

# ‘Talkin’ ‘Bout My Generation’

Older, Unemployed Workers Critique the Workplace Orientations of  
Millennials, Boomers, and the Silent Generation

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# Helen

I lost everything during that ... two and a half years of unemployment. Everything! ... My townhome was foreclosed on. My credit was destroyed... I had nothing. I was living on money from friends and a little bit of money my mother would give me; she was making my car payments. I had nothing. I was getting food stamps ... [and] I was getting welfare.

# American Idle:

## Job Loss Among Aging Americans

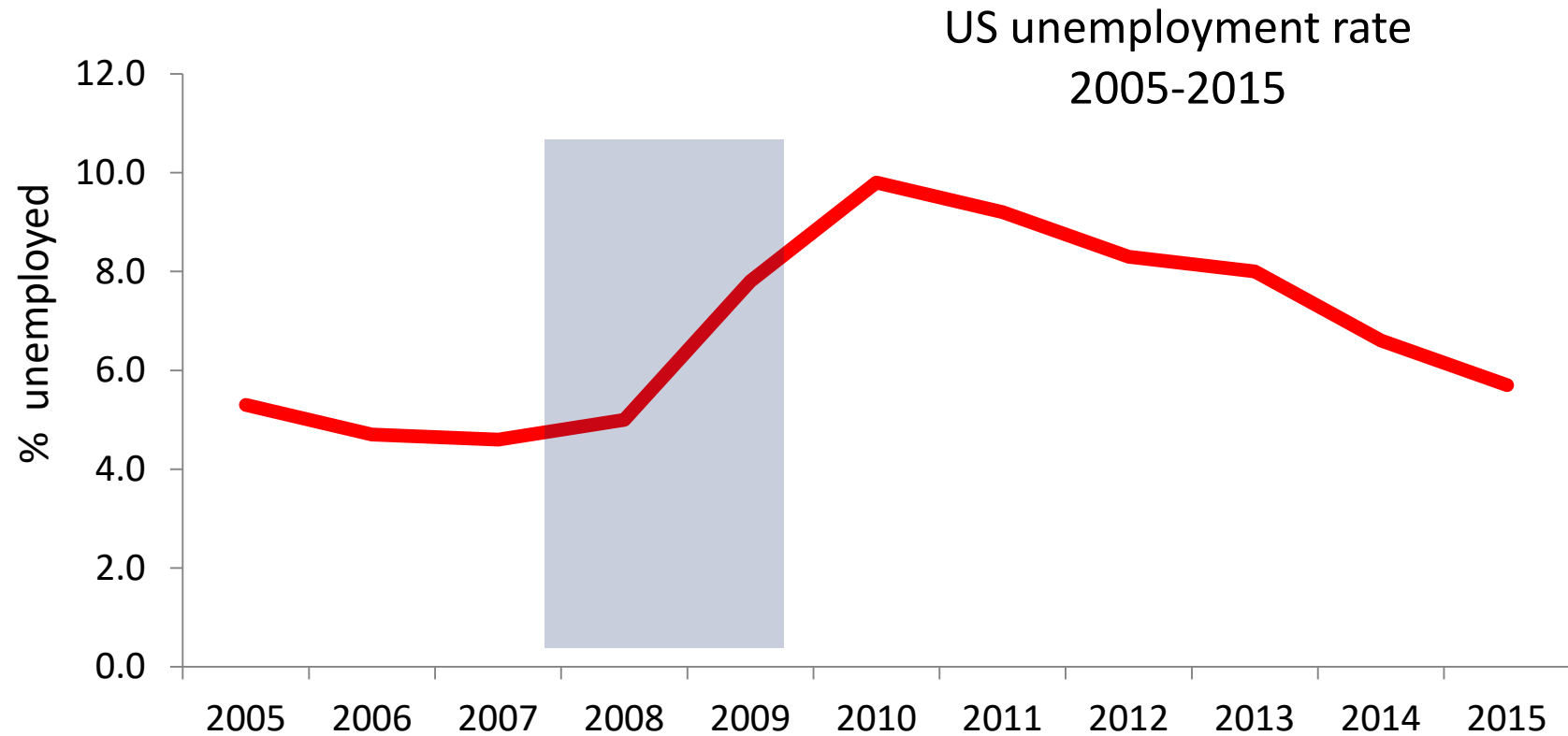
**62 interviews** with unemployed Minnesotans age 50 or older

**41 open-ended questions**

**5 themes** exploring:

- occupational identity
- dismissal experience
- effects of job loss
- job search
- overall reflections

