

Don't Call Me a Senior!
Why Baby Boomers Perceive Aging Negatively

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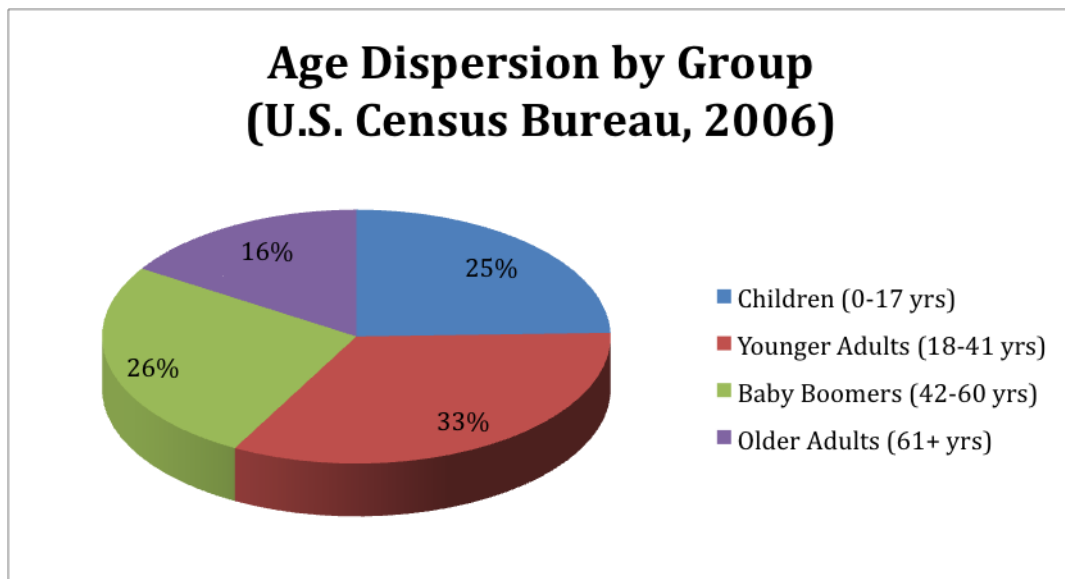
ABSTRACT

With the largest cohort in U.S. history nearing their elder years, the baby boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, is by far the most mysterious. They are changing the long established perceptions of old age and what that means for a successful future. As baby boomers age, there is a hypothesized realization they do not want to be considered a “senior citizen.” This project takes into consideration the characteristics of baby boomers and the anti-aging tactics currently used by them. These tactics can include plastic surgeries and over-the-counter aging remedies. Interviews were conducted with current baby boomers and surveys for current senior citizens (aged 65 years plus) to discuss their views on aging. This project provides insight to professionals in the aging field on how to better serve the baby boomer population. In addition, policy makers may take advantage of these conclusions to better accommodate the aging population.

INTRODUCTION

Currently there are nearly 38 million people over 65 years of age and by the year 2030 there will be over 65 million people over the age of 65 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, MacNeil, 2001). There are, however, major differences between current seniors (age 65+) and those seniors to come. Aging professionals have limited ideas on how to interact with this mysterious baby boomer generation because in the future they will not characterize themselves as being “seniors” or “old.” Baby boomers are the largest targets and consumers of anti-aging remedies, which may come in the form of lotions, botox shots, surgical procedures, etc.

Chart A)



This project looks at the reasons why the baby boom generation is so adamant on preventing or reducing the signs of aging based on the evidence that anti-aging product usage has increased dramatically in recent years. I surveyed current seniors (65 years and older), researching the possibility that previous generations have tried to prevent aging as

well. If this is not the first time a generation has tried to stop the signs of aging, then why all of a sudden are we seeing this massively increasing trend toward anti-aging products? The conclusions drawn from this project will aid professionals in the aging field with the knowledge to properly support baby boomers and their needs. The findings will enable policy makers to implement regulations that are befitting to both baby boomers and the current generation of seniors, each with different needs. It has been proven that if people have a positive outlook on aging they will live, on average, seven and a half years longer (Butler, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researched literature provided great insight into the variables determining why baby boomers do not want to age. Much has been written on the characteristics of baby boomers and the aging of America. In 2006 there were nearly 78 million baby boomers, with almost half being female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Also in 2006, the number of current people over the age of 65 was approximately 38 million with just about 60% being female. The current seniors had only 19% of the population possessing a bachelor's degree or higher, while 28% of the population of baby boomers held at least this degree. In an article by Mykytyn, the anti-aging movement's core mission is "to herald and operationalize aging itself as treatable" (2006, p. 644).

