

# Brodeur Partners

## What Americans Value

*We asked Americans to select among a list of things many people hold dear. Topping the list: caring for friends and family, personal health, and a loving relationship. But there was a curious twist when it came to looking at boomers and the affluent.*

### Executive Summary

In the book “Eat, Pray, Love,” a woman travels across Italy, India and Indonesia to find meaning. A big part of her experience centers around food, faith, and sex.

But these things aren’t what Americans told us was most important to them personally – at least on the food and faith front.

For Americans, the most personally valuable things are family, health, and love.

And among these, caring for friends and family towers over them all.

This was one of many findings from our study, “American Relevance” based on an online national survey of n=1,007 Americans in the late summer of 2012. The research was designed to shed light on how Americans see themselves, what things they value, and what interests them.

Specifically, we asked Americans to look at 10 different things that many people hold dear.<sup>1</sup> The items we tested were:

- Being in a loving relationship
- Being financially secure
- Being personally and professionally challenged
- Being understood
- Having fun
- Caring for friends and family
- Finding meaning
- Making a difference
- Serving others
- Staying healthy

## What we found

- ▶ **Caring for friends and family trumps everything.** When asked what was personally most important to them, Americans overwhelmingly selected “caring for friends and family.” What was particularly

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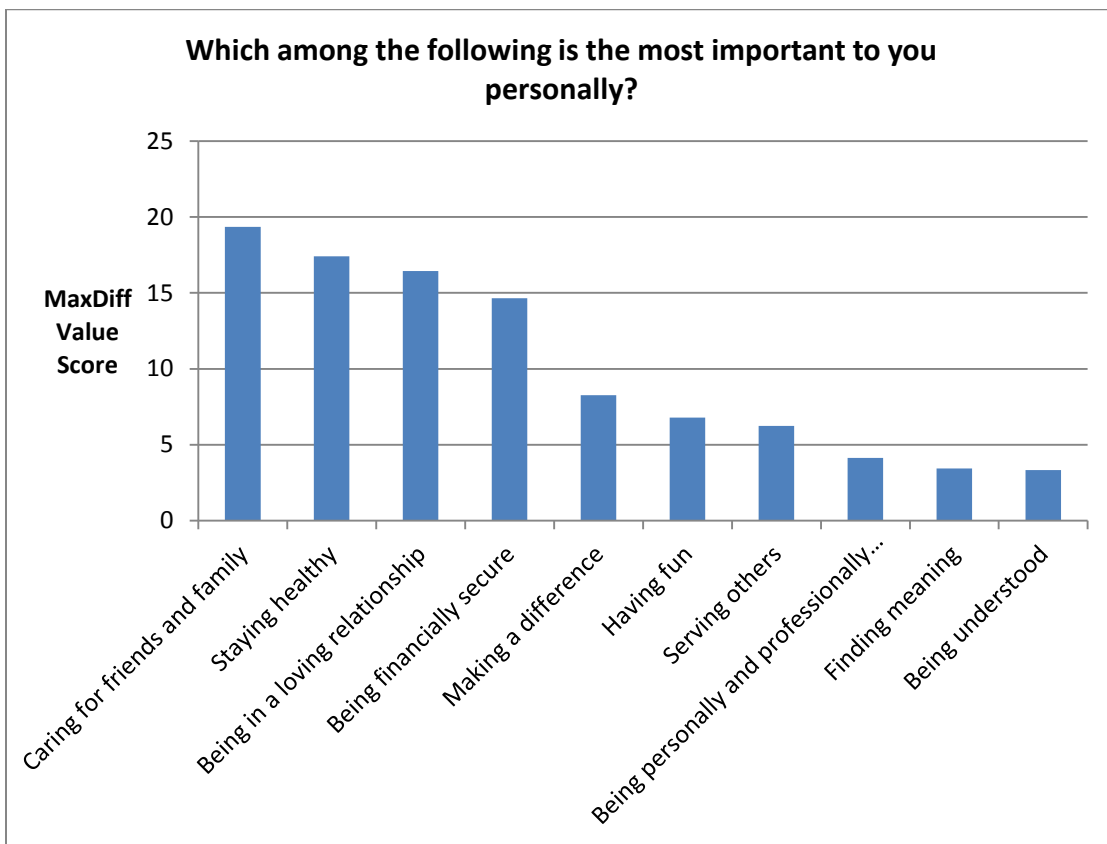
<sup>1</sup> We showed people different combinations of choices and asked subjects to select the one in each set that was the MOST important to them and the one that was LEAST important to them. In a method called maximum difference scaling (MaxDiff), survey participants often saw the same items presented with different alternatives for maximum accuracy. As a result, we collected over 60,000 data points and were able to very precisely assess each option with “value scores.”

interesting was how dominant this value was over other elements tested...

