Gendered ageism and gray hair: must older women choose between feeling authentic and looking competent?

Vanessa Cecil*, Louise F. Pendry*, Jessica Salvatore†, Hazel Mycroft* and Tim Kurz‡,§

*Department of Psychology, College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK; †Department of Psychology, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, VA, USA; ‡Department of Psychology, University of Bath, Bath, UK; §School of Psychological Science, University of Western Australia, Crawley, WA, Australia

**ABSTRACT**
Aging women frequently use hair dye to disguise their age in order to avoid being stigmatized as “old”. Recently, however, some have chosen naturally gray hair. Informed by Goffman’s theory of stigma, we investigated why they would do so in the face of age-discrimination, and their experiences of the process. We identified two major, oppositional themes, competence and authenticity. Despite wanting to avoid perceptions of old-thesis-incompetent, women risked gray hair in order to feel authentic. However, they employed other beauty practices to mitigate the effects of gray hair, indicating conflict between a (subjectively) authentic appearance and societal perceptions of competence.

*KEYWORDS*
Ageism; gender; stigma; authenticity; competence

“Grey hair on a woman . . . produce[s] one of the least desirable personas in Western society – an old woman” (Symonds & Holland, 2008, p. 29)

The quote above attests to the profoundly negative effect on women of a universal marker of the aging process, gray hair. Nonetheless, there is a growing movement amongst women to stop dyeing their hair and choose instead to go naturally gray as seen in mainstream and social media, which we discuss further below. In the current research we investigated the reasons behind women’s decision to repudiate the precept that age should be camouflaged, their experiences of doing so, and the consequences both in terms of how they believed others perceived them, how they themselves felt, and how they acted.

Ageism, a negative stereotype, prejudice, and/or act of discrimination directed toward elderly people (Ayalon et al., 2019), is not only endemic in western societies but is escalating (Jackson et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have recently underscored its depth and pervasiveness (Ayalon et al., 2020). Whether implicit (e.g., JOkey birthday cards) or explicit (e.g., medical discrimination), ageism denigrates older people and denies them resources and opportunities. Its targets are aware of it: 3 in 4 (self-identified older) British respondents reported that older people are subject to age discrimination (Bytheway et al., 2007). Whilst ageism affects both sexes, women are subject to greater discrimination in, for example, arenas of finance (Jones, 2011) and employment (Button, 2020).

The gendered nature of ageism is especially apparent in the matter of appearance. Social invisibility is a recurrent theme in aging literature and in older women’s accounts of their lives, including when discussing hair (Clarke & Korotchenko, 2010; Ward & Holland, 2011). Ward and colleagues noted striking gendered contrasts in their respondents’ accounts of finding themselves invisible to others: Women, more than men, experienced feeling unseen and erased from public and social life (Ward et al., 2008). Furthermore, a recent survey of attitudes toward aging found a general perception that women’s physical attractiveness deteriorates more than does men’s (Royal Society for Public
Health, 2018). Media representations of women reproduce and exaggerate the cultural ideals of female physical attractiveness, namely, youthful, thin, light-skinned, and toned. This is an appearance that is neither representative of, nor attainable by, the majority of women of any age (Rodgers et al., 2019) and certainly not by older women. Men, on the other hand, may be considered to look distinguished and attractive as they get older (the “George Clooney effect”; Royal Society for Public Health, 2018, p. 18), whereas women are expected – despite the fact that it is clearly impossible – to remain forever girlish (Sontag, 1972).

Gendered ageism is an increasingly pressing issue as, owing to demographic changes, each year there are more older women in the population who are subject to its effects (United Nations, 2017). They are the target audience of media that promote a particular vision of “successful” aging, described as a contemporary obsession (Lamb et al., 2017), the visual discourse of which suggests that to avoid “failure” one must continue to look young. Unfeasible though this might be, older women often engage in beauty work – including dyeing their hair – so as to approximate a youthful appearance. Beauty work refers to esthetic practices performed on oneself in order to gain benefits within a social hierarchy (Kwan & Trautner, 2009). For older women it is arguably a rational response to ageism, being goal-directed behavior that aims to counter a problematic environment (Kahana et al., 2014). However, as age is only concealable to a degree, and decreasingly so as one gets older, women can become increasingly at risk of age discrimination with the passage of time.

**Gray hair and age**

The term “gray-haired” is a common metaphor to represent old age (e.g., the phrase “when I’m old and gray”). As the most malleable of bodily features, hair is a common site of beauty work and thus particularly subject to judgment (Weitz, 2001). It cannot remain neutral in so much as it publicly advertises one’s status and identity (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008). Whatever a woman does or does not do with her hair will affect how others respond to her and thus her social power. Consequently it is, suggests Weitz (2001), central to women’s social position. As Hillary Clinton put it, “Pay attention to your hair, because everyone else will” (Zernike, 2001, p.B4). Declining to use dye and to adopt such a potent, universal symbol of age as gray hair may seem hazardous for older women who operate at the intersection of ageism and sexism. The current study examined the experiences of those who have, nonetheless, made a decision to do so.

Thus far, research has primarily focused on older women’s (predominantly negative) attitudes toward going gray and the feeling of social invisibility that doing so engenders (e.g., Clarke & Korotchenko, 2010). One dominant theme of such research is that hair dye is a tool used expressly to counter this and other negative consequences. Scant attention has been paid to the motivations and experiences of women who voluntarily elect to go gray. Such a focus is timely because – despite the significance of hair, the ubiquity of youthful images and the widespread use of dye (used by 75% of women in the USA, according to the manufacturer Clairol [Kreamer, 2009], and 69% in the UK [Statista, 2017]) – a number of women are choosing to allow their hair to be its natural color. This is seen in popular press articles about both the general trend (e.g., Holden, 2017) and its recent increase due to COVID-19 lockdown (Delgado, 2020). It is also evident in online discussion groups devoted to gray hair, of which there are currently around thirty on Facebook alone. These groups serve as sites where women can debate the desirability but also the difficulty of transitioning to gray hair. The proliferation and popularity of such groups suggests that stopping dyeing is increasingly common but that women who do so are aware of and anxious about gray hair’s connotations.

**Theoretical framework: age stigma**

To explore the consequences of women’s decisions about going gray, we draw on the work of Goffman. He conceptualizes a stigma as an attribute which deeply discredits its possessor (Goffman, 1963). One category of stigmatizing characteristic is an “abomination of the body”, such as a physical deformity (p. 13) that
engenders disgrace, generated by ignorance, prejudice and discrimination (Thornicroft et al., 2007). The attributes, or abominations, of age can be seen as stigmas and age a stigmatized condition. As discussed above, negative age stereotypes, discrimination and stigmatization are prevalent and persistent (see also, Cuddy et al., 2005; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004; Levy & Langer, 1994) and a natural, aged appearance (that is, one devoid of beauty work) on a woman can connote moral decline (e.g., Dumas et al., 2005).

