

**Anti-Aging Messages
in our Society:
Case Studies from Nova Scotia**

By

Wendy Crosby-Fraser

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Abstract

This thesis was a preliminary study which sought to examine how eight Nova Scotia women interpreted feminine anti-aging messages prevalent in our culture. If, how, and to what extent these messages were acted on was also of interest. Attempts were made to gain a more complete understanding of current socio-cultural norms concerning feminine aging. Some of the questions addressed included whether cultural constructions about female appearance placed pressure on women to conform and, if so, how these ideologies manifested themselves in the daily lives of the women interviewed. This thesis also generated questions for future research such as: how chronological age might influence susceptibility to anti-aging messages and how a lesbian identity might buffer the impact of anti-aging messages.

Eternally Young:

A

Conceptual Framework and

Literature Review

Introduction

“So now when I put on my make-up it looks like the years don’t come back,” boasts a beautiful, young model about *Visible Lift*, the newest in a recent barrage of anti-aging cosmetics for women. It is a face make-up designed to plump up the skin and make wrinkles virtually disappear. Yet another product joins the alpha-hydroxy, beta-hydroxy, anti-aging wonder creams of the 1990’s. One can hardly open a magazine or turn on the television without hearing this kind of advertising rhetoric. While most advertising is aimed at women’s skin care products, such anti-aging sentiments by no means stop there.

Many subtle messages in our Western culture seem to be imparting a lack of acceptance of any appearance of age on a woman. While it would be incorrect to say that men feel no societal pressure to remain youthful looking, it continues to be true that the standards for men are less stringent than they are for women (Bordo, 1997; Friday, 1996; Halprin, 1995). Examples of this abound in our culture. On Oprah Winfrey’s show (February 7, 1999) Paul Newman was featured. Despite the

grey hair and faded blue eyes, it was obvious that the audience, and Oprah herself, still afforded him the same sex-symbol status he has enjoyed over his nearly fifty-years in the spotlight.

In contrast, on the front cover of April 1999's *Good Housekeeping* sits the fifty-three year-old Goldie Hawn, looking much more like thirty-three. Among other juicy tidbits, she is going to tell us how to, “outfox age.” Inside, the usual rhetoric about keeping fit and remaining positive and happy are accompanied by a striking picture (see figure 1). The slender, “teenage looking” body, the full, lush lips, and smooth, flawless skin are not entirely the products of positive energy and exercise. More than likely, they are the result of many surgical alterations. When asked how she feels about plastic surgery Goldie responds,

Plastic surgery is fine. If you want to update yourself, or make yourself feel better, or get rid of a wrinkle. Look, plastic surgery was just the beginning. We’ve gone by that now. We are on the verge of biologically dealing with the DNA. They are this close to figuring out how to stop those little particles of DNA from breaking off and triggering aging. We’re in a whole anti-aging age. An ageless age (Smith, 1999, 125).

Indeed, we are in an ageless age, focused mainly on ageless women. Whereas, Paul Newman’s gray hair and faded blue eyes seem consistent with his seventy odd years; Goldie’s look is nothing like any of the fifty-three-year-old women I know.¹



(Figure 1)

Popular culture is filled with these messages. Hyde and McKinley (1996), point out that references to media images, consumer pressures, or gender roles are insufficient on their own to explain women's body experience. They cite the need to look at culturally constructed norms of beauty and appearance for a more inclusive explanation (Hyde and McKinley, 1996). It has been suggested that mass images and ideologies concerning feminine appearance do have a normalizing effect on women (Bordo, 1993). Further, Bordo argues that, despite individual differences, the effects of mass imagery on the cultural construction of appearance cannot be ignored. However, it would be incorrect to think that women do not act as agents in the construction of their appearances. As Davis (Davis, 1995) did in her work on plastic surgery, I have looked to the work of Dorothy Smith (1990). Her notion of 'doing femininity' has allowed me to reconcile how women might pick and choose the practices, attitudes, and outlooks that best fit their situations (Smith, 1990). Susan Bordo's (1993, 1997) ideas on the impact of mass imagery and its normalizing effects has also been influential. These works will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Positing that cultural constructions play a significant role in outlining

acceptable codes of appearance, it is my contention that women will attempt to construct their appearances in ways that are socially endorsed. I am not the first to contend that cultural constructions influence women's body experience (Baker, 1998; Bergeron and Senn, 1998; Bordo, 1993,1997; Davis 1995; Goodman, 1994; Hendersonking, 1997; Hyde and McKinley,1996; 1996; Perutz, 1970; Pinhas, et al, 1999; Posavac, 1998; Tseelon, 1995). Yet there is a paucity of research that looks at anti-aging cultural messages.

Using a semi-structured interview format and snowball sampling technique, combined with a qualitative approach, this thesis examines how eight Nova Scotia women interpret feminine anti-aging messages and if, how, and to what extent these messages are acted on. Attempts were made to gain a more complete understanding of current socio-cultural norms as they pertain to feminine anti-aging. Some of the questions addressed include whether cultural constructions about feminine appearance place pressure on women to conform and, if so, how these ideologies manifest themselves in the daily lives of women.

While a great deal of literature exists indicating the need for women as individuals, and as groups, to remain youthful looking (Bordo, 1997; Wolf, 1990; Melamud, 1983; Freedman, 1986; Thone, 1992), it is extremely unclear how these cultural constructions manifest themselves in the lives of women. Nor would this approach be complete without investigating what it might mean to "look old".

Again, having an aged appearance is not endorsed by our society, but this, too, has traditionally been accepted without much investigation or question. Only when such meanings can begin to be discovered can we make any serious attempts at linking them to the daily experiences of women, both as attitudes and as bodily manifestations.

The remainder of this chapter reviews the literature that has been generated on this topic. In addition to reviewing related works, I have attempted to clarify my approach by outlining the vast amount of attention, both traditionally and more recently, that feminine aging, especially in terms of appearance, has attracted. I have chosen to review literature from a variety of sources. Attempts have been made to look at feminist and non-feminist contributions and these have consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Literature Review

Traditionally, many authors have discussed aging as a grim reality for women which robs them of their femininity and value as social beings (Brownmiller, 1984; deBeauvoir, 1968; Sontag, 1972). Susan Sontag (1972) found evidence to support the idea that men age gracefully while women fade into obscurity. The idea that old men enjoy greater acceptance of their looks and increased power relative to women of the same age has been termed the “Double

Standard” of aging. More recently, researchers like Susan Bordo (1997), Nancy Friday (1996) and Sara Halpren (1995) continue to lament this inequality.

Where then do such negative ideas originate? Cultural messages negating feminine aging abound. Television, films and the printed media target women in this way as do the attitudes generally held by many members of society.² As I have illustrated above, one need only walk past a newsstand, turn on the television, or open a magazine to see clearly what is expected of women in this society. Lorraine Gammon and Margaret Marshment (1989) assert that it is from popular culture, which includes soaps, sitcoms, the tabloid press, women’s magazines, popular music and mass produced fiction, that individuals derive their information about cultural definitions of themselves. Mary Vipond claims that the media are our primary source for information about our society (Vipond, 1989: 980). Sadly, the implicit and explicit message sent to women is not encouraging. Susan Bordo points out that, “with created images setting the standard, we are becoming habituated to the glossy and gleaming, the smooth and shining, the ageless and sagless and wrinkleless. We are learning to expect perfection and to find any defect repellent, unacceptable” (Bordo, 1997: 3).

It has also been shown that popular culture postulates a very narrow margin of acceptability, and essentially denies women the right to age (Bordo, 1993, 1997; Ewen, 1988; Kaplan, 1991; Melamed, 1983; Sontag, 1972; Weg, 1977; Wolf,

1990). Bordo (1997) says this phenomenon is strongly evidenced in aging media stars. Women like Cher, Jane Fonda and Liz Taylor are often touted as examples of a cultural trend toward greater acceptance of older women. In reality, these women are examples of our society's slavish preoccupation with youthful beauty since their bodies have been surgically manipulated to look young, in spite of their chronological age (Bordo, 1993: 26). Moreover, unrealistic expectations can have detrimental effects on women since we tend to internalize such standards and judge ourselves accordingly (Bordo, 1993; Freedman, 1986; Halprin, 1995; Hyde and Mckinley, 1996; Melamed, 1983).

While there has been some suggestion that not all women are bothered by an aging appearance, these same studies found indications that aging women did not truly embrace their aging appearance either (Berkum, 1983; Goodman, 1994). In her study of cosmetic surgery patients, Goodman (1994) found that many aging women were interested in altering their appearance to match the youth and vitality that they felt inside. Others had no interest in trying to alter their appearance. Their attitude was that although aging was not highly favored, there was no use trying to change the inevitable (Goodman, 1994). What I find interesting here is that both groups looked upon aging in a negative light.

Other studies have found an inverse link between aging and self perception of appearance in women. Women generally considered themselves to look

younger than they actually were (Goldsmith and Heiens, 1992). Here again, aging is seen as problematic. Women do not want to be identified with their actual chronological age, lest they appear old.

There is also evidence that women's self perceptions improve with age. Some subjects in Berkum (1983) indicated feeling better about themselves than ever before in spite of an aging appearance. Hayter-Reid (1994) found that at least one of the women she interviewed felt almost oblivious to aging and was happy to be relieved of the social pressure to be young and beautiful. It may also be possible that women experience aging as a double-edged sword. While they may be happy to relinquish the social pressures associated with youth and beauty, it is also a time of transition that may not be fully embraced (Halpren, 1995).

The Elusive Butterfly

Female aging has been a subject of interest for decades. Simone deBeauvoir paints a morbid picture of the aging woman:

Whereas men grow old gradually, woman is suddenly deprived of her femininity, she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and the fertility which in the view of society and in her own, provide the justification of her existence and her opportunity for happiness. With no future, she still has about one half of her adult life to live (deBeauvoir, 1968: 575).

Hence, to deBeauvoir aging is analogous to the end of the world for women. It is

a time wrought with loss and sorrow. According to this author, a woman's only hope lies in an attempt to salvage what is left of her aging self. The central thesis is that women have to be attractive to please, and since their only impact on the world is mediated by men, they must make themselves attractive to men. Moreover, this drive to remain attractive must become increasingly aggressive as the aging process renders each woman less physically attractive according to dominant social norms.

Not only does Simone deBeauvoir allude to the fatality of an aging appearance, she also speaks directly about how a woman will accept her plight. In her own personal experience it is not the women most ardently caught up in the beauty culture that will suffer most acutely. These women will be able to predict their fate well in advance, and hence will retreat and suffer in silence. It will affect those women most severely who have been biding their time as dutiful wives, mothers, and homemakers. One day they will awake and realize that their lives are mostly over, their beauty fleeting, and their value to society seriously eroded.

deBeauvoir depicts aging as a hopeless time. She sees old women as discarded objects, ignored and scorned by society; their only value as social beings gone with the loss of fertility and youthful beauty (deBeauvoir, 1959: 575-596).

Kathleen Perutz, in *Beyond The Looking Glass* (1970), examines the idiosyncracies of life in a world dominated by one's physical appearance. She

outlines how this is taught to the very young of our society and exposes the intricacies of successfully negotiating an existence in such a culture. According to Perutz, the beauty culture is acquired through merely existing within its boundaries. One learns to accept, practice, and even to embrace cultural norms. We teach the message through the media, where the emphasis is on eternal youth and the qualities associated with being young. Moreover, there are many cultural intricacies which must be observed. For example, the presence or absence of body hair is extremely important. North American culture permits hair on the legs of men but not women, yet both males and females have hair to varying degrees on their legs.

There are also rules to follow concerning body shape, size and weight. One can never be too thin, and in women, the bust size must conform to the style of the day. Finally, one must never get old. Gels and creams can help conceal the awful truth, while procedures like plastic surgery aid in repairing the ravages of time (Perutz, 1970). This book examines the preoccupation in our society with an ageless, flawless appearance.

Lois W. Banner looks at beauty in the United States through an historical perspective. I have found *American Beauty: The Historical Study of Beauty in the United States* (1983) most helpful in grounding my inquiry in terms of the trends in fashion and beauty since the nineteenth century. It also includes an outline of

media influence since this period. Although trends in fashion and beauty have changed and evolved over time our preoccupation with youthful vitality, especially in women, remains fairly constant and disproportionate to that of men. Hence, the love affair with youth and beauty is not merely a twentieth century phenomenon (Banner, 1983).

For Rita Freedman in *Beauty Bound* (1986), the stigma of aging begins for women when they can no longer successfully paint and package themselves as eternal girls. As a venue for feminine self expression, girlishness is expected of women. Attributes such as blond curls and childlike pouts are seen as endearing in grown women. This preoccupation with girlish charms leaves women for whom this look is no longer possible, or for that matter desirable, essentially without a sanctioned place in society. Such circumstances will often lead to appearance anxiety, which is characterized as a general dissatisfaction and apprehension over one's appearance (Freedman, 1986: 199-205).

In *Mirror, Mirror: The Terror of Not being Young* (1983), Elissa Melamud describes appearance anxiety as having its origins in early childhood when women are socialized to place a disproportionate value on their physical appearance. She describes her own encounter with an aging appearance as strangely alienating. She had for years identified with the persona that seemed young and vital. However, she increasingly began to notice this view of her person was not fitting

the reality of her aging body. Sadly, she had somehow lost herself (Melamed, 1983). In view of such drastic consequences, can it be any wonder that an aging woman would feel apprehensive about her appearance?

In her book *Femininity* (1984), Susan Brownmiller explores the nuances of the term. Her basic aim was to find a biological basis for those traits which society considers to be feminine. However, she also explored the many faces of femininity such as temptress, subjugator, and competitor. Concerning an aging appearance she writes. "The media images we have grown used to are of the young and the extraordinarily good-looking, the exceedingly successful and the remarkably well preserved" (Brownmiller, 1984: 165). For Brownmiller, as for many others, aging is an unrelenting foe that strips women of their beauty, allure and worth as social beings. While she acknowledges a biological basis for drier skin in women than men, she also holds that the appearance of age rises far beyond lined skin or sags and bags. In women these natural signs of aging are associated with defeat and obsolescence. In men, these marks of age are seen as sophistication, wisdom and powerfulness. Men are encouraged to strive for the perks of age; aging women are provided with few tangible rewards regardless of their personal achievements.

Brownmiller points out the oppressive nature of femininity. She uses this venue to explain how aging is a double- bind. Women are encouraged to actively preserve and maintain youth and beauty, while at the same time they are

condemned for the pursuit of such trivialities (Brownmiller, 1984: 165-167).

However, this is not her only goal since she acknowledges both positive and negative aspects to those traits associated with the feminine sphere. Although it is not a main focus, she touches briefly on aging, but she does not deal to any degree with subjective feelings of women about aging. Her handling of the subject tends more toward the generally accepted stereotypical claims forced on aging women.

For Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel Scheer in *Face Value: the Politics of Beauty* (1984), the pursuit of beauty for both men and women is seen as a power struggle. Essentially, beauty possessed by women is a commodity which can be used as leverage to procure power, wealth, influence, charm and strength from men. It is in this way that beauty is viewed as political. Moreover, beauty is touted as very desirable for women, but attainable only if certain conditions are met. A young girl is bombarded with external cues to look, feel, act and think in certain ways. If she is to be successful in the beauty game, she must conform. However, since our society strictly associates beauty with youth, aging can force a woman out of the game. Hence, beauty is not empowering and any illusions to the contrary are not only false but exceedingly dangerous (Lakoff and Scherr, 1984).

Robin Marantz Henig discusses feminine changes in appearance due to aging in her book *How A Woman Ages* (1985). Although this book was most likely conceived as a source of encouragement for aging women, it has fallen into

the classic trap of shrouding changes in appearance as, “inevitable hazard[s] of growing older” (Henig, 1985: 19). The book provides clear, concise information on female aging. However, much of it is less than encouraging. Speaking of women’s bodies she writes.

