



Life, Death, Hope & Boomers by Reginald W. Bibby

Boomers' Achievements Falling Short of Their Dreams *Aging, Health, Mortality Bringing Perspective*

Easter is a time when many Canadians find themselves reflecting on some of life's "bigger questions" about what they have accomplished, their mortality, and the possibility of life after death. Baby Boomers – those adults born between approximately 1946 and 1965 are among them.

Now beginning to enter their 60s, Boomers have often been portrayed as a generation that has had it all – money, careers, health, sex, relationships, and happy family lives.

But a new examination of Boomers that charts their experiences dating back to when they started to hit the adult scene in the mid-1970s paints a somewhat less flattering picture. The study reveals that, to date, Boomers are actually feeling less fulfilled than their parents and grandparents. What's more, perhaps because large numbers have seen themselves as invincible, many older Boomers are struggling with the reality of declining health. Significant numbers are feeling apprehensive about dying. And many are not at all sure that there is life after death.

This large-scale examination of Canada's Boomers spanning 1975 through 2005 has been carried out by well-known sociologist and trend tracker, Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. His findings appear in his latest book, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*.

- Bibby has found that Boomers as a whole are **not feeling as fulfilled** as Pre-Boomers when it comes to such areas as family life, marriage, careers, and even finances.
 - ✓ Divorce has been more common among Boomers than any cohort in Canadian history – experienced by 25% of them to date versus 17% of people over 65 and 12% over 75.
 - ✓ The Boomer generation attempted to have it all in combining family and career; sometimes the balancing act did not work out as well as planned for the partners and children involved.
 - ✓ Despite their relative affluence, only about 65% are satisfied with their financial situations, versus 77% of Pre-Boomers.

Looking at where they are versus their aspirations, some 32% of Boomers say that they are feeling "very fulfilled" with life as a whole, compared to 43% of older Canadians.

- As would be expected, aging has resulted in some 40% of Boomers reporting that their **health is now a concern** for them – up from about 30% twenty years ago.
 - ✓ Among those over 50, almost 1 in 4 males and 1 in 6 females say they have spent time in hospital in the last year or so.
 - ✓ In 1975, 92% of Boomer men and 85% of Boomer women reported they were in "excellent" or "good" health. Today those figures have fallen to 79% for men and 74% for women.

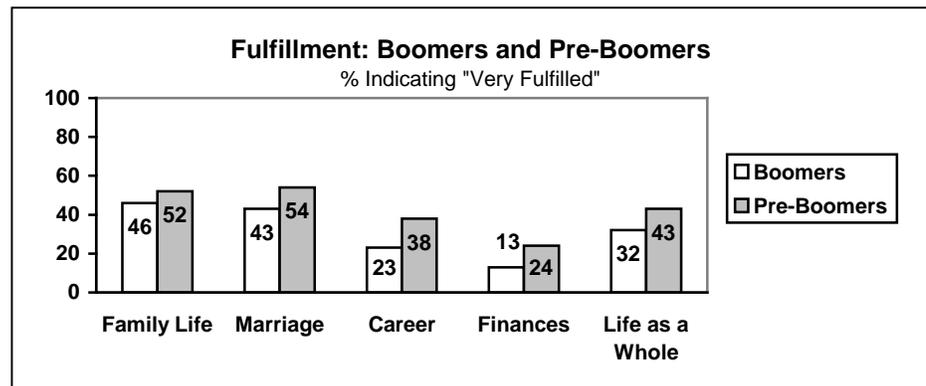
- And the reality of their mortality is beginning to set in. Some 1 in 2 Boomers say that **dying** is a concern for them, virtually the same proportion as older Canadians.
- Baby Boomers have not been a particularly religious cohort, typically valuing **spirituality** but frequently having limited ties with **organized religion**.
 - ✓ 26% attend services monthly or more, compared to 46% of older Canadians...and 34% of younger Canadians
 - ✓ 71% acknowledge they have spiritual needs – similar to people who are older (71%) and younger (74%)
- Some 65% say they believe in **life after death** – a figure that is almost the same as that of their parents and grandparents (62%), but below that of younger Canadians (73%).
 - ✓ But Boomers are slightly less likely than older, Pre-Boomers to say that their primary response to death is one of hope, and somewhat more likely to admit that their primary responses include sorrow and fear.
 - ✓ 58% of Boomers indicate they believe in heaven – slightly below the level of about 65% for both older and younger adults

Bibby emphasizes that the majority of Canada’s Baby Boomers express high levels of happiness and satisfaction with life. But on balance, their feelings of fulfillment in this life and hope beyond this life have not matched the levels of their parents and grandparents.

He also emphasizes that the emerging generation of adults – the Post-Boomers – are showing signs of finding a better balance between work and play than Boomers. They also are exhibiting a fresh openness to spirituality. As such, he says, they have the potential to experience an upgrade in life to that experienced by the Boomers...living out what their parents are still learning.

Illustrative graphic

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Reginald Bibby holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. He has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through a large number of media and personal appearances and ten best-selling books. His most recent book, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada’s Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, was released in October of 2006.