Women tend to have more anxiety about aging than men. This can result in the "double standard of aging," which means that women, not men, can lose their status as they age (Barrett & Robbins, 2008). The Barrett and Robbins article (2008) determined the main anxiety related to aging for women is the loss of attractiveness. This finding

resonates with information from other articles. For example, when a group of college students were asked how they felt about aging, “both genders reported that in the future their body image will be much more central to their happiness and psychosocial functioning” (Agliata, Kanter & Tantleff-Dunn, 2001, p. 7).

The baby boomer generation was the first generation to have a large proportion of professional women in the workforce. This was the first time women were CEOs, saleswomen, marketing directors, etc. and can help explain why older women still in the workforce feel the need to compete with younger women for jobs and/or promotions. It has been proven that attractive women receive better jobs and higher pay (Barrett, 2004). With this fact, it makes it necessary for older women to “keep up” their appearances in order to hold their jobs or contend for new ones.

Income is another variable that can affect the yearning for youthfulness by baby boomers. In the article by Deeb-Sossa and Keister, it was found that baby boomers have significantly more wealth than their parents. Education can play a substantial role in this higher level of wealth. However, with the older baby boomers taking more of the jobs, the benefits for having more education are not as great for the younger baby boomers.

The health of baby boomers’ has also been better than previous generations as they grew up going to the doctor and receiving preventative care (vaccines, etc.). Since the baby boomers are a more educated generation, keeping themselves healthy is highly valued and retaining an active lifestyle falls in line with that. MacNeil’s article discusses the fitness trend for adults: there was a 28.5% increase in participation in sports, fitness and outdoor activities, a 38% increase in health club memberships, and a 129% increase in fitness equipment sales. Baby boomers, according to MacNeil, grew up taking advantage of the

many travel opportunities offered to them. He also suggests that baby boomers love high-risk recreation, such as mountain climbing, white-water rafting, triathlons, and parachuting. All of these variables should play an important role in the reasons why baby boomers reject aging more than their parents' generation.

I was able to locate resources that touched on the anti-aging tactics practiced by all ages, including the baby boomer generation. Overall, the anti-aging beauty market is doing remarkably well. In 2007 Americans spent almost \$30 billion on anti-aging products (Butler, 2008). In one article the focus was on how different generations view the "perfect woman" and how that view influences the likeliness of having surgery to manipulate their looks towards the "perfect body" (Goodman, 1996). "The marked consistency of decline in body-image from older to younger women is cause for alarm. Younger women (under age 30), regardless of whether or not they had experienced cosmetic surgery, were more insecure about and dissatisfied with their appearance and their bodies" (Goodman, 1996, p. 70). "The relentless drum-beat of the media to establish standards of agelessness and idealized beauty, the largest aging cohort in history to proselytize, and the development of higher-tech cosmetic surgeries all seem to insure that cosmetic surgery will become a normative fixture in our society" (Goodman, 1996, p. 70).

The previous quote confirms the reasons why the popularity of botox shots increased by 4159% from 1997 to 2007 (Butler, 2008). Many professional women feel they need to keep up a more youthful appearance. Botox has become a very popular procedure because it is non-surgical and can be done quickly and without pain. In 2003 more than 8.7 million cosmetic procedures were performed, the top procedures being eyebrow lifts and face-lifts (Barrett, 2004). Men are also being targeted to buy anti-aging

products. In 2007 there were fifty-three new anti-aging products for men introduced on the market (Petrecca, 2008). That same year, men spent about \$46 million on skin care products. Botox use by men increased 215% from 2000 to 2007 (Petrecca, 2008).

The articles provide the knowledge that baby boomers are buying anti-aging products, but besides the superficial physical benefits there are no underlying answers of why this is so. I hypothesize that the reason baby boomers are afraid to age is due to the tremendous change their bodies go through. Anti-aging products target the “looks” side of a person to keep their appearances younger. The baby boomer generation is a very individualistic group, having experienced many “firsts.” For example, they were the first generation to have access to contraceptives, employ women in the labor force and redefine traditional families (Wattenberg, 1986). All of these “firsts” have made the cohort extremely different from previous generations.