Gravity plays a nasty trick on the aging body. Eventually, despite her best efforts a woman will notice the inexorable movement of body fat downward-straight to the hips, thighs, and buttocks. Gravity is what makes a woman’s breasts sag. Gravity is what makes her abdomen droop. Gravity is what makes her buttocks drag (Henig, 1985: 20).

However distasteful one may find such allusions to the feminine form, in a society preoccupied with physical appearance, this kind of writing is understandable.

In dealing with facial attractiveness the overtone is essentially as others have said: younger is always better. But, one can and should make the best of an aging complexion. Henig uses the term “weathering” in reference to the natural changes that occur to a woman’s face as she ages (Henig, 1985: 53). This surely holds negative connotations for anyone reading this section. Although she attempts to qualify her negative comments by assuring women that many previously ordinary looking women can improve their looks with age, in reality such sentiments only serve to further discourage and convince women that there is indeed something inherently wrong with aging. This work echoes the undertones of dissatisfaction, fear and repulsion associated with female aging.

Germaine Greer in *The Change* (1991), writes about menopause and aging.

Her treatise on menopause is honest and revealing. She advocates the need for women to acknowledge and perhaps even embrace their aging bodies and faces. Her dismay over women's failure to accept and love their appearances is clear as she writes, "hardy perennials of our own time are less encouraging, because their charms depend upon expensive imitations of the girlish charm of much younger women" (Greer, 1989). The message in her writing is clear: women must stop trying to be eternal girls. Life could and should be so much more than an eternal struggle and turmoil over an aging appearance. We will now turn to a survey of the more recent literature on feminine aging.

Nancy Friday comments on aging women in her book *The Power of Beauty* (1996). Not unlike Germain Greer, she criticizes our inability to embrace our own aging. Friday recognizes beauty as a powerful force that need not be abandoned as a woman ages primarily because women are living longer and extending beauty into middle age. Friday asserts that this extension of beauty is not the function of improved creams as much as it is the kinds of lives we now enjoy as women. The analysis in this book relies on psychoanalytic theory and the idea that the double standard of aging originates in mother's disapproval of daughter's sexuality. Friday holds that the double standard of aging will become obsolete when greater numbers of women embrace their sexuality, realize their economic power and refuse to wait to be chosen by men, but instead do the choosing themselves. Under

patriarchy women are expected to be beautiful, docile and passive. Men are the agents in society and their economic power enabled them to remain attractive to women despite an aging appearance. She also points out that success is attractive and that older women need only, “wear their success self-confidently, and we will not be without friends and lovers, if that is what we desire”(Friday, 1996: 513). Women as agents and masters of their own destiny will render invisibility a thing of the past and function to extend women’s beauty well beyond traditional boundaries (Friday, 1996).

Nancy Friday’s analysis relies heavily on psychoanalytic premises to theorize about the double standard of aging. While such an analysis may have merit, it excludes the cultural forces which perpetuate such differing standards for men and women. While our mother’s fear of her own sexuality may indeed be the reason why she, and by extension, her daughters relinquish the pursuit of beauty to the very young, it stops short of analyzing the cultural ideals that perpetuate such preoccupations. Friday also assumes that greater economic security will be enjoyed by enough women that they will essentially be afforded the privileges now enjoyed by men, including those concerning less rigorous standards of appearance. This may or may not be the case, since many women remain dependent on men for their economic security.

A collection of essays written by Susan Bordo have been combined to make

up the book, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993). She examines a variety of topics. Influenced by the work of poststructuralists such as Foucault, and a variety of feminist writers, she puts forth an interesting analysis of the body. In one essay she develops the notion of the human body as being a text of culture and a locus for social control. Her central thesis is that women can become so caught up in adorning and beautifying the body that their participation in society becomes severely limited. Moreover, not unlike Melamed (1993) and Freedman (1986), she posits that the pursuit of constant improvement, based on the trivialities of fashion, leave women with strong convictions of inadequacy. It is in this way that the pursuit of femininity can be damaging to women (Bordo, 1993: 166).

In keeping with the notion of the body as a locus for social control, Bordo discusses weight maintenance. The youthful slenderness required of women in this culture becomes more elusive as it becomes more socially sanctioned. As she explains, the slenderness of the 1970's can seem flabby by today's standards which require muscle tone and rigorous exercise (Bordo, 1993: 188). Furthermore, if a slim body does not naturally occur, the attainment of an acceptable body can be a difficult task to negotiate. The success or failure to achieve and maintain a slender body is viewed textually as success or failure to achieve normalization (Bordo, 1993: 202-203).

In a more recent book, Susan Bordo moves beyond an examination of the idiosyncratic requirements of successfully navigating our culture to open criticism of the cultural images and ideologies that speak to us about our appearance. In *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images From Plato to O.J.* (1997), Bordo discusses the impact that cultural images have on how individuals in our society think, act, and present themselves. She employs a method which she terms cultural criticism. According to Bordo, the benefits of critically evaluating those cultural practices which are so pervasive as to seem normal is that it allows us to make informed choices.

Bordo is especially concerned that we as a society begin to see the ways in which contemporary images shape existence. As she points out, many of us would like to think that such images of popular culture have few effects on us. However, as she argues, their effects can be quite detrimental since they have come to seem normal and commonplace. Anti-aging images and messages can be extremely detrimental to women (Bordo, 1997).

Marcene Goodman, in a study about self-perception of attractiveness and receptivity to cosmetic surgery, found that all the women studied were concerned to varying degrees with the appearance of their bodies. Younger women were more concerned with their bodies, while older women placed a greater significance on facial attractiveness. Older women were characterized as those over fifty-five.

She also found evidence to indicate that women raised prior to the influence of television were less affected by media images, while those who grew up with these images seemed to adhere more closely to them. However, all women categorically denied being affected by media images of acceptable appearance standards (Goodman, 1994). While this study did shed some light on how aging women feel about their appearance, it did so in the context of receptivity to cosmetic surgery. There were also a limited number of participants and women categorized as older were contrasted with so called younger women.

As Naomi Wolf suggests in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, there is no legitimate historical or biological justification for our cultural preoccupation with youthful beauty (Wolf, 1990: 13). Similar to Lakoff, she posits that myths about beauty are aimed primarily at women in an attempt by men to procure domination. Youth is venerated, while aging is feared. Wolf claims that youth in women is highly desirable since it evidences inexperience and vulnerability. In contrast, older women are feared by structures of male power since older, more experienced women are more difficult to control. The beauty myth, which is essentially the idea that only youthful beauty is desirable in women, functions to divide women from themselves and each other. The fear of aging keeps young women distanced from older women, while a fear that younger women will usurp them, keeps older women fearing the young (Wolf,

1990).

In a similar vein, Sara Halpren in *Look at My Ugly Face: Myths and Musings on Beauty and other Perilous Obsessions* (1995), holds that myths about beauty serve to strip power from all women. She insists that such myths must be examined as they are perpetuated by women, as well as how they affect women. Her own experience with aging has been wrought with relief and pain as a result of her desire to simultaneously avoid and comply with cultural myths about feminine beauty. On the one hand, she is relieved to be free from cultural standards that scrutinize her appearance, while sadly dismayed as these same standards define her as old, obsolete and invisible (Halpren, 1995).

Ruth Raymond Thone, author of *Women and Aging: Celebrating Ourselves*, feels the race to remain youthful and beautiful in society's eyes is another form of male dominated oppression for women (Thone, 1992). She expresses her thoughts in this way.

In twentieth century American culture, women are encouraged from every quarter to choose a different "master" than one's self, the most insidious of which says we are to go to any lengths-even that of having our bodies cut up and rearranged-to look young, even though that look is often produced under false standards of health and beauty, and against our own choice (Thone, 1992: 19).

This pressure to serve the beauty master is most apparent in media images.

According to Thone, much of the media directed at middle- aged or older women

depicts much younger, apparently flawless women. This erodes self esteem, leaving many opportunities for women to feel badly about themselves, and, whether consciously or not, strive to meet an impossible ideal. Sadly, as she asserts, the media are not interested in reality. They are interested in selling. Hence, although the reality of aging women with their grey heads, expanding middles, and lined faces is all around us, we remain victims of this vicious phenomenon (Thone, 1992: 19-21).

Kathy Davis, in her book *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995), reports on how women account for their decisions to have plastic surgery. Rather than concluding that women make such choices as a result of a deluded state of mind, Davis attempts to formulate an analysis that accounts for a woman's conscious choice to have plastic surgery. She freely contends that the aging female is finding it more and more difficult to maintain an acceptable appearance without resorting to various kinds of plastic surgery and that such surgeries are becoming more commonplace. Her main difficulty however, is the inability to reconcile free choice with the obvious feminist dilemmas cosmetic surgery presents (Davis, 1995).

In *On Greying Hair and Oppressed Brains* Ann E. Gerike discusses greying hair. As she affirms, greying hair is a sign of old age universally (Gerike, in Rosenthal, 1990: 35). According to Gerike, the coloring of grey hair has become

so common that it remains unrecognized for the significance that it holds—to offset an aging appearance. For women in our society, appearing old is synonymous with uselessness because value is assigned to women in terms of youthful beauty and fertility, neither of which an old woman possesses. While greying hair in a man might be viewed as sophisticated or as commanding respect, it is often viewed negatively in women (Gerike, in Rosenthal, 1990).

Efrat Tseelon, in *The Masque of Femininity*, (1995) looks at femininity from a symbolic interactionist point of view. She sees the cultural definitions of femininity as an interactive process in which women shape and are shaped by the cultural forces working on them. In dealing specifically with female aging she outlines a relatively recent phenomenon called the “new woman” myth. This is essentially the idea that women can preserve youthful vitality provided they use the creams diets and other youth enhancing aids currently fashionable (Tseelon, 1995: 82). Again the message for women is clear: there is something wrong with aging.

Various explanations are posited to account for our society’s lack of acceptance of an aged appearance in women. However, the one thread that runs through this literature is the lack of societal acceptance of feminine aging, or more specifically “looking old.” Society does not endorse an aged appearance on a woman. Additionally, while some reference has been made to the influence of culturally constructed norms, it is less clear how these norms might function in the

minds and lives of women. It is now necessary to focus on studies that investigate the influence of culturally constructed norms of beauty and appearance.

Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel and Stuckless (1999) investigated the role of female beauty ideals on eating disorders in women. Approaching the subject from a psychological perspective a sample of 118 women completed three different scales: the Profile of Mood States, the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale, and the Eating Disorder Inventory. Following the completion of all three scales an experimental group consisting of 51 women was exposed to fashion magazines containing models representing a thin ideal, while the control group consisting of 67 women viewed pictures containing no human forms. The Profile of Mood States and the Body Parts Satisfaction scale were once again administered to both groups. Women were more angry and more depressed after viewing the ideal images. It was concluded that viewing these ideal images contributed to disordered eating by creating an immediate negative effect (Pinhas, et al., 1999). Hence there is some evidence to suggest that women may be influenced to attempt to replicate what they see substantiated in popular culture. However, this study looked only at women identified as having maladjusted eating patterns. There was no investigation on how cultural norms influences women not experiencing eating disorders. Nor was there any investigation of appearance as it is related to age.

Baker (1998) investigated the role of the visual media and body satisfaction

on blind women. The relationship between eating attitudes and body satisfaction was explored by administering a questionnaire to sixty women from three groups. The groups consisted of congenitally blind women, women blinded later in life, and sighted women. Congenitally blind women had the most positive body images and the most positive eating attitudes. It was concluded that the visual media plays an important role in the cultural dissemination of acceptable standards of beauty (Baker, 1998). Again, evidence seems to suggest that women are influenced by the images in popular culture. As in the study mentioned above, there was no investigation into the role of anti-aging messages on women, nor did this study investigate how such messages might influence feminine appearance.

Posavac (1998) argues that media images are not as influential as is commonly thought in setting the standards for feminine attractiveness. She contends that measures of body dissatisfaction, for example, are more accurate at predicting which women will be influenced by media images. Through reference to three experiments on young women, findings suggest that exposure to media images is moderated by a prior degree of body satisfaction. She suggests that body satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a more reliable predictor of influence by media images than exposure to media images alone (Posavac, 1998). Yet again, media images are evidenced to play a role in women's body satisfaction. However, this study involved what was termed young women. There was also a disproportional

reliance on the predictive value of psychological scales, rather than allowing women to speak for themselves about the influences of media images and other sociocultural factors.

Hendersonking (1997) explored women's body satisfaction by exposing participants to a conversation between two individuals about a third individual's excess body weight, or a neutral conversation about a friend's move. Participants were then exposed to images that represented an ideal female body, or neutral images. Overweight women tended to be more negative about their sexual attractiveness than the thinner women after being exposed to the ideal body images. Thinner women tended to rate themselves more consistently attractive regardless of exposure to ideals or neutral images or conversations. It was found that individual differences play a role in moderating the effects of media images (Hendersonking, 1997). This study takes into account the role of individual differences in determining the effects of media images on the body satisfaction of women. However, there is no attempt to investigate how such images might evidence themselves in the daily lives of women. Nor was there any attempt to look at the influence of anti-aging messages since the study dealt more closely with ideal body weight.

Goodman (1996) examined social, psychological and developmental factors precipitating cosmetic surgery for a sample of 29 women between the ages of 29

and 75. She theorized that ideal images of the female body in our culture would be directly related to the mainstreaming of cosmetic surgery. It was found that women consistently evaluated themselves according to idealized images that were popular during the subject's adolescence or early adulthood. It was also found that body satisfaction decreased with age (Goodman, 1996). While this study deals mainly with factors precipitating cosmetic surgery, here again there is some indication that media influences often dictate the degree of body satisfaction. This study deals with a sample of older women and asks them to self-evaluate. However, there is no investigation of women who may attempt to construct their appearance in ways other than resorting to cosmetic surgery as a direct result of cultural influences.

Bergeron and Senn (1998) look at the influence of sociocultural norms on women's body satisfaction as it pertains to lesbian and heterosexual women. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of lesbian and heterosexual women. It was concluded that both lesbian and heterosexual women are equally aware of sociocultural norms and each group's exposure to such norms seemed about equal. However, lesbian women reported having more positive self images, which was attributed to being buffeted by their sexual orientation. It was felt that lesbian women internalize sociocultural norms differently than heterosexual women (Bergeron and Senn, 1998). This study was more inclusive in its investigation of

cultural norms than those above. Rather than focusing solely on ideal images, there was a focus on the more general aspects of culturally endorsed appearance. However, the main focus was a comparison between lesbian and heterosexual women and it relied on an explanation of internalized body norms as evidenced by a questionnaire. There was no opportunity for woman to qualify their responses, nor was there any focus on the effects of culturally endorsed anti-aging messages.

It is my contention that women will hold current culturally endorsed feminine anti-aging beliefs and these beliefs will be evidenced in their appearance practices. Clearly, many researchers feel that acceptable appearance standards are demonstrated as a consequence of mass culture (Bordo, 1993, 1997; Hyde and McKinley, 1996). Furthermore, such standards continue to endorse an appearance that most closely resembles that of youth (Bordo, 1993, 1997; Wolf, 1990). While a youthful appearance is desired by men and women alike, the maintenance of a youthful appearance in women continues to be disproportionately sanctioned (Bordo, 1993, 1997; Friday, 1996; Halpren, 1995). Ideal images appear to be integral to body image for some women under certain circumstances (Bergeron and Senn, 1998; Hendersonking, 1997; Posavac, 1998). It is less clear if, how, or to what extent these images, and the broader concept of sociocultural norms, translate into the attitudes held by women. Nor is it clear how these attitudes might evidence themselves in women's appearance practices.

