Boomer ACtion tyPe:
FOgINg FAmIly
The basic conflict:
Personal needs vs. collective priorities
Forging family boomers rely on a delicate balance between nurturing those around them and fulfilling their own needs. The majority of their focus and attention is on collective priorities, namely the things they must do to keep their family unit and family networks safe and united. Room for the self requires the same focus and energy as forging family in the first place, so negotiating time, space, quiet, and priority for their own emotional and physical health can be major issues in their lives. With such intense attention paid to collective priorities of family, self always vies for attention, resulting in consequences for these boomers’ senses of self and their well-being.

Lifestage:
Open doors
Family events define many life stages for these boomers. They are always particularly conscious of these stages, and reshape the boundaries between stages more actively and consciously than other boomers. They frequently discover family-oriented experiences they had not expected; thus they resequence stages and forge new ones in relation to their conception of family and their families’ circumstances. Specifically, these boomers value a life stage that cuts across child rearing, empty nests, elder care, and retirement: one where the doors are always open to give and receive care and nurture connections and relationships. For many of these boomers, parenthood is a never-ending, full-time position, even after their children have grown and started their own families.

Expectations:
Community through family
From their familial experiences like marriage or partnership, elder care, child rearing, and network building, these boomers have learned to be sensitive to what they can contribute socially beyond what those around them need materially. To them, a broad conception of family is the most important institution of all, providing support and, more importantly, a drive to provide support, love, and affection to those close to them.

These Boomers who are forging family demonstrate an aptitude for discerning the real needs of the people they care about. Their experiences with loss and dislocation—from abusive relationships to deaths in the family—crystallize what is really important: love, support, and intimacy. Instead of prompting prolonged periods of loss and isolation, disruptive events strengthened and created deep bonds and commitments into which they pour their energies. These boomers prioritize the needs of others, caring for themselves in a way that better fulfills these commitments. They have learned to find family in a wide variety of contexts and forms, from formal families to chosen ones. They use the lessons they learn in forging their families to assist members of their communities or parts of the lives of these boomers, becoming an overarching frame for how they engage with the world.

To these boomers who focus on forging and maintaining intimate family bonds, family is not just a given; it is something they have discovered and worked for through adversity.

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The Action Ecology illustrates the complexity with which boomers anticipate, plan for, and deal with changes in their lives. The inner portion of the ecology highlights resources, sorted into four categories: people, information, institutions, and capitals. The outer ring, organized around our seven dimensions of decision making, describe practices and strategies through which boomers put their resources into action. Finally, there are the “decisions in suspension,” questions that these boomers don’t have answers to just yet.

**DECISIONS IN SUSPENSION:**
- How to save for the future despite frequent disruptions?
- How to organize space for current and future family needs?
- When and how to care for and focus on the self?
- How to form towns and neighborhoods for security and unity?

**Extended Capacity**
- Pride in personal accomplishment

**Adapting the Self**
- Adjusting expectations to the needs of loved ones
- Learning to rely on kin
- Finding satisfaction in fulfilling social role

**Changing Surroundings**
- Changing the home to reflect the family

**Self-Help 2.0**
- Community involvement

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**Self-Help 2.0**
- Community involvement

**Wealth Creation**
- Making it work

**Mitigating Risk**
- Knowing the capacities of kin to assist in times of need

**Cultivating Path**
- Caring as the foundation of a well-lived life
- Finding family and support in a balanced community
- Finding wealth in simple pleasures

**Re-Privatizing**
- Bringing old institutions up to speed

**Re-Purposing the Old**
- Building connections in educational institutions
- Building support for local organizations and networks
- Fighting professionalization of volunteer services

**New Sociality**
- Cultivating bodily identity

**Building the Instrumental Network**
- Cultivating ties for care

**Surpassing Relationships**
- Compassion: identifying mutually as a family
- Planning and action: functional mobilization
- Highlighting intergenerational connections and interactions
The Dimensions of Decision Making

The boomers we talked to helped us discover the key dimensions of the seven big stories that emerge at the intersection of aging, cohort, and period effects. For each story, we found a pair of defining actions—two poles of behavior that turn the stories into scales. We then used these scales to define the action types, each of which represents a unique profile.

Extended Capacity

BOOMERS WHO ARE FORGING FAMILY will navigate complex decisions and challenges through the strength they have found in themselves. Their experiences with their families have shown them that emotional fortitude is a central asset in challenging and extreme environments. They look inward to families and themselves for solutions and strength instead of attempting to change their homes and communities.

Resequencing Life Stages

THE ACCEPTABLE NARRATIVES OF FAMILY have shifted dramatically within these boomers’ lifetimes, from a given template to a more diverse array of possibilities requiring effort and intent to bring to life. Even so, the many paths to family experience fall into new narratives that they will continue to adapt and enact in the coming years.

Self-Help 2.0

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New Sociability

AT THEIR CORE, these boomers nurture relationships that express emotional depth and a constant focus on achieving stability. From these expressive networks emerge larger networks of social connection and dependency that can be called upon in times of need, but the family is always the core.