- ▶ **... except when it comes to Boomers, who value health more than family.** The only group that didn't rank "caring for friends and family" first on their list was young boomers aged 55 to 64. For them, what was most important was "staying healthy."
- ▶ **Health beats love.** A distant second and third for Americans overall were "staying healthy" and "being in a loving relationship" respectively.
- ▶ **Affluent Americans valued "being financially secure" almost as much as caring for family and being healthy.** There was a curious twist when looking at those families with over \$150,000 in income. They rated "being financially secure" almost as important as caring for friends and family and staying healthy. For them, "a loving relationship" came in a distant fourth.
- ▶ **Affluent Americans are the least introspective and most self-indulgent.** The study also showed that affluent Americans (those with over \$150,000 in household income) are the income group that puts the least importance on things like "making a difference," "serving others," and "finding meaning." They are the income group that puts the greatest importance on "having fun" and "being personally challenged."
- ▶ **In general, individualistic and esoteric considerations were least personally important to Americans.** Much has been made about Americans' search for meaning and truth through self-exploration and spirituality. Our study suggests that these things are actually relatively low on people's ratings of personal importance.

## What do we value most? Caring for our family and friends

Again, the most important item, by far, was “caring for friends and family.” That this was a clear winner was interesting on a number of fronts. First, “caring for friends and family” is a value that is other-directed, not self-directed. Indeed, the self-directed and esoteric activities of “finding meaning” and “being understood” came in last. Second, there was a notable exception to the “caring” value in one demographic group.



## Do we grow more introspective as we get older?

There is a common perception that in our youth we are more inwardly focused and that as we age we develop more empathy and compassion for others.

Our study suggests it is much more complicated than that. Indeed, our study would suggest that it may be the opposite – that the older we get, the more introspective we become.

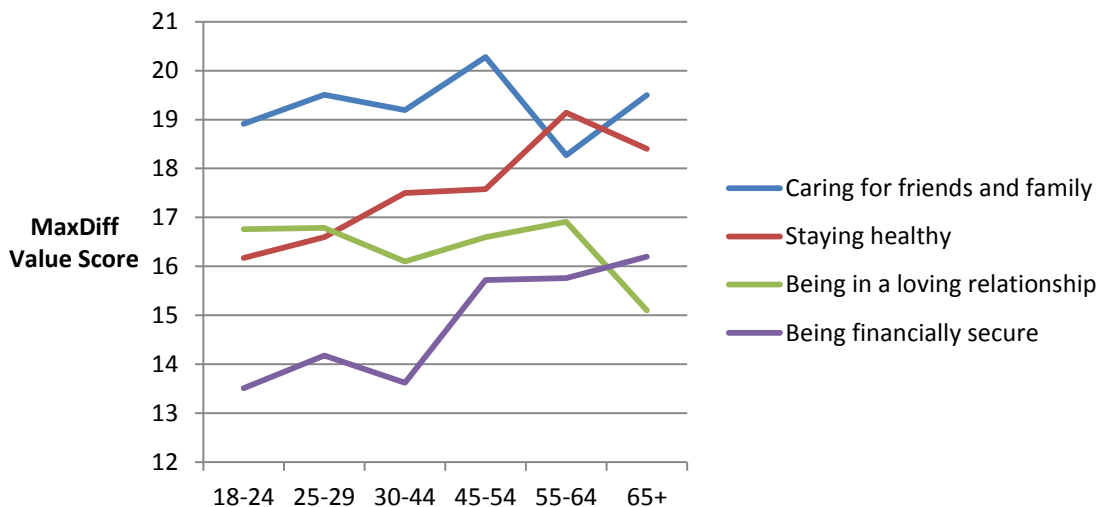
Take a look at two sets of comparative measures:

