

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?
WOMEN'S VOICES ON WORK, RETIRING, CARE AND WELL-BEING IN ENCORE
ADULTHOOD

Phyllis Moen,^a Erik Kojola^a and Erin L. Kelly^b

^aUniversity of Minnesota

^bMIT

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ABSTRACT

This chapter draws on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with women ages 50 through 75 as they consider their options, preferences, and plans. These are the years of what we call “encore adulthood,” a new life course stage emerging after prime childrearing and career building but prior to the infirmities associated with old age, made possible by medical advances and lifestyle changes improving population health and longevity. Women have always followed varied career and labor market pathways as they seek to manage career and care obligations. Their various routes have had tremendous long-term consequences, shaping resources and options in later adulthood. The encore adult years are shaping up to also be a time of varied paths, from conventional retirement exits to ongoing engagement in paid work and other meaningful activities. But this stage is also characterized by the unraveling of conventional career and retirement templates and protections, a competitive global economy, new digital technologies, and the large cohort of Boomers now moving through it. This is the first time in history in which many women and couples are confronting women’s as well as men’s retirement from career jobs, and they are doing so on a moving platform of these multilayered changes. Drawing on women’s own voices, the chapter identifies several pathways women follow, the logics and rationales for them, and their implications for women’s well-being. It then considers the implications for what is a transforming yet still gendered life course, for future research, and for public and organizational policy development.

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO? WOMEN'S VOICES ON WORK, RETIRING, CARE AND WELL-BEING IN ENCORE ADULTHOOD

Married women's movement into the workforce was the labor market 'story' of the last half of the 20th century. The increase in working wives, mothers and dual-earners transformed both the workforce and human experience, dominating social science research agendas by emphasizing work-family issues, dual-career difficulties, and gender discrimination and inequalities in hiring, promotions, occupations, family care, incomes and status. Studies of human capital, work, and career paths went from being almost exclusively about men to recognizing the distinctive patterns of and disparities in women's and men's occupational attachments, pathways and resources. But this agenda was primarily about working parents, typically mothers, or about workers – women only, or women and men – without regard to life stage, at most controlling for age and the presence or number of children.

As we move through the first decades of the 21st century, a key part of the contemporary labor market 'story' is the growing older workforce and retired force as the large cohort of Boomers (born 1946-64) move through their 50s, 60s, and 70s, in tandem with population aging, increasing longevity, and the unraveling of conventional retirement policies and protections. In Europe and North America, populations and workforces are aging, yet medical and technological advances are postponing the debilitating conditions associated with old age. This calls for a new research agenda on the gendered nature of later adult career paths, plans, and retirement exits.

Women have always followed varied career and labor market pathways as they seek to manage career and care obligations. These various routes have had tremendous long-term consequences, shaping resources and options in what I call encore adulthood, the years around 55 to 75, after intensive career and family building, but before the frailties associated with old

age (Moen Forthcoming; Moen and Sarah Flood 2013; Moen and Jack Lam 2015). The encore adult years are shaping up to be a time of varied paths, from conventional retirement exits to ongoing engagement in paid work and other meaningful activities. But this stage is also characterized by the unraveling of conventional career and retirement templates and protections, a competitive and volatile global economy, new digital technologies. All are undoing expected retirement norms and timetables for the large cohort of Boomers now moving through this new encore adult stage. What is clear is that traditional retirement is being deinstitutionalized, even as it was never an institutionalized status passage for married women (See Dora Costa 1998; William Graebner 1980).

Moreover, this is the first time in history that large numbers of professional women occupy career jobs from which they expect to retire (Wan He, Manisha Sengupta, Victoria Velkoff and Kimberly DeBarros 2005; Patrick Purcell 2005). This means many women and couples are now confronting women's as well as men's retirement from career jobs. They are doing so on a moving platform of these multilayered changes transforming vast numbers of workers' and retirees' decision-making as individuals and couples in their 50s, 60s, and early 70s seek or find themselves in alternative pathways around work and retirement. And yet most research on these transitions are out of date, describing the experiences of previous cohorts.

Women in the vast Boomer cohort are moving through this encore adult stage confronting uncertainty and ambiguity about -- as well as the dilemmas of shifting social costs, benefits, risks, logics, and even definitions of -- retirement. But there is little existing evidence as to the motivations and strategic selections of contemporary older women workers and retirees as they progress through encore adulthood, the bonus years of extended life expectancy. What are the options, risks, and constraints shaping women's choices in these uncharted times and this

unchartered life stage? How is this first large group of older women workers and dual-earner couples adapting to the shifting challenges around retirement timing and working longer?

Drawing on women's own voices, we identify several stay-and-go pathways women follow, the logics and rationales behind them, and their implications for women's well-being, focusing especially on professional women working in non-traditional IT occupations, gaining considerable tenure in the workforce and in this particular organization, and, as one said, "doing what it takes" to succeed in this environment. These Boomer women in traditional male jobs reflect the new ways contemporary cohorts of women are working, often prioritizing their jobs and remaining in the workforce even when raising children.

How does this play out as they move into the encore adult years? We find a general uncertainty and ambivalence about the future, which can precipitate what many of these women see as "too early" or else "delayed" exits from their career jobs. Sometimes exits are snap judgements made without full reflection; sometimes staying is simply postponing a decision. These professional women now in encore adulthood voice the constraints of chronic stress and overloads at work as well the risks of job insecurity and actual layoffs; care obligations to ailing parents, husbands, and grandchildren along with their own health difficulties and goals necessitating time spent in self-care; financial and health insurance concerns; and their husbands' own choices and preferences. But they also describe the resources, skills and networks permitting them to rewrite outdated exit scripts, defining this stage on their own terms.

