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Behind the mask: An analysis of women's perceptions and rationale toward the purchase and use of anti-aging products

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BEHIND THE MASK: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND
RATIONALE TOWARD THE PURCHASE
AND USE OF ANTI-AGING PRODUCTS

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Clair Maureen Williams
University of Northern Iowa
December 2013

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study was done to unveil a more contemporary and intimate look at women and aging in U.S. society. This qualitative research explored what women do, if anything, to confront pressures associated with aging. Purposeful sampling was used to homogenize the participant sample for increased richness of data. Criterion was as follows: women, 50's age range, married with children, Caucasian, from the Midwest, and who currently use one or more anti-aging products. In total, 17 women of similar status and background participated in this research. Data collection consisted of in-depth audio taped interviews followed by immediate transcription.

The analysis process incorporated open coding then axial coding to deduce themes. Four major categories were established: Views of Aging, Influences on Views of Aging, What Women do About Aging, and Women's Overall Recommendations Regarding Aging. Five major findings will be highlighted. First, participants admitted to being mildly affected by mediated messages concerning aging, but believed they had not internalized such messages. Second, the role of spouse, children, and friends as support systems helped offset aging pressures and concerns. Third, cost and ingredients played roles in the purchase of anti-aging product(s). Fourth, participants indicated the

use of the same anti-aging product for over 20 years. Fifth, most participants dyed their hair routinely to mask greys and were conscious about “age appropriate” clothing choices. Sixth, participants recommended self-acceptance and encouraged other women who might be struggling with their aging journey to find a support system.

Three of the most significant real-world implications from this research will be highlighted. First, this research provides insight into how, if at all, mediated messages affect aging perceptions. Second, the term “beauty work” is discussed as it relates to the use of appearance-enhancing cosmetics and/or procedures, and how participants’ daily enacted beauty routines (hair, nails and clothes) underscore and reinforce aging insecurities. Third, the positive influences of a strong support system or spouse in offsetting aging concerns are discussed. Future research could include younger women or different ethnicities which would provide new insight into the role of aging in the lives of women.

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This Study by: Clair Williams

Entitled: Behind the Mask: An Analysis of Women's Perceptions and Rationale
Toward the Purchase and Use of Anti-Aging Products

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts

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Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Date

Dr. Michael J. Licari, Dean, Graduate College

DEDICATION

“The art of life isn’t controlling what happens— which is impossible—it’s using what happens” (Steinem, 2006, p. 19).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Academy award winning Italian actress Sophia Loren once said, "There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age" (BrainyQuote, 2001-2010, p. 1). If Sophia is right, and all one truly needs to do is look inward for happiness and the fountain of youth, then why do so many still strive for the contemporary construction of aesthetic perfection? Reflecting on aging appearances is being seemingly encouraged for aging adults - as if aging is unflattering or unappealing.

Consumers are purchasing anti-aging products and services at an alarming rate in America. According to the American Academy of Dermatology (2013), the anti-aging industry rakes in billions of dollars each year with no sign of slowing down. The rate at which these products are being purchased indicates a developing societal trend in normalizing and accepting anti-aging product use as means to combat perceived signs of aging. Though the "illusion" of anti-aging remedies and cures has been around for decades, the increase in consumers drawn toward the promises will only continue to increase.

For many, the attainment of the societal construct of physical perfection is sought in many different ways such as excessive exercise, extreme dieting, or invasive plastic surgery. There has been a societal shift and boom in the last decade toward the purchase and application of various creams, injections, and serums, as many strive to attain the “fountain of youth.” The product of such endeavors is a Band-Aid type masking of the inevitable aging of the human body, the natural progression through life which cannot be put to a halt.

In U.S. society, it seems there is an inescapable underlying emphasis on *attaining* and *maintaining* a youthful appearance. This can be achieved (in theory) with the use of anti-aging products such as creams, gels, injections, surgery, or even diet and exercise. Needless to say, there are copious ways in which the perceived “fountain of youth” is sought after. The constructed picture painted for aging adults of what a youthful appearance *ought* to look like, can be seen perpetuated heavily throughout our mass media – using avenues such as TV commercials, print advertisements, and even applications on smart phones.

The mass media in particular, is not exactly rooting for aging adults. Conversely, it seems like they are benefiting off the proliferation of aging just as much as the anti-aging product industry itself. Could self-perception of aging *and* the perception of others aging be effected by media’s aging portrayal? This

study aims to answer that question. It seems that the anti-aging product industry knows aging consumers are targeted because of their age, and feed off and prosper from that insecurity.

In a ground-breaking quantitative study by Muise and Desmarais (2010), 304 Canadian women were surveyed asking about their anti-aging product use and perceptions of the anti-aging industry. Upon completion of the thematic analysis of responses, researchers agreed that the results were unexpected. The most startling finding was that the women in the study who reportedly used anti-aging products still favored natural aging and strongly disliked negative advertisements perpetuated by the mass media related to women and aging. The contradiction between favoring natural aging, while using anti-aging products, is one that researchers are still working to better understand.

One could make the argument that a youthful appearance is synonymous with attractiveness and beauty in U.S. culture. This correlation is reinforced by aging constructions prevalently communicated and circulated within our mass media. If true, then what constitutes physical attractiveness? As quoted in Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, and Shulman (2009), “physical attractiveness is associated with a variety of positive personality traits including altruism, safety,

sensitivity, sincerity, warmth, kindness and so forth” (p. 243). Could aging adults believe that physical attractiveness and all of its positive attributes can be attainable through a youthful appearance? The mass media sure seems to feed off of the idea, which can be seen in mediated messages paralleling a youthful appearance and physically attractive attributes. It seems to be a cyclical web of youthful promises and constructions all based upon getting more consumers to begin to critique their aging bodies.

Apart from the media seemingly creating a bridge between aging and physical attractiveness, it is also important to recognize how changes in the body/physical appearance affect the aging process. As the body changes physically over time, it can be difficult to remember that an individual is still the same person inside - despite outward differences. Prominent documentarian and lesbian feminist Barbara Hammer discussed her negative experience with physical changes attributed to aging. In an interview describing her life and work, she said, “it’s always a bit of a shock when someone relates to you in a way that points out that you have a lot of wrinkles and liver spots and that you are an aging female, when someone doesn’t recognize the ‘you’ that is still you inside” (Juhasz, 2001, p. 89). The experience of Hammer is not a singularly

shared one, and needs to be kept in mind when discussing how aging perceptions can impact self and others.

As one develops a sense of self, both inside and out, there may be differences in how such perceptions are shaped between men and women. Mediated messages around aging are typically much different for men than women. Women, who are societally assessed to some extent based upon physical attributes, are targeted heavily with messages related to anti-aging which garners attention. A study done by Muise and Desmarais (2010) analyzed the effects of anti-aging advertisements on women's perceptions, and found that "greater aging anxiety and higher importance of appearance were related to greater likelihood of purchasing anti-aging products" (p. 135). This research proves to reinforce the idea that women, who have compounding societal pressures to look aesthetically youthful, may feel pressures associated with increased anti-aging consumerism. Furthermore, it is difficult to strike a balance between the inherent tension between wanting to accept aging physical changes, and the attempt to manipulate one's outward appearance to match socialized pressures.

The main purpose of this study is to better understand the perceptions and rationale of women in their 50's who purchase and use anti-aging products.

This particular area of research stems from my own beginnings of aging concerns. At age 25, I am continually being targeted and persuaded by the anti-aging industry to be pro-active about my own aging experience and to be cognizant of the constructed negative repercussions of ignoring wrinkle warnings. This research is a chance for women to share their aging experiences and shed light on their perceptions of women and aging, media pressures, and anti-aging product use. Research questions posed are:

1. What do women in their 50's, who use over the counter anti-aging products or creams, think about aging?
2. How do these women view media's construction of aging in contemporary U.S. society?
3. What is the experience of these women regarding the purchase and use of anti-aging products?
4. What else, if anything, have they done to confront their own aging?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast academic body of knowledge revolving around the anti-aging industry and aging in general. This literature review aims to better understand the historical and contemporary understanding of aging and analyze how anti-aging and the fountain of youth have been shaped into a perceived American core value. This review of the literature will give an encompassing understanding of the various facets of aging including the difference between age and aging, the media's negative portrayal of aging, the idea that aging is synonymous with disease, ageism, aging pressures for women, anti-aging product use, beauty work, and cosmeceuticals.

An Examination of the Anti-Aging Industry

Though age and anti-aging are related, there is a clear distinction between the two. Aging is defined as "both a verb and noun which stands for both a process and a set of categories. Some parts of the trajectory of social and biological change over time are identified as aging" (Vincent, 2006, p. 682). Someone's biological age and their actual physical age might be completely different, and the outward appearance might not be indicative of their biological age. Nowadays, with the overwhelming varieties of anti-aging medicines,

creams, injections, among other promised “remedies,” someone’s true age might be hidden under a Band-Aid type youthfulness.

When looking to better understand the term anti-aging and all it encompasses, it can prove difficult to define because it is prone to subjectivity and interpretation. One all-inclusive definition comes from Watts-Roy (2009) stating, “the term ‘anti-aging medicine’ is used to describe a combination of practices which include aesthetic procedures, hormone supplementation, medically supervised weight loss and exercise regimens, stress management, massage therapy, and pharmaceutical grade vitamins” (p. 443). This definition encompasses the vast array of techniques and tools utilized by many in an attempt to attain a youthful appearance. When it comes to the nuts and bolts of anti-aging medicine, there are four types identified by Vincent (2006): symptom alleviation, life expectancy extension, lifespan extension, and abolition (p. 689). The type pertinent to this study is that of symptom alleviation which encompasses cosmetic powder and paint, like anti-aging makeup, facial cleansers, and anti-wrinkle creams. As can be assumed, Vincent (2006) further acknowledges that anti-aging products fall under the umbrella of symptom alleviation as means to disguise and hide any visual signs of aging (p. 689).

The anti-aging industry is growing at a rapid rate and shows no sign of slowing down, with an estimated \$50 billion dollars already made from the products sold and procedures done (Mitchell & Bruns, 2011). With the billions of dollars being raked in by anti-aging product manufacturers, it seems clear that this has become a staple in American society and a value not to be tamed. In a culture that puts so much emphasis and pressure on individual physical attributes, it is not surprising that the anti-aging industry thrives on aging insecurities.

Apart from the dollar amounts being spent on the attainment of youth, nonsurgical procedures like Botox have seen a colossal increase in use. From 1997 – 2003, the demand for Botox has grown 3,387 percent (Bayer, 2005, p. 16). It seems as though the anti-aging industry – surgical or otherwise – will continue to see new clientele as more begin to question their aging appearance. As it relates to implicating the anti-aging industry and the manufacturer of such products and services, Vincent (2003) defines anti-aging from the stand point of the manufacturers, “they implicate magic, alchemy, and various forms of non-scientific knowledge in the production of sources of eternal youth, and identify a public susceptibility to such elixirs” (p. 676). This viewpoint of the anti-aging industry gives an honest look into the manufacturers’ efforts to feed off of

America's insecurities and susceptibility toward attaining a youthful presentation of self.

When seeking different options to help alleviate aging concerns, many consumers are given the same underlying promise – that their product will help them (to varying degrees) circumvent negative associations of aging (wrinkles, lines, etc.). A similar sentiment is shared by Michell and Bruns (2011) who articulate this promise well in that,

Through medical treatments as diverse as plastic surgery, injection therapies, and body part replacement, anti-aging medicine holds out the promise --- and the mandate --- that growing old is no longer a given that must be dealt with socially or psychologically. (p. 116)

Some researchers see this anti-aging promise as a guise and direct lie to consumers. According to Vincent (2006), “anyone purporting to offer an anti-aging product today is either mistaken or lying” (p. 686). Is it possible that anti-aging consumers are paying for anti-aging empty promises? Whether the promise being sold by anti-aging conglomerates is real or not is for the consumer to decide, but it is important to keep in mind what is being promised vs. what the human body is inevitably going to do – age.

It is not just the manufacturers of the anti-aging promises being eaten up by consumers that are rolling in the dough, so are the medical doctors providing

surgical treatments to clientele looking to attain a youthful appearance. Bayer (2005) said it best when she mentioned that doctors “are using their medical credentials to capitalize on existing cultural insecurities about aging. Similarly, a number of healthcare providers now compete in the market with cosmetic brands to offer a more youthful appearance” (p. 15). There are *many* people capitalizing and profiting from Americas insecurity with aging, and it is that deep rooted insecurity that has become a staple in contemporary thought about aging appearance.

