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Market Analysis of Apparel Preferences and Consumer Satisfaction of Female Baby Boomers in Canada

Jenelle Sparado
Ryerson University

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MARKET ANALYSIS OF APPAREL PREFERENCES AND CONSUMER SATISFACTION OF

FEMALE BABY BOOMERS IN CANADA

By

Jenelle Spadaro

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Market Analysis of Apparel Preferences and Consumer Satisfaction of Female Baby

Boomers in Canada

Jenelle Spadaro 2012

Master of Arts, Faculty of Fashion, University of Ryerson

Abstract

The study investigated the consumer behaviors, shopping patterns, and consumer

satisfaction of female baby boomers. With a specific focus on the Canadian retail market,

the study first surveyed women born between the years of 1946 and 1964 to obtain market

research and data that will further aid in a smaller focus group. As boomers enter into their

fifties and sixties, there is a growing disconnect between what a boomer wants and what is

available to them on the market. The study provides strategies for product sourcing by

determine what fit, fabrics, and styles of clothing that boomer women want, and whether

or not they are satisfied with what is available to them on the market. The results are

beneficial to both consumer and retailer in understanding clothing preferences.

Keywords: Baby boomer, clothing, buying behavior

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to participate in my research.

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"Boomers were the first generation of consumers to demand individual attention by marketers based on their behavior, personal preferences, and desire for self-actualization"

(Ferguson and Brohaugh 80)

Introduction

In 1958, members of the "baby boom generation" began entering into their teenage years. They were unhappy with the clothing choices offered to them, and the market responded by creating a billion-dollar industry: junior apparel (Harris 137). Previously a young woman could either dress in children's clothing or transition directly into womenswear. This may have been the first instance when the boomer generation greatly affected the apparel industry, but it was not the last: the baby boom demographic has had the greatest impact on marketing of any generation in recent history, even demonstrating that they have the ability to redefine the meaning of age. Just as the term "teenager" did not exist until the late 1950s, the term "older consumer" in fact did not exist until the baby boomers began to enter late adulthood (Szmigin and Carrigan 2010). Within the next ten years, the baby boom generation will comprise 35% of the total population, making them a continuing force to be reckoned with (Thomas and Peters 2009).

Born between years of 1946 and 1964, the baby boomers comprise one of the most influential markets in history. With a spending power that exceeds one trillion annually and a population of 77 million in the United States, their sheer numbers and economic potential require that marketers and retailers supply products that meet their needs (Howarton and Lee 2010). In fact, a study by Russell (1997) found that the

45 to 54 year-old consumer category is the most economically secure group, spending 17% more per capita than average, while the second most secure is the 55 to 64 market, spending 15% above average. Yet even with such a strong economic influence, the baby boomers have been mostly neglected in recent years, earning them the nickname "the forgotten generation" by marketers that have targeted younger age cohorts (Reisenwitz 2007 and Kwon 2010). Female baby boomers in particular report that they experience a general frustration in finding desirably styled clothing in the fashion retail industry (Howarton and Lee 2010). Peters et al. (2011) found similar results, as baby boomer women in their study believed that they were spurned by a fashion industry obsessed with youth. Birtwistle (2005) also studied mature female customers, and found that boomer women wanted to be fashion conscious, but felt that there was a general lack of high-street retailers that provided clothing that met their needs. The population is experiencing a shift where, for the first time in history, the older-aged cohorts will exceed those of the younger. It is crucial that retailers understand the changing needs of the baby boom market in order to meet the needs of the population with the largest numbers and greatest disposable income.

As stated above, baby boomer women in particular feel that the fashion retail industry is not meeting their needs. As these women enter into their fifties and sixties it is surprising that the fashion industry has chosen not to follow them and has instead stayed focused on those in the "thirty something" demographic. This has caused a disconnect between what a boomer woman wants and what is flattering for her to wear. In the year 2000, women 45 to 54 years old spent an average of $2 371 per year on clothes, a figure that is 15% higher than the amount spent by the 25- to 34-year-old

demographic (Harris 142). By retaining a strong focus on youthful apparel, the fashion

industry has moved away from the needs of one of the largest commercially viable

markets in history.

With a specific focus on the Canadian retail market, this study contributes

thorough and accurate information on what boomer women feel is missing in the retail

market. The study presents strategies for product sourcing to determine what fit,

fabrics, and styles of clothing boomer women want, explores whether or not they are

satisfied with what is available to them on the market and, finally, suggests how the

fashion industry can use this knowledge to reach the boomer market. According to

Howarton, boomer lifestyle is identified by "careers, leisure activities, child-rearing

issues, socio-economic and educational levels, and community involvement" (222).

The purpose of this study was to determine female baby boomer consumer satisfaction

with their apparel through analyzing lifestyle attributes to styles, fit, and quality of

fabrics in the market. This market research will add to information regarding the

Canadian fashion retail market that may effectively increase sales, consumer loyalty,

and overall customer satisfaction for retailers.

Statement of Purpose

The study provides retailers and consumers valuable and applicable data by

identifying what affects boomers' apparel choices, what qualities they are looking for in

their apparel, and the overall satisfaction they feel with the current fashion retail

industry. The needs of boomer women are not being reached through both marketing

and product quality and fit (Harris 2003). This study identifies what is needed in the

fashion retail market to fill this void by answering the following questions:

Q1: Are boomer women satisfied with what is currently being provided in the fashion retail market? What are their buying behaviors in this market?

Q2: What are the most important qualities boomer women look for in their clothing?

Q3: What are the factors that affect the needs and wants influencing boomer women's apparel choices?

Review of Literature

Baby Boomer Demographics

As an age cohort, the baby boomers have been extensively researched in terms of demographics. Defined as individuals born between the years of 1946 and 1964, the baby boomers are currently either in their late forties or in their fifties and sixties (Reisenwitz 202). The cohort comprises 35% of the total population and is identified as having "higher education, independent sources of income, and access to the Internet" (Thomas 1019). The formative years for boomers involved "economic progress, and advances in education, science and employment" (Moore 324). Female baby boomers in particular are a byproduct of a culture and time that was shaped by the women's movement, the advent of birth control, and higher educational attainment, which led to a stronger sense of empowerment compared to previous generations (Howarton and Lee 220). All of these factors contribute to the influence of this cohort on the consumer goods market.

Roberts and Manolis (2000) researched the historical circumstances in which the baby boom generation grew up in order to understand their attitudes towards marketing, advertising and consumerism. Their study showed that the expansive nature of the baby boom population ensured that the attitudes and values affiliated with them would greatly influence other generations as they age (Roberts 482). This only reiterates the importance of understanding the boomer market, as it suggests that their needs will shape the needs of younger generations. The Roberts and Manolis study also increases one's understanding of the social and political factors that shaped the cultural viewpoints of the baby boomers, such as neo-liberalism. The study states

that boomers were raised to be independent and control their own destinies (Roberts 483). Throughout the 1960s, they were taught not to trust authority; however the same independent ideal led them to be obsessed with success and material possessions in the neo-liberal 1980s.

Similar to Roberts (2000), the studies conducted by both Reisenwitz (2007) and Kwon (2009) use historical circumstances to understand market trends involving the baby boomer demographic. Unlike Roberts's study, both Reisenwitz and Kwon segment the baby boomers into two age cohorts under the theory that the cohort effect causes baby boomers to be like-minded because they have been addressed their entire lives as an undifferentiated group. The studies divide the cohort to prove that there are very different circumstances that baby boomers were raised in that affected their behavior. Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007) identify the first cohort of boomers as those born between 1946 and 1955, and they refer to this group as the Vietnam Group. The individuals from this cohort are identified as being influenced by the Vietnam War and subsequent human-rights movements. Because of these experiences they are highly individualistic and driven to succeed, but they also maintain a relationship with their society. The other age cohort is referred to as the "Me Group," and it is comprised of baby boomers born between the years 1956 and 1965. These individuals were raised during the Reagan years and experienced the advent of new technologies, which caused them to be well educated and to have extremely high expectations for their lives. Their main focus in life is more individualistic, as they balance work and family in order to succeed.

Kwon and Noh (2009) and Dychtwald (1997) noted that as boomers age it becomes more and more detrimental to view them as a homogenous group, as the "needs and interests of this market are projected to be more heterogeneous than ever" (336). Mumel and Prodnik (2005) found that it was more beneficial to remove cohort segmentation and instead segment the baby boomer population by asking two questions, namely "Are you retired or employed?" and also "Are you socially active" (445). Using historical analysis and market segmentation, previous studies have developed a solid understanding of how baby boomers' attitudes were shaped in their formative years.

The study by Dychtwald (1997) also segmented the baby boomer demographic by stating that the best group for marketers to target is the late adulthood demographic (50-64). This is because they often have mature children, a house with higher value than when they purchased it, and the highest disposable income of any other age group. The increase in life expectancy in the 20th century has made for a "healthier, more vital and active" individual (Mumel 435). Therefore the needs of this particular demographic, paired with their economic potential, makes them the best age cohort to target.

Baby Boomer Economic Power and Income

The attribute of the baby boomer market that is most appealing to the fashion industry is its members' high disposable incomes. According to Rozhon (2004), "Forty percent of women aged 45-54 are employed in a managerial occupation and are spending $23.3 billion dollars a year on professional apparel to maintain their appearance" (C1). Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007) define the baby boomer as an above

average socioeconomic group that is two times as likely as the average person to earn over $50 000 annually and it is estimated that they have "$5000 to $10 000 more annually in disposable income to spend once the children leave the home" (202). Even as the boomer women age beyond their fifties, it is crucial to understand their needs as they still find their personal appearance crucial to their self concept. Thomas (2009) looked into the lifestyle and apparel choices of women over the age of 65 and found that these women are spending "a relatively large amount on apparel consumption and almost 30% report that they are fashion conscious" (1019). Even as baby boomers move into the senior demographic, one can predict that "seniors will become even more affluent and spend twice as much as previous generations" (Thomas 1019). By targeting the demographic through marketing and product development the fashion retail market could profit greatly.