Motivations and Decision-Making

One can think of the life course as a series of decisions and experiences related to role transitions and trajectories, as people move through their biographies, entering one role, exiting others (Glen Elder 1994; Elder and Janet Giele 2009; Linda George 1996; Jeylan Mortimer and Michael

Shanahan 2003, Shanahan, Mortimer and Monica Johnson Forthcoming). These transitions and trajectories are *socially patterned*, as Glen Elder (1998, p. 941) captures in his definition of the life course as a “sequence of socially defined, age-graded events and roles that the individual enacts over time.” This meshes well with a life-span approach to biological and biographical development and aging (e.g., Paul Baltes and Margret Baltes 1990). The words “socially defined” and “age-graded” also underscore the structural and cultural social environments in which biographies unfold. Another definition emphasizes the ecological embeddedness of the life course, defining it as “social processes extending over the individual life span or significant portions of it...shaped by, among other things, cultural beliefs about the individual biography, institutionalized sequences of roles and positions, legal age restrictions, and the decisions of individual actors” (Karl Mayer and Nancy Tuma 1990, p. 3). But these social environments and their constraints and options are different and disparate for women and men, resulting in a very gendered life course (Moen Forthcoming; Moen 2001; Moen and Donna Spencer 2006). It is through this gendered life course lens that this chapter considers professional women’s motivations for work and retirement in encore adulthood, even as the cultural scripts and institutions established around retirement are in flux.

We conceptualize women’s customization of working longer or retiring at particular ages as *strategic selections* in the form of decisions about role entrances, continuities, and exits taking place as they move through their 50s, 60s, and early 70s. These strategic selections increasingly involve more than decisions between the two standardized options of either full-time employment or the full-time non-employment of conventional retirement at a set age. Instead, we find professional women are seeking early or late retirement from their career jobs and/or some form of customized continued public engagement in the form of full-time, part-time or self-

employment and/or unpaid civic engagement. Plans and decision-making around paid work, retirement timing, and civic engagement often reflect choice under conditions of uncertainty (see Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky 1984, Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Tversky and Kahneman 1991). This is especially the case today, given a turbulent global economy, digital technologies, and unraveling retirement protections, along with population aging.

An Encore to Adulthood?

As early as 1980, Jacob Siegel, in his presidential address to the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, pointed to the social and cultural as well as demographic contingencies contributing to a “redefinition of old age,” noting that such definitions vary depending on “the longevity of a population, the proportion of persons in the older ages, and the degree to which persons at different ages are engaged in useful activities” (Jacob Siegel 1980, p. 345). Since all these factors are now in play, some scholars (c.f. Jacquelyn James and Paul Wink 2007; Peter Laslett 1989; Moen Forthcoming; Moen and Sarah Flood 2013; Moen and Jack Lam 2015) suggest a postponement of old age, with a new age period – roughly the 50s, 60s, and early 70s – preceding it.

Is there an emerging encore stage, beyond conventional adulthood but before “old age”? One possible hallmark of this new life stage is ongoing engagement in what Siegel terms “useful” activity: formal public activities (paid work, voluntary service to an organization) or more informal activities (such as caring for or helping out family members, neighbors or friends. This chapter moves beyond the conventional body of work examining retirement or labor force exits, drawing on a gendered life course conceptual framework to consider professional Boomer women’s decision-making around paid work, volunteer work, and family care work during the new encore adult years, from around 50 or 55 to around 75. Labeling this as a new life stage

reflects Siegel's argument of a "redefinition of old age"—what we see as a postponement of old age until the onset of the infirmities typically associated with it.

There is growing discourse by social observers as well as scholars of an emerging life stage in later adulthood – somewhere between the traditionally labeled “prime” years of career/family-building and the frailties of old age. This new stage is variously labeled the “third age” (Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs 2007; Jacquelyn James and Paul Wink 2007; Antti Karisto 2007; Peter Laslett 1989; Michael McCullough and Emily Polak 2007; Moen and Joyce Altbelli 2007; Moen and Donna Spencer 2006; William Sadler 2006; Luna Silva 2008; Robert Weiss and Scott Bass 2002), the “third chapter” (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot 2009), the “encore years” (Marc Freedman 2007; Judy Goggin 2009), and encore adulthood (Sarah Flood and Moen 2014; Moen Forthcoming; Moen and Sarah Flood 2013; Moen and Jack Lam 2015). It arguably represents both the bonus years of healthy aging (produced by medical advances and lifestyle changes) as well as the unraveling of conventional retirement (produced by a turbulent economy, digital technologies, public policies delaying Social Security eligibility, and the disappearing contract between employers and employees trading seniority for job security).

The 50 to 75 period is distinctive in that it involves the transition out of conventional full-time employment and into what are becoming unconventional retirements (Moen 2003). Marc Freedman (2007) sees this period of the life course as, for some, a time of encores of paid service, of remaining in or moving into jobs that contribute to the greater good. Others (Michael McCullough and Emily Polak 2007) depict the third age as a developmental event involving reduced or terminated paid work. Still others (Antti Karisto 2007; Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot 2009; William Sadler 2006) characterize it as a time of creativity, learning, and personal fulfillment. Even as “childhood” and “adolescence” were life stages constructed in prior times,

and an as-yet-unnamed “emergent adulthood” is claimed to be arising in the 20s between adolescence and adulthood (Jeffrey Arnett and Nancy Eisenberg 2007; Richard Settersten, Frank Furstenberg, and Rubén Rumbaut 2005), so too is encore adulthood being conceptualized as a time between traditional adult roles and old age, with being “old” now pushed back to the late 70s, early 80s.

There is considerable variation in the use of the term, but many imply that it is a time of greater choice. For example, Robert Weiss and Scott Bass (2002) describe reaching the third age as a time “in which they can, within fairly wide limits, live their lives as they please, before being overtaken by a fourth age of decline (p. 2). Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs (2005) argue that the third age is not a “product, category, or lifestyle...or a particular state of mind” but, rather, “...better likened to a ‘cultural field’ realized through the activities and discourse of particular social actors within whose lives it acquires concrete form” (pp. 2-3). There is overall consensus with Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs’ observation that the third age is “inevitably ambiguous.” Little is known about actual “concrete forms” of American women’s engagement at different age-points within this (arguably) emerging life stage, and in particular, the diversity of patterns and the timing of moving from full-time employment to full-time non-employment, with some adopting other forms of public engagement along the way. Simply modeling the timing of labor market exits of women and/or their reentries says little about how women in this age group articulate their expectations and rationales for remaining in or exiting from the workforce at certain time points.

