

“BOOMERS UNDISGUISED”

They were taking to the streets for peace, celebrated wild punk and Neue Deutsche Welle parties and felt footloose and fancy-free in love as well: the generation known as baby boomers was loud, non-conformist and ready to overstep its limits. What has become of the rebels of that time? How is the generation of the baby boomers wired today? How is their self-esteem influenced? And is there a stronger gender? What roles do profession, partnership, physical appearance and sexuality play as influencing factors for the own self-esteem?



After three youth studies which have given IKW (The German Cosmetics, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association) deep insights into the inner life of the young people, the current study allows an understanding based on depth psychology of the generation of those aged 50 to 65 – the boomer generation. In this connection 59 men and women were placed on the couch for interviews of several hours to talk about their life, their fulfilled wishes and still open expectations. More than 1,000 were then surveyed in a representative online panel.

The boomers today

If there is a generation which can handle problems, it is this one. The boomers have already overcome many calamities in their life and believe almost always that one can be master of the situation. There are not many who feel like victims. The large majority of this generation believes that they are the architects of their own fortune. Independence is extremely important for them and many have a strong self-confidence. The special thing about this is that they draw this self-esteem from within. A job which secures them recognition can certainly support this feeling. Just like a functioning partnership – whereby men with a partner at their side feel significantly more self-confident than women with a partner. However, their common denominator is that their self-esteem is independent from actual experiences.

The boomers attach a lot of importance to their physical appearance. Even if it is not the most important thing in their life – they do not want to grow old and even less look old. And this is why they invest in cosmetics and beauty. Underlying this is, however, less a matter of an obsession with youth, but rather the desire not to become dependent and infirm. Because those who are fit and healthy have less difficulties to cope with challenges. And this shows them that they are “efficacious” and have power.

1. HOW THE BOOMERS ARE “WIRED”

At first sight men and women do not look like a generation in their different appearances. Whilst men are objectifying their feelings in public and act markedly matter-of-factly, women are outdoing themselves mutually with dramatic real-life stories.

“Well, I can certainly keep up the pace – in my case it was exactly like that and concerning my ex-husband it was even worse.” (female participant in the study)

What looks at first sight like a stereotype of the strong and the weak gender, turns out to be the contrary. As a matter of fact, women grant themselves a high degree of mutual care and comfort through the telling and sharing of their strokes of fate.

“I thought already during the whole time – oh, she actually tells my story – all have gone through experiences here.” (female participant in the study)

Moreover, they consider the ability to cope with difficulties as a yardstick **of their own effectiveness**. In addition, most of them figure out the alleged “superiority” of men: **68 percent** of the women mention that men always want to “have a handle on everything” and secretly know that they are actually the strong gender.

2. THE SELF-ESTEEM OF THE BOOMERS: ARE YOU A DOER OR A VICTIM?

Boomers are altogether a self-confident generation – and this applies in particular to women who in many cases manage the daily routines and can develop their self-esteem more independently from their respective partners than the other way round.

It is, however, of central relevance for the two genders that the self-esteem is not dependent on actual experiences or real blows of fate. It is psychologically above all relevant for the developed self-esteem whether one feels like a victim or a doer. The stronger one has the feeling to be able to take influence, the more self-confident one goes through life.

58 percent of the boomers are rather strongly believing that they are not dependent on fate and that one can always change things if one tackles them. Women are even more convinced about that than men: **62 percent** versus **55 percent**. And **73 percent** of this generation generally believe in a positive trend in their life.

“My life has been extreme; at the age of 14 years I moved out; my father was an alcoholic. I went to a young people’s home (...) Now I’m proud of my own little family, proud of my job.” (female participant in the study)

However, in this generation there is also a group of people who are rather pessimistic. But with **32 percent** it is comparatively small.

How do boomers deal with challenges?