Changing Household of the Boomer Demographic

The boomer generation is also distinct in its household composition. Dychtwald (1997) explains that for the first time society is becoming comprised of mostly a mature and middle-aged population. He has also made note of the fact that for the first time society is experiencing a decrease in the youth population as "28% of the baby boom population have no children, and another 25% have only one [child]" (Dychtwald 271). Many boomers have never married or become single later in life. A study conducted by Stern et al. found that baby boom singles are focused on social self-image, age identification, and the nature and frequency of leisure activities. The author calls these boomers the "social seekers" (Stern 7). This is a lifestyle group within the demographic that is socially oriented and more inclined to care about public image and

fashion leadership. Members of this group also care more than average about dining, travel, and entertainment. However North Americans are not comfortable leaving youth culture behind as the majority of its members enter late adulthood. This paradox is centered on Western culture's tendency to be gerontophobic, which is the pervasive fear of aging and the overall prejudice against the elderly (Dychtwald 272). Even though culture favors youth, baby boomers can no longer be ignored by the fashion industry, as they are redefining the 50-plus market to be more socially active and fashion conscious.

There is also evidence that baby boomers are more interested than any previous cohort in luxury items. According to Szmigin (2010), individuals in late adulthood are major consumers of luxury products such as vacations, automobiles, and alcohol. Furthermore, "Over 55s are 48% more likely to spend their day shopping, and are 14% more likely to eat out than other adults" (Szmigin 506). This data implies that the baby boomer's lifestyle is social and involves shopping as a leisure activity.

Cognitive Age

Because baby boomers are redefining the ageing process, studies have sought to understand the changing perception of age. Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007) differentiate cognitive age from chronological age, defining cognitive age as a "self perceived age that may contribute more than chronological age in understanding how older consumers view themselves and how they consume" (204). Younger cognitive age leads to an avoidance of products that are marketed as for the old or the elderly. Reisenwitz refers to this as "self-defense against ageing" (204). Chronological age "is merely one of the important variables that should be used to describe a market

segment" (Thomas 1019). More important than chronological age is cognitive or perceived age. As the body ages, women in their fifties see themselves as ten to twenty years younger and "accordingly reject labels and negative stereotypes associated with being elderly" (Thomas 1021). Birtwistle and Tsim (2005) found that baby boomers' cognitive age was one decade less than their chronological age and that "old age officially commenced when a person reached 70-80" (458). Dychtwald (1997) also looked into how the definition of "old age" will be redefined, as most boomers already see old age as 79 while they believe that old age started for their parents at fifty (274). The perception of age will change drastically within the next few years. Since purchasing patterns have less to do with chronological age and more to do with the changing attitude towards ageing, the understanding of cognitive age reflects directly on awareness of consumers' fashion interest, as fashion behavior and the consumer are directly related to perception of self (Reisenwitz 205).

As Harris (2003) states, "Boomers can't grow up because they see age as a lifestyle choice rather than a chronological imperative and they choose to stay young" (6). What this means for retailers is that the boomer market is defined by their interests, careers, and lifestyle and cannot be grouped purely by age. Regardless of age, the cognitively young are ushering in a new definition of "elderly," one that holds more self confidence, is open to change, and is willing to experience new things (Szmigin and Carrign 2010). Therefore the new elderly are more open to try new products and brands. Women from 35 to 64 share the same wants within the market, this amounts to 53.6 million women in the United States market, or 51% of female

shoppers (Harris 141). The key for retailers is to adapt to a specific lifestyle within the market and target lifestyle, not age.

Body Perception

Studies such as Clarke et al. (2009) and Birtwistle and Tsim (2005) have looked into clothing as an important means of age differentiation. Clothing is closely tied to how one socially constructs old age. Clothing is integral in managing the stigma of old age as "an older woman may experience her physical appearance as bodily capital that is discredited if physical markers of age are readily visible, and 'discreditable' if the markers exist but are not immediately apparent to the observer" (Clarke 711). The theory is based on the relationship between dress and identity, mainly that an "individual self and the identities this self incorporates are linked to the position the individual is assigned to or achieves within social structure" (Roach-Higgins 5). Clothing is used as a means of differentiation and society defines what is appropriate and what is inappropriate for different age groups.

The definition of "elderly dress" is being redefined as the boomers are entering into late adulthood. Clothing choices can be used as a strategic decision to mask changes that occur to the body. Birtwistle and Tsim (2005) found that the "mature shopper is looking for styles with sleeves, high necklines, skirts that are at least 20 inches long, trousers and skirts with a more generous fit around the waist and loose fitting jackets that cover the top of the thighs" (457). Howarton and Lee (2010) looked into how women use clothing to highlight or detract their features as they age. They found that color choices and layering techniques were used by the majority to add or detract from parts of their bodies (Howarton 225). Howarton also asked what body

part they would like to hide when naked and an overwhelming amount (90.4%) said

their stomachs. Clarke et al. (2009) looked at clothing choices for women in later life

and found similar results, as the respondents used clothing as a "strategic means for

masking or compensating for changes that had occurred in their bodies over time"

(716). In fact the respondents defined mature clothing choices mainly in terms of how

much of the body was revealed by their apparel in comparison to the clothing of

younger generations. For female baby boomers, clothing choices are more strategic in

that their clothes are used to accentuate features and empower the individual at the

level of the body. Their clothing options have the ability to remove the stereotypical

view of elderly women as frail while still maintaining a socially constructed norm of

how one should dress late in life.

Shopping Behavior

As previously discussed, women's preferences in their clothing have less to do

with their chronological age and more to do with their lifestyle choices. Their lifestyle

is usually defined by their career, their child-rearing status, education levels,

community involvement and leisure activities (Howarton 222). To further elaborate

on activities that interest baby boomer women, Thomas and Peters (2009) found that

the majority of respondents spoke of activities that were centered around home life,

mainly "reading, gardening, cooking, decorating, and being with grandchildren" (1029).

The same study also found that individuals in mature adulthood identified eating out in

restaurants as an important social activity, as the majority of their respondents "eat

out three or more times per week" (Thomas 1029).

When making apparel decisions in store, various factors affected the purchase choices of this cohort. Moore et al. (2008) and Mumel (2005) both found that female baby boomers are more likely than any other age cohort to respond positively to quality when making a decision about their apparel purchases. According to Moore (2008) and Prodnik (2005), the baby boomer age cohort is the most "price conscious and the least prestige sensitive" (332). This means that while female baby boomers are willing to spend more of their apparel dollars if the garment meets their quality standard, they will not spend frivolously nor will they buy according to trend. Moore and Prodnik's solution is to target the market with convenience and value strategies.

Conversely other studies such as Myers (2008) state that ambience and personal relationships are increasingly important to the boomers when shopping for fashion apparel. The environment should be committed to service and inclusive to all adults, not just a specific age group, as boomers do not like being defined by age. Most importantly, the products must be of a high quality, as boomers were raised to understand and seek out value and quality. As stated above, these women are redefining fifty; they are looking for durable fabrics, quality, on-trend silhouettes and colors that will accommodate their lifestyle. Female baby boomers want to be fashionable, comfortable, and on trend but are hesitant to allow trends to dictate their lifestyles. Instead the population wants clothing that accompanies their unique and heterogeneous lifestyles.

Studies by Peters et al. (2011) and Thomas (2009) examined why boomer women decide where to shop, and found that baby-boomer women either view themselves as relational or individualistic. These two market segments have different

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attributes that greatly affect their fashion and clothing choices. Defined by Peters et al. (2011), relational baby boomers define themselves "with respect to social roles and bonds" (301). Individualists identified themselves with respect to "unique traits and characteristics of their identity" (Peters et al. 301).

Unlike Mumel (2005), Peters describes the relational market segment as less price-conscious than the individualists, with less fashion leadership. They respond more to brand loyalty, and are more cognizant of brands when purchasing apparel. Furthermore Thomas and Peters (2009) found that the collective/relational senior females consumed certain types of apparel that followed socially acceptable codes of dress.

Contrary to relational boomers, the individualists are less brand conscious, have a more individual sense of style, are more aware of price and quality, and are involved more with fashion in their daily lives. These individuals, like younger generations, have unique fashion identities that impact their consumer behavior. Thomas and Peters (2009) asked about fashion advice and inspirations in their study on self-concept and senior women. The study found a divide between the responses, as some individuals identified their sense of self as inspiration for their fashion choices whereas others said that family and friends have a significant impact on their choices, stating that "they copy the behaviors of the fashion-conscious members of their social network" (Thomas 1031). The results of this study reiterate the findings of Peters et al. (2011) as baby boomer women either cohere to their relational selves or are secure with their individualist identities, and these attitudes in turn impact and shape their fashion choices. The findings of these studies are similar to Clarke et al. (2009) who

concluded that there is a tension between what baby boomer women will freely choose as apparel options and "the degree to which their apparel choices are determined by social norms and ageism in consumer culture" (724).

Myers and Lumbers (2008) also looked into market segmentation and conceptualized variations on baby boomers in terms of their shopping patterns. The typologies of older shoppers consisted of four unique groups: targeted shoppers, shopaholics, leisure shoppers, and reluctant shoppers. The targeted shopper group, which consisted mostly of men, is characterized by individuals who shop alone at specialty stores for specific items (Myers 297). Shopaholics shop whenever they can, as they find it to be a relaxing experience that is shared by family and friends (Myers 297). Leisure shoppers are mostly female, and are often targeted shoppers but enjoy shopping occasionally as a leisure activity that is accompanied by friends and dining (Myers 297). Finally there is the reluctant shopper, who understand the social aspects of shopping but will mostly only shop when necessary, using the Internet or catalogues as a means to purchase their apparel (Myers 297). The study did reveal that there is a strong focus on socializing and shopping for mature adults, mainly females. The information provided by Myers, Peters, and Thomas suggests that market segmentation within the baby boomer demographic can be utilized by retailers in developing strategies to meet the needs of the specific typologies through store ambience, service, and product assortment.