What do we know about the motivations and decision-making around working longer or retiring during this evolving life phase? There is evidence of a lack of well-defined roles for older workers and those already exited from their “career” jobs (Jill Casner-Lotto 2007; Robert

Hutchens and Kerry Papps 2005), even though human resource executives anticipate an eventual labor shortage (Ernst & Young, 2006; Marius Leibold and Sven Voelpel 2007). There is evidence of greater family engagement and expectations in the form of caring for older parents, spouses, adult children, and grandchildren (Noelle Chesley and Moen 2006; Madonna Harrington Meyer 2014). Yet remarkably little attention has been paid to the reshaping of women's plans and experience in encore adulthood, the roughly twenty-five years between the life stages of building families/careers and the frailties of old age.

To best understand women's views about their options and constraints requires listening to their voices as they describe their plans and decision-making in these encore adult years. In doing so we consider three key life course processes – a sense of agency, linked lives and historical timing -- shaping women's motivations (see also Steven Hitlin and Glen Elder 2007a and b; Victor Marshall 2005; Markus Schafer, Kenneth Ferraro and Sarah. Mustillo 2011; Andrea Willson, Kim Shuey, and Glen Elder 2007). Evidence from this qualitative study of professional women Boomers can promote understanding of the contours of 21st century work and retirement that is literally transforming the contemporary later life course (Gary Adams and Terry Beehr 2006). As part of the broader body of work in the chapters of this book, capturing the social and temporal patterning of working for this age group is of pragmatic as well as scientific value, in terms of the costs of Social Security and pensions (John Bidewall, Barbara Griffin, and Beryl Hesketh 2006; Alicia Munnell and Steven Sass 2008), the health and well-being of current cohorts moving through their 50s, 60s, and early 70s (compared to prior cohorts, c.f. Mark Hayward, Melissa Hardy, and William Grady 1989; George Vaillant 2002), contributions to the public good (Erik Erikson, Joan Erikson, and Helen Kivnick 1986; Marc

Freedman 1999, 2007), and the larger debate around successful aging (John Rowe and Robert Kahn 1998; James Stowe and Teresa Cooney 2015).

Methods

The data for this study are drawn from in-depth interviews conducted by the Work, Family and Health Network (WFHN) as part of a larger quantitative investigation of how changing work conditions affect information technology employees in a large U.S. Fortune 500 firm company that we call TOMO (Jeremy Bray et al. 2013; Erin Kelly et al. 2014; Rosalind King et al. 2012; Ellen Kossek et al. 2014; Moen et al. forthcoming). TOMO was selected based on the ability to logistically support data collection and its openness to participating in different aspects of the larger investigation, including the testing a pilot intervention. Because of the centralized organizational structure of the firm, recruitment to the study involved agreements with top leadership over all work units in one division, but individuals chose whether to participate in the survey. These IT professionals represent relatively privileged workers who have high wages and benefits; the average annual income at baseline was \$93,454. Yet they are also facing the pressures of a global 21st century economy, including high psychosocial job demands and long work hours.

We draw on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with Boomer women employees and managers at various points in the five-year study. We also selected a theoretically-driven sample of Boomer participants from the final survey for follow-up interviews: those who had retired or switched jobs by Time 2 and those who reported plans to retire soon. In total, 78 Boomers were interviewed over the course of the study. We include insights as well from in-depth interviews with Boomers over age 65 and those who have already retired in order to understand factors that shaped their retirement motivations and decisions.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person or over the phone, lasting from one to two hours. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and Atlas.ti software was used to facilitate coding for emergent themes and categorizing data around key topics in an iterative process of applying concepts and theory, and developing themes from the data (Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss 2008; Robert Weiss 1994) transcribed, and coded in Atlas.ti. We use these interviews to illustrate the processes through which older women develop retirement plans and engage in strategic adaptations, including responses to an unexpected merger, identifying different pathways through the encore adult years.

This qualitative analysis is meant to provide a deeper context and highlight some of the relationships described in the quantitative analysis in other chapters in this volume, as well as quantitative evidence of this sample of Boomer women and men described in Moen et al. 2016. All participants are given pseudonyms and identifying details have been removed.

Findings

We draw on a typology of encore adult pathways developed from a larger qualitative study (Moen forthcoming) to locate the voices of professional IT Boomer women within different personal motivations and institutional logics. Note that these women follow particular paths, they also switch pathways in light of various personal goals, needs, and resources.

Four Pathways

1. Neo-Traditional Time Shifting

Despite efforts to encourage delayed retirement, most older women (and men) workers are still exiting the workforce “early,” in their 50s or early 60s (Moen forthcoming). Many of these are voluntary time-shifters, less interested in pursuing more income or climbing occupational ladders than a less stressful lifestyle, more time with their families, and greater life quality. Boomers following this “neo-traditional” path take a “normal” retirement exit in that they leave both their

careers jobs and the labor market simultaneously, but often earlier than the conventional age of Social Security eligibility in order to spend more time with their husbands, provide care to grandchildren or ailing relatives, travel, or simply enjoy a less stressful lifestyle. These are “neo-traditional” pathways in that they retain the conventional one-way exit from the career job and into leisure, but time-shift exactly when this departure occurs.

Consider Frannie, one such neotraditional time shifter, who worked steadily at TOMO for fully 43 years, starting in her early 20s. She is an example of a woman following a long hour, continuous career path in the way men have traditionally done, but scaled back to “only” 45-50 hours a week over the last years:

for many years,... I was working 60 hour weeks and that went on for several years and that was stressful, especially when my family was young....For many years I worked 60 and 70 hours, but the last years not so. 45-50 hours at the max. So, you know, it was fine.