- Caring for friends and family vs. staying healthy
- Being in a loving relationship vs. being financially secure

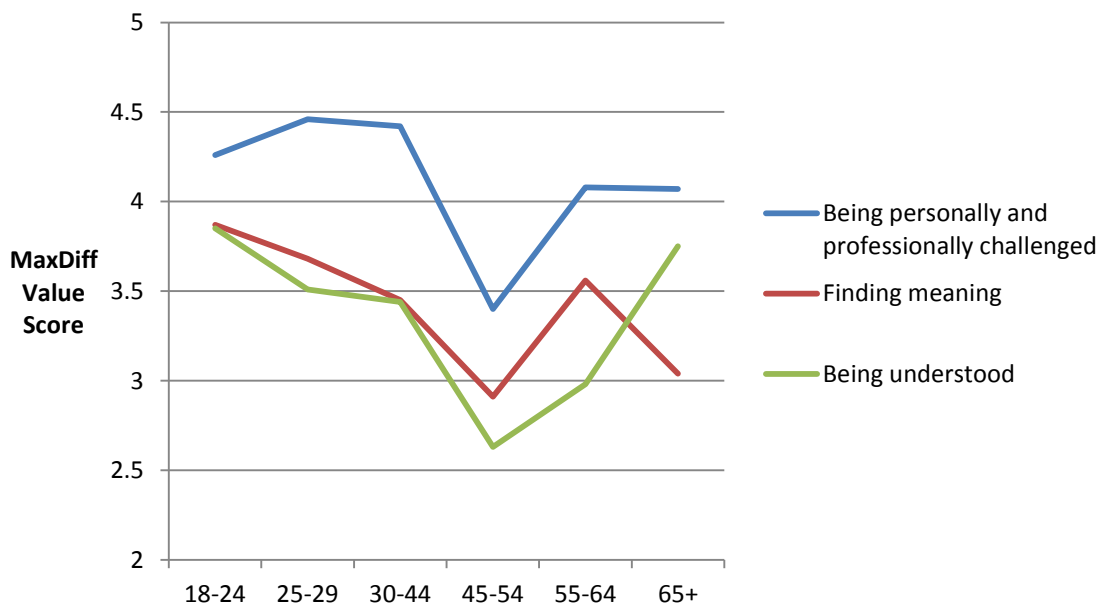
For young people “caring for friends and family” is significantly more important than personal health. However that “gap” narrows as we age to the point that when we become 55 years of age and older, it is effectively a tossup.

Similarly, young people value “being in a loving relationship” significantly more than “being financially secure.” That changes dramatically as we age to the point that as we reach retirement age, money trumps love.

**Which of the following is most important to you personally?**



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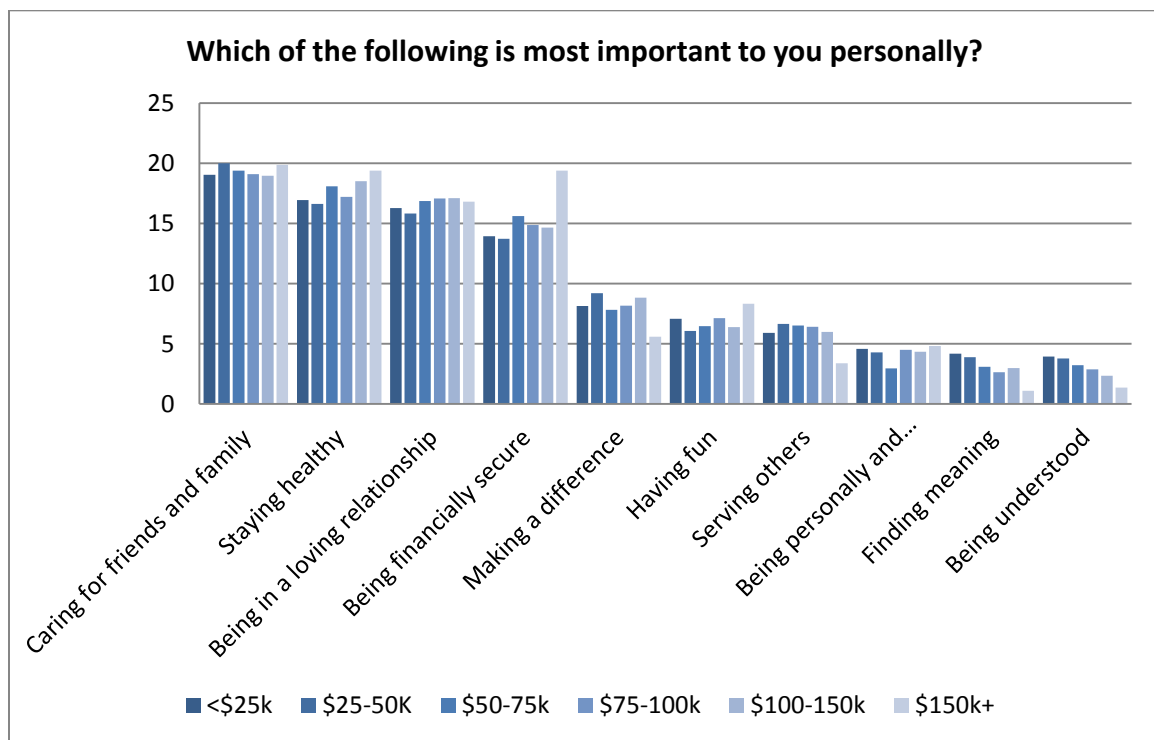