Other studies (Moody 2010) suggest that focusing on sustainability and ethical practices can greatly influence where baby boomers choose to shop and what they buy. The baby boom generation is one that grew up amidst social change and uncertainty.

They grouped together to create movements that directly created change, such as the women's rights movement. Moody's (2010) discussion on the ageing population and the environmental crisis is of particular importance to the fashion industry, and marketing to baby boomers. According to Moody, "The human species will need to make enormous changes in response to global warming, species extinction, and other environmental threats" (70). The ageing population see themselves as gatekeepers of the future. They see things in a much larger perspective than any other demographic, and with a larger disposable income they will be willing to spend more to ensure that future generations are environmentally aware. Boomers are focusing on the ethical sourcing of products, and the environmental impact of their garments (Moody 71). While society usually looks to youth for future trends the importance of sustainability and its growing importance in the eye of the consumer lies in the boomer generation.

Another factor affecting baby boomer shopping behavior is loyalty marketing programs. Ferguson and Brohaugh (2010) researched the importance of loyalty marketing in the retail apparel industry. Loyalty marketing involves retailer-developed incentive programs directed at maintaining the "capital of the baby boomers" (Ferguson 76). The popularity of loyalty marketing amongst the baby boomers demographic led them to become known as the "Loyalty Marketing Generation" (Ferguson 79).

The biggest mistake the market could make is to change the message to baby boomers just because they have hit retirement age. For the past twenty years there has been a focus on the 20- to 49-year-old age bracket, but what is often overlooked is that baby boomers hit their spending peak at 54 (Ferguson 78). Boomers are planning

to work at least twenty hours a week past the age of 67 in order to "live well" (Ferguson 78). If these projections come to fruition, spending patterns of the baby boomers will reflect middle-aged behavior for a longer period of time than has been the case for previous generations.

Other studies have focused on where female baby boomers are shopping for apparel by looking at the main reasons consumers shop at particular stores, their experiences with apparel, their brand loyalty, and the information that is important to them when making a decision about buying apparel. Fit is integral to the shopping experience; Howarton's study revealed that "if a garment did not fit in the store, respondents were not likely to request alterations" and would rather take their business elsewhere (227). Studies by Peters et al. (2011), Thomas (2009), and Birtwistle (2005) all found that women over the age of fifty are interested in fashion, want to be fashionable, and are willing to pay more apparel dollars on clothing that satisfies their unique needs. Mumel and Prodnik (2005) divided their sample in terms of employment and social activity. They found that retired individuals shop for clothing less often than employed individuals and the employed, and that socially active employees will spend more on apparel than their socially inactive counterparts (Mumel 440). Mumel and Prodnik also found that their respondents preferred the service of "small independent shops or shopping centers and were less likely to shop on the Internet or consignment stores" (439). Within the study's most viable market, the employed socially active baby boomer, they found that these individuals are willing to make long-distance trips to buy clothing, favoring style over convenience, and they are more inclined to buy classic and fashionable clothing that boosts their self esteem

(Mumel 443). In addition, socially inactive employees (the second most viable market) are more likely to favor comfort and low price over trend and style. This does not mean that retired baby boomers are not commercially viable, but only that their needs and wants are very different, as they wear the same clothing for many years and rely greatly on the advice of sales associates for their choices (Mumel 443). There is a great difference among baby boomers with respect to the importance of price, service, and fashionability, which is why studying their unique needs and wants is greatly important to retailers.

When asked about the actual preferences boomer women have in clothing, Howarton and Lee (2010) found that their respondents valued care instructions (82.5%), fabric content (75.5%) and finally the construction of the garment (56.8%) as main reasons for purchasing a garment. Fabric care and fabric content were also important in the decision, as fabric quality is identified as extremely important to the female baby boomer (Howarton and Lee) compared to the younger generations. When purchasing a piece of clothing, female baby boomers are more likely (71% versus 17%) to check the fabric content label than younger cohorts (Howarton 222). Respondents of Howarton's study also identified clothing styles they preferred to wear. The most popular clothing styles were "slacks and a blouse, while 71.6% opted for jeans and a t-shirt…followed by jeans and a blouse" (226). Of these respondents, an overwhelming 91.3% preferred apparel that was comfortable followed by those who preferred their apparel to fit well (79.9%) and finally those who wanted their clothing to be flattering to their figures (76.9%) (Howarton 226). Overall the female baby boomer is looking for comfort, fit, and flattering silhouettes when shopping for their apparel.

Methodology

Population and Sample

  The study focused on women of the baby boomer generation living in Toronto. A convenience, non-probability sample was collected of 55 individuals who were female and born between the ages of 1946 and 1964. The sample was gathered from within the Ryerson University faculty and staff. An email was sent to female Ryerson faculty and staff asking that the individuals that met the criteria of the study consent to an online survey. The main criteria of the population was that they were female and between the ages of 46 and 64. Using Reisenwitz (2007) study, the population was divided on the survey by the "Me Group," those aged 46-55 and the "Vietnam Group," those aged 56-64. The researcher further divided the "Vietnam Group" into two sections: 56-59 and 60-64. The researcher did this to examine if there was any differences in consumer preferences as the individual entered/approached retirement age.

  The same population was revisited for the focus group. Quota sampling was used to ensure that the group was "broadly reflective of the population of interest, or will provide an array of market views" (Seale 199). The focus group sample consisted of five individuals that represented the broad descriptors of the baby boom generation with respect to age, marital status, and body type. The researcher felt that five individuals was enough to ensure that the focus group could be successfully directed through open conversation about the topic while still maintaining the "demographic of interest" (Seale 199).

Instruments Used

A mixed methods approach was used in order to obtain data to address the research question from numerous perspectives (Seale 294). The mixed methods approach also assisted in triangulation, which meant that by combining two methods of data collection the results could be crosschecked for consistency while reducing bias (Seale 297). The first method was a social survey that employed structured research questions and self-completion questionnaires (Seale 165). It was chosen in order to obtain the largest coverage without incurring a large cost (time and travel), to reduce the possibility of bias from an interviewer, and to facilitate anonymity (Seale 166). An online survey generator was used to ensure anonymity. The reason for collecting the sample from the Ryerson community rather than the general population was to increase the chances that the survey would be returned, as the academic community has an invested interest in furthering knowledge (Seale 166). Consent was sent with the survey in an email so that the participant knew that by following the link to the website they were consenting to the questionnaire (see appendix a). A focus group of five women was gathered in order to explore the formation of accounts of styles, fit, quality of fabrics, and selection in the fashion retail market. A focus group assists in determining socially produced attitudes, as they are shaped through interactions (Seale 194).

The focus group's data was collected through note taking that was later cross-referenced against the survey data and then analyzed (Seale 195). Once the participants were recruited for the focus group written consent was given to them and verbally read to them before they signed the form (see appendix b). Discussion took

place to determine how satisfied boomer women were with their shopping options and also what they felt was needed in order to meet their needs. The focus group provided another aspect of the account of female boomer opinions of the fashion apparel market. The findings were crosschecked against information found from the survey to increase validity.

How the data was collected and analyzed

The data was collected through emailing the link to an online survey to female-dominated departments at Ryerson University, located in Toronto. The survey was once piloted and subsequently modified to ensure clarity and an estimated completion time of 10 minutes was obtained. The survey was divided into three categories (see appendix c). The first category involved demographics and lifestyle choices. It was based on Howarton's (2010) framework for lifestyle, and was coded based on age, marital status, education, employment, income and household income, retirement plans, and leisure activities. The first section included structured questions that were asked in order to develop a better understanding of the individual respondent's place in the market.

The second section of the survey involved consumer satisfaction questions for female baby boomers about the retail apparel industry. These questions explored participants' satisfaction with fit, ease of care, fabric, trends, and more specifically respondent's satisfaction with specific styles of clothing like formal bottoms and casual tops. The second section of the survey utilized Likert scales to indicate how much respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to attitudes towards the shopping experience (Allen 64). The Likert scale ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating

either 'not satisfied' or 'not important' and 5 indicating 'very satisfied' or 'very important'.

The third part of the survey asked questions based on consumer shopping behavior. Respondents were asked questions relating to where female baby boomers buy their clothing, fashion leadership, brand loyalty, sustainable practices, and how individuals spend their apparel dollars. Likert scales were utilized to mirror section two for clarity, with the scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating 'not important' and 5 indicating 'very important'. The final questions regarding how individuals spend their apparel dollars were closed, structured questions that were coded with 'often' indicating once or more a week, 'somewhat often' indicating once or more a month, and 'not often' indicating once or more a year.

The second part of the research involved a focus group of five individuals from the survey sample that gave further social input to the discussion of boomer females' attitudes towards fashion apparel. The information that was gathered was triangulated with the data from the survey. A semi-structured topic guide (see appendix d) was used to direct the discussion and reflected the main topics of the survey (Seale 194). The discussion involved lifestyle, spending habits, preferred cuts, and quality of fabrics. The focus group discussion also involved visual cues of sourced silhouettes with descriptions of cuts, fabrics, and price delivered to the group by means of a PowerPoint presentation. Perceived reactions were documented.

The first topic of the focus group was based on survey results, mainly identifying the activities that survey respondents had stated were important to them, such as vacationing, athletics, and dining. Discussion followed on whether or not the

individuals found their clothing options suitable for the activities ranked highest on the survey. There were also questions relating to what the women preferred to wear on a daily basis. These questions were intended to generate discussion regarding clothing preferences in preparation for the more specific discussion in part two.

The second part of the focus group involved presenting visual stimuli based on the results of the survey to determine which silhouettes the female baby boomers found pleasing. The researcher collected images of varying silhouettes from an online trend-forecasting website. The images were grouped into three categories: trousers, skirts, and tops. The respondents were asked to identify which silhouettes they would be likely to purchase and explain why they made their decisions. The third topic involved shopping behavior – mainly the importance of personal appearance, the importance of dependants to the shopping experience, and what the participants found pleasing in their shopping experience. The findings were triangulated for accuracy against the survey data.