Many boomers who considered themselves to be currently or generally in the determining position dealt differently with fates and challenges than the others. They often faced crises, setbacks, and fates with a “now more than ever”, “nonetheless” or “it remains to be seen”. **73 percent** of the generation have generally internalised this attitude.

“During my relocation to the house of my daughter three months ago from Frankfurt to Munich I had a breast cancer diagnosis and had to quickly undergo surgery. I thought that I would get over that well, too.” (female participant in the study)

3. WOMEN NEED RECOGNITION AT WORK, MEN NEED A PARTNER!

A series of factors influence the self-esteem of this generation. It is surprising to see how very different the genders are as far as the relevance of these influencing factors is concerned. For men and women, the relevance of **work and partnership** is quite deviating – just as the genders are also different concerning the relevance of **physical appearance and sexuality**.

Work as an influencing factor

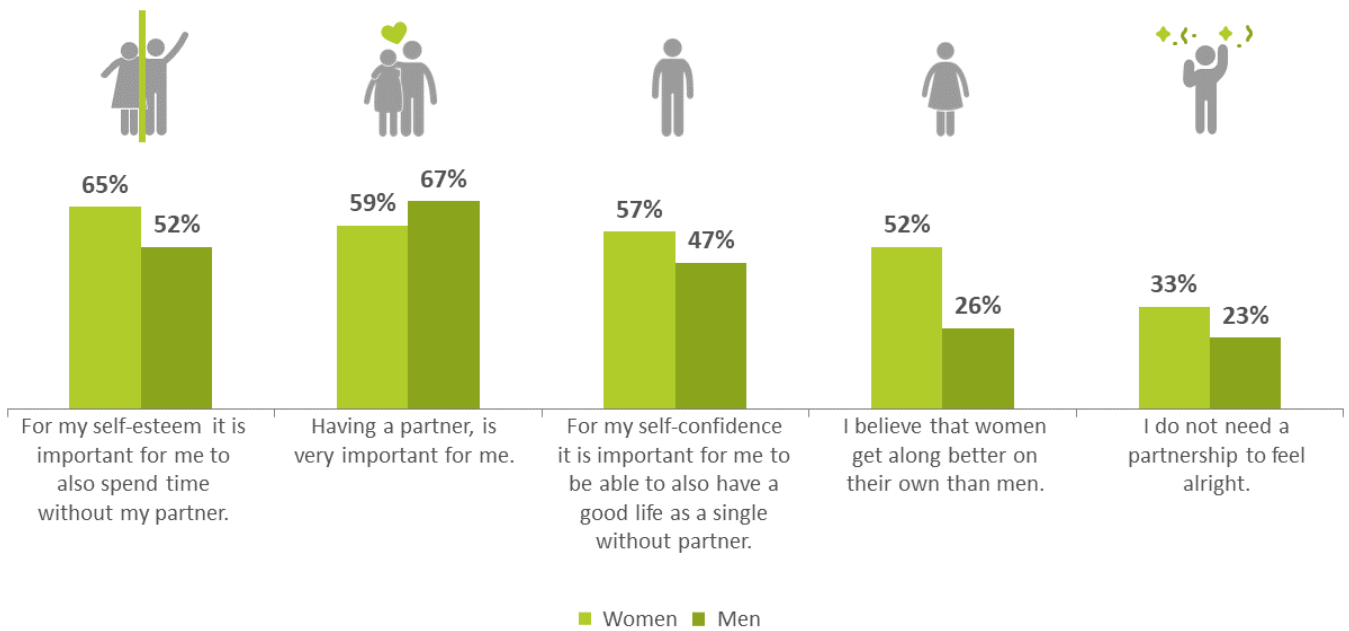
Although the two genders draw **a lot of self-confidence from the job**, the independence in job and career is co-responsible for the self-assurance of the women. Without any recognition in the job or without the exercise of any occupation women are significantly less frequently at peace with themselves. And even women who generally see themselves as hardly self-confident had their most motivating experiences in connection with a job and were, therefore, able to gain more self-confidence. Altogether **62 percent of the boomers want freedom and possibilities of self-determination in their profession and 65 percent are looking for inspiration here.**

