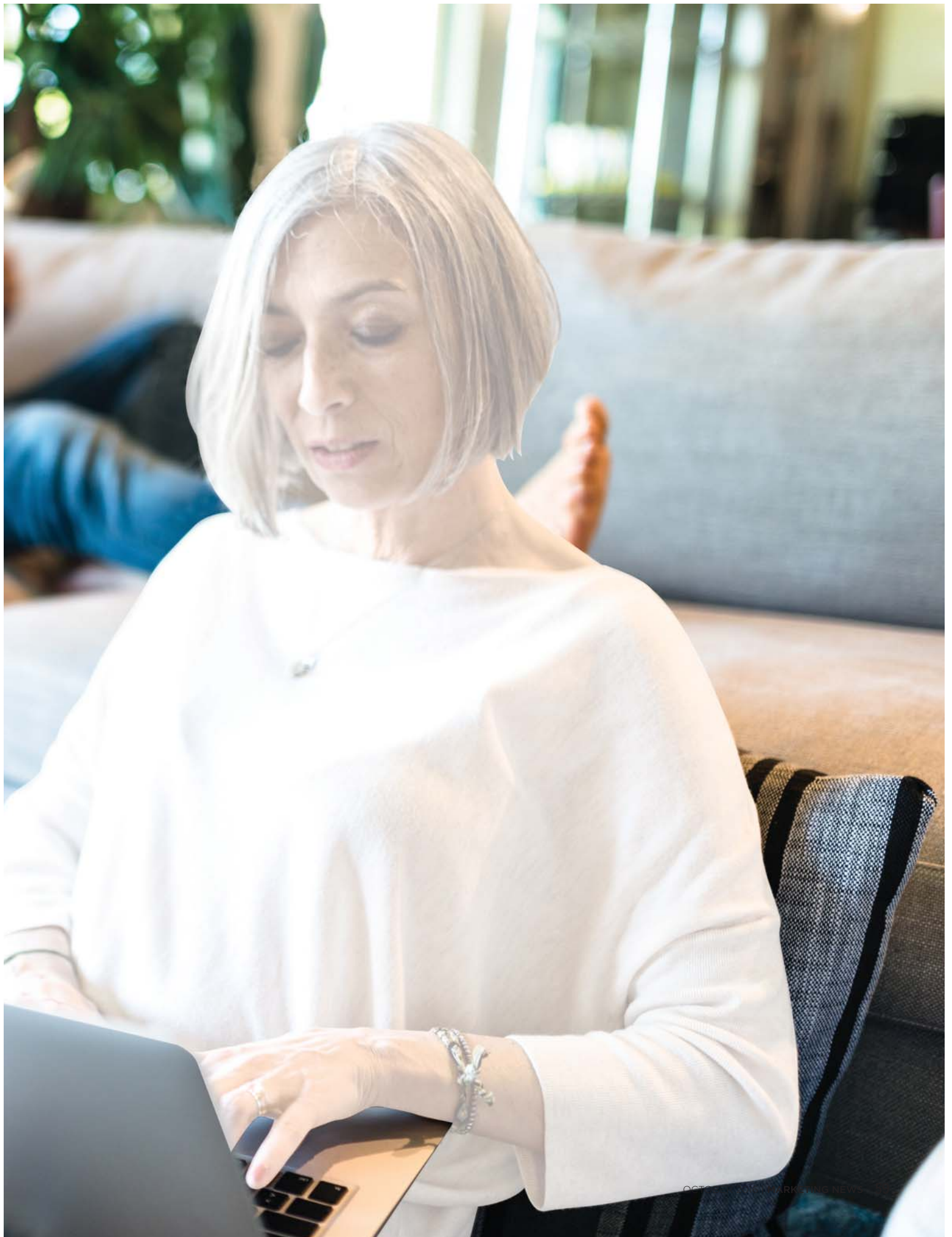




The Out-of-Sight (Out-of-Mind) Female Boomer

The stats show the female boomer has the money and time to spend, but she's invisible to advertisers. With a little myth-busting and fact-checking, marketers could tap into this booming gold mine.