An investigation into what it means to look old as well as what it means to look youthful will be undertaken since a more complete understanding of these issues is necessary to make meaningful links between attitudes and body practices.

Methodology

Methodological inspirations for this thesis have mostly been found in some of the principles of feminist research, in particular the work of Dorothy Smith (Smith, 1987, 1990, 1999) and Susan Bordo (1993, 1997). Susan Bordo's extensive insight into media representations and how they influence women and Smith's theory on femininity, and her more general approach to feminist research have been instrumental in providing a framework through which sense could be made of the data collected. This chapter discusses the above influences as they pertain to this thesis. The actual research tool, the interview, will be discussed, as will issues concerning how the sample was located, and other ethical concerns. Finally, a profile of the participants will be included.

Feminist views on appropriate methods vary according to whom one asks. Most researchers proclaiming a feminist viewpoint agree that there are no distinctly feminist methods (Stanley and Wise, 1979; Reinharz, 1992). Rather, it might be more appropriate to say that feminism in research is a perspective that strives to maintain a sensitivity for and about women's issues, and a dedication to including women.

In particular, researchers like Dorothy Smith (1986, 1990, 1999) among others, have suggested that just being in the world, and the experiences one has while there, qualifies as valuable knowledge. This standpoint epistemology emanates from an increasing awareness that traditional science has produced a

type of alienated or distant knowledge. It is now being recognized that knowledge is valuable however it is generated; knowledge for and about women must be accessible to everyone and must serve as praxis (Stanley and Wise, 1979; in Stanley, 1990).

In terms of methods, this viewpoint leaves the possibilities for feminist research wide open. This is not to suggest that research should be undertaken lightly, or that anything is acceptable. Rather, the point is more to assert that knowledge can be generated in a variety of ways and does not have to adhere to stringent rules and regulations. Stanley and Wise (1979) have outlined several interrelated feminist principles that are deemed essential to the feminist research processes. According to Stanley and Wise, feminist principles should be evident in the relationship between the researcher and the researched, in the inclusion of emotion, and in an acknowledgment of the special circumstances that both the researcher and the researched bring to the project, and in balancing the power between the researcher and the researched (1979). I have tried to observe each of these principles throughout the course of this thesis.

The last several years have brought about an increased awareness of the unique struggles women encounter with issues of beauty, weight and other appearance related phenomena. Perhaps sparked by Susan Brownmiller's, *Femininity* (1984), books like *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf, 1990) and *Unbearable*

Weight (Bordo, 1993) have been among the first to recognize how images and ideologies about feminine beauty influence North American women. According to Elizabeth Haiken, The “youthquake” phenomenon (women seeking a more youthful appearance) is a manifestation of the 1960's (Haiken, 1997: 149). Early in this century feminine aging was regarded as a natural process and women who resisted were chided. As the century wore on this idea was dropped, largely due to the attention focused on the “baby boom” generation (Haiken, 1997). Hence, an acceptable feminine appearance has increasingly been associated with youth. This information, coupled with the constant barrage of anti-aging sentiments from the media, and my own wisps of experience (specifically, being told I looked younger with my grey hair colored) initiated an interest in how women deal with these age/appearance related issues.

Dorothy Smith’s insights into what she terms femininity as discourse provide an interesting commentary on age and appearance issues. Steeped in textuality, discourse has become for Smith the operating principle that structures the concept of femininity. With the emergence of moveable type and the mass distribution of books, magazines, advertisements, and other entities connected to language and communication, a discourse of femininity, already intact, has been broadened and strengthened. The discourse of femininity provides standardized information by mass distribution. The ideas and images in books and magazines,

commercials and advertisements can be distributed to vast numbers of people who are not necessarily known to one another. It is in this way that the same message can reach and influence many. This information and the way it is talked about and interpreted is what Smith terms textually mediated discourse. This discourse is important since Smith sees it as being structured by and structuring the actual appearance practices of woman in their local settings. The discourse of femininity is also a medium through which the beauty industry and connected industries are managed.

According to Smith, a feature of the discourse of femininity is the revelation of the body as imperfect and in need of rectification. This creates in women the desire to alter and rectify their appearances. Within the discourse is offered various forms of remedial equipment such as cosmetics, hair dyes and the like. For Smith, discontent with the body arises in the disjuncture between the text and the defects one finds on her body as a result of textual influence (Smith, 1990:185, 186).

Another feature of the discourse of femininity is the necessity for the body to remain eternally young. Smith asserts that,

As women age, they cease to be able to conform to the textual image of the body forever youthful and as they become incapable of fully competent participation in femininity, they are excluded from heterosexual society (1990:194).

According to Smith the discourse of femininity structures women as objects

created for men. It is in this way that the aging woman, no longer possessing a socially sanctioned look, can be seen as cast out of heterosexual society. Smith sees women as creating themselves as objects for men, but at the same time they are agents in the active pursuit of creating an acceptable appearance. Moreover, the discourse also has implication for those wishing not to package themselves according to the doctrines of femininity. Smith illustrates how the information provided by the discourse is often consciously rejected in an attempt to create an image that is alter or contrary to femininity. As Smith asserts, "Women are active, skilled, make choices, consider, are not fooled or foolish (1990: 302)."

However, this approach can be seen as only a partial explanation since it does not make clear how an acceptable appearance might change depending on the situation. What might be appropriate for the office may not be equally appropriate when going out to dinner.

Although not specifically dealing with aging, Susan Bordo contends that an image saturated culture is responsible for shaping and controlling the female body. In her analysis the dominant contemporary constructions of femininity shape and control the appearance practices of woman. She sees women as "docile bodies," laboring through the exacting and controlling principles of femininity. Diet, make-up and dress are seen as centrally organizing women's days, and since the reference points that guide us through these exercises are ideals, we learn to look

at ourselves as lacking. Coupled with the pervasiveness of mass produced and mass distributed cultural cues, practices of self management and presentation are not only encouraged, but become so commonplace as to seem normal (Bordo, 1993, 1997).

As I have illustrated in the first chapter, a substantial part of the mass imagery pervasive in western culture deals with anti-aging messages directed toward women. This can be seen as comprising part of Smith's discourse of femininity. Both Smith and Bordo refer to the ways in which the body is seen as lacking and in constant need of correction. This may have implications for investigating how and why women construct their appearances. Bordo endorses the cultural component of mass imagery, but has less to say about other manifestations of anti-aging ideology. Smith argues that the discourse of femininity emerges in the actual ways that women package and present their appearances. While it indeed may be the case that the discourse of femininity emerges as a result of the procedures women enact on their bodies, Smith herself acknowledges that the discourse is shaped and perpetuated by the images and ideology of mass culture.

The Focus Groups

Early in 1997, a series of three focus groups were conducted consisting of

thirteen women in total. Group one was the result of my asking for focus group participants while attending a Mary Kay spa. The second group consisted of friends who were recruited through a friend, but unknown to me at the time, and the third was comprised of my neighbors. These women ranged in age from early twenties to late seventies. Recruitment was accomplished by asking for women willing to take part in a group interview on beauty and aging. Two groups consisted of five women, and the third consisted of three. While most of the issues explored in the focus groups were very similar to those discussed in the interviews, several problems with utilizing the focus group interviews arose immediately. The group interview format seemed insufficient to give all women participating a voice. One group in particular seemed completely dominated by one individual, with the other women having very little opportunity to impart their thoughts. Moreover, since I had allowed for discussion through posing very open-ended questions, the discussions often traveled in directions that made the data difficult to compare and contrast among the groups. Finally, group three generated very little discussion. This may have been the result of knowing me personally and not being comfortable discussing personal feelings. Furthermore, as Morgan and Krueger (1993) discuss, it is essential that the topic and the interests and abilities of respondents to discuss the topic be evenly matched. Group three may have been more interested in pleasing me than in the topic being discussed. It was for these

reasons that I felt personal interviews might generate more useful data.

The Interviews

Each interview took about one hour to complete. The interviews were comprised of questions which are discussed below and in subsequent chapters (see Appendix C). They commenced in early January 1999 and were completed by March 1999. The interviews were conducted in each woman's home and generally followed a discussion pattern structured by the questions asked which .

The Questions

As mentioned above, early in 1997 three focus groups were conducted totaling thirteen women participants. A common theme within these meetings was concern over how media images and advertising are seen as pressuring women to fit certain stereotypes of beauty and youth. This sparked an increased interest on my part in the ways women are influenced by anti-aging images and ideologies pervasive in western culture. The interview schedule used for this thesis was the very similar to the one used in these meetings. Some of the interview questions were devoted to investigating whether women were concerned about looking old, if they felt they presently did look old, and whether society would consider them to look old. If one is to assume that women will be influenced by anti-aging messages

and attempt to construct their appearances accordingly, one must begin by inquiring of them both their personal opinions and definitions on looking old, or young, as well as their perceptions of other people's opinions on these issues. It was for this reason that the first section of the interview was comprised of questions designed to gain more information on what it means both personally and socially to have a youthful appearance, or conversely, to have an aged appearance. Although the first section of the interview was specifically devoted to this endeavor, this investigation continued throughout.

It was also necessary to investigate if, how, and to what extent anti-aging messages were familiar to each of the women interviewed. For example one may be aware that such ideology exists, but not be particularly influenced by it. Furthermore, one may, for example, be more or less isolated from the mass media, and therefore be more or less influenced accordingly. Questions were designed to explore these issues. One section was devoted to the investigation of feminine anti-aging messages pervasive in the media, and another section attempted to deal with other possible venues of influence.

Another section was designed to investigate self presentation. Questions were designed to investigate the things women did to their appearances and why. Attempts were made at linking what women do to themselves in relation to what they perceive they are being told to do by mass culture. Make-up, hair, and

clothing practices were investigated here, as well as issues of overall appearance.

The Sample

The women interviewed were recruited using a snowball sample. I approached three female acquaintances and asked them to help me locate a sample of their peers. It was explained that I was studying feminine aging and appearance. Interest in the topic and the willingness to spend about an hour with me were the only requirements. The sample consisted of eight women and was not intended to be a representative sample. Betty is considerably older than others who participated in the interviews. She was included since she expressed interest in continuing with the process after having participated in the focus group interviews. Furthermore, the sample is exclusively white, rural and middle class. I felt that since the topic was conspicuously absent from the existing literature an homogenous sample might be most useful to begin. Each woman signed a permission form and was assured of confidentiality (see Appendix A). Although each woman was given the option to read her interview after I had transcribed it, all declined. Most expressed interest in reading the finished product.

The Data Gathering Process

I have previously discussed some of the weaknesses of the focus group sessions. In addition to the difficulties I had with the focus groups, there were also aspects that I found helpful to the research process. As mentioned above, discussion about media pressure on women to conform to certain stereotypes of beauty and aging was a common theme. Although the research continued to be very broad, I was able to direct my attention toward looking at anti-aging messages in western culture as a result of the perceived interest in this topic generated by the focus groups.

The recruitment processes, both for the focus groups, and for the personal interviews, had some limitations. As mentioned above, asking for individuals to partake in a group interview on beauty and aging might eliminate or exclude some women from wanting to participate. The same can be said for the personal interviews. Recruiting individuals to be interviewed about anti-aging messages prevalent in western culture often resulted in confusion for the women asked. Feelings of not being qualified to participate were often expressed.

A sample of eight women is arguably small and in no way could it be considered a representative sample. I chose to interview eight women due to the constraints of time and available resources. This was both a strength and a weakness. A sample of this size cannot be generalized to the population at large,

but it did allow me the opportunity to gather some very specific information about a fairly homogenous group. Considering that literature on the topic was conspicuously absent, this was especially pertinent since it helped define a starting point from which future studies might be launched. Areas for future research will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion. The snowball sample does have some unique characteristics that often affect data quality.

Three of the women were acquaintances of mine, the remaining five were not. The women who knew me personally may have been less likely to fully divulge themselves to me, while an element of mistrust may have affected the responses of those who did not know me. Furthermore, the sample was limited to the acquaintances of the group which may have excluded other women with valuable contributions to make to the research process. For example, women of diverse ethnic backgrounds may view anti-aging messages in different ways from those interviewed. However, despite limitations of the sample, the interview sessions generated useful and interesting data.

The interview sessions proved much more useful than the focus group sessions in several ways. Each woman was able to speak for herself. The one on one interaction helped keep the discussion focused, while at the same time enabling exploration of new concepts through the use of open-ended questioning. The privacy of the personal interview seemed to eliminate non-responsiveness

which was often present in the focus group sessions. Finally, I was able to probe areas of interest more efficiently. Often the discussions in the focus group sessions taxed my resources to make proper notes, and reliably record what was being said and by whom. The interview sessions were also more useful for gathering personal information, whereas the focus groups only generated general information.

Following is a profile of the eight women interviewed. Each woman has been given a different name to protect her privacy and other potentially identifying information has been excluded:

Jennifer is a forty-four -year-old, white, middle class woman, of Scottish descent. She currently resides with her daughter and is divorced. She runs her own business as well as working for a non-profit organization. Jennifer is heterosexual and currently is involved in a serious relationship. She has two college diplomas. Jennifer claims to practice her own religion. She enjoys playing the piano, reading and writing. A typical day for Jennifer involves working at her jobs and spending time with her daughter and male partner. Jennifer is of about average height and weight and has blond hair.

Donna is a thirty-five-year-old, white, middle class woman of German and

Irish descent. Donna runs her own small business in addition to working for a local business. She currently resides with her male partner and their three children. Donna is heterosexual and has been married for ten years. She is a high school graduate with small business training. Donna describes herself as a non-religious person. Donna enjoys reading, crochet, the internet, socializing with friends and playing cards. A typical day for Donna consists of getting up early, having coffee, getting her kids off to school and going to work. Her evenings are spent at home with family and on the computer. Donna is about average height and weight and has short, straight brown hair.

Heather is a forty-eight-year-old middle class woman. She resides with her male partner in a married relationship. Heather is heterosexual. Heather has one daughter. She runs her own business in addition to working for a local business. Heather is a high school graduate and has also completed technical training. Heather belongs to a organized religion of which she is an active participant. She enjoys quilting, painting, crafts and the computer. A typical day involves getting up early and preparing for work on days she is scheduled to work. Other mornings are taken up with errands or church related commitments. Evenings are mainly comprised of relaxing and sewing. Heather is a slim petite woman with brown hair.

Nancy is a forty-two year-old, middle class, white woman. She is self employed and resides with her two children and male partner. Nancy is heterosexual and is currently involved in a married relationship. She is not currently part of any organized religion. Nancy is a high school graduate and has also completed technical training. She enjoys bowling and golf. A typical day is comprised of rising early and getting her children off to school. She works at her business during the day and is involved with her son's activities in the evening. Nancy is about average height and weight, and has short blond hair.

Tina is a forty-three- year-old, white, middle class woman of German, Irish and Native American descent. Tina is lesbian and is currently involved in a serious, committed relationship. Tina is unemployed and resides with her two children. She is a high school graduate and had completed technical training. She is a member of an organized religion, but is not currently practicing. She enjoys reading and golf. A typical day is comprised of looking after her children. Tina is a slim, tall, youthful looking brunette.

Angela is a forty-four-year-old, white, middle class woman. She currently resides with her spouse and elderly parent. Angela is heterosexual and is currently involved in a married relationship. She is the mother of two children. Angela is

currently unemployed. She is a highschool graduate and had completed technical training. Angela enjoys dancing, partying, reading and writing. A typical day is comprised of running her household and spending time with her children and grandchildren. Angela is a tall, slim, red-head.