Results

Demographic Information

The demographics of the survey respondents suggested that they were primarily living in middle-class households. Of the 55 respondents of the survey, the majority (69%) were married. Of the remainder, 14% were divorced, 6% had never married, and 1% were separated. The respondents had high levels of education, with 21% having a university degree, 13% a college degree, 9% a masters degree, and 6% a doctorate. The majority of the respondents (78%) were employed full time; the remaining 7% of respondents were employed part-time. Almost half (47%) had an income of between $60 000 - $100 000 and 41% had a household income exceeding $100 000. Both of these statistics are higher than the national average as on average individuals between the ages of 45-64 earn $44 798 annually and the average household income is $69 548 (Statistics Canada).

Baby Boomer Attitudes

The majority (50.9%) of respondents had plans to retire within the next five to ten years. Twenty-seven percent of individuals had no plans to retire. When asked how often the individuals spent money in the apparel market, most (50.9%) stated that they shopped "somewhat often" (once or more a month) followed by "not often" (47%). When asked what category of clothing the survey respondents would most likely identify their wardrobe as, most (54.5%) said "business casual" followed by "casual" (32.7%). Aside from work, the activities that influenced their apparel choices were mainly vacationing, dining, and sports or fitness activities (see table 1).

Table 1

What Activities Influence Apparel Choices	
Vacationing	27
Dining	21
Sports	19
Health/Wellness	16
Theatre/Cinema	11
Work	9
Volunteering	7
Childcare	6
Comfort	5
Elderly Parents	4
Grandchildren	3
Finding Unique Pieces	2
Pets	1

The respondents of the focus group did not indicate that they shopped for particular activities. In this instance the data from the survey and the findings from the focus group negated each other. They were constantly looking for versatile pieces that they could "dress up and down" (Participant B). The participants of the focus group stated that they would shop upwards of "three times a week" (Participant C). This did not necessarily mean that they would buy clothing three times a week, but rather found shopping an "emotional release" (Participant B) that they would do after a day at work. The participants stated that they were always looking for items that made them feel good, that were "fun, colorful, and casual" (Participant D). There was a focus on

multipurpose items and versatility in the discussion about what the participants shopped for. Their decision to purchase clothing was based on the clothing being comfortable and multipurpose, and were clothes that the participant generally felt looked good on her, and felt good.

Consumer Preferences

The results of the survey (see table 2) found that the most important factor in making a decision about what to buy was the fit of the garment (m=4.79). Second was the ease of care (m=4.41), followed by comfort and feel, and fabric content (m=4.2). Over half of the respondents considered the quality and the construction of the clothing "very important" (m=4.2) when making a decision about what clothing to purchase. Respondents aged 60-64 did not find ease of care as important (m=4) compared to the average (m=4.41). This could possibly be because the age group is approaching retirement and have more time to care for their clothing. Somewhat paradoxically, respondents said that both clothing trends and classic silhouettes were somewhat important when making decisions about what clothing to buy. Commonly these consumers were trend driven or purchased classic clothing.

The focus group was asked similar questions; however in the focus group, the main discussion involved clothing comfort. When asked about comfort there was a general agreement that the participants would not buy a garment unless the item was comfortable for them to wear. Comfortable clothing was first identified by fabric, mainly cool wools and lightweight natural fibers. Secondly, comfortable clothing was identified by silhouette, including clothing that skims the body and does not cling. Also necklines that "v" or cowl were preferred over other silhouettes because they did not

constrict the neck. As pointed out by respondent A, as boomer women age their bodies

"have more difficulty regulating temperature." As their body temperatures are subject

to sudden changes, it was important to the respondents that the fibers they wear allow

their bodies to breathe and that the silhouette of the garment not constrict the body.

Overall, participants agreed with subject D that comfort is not separate from style,

rather the two must come as a "package deal" when purchasing an item.

Table 2

Consumer Preferences	46-55	56-59	60-64	TOTAL
	m=			
How important is the fit of your clothing?	4.77	4.78	4.8	4.79
How important is the ease of care of your clothing?	4.54	4.36	4	4.41
How important is the comfort and feel of your clothing?	4.74	4.64	4.78	4.2
How important is the fabric content of your clothing?	4.16	4.36	4.22	4.2
How important is the quality of the construction of your clothing?	4.54	4.42	4.55	4.5
How important are clothing trends when making a decision of what clothing to buy?	3.42	3.14	3.11	3.48
How important are classic silhouettes when making a decision on what clothing to buy?	3.48	3.42	3.78	3.5

With 1 being not important and 5 being very important

The focus group participants were also asked how important timeless garments were to them, and whether or not they thought purchasing timeless pieces was important to them. Participants responded positively to the concept of timelessness, saying that they would invest more of their disposable income on an item if it was identified as timeless to them. Respondent A mentioned two coats of which she had replaced the lining twice, but said they were "still on trend" that she could "repurpose and remake" them by integrating fast fashion. Participant D associated classic with timelessness, stating that things such as a "class black jacket" are items that she would most likely invest in.

During the focus group it became evident that the participants liked to change their wardrobe on a constant basis. As Participant C said, "I get sick of my clothes," making purchasing timeless clothing less important. However upon further discussion it was determined that participants liked to purchase inexpensive trend pieces to integrate with pieces that they consider timeless. Moreover, boomer women are more likely to spend on an item of clothing that will last them forever. The participants defined timeless clothing as "something to wear for many years" and said that they would also "buy lower-end clothing to make it seem newer" (Participant A). In other words, baby boomer women are likely to combine quality, tailored clothing with trendy, inexpensive items in order to update the pieces that they had in their wardrobe a long time. If there are items of clothing they believe to be timeless baby boomer women will invest to ensure they get their wear out of the item.

Investing in Better Construction and Fabrics

The focus group participants found that they could easily identify better quality through fabric choices and construction of the garment. It became apparent that the individuals paid attention to details such as darting and lining which greatly affected their apparel choices. Participant C stated: "I am willing to pay more for better material. The fabric, cut, and construction are all important." They also indicated that there was a direct correlation between price point and fit, as the respondents felt that purchasing an expensive garment could be rationalized by better fit. This correlates to the findings of the survey, as both fabric content (m=4.2) and quality of construction (m=4.5) was found to be very important when making a decision about their apparel choices.

In the focus group, Participant B pointed out her particular dissatisfaction with plus-sized clothing stating that fabric choices and fit were a huge issue for her as the "print size, fabric, and length of the pant leg" were disproportionately oversized. The final issue mentioned with clothing choices was care instructions because the "expense of dry cleaning" (Participant C) would sway the decision away from purchasing a dry-clean-only garment. Overall, participants were looking for good-quality fabrics at the right price point. They wanted "good value" (Participant E) for their clothing choices that were easy to care for and comfortable to wear.

Clothing Choices and Satisfaction

Respondents of the survey were then asked to rate their satisfaction with clothing available to them in the market, categorizing the choices by bottoms and tops, then by casual and formal (see table 3). The results showed that women aged 56 to 59

were the least satisfied with the apparel choices in the market, especially casual tops (m=1.85), followed by formal bottoms (m=2.28) then casual bottoms (2.36) and finally formal tops (2.85). Their overall satisfaction was 15-33% less than the other age groups. The other age group that was somewhat satisfied with the clothing selection in the market was the 46-55 cohort. Their satisfaction ranged between m=2.9-3.15 amongst the different categories of clothing. Their overall satisfaction was exactly m=3, meaning that they were somewhat satisfied with their apparel selection in the market.

Table 3

Clothing Satisfaction	*46-55*	*56-59*	*60-64*	*Totals*
	m=			
How satisfied are you with the availability of casual pants, skirts, and other bottoms in the market?	2.9	2.36	3.89	3.2
How satisfied are you with the formal pants, skirts, and other bottoms in the market?	2.9	2.28	3.56	2.8
Are you satisfied with the casual tops you find in the market?	3.15	1.85	3.56	3.1
Are you satisfied with the formal tops you find in the market?	3.03	2.85	3.67	3.1
Overall how satisfied are you with the clothing available to you in the market?	3	2.57	3.89	3

With 1 being not satisfied and 5 being very satisfied

The age 60 to 64 cohort was on average the most satisfied group overall with what was available to them in the market (m=3.89). They were most satisfied with the casual pants offered to them (m=3.89) followed by formal tops (m=3.67), and then both casual tops and formal pants (m=3.56). Satisfaction with clothing then decreased between the ages of 46-55 and 56-59 and then increased from 60 to 64.

Based on the results of the survey, respondents found that overall they were somewhat satisfied (m=3) with what was available to them in the apparel market. They were most satisfied with the tops that were available to them (m=3.1) followed by the bottoms (m=3). The respondents of the survey were somewhat satisfied with their apparel choices, meaning that their needs are not fully being met in the market.

These findings were similar to that of the focus group, where the participants found that they were "somewhat satisfied" with what was available to them in the apparel market, noting elements of their wardrobe that were lacking. The main concerns that the participants had with their clothing choices included ill-fitting items and the need to cover their bodies without feeling like they were purchasing an "older-person's clothing" (Participant C). They expressed a desire to find clothing that "skimmed the body but did not cling" to them (Participant D). Participant A found that it was difficult to find dresses that covered her legs that had a more tailored fit. Participant B also added the importance of a sleeve as being a "function of the ageing process" and found her body was "changing in a different way from the clothing" that she preferred to wear. The main elements that the focus group participants looked for in their clothing were as follows:

a. Pants with a medium to high rise

b. Skirts, pants, and dresses that skimmed the body, showing their figure without being too clingy or baggy

c. Casual tops that did not cling to the mid-section

d. Lower necklines and layering pieces to accommodate the changes to their body temperature

The respondents did not use wording such as "trends" or "classic" to describe what they wanted in the market, rather the wording they used to describe their clothing was "fun and interesting" (Participant A) or "unique" (Participant C). The respondents of the survey were comfortable with the changes that were occurring with their bodies: they were happy with the way they looked, but found that these changes placed them in a category within the clothing retail market to which they did not relate. Participant C noted, "The general attitude of the fashion world has forgotten the 55 plus woman." The participants of the focus group wanted clothing that was not age-specific, but accommodated the natural changes to the female body as one ages.