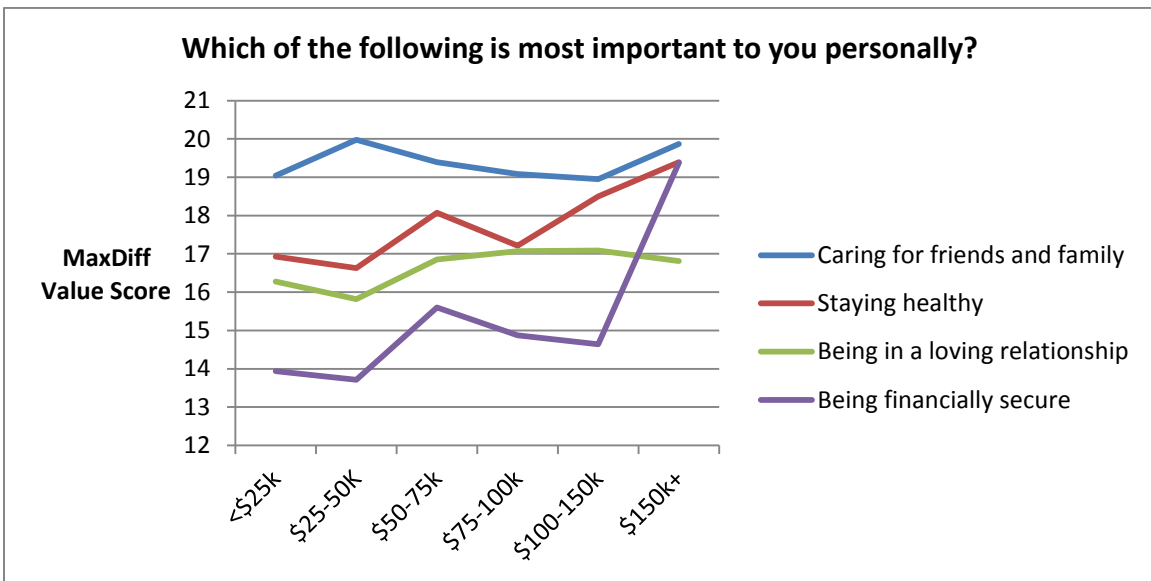
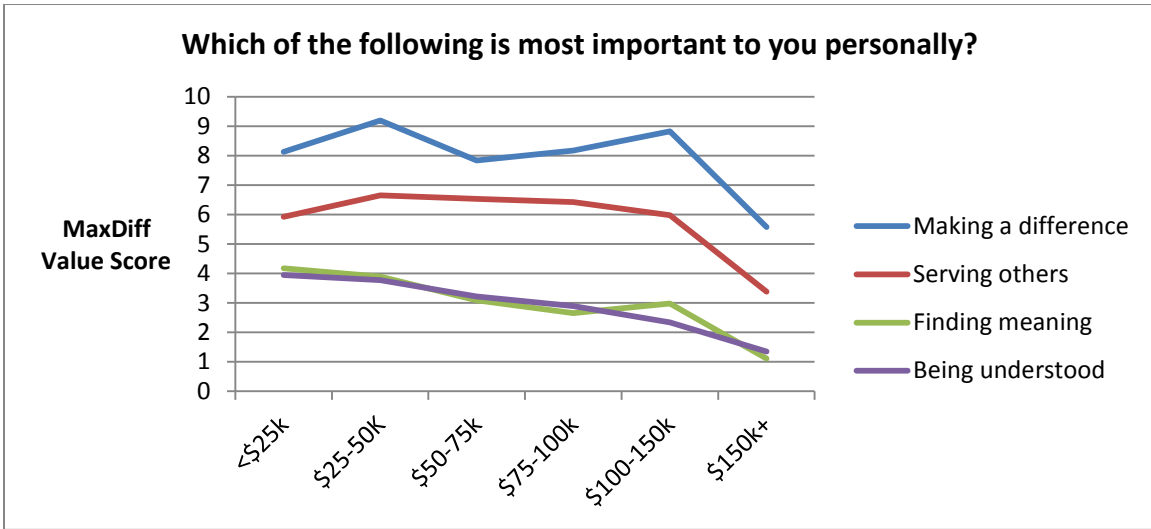
## The wealth-focused and self-focused affluent