Anti-aging pressures and associated purchases of products are on the rise for young people. Joshua Zeichner, MD, the director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at New York’s Mt. Sinai Medical Center, discusses the large number of 20-somethings that come into his office and who he sometimes turns down, who are requesting Botox or other anti-aging out-patient procedures. Zeichner (2011), as cited in the popular online resource WebMD, observes that “we live in an age of Photoshopping, and some young people believe the retouched images of celebrities they see in magazines are attainable. They’re not” (p. 3). Although he notes that he only sometimes turns these young patients away, the traffic of young people to his office seeking anti-aging services

hasn't seemed to slow down. The drive toward a youthful appearance on the already youthful, has given many cause for concern.

Furthermore, Zeichner (2011) has been vocal about his concern for the young people coming into his office seeking anti-aging services like Botox, and various facial creams. He argues that, "In your 20s, you have excellent turnover without any help and your skin is fully capable of repairing itself. The downside is that these products may irritate your skin or make it more sensitive to the sun." (p. 2). There is ample research and various doctors who strongly advice against the use of anti-aging creams and other products for young people. Most of the research suggests that using such products at a very young age makes the skin more susceptible to sun damage. Even with such risks, young people are still turning to doctors and dermatologists in an attempt to be pro-active about their aging.

Apart from the anti-aging purchasing patterns of young adults, researchers Mock and Eiback (2011) explored how feeling older could lead to lower well-being with those harboring a negative perception of aging. Using longitudinal data from the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States-II over a span of 10 years, the researchers predicted lower well-being if the perception around aging is negative. They found that negative

perceptions of growing older and feeling old predicted lower life satisfaction and well-being (p. 984). This research sheds light on how impactful our perceptions are on our overall life satisfaction, and in particular, on aging. Within the anti-aging industry, marketers are making millions by creating and fostering a negative image of aging and making the idea of growing old something to be disdained.

The Media's Perpetuation of Aging as Unattractive

The mass media has long had a hand in the shaping of individual perceptions of the surrounding world. Its pervasive presence is not one to take lightly, and with the rapid changes in technology, it is becoming harder to escape mediated messages. The messages and ideologies visually communicated about what it means to "age" in our society and how one should look as an older adult are heavily presented to the general public through mediums like the television and internet. Through TV especially, there are numerous commercials revolving around aging, seemingly targeting a certain age group, adults (typically women) in their 50's and above.

More specifically, there are numerous TV shows which perpetuate the construction of what it means to be youthful and attractive in society. Examples

of these types of shows include *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan*, MTV's *Real Life*, and America's Next Top Model. These types of shows only prove to unveil the extent to which some people will go to attain the socially constructed fountain of youth or aesthetic physical appeal.

Shows like *The Swan* seem to reiterate to women especially that it is not ok to experience aging, and that the only way to make one attractive again is to have multiple surgical procedures, facial injections, and extensive makeup/hair so that a "swan" is produced. It is as if these types of shows are some form of a call to action wherein they are calling the audience to begin to consider a total extreme transformation to feel and look young again.

In her article, *Gender and Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought*, Elizabeth Spelman (1988) puts forth the term "somatophobia" in relation to the fear of and disdain for the body (p. 126). Somatophobia, in this context is discussing the way in which women are oppressed in Western culture through the intertwined nature of women with their bodies, and how that seemingly inseparable relationship plays a pivotal role in oppression. Could it be possible that somatophobia is seen daily in Western society through the proliferation of anti-aging ideologies and aging discourse? Is it possible that somatophobia related to aging could be a catalyst for the continual acquirement of anti-aging

products and services? This opens up a potential dialogue about one rationale toward the deep seeded root cause of anti-aging purchases.

Whether one chooses to be injected, buy creams, or go through a surgical procedure to get their “youth” fix, there are a multitude of approaches toward achieving a seemingly youthful aesthetic appearance. Depending on the amount of money budgeted for such expenditures, one could easily spend thousands of dollars on a surgical procedure promising a youthful glow, or decide to purchase something from a local drug store promising to wipe away wrinkles and crow’s feet -- the possibilities seem endless. The unhealthy focus on the natural biological changes in the body is what sets up a societal construction of what it means to age, which in turn generates and prolongs low self-perception and esteem (Vincent, 2003). The anti-aging industry feeds off the negative self-perception and beliefs associated with aging, which is why it is a multi-billion dollar industry.

Some go to the extreme in an attempt to attain the fountain of youth and achieve Westernized aesthetic perfection. Ray Kurzweil, a prominent inventor and futurist, has written a popular book detailing his secrets to anti-aging and slowing down the aging process. Of course, his claims are unfounded, but he has an attentive audience none-the-less. Kurzweil takes 250 pills of nutritionals a day

claiming it is what keeps him youthful and strong (Hall, 2006). Though Kurzweil goes to the extreme, he is not alone in his search for the secret to anti-aging. This unrelenting search has been going on for a very long time. Back in the 1600's, a "Hungarian Countess named Elizabeth Bathory would bathe in the blood of virgins in an attempt to retain the beauty of her youth and reverse the signs of aging" (Bayer, 2005, p. 13). Moreover, Bayer (2005) continues to note that statistics and numerous studies expose the reality of striving for youthfulness by showcasing that "use of age defying measures is growing each year among men and women" (p. 13). Whether someone strives for youth with crèmes, injections, a massive amount of nutritional supplements, surgical procedures, or even bathe in the blood of virgins, the obsession toward attaining youth will continue to be a societal pressure felt by many. With a better understanding of how the perception of aging is constructed through outlets like the mass media, this study aims to use that understanding to further research on the perceptions of aging from women in their 50's.

The Idea That Aging is Synonymous with Disease

Through a review of the literature, one commonality found was that aging is synonymous with disease. Although this may not be a generalizable harbored mindset, a handful of the resources examined for this study referenced that ideal.

Aging in the context of the lifespan has dramatically increased over the last century for both men and women. Medical advancements play a huge role in longevity, as does the utilization of things like sanitation, antibiotics, and cleaner environment. A popular aging researcher at the Boston University Medical Center, Thomas Perls (2008), notes that due to the increase in longevity, “the number of centenarians is increasing at a rate of about 8 percent per year in industrialized countries” (p. 1). With the increase in centenarians, learning how people deal with aging and what pressures are potentially felt is important to research. Knowing that the lifespan has lengthened for both men and women might affect how one chooses to portray him or herself to the public.

For more aging population specifics, researchers Mitchell and Bruns (2011) note that, “in 2040 there will be 65 million people in the U.S. over 65, with 69 men per 100 women at 65, and 36 men per 100 women at 85” (p. 115).

Knowing that the older adult population is growing in this country, is it possible that there may be a higher incidence of aging adults wanting to attain

youthfulness? This study aims to better understand the perceived pressures associated with aging and how those pressures may have become a catalyst toward anti-aging product purchase and use.

Calasanti (2005) argues that because attractiveness and health are usually viewed as synonymous within contemporary U.S. society, both men and women aim to work their bodies to appear healthy as they progressively age. A study done by Phoenix and Smith (2011) showcases the depth of decline as related to perceptions of aging from middle aged body builders. There were 13 in-depth interviews conducted of natural body builders between the ages of 50-73, which explored their perceptions on decline and aging. The results indicated that the stereotypical assumptions revolving around of aging did not ring true for them, and yet they are working hard to keep looking a certain way.

Lijtmaer (2010) builds off that societal pressure for aesthetic aging by mentioning that “feeling unattractive produces several intrapsychic conflicts leading to depression and anxiety” (p. 1). Could it be possible that we place so much value on appearance as we age, that we negatively associate aging with things like disease and affliction? According to Calasanti (2005) “people equate old age with disease and decline” (p. 9), which seems to rearticulate the perspective a lot of individuals in society have to those who are aging. This is all

very important to keep in mind when beginning to think about the huge impact the construction of aging has on societal members and the selected portrayal of themselves to the world.

There is a plethora of research revolving around aging as something that can be “cured” and that medical advancements to halt aging are only just around the corner. According to Harry Moody of the International Longevity Center, “a disease is something that we can change and redefine” (2002, p. 35).

Furthermore, Moody (2002) discusses how some utilize the discourse of disease and other negative pejorative terms to increase the probability that people will start to feel guilty and bad about aging. He also references the idea that the medicalization of old age has made billions of dollars for the anti-aging companies and surgeons playing into the growing insecurities of people revolving around aging. Research indicates that some scientists don’t agree with age being equated with disease. This is reiterated by Palmore (2007) when he writes, “most scientists agree that aging is not a disease and that the aging process cannot be stopped or reversed with any pills, herbs, surgical procedures, or other interventions” (p. 1088). It is clear that there are those who support and buy into the fountain of youth conception, and those who think it is ridiculous to believe that a change in aesthetics can change apparent biological age.

The idea that aging is synonymous with disease or somehow negative, has played a role in shaping perceptions of the masses. This is particularly true when it comes to how people believe *they* should be aging, and how they compare *others* going through similar aging associated changes.

Ageism

As the lifespan has increased, which has led to having more centenarians, older adults are not only changing the way they view and experience the aging process, but how others view them. When researching past studies and literature focusing on anti-aging and societal constructions of what it means to age, a commonality was the idea of ageism. Calasanti (2005) defines ageism by saying that, “it is founded in age relations. Societies organize on the basis of age such that different age groups gain identities and power in relation to one another” (p. 8). This description of ageism seems to be all encompassing and proves useful in better understanding how older adults might be viewed within U.S. society.

Ageism can be understood as a socially constructed way in which aging people are categorized and treated based upon assumptions of their abilities and capabilities as aging adults. Vincent (2003) illustrates this well by noting that “our lives are made meaningful by cultural categories that regularize our world – organize and shape it and make it sufficiently predictable to live in. Old and

young, life and death, lie at the core of culture” (p. 681). If many are quick to categorize based on visible appearance, how might that perceived assumption play into the construction of aging? If someone makes a snap judgment and categorizes someone as “old,” then what might that mean? What constructed ideological stereotypes and discourse come to mind when thinking of the categorization of being “old”?

Everything from objects to language are given meaning based upon their constructed value. The same goes for aging and ageism. Calasanti (2005) articulates the idea well by stating, “the mere occurrence of physical change does not explain ageism; it is the meaning we give to these changes that matters” (p. 9). The meaning assigned to ageism is socially constructed, just as the entire understanding of anti-aging.

To tie in concepts previously discussed, it is apparent that the anti-aging industry and ageism go hand in hand. Palmore (2007) agrees by arguing that:

Anti-aging medicines are actually forms of ageism in two ways. First, the term anti-aging medicine implies that aging is a “disease” that can be “cured.” Two, that anti-aging advocates imply that the normal signs of old age such as wrinkles, gray hair, and baldness, are shameful and ugly rather than conditions to be expected and accepted. (p. 1088)

It seems no longer socially acceptable or even preferred to age “normally.”

It is as if the proliferation of successful aging stems from the pursuit of the

construction of youthfulness. The ageism occurring is not receding anytime soon, and seems to be getting worse due to the improvements in medical procedures and the vast array of somewhat affordable creams and elixirs widely available to the public. The anti-aging industry knows, understands, and utilizes ageism in their marketing ploys, which translates into a billion dollar industry. Calasanti (2005) exemplifies this by saying, “the anti-aging industry does not combat ageism. Instead, it reflects and reshapes ageism – reinforcing the belief that old age is repugnant and promising relief to those who can pay enough” (p. 11). As discussed earlier in this literature review, the anti-aging industry relentlessly targets the aging adults in U.S. society perpetuating societal ideologies about what it means to “age.”

Another avenue in which ageism can be seen is through the TV which furthers stereotypes of aging adults. Horton, Baker and Deakin (2007) articulate this idea well by stating, “television is a target, as this particular medium is often accused of perpetuating the negative stereotypes of aging that exist in society” (p. 1024). Television can be an easy outlet for anti-aging marketing campaigns to send their messages about aging to the mass population at large.

Ageist stereotypes can play a major role in not only the self-perception but perception toward older adults. Horton et al. (2007) when they note that,

“perhaps it’s not surprising, given the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes of aging in society that seniors themselves buy into these characterizations” (p. 1024). One of the biggest issues with the proliferation of ageism, is that as young adults and even children we internalize these thoughts and beliefs about what it means to “age” in U.S. society.

This can play out in many ways as people grow older, but one primary way in which internalized ageism can affect people’s lives down the road is the internalization of negative stereotypes. Levy and Banaji (2002) put it best when they describe the realities of pent up negative stereotypes revolving around ageism because as one begins to fall into the category of middle age or aging adult, all the internalized stereotypes and prejudices facing the elderly come to the surface. This can be extremely harmful on aging citizens attempting to navigate through a change in body and ability through the natural aging process, coupled with the stereotypes about aging in general.