The attributes of age are, of course, acquired stigmas that place people in a hitherto unfamiliar relationship with their social world. Members of society have been “trained” in what the stigmatized condition entails and the newly stigmatized person can be uncomfortably aware of what they have become in society’s eyes (Goffman, 1963). In the case of age stereotypes, the training begins in childhood (Nelson, 2002), persists throughout adulthood, and becomes self-relevant when a person reaches old age (Levy & Langer, 1994). Both the internalized negative beliefs about old age (and thus about oneself as an old person) and the external ageism encountered in society can adversely affect health and wellbeing (Levy et al., 2018).

Having internalized such beliefs across the lifespan, people often attempt to conceal stigmatizing attributes of aging. Some are more concealable than others, so people often can and do act to disguise those that are more concealable and “pass” in society as non-stigmatized. That is, they employ impression management strategies in order to present the most socially advantageous image (Goffman, 1959). Dyeing one’s hair is a common strategy. In so doing, older women may pass as younger and be afforded a higher social status. When the positive and distinct aspects of our collective identities are threatened, for example, by discrimination, we have various options to manage this threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This may entail shifting into another social category if possible, a strategy that Goffman calls conversion. Older people do not have the option to convert to younger. The most they can do to manage the impression that they give to observers is to take measures to conceal their age and distance themselves as best they can from the devalued category “old”.

However, passing as a young woman is possible only for a limited time. As the years progress, one’s age becomes increasingly obvious, passing ceases to be feasible, and a person may instead attempt to cover. This is a common management strategy intended to reduce the impact of a known stigma (as opposed to an unknown or hidden stigma like a health condition; Goffman, 1963). It may involve downplaying the visibility of the stigmatizing identifier, for example, gray hair, or the attributes associated with the stigma, for example, forgetfulness (stigma symbols in Goffman’s term). Those with a stigma symbol that is obtrusive commonly engage in covering as a threat management strategy.

According to Yoshino (2006, p. ix), “everyone covers” to improve their social status by toning down features associated with, for example, an ethnicity, sexuality, or disability stigma. Women, he argues, are expected both to cover, e.g., mute their status as a mother in the workplace, and to reverse cover, e.g., not be “too” assertive – that is, as assertive as are men. In an ageist society one can see that aging women are similarly required both to mute the signs of age and, as we describe below, to reverse cover by not appearing “too young” for their age.

To summarize, Goffman (1963) describes three stages of stigma management: conversion (attempting to leave the stigmatized social category), passing (hiding group membership), and covering (toning down visible attributes tied to the category). We may apply this framework to the experiences of aging women: wishing to deny the reality of aging; attempting to pass for younger, for example, through the use of hair dye; then – as passing becomes less achievable, too burdensome, or otherwise unappealing – employing covering to moderate, rather than hide, their aged appearance.

Unconcealed gray hair is a hyper-visible marker of old age that can, ironically, serve to render women socially invisible. As discussed, older women report that as their appearance ages they find themselves invisible, ignored, irrelevant and discounted (e.g., Ward et al., 2008). This is in line with widespread negative stereotyping that associates age with dependency and with incompetence, for example, forgetfulness, inflexibility and inability to learn new information (Dougherty et al., 2016). Women experience a tension between wanting to avoid such negative consequences of signaling their age, and the fear of being mocked as “mutton dressed as lamb” if they attempt to conceal it (Bytheway et al., 2007; Clarke
& Korotchenko, 2010). This common expression in most Anglophone countries is used to shame a woman (but not a man) for trying to look younger than her age and carries connotations of sexual inappropriateness.

Society demands that women remain looking young and attractive if they are to retain social status, but simultaneously that they “age gracefully” – another common term – which deems as embarrassingly undignified any attempts to look youthful and implies that older women should gradually fade from view. How and why, then, do women negotiate incompatible societal norms and the social requirements to both cover and reverse-cover? And how do they experience feeling that they have fallen foul of others’ expectations?

The current study

Concern about one’s body and appearance resulting from stigmatization does not diminish with age (for a review, see Roy & Payette, 2012) and can have a range of detrimental effects on wellbeing (for a review, see Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011). This underscores the significance of women’s willing display of a highly visible and connotational change to their appearance, gray hair, that has the potential to impact their health by opening them up to increased age discrimination and stigmatization. We wanted to understand the motivations of women who decline to dye their hair and knowingly enter a lower-status social category, their experiences of doing so and of the tensions induced by conflicting societal expectations around older women’s appearance.

Unlike previous eras when women had recourse only to local friends and family for advice and support, today virtual communities offer a wide and accessible constituency of supportive peers. Online “gray groups” have a large, international membership; for example, Gray and Proud on Facebook has more than 32,000 members (Gray and Proud, 2020). They provide safe spaces for their members – predominantly identifying as women – to discuss both the process and the wider effects of their decisions and, as such, provide rich arenas for investigating women’s motivations for and experiences of going gray.

We approached two closed Facebook groups where women discuss transitioning from pigmented hair (whether naturally or artificially) to gray hair. In closed groups messages may only be viewed by members, who can be debarred by moderators for violating group rules. As this affords a certain amount of privacy and confidence in safely expressing feelings to fellow members, we surmised that we might reach participants who were willing to respond frankly to our questions within that safe space.

Our primary research questions focused upon how women navigate the tension between conflicting societal norms around appearance-related aging in general and going gray in particular. Women may encounter social costs regardless of what they do: condemned for looking “inappropriately” young, or having “let themselves go”, or simply rendered socially invisible. Why, then, we wondered, do women choose to stop using hair dye, what are their experiences of doing so, and (how) does their behavior change as a consequence? We administered an open-ended survey asking group members about their thoughts and feelings about age-related appearance, in particular their hair, and their responses to the changes they noted, both in themselves and in the reactions of others.

Method

Participants

In the current study we extend the usual age range for aging research downward, as people can start to go gray in their twenties and women (more so than men) are encouraged by the media and prevailing culture to use hair dye as camouflage from early adulthood. Accordingly, we included a lower age category of 30–39, and an upper one of over 70, while remaining mindful that this includes a wide range of age cohorts.
Ninety-one members across the two Facebook groups took part, of whom eleven were eliminated from the study as they returned either blank questionnaires or one-word answers not suitable for analysis. That left eighty women in the study, the majority of whom \((n = 49)\) were aged between 40 and 60; at either end of the age range six were in their 30s and two were over 70. Most resided in Anglophone countries: United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the UK, and Canada, including a respondent answering in French. Two non-Anglophone countries, the Netherlands and Brazil, were also represented. One participant identified as Asian American, one as Native American/White, five as Latina, and the remaining participants as White. Of those who were employed \((n = 59)\), the majority were in professional or administrative roles \((n = 49)\).