By Sarah Steimer



“Do you not see me? Do I not exist? Do you think it’s alright to ignore us?”

yells Grace Hanson, the retired cosmetics mogul played by Jane Fonda on “Grace and Frankie,” a Netflix comedy about two women navigating new challenges later in life. A cashier and others at a grocery store are ignoring Grace and Frankie Bergstein, played by Lily Tomlin.

Grace apologizes to Frankie for her outburst, but asserts: “I refuse to be irrelevant.”

“We are 100% invisible to marketers. That’s pretty easy to establish,” says Marti Barletta, author of *Marketing to Women and PrimeTime Women: How to Win the Hearts, Minds, and Business of Boomer Big Spenders*. “You only have to look at what’s online, what’s on television, what’s on radio. We are such a pop-culture country and in this country—in every country, I think—pop culture is defined by the young because it’s about novelty and it’s about what’s different and what’s exciting.”

Girlpower Marketing released a report in 2013 titled “Boomer Women: The Invisible Goldmine.” Surveying 200 female boomers, the report found that 53% felt overlooked by product advertising and marketing because of their age. The survey also found that 68.3% of respondents felt advertisers never or very rarely target their age group on a regular basis, while 31.7% said advertisers sometimes target their age group. No one in the group said they were targeted by advertisers often or almost always.

Between experts and boomer women themselves, there is little debate that this demographic is not a main focus for marketers, despite its size and spending power.

Baby boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964, making them 52 to 70 years old, and the U.S. Census Bureau puts their population at an estimated 74.1 million in the U.S. The estimated number of female boomers is 38.44 million. According to a 2012 Nielsen study, “Introducing Boomers: Marketing’s Most Valuable Generation,” boomers will control 70% of the country’s disposable income by 2017. Boomers made up almost \$230 billion in sales for consumer packaged goods in 2012, 49% of total sales. In addition to their existing funds, baby boomers are set to inherit \$15 trillion over

the next 20 years. Add to this the fact that women drive 70% to 80% of all consumer purchasing, and it’s pretty clear who spends the most.

Despite these figures, Nielsen estimates that less than 5% of advertising dollars are targeted to adults aged 35 to 64. According to the report, “Typically, once a group of consumers reaches the so-called ‘cut-off’ age of 49, marketers ‘go back to go,’” the report says.

“Most of the female baby boomers feel as if marketers don’t really understand them, and they’re not making a really strong, concerted effort to speak to them as an individual,” says Dave Austin, managing director of marketing agency Influent50, a division of AARP Services. Austin puts the portion of advertising dollars targeted to those 50 years and older at a marginally more encouraging 8%. “It’s slowly changing, but honestly we see both ends of the spectrum.”

The demographic of female baby boomers is itself a wide spectrum. An age range of 52 to 70 encompasses varying degrees of education, for example. The younger end of the range may be computer-savvy, while the older end is less compelled by digital outreach. For example, a MarketingSherpa Consumer Purchase Preference Survey found only 6% of women 65 years and older learn about new products from friends’ and family’s social media accounts, and 9% learn about new products from blog posts or other digital content from magazines and newspapers. The survey didn’t offer information on those between the ages of 35 and 65, but the Nielsen report suggests younger boomers must be using the web: the 50-plus segment spends almost \$7 billion online. The internet is also boomers’ primary source of intelligence when comparison shopping for major purchases.

“We consider them to be at the forefront of using technology for both information-gathering and shopping,” Austin says. “There’s this misnomer that boomers are not technology- or digital-savvy, which is just not true. They’re one of the first generations to use technology in every portion of their life, whether that



be looking for their retirement plan, helping a child find something for school or helping their parents manage through retirement and older age.”

This age range also includes a variety of caretakers: some are still caring for their own children, some have welcomed adult children back home and others are caring for their parents. Women of this generation are often amid a “mom-to-me” shift, the transition between caring for children and focusing on herself, which changes spending habits. “There are major changes in lifestyle that happen when you don’t have to devote all of your resources to the kids,” Barletta says, speaking on buying for the family’s needs versus buying for her own wants. “Now you can devote the resources to yourself again.”

While the female boomer may be defined by her age, the group includes variations in education, family management and economic status, to name only a few. They may also be better consumers than their male counterparts.