However, there is a lack of research focusing on the voices of middle aged women on their perceptions of aging. This study aims to give voice to a collectively similar group of women in their 50’s, and provide an outlet for new insight to the connotation of aging in U.S. society - through a collection of aging perceptions and experiences.

Ageism is important to understand, because it is so commonly proliferated through our mass media and the messages sent to the general public that it might ultimately be what we live by down the road. This study hopes to aid in breaking down the connotative understanding of ageism and focus on the constructed perceptions of aging for women in their 50's, and to see how, if at all, ageism has affected their choice to purchase anti-aging products.

Prolific Anti-Aging Pressures for Women

All research discussed thus far has led up to the idea that although the receivers of the anti-aging stereotypes and constructed ideologies are seen by a general audience, women tend to be the target audience for such pressures.

Researcher Calasanti noted that, "women are seen to be 'old' much sooner than men in this society" (2005, p. 10). Women can also be targeted specifically in terms of ageism as well. Researchers Mitchell and Bruns (2011) argue that:

Within the ageist narrative, there is no room for complexity or subtlety. The binaries of aging are productive/useless, hearty/feeble, fun-loving "Red Hat Club" woman/crotchety tiresome burden, exceptional successes/miserable failure. These binaries are imposed on aging women, but can become internalized much the way sexism can become one's own. (p. 117)

The binaries faced by women with regards to aging are a force to be reckoned with. If women internalize ageist stereotypes and pressures, and everyone else is being fed the same type of information, how might aging

women combat this enormous weight on their shoulders? Calasanti (2005) furthers the enormous pressures aging women face by arguing that “one reason for this perceived earlier onset of old age for women is that, traditionally, how they look carries far more social capital than do other aspects of their lives” (p. 10). The objectification of women has long been studied, but there is a lack of research on the societal pressures revolving around the anti-aging phenomenon in middle-aged women.

To further the argument that aesthetic appeal carries more capital than other aspects of women’s lives, one must then question how constructions of what it means to be “female” in Western culture stacks up to the idea of aging. The construct of male/female has been long studied and critiqued by feminine theorist and documentarians hoping to break the constructs which bind us in the categorization of male/female. How we “do” gender has been a controversial topic for years due to the argument revolving around what gender “is.” West and Zimmerman (1987) help to clarify the meaning of “doing” gender: “we contend that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production” (p. 126). Is our gender inseparably intertwined with our being, and how might that affect the perceptions of aging females in Western society?

West and Zimmerman (1987) continue by arguing that “doing” the female gender typically revolves around things such as domesticated housework, appeasing to others’ needs, and most importantly, being aware of our physicality at all times. Since females are socialized to put extreme weight on aesthetics, could it be that by “doing” female gender, we’re self-perpetuating the negative connotations revolving around aging? Is it possible that the anti-aging product manufacturers know that women, in some way or another, “do” female gender which emphasizes aesthetics, and plays off that by proliferating negative perceptions of aging? The answers are not yet researched, but something interesting to keep in mind. This study hopes to provide insight into understanding purchasing decisions and use anti-aging products in U.S. society. This seemingly unwinnable catch-22 faced by aging women can be described using the terms the “male gaze” and “gaze of youth.”

The “male gaze” has long been studied and can be seen in art and various forms of media dating back decades ago. The “male gaze” is well defined by Calasanti (2005) when she notes that “media and other aspects of current culture convey the notion that women’s bodies are to serve as figures of erotic spectacle for men, ‘male gaze’ objects” (p. 10). The male gaze can be understood very well from a media perspective, and how women are portrayed within contemporary

mass media. The “male gaze” felt and internalized on top of the stereotyped ageism is only the tip of the iceberg felt by aging women.

Apart from the “male gaze,” there is second type of societal pressure felt by aging women: the “gaze of youth.” Yet again, Calasanti (2005) defines this well by stating that, “old age heightens consciousness of failure because such standards are also based on youth. Old people, and in particular old women, are subject to the ‘gaze of youth’ in U.S. society” (p. 10). Not only are women perpetually subjected to the “male gaze” within U.S. society, they also face the pressures associated with the “gaze of youth,” which can be just as much of an impediment on the struggle for self-acceptance.

Both the “gaze of youth” and “male gaze” can be extremely detrimental to women, and when it comes to aging in U.S. society, both gazes can be easily internalized. If the image of a constructed “ideal” for aging women is proliferated to the general public, then one could argue that women try to act on the messages being sent by attempting to appease both the “male gaze” and “gaze of youth.” Is it possible that targets of the anti-aging industry, such as middle aged women, are being simultaneously tugged by aging pressures coming from different angles?

With the compounding societal pressures to achieve and maintain a youthful aesthetic, it is important to keep in mind where the messages of this ideology are coming from. The anti-aging conglomerates know the best way to reach an audience is through advertisements. Focusing on anti-aging advertisements through mainstream media (TV), a content analysis study was done by Williams (2011) to analyze the underlying ideologies communicated through television advertisements revolving around anti-aging. Eight anti-aging advertisements were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a codebook/code form with four separate coders. The three themes focused on when analyzing were: gender analysis, masculinity/femininity analysis, and a language analysis.

It was found that in all eight ads, the main character was categorized as female, and in seven of the eight ads, the main female was categorized as Caucasian. Furthermore, the main characters were also perceived as having a socio-economic status of upper/upper middle class. Similarly, specific language use within the advertisements was for the most part disturbingly able to fit into two primary categories: negative and positive associations with aging. The anti-aging industry is continually finding new and apparently effective ways to target the audience (and primarily women), and Williams' (2011) conference paper helps illustrate this. Since the pressures felt by women from multiple sources are

continually encapsulating them into a mold of what it means to be youthful, this study aims to break that mold and discover what it aging means to women in their 50's and see how, if at all, the social constructions of gender play a role in the use of anti-aging products.

Anti-Aging Products, Cosmeceuticals, and Beauty Work

It is difficult to miss the prolific ways in which the media and other forms of mass communication have pushed anti-aging products on to unquestioning consumers. There has been a steep increase in purchasing of a multitude of anti-aging products which all seem to make promises revolving around turning back the hands of time. According to Muise and Desmarais (2010), the purchasing of anti-aging products seems to come from a catalyst of overall anxiety about aging, instead of just body image dissatisfaction. Any and all anxiety stemming from aging seems to be the life source of a large portion of the anti-aging advertisements marketed to consumers today. Clarke and Griffin (2007) explain it well when they note that, "women's submission to cultural norms of feminine beauty necessitates an ongoing struggle against the physical realities of growing older and the subjugation of the natural body" (p. 189). Playing on aging anxieties, construction of femininity, and the subjugation of the natural body as

described above, has proved to further cement the anti-aging industry as a continually booming business.

Understanding how marketing strategies are selectively formulated by anti-aging manufacturers to target a certain age group, gender, and even socio-economic status, is important to understanding how it is that they seem to so easily latch on to new consumers with seemingly researched warrants and appealing promises. One study done by Frederick, Lever, and Peplau (2007) looked at self-esteem and cosmetic surgery acceptance by age (participants were 18-65) to see if there were any age differences for women and their acceptance. It was found that interest in cosmetic surgery was relatively similar throughout the different age groups, but that there was definitely more interest in older women (the oldest aged participant was 65). They postulated that “interest may be more likely to translate into use with age” (Frederick et al., 2007, p. 1410).

Their finding is supported by other similar studies (e.g., Clark & Griffin, 2008; Frederick et al., 2007; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Muise, & Desmarais, 2010) have found that older women and middle-aged women tend to be the highest cohort consumers of anti-aging products and services. Limited research has looked at how marketing strategies have changed focus to begin to target

younger women in hopes of getting them to be self-reflecting on their age in a negative way.

When it comes to anti-aging marketing and the supposed aesthetically “improving” products for women, there are two popular terms used in research and consumer marketing strategies: cosmeceuticals and beauty work.

“Cosmeceuticals” is a term which grabs the consumer’s attention by making the anti-aging products sound like a union between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. This catchy saying is a genius marketing ploy by the anti-aging industry to sell their products under the guise of “pharmaceutically tested and approved.”

The primary way in which researchers and marketers define cosmeceuticals is from more of a medical and pharmaceutical perspective. The term cosmeceuticals is “commonly used to describe a cosmetic product that exerts a pharmaceutical therapeutic benefit but not necessarily a biological therapeutic benefit” (Choi & Berson, 2006, p. 163). Although the term is fairly straightforward, the reaction to the vast amount of anti-aging products which market themselves as cosmeceuticals has been both positive and negative. Some researchers agree that this new all natural anti-aging marketing ploy saying is positive for the field of natural skin care and organic aging. Dureja, Gupta,

Kaushik, Kumar, and Lather (2005) argue that, “cosmeceuticals are topical cosmetic-pharmaceutical hybrids intended to enhance the beauty through ingredients that provide additional health-related function or benefit. They are applied topically as cosmetics, but contain ingredients that influence the skin’s biological function” (p. 155). These broad claims seem almost too good to be true, and there are researchers looking to squash marketing tactics put forth by anti-aging companies.

Examples of researchers looking to set the record straight are medical doctors Choi and Berson (2006) who argue that this new boom term has left dermatologists and consumers confused. The dramatic claims of post-usage results seem almost unreal, and the promises put forth by cosmeceutical manufacturers have become a problem for dermatologists. Choi and Berson (2006) warned that their,

Patients often receive unregulated information and efficacy claims for products from the internet and media. Moreover, because many ingredients often are derived from plants, consumers may have a false sense of security that these ‘all-natural’ products do not have potential adverse effects. (p. 163)

One reason in which the cosmeceutical industry is sometimes not fired back on for their seemingly unreal anti-aging claim, is because there is

sometimes an alternative benefit to the product that is unrelated to anti-aging.

An example would be that a cosmeceutical product is advertised as an anti-aging all natural product *moisturizer*, and while it might moisturize the skin, the claims for anti-aging are unfounded and results unseen.

Overall, even though there is criticism toward the formation and use of the term cosmeceuticals, there are definitely researchers who strongly believe that the term is marrying two fields and will only increase people's understanding and acceptance of the term. Medical Doctor and PhD researcher in the field of dermatology and skin care, Albert Kligman (1993), holds strong to his perception of the term cosmeceuticals and argues that "giving cosmeceuticals semantic legitimacy will open up new areas of research to learn how these wondrous mixtures beneficially affect the structure and function of skin" (p. 7). The big picture as it relates to cosmeceuticals is that there are opposing viewpoints on the use of the term, but what is undisputable, is that it is sticking with consumers/selling products, and certainly becoming more a part of the widespread discourse around anti-aging. According to Dureja et al. (2005) the natural beauty industry based in cosmeceuticals is the most rapidly growing segment in the natural beauty and care industry.

The second popular term used in research and anti-aging consumer marketing strategies is “beauty work.” According to Clarke and Griffin (as cited in Muise & Desmarais, 2010), the term “beauty work” refers to “the range of appearance-enhancing products and procedures available to women, including cosmetic surgery, hair dye, make-up and non-surgical procedures such as Botox” (p. 127). Understanding how women perform and enact beauty work in their daily aesthetic routine can provide insight into potential purchasing patterns with anti-aging products and services.

One study done by Clarke and Griffin (2007) studied the term beauty work and how women ranging from ages 50-70 perceived beauty work played out in their aesthetic routine. After conducting 44 in-depth interviews, they found that the majority of women in the study employed beauty work with their daily routine, and indicated that through beauty work they were trying to produce a “natural look.” That result seemed almost ironic to me that the women said they were practicing beauty work daily as part of their beauty routine, and yet attempting to attain a natural look. The results from the study demonstrate the inferred importance of middle aged women to participate in beauty work aesthetic practices while still attempting to look natural or give the illusion of doing so.

In Westernized society so heavily bombarded with stereotypical and constructed “ideals” of femininity, some researchers believe beauty work is to some degree inescapable. According to Clarke and Griffin (2008), “social invisibility arises from the acquisition of visible signs of aging and compels women to make their chronological ages imperceptible through the use of beauty work” (p. 653). The pressures associated with aging in western society, especially for women, tend to take hold when it comes to beauty work and supposed normalcy when it comes to aging. Apart from the viewpoint that beauty work is seemingly inescapable, Davis (2003) argues that women need to remember that they have agency and can make the decision not to engage in beauty work and submit to social norms and pressures of aging.