**Data collection**

We were granted access to the groups on condition that they not be identified and that all respondents be anonymized. Additionally, the procedures and materials for the study were approved by the University of Exeter’s Department of Psychology’s ethics committee. We designed a questionnaire that allowed for extended answers about participants’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors with regard to their aging appearances and hair in particular (see Appendix). We did not ask about reasons for not dyeing their hair in order to avoid suggesting that it was not normative, which might have prompted defensive or exaggerated responses. Members of the groups encountered the questionnaire by means of an explanatory “sticky” message, which remained visible at the head of discussion threads and explained the study, the ability to withdraw at any time, assuring anonymity. The message linked to the questionnaire where the option to decline to answer any or all questions was repeated.

**Analytic approach**

The responses were imported into NVivo 11 software and we conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the data, using the form known as template analysis (King, 2004). This constitutes a group of techniques for thematically organizing and analyzing data that occupies a position between methods with predetermined codes (such as content analysis; Weber, 1985), and those with no prior definition of codes (such as grounded theory; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Template analysis was appropriate for our research as it is applicable to a range of epistemological positions from positivist to social constructivist.

It was thus fitting for our critical realist assumptions about the nature of the “real world” social context – namely the prevalence of ageism and sexism – in which our participants construct and understand their position. Critical realism takes the premise that in an open socio-economic system direct causation cannot be induced or deduced but that the structures and actions that interact to govern human behavior can be retroduced (Fleetwood, 2014). Such analysis can identify the structures and mechanisms that have a tendency to generate observed outcomes.

Template analysis utilizes as a starting point a template of predetermined codes derived from literature and the study’s areas of interest, which may be substantially amended and refined during the course of the analysis. As such, it is a useful organizing system when analyzing large data sets such as we had in this study. It combines initial theory-driven codes with subsequent data-driven codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011) to create the equivalent of a code book or manual of code definitions. As a flexible, semi-structured method, it enables the researcher to begin deductive categorization and analysis of the data while allowing for subsequent retroductive analysis with the aim of explaining observed outcomes in terms of their antecedent social structures (e.g., ageism).

The *a priori* codes that comprised the study’s template were derived from reading published literature, theoretical viewpoints, and the areas of greatest interest (discrimination, motivation, and own and others’ views about aging). This produced a provisional template of 10 codes, which, through successive readings of the data and analysis, was amended as codes were modified, added, omitted, expanded, or collapsed. In the final analysis some initial codes remained (e.g., stereotyping), others
omitted if they were not useful in explaining the data (e.g., confidence), while new and unexpected codes were added (e.g., authenticity). All codes were defined in a manual to enable the first two authors to interrogate and clarify them, and were tested through blind inter-coder checking, iteration, and discussion. Proportion agreement was 92.3%. We subsequently identified themes that most closely elucidated the underlying patterns in the participants’ experiences and strategies. This resulted in two major themes and six subthemes incorporating different aspects and domains (see Table 1).

Our analysis built upon preliminary commentaries regarding the difficulties that participants encountered as they transitioned to gray hair, namely stigmatization, the dilemma of contradictory societal expectations and the extra work entailed in trying to conform to them (Cecil et al., 2018). In the current study we approached the coding and generation of themes mindful of the main enquiries of our research: participants’ motivations to stop dyeing their hair and their experiences of doing so.

**Findings**

We identified two major themes, competence and authenticity. These stood in opposition to one another: the first was an important quality that participants were in danger of losing in the eyes of society as they aged, but the second – a motivation for, and benefit of, ceasing to dye – risked forfeiting perceptions of that very competence. Subthemes clustered within each. The first major theme held subthemes related to the perceived lack of competence, namely stigma and discrimination in life and in work; being shamed for looking like “mutton dressed as lamb” or conversely for having “let oneself go”. It also held a subtheme, compensatory effort, indicating attempts to retain the perception of competence via attention to hairstyle, clothes, and cosmetics. The second major theme held two aspects of authenticity, namely, feeling and looking authentic; and benefits of perceptions of (in) competence, that is respect or approachability. In this section we discuss the themes in turn.

**Competence**

Fear of appearing incompetent recurred in our participants’ responses in various guises. This is in line with theories of social perception that indicate that people are located on dimensions of competence and warmth (e.g., Fiske, 2018), and old people and women of any age (unless subtyped as feminists or career women) are considered low in competence but high in warmth. While older women may be perceived as competent in social and familial health areas (*vis-à-vis* men), they are perceived to be low in competence when it comes to work or finances (Kornadt et al., 2013). They thus can find themselves obliged twice over to combat perceptions of incompetence while retaining, if possible, an aura of warmth that encompasses characteristics such as good-nature, trustworthiness, tolerance, and sincerity (Fiske et al., 2007). Age- and gender-stereotyping may be seen in the following subthemes describing participants’ experiences of choosing gray hair and their subsequent behaviors.

**Stereotyping and discrimination**

Participants’ responses indicated that they were aware of negative age-stereotyping and its unequal impact on women:

| Major themes | Subthemes |
|--------------|-----------|
| Competence   | Stereotyping and discrimination: life and workplace |
|              | Shame: letting oneself go, mutton dressed as lamb |
|              | Compensatory effort: hair, cosmetics, clothes |
| Authenticity | Looking authentic |
|              | Feeling authentic |
|              | Benefits: freedom, approachability, respect |

**Table 1. Major themes, subthemes and their aspects.**
It’s a struggle for sure. Accepting that, yes, everybody ages … everybody … . Affirming that it’s good, and natural, and beautiful – even though everything I have learned growing up in society says it’s not! Sigh … . We are definitely fighting against generations of negative perception regarding aging women (Alex, 40–49).

They also indicated that they experienced the effects of such stereotyping, both in relation to aging in general and to hair color in particular:

I think younger people don’t think they can relate to me so they keep their distance. . . . I work with college aged students. Before I stopped coloring my hair they thought I was much younger and actually treated me like one of their own. Now they treat me like an older person – assuming I can’t relate to them (Tracey, 40–49).

Some found that they were stereotyped as less physically able when they stopped dyeing their hair and were, for example, offered seats on public transport. Mattie was very happy with her gray hair but found that it caused other people to stereotype her:

I absolutely love my natural hair color. . . . I feel comfortable and love who and I [am] and who I am changing into. . . .[But] I have noticed with my silver hair that I’m viewed and treated [as if I am] more fragile (Mattie, 50–59).