“At any rate my self-confidence results from my job. A lot results from it. You meet interesting people, such as our clients. We are a large law firm – 22 employees, tax advisors and specialists. The exchange one has every day is something you don’t have at home. And wearing something nice every day when going to work to earn good money, is of course not negligible either.” (female participant in the study)

Partnership as an influencing factor

Although a **functioning partnership** is important for women, it is even more important for men to have a partner. **57 percent** of the men attribute a high significance to partnership for their own self-esteem – only health is a more important topic for men with **64 percent**. Although men do not talk openly about feelings, they are plunged into a deep crisis if they lose with their wife the only person with whom they have been able to talk about intimate and personal things. Because **81 percent rather talk only to their partner!** As far as women are concerned, **70 percent** mention that they, too, like to have an exchange with their partner.

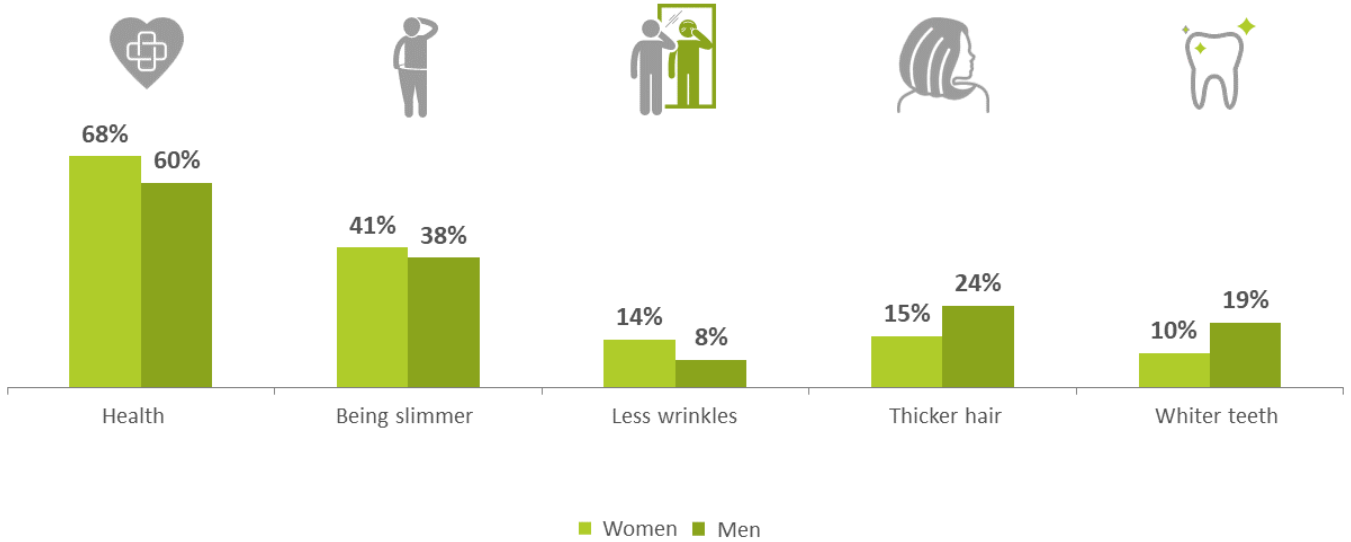
“I have a profound longing for a woman – I have been left and now I’m looking for somebody who loves me and my parrot – I do not understand at all why I’m always left.” (male participant in the study)



However, women are almost just as keen – namely **66 percent** - to also talk to girl friends. Although women are pleased about male partners who pay them compliments and desire them, their self-esteem is slightly less dependent on that. Because: women exchange amongst themselves in a private setting much more genuine self-confidence. In “networking on self-esteem” they exchange recognition and the feeling of being of value. Therefore, **70 percent of the women believe that compared to men they get along better on their own. 43 percent** of the men confirm this.