# The Great Recession



# Two socio-economic contexts

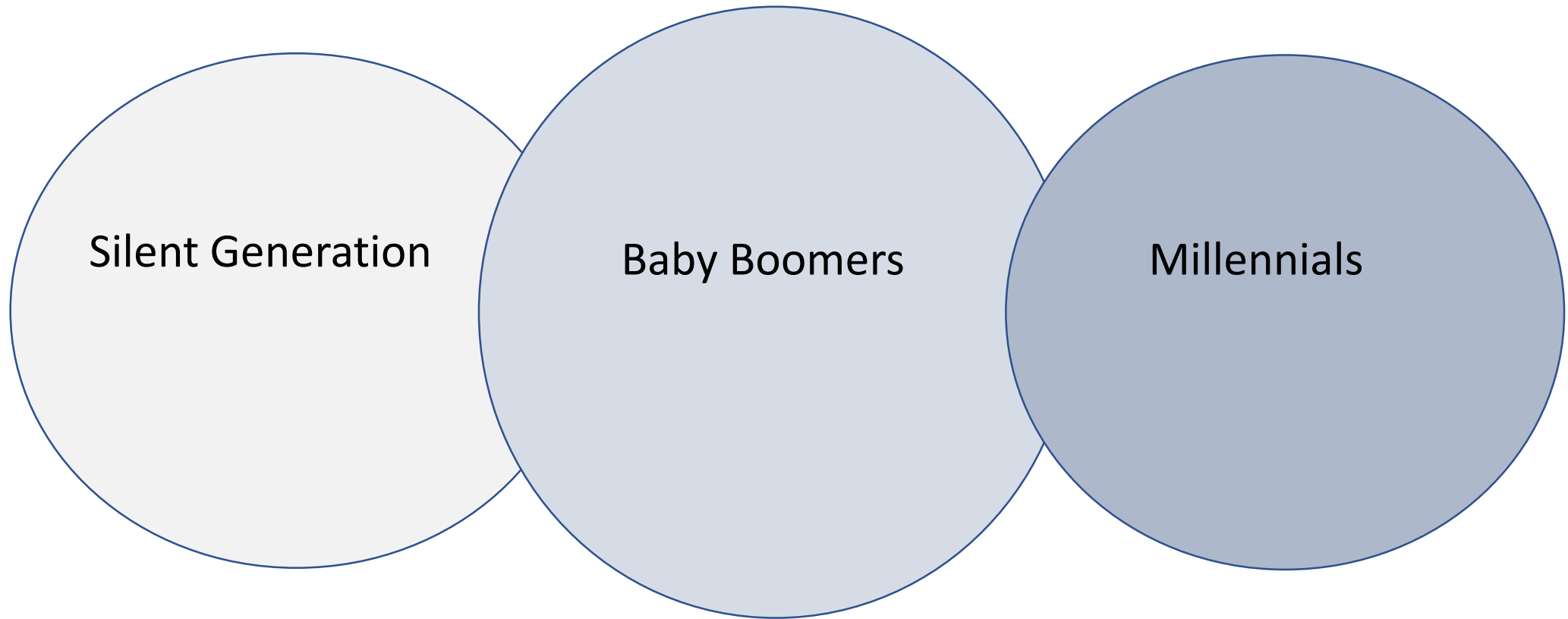
## **Age of security**

- Post-World War II economy
- Internal promotion systems, well-paying jobs, long-term employment, defined benefit pension plans, health insurance
- Faithful and competent employees generally could expect stable employment; steady, living wages; and numerous benefits that strengthened employee commitment

## **Neoliberal age of flexibility**

- Began emerging in the early 1980s
- By the late 1990s, organizations routinely engaged in workforce reductions while also shifting the burden of employment costs to employees
- Employees across industries, occupations, and occupational hierarchies no longer can expect job stability

# Talkin' 'bout my generation



# 48 interviewees

25 male-presenting interviewees

23 female-presenting interviewees

Birth year range: 1946 to 1962

Average age: 59 years



# Silent generation

[My father] retired at ... 60. He spent 25 years on a rail road pension just hanging out. Because it was like, oh my God, all [my parents] did was just hang out – for 25 years. They went to Ireland, they went to Hawaii.... All they did was play for 25 years.... His gross income was probably \$30,000 or something. I mean everything was paid for; it's ... completely fascinating ... that anybody could live like that.

**Helen, 60 years old**



# Silent generation

My father always said, you find a good job [and] you stay there, because that's the generation he was from. You find one, you stay there. And I think nowadays you don't. You get your experience, you get what you can from that company, learn as much as you can, and you move on and take your experience and get more money.

**Margaret**, 61 years old

# Millennial generation

She asked me to send her a resume and I did; and she said, 'I want to talk to you early next week,' and I said, 'your schedule is busier than mine so just give me a couple of dates and I'll respond as quickly as possible;' and then I never heard [back].... I think this happens with a lot of Generation Y – she's Generation Y – and I think she looked at my resume and went, oh well, she's kind of older.

**Sara, 53 years old**

# Millennial generation

They're not willing to spend the time to, how do I want to say this (sigh). They don't see that they have to pay their dues in any way, shape, or form. If I don't like it, I'm going to move on to the next thing. And then the other piece of it is, well, I've been here six months, and I've done a good job, now I need a raise, or I need to be promoted; they want to go through those stages quickly.

**Sally**, 59 years old

THANK YOU!