Others found themselves considered not just less capable physically but less capable or competent in other ways too. A participant evidenced the importance of hair color in the workplace when she said, “I am no longer working so I no longer color my hair” (Alana, 60–69), suggesting that an older appearance was not looked on favorably at work. Another believed that she needed to overtly convey competence through how she looked: “In the work place appearance [of] youth is the first impression. You have to appear on top of your game” (Isabel, 40–49).

To present oneself as competent is, in Goffman’s (1963) terms, to employ disidentifiers, symbols that negate the symbols that announce a stigma. Youthful-looking dyed hair is one. One participant felt she had lost her disidentifying symbol of competence at work when she went gray: “I think my former boss treated me differently after I stopped coloring my hair. It’s hard to explain, but it is almost like I lost credibility with him” (Rose, 50–59).

**Shame**

Stigmatization of old age as an incompetent and objectionable state can cultivate an environment that sanctions age-shaming. Our participants reported experiencing this; for example, “[I] wonder why I waited so long to go grey! I began coloring in my 30’s after my sister in-law shamed my grey strands” (Noelle, 60–69) and “Since I started greying in my teens, I never associated it with old age. It was only under the influence of others that made me dye my hair” (Trisha, 50–59).

For some the shaming was more subtle as they were rendered socially invisible and thereby informed of their irrelevance. Typical reports were: “Glad I am natural and not coloring anymore. But do feel invisible at times and not as appreciated as before” (Val, 60–69) and “I feel invisible. . . . I don’t exist. I don’t matter to anyone who is not in my immediate circle” (Anne, 40–49). On the other hand, having gray hair made some participants’ status as “old” hypervisible:

It is difficult at times to be around some of my friends who still color. I stand out like a sore thumb and some people assume I am much older than they are because of my hair color . . . I do feel like younger people think I am much older than I am because all they see is the gray/white/silver hair and make assumptions (Rose, 50–59)

Another participant was aware of the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of invisibility and hypervisibility when she reported,

You almost feel invisible at times. I do notice more attention with silver hair though. . . . Depends on where you work how you carry yourself and interact with people. Many people as they age let themselves go assign themselves as old and this would be reflected in how others perceive you (Nina, 50–59).

**Letting oneself go.** Nina’s comment suggested that is it normative to think that to be perceived as old is bad and that it is a woman’s duty to prevent this from occurring by not “letting herself go” and
becoming socially invisible. This common phrase and its implication that lifelong appearance maintenance is imperative was evident in several responses. Some were explicit rejections, as if anticipating accusations of having fallen into a shameful, stigmatized state: “I am not letting myself go” (Angela, 50–59). Another participant referred to the gendered nature of the concept when she said, “There’s a thought that once you go natural with your hair color, that you’re ‘giving up’. . . . Men never seem to get this criticism” (Olla, 40–49).

Particularly problematic in this regard was the period of transition from dyed to natural hair. Media portrayals of “successful agers” may include men with tousled multi-colored hair, but women are invariably well-groomed and white-haired. They tend not to have half-grown-out (the “skunk line”, Anne aged 40–49), patchy, or piebald hair. While women are uneasy about the reception of gray hair, they are even more so about this interim stage – which can last months or years – when they correspond neither to the prescribed appearance of youth, nor to that of the “successfully” aged. Participants indicated fear of others’ reactions:

6 months into my transition to my natural grey hair has been quite the journey. Many mixed emotions, fear of looking old, what others might say, what my husband would think, ruled most of my day for the first 3 months (Blythe, 50–59).

[When starting to transition] it bothered me a great deal, with a loss of self-confidence, like an unease or shame about having grey hair, as if I have neglected myself. I felt this at work and in my family life [translated from French by first author] (Mirielle, 60–69).

Mirielle felt not just uneasy but ashamed at giving an impression of self-neglect. This is understandable if older women are already considered incompetent by virtue of their sex and age. Clarke et al. (2009) found that many of their participants made an effort to maintain standards of appearance in order to counter assumptions that they were physically or cognitively deteriorating. They wanted to show society and reassure family that they were capable, healthy and independent. According to Twigg (2013), any sign of dereliction in an older woman risks signaling moral collapse and thus social exclusion. In order to avoid giving the impression of incompetence or dependency, our participants engaged in compensatory effort to mitigate the aging effect of gray hair, which we discuss below.

**Mutton dressed as lamb.** However, there was another hazard to be negotiated: that such efforts could result in criticism for trying too hard. Our participants wanted to avoid looking fake, artificially youthful, or unsuccessfully camouflaged. Passing, it seemed, was no longer an option as to attempt it would also risk shaming: “It’s not possible to look younger unless your body is biologically less aged . . . fake interventions just look artificial” (Kellie, 60–69). As another participant put it, “I had colored my hair for over 30 years . . . I decided I wasn’t fooling anyone. I had a sixty year old face. I decided to go natural” (Jenny, 60–69). For Jenny, to try and to fail to “fool” people through hair dye would be to risk the slur “mutton dressed as lamb”. Participants, then, were concerned to avoid looking neglected or unkempt, which requires covering, but also to avoid looking unnatural, which renders attempting to pass as too hazardous.

In order to retain a sufficiently youthful appearance to give the impression of competence, while contriving not to look artificial and risk derision, participants felt obliged to pay greater attention in general to their appearance than previously. They employed as a disidentifier a kempt or youthful appearance in an attempt to negate the stigmatizing symbol of gray hair.

**Compensatory effort**

Having gray or white hair was considered by many participants or their observers to be aging: “I have several girlfriends who think I am too young to wear my hair silver and gray. They think I should dye it because they think I look young and my hair makes me look older” (Rachael, 50–59). Furthermore, to look old was indisputably objectionable: “I think people just link silver hair with older women. Unfortunately” (Bonnie, 60–69); “I naturally want to look younger and healthy” (Alana, 60–69).
Consequently, there was an apparently taken-for-granted assumption that gray hair must be countered by greater attention to its style and cut, application of cosmetics, non-surgical procedures, and/or careful choice of clothes in order to mitigate its aging effect. Prue (50–59) said that she was "changing my makeup to compensate"; Nicki (30–39) wrote that, "I wear makeup almost every day and have started wearing lippy [lipstick] which I have never done". Another said,

I feel [that] the grey hair is very ageing. And I spend £££s on skin care and trying to keep my wrinkles at bay . . . I also think I have become a lot more concerned by these ageing factors since going grey . . . I guess that’s due to the fact that people assume I’m older because of my hair, so I try to compensate in other areas. Not sure I’m succeeding though, and wish it didn’t matter to me quite so much (Elizabeth, 40–49).

