

stereotypes, multiple discrimination, inequity, identity, sexuality, social exclusion, intersectionality. The authors used phenomenological philosophical, hermeneutic, and inductive approaches, as well as the interpretive research paradigm.

Review and Discussion

In the new era of longevity, in which the forties through the mid-sixties are referred to as middle adulthood, "when many people are at their peak of productivity in love and work" (Lally, n.d.), it is very unlikely that anyone would perceive a forty year old woman as a crone. Due to the efforts of medical doctors, estheticians, plastic surgeons, fitness trainers, nutritionists, etc., women 40+ in affluent countries look far younger than their age. Many of them are successful and independent and are at the peak of their prime. In addition, they may feel much younger than their biological age (Rubin, & Berntsen, 2006), which contributes to psychological wellbeing, more active social functioning, and a greater range of activities (Keyes et al., 2011; Stephan et al., 2018). However, all these positive changes come up against a reality that is not yet ready to accept them.

Even though older people are not left in a remote spot to die or thrown off cliffs today, they are still ignored by society. They find themselves cast to the margins of so-called normal life, experiencing overwhelming boredom, a humiliating sense of uselessness and loneliness in a world that is indifferent towards them (de Beauvoir, 1996). Younger and more energetic people distance themselves from older generations, thus relegating them to the category of Others. S. de Beauvoir wrote that people tend to ignore old age as a shameful secret and a taboo subject since old age is disgusting, sometimes "at the biological level" (1996). To a large extent, rejection of the elderly may express an attempt to escape from one's own aging and mortality.

The subject of aging is even more complicated when it comes to gender. As S. Sontag put it, "getting older is less profoundly wounding for a man, for in addition to the propaganda for youth that puts both men and women on the defensive as they age, there is a double standard about aging that denounces women with special severity. Society is much more permissive about aging in men, as it is more tolerant of the sexual infidelities of husbands. Men are "allowed" to age, without penalty, in several ways that women are not. This society offers even fewer rewards for aging to women than it does to men" (1972, p. 31). As the researcher notes, the double standards of aging are especially harsh in "the sexual market", where only young and attractive women benefit,

while men remain desirable players until old age. Even if men are not young and not attractive, they can compensate for these "minor flaws" with their status, financial position, fame, achievements, since "men's business is being and doing, while women's business is appearing" (Sontag, 1972). Thus, a woman's life turns into a constant struggle with the calendar, namely with nature, with the natural course of things.

Despite certain changes in public consciousness over the role of women in society, we still live in a men's world. The centuries-old subordination of women to men, cultural ideas about the "perfect" female face, body, age, weight, compliance with which is a "pass" to the world of success, or, according to evolutionary psychologists, a "mechanism" that promotes survival, crystallize in various disorders, thereby undermining women's mental health. For instance, body dysmorphic disorder or anorexia nervosa are largely culturally conditioned, however, they have very "natural" outcomes as related to anxiety, shame, fear, anger, aggression, lower intensity of positive emotions, lower self-esteem, etc. (Esperet et al., 2012; Goss, & Allan, 2009; Levinson et al., 2014). S. Bordo wrote that "most women in our culture... are "disordered" when it comes to issues of self-worth, self-entitlement, self-nourishment, and comfort with their own bodies; eating disorders, far from being "bizarre" and anomalous, are utterly continuous with a dominant element of the experience of being female in this culture" (2004, p. 57). Constant anxiety about aging, attempts to turn back time, desperate cosmetic battles are far from just a tribute to fashion or female vanity, but also an attempt to come out of the shadows, to overcome the boundaries of female limited space, and to make a woman visible.

However, women's grand entrance onto the big stage faces a number of obstacles. For example, popular culture targeting a broad audience still does not adequately represent older women (and older people in general), despite some improvements (Lem, 2021). M. Malli notes that older adults are underrepresented in popular culture, because the 21st century is an age-phobic society: "Hollywood casts older adults in peripheral roles where they are characterized as grumpy and posing a financial burden on society. Older age is predominantly stereotyped as a period of vulnerability, dependency and helplessness: these societal discourse about ageing permeate popular culture" (2023), let alone that aging women are more negatively stereotyped than aging men. And even despite the growing cultural visibility of older women, the role models are celebrities 40+ without signs of age, "overt ageism has replaced by a more subtle

form of ageism" (Malli, 2023), and what we get are old candies in new wrapper.