Connie is a forty-four-year-old, middle class, white woman. Connie resides with her one child and her spouse. Connie is the mother of two children. She is heterosexual and is currently involved in a serious committed relationship. Connie is employed at a local business. She is a high school graduate and has completed technical training. Connie enjoys crafts, cross-word puzzles, and reading. A typical day includes working daily, seeing her child off to school, and doing housework. Connie is a petite, slim, youthful looking brunette

Betty is a seventy-nine-year-old white, middle class woman. Betty is a heterosexual widow, and is not currently involved in a relationship. She is retired. Betty is a high school graduate. She enjoys crocheting, knitting, cross-stitching and other craft projects. A typical day involves rising early, morning coffee, housework, walking and socializing with friends. Betty is about average height and weight and has white hair.

What follows is a presentation and discussion of the data from the interviews.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Looking Old-Looking Young: What Does it Mean?

The interviews commenced with four questions about the appearance of youthfulness and the appearance of age. “What do you think it means to look youthful in women?” and “What does society say it means to look youthful in a woman?” were the first questions asked.

In addressing the question about what it means to look youthful, a greater emphasis was placed on attributes that were more easily controlled such as outlook or attitude, physical presentation, level of fitness, or appearance of health. The importance of chronological age was diminished, as were other less controllable factors such as facial wrinkles or sagging skin. One significant difference between personal attitudes and perceived societal requirements was a concept some termed “attitude”. The importance of having a youthful attitude, was deemed significant.

- (Angela) “Zest for life, attitude, joi de vie, exuberance, It’s all in how she presents herself.”
- (Donna) “I think attitude is a big part in looking youthful. You can be an older person, and I see them come in the stores all the time or in the store and shop down there, an older woman, make up applied, carrying themselves well. That’s a way of looking youthful, attitude more than a physical thing I think.”

Displaying self confidence was also seen as representing a youthful look.

- (Tina) “Confidence probably number one, security with one’s self, confidence with one’s abilities,”
- (Betty) “The way she carries herself mostly and acts. I think that has a lot to do with it.”

Another dimension of personal perceptions of youth was an association with a polished appearance. This concept was transmitted through reference to proper hygiene, cleanliness, wearing appropriate clothing, and even in some cases maintaining an acceptable weight, or level of fitness and health.

- (Donna) “Of course being dressed properly, no sweat pants and presenting yourself well.”
- (Connie) “I’ve seen eighty-year-old women with beautiful skin that looked youthful. To keep yourself up, to take care of yourself. Well, to keep yourself well groomed. I don’t know, I think people can be young and if they don’t dress well, or don’t [maintain their appearance] they look old.”
- (Heather) “I think healthy looking, keeping your skin clean and not gaining too much weight. Sort of keeping up to date with things, styles, hair, clothes.”
- (Nancy) “Healthy I would have to say and they are not so tired looking.”

Jennifer saw appearing youthful in women as being more closely associated with the outward physical appearance of the body.

- (Jennifer) “Smooth skin, more often than not, long hair, and generally associated with a smiling face, if I had a picture of youth.”

Furthermore, even though Donna discussed attitude as an important factor in looking youthful, she also included lack of wrinkles, a slim figure, and not having

grey hair in her answer.

- “The blond hair and the thin and no wrinkles. I mean all of the things that we see in the magazines, yes, but attitude is youthfulness to me.”

In contrast to most of the answers above, perceptions of society’s requirements for a youthful appearance in women was generally associated with slimness, smooth skin and colored, as opposed to grey hair.

- (Angela) “Smooth skin, no wrinkles, no grey hair. I guess that’s about it.”
- (Betty) “Oh society, now that’s a whole [different thing], being skinny and all the rest of it,”
- (Nancy) “I would say youthful would be slim, trim, and giggley, grinney and that idea of hair flopping in the wind.”
- (Tina) “It’s based totally on physical appearance,”
- (Connie) “I think society says no grey hair, no wrinkles, low weight, dressing current to the fads.”

Heather and Jennifer made no distinction between what they felt was a youthful look and what they felt society would consider looking youthful.

Although their ideas about what looks youthful in a woman were somewhat dissimilar, their willingness to concede that social expectations formed the basis of their replies was significant. When asked what society says looks youthful each replied:

- (Heather) “Probably the same thing, I think. I think that’s probably where I get most of my ideas on it”.
- (Jennifer) “I think the same thing. I think I’ve been conditioned probably to think the same thing”.

“What does it mean to look old in a woman?” and “What does society say it means to look old in a woman?” were the final two questions asked in this section. Women were asked for their own personal opinions first. As in the examples of perceptions of youthfulness above, when asked what it means to look old in a woman, some women felt that the appearance of age could be controlled by factors such as attitude, or in styles of dress, and other presentations of the self. Clearly, for these women, appearing old was associated less with physical characteristics and more with qualities such as happiness, or in having a zest for life, or in displays of self confidence.

- (Angela) “ Hard, hard frown lines, down-turned mouth. A person who doesn’t smile a lot, laugh a lot. They look so much older. Just a person, a woman who doesn’t have much joy in her life.”
- (Betty) “Dressing and acting are the main things that I think make a person look old.”
- (Tina) “Lacking confidence, maturity, security with one’s self.”
- (Donna) “Lacking that zest that...Women can have grey hair and still look very youthful, but I think again to how I perceive somebody in business and I am out there all the time. It’s not necessarily the clothes, it’s not necessarily the wrinkles in the skin. To me it’s how that person presents, the confidence, the sexiness or how they are portraying themselves to me, and I think somebody who is old lacks that.”

Other women in the study saw appearing old much differently. For these women the appearance of age was more closely associated with the physical body and in particular the face and hair color.

- (Connie) “Grey hair, a lot of facial wrinkles, overweight. I know a lot of women are overweight. I think basically grey hair and wrinkles.”
- (Nancy) “The tired looking factor I would have to put in there. Again, when you look old you look more tired, more like you start to get a few wrinkles and everything sags, or most of us do.”
- (Heather) “Tired, drug out, I don’t think it matters how old you are. I think it ages you when you are tired or stressed out.”
- (Jennifer) “I think of the pictures in the newspapers and it says ninety years young. You know as soon as they start putting young on the end of your age that you are old, and grey hair, saggy skin, kind of muddled cheeks, baggy cheeks, and those people are never smiling.”

When asked what society says looks old in a woman, these women felt society’s message was very oriented toward the physical body. In most accounts there was less room for the broader and more inclusive definitions they had claimed as their own personal opinions on what it means to look old.

- (Heather) “Getting too much sun gives those wrinkles, watching those commercials.”
- (Connie) “Society is always saying get rid of the grey, and use those creams, and you know, keep a youthful appearance.”
- (Tina) “Wrinkles, weight, and somehow devalued comes into that.”
- (Betty) “Oh the society, wearing black for one thing. It’s like the

old people in Europe. They wear these little kerchiefs and black dresses and they look old, and they are not.”

- (Angela) “The wrinkles, the added weight, the grey hair, changes in posture perhaps, mostly physical things.”
- (Donna) “I mean it’s back to the adage of the grey hair, the wrinkles, physical ailments, the incontinence, all of those things I think society looks at as being old.”
- (Nancy) “I would say in most cases society looks at someone and says, ‘well they are getting older and letting themselves go, the weight is getting on there,’ and, you know, just generally.”

Having a youthful appearance means different things to different individuals as does appearing old. However, it can be said that maintaining a youthful appearance is associated with competence, confidence and energy, the appearance of health, and a neat, tidy, polished appearance. Many of the above responses pointed out that having a youthful appearance was not about age, or weight, or hair color. However, references to all of those things were still made. Jennifer saw the outward appearance of the physical body, in terms of smooth skin, lack of wrinkles and lack of grey hair as very much pertinent to appearing youthful. Donna included the concept of attitude along with not having grey hair and wrinkles or being over weight. Perhaps the most significant finding is the narrowness with which most saw society’s expectations. Clearly these women perceived society as requiring women to be slim, smooth skinned and to have pigmented hair to be considered youthful looking. Being overweight, having wrinkled skin, or grey hair were thought to

be perceived by society as looking old.

Media Influences:

"So much of everything we think is controlled by the media, either on TV or the printed word." (interview)

This section deals with media messages and other societal influences. I felt it was important to tap my subjects' knowledge of media messages about aging to determine their awareness of, and attention to this medium, and to gain a more complete understanding of the origins and content of these messages. While a concerted effort was made to include all forms of media in this analysis, the printed word suffered somewhat. Questions about the content of magazines, newspapers and tabloid news were discussed. Unfortunately questions about fictional novels and written literature was unintentionally excluded.

Advertising

I began by asking some questions about advertising. Many women had previously mentioned the role media images, messages and advertising plays in transmitting information about feminine appearance. Specifically, the need to stay young looking was discussed, so very little time was wasted responding with an

emphatic “yes” to the following question: “Have you noticed advertising saying anything to women about looking old?”

Betty acknowledged that advertising can, at times, be very influential.

- “I mean advertising, it would [be influential] to certain people.”

Heather felt advertising often tries to make women believe they can stop the aging process.

- (Heather) “All the time, there’s not a commercial on TV, not a TV program, not a magazine that you pick up that doesn’t show you how to slow down the aging process and almost stop it if it were possible.”

Not only does advertising tell women that they can stop the aging process, but it makes it very clear that fighting age is the only prudent course of action.

- (Angela) “Oh absolutely, getting old is perceived to be negative. You must purchase everything, do everything in your power to stop the onset of age. Color your hair, get the special things for your face, buy the special make-up, pay the big bucks to have surgeries if need be.”
- (Donna) “What they say is you have to work hard, you have to spend money. You have to search out these products to be young. It puts a lot of pressure on women.”
- (Jennifer) “They capitalize on the fight against age with all that anti-wrinkle cream and stuff.”

Finally, they show women how they should look. For the most part, only the very scrupulously maintained older woman is featured in advertising.

- (Nancy) “On the TV if they are advertising something for older women they are using a woman who is very well maintained for her

age, that looks better than the rest of us do.”

- (Tina) “Even when magazines tried to advertise women’s fashions and whatever for older women they still have that ideal, still the good looking, sophisticated, classic looking older women, perfectly made up. You never see overweight or grey haired women.”
- (Connie) “Advertising all these products makes you feel old because you don’t look as good as the models they are portraying as [being in] your age group.”

Advertising was seen as an influential medium that often tries to influence women into believing that certain products or preparations can stop the aging process. These messages are reinforced not only by the spoken or written text, but by visual cues as well.

Cinema/Movies and Films

Nancy, Jennifer and Betty declined to answer questions about popular films since they were not movie watchers. The remaining five had some interesting things to say about the depiction of older women in film. The question asked here was, “If you have noticed, how do popular films treat an aged appearance on a woman?”

It was felt that looking old diminished the opportunity for important roles and that the film industry considers younger women more desirable.

- (Connie) “There’s no real prime roles in movies for women that are getting older.”

- (Angela) “I think overall in the movies it’s the young ones, it’s the hard bodies.”

Furthermore, Connie mentioned that men and women of the same age are rarely being paired together.

- “Every lead actor’s got a lead actresses that’s twenty or thirty years younger than him.”

Additionally, the roles that were seen as available to these women were regarded as secondary, or somehow ordinary, and of less importance.

- (Donna) “There will always be roles for older women to play the mother, to play the, you know. It’s really interesting to watch the older movies and what were our idols as teenagers are now playing the roles of mothers and grandmothers and it’s very interesting because you think of them as being twenty-years-old and as being your idols and as doing all the right things, and then you see them.”
- (Connie) “I think they are always the mother or the grandmother. They are rarely in the lead.”

It was also pointed out that attempts are constantly being made in films to disguise any appearance of age in hopes that the movie going public will not see it at all.

- (Angela) “Some films try to cover up the obvious signs of aging by make-up, or hairstyles, or perhaps filtering.”
- (Heather) “I mean you see people that you know are sixty-five-years-old and they look like they are thirty-five. You know that they are certainly not aging gracefully, it’s mostly chemicals, plastic surgery. They’ve done so much to boost their older skin and make it look like their youthful appearance.”

Although it was generally agreed that older women enjoy marginal status in films, their status was seen by some to be improving.

- (Angela) “but some film makers present woman as they are, and, as I said, valued as an older person.”
- (Tina) “I would say that’s getting a little better. You’re starting to see a lot of actresses who were big a few years ago getting lead roles again now like Susan Sarandon. It’s getting better, but it’s not where it should be that’s for sure. (Would you say these women have an aged appearance?) Yeah, but what I like about some of the movies is that they’re showing them not made up, not anything. Older women are starting to break through that barrier. It’s just barely starting to happen, finally, when they can break through that barrier and not have to look made up or anything else.”

Clearly, this question assumes that all would agree on what constitutes an aged appearance on a woman. Despite this shortfall, it can be said that those interviewed recognized, not only the significance of not looking old, but also of not being old.

Television

Television programs were viewed in much the same way as movies. The question asked in this section was: “How do soaps, sitcoms and television programming in general treat an aged appearance on a woman?” Again, Betty declined to answer this question since she did not watch much television. Older looking women were seen to occupy a mostly marginal, severely restricted, or negative role in television programming.

In soaps and sitcoms the role of the older looking woman was regarded as

being that of mother or grandmother. Although this was seen as legitimate and important, it was also seen as limiting.

- (Donna) “Again they are the mother or the grandmother-older women.”
- (Connie) “Again a lot of sitcoms have mothers or grandmothers in them.”

Angela mentioned that many older women are cast in roles as villains.

- “What I’ve seen just going through they’re usually mean, spiteful, interfering, back-stabbing, old biddies that are trying to stop everybody from having fun.”

In addition to restricted or negative portrayals of older looking women in soaps and sitcoms there was also felt to be an element of unreality about their portrayal.

- (Tina) “I would say they are always perfectly made up, fantasy land. You don’t see much grey hair do you?”
- (Connie) “I remember when I used to watch the soaps the matriarchs were always at the top of the fashion pile. You never saw anybody in a pair of sweats running around the house.”
- (Nancy) “They certainly don’t have forty, fifty and sixty-year-old women that look forty, fifty and sixty. You know they usually, I mean some are [forty, fifty and sixty], but I suppose they have cosmetics to... or cosmetic surgery.”
- (Jennifer) “Generally, probably I would be surprised at the age of some of the soap opera characters. I don’t watch them, but time by time I’m somewhat familiar with some of the personalities. I think I’d probably be surprised at how old they are. Maybe it’s well concealed, maybe they don’t want people to know how old they are.”

Donna found there to be a “double standard” between men and women anchors on television.

- “What’s really interesting is Peter Mansbridge on TV. I mean he’s, grey, he’s bald and he’s still sitting there.”

As in the question on films, this question assumes there would be a consensus as to what constitutes an aged appearance on a woman. Yet, it is again recognized that chronological age limits women’s participation in films, as do physical characteristics that belie aging. Such physical characteristics were either seen to be eradicated, modified, or reduced.

Print Media

Although this question included newspapers and tabloids most women discussed magazines when asked about the print media. There was a focus on images in magazines rather than articles. The participating women were asked, “How do magazines, newspapers and tabloids treat an aged appearance on a woman?”

Here it was said that magazines try to cover up the obvious signs of aging either by disguising the appearance of age or by not showing women who look a certain way.

- (Betty) “Usually some magazines, they make them look a lot younger.”

- (Tina) “Even an older lady, perfectly made up. You’re not going to see much grey hair. You’re not going to see many wrinkles”
- (Angela) “You don’t see an older woman on the cover of *Cosmo*, or *Chatelaine* for that matter.”
- (Jennifer) “They never show an elderly woman unless they are doing an article on aging.”
- (Nancy) “You know, if you look through a magazine most women they depict are young. I’d say under thirty young.”

If magazines did depict an older looking woman it was thought to be done negatively.