Clothes were also put to use in this regard. Many made efforts to modify their clothing in line with their new appearance: "[I am] wearing stronger colours [and d]ressing a bit more adventurously" (Nan, 60–69); "I am also learning and paying more attention to fashion, which before I really didn’t care a lot about, unless I had a special event . . . I now pay more attention to what colors and style suit my grey hair best" (Blythe, 50–59).

Participants appeared to be resisting cultural invisibility and claiming a place in the social world through their clothes (Twigg, 2013) and doing so specifically in relation to the newly acquired gray hair that they believed made their age more obvious and increased their risk of marginalization and invisibility. The additional effort directed toward non-hair aspects of their appearance indicates a continuing disassociation from the social category "old", with its unwelcome connotations of incompetence. Having relinquished the endeavor to pass as younger through the use of hair dye, there emerged instead an effort to cover. Consequently, it may be that the maintenance and expenditure no longer directed toward dyeing hair is replaced (or potentially exceeded) by maintenance and expenditure on other aspects of appearance in order to cover sufficiently well to stave off stigmatizing social categorization.

In view of participants’ awareness of age stigma and discrimination, and the role played by pigmented hair in avoiding membership of a stigmatized social category, one might ask why they would voluntarily opt to stop dyeing it. As one British journalist recently asked, “Who are these women who look like nature intended? Are they actually insane?” (Blackburn, 2019, para. 1). What rewards did our participants anticipate? Going gray seemed to satisfy a desire to feel more like their "true" selves and to find relief from the constant work required to conceal and to self-negate, which they perceived, on balance, outweighed the costs of doing so. The theme we identified to capture and illuminate their motivation was authenticity. However, as discussed below, the costs of having authentically gray hair are such that participants continued to engage in other age-concealing behaviors.

**Authenticity**

We identified two related manifestations of sought-for authenticity. One was in relation to appearance, and the other in relation to feelings about oneself. Both seemed to offer some benefits, which is the third sub-theme.

**Looking authentic**

Participants reported wanting to look natural: as Daria (60–69) wrote, “I’m flying my natural flag.” Feelings of authenticity and inauthenticity are powerful motivators as people seek to achieve the former and avoid the latter (Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013). Consequently, it may be that participants’ aversion to looking fake is as much a driver toward gray hair as is a desire to look natural or liberation from the effort and expense of dyeing.

Some were aware that the effect of dyed hair could be aging rather than youthful: “Dyed hair looks so coloured . . . over-coloured and unnatural. In some cases it can look aging” (Kellie, 60–69) and “Love my silver . . . I see other older women with too dark colored hair and I now find it ageing and
fake looking” (Nina, 60–69). These responses suggest that a woman who is unsuccessful in her attempts to look youthful can be shamed not only for looking like “mutton” but also for looking older than her actual age and thus a member of an even lower-status social category.

An inauthentic appearance was emphatically presented as something to be avoided: “I would be embarrassed to colour my hair back to the way I had it!” (Eva, 60–69), but was to be balanced against the simultaneous imperative to avoid looking neglected, unkempt and incompetent. Either course of action entailed a risk of shame and it seems that many of our participants opted for authenticity while also, however, being vigilant to avoid any suggestion of neglect and incompetence. That is to say they perceived a need to engage in covering. However, a further factor was evident. Participants suggested that their desire for authenticity was not just to project an acceptable appearance and avoid being shamed as fake, but also extended to their personal identity.

Feeling authentic

Besides wanting to look natural, participants wanted to feel natural. Rose (50–59) put it this way: “There are times when I’ve been tempted to color . . . but I keep coming back to wanting to stay authentic. I am 55 old, after all, and it is perfectly natural to have gray/white hair. Society is just going to have to deal with it!” Part of the desire to feel authentic is the specific aim of feeling in line with a changing (older) self. The following extracts give a flavor of this:

I’d begun to feel like covering [my grey hair] was a sham, and that when I dyed my hair, I was—in a way—pretending to be someone I wasn’t. I was not only lying to the world, but more importantly, I was lying to myself . . . . With my decision came a new kind of confidence that I am facing the world exactly as I am” (Ursula, over 70).

“I actually feel better about myself because my exterior matches my chronological age. This is me, like it or not. I am not pretending to be something I am not. It is quite freeing (Rose, 50-59).

The responses indicated a difference between the motivation to look authentic and the motivation to feel authentic. The participants who reported wanting to look authentic also said they made more effort with their make-up, skin care and clothing choices. Those who reported wanting to feel more authentic did not. They did, however, say they experienced greater approachability and respect. This suggests that, unlike those making compensatory effort with their appearance, they were not seeking to distance themselves from the category “old” but instead to reframe the meaning of the category.

Benefits

Moving from a youthful or middle-aged appearance to an older one was not wholly characterized as problematic but could also be welcomed. Cultivating an awareness of the benefits of both being and appearing older was a strategy that some used to mitigate the loss of status and feelings of shame discussed just above. Three forms of benefits were mentioned frequently by participants: greater freedom, approachability, and respect.

Freedom. The invisibility that participants experienced was distressing for some, but appreciated by others who saw it as a liberation from constant scrutiny: “Noticed slowly becoming invisible to some people . . . mostly men . . . but ok with it. It is freeing. Removes some pressure” (Penny, 50–59). Some were ambivalent, both regretting and welcoming it:

Where strangers are concerned I can move about in public more freely and unnoticed . . . . My idea that others see me differently affects me quite a lot. I still have a need to be admired at times, I wish I didn’t . . . but at the same time I quite enjoy the anonymity and being able to go out without making much of an effort and feeling that people won’t be looking at me anyway . . . it’s all very conflicting (Elizabeth, 40-49).

In addition to these social freedoms, some also mentioned enjoying freedom from the practical tyranny of frequent dyeing: “I’ve dyed my hair for most of my life, but it is so great to not have to
worry about dying [sic] anymore” (Amanda, 40–49) and “Going grey brings a certain freedom that is very welcome!!” (Blythe, 50–59).

**Approachability.** Paradoxically, perhaps, while invisibility can bring benefits, the hypervisibility as “old” that accompanies gray hair can also do so. Some participants found that they were more approachable: “Just recently I noticed that more people want to talk to me and approach in public settings [since going grey] . . . . I especially notice younger men and women making conversation with me” (Katie, 60–69). On adopting gray hair for the second time after having reverted to dying for a period, Ditta said,

I started again going grey 6 months ago and surprisingly I have the same experience as back then; people are nicer to me . . . ., and especially teenage girls turn to me for protection or help when I’m traveling. Nothing important, but I’ve noticed that they like staying around me in airports or train stations like they’re looking for some kind of guidance (Ditta, 50–59).