The perception of our age is based on the dialectical interconnection between how other people perceive us and what we understand from their perception. Even if the internal changes are imperceptible, we become aware of our age through the lens of others' attitudes towards it, sometimes protesting against this label and sometimes ceasing to understand who we really are. In 1982, a renowned actress and model Isabella Rossellini became the exclusive spokesmodel for the French cosmetic brand Lancôme. In 1996, at the age of 43, she was fired for "being too old". Isabella Rossellini was told that she was very successful and women customers were grateful to have a woman of her age to represent them; however, advertisements represent women's dreams, not reality, and a woman's dream is to be young (Ranscombe, 2018). This retirement devastated her career and she felt she had been unjustly treated: "I can't say I wasn't sad... I know how to pose. I know how to give expression, and I had all this wonderful experience, but I couldn't exercise it or offer it to anyone. Yes, it was painful" (Hart-Davis, 2018). At the age of 63, Isabella Rossellini was rehired by F. Lehmann, Lancôme's new CEO, as a global ambassador for the company. Representing the brand, Rossellini "fights" the term "antiage" stating that "we can't antiage. It's against nature!" (Schallon, 2018). When it comes to plastic surgery, Isabella Rossellini says: "maybe instead of 65, you look 58, but then when you're 75, you look 68. So I feel it's winning a battle but losing a war" (Schallon, 2018).

Isabella Rossellini is not alone in her fight against ageism. Helen Mirren, Liv Tyler, Judie Dench, Glenn Close, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman are among celebrities who have spoken out against ageism and the double standards of aging in the entertainment industry (Schild, 2019; Raisborough et al., 2022). Regardless of the occupation and achievements of women, their worth and social status are still associated with their beauty, which is often perceived through the prism of youthfulness (Raisborough et al., 2022). Good looks (beauty, youthfulness, etc.) can be interpreted as capital, namely aesthetic capital (Holla & Kuipers, 2016), "aesthetic capital refers to traits of beauty that are perceived as assets capable of yielding privilege, opportunity and wealth" (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 566). In a youth-obsessed world, in which older people are often treated as second-class citizens, youthfulness and beauty have become an aesthetic capital asset deeply ingrained in our society and culture (Danylova, 2020b).

In the era of globalization and mass communication, modern popular culture contributes to the creation of an ideal female image, which "forms" standards and stereotypes in the mass consciousness. Women are forced to live their lives based on these standards and stereotypes. These cultural preferences are fostered by the social environment: to be in the spotlight and to meet with success you have to fit into a mold that someone else has defined. As Jane Fonda admitted, her decision to resort to cosmetic surgery was largely due to the global youth obsession and her desire to continue her career. "I wish I were brave enough to not do plastic surgery but I think I bought myself a decade", she told *The Guardian* (Shoard, 2015).

Gendered ageism is evident in the media industry, in which women's career opportunities "evaporate when they reached their 40s or even earlier" (Ross, 2024, p. 61). The lack of sufficient roles for older women, unless they are caricatured, grotesque, or characterful, also affects cultural representations by foregrounding only "fresh" women and reducing the diversity of female personality to good looks and youthfulness. Considering the interaction of age and gender and its impact on the earnings of Hollywood movie stars, De Pater et al. showed that "the average earnings per film of female movie stars increase until the age of 34 but decrease rapidly thereafter. Male movie stars' average earnings per film reach the maximum at age 51 and remain stable after that" (De Pater et al., 2014, p. 1).

The intersection of age and gender issues in the media industry sends a message that youthfulness and beauty are the only things that matter to women and worth pursuing in life. All achievements outside this area are insignificant, which leads to the fact that women who do not meet the "requirements" suffer from social anxiety, stress, inferiority complex, envy, feeling of inequality and guilt, eating disorders (Bozsik, 2020; Danylova, 2020b; Harper, & Tiggemann, 2008; Strahan et al., 2006). Although these standards do not necessarily have negative connotations, they may generate overly simplistic concepts and expectations that devalue and limit women's potential (Eisend, 2010), thereby objectifying them. Moreover, these imposed standards can corrode self-esteem and self-perception of not only older women, but also young girls (Kaziga et al., 2021; Slater, & Tiggemann, 2006) and force them to validate ageism and lookism constantly investing in beauty and enforcing beauty standards against each other.