- (Heather) “I don’t think there’s a whole lot of magazines that flatter women that are aging.”

Additionally, it was thought that such issues were primarily dealt with through advertising.

- (Connie) “Well I think they really don’t deal with it other than the fact that they are trying to sell products to help you stay younger looking.”
- (Jennifer) “In magazines I mostly notice it in advertising.”

Again, as with the questions on films and television, it is assumed that all will agree on what constitutes an aged appearance on a woman. Most focused their answers on images in magazines. Looking old in women was largely viewed as being ignored or disguised. Furthermore, issues of age and appearance in women were largely viewed as dealt with only through advertising.

Anti-aging Messages and Other Influences

Some of the women I spoke with felt personally influenced by anti-aging messages when asked, “Do messages about how youthful a woman should look influence how you present yourself?” In reference to coloring her hair, Donna had this to say:

- “Yeah, and I gave in to it and I have to admit I did feel better.”

Heather felt that anti-aging messages were a factor at times.

- “Sometimes. (Why?) Well because I always feel that if I’m not looking presentable that people will say ‘boy, she doesn’t take very good care of herself.’ or, ‘she’s awfully let herself go,’ which is what I would suppose I think too when I see people I have known for years and gone to school with.”

The reference to one’s physical presentation seems consistent with the ideas discussed earlier about the association of a polished appearance with a youthful appearance.

Others were unsure of the degree of influence and contemplated the possibility that it may not be a conscious thing, or may apply in some areas and not in others.

- (Connie) “I don’t know whether or not I’m affected, but I try to take care of myself.”
- (Jennifer) “Probably subconsciously, not consciously... I don’t think it has, like things I don’t want to do, like my daughter is always saying, ‘your jeans are too short.’ Well too bad, I’m secure enough in my life that I don’t care if my jeans aren’t exactly, you know, one inch over the top of my shoe.”

There were others who felt unaffected by anti-aging messages.

- (Betty) “No, because I’ve got a mind of my own.”
- (Tina) “No, never. Appearance has never mattered to me a great deal.”
- (Angela) “No, no because I don’t care. I’m comfortable in my role, what I do. I’m comfortable with my friends, my family, and myself.”

However, when asked: “Do messages about how youthful a woman should look influence women in general?” Some thought there would be a significant amount of influence. Betty and Nancy were not sure.

- (Donna) “Oh yeah, oh yeah, what kind of make-up to buy, whether or not to dye your hair, absolutely, absolutely.”
- (Tina) “Yes unfortunately, because we are totally bombarded with these messages everyday.”

Jennifer saw women as being generally quite influenced due to our perceived lack of culture.

- “I think Anglo Saxon Protestants, we don’t have the security of a culture so we can be blown in the wind a little more easily.”

Connie, who had previously been unsure about the effects of anti-aging messages on herself, had this to say:

- “Yes I think so because it affects me. I think everybody is affected by it. I think you would have to be no TV, back in the woods to have your own style.”

Angela felt anti-aging messages were influential to women because of a perceived

subordination to men.

- “We are taught this as children growing up and therefore, you know, we have to be pretty, pretty all the time. And pretty doesn’t usually involve getting old and having wrinkles, and cataracts, and grey hair”

Heather however, felt that most women were not very influenced at all.

- “I’d say not most of them. Because if you see how they don’t really care if they are dressed properly in a formal setting.”

Detrimental elements in these messages were also discussed.

- (Tina) “I’ve seen what it does to people, constantly trying to grasp that looking youthful-always looking. It undermines their self confidence and takes up a heck of a lot of time.”
- (Connie) “I hate the thing that everybody is supposed to be pencil thin and have large breasts and perfect skin and perfect hair and I think it really affects a lot of women.”

Many of the women interviewed felt anti-aging messages were influential for themselves as well as for woman in general. Tina and Angela’s answers were especially significant since they both denied being influenced by anti-aging messages, yet they both reported feeling that women generally would be influenced by such messages. Clearly, women are not blindly led to follow culturally pervasive standards. Yet it would appear that cultural norms are perceived to be generally quite influential.

How pressured women feel to remain youthful looking was the subject of the next set of questions. While many of the answers to the previous set of

questions on anti-aging messages spoke to a degree of pressure especially from the media, those who reported feeling pressured were not typically naming the media as the primary source of that pressure. The following is a range of answers to these question: “Do you feel pressured to look youthful or to look more youthful?” “If so, where does the pressure come from?”

- (Jennifer) “Maybe, my daughter.”
- (Connie) “Well my husband, I try to stay young for him because he is ___ years younger than me. I think that my biggest influence is my husband.”
- (Donna) “Absolutely, a lot of my friends are single parents and of course they go [out] and once in a while I’ll tag along with them in my jeans (the way I pretty well look now) and they look beautiful. ...they’ve taken two hours to do their hair and yeah, I feel pressured because, you know, I should be doing the same thing...yeah from friends, feel it from people coming into the store.”
- (Heather) “A kid, yeah, ‘Mom put some color in your hair you look younger with color in your hair.’ So I suppose, I guess that’s when I put color in my hair. So, I suppose in a way you feel like, ‘ok, they see me in a certain way. Maybe I should change, maybe I should do something to change to do something about it.’ I didn’t feel resentful or anything because I thought they were doing it for my benefit.”

Rather than media images or messages, the main sources of pressure for the above women seems to be friends, partners, or their own children. However, others reported feeling no pressure at all.

- (Angela) “No. When I go out with my friends and they are half my age I don’t feel that I have to try and compete. ‘Take me as I am.’ I’ve never felt pressured by anybody, no.”

- (Betty) “Nope, just be yourself.”
- (Tina) “No.”

“Do woman in general feel pressured to look youthful or more youthful?”

“Where does this pressure come from?” These were the final two questions in this section. Betty felt there was not little pressure since it was not something she had personally experienced.

- “No, I haven’t run across any.”

Jennifer felt the pressure as an illusive concept that was the result of conditioning.

- “It’s hard to say when you are being conditioned like that because if you knew you were being conditioned you probably wouldn’t be.”

Heather, although not feeling personally pressured, thought different circumstances might result in pressure.

- “If I worked out in a shop in the city or something like that, I’m sure I would because most of the girls I know that work in busier places, they are always trying to keep up with the youthful appearance.”

Nancy, Tina, Donna and Angela thought women generally did experience pressure to look certain ways, but in some cases were reluctant to call it pressure to look young.

- (Nancy) “Pressured, well if you consider youthful being slim and trim, yes they are.”
- (Tina) “Yes, to look a lot of ways. I’ve seen mothers constantly telling daughters how they should or shouldn’t look.”
- (Donna) “I think yeah, there’s an awful lot of pressure to buy the

make-up, to buy the perfume, to smell right, to look right, to be right,”

- (Angela) “I don’t know if it’s so much to look youthful. Yes, I guess it is to look youthful, but they also want you to act youthful and behave in a youthful manner,”

Finally, pressure in general was thought to originate from many areas.

- (Connie) “It comes from all areas perhaps, but more so the media.”
- (Nancy) “Yeah, [women are pressured] especially by other women, like, ‘Oh you should loose twenty pounds,’ or ‘that would look better if you were a little slimmer.’ Other women are more apt to comment to you on what’s wrong as opposed to what looks good.”
- (Donna) It comes from everywhere, from our husbands, you know we’ve all been prone to that. Husbands, friends, acquaintances, people at work, it comes from everywhere. I mean it is everywhere.”

As one woman expressed, although the media targets anti-aging issues, perhaps it is a comment on our own innermost thought and feelings.

- (Jennifer) “It comes from them (the media) but they have to be capturing an ideal in everybody’s mind, right? There has to be a kernel of something in people’s minds. They have to be the ones who say, ‘oh, I think I see this.’ It has to be there but they’re (the media) certainly nurturing it.”

Many of those reporting that they felt pressure to look youthful or more youthful named family members and peers as the sources of that pressure rather than media influences. It was felt that such pressure is often elusive and subtle which may help to explain why it was not a factor for all those interviewed. Again, media messages were seen as a main source of that pressure along with other

people.

“Do you think a woman should remain youthful looking regardless of her chronological age?” Again, definitions of a youthful look discussed at the beginning of this chapter were any of a number of attributes ranging from slimness and the absence of grey hair to the maintenance of health and the presentation of a polished appearance . Some of these attributes, depending on one’s age, are more or less difficult to achieve. The answers to this question reflect the various themes previously discussed as being thought to portray a youthful look.

Heather felt that it was good to stay youthful looking to a degree as long as that meant active and healthy. More drastic methods of youth maintenance were seen as excessive.

- “I think it’s good to stay youthful looking to a degree, but it’s good to use discretion like as far as plastic surgery, definitely not. Just aging in general, keeping up an appearance of healthiness. Like trying to keep yourself healthy, like exercise and stuff like that. I mean, that will do a lot for you regardless of how old you are.”

A similar comment was made by Jennifer. She too, saw keeping up an appearance of health and actively seeking to care for oneself as most important for women.

This kind of maintenance was seen as a prerequisite for happiness.

- “I think a woman should be active and try to maintain as good health as she possible can, and in that looking after herself, but I think a woman should do what makes her happy. But generally we’re happier when we are more active and out looking after ourselves. So that would be what I think she should do, just what makes her happy.”

Above, plastic surgery was mentioned only as an option to be avoided. In the following response plastic surgery is seen as a viable option for the achievement of a youthful look as long as it is a conscious choice. It seems here that a youthful look is more closely associated with the outward physical appearance rather than the more general maintenance of health and well being.

- (Donna) “I think if dying the hair, liposuction and plastic surgery is available, and it’s a conscious choice, I don’t think she should have to, but if it’s a conscious choice, and it’s going to be good for her, make her feel better, then I say go for it.”

Connie commented on the need for women to keep up a youthful appearance as a way of maintaining credibility in the eyes of others.

- “Yes I think so. I think when I look at my mother. She kind of flits around. She’s gone from tracksuit mode to actually dressing nice again and taking care of herself. I think people perceive her a lot better and I think, well you know, although people go to older people for wisdom and words of wisdom, I think if somebody is kind of dowdy and has just let themselves go you kind of think, ‘well what can I get from them, they’ve gone to pot,’ type thing. I think a person feels better when they take care of themselves and try to look younger.”

Clearly some women who associated a youthful look as remaining without grey hair and remaining slim felt that striving to maintain such a look was unnecessary and, in some cases an unreasonable expectation.

- (Nancy) “No, its like the grey hairs, every one gets earned.”
- (Tina) “No not at all, what the hell is wrong with aging--looking your

age, whether it's graceful or not?"

- (Angela) "If you are comfortable with who you are and the body you are in it shouldn't matter."
- (Betty) "Just be yourself."

The need for women to maintain a youthful appearance commonly hinged on one's definition of what such an appearance was. Some characteristics of maintaining a youthful appearance present in several definitions, such as remaining active and healthy, were endorsed. Plastic surgery was both endorsed and rejected. Many reported seeing an aged look as something earned, and as such women should not feel pressured to change.

"Does society expect women to remain youthful looking regardless of their chronological age?" As in these previous responses, all the women interviewed felt that women generally were pressured to stay youthful looking. Most attributed this to media influences.

- (Donna) "Yes, it's the magazines... and society says younger is beautiful."
- (Connie) "I'd probably say yes because of what we see on TV and magazines."
- (Heather) "I think so. It's obvious from all the media, the TV and stuff."
- (Tina) "Yes. How many examples do we have? The movies we

were just talking about.”

In addition to asserting that society would like to see all women maintain a youthful look regardless of their chronological age, Angela commented on what she felt the attraction to maintaining a youthful look was.

- “Yes, I think society would like to see that. Once again, you want to be surrounded by the beautiful, the rich, the famous, the desirable. I mean, if there’s a table in a restaurant and there’s two elderly women sitting there having lunch, and there’s a table with two young people having lunch, Where’s anybody going to sit?”

Betty made the observation that some segments of society seem to accept the look that we commonly associate with aging in woman, while others do not.

- “Some people accept it and others say, ‘Oh, she’s letting herself go.’”

Those that actually commented on age brought up an interesting point. Often the connection between a socially acceptable appearance and one’s age is determined through measuring how youthful one looks for one’s age.

- (Jennifer) “I think society expects women to fight the aging process. And you hear people say they look really good for their age. There’s always that little measuring stick of how they should look for their age and if they look older, or younger, or right on, and that’s a compliment, those sorts of things.”
- (Nancy) “It’s not so much age, it’s the appearance. Other than when it comes into the question of you look young for your age, then they throw the age in, but other than that it’s all how you look.”

It was generally felt that society expects woman to remain youthful looking

regardless of their chronological age. It was however, acknowledged that people are often judged by measuring how youthful one looks for one's age. This may help to explain why there is differential acceptance of an aged appearance in women.

A Double Standard

This section deals with male aging as it is seen contrasted with female aging. As in previous sections, the focus was on appearance as opposed to other aspects of the aging process. Women were asked a series of questions designed to gain insight into how aging impacts the male appearance, and to inquire about any perceived differences between the effects of aging on men and women which would be specifically related to their appearance. It was generally felt that aging impacts both men and women, since each does look older.

- (Betty) "Some men yes because they just let themselves go."
- (Tina) "If I were to be honest about it yes, but nowhere near to the extent that it affects women."
- (Jennifer) "I'm sure it has to because they are selling millions and millions of dollars worth of products."

However, in men, aging was seen as predominantly positive, while in women it was viewed as negative. "Does aging impact how a man looks?" was the first question posed in this section.

Many felt that getting older for a man made him look more distinguished, sexier, more powerful, and generally more desirable.

- (Jennifer) “Well of course, and everybody knows that it’s ok for a man to have the grey in the temples because that’s distinguished, right?”
- (Tina) “It’s probably a common myth that men age more gracefully than women. You know, that’s just something that’s been drilled into us too.”
- (Nancy) “When a man grows old it’s maturity.”
- (Connie) “Men look better as they get older, as they get that grey in their hair, they get the weather lines in their face, they get more distinguished looking. I think older men are more attractive than younger men. They have a charm about them because of their appearance.”
- (Donna) “We’re back to Peter Mansbridge again, you know, Sean Connery, still a sexy looking man, and my husband, I mean he gets better looking as he gets older and I catch myself going, ‘Holy Mackerel, pretty good looking guy,’ but I don’t remember thinking that ten years ago.”
- (Angela) “Usually it’s a positive impact, ‘Oh he’s had experience, he’s wise, he’s dignified, he’s handsome, a man’s man, he’s made it.’ His signs of aging are perceived differently, they’re perceived as good things, he’s come up through the ranks, had a good life and earned it.”

The above statements are in sharp contrast to the answers given when the same question was asked about women.

- (Donna) “I think aging (looking old) is a negative thing for women, oh yeah, absolutely.”
- (Nancy) “When a women grows old she’s old, right.”

- (Angela) “Women just get old”
- (Connie) “Once you get past a certain look you are perceived as old”

Clearly, we are seeing the same things happening to both men and women. The lined faces, the extra weight, the silver hair. Unfortunately for women, that look is only endorsed in men. This is not to say that there were not dissenting opinions. Heather felt that women were being more consciousness about their appearances than men by monitoring things like weight and their hair color. When asked if aging impacts how a man looks she replied:

- “Definitely, I think more than women. First of all, they don’t color their hair, so as soon as they start to get grey their age sort of [shows]. In most men you see them progressively getting older. They tend to not be worried about their weight. They will gain and not care.”

This same woman saw the impact of aging on a woman’s appearance as less significant rather than more significant.

- “I think it doesn’t seem to have an impact until they are up in their fifties. I find that most woman up till then pretty well stay looking the same. You don’t seem to show your age until you hit sort of like fifty.”