“Not hit as hard during the recession as men, boomer women in particular are reaching their peak career goals and earning potential in their 50s and 60s,” Girlpower Marketing CEO Linda Landers says. “Those that do retire often don’t stop working. Instead, they start their own consultancies or other businesses.”

MARKETING MISSTEPS

Statistically, it would appear that baby boomers are an obvious group at which to target marketing efforts, but there would be one major hurdle to that: the 18-to-34-

year-old demographic. This group, currently populated by the millennial generation, is the long-desired consumer. The only (rather major) problem is that they don’t have the spending cash.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows for the second quarter of 2016 that of the 4.995 million men in the workforce ages 20 to 24, the median weekly earning is \$516. Of the 15.59 million men in the workforce ages 25 to 34, the median weekly earning is \$791. In comparison, of the 8.66 million women in the workforce ages 55 to 64, the median weekly earning is \$795. Of the 1.72 million women in the workforce ages 65 and older, the median weekly earning is \$736.

On average, boomer women are making more than millennial men. This isn’t counting student loans, as The College Investor estimates the average millennial is saddled with loans valuing \$30,000. Plus, according to Landers, women older than 50 control an overall net worth of \$19 trillion.

Despite these figures, the marketing focus remains on the younger generation. “I agree that 18 to 34 is still the celebrated demographic,” says Denise Fedewa, Leo Burnett’s executive vice president and strategy director. “There’s both ageism in our culture and ageism in our profession of marketing. But some of it’s not even malicious ageism. Some of it is just, ‘I want my brand to feel young and modern and youthful, and the only way to do that is to be targeting it to the young and modern and youthful.’ But that’s simplistic thinking.”



Barletta echoes this, saying the focus on this younger demographic has blinded marketers to the fact that those actually making the most purchases are 50 and older. She gives the example of a recent campaign by a luxury hotel chain that featured a millennial male. The likelihood of someone his age being able to afford such a stay could be disputed, but she wonders whether marketers fear that showing a boomer means a millennial won't be interested.

"You market your product," Barletta says. "You don't market to the age group. Somehow people are convinced that if you're going to market to somebody who's 50 years old you have to say something about being 50 years old or older. They seem to believe that once you're 50, you live behind a wall, and you're completely different from other people in what you want from [products and services]."

The conversations about boomer women within agencies also may not be happening because women aren't always there. Only 11% of creative directors in the U.S. are women, according to The 3% Conference, so named for the number of female creative directors when the conference was launched in 2010.

"We could see more women in positions of authority in some of these creative industries and that would probably help," Fedewa says. "The female point of view is getting into the work, in terms of talking to boomer women, but that ageism is as big an issue as scarcity of female creative directors."

THE MYTHS OF THE BOOMER WOMAN

For a marketer to begin to understand the female boomer audience, certain misconceptions must be corrected. For instance: that she'll use the same brand of detergent she started using at age 28.

Barletta says there is a myth of brand loyalty surrounding female boomers, which may have been concocted when the market only consisted of a handful of brands. She says brand proliferation has completely changed the marketplace since the tenet of marketing established that once a brand snags a young customer, she is theirs for life.

"We do an annual study on marketing trends and the thoughts and feelings of boomers in general," Austin says. "Well over 80% of respondents said they're willing to try a new brand or new experience, and not just based on price."

He says his research suggests that more than 70% are willing to try a new brand, particularly if there's greater value. "And by value, it's not just a discount," he says. "They're willing to try a new brand if there's better customer service, as opposed to a better price."

Leading to the second myth: boomers are saving for retirement and are not looking to spend their money.

"That's another thing that marketers miss," Barletta says. "They assume that people in their 50s and 60s, why would they buy anything? They have a house, they have furniture, why would they buy anything? Because it's our turn now, not the kids'."

Austin explains that there is a perception that boomers are so-called “early bird specials shoppers,” looking for a deal and not out to spend. “That’s not the case. They’ve worked all their lives to save this money and to spend this money, and they’re looking for new experiences. They’ve lived their past 20 to 30 years raising their families, and now they’ve got—the empty-nesters in particular—time and the dollars to spend, and they’re looking for something new in their lives.”