In the same study conducted by Clarke and Griffin (2007), out of the 44 in-depth interviews, one result stood out to the researchers as it related to beauty work. It was found that a large majority of the respondents noted that they began to feel invisible when apparent signs of aging had occurred on their faces. Examples of how the participants defined feeling invisible include the feeling that they were unseen by potential sexual partners or their own significant other, and how their aged appearance was perceived as detrimental in the dating world (p. 661). In an attempt to stay visible, the women felt the most logical way was to

enact beauty work. Their attempts to remain socially visible help researchers and consumers alike better understand the prolific pressures for anti-aging products and services to reduce the appearance of the natural signs of aging.

Similar to cosmeceuticals, there are both people in support of using and identifying with the term beauty work, but there are researchers who feel the term has a much deeper meaning for women than simply face value aesthetics. Tseelon (1993) identifies the negative side of beauty work for a woman, and potential implications to self and identity.

To the extent that the beauty model defines and values the women through her appearance, it essentially regards her natural, bare, and uncontrolled body as a stigma, as ugliness—something to disguise, to modify, to improve. Thus the woman is placed in a no-win situation. She is expected to embody a “timeless” cultural fantasy that is removed from the diverse and changing world of the living. But her special beauty is not really innate, and it takes a lot of effort to maintain. (p. 319)

The negative and positive perceptions of beauty work is what has made the term so readily used in body image, gender, and contemporary aging research. Beauty work has been researched from many different perspectives, and researchers Kwan and Trautner (2009) assert that there are both positive *and* negative perceptions of beauty work and of those who perform it. They argue:

On the one hand, individuals who participate in body modification practices can be thought of as “cultural dopes,” passively adopting hegemonic beauty norms. In this vein, beauty work, especially for women,

is a form of complicity. On the other hand, it is possible to understand individuals as active agents who perform beauty work to consciously reap certain rewards and avoid stigma. (pp. 63-64)

Beauty work has been thoroughly researched and understood to primarily be a woman's conformity to social norms and pressures associated with femininity and constructed attractiveness. Although some research has focused on beauty work as performed by males, the majority of beauty work research is directed at women due to the double standard in western society for aesthetic appeal and attractiveness as it relates to a woman's identity and perceived self-worth. According to Kwan and Trautner (2009), "the social rewards and benefits that accompany physical attractiveness provide strong incentive to participate in beauty work" (p. 54).

Conclusion

There is currently a large body of research done on aging in U.S. society and of consumer purchasing behaviors regarding anti-aging products and services. Current research in this area heavily covers ageism, prolific pressures for women, and dis-associating aging and disease. There is not, however, much research done looking at middle-aged women's perceptions, usage, and motives for purchasing anti-aging products all being analyzed in one study. This study will add to the literature revolving around the societal pressures for these

women when it comes to striving for the attainment of youth, and provide new insights into motives, purchasing patterns, and perceived results of the anti-aging products among middle-aged women.

I hope to uncover an intimate look at the experience of aging women and gain insight into anti-aging product use. Research questions posed are:

5. What do women in their 50's, who use over the counter anti-aging products or creams, think about aging?
6. How do these women view media's construction of aging in contemporary U.S. society?
7. What is the experience of these women regarding the purchase and use of anti-aging products?
8. What else, if anything, have they done to confront their own aging?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research was conducted to better understand women's perceptions of the anti-aging industry and to shed light on what, if anything, they have done in response to potential pressures associated with aging.

Data Collection

In collecting participants, I utilized purposeful sampling to homogenize the participant sample for increased richness of data. In the book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, author Merriam (2009) states that purposeful sampling is, "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Purposeful sampling was chosen to filter criteria for participation enough to maximize richness of data from a very narrow scope of individuals. Criteria for participation were as follows: women, 50's age range, heterosexual, married with children, Caucasian, from the Midwest, and who use anti-aging products.

Participant collection began with the initial help of an acquaintance who was in her 50's who spread word of the research to others in her age range.

Variations of a recruitment script were used based upon *who* was delivering the request for participation (Appendix A). The first variation was one I used directly as the sole researcher asking for participation among women. The second recruitment script was given to those who wanted to spread the word on behalf, and who needed a non-biased script for their own dissemination.

For each interview, a neutral place was chosen based upon the suggestion and comfort of each participant. To insure responses were analyzed verbatim, each interview was audio taped and immediately transcribed following the completion of the conversation. Supplementary to audio recording, notes were taken over the course of each interview to capture passive comments, participant mood, and relevant non-verbals of each interviewee. Side notes became important during the data analysis phase because they helped contextualize responses.

Broad, open-ended interview questions (Appendix C) were used for every interview. Each participant was briefed on the topic of study, and synopsis of my background as the sole researcher. Prior to each interview, every participant was asked to complete a standard demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) with questions including age, perceived social economic status (SES), and ethnicity.

Participants were then talked through the consent form, and signed off on participation if comfortable. Upon completion of both forms, the demographic information was separated from the participants' consent form for confidentiality purposes. A total of 17 women participated in this research, and each participant received a pseudonym to further ensure confidentiality. Refer to Table 1 for a glimpse of participants on an individual level and aggregated whole.

Table 1

Self-Reported Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	SES*	# Hrs. Worked/Week**	Marital Status	# Children
Jaquelyn	49	C	MI	40	Married	2
Ana	50	C	MI	40+	Divorced	2
Samantha	50	C	MI	40+	Re-Married	3
Liz	50	C	MI-HI	25-35	Married	2
Alida	50	C	MI	~47	Married	4
Megan	51	C	MI	45	Married	4
Melanie	51	C	MI	~50	Married	2
Emilia	52	C	HI	30	Married	2
Lola	52	C	MI	32	Married	2
Kari	53	C	HI	70	Married	2
Vanessa	54	C	MI	60	Married	1
Haley	56	C	MI	55	Married	3
Michelle	57	C	MI	40	Married	4
Helen	57	C	MI	40	Single	0
Valerie	59	C	MI	25	Re-Married	4
Nicole	59	C	MI	50	Married	1
Karen	62	C	MI	45	Divorced	0
AVERAGE	53.6	Caucasian	MI	44.3	Married	2.2
*C mean Caucasian						
**Social Economic Status: Low Income (LI), Middle Income (MI), High Income (HI)						
***Signifier ~ means about, Signifier + means plus						

Four outliers existed in the participant sample, and were purposefully left in the research. The first outlier was Liz, who was 49 at the time of the interview. She was just shy of her 50th birthday, and I felt her participation was pertinent toward understanding a woman's perceptions of aging coming *into* her 50's. Similarly, Helen (62) was two years over the 50's age range. She was also kept in

the sample because she provided input into a woman's perceptions coming *out of* her 50's. One original criterion for participation was to have children to see how, if at all, children played a role aging pressures. The third outlier was Helen who had zero children. She was included in the research to gauge whether periphery aging pressures (friends, coworkers, spouse) were potentially more intense because there were no children present. The final outliers were Ana, Helen, and Karen. All three were not currently married, but were kept in the research because they provided insight into how, if at all, aging played a role in their "single-dom."

Data Analysis

Once all transcriptions were complete, I used a qualitative research data analysis method known as grounded theory. According to qualitative research scholars Lindlof and Taylor (2011), "the first step of the grounded theory model involves coding for as many categories as possible from the data" (p. 250). To code for all categories possible, I utilized constant comparative methods. In constant comparative methods, I continually referenced prior interview transcriptions for thematic repetition among responses. I focused solely on one interview question at a time, and through the use of constant comparative methods across every participant response, I was able to generate a list of themes

and sub themes (Table 2). This thorough thematic generation is known as open coding in grounded theory.

Upon completion of open coding, I then used another analysis method in the grounded theory approach called axial coding to find broader “umbrella”-like categories to house themes and sub themes. Axial coding in this research was imperative toward generating overarching categories to help contextualize all of the themes found. There were four major categories established: Views of Aging, Influences on Views of Aging, What Women do About Aging, and Women’s Overall Recommendations Regarding Aging.

All participant information, transcriptions, and any other potentially compromising information were destroyed upon completion of the study.

Table 2

A Categorization of all Themes

Major Categories	Themes	Sub Themes	
Views of Aging	Coming to Terms with Aging	Aesthetic "Ah-Ha" Moments	
		Momentary Disturbances of Pictures of Self	
		Starting to Accept One's Own Aging	
	Concerns with Aging	Internalized Views of Own Aging	Don't Feel or Notice Age Much
			Look Younger Than Actual Age
Influences on Views of Aging	Impact of Media	Fear of Replacement	
		Perceived Double Standard	
		Misleading or Limited Representations	
		Maintaining One's Self	
		Media's Positive Impact	
	Compounding or Alleviating of Pressures Surrounding Aging		Spouses
			Children
			Friends
What Women do About Aging	Anti-Aging Product Usage	Factors Influencing Purchase	
		Product Usage Among Women	
		Overall Experience with Anti-Aging Products Used	
	Anti-Aging Beauty Regimens		Nails
			Hair
			Clothing
	Alternative Ways of Working Through Aging Insecurities		Exercise
			Healthy Food Choices
Poking Fun at Aging			
Women's Overall Recommendations Regarding Aging	Embrace Yourself and Acknowledge that Beauty is Fleeting		
		Stay Active and Healthy	
		Stop Being So Mean To Each Other	

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Following the transcription of all 17 interviews, responses were first open coded and then axial coded for thematic similarities. Multiple exemplars will be used to help support themes found and illustrated throughout the results section. Exemplars, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), “perform the work of --- and act as the substructure for --- interpretive claims” (p. 269). The pseudonyms assigned (refer to methods section for specifics) will be used to feature responses from women to answer all four research questions. Four categories were established to best layout all themes and sub-themes found: views of aging, influences on views of aging, what women do about aging, and women’s overall recommendations regarding aging.

Views of Aging

The first category of women’s responses, views of aging, help answer research question number 1: what do women in their 50’s, who use over the counter anti-aging products or creams, think about aging? Themes of responses to views of aging were as follows: women coming to terms with aging, the realization of age, concerns about aging, and internalized views of aging. Many

sub-themes became apparent within each theme, all of which support different perspectives to answer research question 1.

Coming to Terms with Aging

Many of the women talked about a time in which they realized their appearance was changing, starting their process of coming to terms with their aging. Three sub-themes arose from their responses: (1) aesthetic ah-ha moment(s) (early onset white hair, skin change, and the aftermath of weight fluctuations), (2) momentary disturbances from pictures of self, and (3) starting to accept one's own aging.

Aesthetic "ah-ha" moments(s). Many women reported the greying of hair as a realization of the effects of aging on their bodies. Liz talked about her experience with an early shift in hair color when she said, "my hair turned completely white in my 20's which made me look completely different and made me stick out like a sore thumb." Jacquelyn also experienced early onset white hair when she noted that, "my hair started turning white when I was 27 years old...and I was thinking that I was a little young for that!" Finally, in terms of white or changing hair being a physical aesthetic "ah-ha" moment for women, Emilia said, "after the birth of my son at 38, I started to notice more grey hair."

Changes in skin were also noted by several women in terms of a realization of age. The discussion of skin changes revolved primarily around sun exposure or damage and looking “tired” or wrinkle laden. Emilia noted, “in my 40’s I started to see sun damage that wasn’t going away,” which echoed what Megan said,

My skin completely changed. I had a lot of sun exposure in the olden days that has really caught up with me. There are marks on my face that simply won’t go away. I love the sun, but it makes my skin really dark and blotchy. Occasionally a mild bother, but then I don’t care.

Similar to both Emilia and Megan’s response about skin damage from the sun, Valerie noted that, “...definitely sun spots are starting to show up, and I had peaches and cream skin kind of like yours once.” Jacquelyn mentioned skin in terms of wrinkles and the effect of them on her realization of age when she responded,

I am a little vain in that I have compared my little lines [forehead] to my friends and I’m older than a lot of my friends and I’m a little smug with the fact that they have more wrinkles than I do...I really don’t have a lot of wrinkles around my eyes except my forehead.

Changes in skin and visually seeing what was believed to be signs of aging were common among women. Nicole said she had begun thinking she looked tired and realized her body was changing. She said,

I looked in the mirror one morning and I thought that I looked tired. I remember thinking “boy what I wouldn’t give to be able to get up and brush my teeth and run a brush through my hair and look ready to go for the day,” but that’s when I realized the body was changing.

The women were all able to think back to a time in which they could vividly remember when their appearance was changing.

Momentary disturbances from pictures of self. Changes in hair and skin were common responses from women in terms of recollecting specific moments in which their appearance was changing. In relation to coming to terms with aging, the second sub-theme was being momentarily disturbed by pictures of self. This response threaded a handful of the women together when discussing how they have been working through aging insecurities. Megan touched on this idea when she responded,

My son and his wife got married about seven years ago, and I looked at the pictures, and I had a Facebook picture of my husband and me at the wedding sitting at the table eating at the parents table. I looked at it and said “yeah, I look pretty good there” but now I say “hmmm,” and you know for just a moment I am disturbed by that, but then I think “whatever.”