She has a strong work ethic:

Well, of course, you know, earning the paycheck was always a good thing [laughs] but I always felt devoted. I always wanted to get my work done, I was never late, I didn't want to be in trouble from that... um... viewpoint.

She describes how she had to travel a lot when her children were small, saying it was “back in the [laughs] 80's, so you know you just had to do it. You knew you had to do it to keep your job.

Frannie retired a year ago:

I've just been taking it easy. [laughs] Too easy! So it's been a year. How time flies... I just thought I'd take some time off.

She left TOMO at least in part because of caregiving responsibilities for members of two different generations:

I do have a 12-year-old at home that we're raising – my husband and I – our granddaughter. We have custody of her so she keeps us quite busy. And then I've been working with my parents. I have an estate to handle and take care of and so um I've been trying to work through all those issues.

In addition to raising her own children, Frannie has had responsibility for her granddaughter since she was born. She also spent a lot of time with her ailing parents:

I was with them every day – almost every day – and I had a caregiver in their final two years live with them 24-7 but I still did all of their chores, you know, tasks, like grocery shopping and those types of things for them.

Her husband has been retired for about fifteen years, permitting her to devote long hours and energy to her job. For example, he took their granddaughter to school and picked her up, so they never needed child care.

She had many different jobs at TOMO but describes the last one as “basically creative-type work. She liked working: “it was my best job ever with the company.” She didn't exit because of the work or the people around her:

I worked with our advanced technology team and we were able to develop a computer system and I was the rules writer for that and it was just a creative job, we had successes, you could feel successful and I was very satisfied with that job. And I just worked with a wonderful team of people and learned so much from them.

Periodic layoffs became less stressful the longer her tenure:

...once I hit 30 years in my anniversary, it was no longer a stressful thing for me because I knew I had vested retirement and all that. It didn't impact me like my peers.

Still, the merger, which was really a takeover by another company, announced unexpectedly in the middle of our data collection, brought new uncertainties:

We had a director that was let go, managers were being switched around, and so there was going to be a whole new uncertainty of how your management style would now be in play with the changes that were going to occur within a couple of weeks prior to my leaving or after my leaving, I should say.

Asked about plans for the future, Frannie laughs, saying,

Well, I just plan on getting busy and getting the things that I always said I was going to do when I retire, done. And I don't think I'm going to go out and get any jobs. Maybe do some volunteer work and then just continue to enjoy my granddaughter. I was looking at some community services like the food bank and those types of volunteer activities within the city that I live in.

In the U.S. a surprising number of Boomers are following the neotraditional time-shifting strategy, with women especially apt to leave the workforce all at once, often because it feels like time to do so, and to focus on care, like Frannie says, to "enjoy my granddaughter." They may continue to do some work, but it is unpaid volunteer work for the community.

2. Time-Shifting for the Long Game

Despite all the discussion about the need for working longer and incentives designed for encouraging Boomers to do so, this remains a road less traveled, especially for women. Still for an important subset of professional Boomer women, working past traditional retirement ages in

one's current job or occupation represents business as usual. Doing so can both postpone resetting identities and improve finances.

By contrast, an important segment of Boomers – often in professional jobs -- loves their jobs and would like to continue working as long as possible.ⁱ Some in this “long game” path might hope to scale back a bit on their workload and to have more flexibility, but do not see retirement on their horizons for many years, if ever. These voluntary postponers are truly in it for the long game. Many feel they *are* what they *do*, and can't imagine life without work.

Even though their same-age friends and co-workers may be scaling back or leaving, some Boomers following the long game strategy are putting in even more hours and doubling down on their work effort. For some, this is because of the nature of their jobs. For others, working more intensively is a strategy to increase their value, thereby reducing the risks of being laid off, being seen as less productive, or becoming marginal to their teams, divisions, or organizations.

Betty is a case in point. She left TOMO for another job at age 52, in part because she felt overworked, but does not feel anywhere near a final exit from the workforce. She found a job before she resigned from TOMO (which had already been taken over by the time she left). She had been looking for a new position over the last 6 to 9 months at TOMO. She wanted a job “where I could have more of a normal workday” and was attracted to the new organization because it's a non-profit, faith based organization in health care”

I really wanted to get into healthcare, I wanted to switch industries. It just so happened that they had an opening that matched my skill set.

She sees this move as part of her overall career strategy, part of her long game:

It's the same career because I'm doing basically the same thing. But, it's just a different industry.

Betty works as a testing supervisor, both now and in her previous job at TOMO, supervising a group of software testers. But in the new job she is tasked with actually building a testing team, involving "a lot of coaching and training and working with the people at the hospital how to do testing." And here she is able to hold her hours down to 40, which is what she was looking for. This is vastly different from TOMO, saying "I was working 55-60 hours. I was working 12 hour days and sometimes on the weekend."

As with many professional men, Betty was expecting to switch jobs after a dozen years at TOMO as part of her career plan:

I gave it a good almost 12 years. It's about expected, I like to change industries every 10 to 15 years.

Still, working conditions at TOMO helped to push her out. She observes:

It was just, you know, the getting up early because TOMO was going more and more toward that offshoring model even though they went over there and opened up TOMO in India. So, we were having to deal with a lot of offshore people and with that being an 11 and a half hour time difference, we were getting up at 6 in the morning or 6:30 and having conference calls because they refused to change their schedule. We couldn't get them to come in early. They liked to stay late, but that was part of their normal day because they came in later. Like, we would work from 6:30AM to 6PM or longer. They were really a 9 to 6 type of job. Every now and then, we could get them to modify their schedule. But, most times it was, "Nope this is what we work." So, we were putting in all of the overtime.

This way of working became institutionalized. As Betty recounts “It got that way to where it was expected and that was the norm that you had to suck it up and be flexible.

But even though Betty saw switching industries as part of her career plan, she took this job even though it meant a “substantial” decrease in earnings, something men who change jobs rarely do. As Betty says: “I sacrificed that so I could get back to some sort of normal life.”