The impact of age on appearance is largely viewed as positive for men and negative for women. Logically one might deduce that it is more acceptable for men to look their age than it is for women. The following is a series of answers to that question.

Some saw this discrepancy as a double standard.

- (Betty) “Yes they can get away with it better. I don’t really know, they accept older men more than they do older women.”
- (Angela) “There’s a double standard, definitely.”
- (Tina) “Yes definitely. Society has always differentiated between males and females that way. They equate success in a man with age and status. It seems to be totally opposite, the reverse for women.”

Others described the phenomenon more as a credibility discrepancy between men and women.

- (Heather) “Oh yes definitely, I think when a man is an older looking man, especially in a professional sense, people tend to trust them and their judgement and what they say more than with a woman.”
- (Connie) “Men never seem to go past their prime. They seem to get better and better.”
- (Donna) “I think it matters to women to maintain that youthful look. I think a man becomes more mature with age. It’s almost, you know, as a man gets older it’s almost that he’s got year of success behind him, that sort of thing.”

Maturity, credibility and intelligence are attributed to the older man and valued as assets. References to trusting the judgement of an older man over that of an older woman, and seeing older men as more mature, sensible, and stable than older women, makes it easy to see why many women might want to minimize the changes in appearance often attributed to age.

Self Presentation

This section deals with issues of self presentation. Women were asked a number of questions designed to investigate the ways in which they construct their appearances. Cosmetics, diet, exercise, weight, clothing, hair and similar issues related to appearance were discussed.

General Appearance

The discussion in this section pertains to the following questions: “Do you monitor your appearance?” “What are the things you monitor about your appearance?” “Why are these aspects of your appearance important to you?” It was the general consensus that all monitored appearance. The most common areas of concern were hair, weight and clothing. There were also several references made to concerns about not appearing old.

Hair was monitored for its perceived neatness, style and color. Betty was most concerned about the neatness and style of her hair.

- “Well hair is one important thing I find, if you let your hair go straight and scraggy.”

Neatness and style were factors for other younger women as well. As a way of improving her appearance, Heather mentioned her need to take more care in doing

her hair on days when she felt ill or tired and was not looking her best. Heather had previously included looking tired and “drug out” as a factor in looking old.

- “I do my hair a little bit better”

In addition to expressing concern over neatness and style, hair color was an issue.

- (Angela) “My hair. I don’t want to have grey hair right now, but then I change my hair colour. Maybe it’s not so much that I don’t want grey, but I like different things. Probably the only thing I monitor is my hair, my hair colour.”
- (Nancy) “I lighten my hair”
- (Donna) “What do I do to myself? I color my hair”
- (Connie) “I always put a rinse in my hair”
- (Jennifer) “I’ll make sure my hair is coloured and that kind of stuff.”

Weight was another common area of concern for these women.

- (Connie) “I’m very conscious of my weight.”
- (Donna) “I watch my weight as everybody does.”
- (Nancy) “I try not to gain too much more weight.”

Clothing and styles of dress were offered as examples of appearance monitoring.

- (Donna) “I have to buy better bras. I have to buy different styles of clothing to enhance my appearance.”
- (Betty) “What you wear too. I try to wear [nice looking] sweaters and slacks.”

Although Tina was assured that her efforts were only for herself, “[I do it] for self satisfaction. Certainly not for anybody else. It’s what makes me feel

comfortable.” Most reported looking after these aspects of their appearance as a means of projecting an acceptable appearance.

- (Jennifer) “To fit into the world you can’t be totally oblivious to what other people think.”
- (Donna) “I’m not a bomb shell so it takes a little bit more effort on my part to get that acceptance.”

This need to project an acceptable, credible appearance has previously been discussed as being linked to the presentation of a youthful appearance. Equally interesting however, were the several references to consciously striving to project some aura of youth.

- (Connie) “I have a [young] son and I don’t want to be an old mother to him. I have a [young adult] daughter and I don’t want to be an old mother to her.”
- (Betty) “I don’t say I wear something a sixteen-year-old would wear, but”
- (Donna) “To keep myself feeling good and youthful, especially in other people’s eyes is my attitude.”

Participation in society requires from most of us attention to our outward physical appearance. All the women reported taking care of certain aspects of their appearance. While one woman was adamant that her efforts were solely voluntary and selfish, most felt that a certain effort is necessary to be accepted in society. Many areas of concern were held in common such as hair, weight and

clothing. Issues of acceptance and credibility were of great importance as were other issues like attempting to project an aura of youth.

Make-Up/Cosmetics

The questions began with a discussion about cosmetics. “Do you use cosmetics?” “Do you use cosmetics labeled anti-aging or for maturing skin?” All the women reported using some combination of cosmetics except for Betty who said that allergies prevented her from using anything.

The use of cosmetics in many cases was strongly associated with the presentation of a public versus a private appearance.

- (Connie) “I do my make-up unless I’m in cleaning house mode and I just have my [work clothes] on.”
- (Nancy) “Just a little eye make-up if I’m going out usually,”

Additionally, there was also the feeling that using make-up provided one with a more professional and credible appearance.

- (Jennifer) “When I go out to [work] I make sure that I have make-up on and something that looks nice.”
- (Donna) “If I were, like I said, still working in downtown _____ I’d be in the heels and the proper make-up,”

Make-up was also reported to be used as a means of covering up perceived flaws.

- (Tina) “To cover up the dark circles”
- (Nancy) “A little blemish [concealer] under the eyes”

The use of make-up was associated not only with looking better, but feeling better too. Nancy reported using make-up to give her a boost on days when she was feeling apprehensive about her appearance.

- “I normally don’t wear a lot of make-up, but if I was to put on a little make-up... it makes a difference and I guess if you think you look better you feel a little better.”

Whether it is used sparingly and occasionally or more heavily and more often, for the majority of these women the use of make-up is an integral part of their being. As demonstrated above, make-up is used to control and project a desired image, conceal flaws and boost self esteem. Since most reported using some type of cosmetic they were also asked if they used anti-aging products or products for maturing skin. Several said they did use these products.

Specifically formulated anti-aging products were of interest to most of the women interviewed. As Heather mentioned, there is very little else on the market to buy. “I use cosmetics with labels of anti-aging on them because I don’t think you can buy too much now that doesn’t have it on it.” That fact aside, many were either using some of these products presently, had in the past, or were contemplating using them in the future, or if finances would permit. Tina and Betty were uninterested in these products. Betty mentioned allergies as her reason for not using them, and Tina stated not being interested in concealing her age.

The three women currently using these products, Heather, Jennifer and Angela, seemed mainly concerned about preserving moisture in their skin.

Heather and Jennifer reported dry skin as the primary reason for using anti-aging products.

- (Heather) “Once I started using [anti-aging products] I found that dry skin wasn’t a problem anymore.”
- (Jennifer) “I’m out there buying the night cream because my skin is drier than it used to be. Looking for the night cream or whatever that’s going to put the moisture back in my skin.”

In addition to concerns about skin moisture, Angela, saw herself as belonging to that certain age group that is supposed to be buying these types of products.

- “If it’s specifically formulated for the older skin. (Now why? Is there some wisdom in that?) The wisdom is that I want to get bang for my buck, to be sure that what I’m buying is the proper product for myself.”

However, not all those expressing an interest in these products currently were using them, nor were they convinced that these products would, or had been of benefit to them.

- (Nancy) “I’ve been looking at them but...I actually have a sister who does [use anti-aging cosmetics] and she has since she was twenty, and she’s not showing her age, but whether it’s to do with her life style, or her cosmetics, I’m not sure.”
- (Connie) “I don’t know, maybe it’s financial. If I could afford the top of the line [anti-aging cosmetics] I might consider it. I’d probably consider it, but I feel a cream’s a cream. Hell, I use Jergen’s Lotion on my face.”

- (Donna) “Six months ago I did buy one hundred dollars worth of Mary Kay and I was going to start the skin regime. I did use it religiously for about three weeks, and well, I guess I thought, ‘Why am I doing this? Who am I doing this for?’ I just didn’t see that much of a difference in how people approached me, you know. There was no, ‘oh your skin looks really good,’ except from the Mary Kay lady of course, right?”

Finally, women were asked how concerned they were about becoming wrinkled and or getting sagging skin, and how society perceives wrinkled and or sagging skin on a woman. As would be expected, some were concerned and some were not. Tina was adamant that she was not concerned about wrinkles and sags.

- “None whatsoever, no!”

Donna saw concern as action.

- “I think if I were more [concerned] I’d be doing the creams and the anti-aging [preparations].”

Betty saw wrinkled skin and bodily sags as an accepted part of her experience.

- “Well, I’m already there and it’s just the process of aging.”

Other women feeling little or no concern, although younger than Betty, expressed the same sort of acceptance.

- (Heather) “I always used something, like Noxema or something and I tried Mary Kay because I think I was more worried about getting old when I was thirty than, like and looking old when I was thirty than I am now. Because at that age you start thinking, ‘Oh gosh, I’m going to look old soon,’ but now I realize, ‘ok,’ we are all going to look old as we age.”

- (Angela) “No because I think it’s part of the transition, part of the journey. It’s part of the voyage and I just think it’s a good part. I mean you can’t stay youthful forever.”

Yet, there were those who did feel concern about getting wrinkled or starting to sag. Wrinkles and sagging were seen as distasteful.

- (Nancy) “My skin seems to be sagging and I don’t care for that.”

In addition to finding wrinkles and sags distasteful, Jennifer and Connie saw the wrinkles and the sagging as an indication of unpleasant things to come.

- (Jennifer) “Yeah, I am [concerned]. I don’t feel myself that it’s attractive, and nobody wants to write their will, right?”
- (Connie) “Yes, I don’t think anybody, I can’t say I don’t think anybody likes that, but myself, yes I am. Because I associate that with the beginning of the end. The long trip downhill.”

Finally, many felt society holds wrinkles and sagging skin in great disfavor.

- (Donna) “It’s old, it’s not acceptable, it’s not what society likes to see,”
- (Tina) “Ugly”
- (Nancy) “They try to fix it. They build you under wire bras to try and get you up where you are supposed to be. They give you the creams and lotions or they try to sell you the creams and lotions to try and give you a more youthful appearance.”
- (Jennifer) “Well, you know, it’s associated with age and once again, you get that stereotype of worthless and you know that they are not as smart, not as on the ball. It’s a grouping.”
- (Angela) “Again, I think society doesn’t perceive them to be as valued as a man.”

- (Heather) “I think they do look at it as you’ve lost your youthful beauty.”

Not everyone felt so strongly. However, there was still the feeling that women with wrinkles and sags are cast aside.

- (Betty) “I think it’s accepted. I think they just look at you and say, ‘Oh, you’re old.’”
- (Connie) “I think they treat them more like a mother figure.”

Cosmetics were an important part of life for most of the women interviewed. The only woman indicating she did not use them, could not, due to allergies. While not specifically or consciously used to conceal the signs of aging, anti-aging preparations were seen as potentially useful to most of the women interviewed. Efforts to preserve moisture are commonly associated in advertising with the maintenance of a youthful appearance. Many women here did report using these preparations for just that purpose. It must also be said, however, that dry skin is as uncomfortable as it is puckered and old looking. Furthermore, many young women combat dry skin. Heather reported having dry skin from youth, “from the time I was a kid I had dry skin.” It is in this way that those using, or expressing interest in these products are similar to Tina, who said she did not use these products because she was not interested in concealing her age. There did not seem to be any real interest in using anti-aging products specifically for age concealing purposes. This seemed mainly due to a lack of faith in the usefulness

of these products, and a lack of success with their use. Finally, although many indicated no great concern over wrinkled or sagging skin, this may have been resignation to the inevitable since most saw society as holding wrinkles and sags in disfavor.

Clothing

This section deals with styles of clothing. Women were asked what styles of clothing they enjoyed wearing and about their intentions when buying clothes. I felt it was necessary to understand how these women dressed themselves, and the reasons behind their choices. Many themes emerged when the discussion turned to clothing and styles of dress. Casual comfort and functionality were paramount. Subtleties about youthful styles, and how age factors into feminine style were very much issues to be discussed.

When asked, “What styles of clothing do you enjoy wearing?” It was not surprising that most indicated comfort and casual style were most important

- (Betty) “I like to wear something comfortable.
- (Angela) “Comfortable clothing that I am comfortable in.”
- (Tina) “Casual, not dressed up.”
- (Heather) “I like something that is comfortable.”

However, issues concerning flattering styles and presentable dress often superceded comfort.

- (Jennifer) “First of all I’m careful to make sure it’s flattering to my figure regardless of the style.”
- (Nancy) “Loose, comfortable to a degree. I have to wear jeans as opposed to jogging pants. I find jogging pants, unless you are skinny are sloppy.”
- (Heather) “Stuff that sort of feels comfortable and makes you at least in your own eyes feel presentable.”
- (Connie) “It’s got to be comfortable and at the same time look good.”
- (Donna) “Comfort, I like my sneakers but...”

The women were then asked, “Do you buy clothing for the express purpose of presenting a youthful appearance?” Although all but two women said , “no,” the ensuing discussion reveals how age governs women’s clothing choices. It was very much felt that certain age groups of women are expected to dress in certain ways. Some fashions were seen as inappropriate for what was termed “older women.” Heather had this to say:

- “I mean if you wear stuff that suits your age you are going to look more youthful than if you try to think you’re sixteen and dress like it.” (Why do you say that?) Well I guess because I’ve seen some ladies that are my age and they are still wearing mini skirts and tight tops and I think it looks ridiculous.”

Angela said this:

- “Actually it looks like Hell to have an older woman wearing a style that you know darn well is targeted to the younger people and you

see an older woman wearing that style, it looks like Hell. I certainly wouldn't go out and buy one of those baby doll dresses that all the kids are wearing now, cram myself into that."

Betty felt much the same way:

- "Well, those mini skirts. They're made for younger people. I don't mind them on younger people, but I would not wear a mini skirt."

Like how youthful one looks, dressing youthfully may be measured by one's age.

Clearly there are certain styles that are seen as inappropriate for women based on their age.

Other women said they did try to project a youthful appearance in their dress.

- (Donna) "Yes, I think so, I mean I dress in jeans, designer jeans if I can get them and they are not too expensive. Yeah I go for that stuff, absolutely. Jackets and shoes with the bigger heel, yes, absolutely."
- (Connie) "In some ways [my clothes] are youthful with the turtleneck and the leotard,"

Moreover, dressing youthfully was seen as spanning many age groups.

- (Jennifer) "[When I went out the other night] I had a nice pair of jeans on, a really nice white blouse and a black blazer over it and some nice shoes and I looked good. But then, I could very easily see in some of those magazine articles some spiffy sixty-five-year-old that was nice and fit wearing jeans and a white shirt and a blazer so..."
- (Connie) "You can see a fifty-year-old woman walking down the mall with a twenty-year-old girl and the style is very similar."

As was the case above, looking polished and presentable or “looking good” was for some closely associated with looking youthful. In reference to what they liked to wear Nancy and Jennifer said this:

- (Nancy) “So I guess it goes back to what makes me look good and I guess I would have to say that goes back to what doesn’t make me look any heavier. So I guess I would have to say I signify weight a lot with youthfulness, or looking good, or something.”
- (Jennifer) “You know, I have to be honest, that nice is associated with a younger [persona].”

While certain styles of dress appear to be thought of as belonging exclusively to young women (perhaps, specifically teens), dressing youthfully is thought to span many age groups. Furthermore, it seems to be very much associated with presenting a polished, smart appearance, which perhaps leans toward a conservative style. Women who are seen as dressing in clothes targeted to youth are viewed as stepping outside the acceptable parameters of appropriate dress.