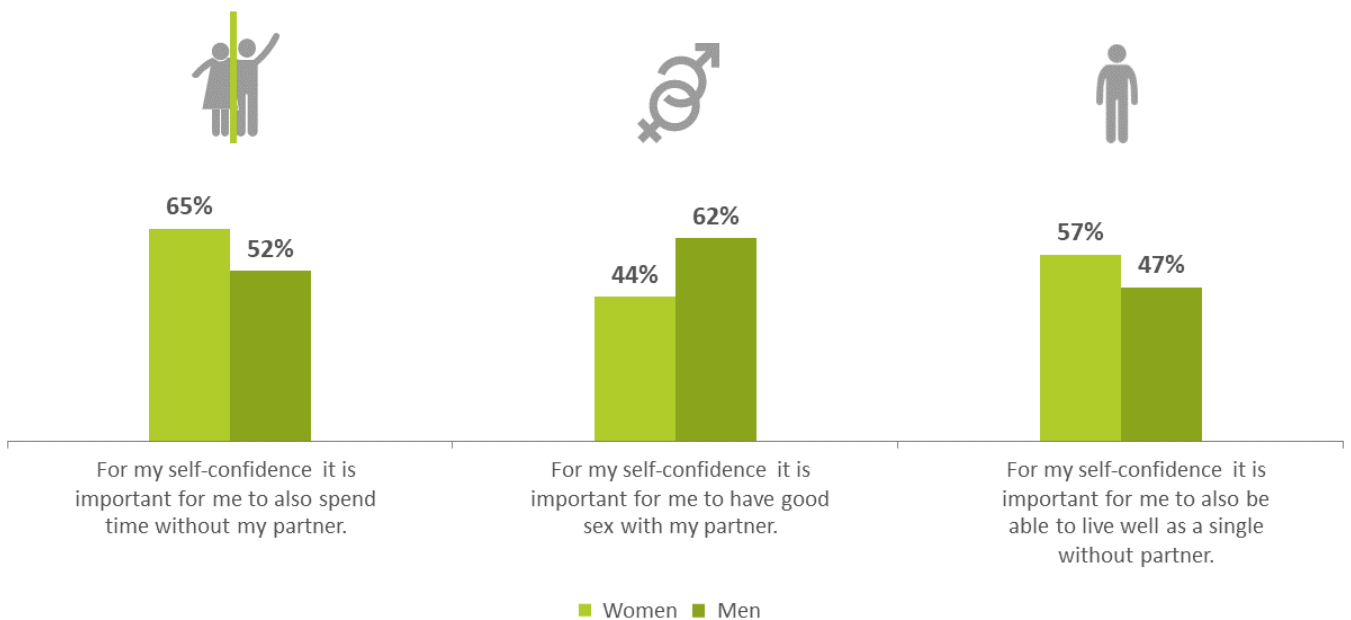
Physical appearance as an influencing factor

This generation hardly wrangles over its physical appearance. **68 percent** of the women and **60 percent** of the men hope for health, free of charge and without adverse side effects, from a good fairy fulfilling their wishes. The most important “external” wish for **41 percent** of the women and **38 percent** of the men is to be slimmer. Only **14 percent** of the women want to have less wrinkles, but **24 percent** of the men want to have thicker hair. As far as “external” changes are wished at all, they are to secure, more particularly for women the future mobility and hence independence.