She has no plans for retirement, noting,

I was thinking about retiring at 65, but honestly, I like working, and the people interactions, so I don't think I will ever retire. I do want to stay here for at least 5 years and then after that 5 year period, what I'm going to do is look for just a basic job where I have no supervisory responsibilities, a real, true come in at 8 and leave at 5 type, like working at a bank. Something where I still can work and interact with people but I don't have the stress of the software testing aspect.

When asked with such future work would be full time or part time, Betty is somewhat ambivalent:

Oh probably fulltime, yeah. You know, depending on finances. If I could go part time and work 20 hours a week that would be good too.

She explains some of her rationale for the long game:

Well, you know, now you can't really get Social Security. I mean, it doesn't pay until, like 67. I've heard they are thinking about raising that to 70. I would say, as long as my health holds out. I just don't want to be doing this hard of a job at 60 and 65.

Betty is similar to many men in that she has worked continuously, but shifts employers from time to time. But she is following a more gendered career path in that she looks for jobs that

permit her to have “a life” as well as to do challenging work. In her long game plan, she wants a job with fewer responsibilities, a true 9 to 5, even if it means no longer using her considerable skills. She is an example of someone who likes to work, enjoying this new job “learning a new industry really is quite fun and challenging as the days go by where I learn something new about the healthcare industry.” But nevertheless, she does not want to continue doing “this hard of a job” for the long term.

3. Portfolio Time Shifting

Social entrepreneur and visionary Marc Freedmanⁱⁱ (2007, 2011) suggests that growing numbers of older workers want jobs that provide meaning and promote the public good, his idea of “encore” careers. For those who can afford choosing riskier or possibly lower-paying positions, encore adulthood can offer the chance to time shift away from their career jobs to follow a dream or make a drastic change from working for the money or the benefits to working to make the world better. Others manage to do both – seeking money and meaning. Still others are seeking greater control and flexibility, or jobs that can provide a rhythm and routine to their lives. What characterizes portfolio time shifting is the wide assortment of pathways these Boomers are following in improvising this next stage of their lives.

Some Boomers are becoming self-employed entrepreneurs, freelancers, and consultants, generating their own “start-ups” and clienteles while also setting the parameters of their own careers. If their years in career jobs have afforded them the chance to save money and create strong networks, it may even be a time of unprecedented success and excitement.

Other Boomers turn to a portfolio of volunteer work. The notion of service—giving back to community, helping those less fortunate, and working toward a greater good—by volunteering for local or national organizations runs deep in American culture. It provides the glue connecting citizens to their communities.

Given that all the Boomer women interviewed had worked at TOMO, none of them have strictly followed portfolio careers throughout their life courses. However, Salena, now 59, is an example of someone following a portfolio pathway after the merger. Married to the same man for almost 38 years, they have three children as well as grandchildren, mostly out of state. Her husband is 6 months younger than she is, and works in construction. Asked about caring for a grandchild, she says, “No, they live out west. They come out sometimes for the summer. But, I don’t look at that as caring, I look at that as pleasure.”

Salena retired from TOMO in her mid 50s, worried about the stability of her retirement savings and pension in light of the impending takeover. She didn’t leave angry or necessarily willingly: “I loved TOMO. I thought the leadership was open to suggestions. I had no problem talking to my CEO or VPs, directors,” But she felt she would lose out with the merger:

It was all about money. Didn’t want to lose any more money with the merger and um, you know, it was a good time for me to... my husband worked and I didn’t really need to work and I wanted to make sure that my retirement was safe and so I retired and took my pension out and reinvested it.

She quickly took up portfolio work, contracting out as a project manager, the same kind of work she did in her career job. She is an example of someone who came to TOMO without a BA but learned IT on the job, working her way up. When asked at the beginning of the interview whether she was currently employed, looking for work, retired, semi-retired, or something else, Salena replied “Something else.”

I was doing contract labor. I retired from TOMO three years ago. I went back contracting and my husband became extremely ill in April and I ended my contract and I am taking care of him.

For the past two months, she has not worked in order to care for her sick husband, something a portfolio of contract jobs permit her to do. But she will be back as a contractor at the end of summer.

Salena is apparently very good at what she does. After retiring from TOMO much earlier than she had expected (hoping to retire in her mid 60s), several contracting companies recruited her and she has several potential options lined up for starting back to work in the fall. When asked in the interview how long she was looking for work after retiring, she responds: “I didn’t look for work. People called me.” About working this fall she points out “I’ve had a couple contract companies reach out to me and ask me to let them know when I will be ready. I could have work next week if I wanted to.”

Asked about her motivations for pursuing a portfolio path, Selena first responds like many workers do: “money.” But she goes on to say: “I don’t need to work, I just got bored at home being retired.” Note that she was “retired” all of two months before first taking her contract job. Benefits were not the issue, which is good because contract work rarely provides them. She observes,

Um, you know benefits and health care... I had to pay for that -- a portion for my retirement...It wasn’t a very good deal so I’m paying for it on my own. So, no. It wasn’t a deciding factor.

She worked for one company for 6 months after retiring, but quit because it was a horrible and stressful place to work, partially because of the executive leadership.

The VP or the executive leader of everyone was... he was a mean person. He's left there, they've since fired him, and he's gone on. But he was a mean, vicious person. Never to me but to other people. But when you start feeling stress like that you leave.

This is another "perk" of portfolio work when you have sought after skills – no need to tolerate bad bosses. She reiterates: "That was a terrible, terrible place to be and not because of the work but because of the leadership and I left."

She enjoys contract work because she does not have to deal with all the human relations and bureaucratic issues.

I enjoyed the contract work because I didn't need to... I didn't have all the HR stuff. I didn't have to worry about... you know, I started the same time as another girl and she was so stressed because the manager didn't communicate and she didn't get a lot of the information that she thought she should have... there wasn't a lot of team interaction. As a contractor you don't worry about that. I didn't.