Hair

Many of the women I spoke to were very concerned about their hair. Although many women discussed greying hair and other issues surrounding hair, prior to my asking, it was necessary to gain more information. How individuals felt about greying hair, whether they felt it was necessary to colour hair, and how

they felt society perceived greying hair were issues to be explored. “Do you colour your hair?” “Are you personally concerned about greying hair?.” “How does society treat woman with grey hair?” were the questions asked in this section.

As indicated before, many of the women I spoke with altered the appearance of their hair through the use of hair colour.

- (Connie) “I’ve been grey since I’ve been twenty and I always put a rinse in my hair.”
- (Angela) “I’ve dyed my hair since I was eighteen,”
- (Nancy) “I keep my hair lightened a little.”
- (Jennifer) “I’m pretty adamant about having my hair coloured.”
- (Donna) “I colour my hair”

Of those indicating that they used hair colouring products, many indicated wanting to look younger as the most important reason for so doing.

- (Jennifer) “I’d like to think I look younger with my hair coloured.”

In reference to colouring her hair, Connie had this to say:

- “I’m going to try to stay as young looking as I can.”

As part of her response to the question about how pressured woman feel to look younger, Donna associated looking younger with looking better.

- “I wanted to look better, dying my hair.”

Nancy coloured her hair to look younger even though she did not have grey hair.

- “My hair used to be light and now it has gone dark and when it’s not lightened my whole face just kind of droops a little more. Yeah, it perks me up so that’s kind of why I do it. Just to think I’m young again.”

Finally, Angela said she coloured her hair because she liked change, yet even she did not want grey hair.

- “It’s just that I like different colours in my hair. I don’t want grey hair right now. (Why do you think that is?) I like to be different. When I dye my hair it’s not brown, it’s vibrant colors. I just like to be different, I guess, for myself and I like the vibrant colours. I like different colours.”

Betty, Tina, and Heather indicated not colouring their hair. Betty and Heather, however, opted out for reasons other than loving their grey hair. The perceived difficulty in getting a “natural looking” color and the repercussions of looking artificial were discussed as reasons for not using hair color.

- (Heather) “I stopped about, let me see, ‘97. I think I put color in my hair once since ‘97, only because I wanted to get rid of that drab, dreary.” (So why don’t you do it now?) “Because it’s a waste of time. I’m going to get older and my hair looks better when it’s a natural color than when it’s colored, unless you really carefully plan and place it. You have to get it right. Too dark a hair makes you look old the same as too grey a hair.”
- (Betty) “Some women dye their hair black and it makes them look very, very hard. I mean I could put a light blond in, but I tell you why I don’t do it personally, because every two weeks I’d be having it done because my hair grows too fast and it’s a waste of money.”

The lone woman, Tina, who actually seemed to fully endorse her natural colour had this to say:

- “I like it.”

There was extensive talk about wanting to cover grey and dye hair to look younger, yet there was also the sense that certain colors of grey hair or certain ways of going grey are more acceptable than others.

- (Connie) “I see a lot of women are just letting their hair go out naturally, my mousy brown with grey, and I don’t find it looks nice at all. I think one little rinse through it would probably take ten years off their appearance. However, I’ve seen women with beautiful white hair in their early forties and fifties and they are exquisite. They look like china dolls.”

In reference to the grey of her husband’s hair, Nancy felt most women would like to have hair that looked like his.

- “Well most women would like his hair too. They wouldn’t mind if it was his color.”
- (Connie) “I’ve seen women with beautiful silver grey hair, very regal, very attractive.”
- (Angela) “I’ve seen women with beautiful grey hair in their early forties and fifties”
- (Angela) “I don’t want grey hair right now.”

Furthermore, perhaps there is a time to be grey. Not unlike measuring how young one looks relative to one’s age, grey hair may enjoy more or less acceptance depending on one’s age. However, it’s not clear how old one should be before letting the hair go grey.

- (Jennifer) “You’re expected not to have grey unless you are sixty-five or something or other.” (So you think there is a point when it is

fine for women to have grey hair?) “Well, I don’t even know about that. Like I remember when my Mom was sixty-five or something or other and she decided she wasn’t going to color her hair anymore and everyday after that it was, ‘Oh, [Ethel] color your hair,’ you know, like it just looked better.”

Personal concerns about grey hair generally depended on several factors. Nancy wasn’t bothered about greying hair because she had none.

- “I haven’t got any yet so..”

Tina was not personally concerned about grey hair because she liked the color of her hair.

- “No, not at all, I like it.”

Heather and Betty, after qualifying why they felt it was a waste of time and money and didn’t look becoming anyway, seemed resigned to having grey heads.

- “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with going white.”
- “No. It’s there.”

Those that did express concern over grey hair were varied in their responses as well. As discussed above, some were worried about looking older and losing their credibility.

- (Jennifer) “And I so think [grey hair] makes you look older....I think you are perceived as being more credible if you are not too ancient.”

Others were worried about looking older and not looking as good. In reference to coloring her hair Donna made this comment.

- “Yeah, like I said, it feels good when somebody says, ‘wow, you look good,’ It’s a validation when someone says you look younger.”
- (Connie) “I don’t find it looks nice at all. I think one little rinse would take ten years off their appearance.”

Angela was just plain not interested in having grey hair.

- “It’s not that I’m so concerned. It’s just that I like different colors.”

With individual hair coloring practices and personal concerns already covered, women were then asked, “How does society treat grey hair on a women?” Nancy could not answer this question because she had never given it much thought, and Betty said she felt there was no difference.

- “I don’t think that society treats women with grey hair any differently than woman with darker hair.”

Not everyone was in agreement however.

- (Donna) “Society says grey hair is old.”
- (Connie) “Well if you have grey hair you are not going to be playing a younger role [in films and television]”.
- (Heather) “Well little children tend to think you’re their grandmother.”
- (Jennifer) “I think they are kind of ‘pooh poohed’ off. Now I don’t know if it is because they are deemed as not being useful, deemed as not being youthful, or deemed as not having money, or a combination of all three. It probably is somewhat of a combination of all those.”

Grey hair, in addition to being thought of as an indication of age, was also thought to project an unkempt appearance.

- (Angela) “They look at them and say: ‘Why can’t that person take care of themselves? Why don’t they color their hair? It makes them look so old and haggard.’”
- (Jennifer) “You kind of look uncared for if you haven’t colored your hair.”
- (Tina) “Probably almost as if we have no desire to keep up appearances or take care of ourselves.”

Diet, Exercise and Weight

This section deals with issues surrounding diet, weight and exercise.

Above, many saw excess weight as an indication of age, or they felt society gauges people in that way. The questions asked here were as follows: “Do you diet and or exercise?” “Are you concerned about gaining weight?” “Do you associate excess weight with looking old?” “Does society associate excess weight with looking old?” Each question was followed by a series of probing questions.

Although no one said they dieted, several indicated paying attention to what they ate.

- (Connie) “I don’t really diet, but I don’t eat a lot.”
- (Nancy) “I don’t so much diet as I try to watch what I eat.”
- (Betty) “I eat what I think I should be eating and that’s it”

Nancy and Betty indicated exercising on a regular basis, while Heather and Donna said they exercised sometimes. Although no one interviewed was more than five to ten pounds overweight, and most were not overweight at all, three of those

indicating that they did monitor their diet and or exercise, did so at least in part for the purposes of weight control. When asked about watching her weight Connie replied,

- “I don’t feel good about myself when I’ve got extra weight on.”

Heather indicated feeling the need to exercise after gaining some weight.

- “I don’t diet, but sometimes I exercise when I can’t button my pants.”

Although not a problem currently, Tina found exercise beneficial when she needed to lose weight.

- “If I was concerned about those types of things it never worked for me to diet. I would exercise. If I just do I feel good about doing that.”

The remainder either listed health reasons for their diet and exercise endeavors, or indicated not participating in exercise or diet programs at all. Some felt unmotivated, or saw no particular need to do so.

- (Angela) “No I don’t because I’m lazy and I haven’t had any inherent medical problems yet.”
- (Jennifer) “No not really. Too lazy”
- (Donna) “I don’t go to extremes. If I want to eat a fatty porkchop, I eat it.”

Dieting, as interpreted by those being interviewed, was generally not seen as useful. Although some did exercise and/or diet, at least in part for the purposes of weight control, many more did not. Some indicated lack of motivation as their

reason for not participating in diet and or exercise programs, others saw it as unnecessary. This may have been largely due to the fact that no one was facing any serious weight issues or other health related problems.

Connie, a very slim woman, indicated being very concerned if she were to gain even a few extra pounds.

- “When I put on five pounds, I feel the five pounds.”

Others like Donna, had either accepted their bodies, “I’ve accepted that I’m not going to be ever again 125 pounds,” or they were satisfied with their weight.

- (Betty) “I’m happy the way I am.”
- (Tina) “I’ve never been that concerned with self image, even when I was heavy too.”

Still others indicated always being thin and so weight had never been an issue.

- (Heather) “Not necessarily, but then I guess I’ve always stayed within five pounds.”
- (Angela) “All my life, right up until I hit forty, I’ve always been a bone rack.”

Ironically, Connie cited media representations of thinness as a factor in her perceptions of appropriate body size and shape. In reference to putting on weight, she had this to say:

- “I don’t feel good about myself and I think that’s a lot on society and what we see because of all these models and their pelvic bones are out six inches, but then they put clothes on and we perceive it as, ‘wow, she looks beautiful,’ type thing.”

Most of the women interviewed were not concerned about gaining weight. Perhaps this is not surprising since, as I said before, none were dealing with significant weight problems. One woman did acknowledge that her ideas about appropriate weight were the result of media representation.

Although many felt society associates weight gain with looking old, only Jennifer reported making that connection personally. Most did not associate weight gain with looking old, unless it was to acknowledge that aging seems to make it easier to gain weight. The reason most often cited for not associating weight gain with appearing old was that many relatively young women are thought to have a weight problem.

- (Angela) “No because most of the older women I know seem to be in better shape than the younger ones. I don’t know what it is, but that’s one connection I don’t make.”
- (Betty) “No, I’ve seen too many big [younger] ones around.”

Other women made reference to the ease with which many people gain weight as they grow older, and in that way they made the connection between aging and being overweight. However, the connection was not made between looking old and being overweight.

- (Connie) “A lot of people I know when they were younger they were small and as they got older they put five pounds on every year.”
- (Donna) “I know myself as I have gotten older, again, I’ve gained weight and it’s been harder to lose.”

- (Tina) “That’s probably just physically part of the aging process”

Heather felt that often the extra weight associated with aging enhances one’s appearance of youth.

- “Not necessarily because I know a couple of women who are very overweight and they look younger than they did when they were smaller. They looked very drawn out, but with the extra weight they look actually healthier.”

Most saw society as connecting extra weight with looking old. To cement their points, reference to media influences was made.

- (Nancy) “I mean when you look around most sixty-year-old women would not have figures that would be modeling clothes.”
- (Jennifer) “Yeah, I think so because when you see the pictures of the youthful [they are slim].”
- (Connie) “You never see on TV an overweight older person, like on TV they have figures like the twenty-year-olds and stuff.”

Looking “Old”

The interview concluded with a series of questions designed to gain a better understanding of how women felt about looking older, how they felt others perceived their appearance, and how they perceived themselves. Again, the focus was on looking old as opposed to feeling old, or others issues associated with getting older. The final questions were as follows: “Are you personally concerned about looking old?” “Do you think you look old?” “Would society say you looked old?”

The eldest woman in the sample, Betty, saw looking old as something that will happen to everyone eventually.

- “You mean is getting old getting me down? No. It’s just a process that everybody has to go through eventually.”

Tina reported feeling good about maturing in her looks.

- “No, I feel totally the reverse actually. I feel better with age.”

Heather was not concerned since she saw it as something to worry about later in life, or if some conditions in her life were to change.

- “Not right now, but if I happened to be in a position where I saw a picture of myself and looked liked I’ve gained thirty, forty pounds and I look like I’ve aged twenty years in a month, I suppose that I would probably start worrying.”

In addition to not presently being worried about looking old, Angela was looking forward to a time when she would be able to relinquish some of the pressure to remain youthful looking.

- “I’m quite looking forward to it where you don’t have to worry about the grey coming through, or whether or not you have wrinkles, or excess weight, or whatever.”

There was also the notion that looking old was not as serious as feeling old. More concern was expressed over being less able and losing independence than in looking old.

- (Nancy) “Getting old doesn’t bother me so much the way I look as it does in my lack of mobility and lack of energy.”

- (Donna) “I think I’m more concerned about feeling old. I’ve got to work so hard at feeling young [I’m worried] that my body’s going to grow old and not be able to.”
- (Jennifer) “Nobody wants to think that they’re mortal and that could be part of it too in the whole thing. We don’t want to realize that we are getting older.”

Relief at being physically able was certainly expressed by Betty.

- “But as long as I’m able physically then I don’t feel old.”

Although not seeing herself as generally looking old, Connie expressed anxiety over what she perceived looked old about her appearance.

- “Yes, [I’m concerned about looking old] because of [my husband] and stuff. If there was anything I could change about myself right now it would be these things that are happening (pointing to her under eye area) and it drives me crazy.”

“Do you think you look old?” and “Would society say you looked old?”

were the final questions asked of each woman in the sample. Some felt they did not, others felt that they did. Only Nancy felt she looked old and thought others would see her as looking old.

- “I know I’m showing my age a little quicker than some people do.” (Do you think so?) “Yes, you know, I mean, I’m forty-two and most would say I probably look closer to forty-eight, fifty.”

Angela and Tina felt they did not look old because they did not feel old. When asked about the connection between how one looks and how one feels, reference was made to not feeling any “differently” than previously and as “not slowing

down.” These same two women answered the question on society’s perceptions of their age by saying that many people thought of them as young looking.

- (Angela) “Well most of society says, ‘you don’t look old enough to be a grandmother.’”
- (Tina) “I’m constantly told I’m much younger looking than my age.”

Similarly, Donna felt she did not look old because she worked very hard at being positive, happy and energetic which had previously been part of her definition of looking youthful.

- “I’d have to say no because again, my funny sweatshirts, my sneakers. I’m singing songs and telling jokes all day at work.”

Although affirming that she did not feel she looked old, Donna felt it would be difficult to determine how others might see her.

- “I don’t think that within the first five minutes of meeting somebody [they would think I looked old]. What their initial reaction is, I don’t know, ‘Look at the old bag in the sweatshirt,’ I don’t know.”

Connie also felt it would be difficult to determine how others might see her, but felt that although she felt she looked young, those younger than she would say she looked old while those older might say she looked young.

- “I think a younger person would say, ‘yes,’ I look old, but a older person might say I look young.”

Similarly, Heather felt that most people younger than she was would say she looked old even though she did not see herself as looking old.

- “Anything over thirty-five they figure is looking old.”

However, Heather also pointed out that often we don't see ourselves as we really are.

- “But of course everybody sees themselves aging in a day to day process and you don't really look at yourself any different.”

Finally, Jennifer and Betty saw themselves as acting young, but as looking their age.

- (Jennifer) “I act very young. I certainly think I look my age. Yes, I think I could look old. Society would say I look middle-age.”
- (Betty) “I know I look old and I am old and I accept that. [Society would say I looked old], but then they say I don't act it, so there you go.”