Trouser and Skirt Satisfaction

The participants of the focus group were then asked to look at a group of trousers (see fig. 1) and a group of skirts (see fig. 2) and determine which silhouettes they preferred. They noted that "finding pants that accommodate thighs" (Participant A) and "the proportions of the pants on the leg" (Participant B) are the two main factors they consider when buying trousers. The participants wanted a pant that looked good and had style, but could also maintain its shape, It should be made of a natural fiber, and be lined and darted. They also noted that they "spend a fortune on alterations" (Participant B) for their pants because they were dissatisfied with the way

they fit. Overall the participants were looking for an interesting pant that was well tailored.

TROUSERS

Fig.1: Trouser Options for Focus Group Respondents

WGSN Original Artwork. *Trousers S/S 12 Womenswear Key Items.* 2010. New York. *Worth Global Style Network.* Web. 6th Jan 2012.

When given the choices of different silhouettes most chose option 2 (see fig. 1): the lightweight, mid-rise trouser. They noted that the silhouette was versatile, as they could "dress it up or down" (Participant A) making it a good option for work or for a special occasion. Participant B added that the "loose weight of the fabric would hide the thigh" without clinging to the body. Participant D noted that the angled pockets were more flattering for the figure, which would greatly affect her choice to purchase the pant. Participant E added that the casual nature of the pant appealed to her.

The second choice was option three (see fig. 1): the high-waisted straight leg pant. Participants liked the narrow leg as they felt that it would not "emphasize width

because it is straight from the hip down" (Participant B). Participant D also noted that

the pant would be best for petite silhouettes because the straight line it creates would

elongate her figure. Finally participants were also drawn to option five, a hobble pant

with a relaxed waist, and a rounded leg that tapered at the ankle. The narrow leg also

appealed to the participants and they identified the pant as a good summer option.

Participant E found that she liked the silhouette of trouser option five but felt that she

was too old to wear it. Participants were looking for a relaxed silhouette that did not

cling to their hips and had a mid to high-rise.

Three silhouettes also stood out for skirt selection (see fig. 2). All participants

were drawn to skirt option one (see fig. 2): the fitted flared mid-length skirt. This skirt

skims the hips and falls fuller at the hem, resting mid-calf on the individual. Participant

C noted that the "fabric had to drape well" on this particular skirt for it to appeal to her,

stating that the fabric needed more weight. Participant D added that a lighter fabric

would also appeal to her as she saw it as a perfect summer option. Participant B noted

that the skirt's silhouette is great for travel and as an eveningwear option. She also

added that the length was good as she pays more attention to skirt length because as

she ages she is "more conscious of tripping" (Participant B). Participants were all

conscious of fabric that fell by the ankles, as they were concerned with tripping and

seriously harming themselves. Participants were also drawn to option three (see fig.

2): the darted rectangular straight cut that fell mid-calf.

SKIRTS

Fig.2: Skirt Options for Focus Group Respondents

WGSN Original Artwork. *Skirts S/S 12 Womenswear Key Items*. 2010. New York. *Worth Global Style Network*. Web. 6th Jan 2012.

Participant A noted that the garment "skims the body" in a flattering way and that she would wear it in a medium-weight jersey. Participant B found that the garment was work appropriate. Participant D also liked the shape of the skirt, stating that the full skirt is good but she "thinks of it as a winter skirt." Finally Option two (see fig. 2) was favored by the petite women of the group, but both of them believed that the skirt needed to be slightly longer. Overall the women were looking for a mid-calf length that skimmed the body, mainly through the thigh.

Satisfaction with Tops

The participants were generally satisfied with top Option three (see fig. 3): the shell top that a-lines, with a collapsed boat neckline and a bracelet-length sleeve. Participant A stated that number 3 is a more classic option in "a t-shirt material." She

also stated the top appealed to her because it was not sleeveless, it covered her bra

straps, and had a generous fitting armhole. Participant B added that Option three was

a good choice because of its versatility, as she could "accessorize the top to change the

look." Option 2 (see fig. 3): the loose, low-slung wrap top was an option that got mixed

feedback from the participants. Participant A was drawn to the top as a slightly formal

piece. However Participant B stated that she would never wear Option 2 because "it

requires a layer." The petite participants liked option two because the "v-neck

elongates the body and gives a long clean line" (Participant D) and generally found it
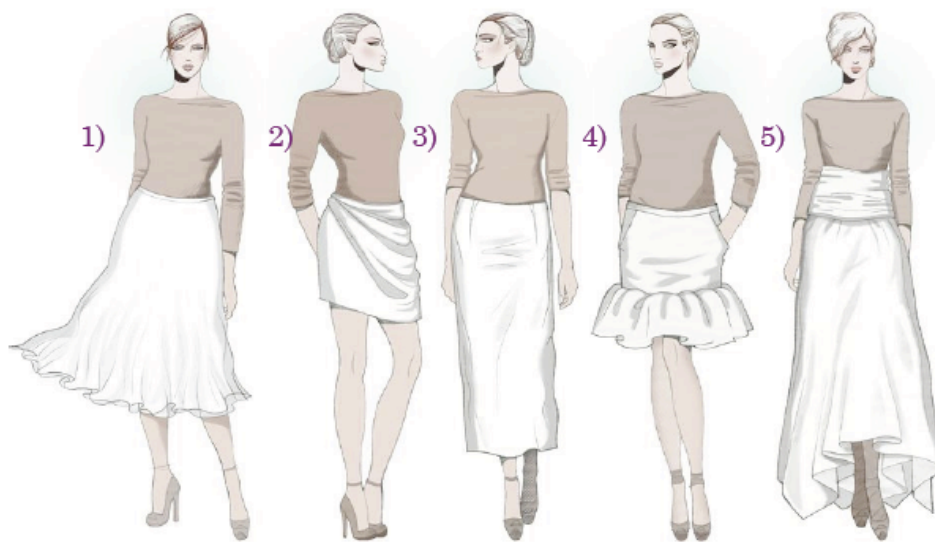
slimming and flattering for their figures.

TOPS

Fig.3: Top Options for Focus Group Respondents

WGSN Original Artwork. *Tops S/S 12 Womenswear Key Items*. 2010. New York. *Worth Global Style Network.* Web. 6th Jan 2012.

Participants also found option 1 to be suitable for formalwear (see fig. 3): the waist accentuating long top with broad shoulder line and cut off sleeves. Both participant C and D preferred this option because "it shows off my natural waist" (Participant C). All of the participants liked the tailoring in the shirt in Option 5 (see fig. 3) but felt that it was too boxy and would not show off their shapes as much as they would like. Overall the participants of the focus group wanted tops that were not too close to the neck, showed off their natural waists, could easily conceal their undergarments, and were forgiving in the armhole. The participants that identified themselves as petite also noted the importance of creating a long line by wearing v-necks. All of the details discussed were integral to the participants when making decisions about what to purchase in the apparel market.

Shopping Behavior

The survey respondents did not find it important (m=2.56) to buy their clothing at a boutique or specialty store. The intimate nature of the service at a boutique did not appeal to them. The results were similar (m=2.7) when asked how important it was for them to buy at a department store. The age group that found it least important to buy at either a department store or a boutique was the 61 to 64 age-group.

There were similar mixed results for the focus group. Participant A preferred a boutique over a department store because department stores "are too overwhelming." The selection at a department store is over-stimulating. Others preferred the department store because of the "hassle-free return policy" (Participant B). Participant C identified herself as an independent shopper, who will shop anywhere because she "knows what looks good on [her] body." All participants stated that they were more

price driven when determining where to shop, preferring off-price retailers like

Marshalls and Winners when shopping. They were able to easily identify quality

materials and tailoring but did not like paying full retail for it.

Table 4

Consumer Shopping Behavior	46-55	56-60	61-64	Totals
	m=			
How important is shopping at a boutique or specialty store when buying your clothing?	2.72	2.28	2.44	2.56
How important is shopping at a department store when buying your clothing?	2.62	3.14	2.44	2.7
How important is it that you look your absolute best?	4.03	4	4.3	4.1
How important is the brand of clothing when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	2.81	2.2	2.89	2.67
How important are loyalty programs when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	2.37	1.93	2	2.2
How important is ethical/sustainable practices of a garment when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	3.09	3.14	3	3.1
With 1 being not important and 5 being very important				

The survey also found that respondents felt it was important to look good

(m=4.1). This meant that they would spend more on items that made them feel better

about themselves. The survey also found that baby boomer women did not find loyalty programs (m=2.2) in stores and branded fashion (m=2.67) important when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy. The age group that found loyalty programs (m=2) and branded fashion (m=2.89) least important was the 56 -59 age group.

There were similar results in the focus group, where the participants said they did not participate in loyalty programs. They did however feel a stronger loyalty to branded fashion than did the respondents of the survey. As Participant B stated, "Once [I] have a brand that fits, I will go back to it." Participant A also stated that her look is more forward and innovative, so if she knows a brand that fits her look, she will return to it.

Finally, both survey respondents and focus-group participants found ethical products "somewhat important" (m=3.1) when making a decision on what to buy and where to shop. The focus group respondents added that knowing about a retailer's ethical practices such as anti-child labor retailers would encourage them to buy the clothing. However, they said that other sustainable practices such as the use of organic fibers would not sway their decision on where to shop and what to buy. Overall the respondents felt that it was important to look their absolute best. Female baby boomers did not respond to loyalty programs or branded fashion, and preferred off-price retailers to boutique and department stores when making a decision about where to shop.