**Respect.** Another agreeable effect of looking older for some was – in contradistinction to marginalization – greater respect both in life in general and in the workplace, which some found surprising:

I actually feel that as I have gotten “older” people are nicer to me, kinder to me, and show me more respect than ever in my life before [and] ask my opinion on certain things, and spend time in deep conversation with me. [I am] seen as a resource, a guide, a mentor, a role model, and even a mother-substitute (Ursula, over 70).

Others said, “I feel more respected . . . . As a nurse I feel more well received as knowledgeable, trusted and [capable]” (Katie, 60–69); “I find younger people are really polite to me. LOL. Maybe some sort of default respect because I am older? It’s so strange!” (Alex, 40–49). Thus the shame of old age was offset by focussing on its benefits. Alex, who (as quoted previously) struggled to accept that aging was “natural and good”, was perhaps able to offset this by giving attention to the greater respect that came with gray hair. Such attention may function as a strategy to maintain self-esteem and wellbeing.

In the following section we discuss the findings in the context of extant literature and theories. We consider what they indicate about older women’s experience of and resistance to societal pressures in relation to their appearance and the nature of the authenticity they seek, and the tension between a (subjectively) authentic appearance and perceptions of competence.

**Discussion**

Eighty participants drawn from several countries composed our large data set, throughout which we identified some of the ways that aging women relate to and resist age-stereotyping and stigmatization.

The social shaming of aging women is pervasive and insidious in our culture, and younger people often view old women – if they see them at all – as “little old ladies, as old bags, as useless nobodies” (Bouson, 2016, p. 2). In the face of trenchant ageism and sexism it is no surprise that older women try to modify their looks to pass for younger or cover the revealing signifiers. It may be more surprising that some choose not to. Older women are beset by hazards on all sides. They run the risk of ridicule for being mutton dressed as lamb; the risk of social rejection, erasure and invisibility; the risk of discredit by virtue of their hypervisible abominations of the body that relegate them to a “warm but incompetent” low-status position in society. Our participants gave an indication of how they negotiate their way through the status-threatening changes that come with age, and the inherent contradictions of their position given conflicting societal norms for older women’s appearance.

Decisions about their hair color were made in full awareness of stigmatization of old age, particularly women’s old age. Whether choosing to disregard societal expectations and go gray in the face of others’ – including significant others’ – disapproval, or to conform to such norms by countering gray hair with cosmetics and careful clothing choices, our participants were attempting to circumvent the stigma they knew was an ever-present danger. Their actions were circumscribed by the
shaming perpetrated by other people, whether directly (e.g., from acquaintances, or media commentary) or indirectly (marginalized through being rendered invisible), and from their own internalized age-stereotyping. This included, for example, shame to be seen as someone who tries too hard and fails to be “age-appropriate”, or conversely, as someone who does not try hard enough and looks neglected and incompetent.

**A subjective authenticity**

The stigma and shame with which participants had to contend stand in opposition to the authenticity they sought. Authenticity – the subjective sense of being one’s true self (Lenton et al., 2013) – is an important psychological state and trait; it is associated with greater wellbeing, physical health, and meaning in one’s life (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Clinical practitioners have noted the ways that stressful and stigmatizing experiences like contending with sexist forms of ageism sometimes function as a kind of crucible that produces satisfying subjective feelings of achieved authenticity in later life (Pipher, 2019). Yet practitioners also note that the desire to feel authentic and natural is one that brings women to therapy. Our findings suggest that one of the tensions they may wish to explore is the tension between desiring authenticity and desiring to be treated as competent.

In the case of our participants, a desire to look and feel “natural” proved sufficiently motivating for them to reject dye and attempt to pass despite societal pressures and their own internalized ageism and self-stereotyping. They opted for an authentic appearance. It was, however, an authenticity constrained by wanting to avoid embodying the “least desirable persona” referred to in the opening quotation (Symonds & Holland, 2008, p. 29) and membership of a new, deeply ill-favored social group.

Accordingly, participants made extra, compensatory effort with their appearance to mitigate the effect of gray hair and conform more closely to an idealized youthful image. No longer thinking it feasible (having acquired gray hair) to pass as younger, they instead covered by means of careful attention to hair styling, cosmetics and clothes, in an attempt to reduce any impression of having let themselves go. Through this strategy, which called into question the character of their authenticity, they hoped to distance themselves from perceptions of un kemptness and imputed incompetence, and so to retain status.

**Conflict between authenticity and perceived competency**

Our participants wanted to resist pressure to conform to an impossible, forever-youthful image and instead present themselves as authentically gray-haired and thus inevitably older-looking. However, this may be possible only at the expense of social value: To the extent that gender- and age-stereotyping designate older women as incompetent, their relevance and social standing depend precisely on not looking old.

In critical realist terms, the causal mechanism pushing women not to dye their hair was society’s prescribed and ultimately unachievable appearance norms and women’s feelings of inauthenticity when trying to meet them. The social costs incurred by those deemed to give insufficient attention to their appearance explains the effort expended on other beauty work and dress in order to maintain a youthful (and thus competent) image. This, however, may seem to undermine the authenticity they sought.

If gray-haired women’s social status can be maintained only by effort devoted to covering, then the authenticity achieved is highly subjective and also potentially tenuous. While the term authenticity lacks clarity in the literature, it pertains to internal, personal, and thus necessarily subjective judgments (Newman & Smith, 2016). Vannini and Franzese (2008) conceptualize it as involving two features: the emotional experience of being true or untrue to oneself and ideas about what one’s true self is. Participants’ reports of feeling authentic indicate that they experienced feeling true to themselves and that that trueness resided, in part, in their appearance.
The media coverage of successful aging – with its depictions of youthful-looking, gray-haired models, and in particular celebrities with their ages declared – may allow women to feel authentically their age when they reject hair dye but not when also rejecting cosmetics or current fashions. This subjective and selective authenticity means that the effort at appearance, post-dye, may be at least as great as before and the effect, whether “successful” or not, may be just as much an artifice. In other words, participants are still pursuing a younger appearance, albeit by means of different variants of beauty work, which still constitute covering and aim more at mitigation than camouflage.

Limitations and future directions

Ageism and attributions of (in)competence are likely to differ between socioeconomic groups, employment sectors, ethnic communities, and age cohorts. While the present study benefitted from a large number of participants, they were necessarily confined to those who were familiar with using the internet to access their peers, and sufficiently concerned about the consequences of going gray to do so. And, as gray hair can start in early adulthood, we selected a low age boundary for our participants, resulting in a large age range. Future research could examine more stratified groupings to tease out the effects of appearance-related ageism and beauty work for sub-groups of older women of differing age ranges who experience the intersection of different stigmatized identities – for example, related to class, ethnicity or employment status.