As N. Wolf stressed, beauty takes women out of the power structures (2002) returning them to where men want to see them, that is, to a private space, where their role should be limited to the

classic “Kinder Küche Kirche”. But unlike any patriarchal society that glorifies these women’s roles, the modern world disguises them as youth and beauty, which are being put on the market to make money and preserve the status quo (Wolf, 2002). This is a matter of serious concern for our society.

The growing popularity of social platforms has led to the shift towards digital channels. For instance, the U.S. citizens spend an average of 23.6 hours online every week, mostly on social media accounts: 73 percent of adults spend their screen time on YouTube, 68 percent – on Facebook, 35 percent – on Instagram, 29 percent – on Pinterest, 25 percent – on LinkedIn, 24 percent – on X (Twitter) (How Social Media..., 2018). The growth and expansion of social media has given rise to a new profession known as influencer. They are the ones who promote fashion, beauty and health products and shape the lifestyle of social network consumers, especially women. Quite often, their profiles represent a certain version (often idealized) of their lives, and consumers respond to the influencers’ online identities as to their offline reality (Danylova et al., 2022). Social media may be seen as a lens through which users compare themselves to what they see on the screen. Given that the online identities may not reflect the real aspects of the influencers and models’ lives and be only an idealized version, people compare themselves with others not in their favor that can cause feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction, frustration and depression (Barthel, 1988). By making a mistake of using the same scale to measure two completely different “realities”, online and offline, they pay a high price – mental health decline and poor wellbeing.

If, according to N. Wolf, beauty takes women out of the power structures, then non-compliance with generally accepted standards (nice looks and young age) may force women feel excluded in society and life by making them invisible. Women in the second half of their lives are especially sensitive to these issues. Wayne Goss, an English makeup artist, YouTube personality and entrepreneur, released a video, in which he raised this issue emphasizing, in particular, the lack of representation of women over forty in the beauty market. He said that “women over 40 are invisible in the cosmetic industry despite the fact that they are the ones spending the majority of the money on all products. It is not the 20 year olds who are spending all the money on makeup. It is women over 40, because they have more disposable income but yet they’re invisible to the beauty industry” (Goss, 2022). The video has sparked a discussion and the key theme (there are 3 235 comments today) is the invisibility of women over 40 in society. In the comments, women admit that

they feel invisible, non-existent, that they don’t matter in public.

As a 66 yo I 100 % agree. It’s almost like you are not there. Completely invisible! It’s hard because I was pretty known for being a beauty. I spend way way more than the younger ones on skincare and make up. I am shocked that someone is actually bringing this to the attention of the industry. Kudos Wayne!!

As a 47 year old woman who feels like I have suddenly become invisible and unattractive, thank you ❤️

Yes this is correct but it’s not only make up, it’s clothes and many other things. Over 50’s are totally invisible even though we’re energetic, outgoing, fit etc, we are ignored.

It’s a weird world because we’re in a time where they’re even making people over 25 feel bad for not being teenagers anymore.

It’s sad how ageist our society has become in the past few years. Every age range, gender and ethnicity should be equally represented. Enough is enough.

As a 36 y.o woman, married with children, I feel sooo much gratitude that someone FINALLY addresses this!!! ❤️ We are considered “old” or “done” or I don’t know, that “youth” have passed us by and we are invisible and this is sooooo frustrating and disappointing because everyone is beautiful and every age has its beauty and mystery and charm ❤️ everyone should feel attractive and “seen” because everyone deserves it! ❤️ Only recently a friend of mine who is over 40 got fired from her job at Sephora cause she was too “old”! For God’s sake a young woman at the age of 42 lost her job due to age 😞 I mean...if I can’t be represented by a woman’s experience and skills close to my age how could I feel “safe” around a young girl with who I couldn’t identify?? 🤔 It’s sad and I hope things could change ASAP! Thank you for this beautiful video ❤️❤️

A friend of mine and I were talking about this maybe two weeks ago: once a woman is no longer young, svelte, and fertile, then society seems to see her as useless. She can be mocked, considered physically disgusting, labeled a “crazy woman” because of hormonal shifts or hot flashes, and regarded of no value to fashion designers. I often think of even the Disney movies, where the slim young woman is the princess (and occasionally a queen) while the more “matronly” bodied woman is a servant. All of this is just saying that I think anything that would focus on the real needs of the 40+ age group would probably have a ready market, all other things being equal. Other cultures see older people as wise and worthy of respect. I’m not sure why our culture couldn’t as well.