METHOD

The project uses a cross-sectional research design integrated with a semi-structured interview and survey aspect. It is the best design since the research question has many different variables that need to be addressed. I compared the characteristics of baby boomers with those of current seniors while also looking at societal views on aging and anti-aging tactics. I conducted eight interviews with several baby boomer women and one male to discuss their views on aging and the anti-aging tactics they use. Three women and one male were living in Iowa and four of the women were living in the Bay Area, California at the time of the interviews. In addition to those interviews, I randomly handed out eighty-six anonymous surveys to current seniors attending programs at a senior center in

the Bay Area in January 2010. This assisted me in determining if previous generations also perceived aging negatively or if this is a new trend brought about by baby boomers. The majority of the information used in my project came from the interviews and surveys conducted with baby boomers and current senior citizens.

I collected information on the characteristics and interests of current seniors (65 years and older) and baby boomers from published journal articles and websites, such as the United States Census Bureau. Additional data was obtained on how society views aging and their purchasing habits of anti-aging remedies. The unit of analysis is the individual. The dependent variable is the perception of individuals about becoming a senior. The independent variables are the characteristics and anti-aging tactics of the respondents. More narrowly, I will look at the work history, income levels, education, interests, quality of health, family dynamics, society's perceptions on aging, cosmetic surgery, over-the-counter anti-aging remedies and general anxiety about aging.

I measured the above variables with national statistics and data along with personal insights. The eight interviews executed with the baby boomers addressed the perceptions of senior citizens, their past employment, interests/hobbies, their personal health, their use of anti-aging makeup or lotions, their familiarity of cosmetic surgery to prevent aging, and how society views aging. These interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The purpose of the surveys on current seniors was to address some of the same variables as the set of interviews. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 2. A majority of the secondary data was collected in the form of published articles (mainly peer-reviewed). I analyzed the data and drew conclusions based on the visible relationships between the variables. The interview data helped formulate the "why" in this research question.

RESULTS

From the surveys with the current senior group, I conducted an ANOVA test to determine if there were differences in the age groups of the current seniors and how they viewed aging and a second ANOVA test with the age groups and whether or not they used anti-aging products. This type of test would help me determine if there were differences between the behaviors and views held by the older seniors versus the younger seniors. The null hypothesis in test A was that the outcome of each age group showed no difference and the alternative hypothesis showed a difference or differences; they were not equal. In test A, I collapsed the age groups into larger intervals to see if the test showed any significance. In the test involving the use of anti-aging products (A), the degree of freedom was 4 between groups and 79 within groups and the F-statistic was 2.328. From this test, I failed to reject the null hypothesis meaning there was no significant difference between the age groups and their views on aging, whether the views were positive and negative. However, at the 90% confidence level, there are significant differences.

Test A)

How do current seniors view aging?

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
50-60	1	3.00	.	.	3	3
61-69	18	2.00	.343	.081	1	3
70-79	36	1.94	.410	.068	1	3
80-89	22	1.91	.294	.063	1	2
90+	7	1.86	.378	.143	1	2
Total	84	1.95	.377	.041	1	3

ANOVA

How do current seniors view aging?

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.245	4	.311	2.328	.063
Within Groups	10.564	79	.134		
Total	11.810	83			

In the second test concerning the use of anti-aging products by current seniors (B), the categories of age were in smaller intervals than test A. (56-60, 61-65, 66-70, 71-75, 76-80, 81-85, 86-90 and 90+ years of age). The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between the age groups and whether they use anti-aging products. The alternative hypothesis infers there is a difference. For test B, the degree of freedom was 7 between the groups and 75 within the groups and the f-statistic was 1.792. There were no significant differences in the age groups and the use of anti-aging products. Of the eighty-six surveys, only 9.5% view aging positively while 85.7% view it negatively. When it comes to using anti-aging products, 61.4% do not use them and 38.6% do use anti-aging products.