Re-Institutioning

THESE BOOMERS BECAME INTERACTED WITH INSTITUTIONS as they strive to forge their families, and they see the connection between the strength of these institutions and the well-being of those for whom they care. Through their efforts, old institutions will be repurposed and reinvigorated to deal with challenges ahead.

Wealth Generation

PROSPERITY FOR THESE BOOMERS is not rooted in the accumulation of monetary wealth, but in the happiness and well-being of their families. Risks exist, but these boomers have faith in the strength of the connections they have forged through generations and community. The financial and infrastructural resilience to confront aging and external instability can be found in these connections.

Global Transparency

ALTHOUGH THESE BOOMERS know they are by no means insulated from global issues, the focus of their attention and decisions in the coming years will be resoundingly local. They work to create neighborhoods where they can live close to their children, elders, and friends. They will focus on the local to retain mobility and create a rich history.

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Profiles & Quotations

Each of these profiles describes a person who embodies the Forging Family action type. These three personal stories best illustrate the decision-making lens of the action type but are not the only interviewees who shaped the type. The profiles represent actual people and their words, although their names and some details about their lives have been changed to protect their identities.

Brenda Clifford

Age: 51
Rural Northeast

Brenda Clifford left her last of several husbands ten years ago because his abuse posed a threat to her son. While she knew about the resources available on abuse hotlines and had even volunteered on abuse hotlines, it took seeing her son in immediate danger for her to finally sever ties. Two years later, one of her youngest sons died in a car accident, an event that finally forged the dispersed pieces of her family into a cohesive unit: they were closer before, but now they are “more of a family.” When her brother bulldozed her cottage after her son’s death, intending to sell her land out from under her, the community banded together and collected donations from across the country to buy her the house where she now lives, with all of the five or so surviving children from her marriages. When they are not talking to each other or watching TV, a radio in the kitchen broadcasts emergency information for the volunteer medical crew Brenda staffs. Every day, she spends time talking on the phone with her grandmother, who raised Brenda in a similarly large household. After her day of work as a stonemason, she spends her time on Ancestry.com filling out the details of her family, discovering history and lore, and searching for her father, whom she has not seen for decades. She longs for time alone and order in her household, but that always comes second to family needs.

Fred and Marie Ho

Age: 60 and 55
Urban Southwest

Fred and Marie moved their parents to the Southwest to provide care but acknowledge that their parents care for them more often. They cobble together social services, family consultations, and animal rescue services. Almost all of their disposable income goes to keeping both of their children in prestigious private schools. They feel three schools nourish their own need for community as well as their children’s creativity. Fred remarks that they feel “out of phase,” since they waited longer to have kids and their children have grown kids with their own families. Their children, one born to them and the other adopted from China, grounded their reunion after several years of separation, in which they found their identity both as individuals and as a family. Repairs go undone at Fred and Marie’s house, and they lead less affluent lifestyles than many of their empty-nested peers, but the health and happiness of their children and parents come first. In fact, Fred believes that he owes his identity to fatherhood—“I’m a dad” is the first thing that comes to mind when someone asks him what he is or what he does.

On never having an empty nest:

“His kids will always be around. I don’t think of an empty nest. They walk in and out the door — some [people] send their child to college, but I’ve been sending kids out for 17 years now and it’s been an ongoing thing for me. Other people do it. I’ve seen them going through it, but I’ve been going through it forever and I still have more to keep doing.”

On the importance of keeping doors open:

“My son and his wife had a fire in their home, so they moved back here with three more small babies. I think there were 12 or 13 of us. Plus, I had taken in my son’s friend whose mother abandoned him and he was sleeping out in the cold, so I brought him in on October. I had people sleeping everywhere …. It doesn’t matter whether they live here or not, you know? I do not lock my doors at all and I wake up and find somebody on the couch, invariably.”

On a desire for personal space:

“Twist my arm: I want to have a little bit of organization. I want to be able to come home and see the house the way I left it in the morning, not totally destroyed by little people, as much as I love them.”

On using and becoming part of resources in the community:

“My daughter’s father is a police officer, and her guitarist is a police officer. I’ve been with all these different organizations and I know all these people so I just jump in. I was lucky because I have a social worker. Again, it’s just people, you know.”

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On children and grandparents:
Fred: “It really is a blessing to have both girls know Grandma and Grandpa and to have Grandma and Grandpa watch the girls grow up, which would not have happened had they stayed in Los Angeles. So it really has been a great thing.”

On holding off becoming parents:
Marie: “I like being in parenthood at this age. When I was in my twenties, at a time when many of my contemporaries were becoming parents, I felt fully unprepared to be a parent. So I feel smarter than them! Smarter but more exhausted! … I don’t think you’re ever not a parent. I think the relationship changes over time and so that becomes a different dynamic, and your input potentially decreases as your children hit their twenties and on, but that doesn’t mean it’s less valuable.”

On spiritual community:
Marie: “The [Religious Center] isn’t really a church, it is more a school of spiritual philosophy. And we were each doing individual spiritual exploration, but also sharing that with each other, andaligning ourselves by the philosophies we held. So I think we’ve both stayed reasonably involved, and we’ve worked a lot with each other. And coming from different backgrounds, with Fred’s background being Jewish but that not being drilled into him, I had sporadic exposure to an organized church, but nothing consistent. It was a common point for us because we shared the philosophy.”