(Goss, 2022)

The participants in the discussion note that older women are underrepresented as models in fashion and beauty ads, as well as beauty and fashion consultants in shopping malls and beauty corners.

L’oreal used to do ads that represented women over 40 but haven’t noticed that lately. I remember as a kid Oil of Olay commercials showing women 40+ and thought I want to age gracefully like that! I’m 49

Oh my God!! I have been SCREAMING this!! I no longer shop at Ulta because twice I’ve gone there, and twice the associates looked right through me as if I weren’t there. I took my daughter with me the second time, associates raced to help my 30 something daughter...did not even acknowledge I was there. I’m 60+ and have plenty of money to spend on makeup. I’m not rich, but I don’t have to turn every penny over twice before buying something. I’ve said for YEARS, if there was a makeup counter with associates that have mature skin, as I do, and don’t act as if I’m a lost cause...I’d be all over it!

You are singing my song, Wayne. I am 62 and into skincare and makeup. When dealing with retail, there only seems to be young people available to help me and they often, not their fault, aren’t so helpful when advising someone my age.

I would love for the beauty industry to tailor more to us older folks. As you point out, we’re the ones with more income and yet that is never considered in the industry’s marketing strategies, it seems. So thank you for making waves & sending out the message. We will shop where we feel included and revered.

xox

I'm 69 and like I'm going to take advice from a young 20-30 giving me skincare recommendations, uh no, yes they need to hire more women our age, thank you Wayne for representing us. ❤️

(Goss, 2022)

Middle-aged women have historically been neglected or denigrated in literature, in the media, by social institutions. If they did come into focus, it was in the context of illness, imminent death, or some unpleasant event, but not in relation to their self-perception, self-worth, or self-esteem. Even in "neutral" academic literature they are "invisible" with all the ensuing consequences. As K. Crenshaw says, "the image of the citizen is still a male citizen" (Steinmetz, 2020). Discussing Goss's video, women note that the only "worthy", socially encouraged areas for an older woman are insurance and funeral ads.

Thank you for putting this vid up. I forgot to mention holidays as well, in fact the only areas we're not ignored are the 'funeral ads' and those for 'life insurance'! I ignore these insulting ads. I'm an outgoing outward looking person, look much younger than my age and don't intend to grow old gracefully.

I agree with you absolutely. Over 40 and your over the hill according to the advertising industry. I'm tired of commercials for skin care and makeup showing young girls. It seems they only want older women playing Grandmother's or for funeral insurance. It's insulting really. Thank you Wayne for speaking up for older ladies.

(Goss, 2022)

The enduring neglect of women over 40 in modern society goes far beyond the beauty and fashion industries.

To me it's not just in this industry, it's in workplaces as well. It's actually pretty scary.

(Goss, 2022)

Still now, ageism as a form of discrimination and prejudice, directed towards individuals or groups based on their age, does not receive as much attention as other forms of discrimination. As the World Health Organization states, ageism is still "widespread in institutions, laws and policies across the world" (Global Report on Ageism, 2021, p. vii). Ageism affects people throughout adult life. It has negative impacts on both genders; however, it affects women especially strongly. The survey conducted by Women of Influence+ reveals that almost 77.8 percent of women encounter age-related discrimination in the workplace (New Survey Reveals..., 2024). Older women are more likely than older men to be perceived as having outdated skills or being poorly adapted to the changing world (Australian Human Rights..., 2015; New Survey Reveals..., 2024). Although the idea that older women suffer from lookism and failure to live up to modern beauty standards is debated in scientific discourse (for example, U. Isopahkala-Bouret (2016) argues that "noticeable signs of aging can have a positive connotation" in the workplace), older women have felt pressured to

look a certain way, because discrimination is often based on a woman's appearance as she grows older (Handy & Davy, 2012; Hurd, 2023). Older women must conform to generally accepted standards of physical attractiveness that again and again equate beauty with youthfulness (Krekula et al., 2018; Pritchard & Whiting, 2015), "women are often forced to make changes to themselves to look like they're the "right age" for a job. This is often referred to as the "pink tax" – the money and time women spend on physical enhancements to meet social expectations" (New Survey Reveals..., 2024).