Looking at past pictures of ourselves can lead to self-critique and introspection in terms of changes in physical aesthetics. This negative reflection also seemed to be the case for Jacquelyn in terms of looking at pictures of herself

and having that shocking moment of realization that her appearance had changed. She exemplifies this when she responded,

I also realized that too when I smile, my eyes are puffier and I've seen pictures of myself...I think that's really what it is when you see photographs of yourself you're like "holy cow!" I was with a bunch of my friends from high school the other day, and they said I don't look any different than from high school. We hadn't seen each other for a long time, but you get to a point in your life and just think...ugh...because I don't feel old but it's not what I see.

Jacquelyn's response really touches on the sentiment that when our image is reflected back on us through photographs, it might be difficult to negotiate how one feels inside, with how one perceives self-image on the outside. A realization of age through looking at a photograph was also noted by Haley. Her experience is rooted more in the form of acknowledging that she parallels age changes with that of her children. She stated,

There was a realization of looking at pictures of yourself with your kids. You see that they're younger and therefore I must be younger as opposed to when my daughter just got married and I'm thinking that if she is older, then I have to be older. And that's been a little bit of a shock, that we've all gotten older together.

Samantha also mentioned looking at photographs of herself and realizing the change in age, but unique to the other women, she associated the change in her appearance to her stressful work environment. With the acceptance of a new

job about five years ago, Samantha discussed how she feels the extreme stress has translated into her changing physical appearance:

I look at myself now and I have been working at this job for five years, and I look at pictures of myself from five years ago and you can see the stress and difference in my appearance. I contribute it to the nature of my job, it's the number one stress burnout job in America.

Being momentarily disturbed by pictures and images of self were common among women, and shed light on the ability of women to recall one specific incident in which they remembered their appearance had changed.

Starting to accept one's own aging. Apart from aesthetic "ah-ha" moments and picture realizations, women also talked about recognizing the inevitability of aging and learning to accept that fact. For example, Helen discussed a book of prayers she frequently reads, which for her illuminated her realization of age.

She explained,

I have this book, it's prayers, it's more poetry, and there was one on signs of aging and like getting grey hair was an announcement of things to come, and you can pull it out but it's always going to be there, and that just kind of led me to believe that you aren't going to beat it, and just to live gracefully.

Vanessa said, "I don't think I'm going to mind aging, I hope I don't. As long as I feel good I'll be ok." Kari also touched on accepting her age when she noted that, "I am happy, and I like where I am." She added:

You know what I think, I look pretty damn good for 52! [laughter] You know I feel good, I feel better than I ever have, and I am comfortable. There is something also liberating about getting old that you get to a point where you say, "it is what it is, and I'm not going to dress and pretend that I'm 19 and 21 because I'm not you know. I'm a middle aged woman, but I feel and look better than I think I have in years so I am ok with the way I look."

Liz agreed, when she said:

I am enjoying my age now and I won't be getting rid of my white streak [naturally in her hair] anytime soon. I don't care if people judge me for it. I don't see it anymore when I look in the mirror, and people just need to get over it.

Milestone birthdays can also play a role in coming to terms with aging.

When discussing coming to terms with aging and when it happened, Lola responded, "when I was 50! That number just totally caught me off guard. It was more psychologically major because of what 50 means!" Lola exemplifies the constructed societal proliferation that each decade can be a milestone in a woman's life, and that as one gets older, these milestones can provide a catalyst into coming to acceptance of one's age. Nicole illustrated this when she said:

Never regretted my 20th, 30th, 40th, and 50th birthday, but the 9ths of each decade killed me because I was leaving one generation, and I never knew what to expect physically or socially with the next decade I was going into, but what I have found from each decade, is that each decade gets better. The 20's are really stupid, the 30's is about survival, the 40's is about figuring it out, the 50's are "ok figured it out, life is really good," and in the 60's, now you can just go and enjoy. Every decade is just unbelievable.

Many of the women discussed coming to terms with aging by starting to enjoy the *benefits* of aging. For example, Melanie noted that she has had,

More positive ah-ha moments now that I've gotten older [laughter]. I think you just get into the throes of intense child rearing and you get to a certain point where they're more independent and you have more time for yourself and self-awareness, so I think you have time for appreciation of yourself without being terribly selfish.

Megan talked about coming to terms with aging in relation to having significantly less stress in her life as compared to when her son was deployed. She said,

The thing that aged me the fastest in the last nine years was having my son deployed to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once. The day he told me that he wasn't going to re-enlist was a joyful moment...I smile a lot more nowadays and feel like we can handle most things after that nine long years.

Another way age had been accepted was in the response of Haley who discussed not having any regrets. She articulated that,

I figure I earned every wrinkle; I only color my hair because my youngest talked me into that, and now we're little by little letting it go grey slightly. I figured grandmas that are not grey doesn't seem right. Erik Ericson talks about the psycho-social development and the last stage is "are you really happy with your life and what you did?" Because then you are going to embrace the aging and everything, but if you don't and you have a lot of "despair" then you regret so much. I don't regret things. I always talk about having a PhD. I got it august of '86, got married in October '86, then stayed home with kids for 11 years and taught part time. That was tough but I was grateful for being able to teach. The kids had a stay at home

mom, and it was like everyone got a little bit of something...If you let your life take you where you need to go, it's part of the faith thing, and then it works out. I never thought I'd be in a field like this, but I answered the ad, and it worked out.

Overall, the themes of recollecting an aesthetic "ah-ha" moment, being momentarily disturbed by pictures of self, and starting to accept one's own aging, all play a crucial role in understanding how women view aging. However, some women still indicated concerns about aging.

Concerns about Aging

In this second theme, when reflecting on overall concerns about aging, most women indicated that they have a much higher concern for physical or mental health, or no concern at all. For those who were concerned about growing older, they indicated more concerns with their physical bodies wearing out or maintaining mental health than physical aging attributes or changes.

When asked about potential concerns for aging, Liz asserted "yeah, but not as much aesthetically as physically...I want to be able to move for a lot more years, but that's the only thing I tend to really worry about." Samantha said similarly,

Medically yes...not how I look, I am ok with that. There came a time and I think it happened after my divorce where you have to really look at yourself and you get to a point where you say "you know what, I am

never going to be this ideal perfect, but I am perfect in my imperfections,” so I’m there and it’s such a good feeling.

Both Nicole and Ana mentioned being concerned about potential physical limitations or setbacks as well. Nicole replied, “I’m concerned about the physical than anything else. I don’t want to be limited because my cartilage is starting to wear thin but I think those are obvious things that are going to happen.” Ana echoed aging concerns by Nicole when she said, “I’m concerned about not taking care of my body so that I won’t be able to age gracefully.”

Coupled with physical concerns about aging, Michele mentioned her concerns for mental health and stability throughout the aging process when she said,

Um....a little bit, but not a whole lot. I think more my mind....my mind might go, you know? I mean I am on depression medicine and have been for years and I don’t know if or maybe even forgetfulness I’m worried about. I’m more worried about the mind, I forget things sometimes.

Apart from the physical and mental health concerns, several women communicated that they were not concerned with age whatsoever. Helen seemed to fall in the middle when she said, “mostly physical. Like on a scale from 1-10 and 10 being not concerned at all, I’m a 9.” Lola, Kari, and Melanie simply said “no” when asked if they were concerned about aging. One humorous response was from Helen when she responded, “what can you do about it?” followed by a

belly laugh. The responses of women related to potential concern for aging, provide more insight into views of aging overall.

Internalized Views of Own Aging

When responding to views of aging, many women introspectively reflected on how they view themselves in relation to their age. Within the theme of internalized views of aging, two sub-themes arose: (1) they don't feel or notice their age much, or (2) they believe they look younger than their actual age.

Don't feel or notice age much. Several women indicated that they don't feel or notice age. When asked, Melanie responded with a big laugh and said, "I think I probably look mid 40's, internally I feel about 20, but a smart 20." Liz discussed how she doesn't necessarily notice her age either, "I forget how old I am most of the time because I just don't tend to act my age I think. I like to wear different young stand out types of clothes, and I don't think about how old I am all of the time." Ana shared a similar sentiment to Melanie and Liz, but added her perspective on where she sees herself now in terms of her age:

I mean to me I work out all the time, I am active. I don't notice myself aging much. My goal last year when I turned 49 was to go into 50 healthier, and I did. I lost a considerable amount of weight in the last year, and I am actually healthier than I was in my earlier 40's.

Along the same lines, Michelle discussed her belief that age is just a number and how she feels healthy in terms of her age. She noted,

My age to me is just a number. I mean, you know 57...sometimes it is like "oh my gosh I can't believe I'm this old." I don't feel I don't know how to feel at 57. It's just a number to me. I feel I'm just as in good shape as when I was in my 30's, you know. I worked out regularly, and I mean I don't have any health issues or anything. I am fortunate that I'm in good shape.

Megan also discussed her disconnectedness with feeling or noticing her age. Her response echoed many of the other opinions of the women:

I am 51, and I am a grandmother. I don't feel like a grandma, at all. If I could retire I would, but I'm not and I couldn't right now. When I think of a grandma, I think "god, she's old as dirt." But I am active, I do a lot of different things, and I do whatever I want to do, and I don't see myself like that. When I hear the number 51, I think "wow, that's frickin' old," but when I think of me being 51, I don't feel 51 at all. My son was 27 when he had his first child. I had two kids by then already. Anyway, I just don't feel like I'm old at all. In the mornings when I get up, I hurt, but I know that I just gotta get going and then all the pain is gone. Those reminders, the physical pain, yeah I feel my age sometimes. I don't feel old, like "I'm going to sit on the couch all day;" I can't because I've got shit to do [laughter].

Understanding one facet of how women internalize views of aging through not feeling or noticing age much sheds light on just how complicated views of aging can be.

Look younger than actual age. Apart from not feeling or noticing age much, several women reported that they feel they look younger than their actual

age. Haley indicated that, "People tell me they think I am younger than I am which is a good thing. YAY...most people say they don't think I'm that old."

Corresponding well with Haley's response was that of Karen, who said, "younger than I am because of what I have done to look younger. I work out regularly and all that." Similarly, Samantha stated that,

I think I look, and I only say this because I've been told it, but I don't think I look 50 or I'm getting there now, but I've always been told I look younger than what I am. So I like to hold on to that [laughter].

In the same vein, Vanessa replied, "...people tell me I don't look my age, that I look younger than my age, and I am lucky because I don't have grey hair yet so I don't have to worry about that whole issue." Parallel to Vanessa's response, Valerie said, "...a lot of people tell me I look younger than I am and I could probably pass for younger especially if I had my hair colored, which I usually kind of do; it's growing out right now." Alida's response also fell into this sub-theme because it revolved around how clients in her profession had complimented her in saying that she didn't seem her age. Her response was,

I think I'm not bad. You know at work they surprised me today and had a birthday party for me and I had clients that were like 'no way...you're not turning 50!' [laughter] and it kind of feeds into ego; it helps kind of solidify that "ok, yep, I'm not looking like I'm really aging quickly!"

Overall, when asked about views of aging, most of the women in this study reported that they either don't really notice or feel their age, or they look younger than their actual age. The common thread in responses seems to indicate that age isn't necessarily of huge significance to some of the women in this study. Women's responses through this first category of views of aging and subsequent themes and sub-themes, sheds light on research question number 1 which looked to answer what women who use anti-aging products or creams think about aging.

Influences on Views of Aging

The second category of women's responses, influences on views of aging, help answer research question number 2, "how do these women view media's construction of aging in contemporary U.S. society?" Responses identifying the impact of the media, including both compounding and/or alleviating of pressures related to aging via close relationships, are discussed below to understand influences on views of aging.

Impact of Media

Several women indicated that the media, to some degree, had influenced their views of aging. Many women had very strong opinions regarding the potential impact(s) of the media which is why it became the first theme in the

second category of influences on views of aging. Jacquelyn mentioned “the media though does a pretty good job of making women seem ageless.” The influence of media portrayals of women and aging was also discussed by Alida, when she said, “the push is that you have to do this [use anti-aging products] and that you really shouldn’t look your age. There is almost a negative connotation to aging.” This “push” was also felt by Liz when she said “we [women] are judged too harshly” in the context of media representations.