Doug Holzmann remodels homes—the beautiful hundred-year-old home in which we interview him is one of his remodeling jobs that he couldn’t sell. After his divorce several years ago, he now lives there with eight men between the ages of 22 and 60, whom he met through a 12-step program. Many of them are involved in his business, Guy’s Homes, and they all call themselves “Guy.” Because of their shared history of drug and alcohol abuse, the roommates have to be conscientious about each other’s habits. If a roommate falls off the wagon, he will be asked to leave in order to continue to make the household work. In addition to this cultivated family, Doug’s grown son and grandchildren live in a nearby suburb, and mountain retreats and football tie the different parts of his families together. He recently also invested in a local restaurant and is devoting his time to that venture and the community and local government that supports it.

On the workplace family:
“At the restaurant I’m like, ‘Geez, it’s like an all-star team.’ People quit really prestigious places downtown and come out here with these guys, and it seems to be working out. They've been non-advertising; everybody just kind of comes in. It’s packed and people are coming back and it’s fun. That’s the way I like to work with my guys, if everybody’s thrown in together, that’s the fun.”

On making a large, untraditional household work:
“The secret of the work and living here is getting the first couple good ones, because people conform to the norms of the group or they’ll leave. These guys are working in the mountains. Sometimes I see ‘em maybe once a week. We go up and cook and play cards and stuff, but my guys will tell me, say, ‘Hey, this guy, we’re not carrying him.’ So the part is pretty good. And the part about renting … they’re looking out for what they have here … then again it’s like having four husbands or something.”

On connecting with the community:
“I feel part of the community. I consciously try to help out and work with my neighbors with their homes and stuff like that. It’s nice to know your neighbors. So, yeah, I really feel part of the community and part of some of their projects. Even if they don’t hire us, I see them at the store and I see them around town. I feel like I’ve been a little bit of a team player.”
**Action Ecology: Forging Family**

The Action Ecology illustrates the complex ways in which boomers anticipate, plan for, and deal with changes in their lives. The inner portion of the ecology highlights four life stages that frame the lifestage of boomers—full-time and part-time work, emerging family networks, retirement, and aging in a community. The outer ring, organized around our seven dimensions of decision making, describes practices and strategies through which boomers can anticipate, plan for, and deal with changes in their lives.

### Decisions in Context

**Work:**

- **Expectations:** Worker Firing boomers may need a delay before reentering the workforce. The issue of reengaging with the workplace, sometimes using work as a vehicle for building the "chosen" family, may create strains and conflicts. For this reason, workplace play can change the decision-making processes employed by many boomers. They less have to work at changing others but respond to changes in job and family demands. As the family demands increase, most of these boomers see their working lives as a means to an end, a way to look to the younger members of their family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

**Expectations:**

- **Respect and recognition:**
  - For family firing boomers who may not have a delay before reentering the workforce. The issue of reengaging with the workplace, sometimes using work as a vehicle for building the “chosen” family, may create strains and conflicts. For this reason, workplace play can change the decision-making processes employed by many boomers. They less have to work at changing others but respond to changes in job and family demands. As the family demands increase, most of these boomers see their working lives as a means to an end, a way to look to the younger members of their family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

**Expectations:**

- **Education and training:**
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### Outcomes

**Resilience and adaptation:**

- **Personal needs vs. collective priorities:**
  - Even when their goals are pursued family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

**Resilience and adaptation:**

- **Self-discovery:**
  - Family firing boomers who may not have a delay before reentering the workforce. The issue of reengaging with the workplace, sometimes using work as a vehicle for building the “chosen” family, may create strains and conflicts. For this reason, workplace play can change the decision-making processes employed by many boomers. They less have to work at changing others but respond to changes in job and family demands. As the family demands increase, most of these boomers see their working lives as a means to an end, a way to look to the younger members of their family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

### Conclusions

**Resilience and adaptation:**

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**Resilience and adaptation:**

- **Community and volunteer groups:**
  - Family firing boomers who may not have a delay before reentering the workforce. The issue of reengaging with the workplace, sometimes using work as a vehicle for building the “chosen” family, may create strains and conflicts. For this reason, workplace play can change the decision-making processes employed by many boomers. They less have to work at changing others but respond to changes in job and family demands. As the family demands increase, most of these boomers see their working lives as a means to an end, a way to look to the younger members of their family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

### Decisions in Context

**Personal needs vs. collective priorities:**

- **Open doors:**
  - Family firing boomers who may not have a delay before reentering the workforce. The issue of reengaging with the workplace, sometimes using work as a vehicle for building the “chosen” family, may create strains and conflicts. For this reason, workplace play can change the decision-making processes employed by many boomers. They less have to work at changing others but respond to changes in job and family demands. As the family demands increase, most of these boomers see their working lives as a means to an end, a way to look to the younger members of their family networks as apprentices of the trades that they love to learn.

### Expectations

**Community through family:**

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