The social environment may in various ways induce age stereotypes and perpetuate internalized ageism, which can have detrimental effects on health and wellbeing (Patterson, 2023). Age discrimination not only "removes" women from the public space rendering them invisible to the world, but also seriously undermines their health downplaying the value of wisdom, knowledge and life experience and eroding women's self-esteem. Though both genders are being devalued as they reach older age, women are under particular pressure. According to 2021 "Mirror/Mirror" survey from AARP (The American Association of Retired Persons), nearly 2 out of 3 women age 50+ said they were regularly discriminated against because of their age (Crouch, 2022). Facing biases, many women are at risk for mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, psychological distress, obesity, substance abuse, cognitive decline. Ageism leads to social isolation and loneliness, increases risk of experiencing violence and abuse (Appel & Weber, 2017; Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; Savikko et al., 2005; Seidler & Wolff, 2017; Zhong et al., 2017). Ageism is associated with earlier death; poorer physical health; risky health behaviors; poor sexual and reproductive health and increase in rates of sexually transmitted infections; inappropriate medication use, including inappropriate prescribing, polypharmacy and medication nonadherence (Chang et al., 2020; Fialová & Onder, 2009; Fialová et al., 2005; Formosa, 2021; Levy et al., 2002; Levy et al., 2012; Levy, 2022; Minichiello et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2012; Stewart, 2021; Vickerstaff & van der Horst, 2022; Villiers-Tuthill et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2017).

Dominating the public sphere, ageism also invades the private sphere restricting older people's sexuality (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 2009; Nicolosi et al., 2004; Schaller et al., 2023). Older women are inclined to internalize ageist beauty standards that leads them to believe they are unattractive. Portraying older women as asexual, the mass media imposes ageist stereotypes regarding sexuality in later life inhibiting

the expression of sexuality and the desire for intimacy (Vares, 2009). As G. Chepngeno-Langat and V. Hosegood rightly pointed out, “the issue of older people and sexuality has largely been ignored with the focus being almost entirely on fertility and reproductive aspects of sexuality, thus favouring the young and reproductive individuals” (2013, p. 93). The researchers emphasize that “it is crucial to underscore the double jeopardy faced by older women where they not only face prejudice due to age, but are confronted with sexism as well where sexuality of older men is more tolerated than for their female age counterparts. The ageist and sexist attitude towards older people’s sexuality need to be addressed across multi-disciplinary perspectives. Negative attitude towards older people’s sexuality is not only disempowering as it is likely to inhibit open expressions of sexuality, but it can prevent healthy sexuality” (Chepngeno-Langat & Hosegood, 2013, p. 93).

Tackling age discrimination is not an isolated endeavor. It requires concerted efforts considering its intersection with other facets of a person’s identity, namely gender, race, ethnicity, class, ability. Various social categories are interdependent and interact within certain contexts “shaping” inequities (Hankivsky, 2012; Potter et al., 2019). Facing with more than one form of discrimination, women “may be at greater risk for poor mental and physical health due to the collective impact of multiple stigmatized statuses” (Grollman, 2014, p. 4). A recent study conducted by E. Åberg, I. Kukkonen and O. Sarpila shows that the individuals face the challenges in achieving so-called successful ageing not only in the context of their gender, but also in terms of their economic, social, and cultural resources. The researchers claim that “ageing working-class women are less confident about their appearances than upper-class women. Thus, upper-middle-class women seem less vulnerable to the negative aspects of ageing than women who have less social, cultural, and economic capital to enhance their ageing appearance” (Åberg, et al., 2020). The study also found that, though men, regardless of their socioeconomic class, are significantly less likely to worry about the process of ageing than women, upper-middle-class middle-aged men evaluate appearance equally important as women of similar social background and age, and both genders within this class should meet strict standards regarding aging, “good looks may also appear as a marketable skill and an asset” (Åberg, et al., 2020).