As Barletta notes, the new purchases baby boomers make are often those items they “really” want, now that one of their prime roles is no longer caregiving. Perhaps they are looking to get rid of the minivan and purchase a sportier car, buy nicer furniture to update the house or purchase a new tech device.

One of the most common misconceptions of female baby boomers, or any boomer, is that they are the grandparents of yesteryear, wearing cardigans and sitting in rocking chairs as (literally and figuratively) the

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TRAVEL—Baby boomers have the time and the money to roam—plus most no longer have children begging, “Are we there yet?” According to AARP’s 2016 travel trends, 99% of its boomer survey respondents said they plan to travel this year. “I think the travel industry has recognized that the boomers really are their sweet spot,” says Influent50’s Dave Austin. “Eighty percent of all luxury travel is taken by [people 50 years and older], so they really cater to communicating to this crowd.” AARP’s travel website, which helps users book their trips, includes articles for solo female travelers, suggested “girlfriend getaways” and other female boomer-specific travel recommendations. Travel company VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations doesn’t specify that it markets to boomers on its website, but the photos clearly indicate their active demographic. VBT’s Gregg Marston told *The Huffington Post* that the company’s average traveler is 64 years old.

KITCHENWARE—Many baby boomers have voiced their interest in remaining in their own homes as they age. Kitchen companies are taking note of this via smart products—which are also cool to younger consumers—and universal design. By definition, universal design means products or places are inherently accessible to older people, as well as people with disabilities. The International Home + Housewares Show, held in March in Chicago, included a seminar called “Aging in Place” and a variety of universal design products. On the forefront of this trend is the OXO Good Grips brand, which was created by Sam Farber when he noticed his wife was having trouble comfortably holding her peeler due to arthritis.

PHARMACEUTICALS—“Pharmaceuticals know where their sweet spot is. They really cater to that crowd,” Austin says. “Some of their advertising really does a nice job of showing a true boomer—whether that be a male or female—in their real life.” Leo Burnett’s Denise Fedewa says the advertising for Pfizer’s Premarin vaginal cream is particularly authentic. “We’re not showing them as super women climbing the face of a rock and we’re not showing them as women who are sitting alone in their house with cats. We’re showing them as vibrant women participating in life—and isn’t that wonderful?”

COSMETICS & SKIN CARE—Before boomer women turned 50, only 31% of beauty-product use came from women 50 and older. As of 2013, that number increased to 44%, according to GfK MRI statistics. Dove caught a lot of attention (both positive and negative) for its 2007 Pro-Age Campaign featuring nude (yet covered) women in their 50s and 60s. More recently, L’Oreal signed 66-year-old Twiggy and 71-year-old Helen Mirren as brand ambassadors.

FASHION—Perhaps the most surprising industry on the list, the fashion world has begun to circle back to many of the women who first inspired it decades earlier. A 66-year-old Sissy Spacek is featured in Marc Jacobs’ fall 2016 campaign, joining other boomer women who have represented Jacobs, such as Cher, Bette Midler and Jessica Lange. *New York Magazine*’s spring 2015 fashion issue featured 71-year-old boomer icon Joni Mitchell. Even brands that are considered almost exclusively aimed at the millennial market are getting in on the game: H&M featured 60-year-old model and stylist Gilleen McLeod for its 2016 swimsuit campaign.

sun sets. “When boomer women were growing up, women in their 50s were very different than women in their 50s are now,” Barletta says. But marketers haven’t reset their templates for what these women look like. There are plenty of examples of female boomers that marketers can look to, including comedienne Ellen DeGeneres, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and entertainer Madonna.

In some cases, advertisers go in the opposite direction from showing female boomers as far older than they are, instead portraying them much younger. They sometimes show them engaged in extreme sports and other high-energy activities.

Both types of imagery wind up being incompatible with how many boomers see themselves, says Fedewa. “It’s like they’re either showing them as a feeble person who’s no longer relevant, or you’re showing them as this uber-in-shape person who can do what a 25-year-old can do,” she says. “That’s not relevant, and that doesn’t resonate with people, either. Those are some of the clichés we need to overcome.”

REDISCOVERING A FAVORITE CONSUMER

For many years, advertisers were enamored with female boomers. Crisco sought teenage boomer girls in the 1960s to convince their mothers to use Crisco cooking oil. In the 1970s, Ivory suggested young boomer women could keep their skin looking soft with the company’s dishwashing liquid. The generation learned not to leave home without their American Express in the 1980s.