Respondents of both the focus group and the survey did not find any particular importance for factors when making a decision on where to shop and what to buy. In

the focus group discussion, it was determined that female baby boomers preferred off-price retailers as opposed to department stores or boutiques. They preferred to shop independently and were not influenced by loyalty marketing, sustainable products, and branded fashion. Therefore the best way to reach the lucrative demographic is if off-price retailers plan clothing assortments that meet the needs of female baby boomers.

Discussion

Major Findings: Are boomer women satisfied with what is currently in the market?

   The results of the survey and the focus group both found that baby boomer women are overall somewhat satisfied with what is available to them in the apparel market. As boomer women have the highest disposable income for clothing of any age cohort, the apparel market should be meeting their needs significantly more than what they are currently. The two most important factors affecting apparel satisfaction were the fit preferences of baby boomer females, and the hormonal changes due to menopause and the effect on apparel choices.

   The following is a chart (table 5) outlining the specific details that the female baby boomer participants of the focus group looked for when purchasing their clothing:

Table 5	
Major Details that Focus Group Participants Looked for in their Clothing	
Tops	**Trousers and Skirts**
- V-necklines - Light-weight sweaters and layers - Versatile silhouettes for work and for weekend wear - Accentuated natural waist - Form-fitting fabrics that did not cling to the mid-section	- Mid-rise pants - Mid-length skirts that fell below the knee - Light-weight fabrics - Versatile silhouettes - Narrow leg for trousers - Silhouettes that accentuated the natural curves of the body, and that did not cling to the thighs - Elongating silhouettes - Straight or A-line skirt silhouettes

The details mentioned from the focus group were centered around fit and fabrics that accommodate their changing body shape, as well as the hormonal changes that boomer women undergo as they enter their late 40s. The most important discovery during the data collection was the respondents' general feeling that the clothing they preferred did not change along with the natural changes their body undertook as they aged. This suggests that there is a need to change the fit model at the production level to accommodate the changes that take place as women enter late adulthood.

It has been well documented (Howarton, Gardyn, Salusso, Browne, Petrova) that apparel companies do not meet the current fit preferences of female baby boomers. Howarton (2010) in particular describes fit as being the foremost quality in clothing that affects shopping preferences. Gardyn (2003) and Salusso (2006) both assessed the fault of the American sizing system. The apparel sizing system dates back to 1941 in a study that "yielded measurements from a small sample of mostly white, young women in the military" (Gardyn 27). Browne (1992) and Salusso (2006) add to the statement saying that women age 55 and over were under-represented in the study and therefore their needs are not currently being met by ready-to-wear apparel. This creates a problem in the apparel market because there is no way of tracking lost sales due to fit. Howarton and Lee's (2010) study on fit preferences finds that the dissatisfaction of baby boomers with the apparel industry is associated with age-related physical changes as "females typically grow 3-5 inches in the waist, 1-3 inches in the hips, and 4-6 inches in the chest as they age" (220). This makes previous fit standards that were developed over fifty years ago impractical as "women today are in

fact larger and more pear shaped than in previous decades" (Howarton 220).

Birtwistle and Tsim (2005) also found that the changing body of boomer women is not

reflected in fit models and sizing systems, and that in order for changes to be made,

bodily changes need to be taken into account. As sizing standards have yet to respond,

female baby boomers are frustrated with the apparel market and its lack of well fitting

clothing.

While women in the focus group expressed a dissatisfaction with clothing fit,

there are articles that indicate that retailers are beginning to rethink current sizing

systems. An article published in the *Wall Street Journal* by Agins (2005) disseminates

research by major corporations such as Gap Inc and the Doneger Group to examine

how "confident, professional women who stay trim with exercise, body-shapers and

liposuction" are the new fifty-something woman (B1). Using trend-forecasting

companies, Agins also states that boomer women are looking for clothing that is tighter

and sexier than their mother's fashion of the 1960s and 1970s. However this new

desire for form-fitting clothing creates a "fashion dictum" (Agins B1) where desired

clothing is revealing but not crass. The statement made by Agins is very similar to the

findings of the focus group discussion. In order to solve the sizing issue, the article

proposes technology such as three-dimensional body scanning in order to change

garment sizing to meet the wants of baby boomer women. Agins states that companies

like Liz Claiborne have benefited from "using an over-40 fit model" to reach their target

customer. Companies including J.C. Penney, Gap Inc, and Eileen Fisher are all

benefiting from production using the 40-plus fit model by taking boomer women's

bodies into consideration while considerably slimming the cuts of their jackets and

pants (Agins B1). Slimming the silhouettes of jackets and pants while accommodating the normal changes to the female body would solve many fit issues that arose during the focus group discussion.

While fit preference is subjective, ill-fitting clothing is believed to affect an individual's social and emotional well-being as "good fit enhances the consumer's body, creating an illusion that the customer's body is symmetrical and well proportioned" (Howarton 221). Petrova and Ashdown (2009) researched the relationship between good fit and social well-being as relating to the differences between a garment and the body. Petrova and Ashdown found that "there is no natural grouping of the population along body measurements, body shapes continuously transform into one another making body shape categorization extremely difficult" (229). This suggests that while 88% of consumers and 53% of retailers believe that there should be a universal system for sizing (Chun-Yoon 430), the rapidly changing body form of boomer women might require a more made-to-measure industry. Made-to-measure clothing would alleviate many issues regarding fit. Custom clothing would particularly solve fit issues with women's trousers, where focus group respondents stated that they already spent a significant amount of money on alterations. While there is research that suggests the fashion retail industry is recognizing the need to re-assess fit and sizing standards, these changes have yet to affect the satisfaction of baby boomer females. If the changes are made to accommodate the details that baby boomer females look for in their clothing (see fig. 4) it could greatly increase the profitability of fashion retailers.

The second issue that arose during the focus group discussion was the importance placed on the need to change their apparel choices due to body

temperature regulation as a result of menopause. The focus group participants

articulated this concern best, especially in relation to fabric preferences. Baby

boomers would rather wear layers of lightweight clothing than heavy fabrics in order

to assist in regulating their body temperature to accommodate hot and cold flashes.

Menopausal transitions "usually begin when women are in their mid to late 40s and

can last commonly 4-5 years" (Nelson 760). Therefore most baby boomer women are

or have already experienced the changes and symptoms of menopause. Focus group

participants stated that the hot flash/flush episodes they experience greatly affect their

apparel choices. Also known as vasomotor episodes, hot flashes greatly affect women's

daily decisions on what to wear as they "manifest as spontaneous sensations of

warmth, usually felt on the chest, neck, and face…and are sometimes followed by a

chill" (Nelson (760-1). When women are looking for top options in particular they are

interested in items that do not constrict their neck, are light-weight, and can easily

layer. In a study by Dillaway (2005) on the effect of menopause on gender

representations, she states that women "are caught between desiring and discouraging

public awareness of their bodies during the transition" (10). Women do not want to

bring attention to the changes their bodies are undergoing, but at the same time they

do not want to lose their gendered identity. This conflict relates directly to their

clothing, as the respondents of the focus group in particular wanted clothing that still

accentuated their feminine shape while accommodating the changes their bodies were

undergoing. The issues of clothing fit and lightweight fabrics centered around the

changes that a woman's body undertakes as she enters late adulthood. The results of

the survey as well as the focus group found that women were only somewhat satisfied

with their apparel choices, as the clothing available to them and the clothing they found appealing did not accommodate their changing bodies.

Major Findings: Factors that affect apparel choices.

The general findings with respect to shopping patterns was that baby boomer women are looking for items that are versatile, casual, and comfortable that can work into their day-to-day lives as well as their careers. Many studies (Ferguson, Roberts, and Silvers) have summed up the change in a woman's lifestyle by defining it as "multitasking." For example, boomer women are moving their businesses to the home, increasingly adapting to technology, invested in a desire to travel, may be putting their children through college, taking care of grandchildren, and even opening their households up again to adult children and their ageing parents. The results of the survey found that when women shop they are shopping for items that they can easily dress up and down. If they shop for activities (aside from work) they are looking for items for vacationing, dining, or fitness. However even if boomer women are shopping for specific activities, the items of clothing still have to be recognized as versatile before they can purchase them.

It is also important to note that while these women are demanding more versatile, comfortable clothing, they do not want their mother's wardrobe. They do not want elastic waist pants, pleated fronts, baggy tops, and tunics that go past the hips. The respondents of the survey were looking for updated and contemporary clothing that they identified as fun, interesting, and unique. They were independent shoppers who did not need the assistance of sales associates in order to find the quality and tailoring that they wanted. The main factor in deciding where to shop for their apparel

was the most interesting analysis of the shopping behavior section. Participants of both the survey and the focus group said it was not important to them to shop at either a department store or a boutique. The topic was elaborated upon particularly in the focus group, who said that off-price retail outlets were their ideal shopping locations. This suggests that off-price retailers could increase their market share if they made more of an effort to meet the needs of female baby boomers.

Theoretical Extensions

The respondents of the focus group identified themselves as independent shoppers who preferred off-price retailing. The individualistic and frugal qualities that have been attributed to baby boomer consumers in previous research by Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007) and Mumel and Prodnik (2005) can help us to understand their preference to shop this way. According to Reisenwitz and Iyer, the social and political events that surrounded the upbringing of the baby boomers caused them to be highly individualistic. Mumel and Prodnik segmented the market into relational and individualistic shoppers. The focus group respondents were all "individualist shoppers" as defined by Peters (301). They searched for unique pieces that were characteristic of their identity. They were also more aware of price and quality. Even though they saw themselves as independent shoppers, the focus group participants were still cognizant of social norms for appropriate apparel choices but also wanted more choice than what they saw available to them. The respondents of the survey stated that they were only brand conscious if they knew the company to fit their bodies, but were still not willing to pay a premium for the branded fashion. Overall the

participants of the focus group and the survey were more indicative of the individualistic baby boomer market segment.

The study also looked into activities aside from work that affected apparel choices. The activities identified by the respondents in both the survey and the focus group were similar to those identified by Stern et al. when defining the "social seeker" (7). As baby boomers' lifestyles change in later adulthood, work apparel is still important. However activities such as dining, vacationing, sports, and the theatre all affect their choices on apparel.