Further research could also clarify the nature of the authenticity participants sought and experienced – whether it was, as Newman and Smith (2016) suggest, a subjective state of feeling true to oneself and free of social pressures to be otherwise. Interestingly, perceptions of being authentically oneself have been found to increase through the lifespan (Seto & Schlegel, 2018). However, we might ask whether attempts to be authentically true to oneself in a society where old age is habitually coupled with incompetence are doomed unless the focus can shift from physical appearance to benefits like respect and approachability. Future research might investigate whether interventions could actualize such a shift.

Equally important is to understand whether engaging in the common practice of beauty work – with its trade-off between competence and authenticity – is beneficial to older women’s wellbeing. Research might investigate whether continuing effort at appearance confers benefit through the maintenance of visibility and social status – or whether, on the other hand, it threatens wellbeing through the ever-increasing difficulty of passing, or effectively covering, and fear of failure and being shamed. Conversely, one might ask whether foregoing beauty work bolsters wellbeing by engendering feelings of authenticity or harms wellbeing by exposing women to perceptions of dereliction and incompetence.

Conclusion

Our study indicates that older women are alert to age-stereotyping and discrimination and the hazard of invisibility, social devaluation, and irrelevance. They want to retain social status. However, they want to do so without resorting to camouflaging their age if that means feeling inauthentic. They may eschew hair dye in the pursuit of authenticity. But avoiding perceptions of incompetence, dependency, and other social decrements of old age demands effort, financial expense, and vigilance not dissimilar from that required to dye one’s hair. Such efforts to pass or cover, or on the other hand to desist from beauty work and “let oneself go”, can themselves all risk stigmatization, discrimination and shaming. Consequently, women can find themselves constrained by incompatible societal expectations and ageist and sexist stereotypes, and beset on all sides by the threat of being shamed. Whatever their decisions about their self-presentation, their appearance will risk feelings of (in)authenticity and perceptions of (in)competence. Future research should seek to quantify and clarify what the effects might be, as well as for whom it might be beneficial versus detrimental to engage in beauty work.
Acknowledgement
The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References
Ayalon, L., Chasteen, A., Diehl, M., Levy, B., Neupert, S. D., Rothermund, K., Tesch-Römer, C., & Wahl, H. W. (2020). Aging in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: Avoiding ageism and fostering intergenerational solidarity. The Journals of Gerontology: Series B. 76 (2), e49–e52. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa051
Ayalon, L., Dolberg, P., Mikulionienė, S., Perek-Bialas, J., Rapolienė, G., Stypinska, J., Willinska, M., & De La Fuente-Núñez, V. (2019). A systematic review of existing ageism scales. Ageing Research Reviews, 54, 100919. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arr.2019.100919
Biddle-Perry, G., & Cheang, S. (2008). Hair: Styling, culture and fashion (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.2752/9781847887191
Blackburn, V. (2019, February 6) Should a woman ever let herself go grey? Daily Express. https://www.pressreader.com/uk/daily-express/20190206/282011853604482 button
Bouson, J. B. (2016). Shame and the aging woman: Confronting and resisting ageism in contemporary women’s writings. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31711-3
Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
Button, P. (2020). Population aging, age discrimination, and age discrimination protections at the 50th anniversary of the age discrimination in employment act. In Czaia, S. I., Sharit, J. and James, J. B. (Eds.). Current and Emerging Trends in Aging and Work (pp. 163–188). Springer: Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24135-3_9
Bytheway, B., Ward, R., Holland, C., & Pearce, S. (2007). Too old: Older people’s accounts of discrimination, exclusion and rejection: A report from the research on age discrimination project (RoAD) to help the aged. Help the Aged, London, UK. http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/7281
Cecil, V., Pendry, L. F., Salvatore, J., & Kurz, T. (2018). Women’s grey hair as an abomination of the body: Conceal and pass, or reveal and subvert. In S. Barak-Brandes & A. Kama (Eds.), Feminist interrogations of women’s head hair: Crown of glory and shame (pp. 124–140). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429505430-9
Clarke, L. H., Griffin, M., & Maliha, K. (2009). Bat wings, bunions, and turkey wattles: Body transgressions and older women’s strategic clothing choices. Ageing and Society, 29(5), 709–726. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x08008283
Clarke, L. H., & Korotchenko, A. (2010). Shades of grey: To dye or not to dye one’s hair in later life. Ageing and Society, 30(6), 1011–1026. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x100036x
Clarke, L. H., & Korotchenko, A. (2011). Aging and the body: A review. Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue Canadienne Du Vieillissement, 30(3), 493–510. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0714980811000274
Cuddy, A. J., Norton, M. I., & Fiske, S. T. (2005). This old stereotype: The pervasiveness and the utility of the elderly stereotype. Journal of Social Issues, 61(2), 267–285. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00405.x
DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., & McCulloch, A. W. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. Field Methods, 23(2), 136–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X10388468
Delgado, K. (2020, June 9). Women have grown their grey hair out in lockdown and won’t be going back to dying it. inews: https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/wellbeing/women-grey-hair-grown-out-lockdown-dying-hairdressers-442044
Dougerty, E. N., Dorr, N., & Pulice, R. T. (2016). Assisting older women in combatting ageist stereotypes and improving attitudes toward aging. Women & Therapy, 39(1–2), 12–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2016.1116308
Dumas, A., Laberge, S., & Straka, S. M. (2005). Older women’s relations to bodily appearance: The embodiment of social and biological conditions of existence. Ageing and Society, 25(6), 883–902. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x05004010
Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype content: Warmth and competence endure. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27(2), 67–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417738825
Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11(2), 77–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005
Fleetwood, S. (2014) Bhaskar and critical realism. In: Adler, P., Du Gay, P., Morgan, G. & Reed, M., (Eds.) Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory and Organisation Studies: Contemporary Currents(pp. 182–219). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199671083.013.0009
Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine de Gruyter.