Test B)

Do current seniors use anti-aging products

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
56-60	1	.00	.	.	0	0
61-65	7	.14	.378	.143	0	1
66-70	12	.67	.492	.142	0	1
71-75	21	.43	.507	.111	0	1
76-80	15	.33	.488	.126	0	1
81-85	9	.56	.527	.176	0	1
86-90	11	.09	.302	.091	0	1
90+	7	.43	.535	.202	0	1
Total	83	.39	.490	.054	0	1

ANOVA

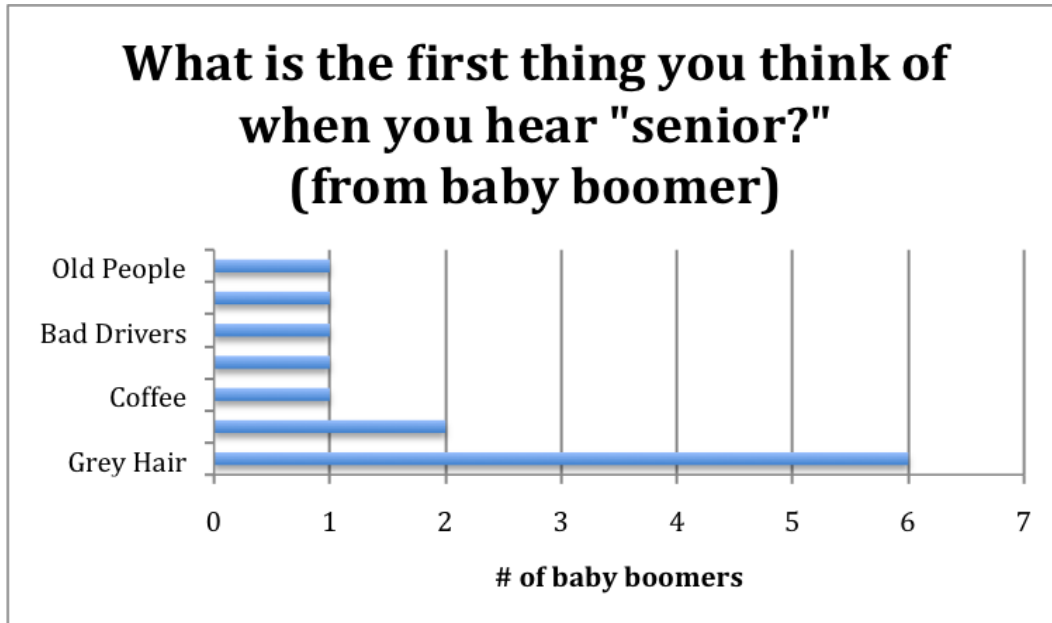
Do current seniors use anti-aging products

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.817	7	.402	1.792	.101
Within Groups	16.846	75	.225		
Total	19.663	82			

In the eight interviews with the baby boomer generation (see chart C), I found six people stated that grey hair was the top image they thought of when they heard the word “senior.” Next were canes. The baby boomer’s top activities they enjoyed participating in during their free time were gardening, exercising, spending time with friends and taking care of their dogs. All of the participants viewed their health as either good or very good and only one does not get a yearly physical. When it comes to anti-aging products, six people use them and two do not (this includes the only male). All six use the products for the reduction of wrinkles and other skin imperfections due to aging. Only one of the baby boomers had had plastic surgery in the form of Botox injections. When it comes to wanting plastic surgery to reverse the effects of aging, two people said they would like it. The types of surgery were the two baby boomers preferred to have (with no duplicate answers) were a liposuction, a breast enhancement, an eyelift, a facelift and a neck lift. The question that asked how they thought society viewed aging, seven of the eight said society viewed it negatively. The answers ranged from negatively, to neglectful of the aged, to “many people think that life is not as great as it used to be.” One respondent stated that it was better now than it used to be viewed. When they were asked if they agreed with this, it was an even

four to four split. Four people agreed with society and four people did not and thought society should be more respectful towards the aging.

Chart B) Interview answers from baby boomers



I was able to gather information from the surveys handed out to current seniors on what they feared the most about aging. The top answer was the fear of losing independence and becoming dependent upon others for basic care. The second most popular answer was failing health and being sick. The seniors thought the best thing about aging was the freedom and being able to do what they wanted, when they wanted. The benefit of senior discounts was the second most common answer. When I asked the current seniors what they first thought of when they heard the word “senior” twenty-eight said older people, usually 65 years and older. The answer that caught me by surprise were the six people that said high school and prom.

CONCLUSIONS/LIMITATIONS

From the research conducted for this project, it can be stated that both the current seniors and the baby boomers view aging negatively. I was able to determine that anti-aging products were used by both generations, however more frequently by the baby boomers with the interviews I conducted. Within the current senior population, there are no differences between the younger seniors and the older seniors and their views on aging and the utilization of anti-aging products.