Unlike the study by Moody (2010), the respondents in the current study said that sustainability was not an important factor when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy. The focus group respondents did add that if they knew a retailer sold merchandise that was produced using child-labor or other unethical means that they would likely not shop there. However sustainable practices like organic fibers did not affect their choices. This completely negates Moody (2010), who stated that baby boomers are willing to spend more on products that are more environmentally aware. Similarly, a study by Ferguson and Brohaugh (2010) who identified the baby boomers as the "Loyalty Marketing Generation" (79) was also negated in the research study, as neither survey nor focus group respondents found loyalty programs an important factor when making a decision on where to shop. Several previous studies (Myers and Lumbers [2008], Thomas and Peters [2009]) found that baby boomers preferred to shop socially at intimate locations such as boutiques. The results of the focus group and the survey conflicted with this research, as most respondents preferred shopping independently at off-price retailers. These results correlate to Moore and Prodnik

(2005) as they identified the baby boomer group as "the most price conscious and the least prestige sensitive" (332). This means that the baby boomers are not affected by prestige markets like boutique retailers but would rather shop for the best quality and the lowest cost.

Cognitive Age

The results of the survey also found similar results to previous studies relating to cognitive age and the baby boomer demographic. As previously discussed, female baby boomers' clothing preferences have less to do with their actual age and more to do with how they perceive themselves. Similar to Reisenwitz and Iyer (2007), the results of the survey and focus group found that baby boomer women rejected clothing brands and silhouettes that were associated with being elderly. Survey respondents and focus group participants both found looking their absolute best to be of the utmost importance. This pertained to them wanting to look fun, interesting, and youthful. Just like Szmigin and Carrign (2010), the respondents of the survey do not perceive themselves as elderly, but rather as youthful and open to new things. Rather than targeting age it is important to think of lifestyle choices, mainly versatile clothing that can easily transition from work to social functions.

Cognitive age also relates to body perception and the changes that a woman's body undergoes as they age. Women are looking for clothing that accommodates the changes their body undergoes while still remaining youthful. The women in the focus group noted that they are aware that there are certain silhouettes that are not appropriate for their age but they still felt that clothing choices are an important means for self expression, individualism, and gender identity. Their clothing choices are more

strategic, as they must accommodate the changes to their body. However baby boomer women want their clothes to express a fun, youthful, and individualistic appearance.

Practical Implications

The study improved the understanding of clothing preferences and consumer satisfaction among female baby boomers. The research was constructed to gather information to benefit marketing strategies aimed at baby boomer women. The information gathered was on a small scale but adds to the pool of research based on baby boomer preferences in the clothing and consumer goods market. If the research was to be conducted on a larger scale, then it could be utilized from a marketing point of view. Because the findings went into detail regarding what baby boomer women prefer to see in their apparel, the research can also aid in product development in the retail apparel market. The knowledge gained from section two can assist retailers in planning a product range geared towards the baby boomer market. It can also assist companies in creating clothing options that meet the needs of the lucrative baby boomer cohort.

Research Limitations/Suggestions for Further Research

The research was conducted on a small scale. The population was limited to professional women in a large, urban city. This also implies economic limitations as all respondents were employed as a faculty or staff member at a university. Further research should broaden the sample population to include rural areas of Canada. It is also important to sample a broader spectrum of economic demographic groups because the research only obtained a sample of middle-class, employed females. As the study only targeted the most viable market, the employed socially active baby boomer,

the study could be expanded to include other demographic segments of the baby boomer population. These segments should include employed and non-social individuals, retired social individuals, and retired non-social individuals.

The study's results were mostly similar to previous studies that analyzed the baby boomer market. An interesting trend that arose during the focus group was the importance of off-price retailers to female baby boomer shopping patterns. Further research should examine how off-price retailing can increase sales by focusing on female baby boomer demographics. Another interesting trend that arose during discussion in the focus group was the effect of menopausal changes to the body and how these affect baby boomer clothing choices. By considering symptoms such as hot flashes and the effect on clothing preferences, product developers and retailers in the clothing market can further target the baby boomer demographic. Further research would add to the data collected in this study to provide a better understanding of baby boomer shopping preferences and apparel choices.

Conclusion

The study added to the previous knowledge about the baby boomer demographic and clothing choices. Baby boomer women are only "somewhat satisfied" with what is currently being provided to them in the fashion retail market. The most important qualities that boomer women look for in their clothing are all details that accommodate the changes to their bodies as they enter their 50s and 60s. These qualities differentiate their clothing preferences from other age demographics. The women in the study were all socially active and employed individuals, are consequently the main factor that affected their apparel choices was versatility. The women wanted clothing options that were business casual that would work into their weekend leisure activities as well as their work wardrobe. Finally the buying behaviors of the respondents in both the survey and the focus group were indicative of an independent and individualistic shopper. The women preferred to shop by themselves and sought out clothing that represented their unique identity. They also expected higher quality pieces at lower costs, and often opted to shop at off-price retailers in order to find inexpensive, well-made items of clothing. The needs and wants of boomer women are currently only somewhat being met by the fashion retail market. The information provided in this study will add to pre-existing research about the baby boomers in hopes of increasing consumer satisfaction within the market.

Appendix A: Questionnaire Consent Form

Ryerson University

Questionnaire Consent Agreement

Market Analysis of Apparel Preferences and Consumer Satisfaction of Female Baby Boomers in Canada

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and are sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators:

Principal Investigator:

First Name: Jenelle

Last Name: Spadaro

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Masters Student

Department: Fashion

Email: jenelle.spadaro@ryerson.ca

Supervisor/Co-Investigator:

First Name: Lu Ann

Last Name: Lafrenz

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Associate Professor

Department: Fashion

Email: lalafren@ryerson.ca

Purpose of the Study: The study will investigate the consumer behaviors, shopping patterns, and consumer satisfaction of female baby boomers. With a specific focus on the Canadian retail market, the study first surveys women born between the years of 1946 and 1964 to obtain market research and data that will further aid in a smaller focus group.

As boomers enter into their fifties and sixties, there is a growing disconnect between what a boomer wants and what is available to them in the market.

The study's goal is to better understand what female baby boomer want made available to them in the apparel industry with respect to fit, fabrics, and styles of clothing. The study will also determine whether or not boomer women are satisfied with what is available to them in the market, and finally how the fashion industry can reach the boomer market with this knowledge.

Description of the Study:

The following is an anonymous questionnaire that will ask questions to determine clothing style preferences, fabric quality preferences, and personal attitudes towards shopping. The survey consists of three sections and in total will take a total of 20 minutes to complete.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Risks or Discomforts:

Survey questions are centred on age and personal preferences involving clothing. These questions may be uncomfortable for some to discuss. In order to reduce this risk, the data will be anonymously collected and will at no time be linked to the

respondent.

Benefits of the Study: There are no benefits that the individual will immediately receive. The data collected from the study will provide information on what is missing in the retail market for boomer women.

Confidentiality:

The data will be collected through an online survey application that ensures anonymity for respondents. All answers will be collected and stored anonymously to ensure that any data of an intimate or sensitive nature is kept confidential.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

First Name: Jenelle

Last Name: Spadaro

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Masters Student

Department: Fashion

Email: jenelle.spadaro@ryerson.ca

Supervisor:

First Name: Lu Ann

Last Name: Lafrenz

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Associate Professor

Department: Fashion

Email: lalafren@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

> Research Ethics Board
>
> c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
>
> Ryerson University
>
> 350 Victoria Street
>
> Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
>
> 416-979-5042

By proceeding with the survey you are indicating that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to address any questions you have about the study. Your consent also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Thank you.

Appendix B: Focus Group Consent Form

Ryerson University

Focus Group Consent Agreement

Market Analysis of Apparel Preferences and Consumer Satisfaction of Female Baby Boomers in Canada

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and are sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

<u>**Investigators**</u>**:**

Principal Investigator:

First Name: Jenelle

Last Name: Spadaro

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Masters Student

Department: Fashion

Email: jenelle.spadaro@ryerson.ca

Supervisor/Co-Investigator:

First Name: Lu Ann

Last Name: Lafrenz

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Associate Professor

Department: Fashion

Email: lalafren@ryerson.ca

Purpose of the Study: The study will investigate the consumer behaviors, shopping patterns, and consumer satisfaction of female baby boomers. With a specific focus on the Canadian retail market, the study first surveys women born between the years of 1946 and 1964 to obtain market research and data that will further aid in a smaller focus group.

As boomers enter into their fifties and sixties, there is a growing disconnect between what a boomer wants and what is available to them in the market.

The study's goal is to better understand what female baby boomer want made available to them in the apparel industry with respect to fit, fabrics, and styles of clothing. The study will also determine whether or not boomer women are satisfied with what is available to them in the market, and finally how the fashion industry can reach the boomer market with this knowledge.

Description of the Study:

You are being asked to participate in a focus group consisting of five individuals who are female and between the ages of 46 and 64. The focus group will meet for an hour and a half in the Masters of Fashion Graduate Room in the Ryerson University campus, which will be booked for the time in order to ensure aural and visual privacy.

Risks or Discomforts:

Focus group questions are centred on age and personal preferences involving clothing. These questions may be uncomfortable for some to discuss. Therefore some may perceive the discussion as a social risk. If you are uncomfortable at any point you can leave the research process. You may also choose to rejoin at any point, as participation is completely voluntary. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer

any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Participants should be comfortable discussing body type and fit preferences amongst individuals that are their peers. If you are ever uncomfortable with anything being discussed you can choose not to participate.

Benefits of the Study: There are no benefits that the individual will immediately receive. The data collected from the study will provide information on what is missing in the retail market for boomer women.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will document the findings through written notes. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. The written notes will be stored until June of 2012 in a locked filing cabinet in the supervisor's personal office. The individual's will not be identified in the written data.

While the researcher ensures confidentiality, this cannot be promised on behalf of the other participants even though it is requested.