When reflecting on the potential influence of the media on aging, Melanie stated her belief that the media is clever in their ability to shape ideals related to aging which she believes women are attuned to. She stated that she feels strongly that the “...media can mold public opinion” through the use of constructed “archetypes” proliferated in the media which can play a role in shaping our understanding of the world around us. Overall, the beliefs women held about the impact of the media center on five sub-themes: (1) fear of replacement, (2) perceived double standard, (3) media as misleading or limited in its representation, (4) media pushing the notion of maintaining one’s self as you age, and (5) media’s positive effect.

Fear of replacement. The first sub-theme, fear of replacement, was mentioned by several women. First, the fear dealt with the possibility of being

replaced by a younger woman in a work or professional context. Second, the fear stemmed from proliferated images of women being dumped or replaced by their husbands for younger women.

The first fear of replacement in the context of a profession was best illustrated by Emilia who stated she felt “Ann Curry [a former Today Show anchor] got replaced with Savannah Guthrie, and Katie Couric is gone, and those women are in their 50’s and no longer the front and center. They never came out and said it was about age, but I really felt like it was.” Similar to Emilia’s example of being “replaced” in a work context, Ana mentioned that if she were to lose her job or not receive funding for her work next year, she would find herself in a competitive job circumstance, and “it would be easier to hire someone younger and for less money.” Conversely, Valerie offered up an alternative explanation about why someone might get replaced or turned down for a position by noting that sometimes the fear of replacement is unfounded because employers often recognize “the potential that those people [applicants] have for being a long time employee.”

The second fear of replacement, that of a spouse, was also mentioned by some of the women interviewed. Emilia was very keen in her perceptions of replacement when she said,

I think we're seeing more media showing off aging men with younger wives and we see images of older women who are being replaced by a trophy wife, which seems [like] a pretty common fear among 50 year old women.

Similarly, Melanie discussed the fear of replacement in terms of what she has seen often in the media of an older man with a younger woman in tow. She stated, "you will frequently see the older actor with a young actress and it's like...gosh come on." These types of images communicate many ostensible societal norms regarding an older man's desire to be with a younger woman. This notion might be a catalyst to women in terms of fearing the loss of their spouse to a younger woman. Emilia noted that "I think the message is 'choose wisely the man you marry.' You're both aging and if he decides to replace you with someone 20 years younger, then you haven't chosen well, quite frankly." Fear of replacement threaded through responses of women and shed light on how mediated messages might be an influence on views of aging.

Perceived double standard. The second theme in influences on views of aging was a perceived double standard in terms of aging between media treatment of women versus. Kari, for example, described a time in her life when a double standard played a huge role in her perception of her age. She

articulated that when she was announced as the chosen candidate for a prestigious new career position by the Governor,

It seemed like every time they [the media] talked about me, it was my name with the age 50 by it, like it was part of my narrative and introduction, and I made a joke out of it...and I turned to them and said, "ok now, do you do that to the men in this administration?" I just thought it was ridiculous.

Kari's perspective was not a singularly shared one. Her example of how her age came into play in a completely innocuous circumstance highlights a perceived double standard in media representation. On a similar note, Samantha noted that age plays a role in politics when she said that, "...many times women are judged by how they look, even politicians and people that are trying to do things that have nothing to do with looks."

The double standard sub-theme was also discussed in terms of media representations of aging across gender. Jacquelyn illustrated this form of double standard when she said,

Men on the other hand are OK. It's ok when their hair greys, and even attractive. I don't see a lot of men that have had smooth and flawless skin as women do, it's again another double standard where it's ok for men to get a little chubbier and to go grey or go bald or even want to make fun of men who make fun of that, but women are expected, especially if they're in the limelight, to maintain a youthful look.

Liz shared this sentiment by stating that "...there is a huge double standard in the media that shows guys getting older and not saying one damn thing about it, in fact, they even praise the older men!"

Apart from the women's perception of an aging double standard in the media, other women discussed a double standard in terms of the profession of news anchor or newscaster. Ana noted that, "I think where we lack a little bit is news anchors, especially women anchors." This perceived absence was echoed by Alida who said, "weather women, you don't see them, you see aging men or older men who are weather men, but I don't think I've ever seen an older weather woman. Anchors in general you do see older men, never usually a woman past the age of 50 or 55, not that I can recall anyway." The responses of women on a perceived media double standard provide insight into potential influences on views of aging.

Misleading or limited representations. The third sub-theme under the theme of impact of media, was misleading or limited representations of aging in the media. Melanie had a lot to say in terms of her perception toward the manipulation of the media. She discussed her perceptions of the media both negatively and positively, when she stated that the media is "pure manipulation." She went on to say that she felt lucky because she had at one time

taken a class on women and popular culture which provided her with the intellectual instruments to have a more critical eye on mediated messages.

Multiple women commented on the way in which the media portrays aging women. In particular, they often found themselves critiquing the “realness” or authenticity of the woman characters shown. To support this, Lola said that “I feel like magazines show pictures of women in their 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s but they are targeting women in their 50’s and up. It seems a little misleading.” Similarly, Emilia critiqued that “the media images are of people with flawless skin; you don’t see a lot of images of women who are ‘real’ so that certainly has an impact.” Lola continued to voice concerns when she said, “I’d say pictures of celebrities are annoying sometimes because they just look fake.” Samantha shared a similar perception of the manipulation created by the media when she noted that,

I guess for the fact that they still use really pretty people who are models in the advertisements. And so you just don’t see ‘real’ people, you see people who are models in their younger years who are just a little older, older models doing commercials for anti-aging that are still beautiful.

Apart from perceived manipulation, limited portrayals of women and aging were also a concern for some women. Melanie argued that,

The media is so extraordinarily limited in its portrayal of women, let alone women who are considered to be aging. I think that the media puts

women in certain boxes...in particular the media does a horrible job of accurately portraying women aging and sexuality. I think it's just not talked about.

Together, the perceptions of women toward the media as manipulative and limiting, provide more insight into potential influences on views of aging.

Maintaining one's self. The fourth sub-theme toward understanding the potential influence of media on views of aging was the notion of "maintaining." This notion was brought up in terms of physical health and wellbeing by Megan, who said that there is "such a push toward health and taking care of yourself so I'd say that the television thing overall that's pushing exercise and healthy diet and all that crap." A similar response was given by Alida in our conversation when she said that the media doesn't just talk about anti-aging, there also seems to be a push "not just to look younger but to maintain."

Karen also exemplified this well in her response when she said that the "media very much has given me the impression that you need to, you know, keep up your looking nice, and your makeup, and dress nicely." Megan continued to talk about how she has gotten frustrated with the push and pressure of maintaining "because it's just too much sometimes." This sub-theme in particular struck a chord with some participants due to the profound pressure felt to "maintain" a physical aging standard.

Media's positive effect. The fifth and final sub-theme revolved around women who felt the media has given them positive examples of aging. When discussing the potential influence of media, Ana responded, "I think they're being better about portraying aging women as being more active and youthful looking. Before it was always twiggy thin women, and a lot of the TV shows have a lot of older actresses on there, and so everybody is not as skinny as they used to be."

13 of the 17 women mentioned one of the following female celebrities as positive aging role model representations in the media: Betty White, Hillary Clinton, and Meryl Streep. The three celebrities mentioned (in order of response popularity) by women highlight a positive perception related to women, aging, and media. In reference to Betty White and Meryl Streep, Jacquelyn mentioned, "I think that's some pretty good portrayals of what it's like to be real." Helen shared similar positive sentiments about the media, in that "I think they're getting more pro-aging than when I first started watching TV. It's not as age defining...and there's more product available than when my mom was around."

Haley recommended finding a role model to look up to, if one is feeling pressures associated with aging. She responded,

I know when I got my doctorate, I said Bill Cosby was my role model and you find a role model like Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Diane Lane, Cloris Leachman, and Betty White is a hoot and holler. Find a role model, and it really showed me what this part of life can be like because of that role model, and if they can do it...I can do it.

There were also women who noted that they have found other aging role models in alternative media. When potential impact of the media was discussed with Valerie, she told me that one of her best friends is an older woman with beautiful silver hair who models in More Magazine (a magazine targeted to older women with the slogan “for women of style and substance”). When she talked about whether or not she had any aging role models, she said, “to me when I think about positive images of women I think of More Magazine because it was designed specifically to be sold to people like us so I kept all of the copies with the pictures of her [model best friend] in them.”

Alongside the women who responded that the media has had a positive influence on them in terms of views of aging, some women articulated that media doesn't have an effect on them or that they have positive aging role models disassociated from the media. An example of this is when Haley said, “I don't think they have much at all. I'm not one to look at magazines and that kind of stuff, that's just not me.” Similarly, Samantha discussed her positive role model outside of the media, “my mom is a positive role model.” Megan opened

up about how the media has influenced her views of aging, and said, “I’d say my perceptions on aging have been more influenced by people in real life not so much television. I would say people in real life probably influence more my perceptions.”

Through exemplifying the sub-themes of fear of replacement, double standards, media as misleading or limited, media pushing the notion of maintaining one’s self, and media providing positive role models, the role of media is better understood as a potential influence on views of aging.

Compounding or Alleviating of Pressures Surrounding Aging

Along with media influences, many of the women interviewed discussed potential pressures associated with aging from specific people or groups like a spouse, children, coworkers, or friends. Responses indicated constancy across the board regarding spousal influence, children, and friends. Overall, the responses resulted in three sub-themes related to potential aging pressures: (1) a spouse (a consistent source of non-pressure), (2) children (poking fun, no pressure, or positive compliments regarding age), and (3) friends (no pressure, validation and support, or remarks revolving around aesthetics).

Spouses. The first sub-theme revolved around responses from women as to whether or not they found their spouses to be a source of pressure in the

purchase and use of anti-aging products. Across the board, responses strongly suggested that spouses had no significant impact on the women's decision to purchase and use anti-aging products. A vast majority of the women suggested that their spouse was not a source of pressure. Liz noted said that "no, he loves me for who I am," which was echoed by Kari who said, "absolutely not, in fact my husband would just as soon I never wear any makeup." Similarly, Emilia replied,

He is six months older than me, and he knows not to say anything, he knows better. He's a really good guy and a keeper. He's sensitive enough not to say anything about age, and he's more likely to pay compliments. He doesn't notice very often if I do things like get my hair colored.

Valerie also agreed that her spouse was not a source of aging pressure for her when she responded, "no, never. I've been really fortunate with that...my husband now would never criticize me even if I goad him because I really want the truth." A humorous response was given by Megan when she said, "he never talks about how I look, and so in some ways I am really grateful about that. He couldn't give two shits." Haley also has an older spouse and said, "no, not at all either. He doesn't pay attention to the hair at all. He is 10 years older so he wouldn't make those comments."

Coincidentally, Haley, Vanessa, and Jacquelyn shared a similar age gap with their respective spouse, and Vanessa's response to the discussion of her spouse was,

He's 11 years older than me, so he is completely white and has been for a long time, so he looks at me and says I'm insane if I find one grey hair and panic. He used to be married to someone that looks his age, and so I think he likes that I look younger than he does.

Jacquelyn, like Vanessa and Haley, noted that she has a husband who is supportive and doesn't make comments about her aging. She said,

No, my husband never said anything but nice things about the way I look. Whenever I say anything about my looks – my husband is six years older than me, and whenever I say something or about gaining weight or about slowing down, he says, "well, we're all aging, it's just a part of aging, and you need to accept it." He has basically told me that no matter how I look, it is fine, he doesn't care.

Aside from the depth of response from the handful of women already showcased, Lola, Samantha, Michele, Nicole, and Karen simply responded with "no" when asked if their spouse was source of pressure for them. Overall, women tended to agree that their spouse was not a source of aging pressure for them and/or positive in terms of spousal encouragement.

Children. The second sub-theme related to potential outside pressures with aging is children. The opinions of children can be long lasting and impactful, and particularly heartfelt on women with regard to aging. The only

woman that discussed direct pressure from her child was Haley, who noted that, “my daughter pressured me with the hair dye, and I’ve kept it up and I don’t want my roots to show and so now my hairstylist and I are changing the colors.” A majority of women responded that their children either poke fun at aging, are no source of pressure at all, or positive and encouraging.

Several women had stories or accounts of when their children poked fun of getting older. In the context of her having a white streak in her hair (similar in appearance to Jay Leno), Liz told the story of how her children “just laugh about being able to see my white streak across the UNI Dome.” Similarly, a specific recollection of a time in which her children poked fun at her for her age was given by Samantha when she said,

Sometimes I’ll pick out some jewelry or headband or something and they say “mom really?”, “that looks like it’s for 12 year olds,” “it’s got flowers on it and it’s quirky,” and they go “mom really?” So now I’m more conscious about their opinion, but their opinion doesn’t make me go out and buy something, but it does make me stop doing something. It makes me think.

