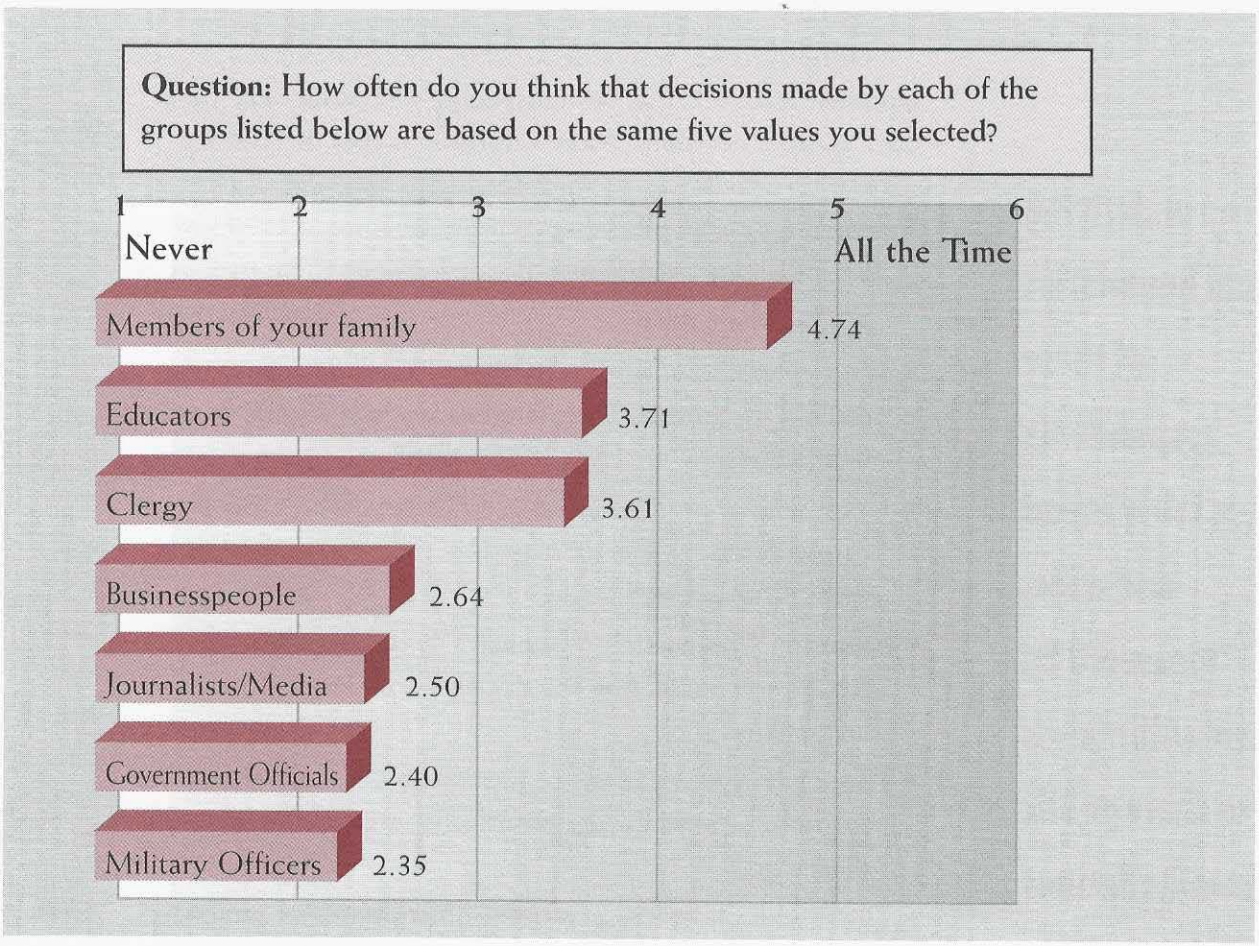


Figure 7
Decisions by Others

People who live outside the United States consider their family members' decisions to be guided by their own values significantly more often (5.05) than U.S. residents (4.66). Perhaps this analysis illustrates the commonplace perception that American families are more loosely interrelated than those in other countries. U.S. residents, on the other hand, considered the decisions of clergy closer to their own values (3.71) than those outside the United States (3.28). While the overall average shows a general lack of credit to government officials for sharing the values of our respondents, in the United States there is slightly more perceived similarity between officials' values and respondents' values (U.S.: 2.47, non-U.S.: 2.14).

While neither sex felt particularly close to military officers' values, men (2.56) were significantly more likely than women (2.07) to consider the decisions of military officers to be based on values similar to their own.

It is worth noting, however, that none of the average scores for military officers' decisions is higher than 3.00. Even those who chose values close to military-style values do not feel that the values of officers are really very close to their own.

The underlying moral boundaries of these respondents seem fairly broad and wide, measured by their willingness to share public accommodations and friendship with people who have different values.

Not surprising, respondents whose occupations fell into the business sector felt that businesspeople used values like their own to make decisions. More surprising is that the average score even of business-sector respondents was only 2.91. Among businesspeople, however, educators stood even lower (2.28), indicating a substantial divide between these two arenas.

Among the values:

- Those who chose Truth were more likely than those who did not to consider their families' decisions to be based on their values.
- Those who chose Compassion or Devotion considered educators' decisions less informed by their own values than those who did not.
- Choosing Compassion or Generosity was significantly related to considering the decisions of clergy close to one's own values.
- Those who chose Honor or Responsibility were more likely to consider business decisions to be made with values like their own.
- Those who chose Preservation of Nature or Reverence for Life considered business to be significantly less informed by their values.
- Those who chose Responsibility considered government officials' decisions to be more frequently based on their own values.
- Those who chose Fairness, Honor, or Responsibility were more likely to consider military officers' values similar to their own than those choosing Compassion and Preservation of Nature.

IN SUMMARY, Forum respondents seem somewhat concerned that their communities do not support the values they embrace. They feel more removed from some parts of society than others, however. The military, government in general, the media, and business get low marks for sharing the values of our respondents. But the underlying moral boundaries of these respondents seem fairly broad and wide, measured by their willingness to share public accommodations and friendship with people who have different values. And while we see occasional significant differences among subgroups, we never find very large gaps among the scores of members of these groups.