Also as a contractor she was not permitted to put in more than 50 hours a week. Contrast this with TOMO where "probably a couple days a month we'd work, I bet we would 15-16 hours a day." As well as working on weekends: "our releases were on weekends, so probably a couple weekends a month. "

Salena is now exploring different options for her future of portfolio careers:

At another place I worked for, I talked to the manager and they have a contract company that you go through. The contract company I went through, I had no interaction with them whatsoever. I mean they had a 401k and they had that kind of stuff they offered, I definitely took them up on that. But as far as managing my

time or being involved with them, there was nothing. So it felt like I was alone. I have another contract company that's after me to come back and so I could do it independent or I could go through a company. I don't care. It's all about the money I make.

She now expects to stay in the workforce until her 70s. She describes herself as devoted to her work, but also for the money: "I work because I like it, so I guess I'm devoted to work but I also work because I like the benefits of the paycheck."

Salena is a great example of time shifting on her own timetable: both retiring early *and* following the long game through a series of jobs. Contract work also provides her time off the job clock which she spends "vacationing, visiting my grandchildren, I garden... I keep pretty busy. Work with my husband sometimes." She is pleased to have "very flexible schedules" of contract work and to have left the stress of "unrealistic software release dates" that characterized TOMO's work process. However, she is experiencing a degree of "levelism" in the contract world, something she had not found at TOMO:

TOMO had cut a lot of the levels out. At other locations I've been at, there's so many levels. And yeah, there's just no... there's... TOMO was very fortunate because they focused on process. Other companies I've been at... they are... they have no process and they flounder. And it's interesting to be process... I'm very process-bound and so to sit back and watch that... It can be painful, but it's also good because you can provide a lot of input.

Asked about retirement planning, the answer is somewhat vague, possibly because neither her husband nor herself sees total retirement from the workforce on the horizon. About planning she says: ...

I guess we do it all the time. I mean, we bought a boat, we go out in the boat... like I said, we get our grandkids, we take trips. We plan quite a bit... The plan for the future is to take off the summer and enjoy it, work for a job in the fall, and in the future I hope my husband and I can travel more and be happy like we are today. [laughs] Hopefully we have health.

4. Unanticipated Time-Shifting

Labor markets governed by frequent restructuring, a turbulent economy, and an aging workforce mean that significant numbers of Boomers (in the U.S., at least) are delaying a total exit from the workforce because of financial concerns. Even though they may wish to retire or be less able to do their physically demanding jobs, many Boomer families are squeezed financially with increased debt, needing to prolong their working lives to make ends meet as publicly-provided safety nets shrink.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other Boomer women find themselves “retired” unexpectedly, unwillingly time shifting exits through buy-outs and layoffs from a competitive global workforce.^{iv} These labor market risks, together with age discrimination, age-based stereotypes, and an age-stratified labor market (presuming “entry” level jobs go to young people, for example) make it difficult for laid-off older women to become reemployed or for retirees to find post-retirement employment. As repeated, unsuccessful job searches turn them into “discouraged workers,” many become unwilling retirees, dropping out of the labor force altogether.

Whereas unemployed or discouraged workers in the second half of their 60s may qualify for Medicare and Social Security benefits, laid off women in their 50s have wholly inadequate safety nets. Tight limits on welfare income and short-term unemployment benefits will not help them sufficiently or for long enough so that they might reach an age to receive federal benefits,

and they're often still too far from an anticipated retirement to have planned or saved much in advance. Their children, if they have them, are likely to be in college or looking to establish secure jobs of their own, making Boomers' economic difficulties especially problematic for both generations.

Most people in the leading edge and the trailing edge of the Boomer cohort are in considerable flux; most expect to engage in some form of work during what have been defined as the traditional retirement years. Some know if they lose or leave their career job, they must get over the hurdles of potential unemployability, and seniority that may still be useful in leveraging less physically demanding duties at a long-held position.^v Concerns over the loss of affordable healthcare benefits in the U.S. is now less of a problem given the Affordable Care Act implemented in 2014, but the costs of such insurance may still be prohibitive for those with a sudden drop in income. Other Boomers are taking the early retirement provision of Social Security at age 62, accepting the penalty of a lower payout because they have been laid off (or are fairly certain they will be), can't find employment, have health problems, and/or need the money. Continuing occupational changes, rapid technological shifts (particularly related to information and communications technologies), and a multitude of trends associated with globalization (for example, increasing competition, cost-cutting, out-sourcing, and mergers) have diminished job opportunities and employer commitment to all employees. Even for those in emerging adulthood, career-like, full-time jobs and standard employment contracts are being replaced by non-standard, short-term arrangements.

search,^{vi} but

Margery is an example of an involuntary exit. A college graduate married to a retired husband and the mother of four children as well as grandchildren, she was unexpectedly laid-off

from TOMO in her 50s as part of the merger, when her team was consolidated with another. She was given only two weeks notice, and feels her new manager (from the company taking over TOMO) wanted to get rid of her, in that she was given no options as to relocating or working elsewhere. Margery was shocked by the announcement. She had been planning to stay with the company:

I was hoping to stay there for another 5-6 years. My... I am 58, so I was hoping to get to retirement, but... true retirement. I was there 27 years, so I was retirement-eligible by the letter of the rules but not financially and age wise. I was hoping to stay for another 5-6 years.

This lay off came as she says, “out of the blue””

It was a total shock, because like I said, I had the management team and we were right in the middle of... I had just finished a 7 million dollar purchase of PCs and we were in the middle of a huge project. It was the farthest thing from my mind. And I had just returned from performing as the director’s representative at somebody else’s retirement party who is laid off and who was a peer of mine because she didn’t want her director to come do it and... did all of that, came back from the trip, and the next morning is when he told me I was getting my two weeks notice. So it was totally out of the blue.

As it turns out, she continued working several months past her 2 weeks because she was working on a project and that team found the money to keep her on until it was completed. This additional time helped her plan her transition while simultaneously providing a needed financial cushion.