Different aspects of our identities intersect and affect each other. Women, in particular women of color, face barriers to economic security, health care, educational opportunities, employment

prospects, housing, as well as a decline in mental health and wellbeing, especially when they are aging (Franckhauser, 2017; Gronniger, 2021; Harlow et al., 2022; Ruiz-Narváez et al., 2024; Sabik, 2015). As 2021 “Mirror/Mirror” survey shows, African American women 50+ reported the highest levels of discrimination, with 70 percent saying they experienced discrimination regularly, while 59 percent of Latinas and 60 percent of Asian American/Pacific Islanders age 50+ said they were regularly discriminated against (Crouch, 2022).

Multiple discrimination goes beyond the sum of discriminations on one ground, thus creating a synergistic effect. Emphasizing that the whole is beyond the sum of its parts, Aristotle wrote that “you may have the parts and yet not have the whole, so that parts and whole cannot be the same” (Barnes, 1991, p. 346). Though older men also report discrimination based on age, but in the case of women, when discrimination is also based on gender (let alone race, class, ability in both cases), a multifaceted system of inequity is created that is difficult to deal with.

Addressing one type of inequity will not lead to the establishment of a just society. Quite often, negative stereotypes and prejudices, which impede social inclusion, are expressed in subtle ways. However, no matter how social exclusion is manifested, it undermines human dignity, life conditions, health, and wellbeing (Maury, 2020; Grave risk of poverty, 2020; Westwood, 2023). For women, and older women in particular, to overcome barriers to social inclusion, a significant amount of work needs to be done by every member of our society. This movement towards a just society requires motivation, time, joint efforts, determination, mindset shift, etc. Therefore, modern researchers, together with non-academic stakeholders, have to lay the groundwork for acknowledging and addressing inequity and resulting discrimination, honestly recognizing their own historical and cultural backgrounds. The new approach can be established on the basis of transdisciplinarity, which warns against the “reduction” of a human being to race, ethnicity, gender, age group, etc. and emphasizes that each and every individual as an inhabitant of the planet Earth is a transnational being whose dignity has both planetary and cosmic dimensions (Nicolescu, 2002), “if we make the right choices now, we can not only help older adult women today, but generations of women to come” (The Intersections, 2021).

Limitations and Future Directions

Intended as an overview, this paper attempts to view the problem as a whole, so it does not

consider the isolated aspects or individual parts of it within the regions, cultural communities in different socio-political and economic environments. Hence, caution should be taken with generalizing the findings. At the same time, this theoretical study may provide an avenue for more complex, transdisciplinary research at the intersection of mental health, women’s and gender studies, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy.

Below, we identify themes that can provide a framework for future research.

Nowadays, a significant number of researchers, based on evolutionary psychology, explain our perception of physical attractiveness in terms of biological adaptation as a part of universal human nature. In “Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty”, N. Etkoff (2000) unfolds the big picture of biological selection, in which young and physically attractive women, who embody fertility and good genes, become winners. Youthfulness and beauty/attractiveness, which have eventually become aesthetic preferences, are biologically beneficial for the preservation of the human race and reflect the adaptations determined by sexual selection, which is one of the driving forces of evolution (Esel & Esel, 2017; Tadinac, 2010). Therefore, men’s choice of young and beautiful women is due to our genetic heritage. These theories may explain mate choices and sexual selection, however, they, unfortunately, can be used to justify ageism, lookism, predatory actions, thus maintaining the current state of things. For example, one male participant in the discussion “At what age do men find women unattractive? I am referring to the woman’s age” posted on Quora responded in the spirit of evolutionary psychology that caused a storm of indignation among the female participants.

Quora

If you want an accurate and honest answer, look at how people behave, not what they say. When men have money and power, which gives them dating options. They either date young women or women who look younger than their years.

This isn't because of patriarchy or men being shallow and evil. It boils down to what sex is really about. Sexual desire is nature's way of tricking us into having children. It has been shaped by millions of years of evolution and that is why men prefer younger women.

Younger women are more fertile, more likely to survive child birth and therefore men who prefer younger women are more likely to pass on their genes.

You all know this is true. There is reason older women spend a fortune on beauty treatments, skin creams, cosmetic surgery, diets and exercise classes. You do this to look younger and more desirable.

Of course this answer will cause outrage because it touches on the ultimate taboo. Mortality, the fact we will all die. We all have our time in the sun and then it is over.

(At what age, 2022)

The comments of some male participants in the discussion, who actively defend their sexual preferences, support this point of view and may reflect cultural devaluation and negative attitudes towards older women. These attitudes may be automatically transferred to all areas of women’s

lives turning a woman into “an obedient machine for producing children”, which is subject to replacement over time, and losing sight of all the facets of her being.