Our study suggests that the affluent – in this case those households with incomes over \$150,000– have a very different set of personal values than those with lower incomes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the affluent are the most likely to say that “being financially secure” is important to them personally. Indeed, for those households making over \$150k, financial security is almost as important as “caring for friends and family.”

What was noteworthy was that affluent households were the least likely to value altruistic or esoteric values. They were the least likely to say that “making a difference” or “serving others” was important to them. And they were the least likely to say that “finding meaning” or “being understood” was important to them. Conversely, they were the most likely to say that “having fun” was important to them.





## Some questions

These findings raise some interesting questions. Among them:

- **Aging and Boomers.** Do priorities change as people get older, or is there something unique about the Boomers. Specifically, as one gets older does one become more focused on personal health (and less on family) or is that a characteristic unique to Boomers and their focus on personal health and appearances?
- **The effect of affluence.** Are the rich really different from you and me? Why are they the least focused on the existential value of finding meaning?
- **Social schisms.** What do these findings mean for the United States, or any nation? Specifically, there appears to be a schism of values between the young (who place greater value on friends, family and love) and the old (who place greater value on health and financial security).

## Conclusion

Our study is a reminder that one of the most relevant things in any person's life is friends and family. Product marketers often get carried away with functional elements like features and functions. Lifestyle promoters get caught up in the zeitgeist of self-discovery and meaning. But underneath all what both need to remember is that what people most value is how that product or service fits into nurturing or "serving" their friends and family.

Effective communications that work to change not only heart and mind but also behavior, should strike three chords: a connection to my group or clan; an ability to show how it enhances personal wellbeing; and a loving relationship.

These findings build on others from this study that we detailed in an earlier Brodeur Partners white paper, ["The Compassionate, Happy, Upbeat](#)

[American.](#)” which suggests Americans are much more compassionate, happy and even optimistic than some might suspect.

Integrating the top-level findings of the two papers from a 35,000-foot level, one might surmise the following:

*We care deeply about family and friends. As we actively care for them, however we do it, we both express our native compassion and satisfy our aspiration toward living out a compassionate ideal. And as optimistic people, we expect good things to come from our caring and compassion. One of those things is happiness.*

This statement may seem obvious, speculative or both. But what it tells us as professional communicators is that we should never overlook the power of the personal, the familial and the human.

A smart phone is good when it’s fast and thin and has lots of apps – and better when it connects kids and grandparents across the ocean. A luxury car is a nice way to trumpet your status as you travel – and even better when your children receive the best protection available. Security software is great when it prevents loss of valuable data – even better when it keeps companies afloat so employees can feed their families.

In every product, brand, idea, candidate or cause, there are human beings, families and narratives to wrap around them. Find these people. Tell these stories. And for maximum relevance in your communications initiatives, speak to people’s deepest concerns.

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