“Today’s 50-plus females are the healthiest, wealthiest, most active and influential generation of women in history,” Landers says. “Unlike the generation before them, they wield unprecedented buying power and influence. But with that buying power, they expect the same level of attention from advertisers and marketers that they grew accustomed to in their youth, but are no longer getting. And that’s why 91% of women say they feel marketers don’t understand them.”

In addition to boomer women’s spending power, this group also holds an enormous opportunity

Where to Market to Boomer Women

According to the Pew Research Center, 38% of daily newspaper readers are ages 55 to 64, while 50% are older than 65. People 50 years and older watch the most television, Nielsen reports. Many of the top 20 magazines in the U.S., according to May data from Statista, have significant female boomer audiences:

People: (No. 2 with a reach of 77.5 million people) 73% of the audience are women, and 32% of the audience are baby boomers.

Better Homes & Gardens: (No. 6 with a reach of 48.12 million) 81% of its readers are women, median age is 51.5.

Time: (No. 7 with a reach of 45.52 million) 48% of its readers are women, median age is 50.

AARP: (No. 8 with a reach of 44.78 million) AARP breaks down its readers by age bracket, but 59% of its 50-to-69-year-old audience is women.

Good Housekeeping: (No. 13 with a reach of 30.2 million) 88.3% of readers are women, median age is 57.4.

Country Living: (No. 15 with a reach of 27.14 million) 77% of readers are women, median age is 54.4.

Reader's Digest: (No. 16 with a reach of 25.01 million) 63% of readers are women, median age is 57.

Bon Appetit/Epicurious: (No. 17 with a reach of 24.3 million) 74.6% of *Bon Appetit* readers are women, median age is 50.94.

Woman's Day: (No. 19 with a reach of 22.26 million) 96% of readers are women, median age is 56.6.



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for marketers across categories such as luxury goods, consumer technology and financial services, Landers says. The trick is knowing how, exactly, to speak to the audience.

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Landers says boomers see themselves as a decade or more younger than they actually are, so she cautions against referring to them as golden, mature or senior. She recommends using the appropriate imagery, which means showing boomer women pursuing their own interests, not just appearing as part of a couple. Landers adds that marketers looking to target women should be authentic, relevant and transparent. She also recommends using a boomer woman’s peers. “Peer influencers have a much greater impact than young celebrities,” she says.

Girlpower Marketing offered an example in its report on the power of speaking directly to boomer women. The Dove “Campaign for Real Beauty,” launched by Unilever in 2004, featured women of all shapes, ages and races. Within the first two months of the campaign’s launch, product sales rose 600% in the U.S.

Conversely, there may be ways to reach the female boomer without specifically naming her or featuring her image. Fedewa ran LeoShe, a Leo Burnett effort that focused on marketing to women 45 years and older. The study found that women took pride in their wisdom, experience and in feeling good about their current phase in life.

“Yes, it would be nice for society and culture to acknowledge boomers a little more, show them a little more inclusively, to include them in visuals and so on,” she says. “But there are also certain universal insights, certain formative times in your life, that people have. They continue to be able to relate to those experiences for the rest of their lives. I don’t want to say the only way to appeal to boomers is to show boomers or to portray insights about boomers, because sometimes it’s just human experience insights that will resonate with them, too.”

Landers explains it by way of the strong right-brain connections women have. This, she says, is the home of emotional memory, intuition and experience, so marketers should tell boomer women a story and explain why the brand is relevant to them.

These women know who they are and what they want, and they do not appear interested in letting marketers define their demographic for them. A common theme of AARP is to disrupt aging. As Austin explains it, this is particularly about disrupting the perception of what it means to age. “Get rid of the stereotypes,” Austin says. “There is some advertising out there that puts boomers and women in such a negative light that it’s going to actually hurt their brand and acquisition efforts.”

Fedewa says much of her work at Leo Burnett has considered the voice of the female consumer and the older consumer, and she also espouses the idea of changing the story. “We feel really energized by this opportunity to change the conversation,” she says. “We have almost taken it on as a mission for ourselves.” 