Margery was actively job searching for almost a year. She finally found something in insurance:

I took a position at the end of February in a new career path in the insurance industry because I was told about an opening there and decided, “Well, maybe it’s time to do something different.” And I did the training and worked with the lady that has the agency and does the training beforehand, then took and passed the test and got licensed.

But then she found a different job using her IT skills in a hospital, supposedly part time and temporary. She signed up for that one as well.

So, started with the insurance company toward the end of February and then was doing part-time temporary work at the hospital doing IT support, which is my long-time career background. After hours, 3 days a week and then some on weekends. And then as time went by, the CEO at the hospital said, “Well this might turn out to be more than a temporary job, so if the insurance doesn’t work out, let me know and we’ll see what I can do.” And then as time went by she said, “We actually could offer you an almost full time, 32-hours where you could get benefits and it would be a permanent position.” So I had to make a big decision to go back and talk to the insurance person and it was really field of expertise and it was half the distance from home and had benefits, which the other position did not. So I gave her a month’s notice and then took the job at the hospital. So that’s what I’m doing now.

She is now at the hospital full time (32 hours), using a fraction of her skills, doing the work previously outsourced to an out-of-state company providing IT support.

I do IT support, so it's kind of help desk functions for all the hospital employees. We have the hospital – it's a small rural hospital – it's also a trauma/ER and we also have clinics in surrounding communities and the community where the hospital is. I do the IT support to be the first-hand kind of hands and feet. And the reason they thought it was going to be temporary is that they had.

Still, it is related to what she used to do at TOMO a while back, noting:

It's, you know, along the lines of things I've done in the past because I worked in desktop support, I worked at the help desk. I've done a lot of those things both as a technician and as a supervising manager. So I'm now back to kind of doing the hands-on, so it was a little bit refreshing because for the last couple years I've done supervising of it and not actually doing it myself. So I had to kind of refresh some of those skills, but I'm enjoying it. It's really a good job. The people are very welcoming and it's a little chaotic some days when you can't even get through the time crunch and they're asking you for help [laughs] but it's very rewarding and like I said, the people are very nice and I'm enjoying it so far! I'll be there 3 months here in the next week.

Margery called herself “semi-retired” during the 11 months she was looking for a job. She needs to work because of the health insurance.

One of the biggest reasons I wanted to go back to work, you know, ... was the benefits... because we saved a little bit of money and we were doing okay financially but because I'm not old enough to collect Medicare or anything like that, you know, I really needed to get back to work at least for a few years and mostly because of medical-type coverage. Medical treatment is very expensive

and both my husband and I both take prescriptions that are expensive so that was the key to doing that... um... either get a job that I could make enough money to pay for my own healthcare or get one that has those kind of benefits.

She plans on keeping working into her 60s, staying at her current job at the hospital until she retires, by which she means collecting at least minimal Social Security, though she would like to keep working longer, scaling back even more than the current job.

I wouldn't mind having a part time job or something you know... once and a while. I would like to have some time to do things with my husband... play some golf and do that. But I wouldn't mind working part time if something presented itself.

Margery is an example of how these pathways morph into one another. She was laid off to be sure, but then found an “encore” job – two of them actually—and is working less, at a less stressful job, but happy to be helping other people. The answer to should I stay or should I go for her was she had to go from TOMO whether she wanted to or not. But she needed to stay in the workforce, for the health insurance. And she likes to work, and would like to continue to do so well past her formal retirement (receiving Social Security at age 62), but even less, and may end up following a portfolio path in a series of encore jobs.

[Implications for Well-Being](#)

Discussion

[Increasing Diversity in Women's Encore Adult Experience](#)

Professional Boomer women – even those in the same types of occupations working for the same organization (TOMO), come to the encore adult years with unique biographies, which in turn shape their risks, options and resilience at this life stage. For example, prior decisions about

marital and parental timing earlier in adulthood along with (sometime unexpected) divorce or, as in the case of Frannie, custody of her granddaughter, shape motivations and expectations.

Boomer women who delayed child-bearing until 39 or 40 and men who started second families with younger second wives are a long ways from an empty nest, especially given the lengthening transition to adulthood among 20-something children. Boomer parents still caught up in childrearing may have to delay any plans to reinvent themselves in encore adulthood or else, for women who can afford it, decide to leave the workforce entirely in order to enjoy time with their children or grandchildren.

The old adage about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer seems to apply in the encore adult years as well, since successes and adversities tend to accumulate^{vii} over time. The large inequalities in income, health and other resources especially apparent in American society become magnified in encore adulthood, as do gender inequalities. Boomer women's families, health, economic circumstances, and goals and expectations tend to diversify as they move into encore adulthood. They also vary in their degree of uncertainty and ambivalence about what comes next and in their sense of control over this next phase of their lives. Despite considerable diversity across these women Boomers sharing the experience of working at TOMO, most experience a sense of continuity in their sense of self, attitudes, and behaviors, even as they may be moving into new situations.

[Implications for Research](#)

A gendered life course theoretical approach points to the ways the social, economic, organizational, and political institutions of particular societies – embedded in work, career paths, family, unemployment, pensions, retirement norms, disability regimes, and other public and business policies and practices – are socially organized based on the everyday experiences of white-collar men and homemaking women, but organize the lives of everyone, including older

women who have followed professional career paths in traditionally male occupations like IT. The range of institutionalized adaptive strategies in the encore adult years in the wake of certain events (such as ratcheting work demands, layoffs, care responsibilities, one's own health concerns) depends on a person's age, gender, and education (see also Dale Dannefer 2011). As seen in the qualitative examples in this chapter, there are both *pull* factors (such as pensions and Social Security, and *push* factors (long hours, stressful work, corporate mergers, buyouts, and organizational retirement logics) that shape the pathways through and the timing of older women's retirement from their career jobs and from the workforce altogether (see also Bernhard Ebbinghaus 2006; Anne Marie Guillemard and Martin Rein 1993; Martin Kohli et al. 1991).