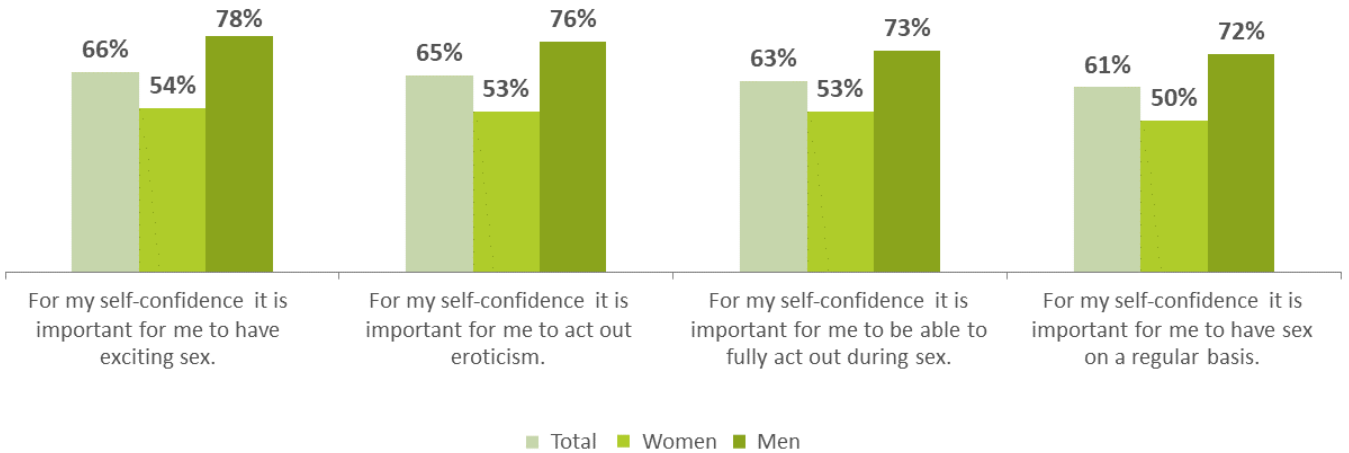


Sexuality as an influencing factor

Sexuality is moving in this age group between ecstasy and disillusionment: some are still engaging ecstatically with eroticism – and are partly even like newly in love. For others there has rather been a disillusionment. For **62 percent** of the men good sex is significantly more relevant than for women with only **44 percent**. And **65 percent** of the female interviewees like to spend time with themselves or **57 percent** also feel perfectly alright as singles. By contrast, this only applies to **47 percent** of the men.

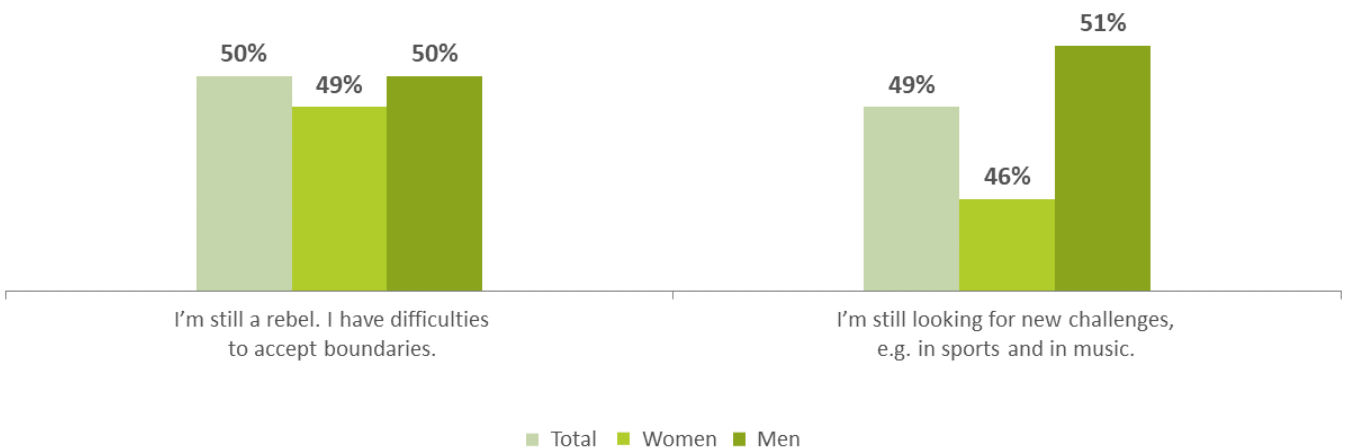
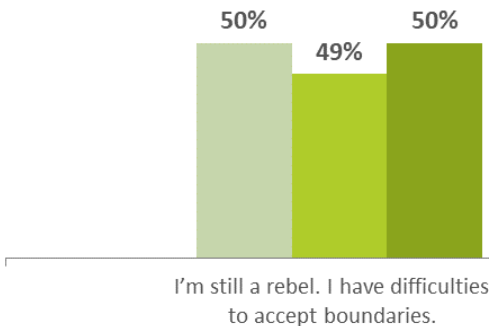