For most of the women interviewed there was only minimal concern over “looking” old. More concern was expressed over losing mobility and independence and other issues associated with aging. Generally women saw themselves as looking young, or relatively young depending on who was asked. While some saw themselves as looking their age, which perhaps was not particularly young, they did emphasize the fact that they acted in a youthful manner.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this thesis was to explore women's responses to messages about feminine aging learned or internalized from the mass media and popular culture. While much of the literature on aging and women indicates that women need and want to remain youthful looking, there has been a paucity of data on just how this manifests itself in the lives of women. By analyzing the material gathered in interviews with these eight women from Nova Scotia, it is hoped that an addition to the discourse of feminine aging has been made. The main difference between personal and societal perceptions of what it means for women to look old, or young, was the breadth of the definition. While many women included greying hair, facial wrinkles and weight in their own definitions, seeing the absence of these characteristics as signifying youth; other characteristics were often included. Concepts like having a youthful attitude, or maintaining a level of health and fitness combined with a polished, neat clean appearance, all served as definitions of presenting an appearance of youth. Interestingly enough, many young people today do not represent this ideal despite their youth. Most would agree that grunge fashion and skateboarding fashion, just to name two, represent anything but a neat, tidy and clean appearance. For the women interviewed, ideas about fitness, health maintenance and cleanliness served as extremely positive attributes, while the reverse of these was seen as highly negative, the positive

being associated with youth while the negative spoke of old age and obsolescence. Additionally, there was a notion that youth and beauty are synonymous. As Angela said, "We have to be pretty, pretty all the time, and pretty doesn't usually involve getting old and having wrinkles, and cataracts, and grey hair". Mostly, society was seen as less inclusive, accepting only slim bodies, smooth skin and colored hair. This phenomenon could be considered as evidence of knowing the rules for being considered youthful looking which is consistent with Perutz (1970) who maintains that we learn to accept, practice and embrace cultural norms. Moreover, it evidences the fact that little has changed in the last thirty years.

The general tendency to see society as a harsh purveyor of acceptable appearance standards was a theme throughout the data. Perhaps it is a somewhat deserved reputation since the women interviewed found very little acceptance of the aging woman when they looked to the media. This is consistent with Susan Bordo's (1993, 1997) ideas about the pervasiveness of media images and their tendency to show only the very young, smooth skinned, ageless and flawless. Thone (1992), Perutz (1970) and Brownmiller (1984) also speak of the media as representing unrealistic versions of feminine beauty and youth.

Again, in terms of what I have been calling an aged appearance, it was thought by many to be disguised, modified, or ignored in films and television. Magazine advertisements, and advertising in general were seen as mostly trying to

capitalize on a lack of societal acceptance of the aging woman. This was thought to be done primarily through endorsing products purported to make women look younger. A more thorough investigation of media influences on women might include accounting for the amount and pervasiveness of exposure to media images and messages. For example, Betty reported not watching movies, or watching much television. She also reported feeling less influenced by societal norms. While this cannot be claimed as binding evidence of a connection between the two, it does give cause to question the amount of influence these media have on us all. It is consistent with Goodman (1994) who found that women raised prior to the emergence of television were less influenced by the mass media. The seventy-nine-year-old Betty would certainly fit into this category. It should also be mentioned that a lack of acceptance toward an aged appearance on women was not only seen as emanating from the media. It was expressed as being pervasive, and as coming from “everywhere”. Spouses, children, other women, friends and peers were all reported as placing pressure on women to remain youthful looking.

It was also evident in the data that an aged appearance might enjoy more or less acceptance depending on one's chronological age. In discussing appearance in general, and in the discussion on hair and clothing it has become clear that how ‘old’ you look often depends on how old you are or on how ‘old’ you think you look. For example Nancy and Jennifer made reference to how people are often

said to look young for their age, and how characteristics like greying hair are seen as more acceptable on an older person. It was less clear at what age it is acceptable for women to have grey hair, or what about appearance is more acceptable depending on one's age.

In terms of self presentation, neatness and the presentation of a polished appearance were generally seen as paramount. This was evidenced on the body through attention to hair, make-up and weight management. Issues surrounding the hair centered not only on neatness and hair style, but hair colour. It was acknowledged that grey hair can be very becoming. Angela and Connie mentioned the beauty and regal look of some women's grey hair. Nancy, through referencing the grey colour of her spouse's hair, thought most women would like [to have] his colour too.

There was some sense of grey hair being more acceptable depending on one's age. However, again it was less clear at what age grey hair would be acceptable. Mostly, the women seemed to endorse coloured or pigmented hair on women as opposed to grey, and many actively sought to maintain that look on themselves. Colouring one's grey hair was seen by Donna as, "giving in," to the pressure of society. Jennifer and Connie felt they looked younger having colored their grey hair. Even Betty and Heather, two of the women who did not colour their grey hair, seemed to opt out for reasons other than actually really liking the

colour of their hair. This seems consistent with the ideas posed by Gerike that the colouring of grey hair is essentially for the purposes of presenting a more youthful appearance (Gerike in Rosenthal, 1991). Tina was the only woman who actually seemed to like her grey hair; perhaps this may be attributed to her lesbian identity. Bergeron and Senn (1998) found evidence to support claims that a lesbian identity provided a buffer from cultural images of feminine beauty.

Allowing oneself to have grey hair was also seen by some to be evidence of an unkempt appearance. This is certainly in keeping with the association between a polished, neat clean appearance and youth.

Although there was no evidence to suggest that women actively seek out anti-aging cosmetics to look younger, many were very aware of the messages conveyed by the advertising for these products. As Jennifer said, “they capitalize on the fight against age with all that anti-wrinkle cream and stuff.” Awareness of the message was not enough to prompt most women to use these cosmetics. This was true even for those who expressed a concern about getting wrinkles and sags. Additionally, for those using these preparations, combating dry skin was the motivating factor. Again, many ads connect dry skin with age, but Heather reported having dry skin from childhood. Heather also made the point that most products are anti-aging preparations, so there is very little else to use. Cosmetics

other than anti-aging preparations held more of a place in these women's daily experience.

The use of make-up was a part of the daily routine for most of the women interviewed. Cosmetics were used to conceal perceived flaws and to present an acceptable and, in some cases, credible appearance. This has implications for the previous connections made between the appearance of youth and neatness, or a polished presentation.

Wearing clothing was about looking presentable, polished and neat. Although comfort was important, "flattering" styles often took precedence over comfort. Appropriate clothing for women was often connected with what was thought to be appropriate for their age. So called 'older women' were seen as looking out of place in certain articles of clothing, such as mini-skirts, baby doll dresses and tight tops. These items seemed mostly closely associated with styles often thought about as being worn by teens. Women dressing in these styles were seen as stepping outside the acceptable parameters of appropriate dress. This is not unlike the double-bind reported by Brownmiller (1984) where women are both encouraged and condemned for seeking out ways to remain youthful looking. However, many felt that their styles of dress did project an aura of youth, which was seen as spanning many age groups. These were seen by some as classic styles which were associated with acceptable, presentable, polished dressing, again an association with youth.

Excess weight was both present and absent from definitions of appearing aged. Heather and Nancy made reference to keeping slim as a way of staying youthful looking. Donna made reference to weight not being a factor when women were tidy about their appearance. Betty made no connection to weight and age since she felt many very young women are often overweight. It was, however, generally acknowledged that as one ages it is more difficult to remain slim. Excess body weight was often associated with looking old according to society's standards by the woman interviewed. Hendersonking (1997) found that excess body weight can make women more susceptible to media images depicting feminine beauty ideals by causing a greater degree of depression and anger relative to slimmer women.

Tina consistently reported being less concerned about how she looked and less influenced by cultural standards than many of the others. This finding is consistent with Bergeron and Senn's (1998) assertion that a lesbian identity provides a buffer from internalization of sociocultural norms. Further investigation into sexuality and appearance related issues would provide us with a more complete picture of the relationship between sexual orientation, women and appearance. As Smith asserts, the discourse of femininity can be referenced to create a non-feminine appearance, as well as one more closely associated with femininity. This can be accomplished by rejecting and refusing to replicate

feminine beauty ideals (Smith, 1990). This may help to explain why Tina felt less inclined to package herself in a traditionally feminine way, despite indicating a perception of society as requiring such compliance.

Betty consistently reported being less influenced by current cultural anti-aging messages also. As was mentioned above, she also reported not watching movies or much television. In addition to the obvious implications that lack of these influences might have on women, Betty was also seventy-nine-years old. It may be that, due to her age, her look was given more acceptance by those she came in contact with, and society in general. A more extensive investigation into how chronological age influences social expectation of appearance for women is necessary. Many of the questions evidenced by Betty's experience could be better answered through such endeavors.

Future Research

Clearly this thesis has generated questions for future research. Although women were very aware of media images and messages imparting a lack of acceptance of feminine aging, many reported media influences as being less influential than the attitudes and urgings of those closest to them. A more detailed exploration of interpersonal relationships, and how attitudes and expectations of other people influence women to act on their bodies may provide a better understanding of this phenomenon.

As mentioned above, Tina's discourse was often markedly different from the other women interviewed. A more detailed exploration of the dynamics of a lesbian identity might help to explain why Tina seemed more comfortable with her body and less influenced by anti-aging messages than some of the other women interviewed.

The effects of chronological age might also be explored. Betty's attempts to remain youthful did not hinge on colouring her grey hair, or eliminating facial wrinkles. She placed much more emphasis on her dress and activity level as indications that she was "keeping" young. Again, as I have indicated above, there was also a sense that a point in life is reached when it is acceptable to have grey hair and wrinkles. How chronological age influences one's susceptibility to anti-aging messages needs further exploration.

Betty's experience was also important since she reported not watching much television or having much exposure to media in general. A closer look at how the amount and pervasiveness of exposure to anti-aging media images influences women would be helpful.

Finally, this thesis did not deal with how men perceive feminine anti-aging messages. If, how, and to what extent the attitudes of men influence women to act on their bodies would be an area for further investigation. The experiences of non white women, women from higher or lower socio-economic backgrounds, or

demographic areas, higher or lower educational attainment, and differing professional status would also be important to a more complete investigation.

The discourse of these women demonstrates that anti-aging messages do exist and influence women to construct an appearance of youthfulness. However, the discourse is multivocalic and the voices, like the messages that women receive, are often contradictory. For example, a woman may, or may not be influenced by some societal messages about youthfulness depending upon how much she wishes to express her autonomy and independence, as well as by her age, socio-economic class and sexual preference. As Smith (1990, 302) argues, the textually mediated discourses of femininity are not determinate phenomenon. Herein lies the implications for ascribing agency to the women who produce and reproduce the images of texts on their bodies. So, too, my data indicates that women are not blindly influenced by the discourses. Some manifest their acceptance of or resistance to the message of youthfulness through attitude, some by dress, and still others through body appearance or make-up. The options available in a variety of contexts continue to need to be explored.

Notes

1. It should also be mentioned that female anti-aging images and ideologies are largely a western phenomenon. Mature women in other cultures often enjoy status and power that is in no way related to maintaining an appearance of youth. Woman in a large number of nonindustrial societies enjoy increased influence, power, prestige and freedom both within and beyond the domestic sphere (Foner, 1984).

2. Although, other forms of media did play a role, most of the references to media in this thesis deal with television media.

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Appendix A

Permission Form

The information gathered today will be used to complete a MA thesis at Acadia University. All information you provide today will be kept strictly private and confidential and no names will appear in the thesis. Moreover, you may at any time discontinue this interview, or decline to answer any question you feel is inappropriate. With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview; however, this too, will be kept equally in confidence. In addition to the above, if you wish, my interpretation of your interview will be made available to you for your approval prior to completion of the thesis. Finally, I would ask that you sign this form indicating that you understand and consent to the above. Thank you for your participation and cooperation.

Sincerely,


Wendy Crosby-Fraser

Signature _____

Supervisor: Professor A. M. Powers
(902)585-1107

Appendix B

Anti-Aging Advertisement



**Dare
to expect
more
results.**

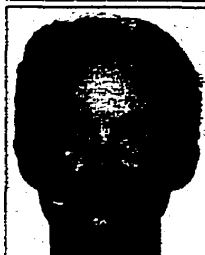
**Anew All-in-One
Intensive Complex SPF 15**

This sensitive complex, now with 8% AHU*, incorporates all of the most advanced techniques to help fight the signs of time. In one formula. Not only does it help skin rejuvenate its clarity, texture and softness, but at the same time it helps slow the signs of aging... lines, wrinkles and sallowness will be a thing of the past. Try it yourself! Satisfaction or your money back!

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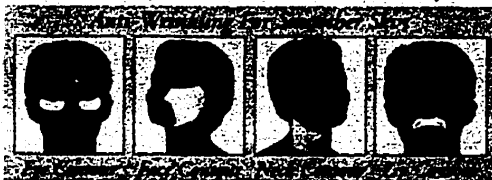
AVON

ANTI-WRINKLING FOR SMOOTHER SKIN



Methodo Medique restores your complexion's smooth, vibrant, youthful, and toned look in just 30 minutes! Fine lines and wrinkles seem to disappear. Your complexion's dry, tired appearance melts away. Methodo Medique Beauty Pads are a series of extremely intensive moisturizing treatments that rapidly re-hydrate, tighten and tone those wrinkle prone areas around your eyes, above your lip, along the cheek and jaw line and on your neck. Each treatment consists of four applications of pre-cut and shaped surgical gauze imbued with naturally healing and revitalizing

botanical extracts, *anti-oxidant vitamin C*, oils and other natural ingredients. Simply apply the pads and relax for 30-45 minutes. Remove the pads and apply the special *Daily Maintenance Cream* that reinforces the effects of the Beauty Pads. Quick, easy, wonderfully gentle and without a doubt, extraordinary. So extraordinary in fact, that after just one application, your complexion will look and feel younger, smoother, more toned and will continue to improve with regular weekly use. And unlike many other products, you don't have to wait months to see results. Patented worldwide, Medique is salon and spa tested and approved. *Methodo Medique — think of it as an indulgence — but use it as your secret weapon against aging skin.* Imported from Italy, Methodo Medique is sold only through The Magellan Group. Satisfaction guaranteed. Simply return the unused portion. Medique Eye Contour #5100, Face Contour #5200, Lip Contour #5300, \$39.95 each. Add \$6.95 S&H ea. Buy all three treatments (12 applications) and save \$30.00. Medique Complete \$99.95 (\$10.75 S&H) #5400. NEW — Medique Neck Contour \$34.95 (\$6.95 S&H) #5500.



**THE WATCH ISSUED TO
U.S. TROOPS DURING DESERT STORM**

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What do you think it means to look youthful in a woman?
2. What does society say it means to look youthful in a woman?
3. What do you think it means to look old in a woman?
4. What does society say it means to look old in a woman?
5. Have you noticed advertising saying anything to woman to woman about looking old?
6. If you have noticed, how do popular films treat an aged appearance on a woman? Why?
7. How do sitcoms and soaps treat an aged appearance on a woman? Why?
8. How do popular magazines and tabloids treat an aged appearance on a woman? Why?
9. Do messages about how youthful a woman should look influence how you present yourself? Why?
10. Do you think messages about how youthful a woman should look influence woman in general?
11. Do you feel pressured to look youthful, or to look more youthful? If so, where does the pressure come from?
12. Do women in general feel pressured to look youthful or more youthful? Where does this pressure come from?
13. Do you think a woman should remain youthful looking regardless of her chronological age?
14. Does aging impact how a man looks?
15. Do you monitor your appearance? What are the things you monitor about your appearance? Why are these aspects of your appearance important to you?

16. Do you use cosmetics labeled anti-aging or for maturing skin?
17. How concerned are you about becoming wrinkled or getting sagging skin?
18. How does society perceive wrinkles and or sagging skin?
19. What styles of clothing do you enjoy wearing?
20. Do you buy clothing for the express purpose of presenting a youthful appearance?
21. Do you colour your hair? Are you personally concerned about greying hair? How does society treat women with grey hair?
22. Do you diet and or exercise? Do you associate excess weight with looking old? Does society associate excess weight with looking old?
23. Are you personally concerned about looking old? Do you think you look old? Would society say you looked old?

Social Frame

A series of questions were asked on age, occupation, education and sexual orientation to establish a social frame.