A very humorous story was told by Nicole who shared with me a specific moment in time when her daughter had a big impact on her. Her story began when she said,

My daughter, when she was seven years old and I was in my 30’s, one time we were driving in the car and this was when I first started using

face cream in Denver CO and it was very dry. I was wearing face makeup and she looked at me and told me I looked like an old pumpkin! I looked in the mirror and she was right because my face was dry and it was cheap makeup and it had a little orange glow to it and I thought “she is right! I do look like an old pumpkin!” So that’s when I decided in my early 30’s that I needed to start taking care of my face and hydrating it and watch what type of makeup products I used because it made all the difference.

Children poking fun can also be seen through the response of Vanessa in terms of her daughter making fun of her hair coloring choices. She noted that,

My daughter is so smooth. I used to highlight my hair, a lot lighter than this. It wasn’t blonde but pretty darn light. My daughter said it looked grey the first time I did it, so I continued to do it because I liked it but then I got to thinking, “wait a minute, I’m spending money on lightening my hair that my daughter says looks grey and I don’t have any grey hair yet. Why don’t I just not do that anymore because eventually it will lighten up at some point in time.” I don’t do anything with it now.

Apart from poking fun at aging by children, some women discussed how they feel no compounding pressure from their children. Both Ana and Karen simply said “no” with regards to whether or not children had been a source of compounding aging pressure. Alida also discussed the role of children and aging pressure when she said,

When I turned 40 it’s so funny, I have two boys and they said “mom you don’t act like you’re 40!” and I said, “well, what does 40 act like?” They didn’t know. I was a single mom until I met my husband, and I was the one that was like, “we’re going to have fun and fart and belch and take the car out and spin it around in the car and stuff,” so no, no pressure.

When reflecting on whether or not children had any impact on aging pressures, several women indicated that their children gave them positive compliments or affirmations. Melanie showcased this well when she said, “no, I guess I am just very fortunate, they’re always telling me I’m wonderful.” A similar sentiment was shared by Jacquelyn who replied, “I have two daughters 25 and 23. They’ve been very complimentary and have told me I’m beautiful, though I think they’re biased.” Valerie has also had a positive experience with her children in that she says that they are, “positive, yeah they just usually think that I look like I’ve taken good care of myself.”

Valerie noted that though she does feel positive support from her children in terms of aging, they might get upset if she did something drastic, like have plastic surgery. She noted that, “...I think my children would be very angry with me if I actually did get work done.” In her response, it seems as though the children are both positive supporters, as well as concerned children with regards to taking drastic action to combat aging (surgery). Understanding the impact of children and their potential role in compounding or alleviating aging pressures, furthers knowledge on different types of influences on views of aging.

Friends. Friends are the sub-final theme housed under the theme of compounding or alleviating pressures that might shape views of aging. When it

came to friends, many women commented that friends are not a source of pressure, but rather a source of validation and support. However, not all women shared the same perspective on friends, especially towards acquaintances.

Several women noted that friends were not a source of aging pressure. Melanie, Alida, Haley, Ana, and Lola simply said “no” in terms of friends and aging pressure. Liz elaborated a little further on the role friends play into her aging perception when she said, “my true friends no, they don’t [source of pressure]. But if I have acquaintances, I sometimes feel like I want to uphold an image, but with my close friends, no.”

Conversely, there were women who noted that their friends *do* play a role in shaping their perceptions in the sense that they show support and validation. Melanie elaborated on the significance of her friends when she responded,

I would say that my closest friends are well balanced, and I think they are women who are very comfortable in their skin, they are true believers in staying healthy, so I feel positive support not negative. I guess just because those who are closest to me in terms of female companions are just very positive and very aware of how important staying healthy is and doing things that are healthy for your body.

Helen shared in the validating or supporting roles friends can play when she said, “most of my friends are my age, so not so much. They are more validating in that some of them talk about not remembering things any more so

we talk about aging together.” Similarly, Jacquelyn replied, “I’m not around a lot of people who give me pressure. I don’t give my friends pressure. My friends and I like to kayak and sit out in the dirt [laughter], we don’t care that our nails are clean.” Melanie, Helen, and Jacquelyn all showcase the positive impact friends can have as influences on views of aging.

Aside from not being a source of pressure and being validating and supportive, women also noted that there were specific remarks made by friends that *have* influenced some of their views of aging. The term “aesthetics” in this context refers to various contextualization and constructions of pressures associated with woman and aging. Examples include hair color, wrinkles, and weight fluctuations. Valerie illustrated this notion well when she responded,

They [her friends] get annoyed because I don’t have grey hair yet [laughter]. I’ve got one good friend I do a lot of stuff with in Des Moines and she will say ‘she doesn’t color her hair!’ and makes a big deal out of it.

Nicole shared a similar perspective on the role of friends when she replied, “my friends have said ‘you don’t seem to have any wrinkles’ and I think a lot of it is genetic because the women on my mother’s side, they just don’t wrinkle early.”

When discussing friends, Valerie continued to reveal a deeper, more intimate look at the role of her friends in potential aging pressures. She said that

she has always been thin her entire life and how her friends sometimes make comments about that, which impacts her. She said, "I get comments sometimes about maybe I'm too thin from both my friends and coworkers and family." She continued by talking about how it is stressful that her weight is discussed at all. Another example is when Karen responded "a couple of my friends are overweight and I mean, significantly overweight. That really gets old...they'll talk negatively about themselves."

Overall, the responses of women related to media perspectives and potential compounding or alleviating pressures, provide insight into different influences on views of aging.

What Women Do About Aging

Apart from understanding views of aging and potential pressures affecting those views, women also revealed specific ways in which they deal with aging. These responses will answer research questions number 3, "what is the experience of these women regarding the purchase and use of anti-aging products?" and research question number 4, "what else, if anything, have women done to confront their own aging?" From the women's responses, three themes arose: anti-aging product usage, anti-aging beauty regimens, and alternative ways of working through aging insecurities. Exemplars are used

below to provide insight into what women are doing in hopes of combating their own aging.

Anti-Aging Product Usage

All of the women spoke to at least one of the following three sub-themes related to their use of anti-aging products: (1) factors influencing purchase (cost, ingredients, and endorsements or other women's testimonials), (2) product usage among women (product name and duration of use in years), and (3) overall experience with anti-aging products used (like it/love it or no noticeable difference).

Factors influencing purchase. Factors informing the purchase of anti-aging products (cost, ingredients, and endorsements or other women's testimonials) were one of the most popular responses from women. Out of the 13 women who responded to this question, eight of them referenced cost as being a major factor for purchase. Lola said, "I look at cost, that's number one." Megan mentioned how she has tried a couple different products and said, "I can't say expensive is better at all, it's more about what the feel is on my skin and texture."

Cost was also important to Emilia and Haley, who both referenced "specialized" stores as carrying very expensive product. Emilia said, "I've tried some specialized stuff over the years like Clinique, but it's so cost prohibitive,

and it's more convenient to pick up stuff at the store than online and specialized stores...I typically just buy whatever is on sale or at a good deal." Specialized store products were also noted by Haley when she replied, "I won't buy super expensive stuff, I won't go into Younkers or any of those stores because I look at those women and say to myself you're paying what...for what?"

When discussing her product of choice, Samantha responded, "...though it is very expensive, I thought if I'm going to spend the money I want to see some results." When asked what factors influence purchase, Kari discussed in-depth how "ridiculously expensive" her product is, but how it turned out to be a worthwhile purchase. When asked about her product she said,

It's pricey and sold through a distributor, but I can go online and order it myself, but it's a private brand. I never took care of my skin, and I have good skin and good genes in my family, and so therefore I would never wash my face. I always slept in my makeup, and I think it was my good friend that got involved in selling skin care products and wanted to get out of the corporate world, and she wanted to start a business, and so it started because I wanted to empower my friend to make a life decision change. Then I said, "this is ridiculously expensive," and she said, "you'll love it." And I really do love it, I love my way my skin feels and so I've been using it faithfully ever since.

In terms of cost, Alida provided specific numbers as to what she is willing to pay now and what her maximum would be for any one anti-aging product if it

really worked. When asked if cost played a role in the purchase of her products, she replied,

I like to keep it under \$100. I like shopping like HSN and QVC but usually things come in a set, and they're much more reasonable, and really just as long as it's under \$100, I would buy it, but if it was really amazing and fantastic, I might go over \$120 maximum.

Apart from a very specific amount of money willing to be spent on products, Jacquelyn not only shared a funny story about the demise of an expensive product she purchased once, but also how ingredients affect her purchasing decisions. She said,

Also, a scrub I got at a place in the mall in a store in Illinois, some all natural store...oh it's called Lush. I did get some product from there, and I remember walking out of the store and thinking I just spent \$60 on soap [laughter] and then it melted in my car because it was so hot that day [laughter]. ...right now have two little jars in my cupboards and believe it or not I bought them at Aldi's grocery store and it's sad...but it's like what the heck. So, I have a day cream and a night cream, and I look at the ingredients and if they are the same as ingredients that you can buy in a department store that are very expensive, then why not?

In addition to Jacquelyn, Samantha also emphasized the importance of ingredients. Her response was,

When you're taught to read labels, you always look at the first ingredients because that should be the most. So my thinking was that I wanted to find a product where under eye puffiness was labeled for, and this product said that. My problem is that I'll break out and I have sensitive skin, and sometimes when I use a new product and it can be top of the line Lancôme or any of the really nice ones, and if I break out that's it, I don't

want to use it again. I think sometimes that if my skin reacts right off the bat negatively, I don't use it again. There are some products that just don't work with particular skin types. I really love my product and I've used it for 5 years, and I told my grandma who is in her mid-90's, about the product. She couldn't find a face cream moisturizer because her skin is also sensitive, and because she has some skin cancer lumps and what I like about the product is that it's made with a zinc base and not the other base that most moisturizers are used from, and because of that, it's wonderful for my skin.

Lola, who in conjuncture with looking at cost, said she also looks at ingredients. Ingredients in the anti-aging product purchased were a primary factor for Ana who opened up about her skin condition called Vitiligo. She discussed that the ingredients are important in terms of what she needs to maintain healthy skin. She said,

I have a strange condition called Vitiligo which takes the pigment out of the skin. So I've been using anti-aging things for a long time because they all have the sun screen block in them. I primarily use a product that is an anti-aging product, and I think really the anti-aging compound in it is the moisturizer. ...The standard sunblock I used to use didn't work, and now I use an anti-aging moisturizer with sunscreen.

Although cost and ingredients were major factors which influenced the purchasing decision of women, endorsements or other testimonials by women were also disclosed. Lola, who said cost and ingredients were factors for purchase, also said, "I do some of my own pseudo research on Google to get a better idea for what's popular and what other women are using." This sentiment

of educating one's self on what other women are using and their reactions to products is not a singularly shared factor for purchase. Apart from having cost and ingredients be factors for purchase, Samantha noted that testimonials from other women were important in terms of "taking comfort knowing other people had tried it." She said,

I took more comfort knowing other people had tried it and loved the product, and then they said "yes" this really worked. That is what sold me on it or at least got me to try it. I don't believe commercials, and I don't believe what they say on the box. They [women] call in and say 'I'm calling from...., and I just love this product' also on the QVC website, they have customer's reviews which are really nice because I always go in and read the customer reviews. So I try to research if it's a good product, and if people really liked it. You can give a product up to 5 stars, and you can see why they may not have liked it. I don't just read the good reviews. I also read the ones that gave it 1 star. It may be a situation sometimes where everyone gives it 4 or 5 stars, but then one person gives it one, and so I read all of the reviews...I found that really helpful.

There were other women who also discussed the importance or significance of endorsements as factors toward purchasing products. Melanie discussed how she looks at endorsements through magazines when she noted, "I like to look at InStyle Magazine's annual top list of products, and I think that's a good source." Samantha also touched on how celebrity endorsements like Oprah Winfrey or TV shopping networks geared at selling anti-aging products were also

factors for purchase. She said she purchased a product and got a free sample of another product and,

It's called "Hope in a Jar," and its anti-aging for people a little older for aging skin, and Oprah Winfrey endorsed it on one of her shows as one of her "favorite things." She said it was her very favorite night cream product, and she gave it to everyone in her audience, and then as a special thank you that product company put her picture on the jar for a limited time. I saw it [her favorite product being advertised] on TV through QVC, and I was watching TV, and they were demonstrating the product, and it looked really good, and there were people calling in saying they used it and it worked good, so I thought I'd give it a try.

Cost, ingredients, endorsements, and the testimonials of other women help to increase knowledge on why women chose certain anti-aging products.