The relevance of sex for self-confidence differentiates the genders. Sex is extremely important for men. However, for the whole generation sexuality, i.e. the dissolution of boundaries, plays a major role.



4. BETWEEN DISSOLUTION OF BOUNDARIES AND DISILLUSIONMENT: THIS IS HOW THE BOOMERS ARE WIRED!

In their youth they were rebels. Norms and stereotypes were abhorrent to today's boomers. Borderline experiences and the transgression of limits were then part of the life motto: in music, in eroticism and in partnerships. They were young with Christiane F. – and their parents had internalised heroine as the major spectre. Although the ecstasy of transgression of limits is replaced in everyday life by a certain disillusionment, the fascination of the extreme has remained. **50 percent still see themselves as rebels**, who have difficulties to accept boundaries. Because: **the dissolutions of boundaries are the core of this generation. Enough is never enough!**



The generation loves the ecstatic, in partying and in eroticism. Although sexuality is still more important to men, more than **60 percent** of the generation wants regular and exciting sex. Boomers act out the dissolution of boundaries in the job as well, they work significantly more than other age groups – and expect a lot of physical strain or extreme sports of themselves. **49 percent are looking for and love challenges.**

“As far as work is concerned, I have struggled through a lot. As a young man I trained as baker, then I was an unskilled craftsman away on jobs and I was also a freelance vacuum cleaner rep.” (male participant in the study)

And the boomers still enjoy **not to “accept” their fate.** This also includes generally not to accept age as a limit. In the depth interviews many admitted using various methods to counter physical ageing processes. They re-create their body themselves. **69 percent of the women want to look younger than they are.**

“I’m not against Botox or hyaluronic acid. Once the time has come, I will do that.” (female participant in the study)

“I did eyelid surgery a couple of years ago; depending on who you talk to, who shares this interest, the topic, the idea evolves. How to call doctors and inquire about prices. At some point one has a good address. Then it takes half a year before one has the courage – and then you go.” (male participant in the study)

5. FUCK AGE! WELCOME SELF-ESTEEM! BOOMERS INVEST IN THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE.

Even if the physical appearance does not play the decisive role for self-confidence, doing something for a good and smart appearance is very important for **89 percent** of the women. For men these are **71 percent.** Body and beauty care is generally more important for women than for men. Consequently, not so many women can imagine a life without cosmetics, namely only **37 percent.**



89%

71%

For my self-confidence it is important for me to do something for my physical appearance.



79%

61%

Body/beauty care are very important for me in my life.

■ Women ■ Men

For this reason, women invest a lot into their physical appearance. However, this does not necessarily concern youthfulness but health, self-determination and last, but not least independence. In this connection the actual investment into the appearance is particularly relevant. It strengthens self-esteem even more: this is the case for **67 percent** of the women after manicure and for **64 percent** after a visit to the hairdresser. A pedicure increases self-esteem for **50 percent** of the men and a manicure even for **55 percent** of them.

When competency concerning the topics of physical appearance and cosmetics are concerned, the evidence base is clear: men rely on the competence of their partner. Advice by their wife or girl friend is the most important criterion of decision to purchase a cosmetic product.



