

Looking Young and Feeling Young

Baby boomers may not have a corner on the market for an urgent desire to stay youthful but they certainly have set a high standard for creating a virtual avalanche of products and services to attend to that need. The quest to look young in baby boomers has resulted in an explosion of profits in the cosmetic and plastic surgery markets. It's easy to criticize the desire of baby boomers to want to see themselves as youthful as simple vanity. But it goes a lot deeper than that.

It doesn't take a lot of research or analysis to see that baby boomers grounded their identities in the youth movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Before the boomer generation erupted like a generational volcano, there really was no youth movement. But in the 1960s, when youth culture virtually took over American and indeed world culture, everything changed for baby boomers and that change was never really reversed.

The culture of that time that now seems very long ago, was one of the adoration of youth. That desire to put age on a pedestal and worship everything about being young has permeated the culture even as the boomer generation moved into middle age and now is on the verge of creating the largest retirement generation ever.

Not all of the youth worship that is easy to document in baby boomers is just about looking sexy and dreading the physical changes of growing older. Some of what boomer's love about the concept of youth has to do with the idealism and the commitment to causes that is common in young people. The desire to change the world and to be a force to make mankind better was part of what made the new youth culture in the 1960s so unique. And because those values are laudable, we really can't completely condemn the desire by baby boomers to stay youthful.

So the quest to stay young often manifests itself in cosmetic attempts to look young. You can almost understand the appeal. We all like to look good. But the real source of youth is not a tight butt and abs and smooth, wrinkle free skin. The phrase "you are as young as you feel" is often scoffed at by baby boomers as a cheap cop out. And it can be used to have an excuse to behave younger than you are and perhaps want to socialize with younger people in an inappropriate way. But it can also reflect that an inner youthfulness which is fueled by a youthful outlook on life and a basic policy of good health and exercise will keep anyone spry and vital well into their senior years.

It is when baby boomers combine those elements of "inner youthfulness" with their cosmetic efforts to stay young that they really do retain much of their youth beyond what their years would report. We all have met an elderly man or woman who is so full of life and fun that they leave you feeling older than they are. The sparkle in the eye, the curiosity about everything life has to offer and that optimism and idealism that you ordinarily associate with teenagers is truly inspiring when it is being expressed by a senior citizen.

This is the real youth movement that the baby boomer generation is pioneering.

It is more than dying the hair or using Botox and wrinkle creams. It is about being strong role models to the youth coming up that they don't have to give up on their dreams and that their idealism and excitement in living can thrive no matter what age they are. And if that is the legacy of the baby boomer generation, it's a fine ethic for them to leave behind for future generations to enjoy.

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