Of course, we agree that the wonderful images of fashion models and celebrities, which surround us everywhere, can reflect our subconscious desire for aesthetic values, including beauty and youth. However, this process is not unidirectional. Our desire “ignites” advertising, which in turn adds fuel to the fire forcing women to follow “a path without a heart” and to squeeze themselves into the Procrustean bed of stereotypes in every possible way, sometimes at a very high price. Although today, the concepts of body positivity and body neutrality has become widespread (Body Neutrality..., 2023; Leboeuf, 2019), L’Oréal Paris has launched a ‘golden squad’ of stars over the age of 50 (Pike, 2018), and the gorgeous model who promotes the Shiseido Vital Perfection Concentrated Supreme cream is clearly not 20 (Shiseido Vital..., 2024), it is a drop in the ocean given that society (both men and women) still maintain discriminatory attitudes.

While recognizing all the merits of evolutionary psychology, it is necessary to emphasize that we deal with a human being as a multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in both the natural and social worlds. And within the framework of the dichotomy “nature – nurture”, or “the natural world – the world of culture”, gravitating only to one pole of this opposition, it is impossible to give an exhaustive explanation of a human being, his/her behavior, motives, goals, and desires. In order to “fit” evolutionary explanations into a broader picture of “multiple human worlds” and to support the pursuit of social justice in human society (which per se does not exist in nature, since it is a social construct), it is necessary to bridge the gap between the various scientific fields and disciplines without absolutizing any of them.

The women’s feelings of getting old are closely related to the fear of losing physical attractiveness. Within this context, it seems interesting to study the experiences of women who were/considered to be beautiful, average, or unattractive (self-evaluation of physical attractiveness and compliance with beauty standards), as well as the attitudes of less attractive women to the emotional experiences of more attractive women regarding their aging and loss of aesthetic capital (or their privileges). The comments below got us thinking about it.

@di3486 Right? It's hard to conjure up any sympathy for the people who are upset they are no longer getting attention, special favors, job interviews, etc. because they are getting older have can't fall back on their looks. Us average people are not sympathetic.

@di3486 this was exactly the comment i was going to make. the former privileged folks are complaining that they're no longer privileged.

(Goss, 2022)

In a broader sense, this is a problem of female competition. As N. Etcoff wrote, “women torture themselves about minor beauty flaws, and can’t help but compare their looks with those of other women. When the other woman is more beautiful, they feel envious, and may subconsciously try to even the score (she must be dumb or shallow, a bitch or a bore)” (2000, p. 77). According to the researcher, women compete for prime resources – their looks. Often, this competition goes beyond the aesthetic plane manifesting itself in other spheres (Benenson, 2013; Boyrikova, 2022). As M. Kiner emphasizes, female rivalry in the workplace is due to internalized sexism (2020). Mistreating, underestimating, judging and keeping another woman down, women reinforce sexism and misogyny that prevent them from supporting each other and working together to change society.

Conclusions

Aging is a natural and inevitable process, and old age is a significant part of life, which can be filled with joy, achievements of small and big goals, dissemination of accumulated experience and wisdom. Unfortunately, these wonderful aspirations are hindered by ageism – one of the last socially acceptable prejudices. Inducing age stereotypes and perpetuating internalized ageism, our social environment maintains discrimination of women over 40 in workplace, social settings, and private sphere that has detrimental consequences for women’s mental and physical health. Therefore, combating ageism and sexism and eliminating age discrimination is essential to support older women’s health and wellbeing. Both women and men share the responsibility to progress towards true equity that will help women around the world achieve success on their own terms and reach their full potential (Danylova & Kats, 2019; Danylova & Komisarenko, 2024). Life journey of every woman is a way of self-discovery and self-development, in which the various aspects of a woman’s personality come together to create unique integrity of body, mind, and spirit (Danylova, 2020b). To fully realize the potential of half of humanity, it is necessary to dismantle the systems that maintain inequities, as well as to raise up and empower women of all ages, colors, abilities to assert themselves and be respected in both public and private spheres, to accept reality and move on, to feel comfortable and confident in their own skin, to do wonders for everyone on our planet, and to know that every woman matters.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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