Incentives to Participate: The participant will not be paid to partake in the study.

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation: There are no costs associated with participating in the study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please

ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

First Name: Jenelle

Last Name: Spadaro

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Masters Student

Department: Fashion

Email: jenelle.spadaro@ryerson.ca

Supervisor:

First Name: Lu Ann

Last Name: Lafrenz

Institution: Ryerson University

Academic Title: Associate Professor

Department: Fashion

Email: lalafren@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this

study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board

c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation

Ryerson University

350 Victoria Street

Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

416-979-5042

<u>Agreement</u>:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____

Name of Participant (please print)

 _____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C: Questionnaire Questions

Apparel Preferences of Female Baby Boomers

Section One: Demographics
What age group do you belong to?

- ○ 46-55
- ○ 56-59
- ○ 60-64

What is your marital status?

- ○ now married
- ○ never married
- ○ widowed
- ○ divorced
- ○ separated

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ○ less than high school
- ○ high school
- ○ some college/university
- ○ college degree
- ○ university degree
- ○ masters degree
- ○ doctoral degree
- ○ other: ☐

What is your employment status?

- ○ employed full time
- ○ employed part time
- ○ contract
- ○ volunteer

How often do you work from home?

- ○ I don't work from home
- ○ 1-2 days a week
- ○ 3 or more days a week
- ○ 1-3 days a month

How would you describe how you dress in your current work environment outside the home?

- ○ casual
- ○ somewhat casual
- ○ somewhat conservative
- ○ conservative
- ○ other: ☐

What is your income?

- ○ less than $20 000
- ○ $20 000 - $39 999
- ○ $40 000 - $59 999
- ○ $60 000 - $79 999
- ○ $80 000 - $99 999
- ○ $100 000 - $149 999
- ○ $150 000 or more
- ○ prefer not to answer

What is your household income?

- ○ less than $20 000
- ○ $20 000 - $39 999
- ○ $40 000 - $59 999
- ○ $60 000 - $79 999
- ○ $80 000 - $99 999
- ○ $100 000 - $149 999
- ○ $150 000 or more
- ○ prefer not to answer

When do you plan to retire?

- ○ within the year
- ○ next year
- ○ within the next 5 years
- ○ within the next 10 years
- ○ within the next 15 years
- ○ I have no plans to retire

How many dependents to you currently have living in your household?

- ○ 0-2
- ○ 3-5
- ○ 6+

Which activities influence your apparel choices most?
You may choose more than one option.

- ☐ vacationing
- ☐ sports
- ☐ going to the opera/theater/ballet/concert
- ☐ dining
- ☐ caring for your children
- ☐ caring for your grandchildren
- ☐ caring for your elderly parents
- ☐ volunteer/charitable work
- ☐ health/wellness
- ☐ other: ☐

Section Two: Consumer Satisfaction
Answer the following questions by ranking your answer from 1-5, with 1 being Not Important and 5 being Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the fit of your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the ease of care of your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the comfort and feel of the fabric of your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the fabric content of your clothing?	○	○	○	○	○
How important is the quality of the construction of your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important are clothing trends when making a decision of what clothing to buy?	1	2	3	4	5
How important are classic silhouettes when making a decision on what clothing to buy?	1	2	3	4	5

Answer the following questions by ranking your answer from 1-5, with 1 being Not Satisfied and 5 being Very Satisfied

	1	2	3	4	5
How satisfied are you with the availability of casual pants, skirts, and other bottoms in the market?	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
How satisfied are you with the formal pants, skirts, and other bottoms available in the market?	1	2	3	4	5
Are you satisfied with the casual tops you find in the market?	1	2	3	4	5
Are you satisfied with the formal tops you find in the market?	1	2	3	4	5
Overall how satisfied are you with the clothing available to you in the market?	1	2	3	4	5

Section Three: Consumer Shopping Behavior

Answer the following questions by ranking your answer from 1-5, with 1 being Not Important and 5 being Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
How important is shopping at a boutique or specialty store when buying your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is shopping at a department store when buying your clothing?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it that you look your absolute best?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the brand of clothing when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	1	2	3	4	5
How important are loyalty programs when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is ethical/sustainable practices of a garment when making a decision about where to shop and what to buy?	1	2	3	4	5

How often do you spend money on clothing for yourself?

- ○ often - once or more a week
- ○ somewhat often - once or more a month
- ○ not often - once or more a year

How often do you spend money on clothing for others?

- ○ often - once or more a week
- ○ somewhat often - once or more a month
- ○ not often - once or more a year

What category of clothing do you invest most of your clothing dollars?

- ○ Casual
- ○ Business Casual
- ○ Business
- ○ Formal-wear
- ○ Athletic-wear

Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

Introduction: My name is Jenelle and I am a Masters student at the school of fashion at Ryerson University. My focus for my major research paper involves consumer satisfaction and the apparel needs of baby boomer women. You have been asked to participate in a group discussion to better understand what the baby boomer demographic likes about your apparel choices and what you feel is missing. This focus group is based on a survey regarding shopping and consumer behavior that was conducted earlier this year. I will first introduce the topic in more depth. The first topic will involve your daily activities that affect your clothing choices. The second topic of discussion will involve your shopping behavior. Finally, the third topic will involve your consumer preferences, where I will show you images of various items of clothing and discussion will be based on your reaction to shape and silhouette.

General Topic: The study will investigate the consumer behaviors, shopping patterns, and consumer satisfaction of female baby boomers. With a specific focus in the Canadian retail market, the study first surveys women born between the years of 1946 and 1964 to obtain market research and data that will further aid in a smaller focus group.

As boomers enter into their fifties and sixties, there is a growing disconnect between what a boomer wants and what is available to them on the market.

The study will provide product knowledge sourcing to determine what fit, fabrics, and styles of clothing that boomer women want, whether or not they are satisfied with

what is available to them in the market, and finally how the fashion industry can reach the boomer market with this knowledge.

Topic One: (General questions that are suppose to help break the ice and give a general idea as to where the topic of discussion will go.)

Most women described their work dress as being somewhat conservative to somewhat casual. There appears to be a movement away from conservative business attire. Is this true for you as well? What do you wear on a daily basis and why?

The survey found that the activities that affect boomer women's clothing choices are:

A) Vacationing

B) Dining

C) Sports

D) Health/wellness

Do you feel that there are suitable clothing options for these activities?

Is there anything that comes to mind that you wish you could wear but for whatever reason (ie ill fitting, cannot find your size) you don't feel is made available to you?

Topic Two: Consumer Behavior -- Howarton and Lee's (2010) study on fit preferences finds that baby boomers dissatisfaction with the apparel industry is associated with age-related physical changes as "females typically grow 3-5 inches in the waist, 1-3 inches in the hips, and 4-6 inches in the chest as they age" (220). This makes previous fit standards that were developed over fifty years ago impractical as "women today are in fact larger and more pear shaped than in previous decades"

(Howarton 220). Birtwistle and Tsim (2005) also found that the changing body of boomer women is not reflected in fit models and sizing systems and that in order to for changes to be made, bodily changes need to be taken into account. Mainly, decreased sitting height, arm span, trunk height, and skin elasticity (Birtwistle 455). As sizing has yet to respond, female baby boomers are frustrated with the apparel market and its lack of well fitting clothing.

a. The results of the survey found that 78-88% believed that the most important factor in making a decision about what to buy was the fit of the garment. Second to fit was the feel of the fabric. This importance increased with age as 53% of the 46-55 age group found the feel of the fabric to be important, while 64% of the 56-60 age group did, followed by 77% of the 61-64 group. Roughly half of all respondents thought construction was important in purchasing a garment. Most respondents felt that they were not affected by trends or classic silhouettes when making clothing choices.
 - will you spend more on a better constructed garment and why?
 - if you find the piece to be special or unique will you spend more money on the garment?
 - how important is comfort when buying a garment? How would you define a comfortable garment?
 - does the concept of timelessness appeal to you? Or are other factors more important when purchasing clothing?
 - if a garment has difficult care instructions, will this sway your decision to purchase it?

b. Most individuals surveyed are somewhat satisfied with what is available to them on the market (42-50%). The main issue with consumer satisfaction arose with women's bottoms, both formal and casual. What issues do you encounter with the bottoms that are made available to you in the market? (Discuss images).

 (Discuss rise of pants, pant leg, length of skirts as well as shape of skirt when looking at visuals.)

 - which of the bottoms would you be most likely to purchase? Why?

C. Satisfaction for blouses varied between somewhat satisfied and very satisfied. What do you look for when investing in a blouse? (Discuss images)

 - (discuss comfort, fit, structure, fabric, and color, sleeve length)

 - which of the tops shown would you be most likely to purchase? Why?

Topic Three: Shopping Behavior

a. Most individuals surveyed did not shop regularly for their dependents. Do you still shop for your dependents? Are you more willing to shop if others in your household shop with you?

b. Shopping location: Most women surveyed listed shopping location as somewhat important when making a decision about where to shop. This lack of importance increased with age, as the 61-64 age group found the location of shopping to be not important (44%). How important is the location of shopping to you? Do you prefer boutiques or department stores? Are you an independent shopper or do you prefer the personal service of a boutique?

C) 70% of women between the ages of 56-64 found brands, loyalty programs, and sustainable practices are somewhat to not important when making a decision on

where to shop and what to buy. However the 46-55 year olds were more likely to let these factors affect their choices. 60% thought sustainable practices were important, 50% thought loyalty programs were important as well as purchasing branded fashion. There is a clear discrepancy between the two age cohorts.

 - are you more willing to shop at a store that offers incentives to shop (ie HBC points, free alterations, discounts)?

 - How important are brand names when purchasing products? Why? What do you associate with brand names that make you choose them over other clothing options? What types of clothing are you more likely to invest in if they have a brand name? Suiting? Casual? Athleticwear?

 - if you knew a product was made locally or ethically would you be more willing to invest in the product as suppose to others, regardless of price?

D) Do you shop out of need? Or do you find yourself shopping as social function with others?

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