There are limitations that exist in this research project. The results would be more representative if, in addition to a larger and more diverse set of interviews, I was able to complete a national survey. However, I did not have the resources to complete this. My interviews and surveys are also not representative of the entire population of baby boomers and current seniors. I primarily chose educated, middle class, married, Caucasian participants for the interviews because that group represents the majority of baby boomers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Further research should be conducted to find more representative results. Another aspect that should be looked into is the amount of money the baby boomer generation is spending per year on anti-aging tactics, both male and female. In addition, how much are the businesses spending on marketing products designed for anti-aging and interviewing them about their marketing strategies.

This research project has the potential to increase awareness of how differently baby boomers are compared to previous generations. The baby boom generation will have completely different needs that must be addressed in the future. If the United States is going to see a doubling in numbers of people over 65 years of age, there will be a need for reforms within Social Security, Medicare and other governmental agencies. The baby

boomers will have new and different interests, causing Park and Recreation agencies to adjust and plan their services accordingly. Retirement communities will need to take a different approach in recruiting a generation that has had more education, has worked longer, and is, by nature, more independent. All in all, every service will need to be adjusted to properly serve this individualistic generation. My project partially reveals why baby boomers will require such a dramatic transformation in society as they enter their senior years.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BABY BOOMERS

Interviewer Instructions: *(Have 3 pens and enough paper to complete the interview. Read out loud the informed consent script below. Ask if there are any questions regarding the interview and answer them. Be sure the participant is comfortable and ready to begin.)*

Introductory & Informed Consent Script:

I am a graduate student at San Francisco State University working on a research paper about Baby Boomers.

You have been asked to participate in this interview to describe your experiences and opinions. You may refuse to answer any questions you wish, without explanation.

The interview is confidential and your confidentiality will be maintained throughout my project. I will not include any information in my paper that will identify you.

The interview will last no more than 45 minutes. I would like to take notes during the interview. I will email you the typed notes when I am finished and ask you to review them to ensure that all information is correct.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and by participating you are giving your consent for your interview to be used in my project. You will not receive any compensation for your time. You may refuse to participate in this interview or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Interview Questions:

1. When you hear the term “senior citizen,” what picture pops into your head?
2. What type of jobs have you held?
3. What types of activities do you enjoy doing during your free time?

Probe: How often do you do these?

4. How would you describe your health?

Probe: How often do you exercise?

Probe: Do you get a yearly physical?

5. Do you use any anti-aging makeup or lotions?

Probe: If no: Have you ever used them?

Probe: If yes: What results are you hoping to achieve by using them?

Probe: Do you believe they work?

6. Have you ever had or considered having plastic surgery to prevent aging?

Probe: If yes: What type of surgery or what area do you want addressed?

7. How do you believe society views aging?

Probe: Do you agree with this?

APPENDIX 2

Aging Questionnaire

I am a graduate student at San Francisco State University working on a research paper about aging. You have been asked to participate in this questionnaire to share your experiences and opinions. You may refuse to answer any questions you wish, without explanation. The questionnaire is confidential and your confidentiality will be maintained throughout my project. I will not include any information in my paper that will identify you. The questionnaire will take no more than 10 minutes. Your participation in this questionnaire is completely voluntary and by participating you are giving your consent for your answers to be used in my project. You will not receive any compensation for your time.

Please circle one of the following answers.

1. What is your sex?

Male

Female

2. What is your age?

50-55

56-60

61-65

66-70

71-75

76-80

81-85

86-90

90+

3. Do you exercise regularly (3 or more times a week)?

No

Yes

4. How would you describe your health?

Poor

Average

Above Average

5. Would you consider your views of aging as positive or negative?

Negative

Positive

Don't Know

OVER

6. Do you use any anti-aging treatments, such as makeup, lotions, creams, etc?
Yes
No
Don't Know

7. Have you ever had plastic surgery to reverse the effects of aging? (this includes Botox treatments)
Yes
No
Don't Know

8. If you answered no to the above question, would you or have you considered plastic surgery (including Botox treatments) to reverse the effects of aging?
Yes
No
Don't Know

Please comment as you please to the below questions.

9. What was your biggest fear or concern about growing older?

10. What is the best thing about becoming older?

11. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word "senior"?