27%

43%

I make sure that my partner has recommended the product.



22%

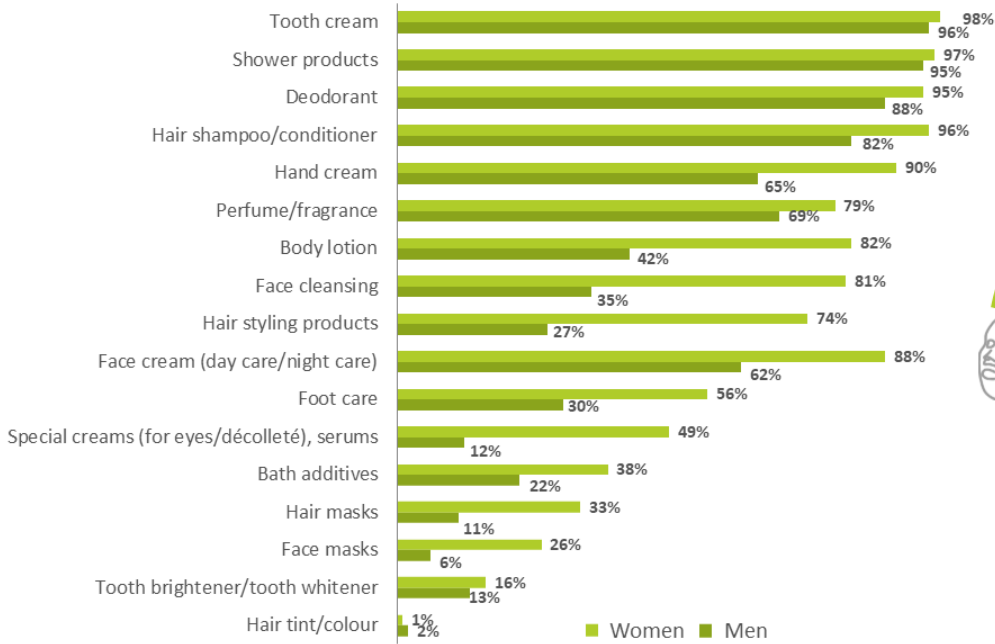
27%

I make sure that my friends have recommended the product.

■ Women ■ Men

Which cosmetic products are preferred?

Hand cream is surprisingly important for the age group. It is amongst the top three cosmetic products for women: **77 percent** put cream on their hands against ageing several times a day. However, also **65 percent** of the men use hand cream at least once a week.



CONCLUSION

The boomer generation is a genuine self-made generation: it considers itself rather as a doer than as a victim of its life. Strokes of fate are certainly narrated readily – and in the case of women also publicly – but rather to show how much has already been achieved. Dissolution of boundaries is the core motivation of the generation. The generation is so-to-speak “sweeping” through its life. Enough is never enough: this generation is not only the one working hardest but also still likes to celebrate a lot. Eroticism has always been a topic of which it cannot really get enough.

In the meantime, there are always in addition to the “ecstasy” also phases of “disillusionment” during which they want to mind their health and leave the hamster running wheel. At the end of the day they use this as an opportunity to recollect, to pamper themselves and bring themselves into shape – to remain independent and fit for life. This applies, more particularly, to women for whom independence is of particular importance. Women draw a large part of their self-esteem from their job and mutual support amongst themselves, whilst men focus less on friends than on their partner as closest confidant. Cosmetics and good physical appearance are more important for women than for men, more particularly, the pampering care of the hair, the hands, and the face. The female boomers do not want to live without cosmetic products, since they make them more self-confident and hence more independent. They want to look younger than they are. For men, their own physical appearance is rather slightly less important – nor do they believe that they need special care for the sex that they still want to have very intensely.

This study was conducted by Lönneker & Imdahl rheingold salon on behalf of The German Cosmetics, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association.

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