A prominent and gendered life-course related theoretical approach, *cumulative advantage/disadvantage*, proposes that the amplifying process is indeed the case (Dale Dannefer 2011; Angela O'Rand 1996; Andrea Willson, Kim Shuey and Glen Elder 2007). A variant of cumulative advantage/disadvantage proposes heightened disadvantage as a result of a cumulation of adverse risk factors (Kenneth Ferraro, Tetyana Shippee, and Markus Schafer 2009) and yet another, fundamental cause approach holds that existing social-locational inequalities persist throughout adulthood despite medical advances, which are disproportionately allocated to or adopted by those with higher levels of education (Bruce Link and Jo Phalen 1995). An alternative, *age as leveler* hypothesis suggests health disparities (and we suggest retirement path and timing differences by gender) may attenuate with age (see Pamela Herd, Stephanie Robert and James House 2011). Future research needs to examine the distinctive pathways different subgroups of women and men follow as they move toward and through the encore adult years, and whether this life stage reflects cumulative advantages and disadvantages by gender or whether indeed, age operates as a leveler. But we have shown that even women in the same

organization and occupation follow a variety of paths, pointing to the need for studies of women in different organizations, different family situations, and with different sets of constraints and resources.

Implications for Public and Organizational Policy and Practice

The processes by which the allocation of women (and men) to different roles and relationships based on their age and gender (as well as race and class) and by which women are socialized to expect and choose different paths depending on their age and gender (as well as race and class) are the direct result of social policies as well as the cultural norms and practices related to them. European scholars have pointed to the ways social welfare policies have constructed and institutionalized the life course as a series of patterned role entries, trajectories, and exits (Martin Kohli 1986; Martin Kohli et al. 1991; Georg Krücken and Gili Drori 2009; John Meyer 1986; 2008; John Meyer and Ronald Jepperson 2000). As Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs point out (2005; p. 32-33), “The institutionalization of the life course within modernity was achieved by the progressive involvement of the state in the redistribution of resources across the lifespan as much as across social classes.” The result in the middle of the last century was greater predictability and consistency, “a narrowing of the child-bearing years and a clearer common demarcation between when working life begins and when it ends.”

To this feminist scholars would add that the institutionalized life course is also *gendered* (Sara Arber and Jay Ginn 1995; Madonna Harrington Meyer and Pamela Herd 2007; Moen 2001; Moen and Donna Spencer 2006), grounded in gendered norms about work, family and social relations that intersect with age. The distinctive life courses of women and men tend to disadvantage older women because of their care obligations and discriminatory practices in the labor market and welfare distributions throughout the life course. These factors make it unlikely that women follow the conventional career mystique characterizing the life course of white

middle-class men in the middle of the last century, a lock-step of continuous full-time work, often for the same organization, that became a “hook” for the development labor market and social welfare policies (Stephen Barley 1989; Moen and Patricia Roehling 2005). And yet the women at TOMO did just that. Nevertheless, the professional Boomer women in the IT organization we study are putting in long hours, and have worked continuously, possible precursors of the way younger cohorts of women are working.

In the face of an aging population, current public policy goals in the U.S. and in Europe seek to retain this standard lock-step, only delay the transition from full-time work to full-time leisure by several years (in the U.S. optimally up until age 70), or else to encourage phased retirement with work-hour reductions, often on the career job (Lei Delsen and Genevieve Reday-Mulvey 1996; Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemerijck, and John Myles 2002; Alicia Munnell and Steve Sass 2008; Joseph Quinn 1999; Chris Ruhm, 1996; Paul Taylor 2002). But policy makers consider few mechanisms for making ongoing or post-retirement employment more meaningful and attractive, or for facilitating unpaid civic engagement. (Marc Freedman, 1999, 2007; Marc Freedman and Moen 2005; Brian Kaskie et al. 2008).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of the women’s movement promoted equal rights for women, focusing on parity in education, salaries, and career advancement. In other words, the “problem” was defined as the right of women to have access to, and reap equal rewards from, jobs in the primary sector, that is, “men’s” jobs (Moen and Patricia Roehling 2005). Although most families now live on two incomes and workplaces are populated by women workers as well as men and women from dual-earner couples, employers and governments have been reluctant to embrace this new workforce as the way things are. Work-family issues have garnered public attention, but policy initiatives have achieved only limited

success, in part because of the implicit assumptions remaining about breadwinning, homemaking, and gender.

We are in another transformational historical period, as demographic changes (in the form of population aging, extended life expectancy, and the aging of the large boomer cohort born 1946-64), economic and technological changes (in the form of global economic turbulence, rapidly changing digital technologies, and a global labor force), and institutional changes (dismantling the social contracts equating seniority with job security, pensions, and health care) converge to challenge conventional, widely-accepted norms and expectations around work, retirement, age, gender, and the life course.

Diana Kuh and Ben-Shlomo (2004: 458) argue for the need for life course epidemiologists and policy makers to move beyond childhood interventions to “identify opportunities to break adverse chains of risk at other life stages.” Their emphasis on the need for policies around adolescent and early adulthood transitions “to provide not just safety nets but springboards to alter life course trajectories with benefits for subsequent health” is also true for women’s – and mens -- transitions throughout encore adulthood.

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ⁱ Hedge et al. 2006; Mermin et al. 2007

ⁱⁱ Marc Freedman (2007; 2011) coined the term "encore" to capture second careers in the social sector to advance the public good.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edsall 2012; Grusky, Western, and Wimer 2011; Reich, 2011.

^{iv iv} Appold 2004; Bidewall et al. 2006; Gendell 2008; Hardy 2011; Hardy et al. 1996

^v NEED CITE ON UNEMPLOYABILITY, [i] early social security cite

^{vii} Scholars like Dannefer (1987) and Schafer, et al. (2011) call this the "cummulation of advantage and disadvantation" or the cumulation of inequality