Goffman, E. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/43.1.127

Gray and Proud. (2020). Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/16875750181/

Holden, M. (2017). Covering up gray hair is an emotionally-draining chore. *Allure*. https://www.allure.com/story/covering-gray-hair-emotionally-draining-for-women

Jackson, S. E., Hackett, R. A., & Steptoe, A. (2019). Associations between age discrimination and health and wellbeing: Cross-sectional and prospective analysis of the English Longitudinal study of ageing. *The Lancet Public Health*, 4(1), e200–e208. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30035-0

Jones, R. L. (2011). Imagining old age. In J. Katz, S. Peace, & S. Spurr (Eds.) *Adult lives: A life course perspective* (pp. 18–26). Bristol: Polity Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1895q0.8

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (2004). *Older people shaping policy and practice*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/1859352456.pdf

Kahana, E., Kahana, B., & Lee, J. E. (2014). Proactive approaches to successful aging: One clear path through the forest. *Gerontology*, 60(5), 466–474. https://doi.org/10.1159/000360222

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In Cassel, C. & Symon, G. (Eds.) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (pp. 256–270). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280119.n21

Kornadt, A. E., Voss, P., & Rothermund, K. (2013). Multiple standards of aging: Gender-specific age stereotypes in different life domains. *European Journal of Ageing*, 10(4), 335–344. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-013-0281-9

Kreamer, A. 2009. *Going Gray*. Little, Brown.

Kwan, S., & Trautner, M. N. (2009). Beauty work: Individual and institutional rewards, the reproduction of gender, and questions of agency. *Sociology Compass*, 3(1), 49–71. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00179.x

Lamb, S., Robbins-Ruszkowski, J., Corwin, A., Calasanti, T., & King, N. (2017). *Successful Aging as a Contemporary Obsession: Global Perspectives*. Rutgers University Press.

Lenton, A. P., Bruder, M., Slabu, L., & Sedikides, C. (2013). How does “being real” feel? The experience of state authenticity. *Journal of Personality*, 81(3), 276–289. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2012.00805.x

Levy, B., & Langer, E. (1994). Aging from negative stereotypes: Successful memory in China among the American deaf. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(6), 989–997. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.66.6.989

Levy, B. R., Slade, M. D., Chang, E., Kannoth, S., & Wang, S. Y. (2018). Ageism amplifies cost and prevalence of health conditions. *The Gerontologist*, 60(1), 174–181. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gny131

Nelson, T. (Ed.). (2002). *Ageism: Stereotypes and prejudice against older persons*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/1157.001.0001

Newman, G. E., & Smith, R. K. (2016). Kinds of authenticity. *Philosophy Compass*, 11(10), 609–618. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12343

Pipher, M. (2019). *Women rowing north: Navigating life’s currents and flourishing as we age*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Rodgers, R. F., Campagna, J., & Attawala, R. (2019). Stereotypes of physical attractiveness and social influences: The heritage and vision of Dr. Thomas Cash. *Body Image*, 31, 273–279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.01.010

Roy, M., & Payette, H. (2012). The body image construct among Western seniors: A systematic review of the literature. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 55(3), 505–521. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2012.04.007

Royal Society for Public Health. (2018). *That age-old question: How attitudes to ageing affect our health and Wellbeing*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. https://www.rsph.org.uk/

Schmader, T., & Sedikides, C. (2018). State authenticity as fit to environment: The implications of social identity for fit, authenticity, and self-segregation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 22(3), 228–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317734080

Seto, E., & Schlegel, R. J. (2018). Becoming your true self: Perceptions of authenticity across the lifespan. *Self and Identity*, 17(3), 310–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2017.1322530

Sontag, S. (1972, September). The double standard of aging. *Saturday Review of the Society*, 29–38. http://www.unz.com/print/SaturdayRev-1972sep23-00029

Statista. (2017). Frequency of hair dye usage in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2017. Statista https://www.statista.com/statistics/715622/frequency-of-hair-dye-usage-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/

Symonds, A., & Holland, C. (2008). The same hairdo: The production of the stereotyped image of the older woman. In R. Ward & B. Bytheway (Eds.), *Researching age and multiple discrimination* (pp. 26–44). Centre for Policy on Ageing. http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/27390

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In Postmes, T. & Branscombe, N.R. (Eds.) *Rediscovering Social Identity* (pp. 173–190). Psychology Press. ISBN 9781841694924

Thornicroft, G., Rose, D., Kassam, A., & Sartorius, N. (2007). Stigma: Ignorance, prejudice or discrimination? *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 190(3), 192–193. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.106.025791

Twigg, J. (2013). *Fashion and age: Dress, the body and later life*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.2752/175174110x12792058833898
Appendix

Questions about “age-related changes in appearance” that participants responded to in an open-ended format. Each was followed by its own text box.

There are several aspects of this that we would like to investigate and would be grateful if you would share your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to the questions below. You do not have to answer them all, just as many as you are happy to share your views on. Please write your answers in the text boxes which can be expanded by clicking and dragging the bottom right-hand corner so you can write as much as you like!

1. How do you feel about the changes in your appearance that come with aging (for example, hair, skin, body shape and size)?
2. In particular, what are your thoughts and feelings about changes in hair color and your hair care choices?
3. Do you take measures to alter your appearance in other ways so as to look younger? If so, in which ways?
4. How old do you feel?
5. How old do you think you look?
6. How old would you like to look?
7. Do you think that other people view you or treat you differently as a woman as a result of your changing appearance? Have you noticed other way in which people treat you differently? If so please explain.
8. Do appearance changes affect your work life (if you are working), your social life, your home life? If they do, can you explain how?
9. Do you feel differently about yourself as you notice your changing appearance? If you do, can you explain further?
10. How do you feel about the whole process of your personal aging, and about aging in general?

United Nations. (2017) World population ageing. United Nations https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Highlights.pdf

Vannini, P., & Franzese, A. (2008). The authenticity of self: Conceptualization, personal experience, and practice. Sociology Compass, 2(5), 1621–1637. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00151.x

Ward, R., Jones, R., Hughes, J., Humberstone, N., & Pearson, R. (2008). Intersections of ageing and sexuality: Accounts from older people. In R. Ward & B. Bytheway (Eds.), Researching age and multiple discrimination (pp. 45–72). Centre for Policy on Ageing. http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/27390

Ward, R., & Holland, C. (2011). “If I look old, I will be treated old”: Hair and later-life image dilemmas. Ageing and Society, 31(2), 288–307. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x10000863

Weber, R. P. (1985). Basic Content Analysis. Sage Publications.

Weitz, R. (2001). Women and their hair: Seeking power through resistance and accommodation. Gender & Society, 15(5), 667–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243015005003

Wilson, D. M., Errasti-Ibarrondo, B., & Low, G. (2019). Where are we now in relation to determining the prevalence of ageism in this era of escalating population ageing? Ageing Research Reviews, 51, 78–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arr.2019.03.001

Yoshino, K. 2006. Covering. Random House.

Zernike, K. (2001, May 21). At Yale, Mrs. Clinton Ponders hair and politics. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/21/nyregion/commencements-at-yale-mrs-clinton-ponders-hair-and-politics.html