Product usage among women. The second sub-theme of specific product usage (product name and duration of use in years) among women is shown in Table 3. The women self-identified all of the products listed as either currently being used, or used in the past related to anti-aging, and the specific duration of product use. See Table 3 below:

Table 3

Anti-Aging Product List and Duration of Use (In Years)

Product Name	< 1	1 to 5	6 to 9	10 to 19	20+
Oil of Olay	3	2		1	2
Clinique	1	2		1	
Neutrogena		2			1
L'Oreal		1			
Cetaphil				1	
Mary Kay		1	1		
Avon				1	
Retinol					1
Beauty Control				1	
Aldi's Day & Night Cream	1				
Lancome		1			
Boots #7		1			
Garnier	1				
Motives			1		
Philosophy	1				
Dr. Denese		1			
Dermmalogica	1				
Potent C*					
Yves Rocher	1	1			
Almay		1			
Arbonne				1	
Elizabeth Arden	1				
Este Lauder		1			
Melaleuca					1
Serious Skin Care				1	
Signature Club A	1				
Latisse		1			
Dollar General Night Crème	1				
Aveno		1			
TOTAL	12	16	2	7	5
*Duration not specified					

Information about product usage (product name and duration of use in years) can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. The number of products used, and the number of women using each product, is important to note because it illuminates products which seem to be most popular. Visualizing how many and how long women have been utilizing anti-aging products helps answer research question number 4 in relation to what women have done to confront their own aging.

Duration of use is also important for a couple of reasons. First, it seems as though there are several women who use products for less than a year, or for one to five years, which gives the impression that women like to dabble in and test different products for outcomes like effectiveness. Similarly, there are several women who have used the same product for six to 10 years, 10 to 19 years, and even 20 plus years. This seems to communicate that many women in the study are loyal to certain products for various reasons, including effectiveness and affordability. Five women have been loyal to the same anti-aging product for over 20 years. This is significant, highlighting how those five women have stayed with the same anti-aging product and brand for a long period of time. For example, two of the women in the study reported using the same brand, Oil of Olay, for at least 20 years.

Overall experience with anti-aging products. Coupled with factors contributing to purchase and duration of product use, many women noted their experiences with the products chosen. The final sub-theme of understanding what women do about aging, is the experience of women with their respective anti-aging products (like it/love it or no noticeable difference). These responses will answer research question number 3 which asks about the experience of the products among women.

When asked about their experience with their anti-aging products, 13 out of the 17 women said they either simply liked it, loved it, or they thought the product was working well. The three remaining women noted that they were not sure whether or not the product was making a difference. Michele commented on this when she said, "I like it. I don't know, I mean I'm still getting wrinkles so I don't know if it's working to be honest." This concern was shared by Nicole when asked what her experience was, "...about the same experience I've had with all of my other skin care, I don't notice anything differently." Helen also agreed, "it just feels nice. I don't really believe that anti-aging products work." Emilia also spoke to this when she said,

It's soothing, it feels better I sort of miss it if I forget to do it, you *feel* it if you're not moisturizing. Is it making a difference? I mean bottom line is that it's not *really* going to turn back the clock but it does it improve the

face, yes; moisturized skin is going to look better than dry skin. It just feels better.

Overall, the experience of women using anti-aging products, both positive and negative, is important toward better understanding what women do about aging.

Anti-Aging Beauty Regimens

Aside from product usage, many women also discussed that they enact several different types of beauty regimens synonymous with the societal construction of what it means to be a woman in U.S. society (hair, nails, clothes). There seemed to be a relationship between enacting beauty regimens and combating aging for some of the women in the study. Many exemplars will be used to showcase an answer to research question number 4 based upon better understanding how women confront their age through enacted beauty regimens. Responses of beauty regimens fell into three sub-themes: (1) nails (having a routine manicure/ pedicure/fake nails, painting occasionally, or don't do or care about nails), (2) hair (routinely dye hair to fight greys, and home dye or stopped dying for economic reasons), and (3) clothing (comfort, same style or positive change, purposeful clothing choices, and "age appropriate" clothing critiques).

Nails. With regards to nails, having either a manicure, pedicure, or applying fake nails routinely was a popular response by women. In terms of getting a pedicure only, Helen said, “I do my toe nails, I like to have pedicures.” Most of the women who acknowledged they enjoy the occasional manicure or pedicure also provided a specific amount of time between each visit. Kari talked about getting her nails done when she said, “I do have manicures...I like manicures,” which was similar to the response by Melanie when she revealed, “I would say within the last two years I really love going to have my nails done, about every six weeks. It makes me feel kind of finished up, the period on the sentence.”

Emilia talked about getting her nails done but also mentioned how she grew up with a constant pressure to “do” nails. She said, “I grew up in NYC [New York City], so every corner in NY [New York] had a nail store, and here I get my pedicure in the summer maybe once every six weeks, and manicures not that often.” Alida talked about getting her nails done as well, when she replied, “...because I’m usually keeping house and dishes I wish I could do the fake nails but I can’t. I do get pedicures about every month, but sometimes it’s hard. I do it for myself every other week.” Vanessa gets her nails done “every two weeks.” Nicole also talked about getting her nails done routinely when she said,

I have a manicure probably once every three months, and then I do not wear my nails long because of the equipment I work with; that's (wearing them long) changed since I've been 40. I don't wear polish on my nails, but I do bite my nails.

Separate from the other women who indulge in manicures and pedicures, there were women who liked to use fake nails. Karen talked about how she used fake nails in lieu of going into a salon and to save money. She articulated that, "I do the artificial nails, the pink on white." Overall, spending time and money on nails - fake, manicured, or pedicured - were important to a majority of the women interviewed.

There were two women, however, who insisted that they occasionally paint their nails but nothing too serious. Jacquelyn said that when it came to doing nails, "it is fun, I like to do it. I do it once in a while in the winter...in the summer time I might be inclined to paint my nails." This was a similar sentiment shared by Megan when she said,

Occasionally I paint my nails, but I'm too active to keep up with the color. I don't think I ever painted my nails until I got into Cosmetology College. Nowadays I keep nail polish on my toes all the time, because I'm getting the older women toe nails that are not very flattering so I cover it up.

Though a majority of the women indicated that doing their nails was an important staple in their beauty regimen, there were a small handful of women who said they don't care about their nails and or don't do them at all. Lola

simply said, “I don’t do those” when asked whether or not she did anything with her nails. Haley had similar remarks when she said, “I hate fingernail polish, last time I wore it I got married. I never liked it.” When asked about nails, Alida talked about how she does put nail polish on but doesn’t go and get her nails done. She said, “I always keep a clear coat usually because I like my nails short to type and do things. I do my toes, but I don’t get a pedicure.”

Similar to the other women, Valerie doesn’t use nail polish, but she has a more specific reason as to why. When asked about doing anything with her nails she responded,

No, absolutely not. I do not paint my nails hardly ever because of the chemicals. Melaleuca makes some non-chemical nail polish, but what you have to put on to take it off is pretty toxic stuff, and so I just figure I have nice big strong white nails, so I just cut them and they just grow out until I cut them again.

Whether the women indulged in doing their nails or not, it was important to ask about during the interviews to gain insight into other beauty routines in the lives of women that might play a role in how they experience aging.

Hair. Apart from nails, women were also asked about the beauty regimen of hair. Surprisingly, there were several in-depth responses from women regarding hair and aging. Responses around hair were that women routinely dye hair to fight greys, they home dye, or they stopped dyeing for economic reasons.

Several women indicated that they routinely dye hair to fight greys. Of the 17 women, 15 of them currently dye their hair. Of those 15, 10 women gave specific durations between hair appointments which emphasized the importance of the durations in order to keep greys at bay. The first classified time frame for hair dying was every four-five weeks, for which six women identified as their dying routine. The second respondent time frame was dying hair every six-eight weeks, for which four women acknowledged as their dying routine.

Many women indicated that their rationale for such frequent dying was the attempt to combat aging through the masking or hiding of grey hairs. Since hair is a socially constructed feminine quality, and synonymous for playing a large role in the identity of a women, it was important to learn more about why they dyed it.

Liz discussed her early onset white hair and how that changed how she dealt with and perceived her hair in terms of it becoming a part of her overall look that she is proud of. She said,

Listen, I have had white hair since my mid-twenties, and I kept a chunk of it at the front like Jay Leno, and I don't even notice it anymore, but some people that meet me for the first time, they ask me if it's real and stuff like that. I could dye it because I dye the rest of my hair, but I decided not to because it adds character.

The experience of Liz in having hair turn white at a young age is not a singularly shared one. Jacquelyn also had early onset greys and whites at a young age. When asked, she discussed how her hair color change affected her, and how her friends tried to advise her through it. Her response was,

My hair started to turn white at 27, and it's very white right now, but a long time ago I had a friend say to me "you're too young to have grey hair," and another friend said "you know, if you're going to have grey hair, don't have long grey hair because that looks like crap," so "I'm like ok...lots of opinions," and I said, "thanks for being honest." My friends told me to cut it off or dye it. I've been coloring my hair since I've been in my 20's.

Michele also had an in-depth response when asked about dying hair, by talking about how it has been an indecisive beauty routine for her. She said,

I started dying my hair when I was 29, ok, and then I quit and let it grow because it was all colors, because I was doing it myself and I thought I had to stop this. So I let it grow out. Probably for about a year it was really grey, and it did bother me. So, I decided to color it again. So I decided to go back. The grey yeah...if anything with aging that would be something, I am sensitive to that.

Like Michele, Samantha also noted that routinely dying hair to hide greys made her feel old. Ana and Alida shared similar sentiments toward dying hair when Ana said she is, "fighting grey all the time," while Alida said, "ooooh yes [laughter] I'm a fanatic about the hair as well, and the minute there's a grey coming in there was coloring."

Starting with pressure from her daughter, Haley started dying her hair as she began to age, and now is hooked into the look of not having any greys show. She mentioned, “my daughter pressured me with the hair dye, and I’ve kept it up, and I don’t want my roots to show, and so now my hairstylist and I are changing the colors.”

When asked about hair, two of the women talked about how they do dye it routinely, but both are working toward either letting it grow out naturally or fade in hopes of “aging gracefully” or purposefully changing the dyed color to not look “artificial.” Nicole showcases this when she said,

I am completely naturally grey but I don’t wear grey hair. I dye it every 5 weeks. The grey hair makes me feel and look tired. Interesting you should ask this, because I’ve been going grey since middle 30’s, and this Saturday, I am going in and talking to my hairstylist and see how to gracefully to get out of dark brown hair. I am excited, I think it’s time because you can’t be 80 years old and run around with dark black hair; it goes back to trying to age gracefully.

Kari also discussed the changes in hair dye color she has made to avoid looking “artificial” at an older age. She said,

I dye my hair and experiment a little with color, and I have actually gotten lighter because my natural hair is much darker, and the older you get, darker hair isn’t the best because it looks artificial like an older women with dark hair, but over the years I’ve lightened it. I like to change styles.

One of the most in-depth and interesting responses when asked about hair was from Valerie. She elaborated not only on what type of dye she used and why, but why she dyes her hair and how she is currently thinking about letting it grow out naturally. She responded,

I look at how my mom greyed, and she just went really mouse-y brown for a really long time, and I don't want to do that. I love people with really silvery hair like my husband, and my hair hasn't been the darker brown enough for that to look especially good on me. My whole family has this little white patch, and because I have such angular features, I'll look like Cruella De Vil so I don't want that. When I color my hair, it's just a tint...I only put a semi-permanent dye in my hair and the stuff you have to mix with ammonia; I don't like because I don't like the chemicals in my hair, and I'm overdue right now. In my purse there's this little wand that looks like mascara, and it's something new and it's my little vanity product and you just put a little on the hair to cover up greys. I got it from my hairdresser and I just use it to make my white hair blonde. I think, "ok, I'm just trying to be as gradual and natural as possible," but I am really white where it is light.

The final woman who went in-depth with a response about dying hair was Megan. She responded by talking both about dying hair and also cutting her hair in relation to stressful and chaotic events in her life. She replied,

Over the holidays I had a box of semi-permanent hair color, and it had been in the cabinet for a while so I tried it, and I wasn't used to seeing the dark hair again. Now that the color has faded a little bit I'm thinking of keeping it.

In terms of cutting her hair, Megan revealed she tends to cut it in times of extreme stress or when being faced with a sense of chaos in her life. She said,

When my life gets really busy and chaotic, like when my son was in Iraq and Afghanistan, I had to simplify the chaos, so I would cut my hair short. My husband let me know that he didn't care for short hair; he rarely said anything ever about anything about choices I've made but that was a clear one. Recently, I'm growing it back out again.

The response of Megan in relation to her hair cutting and dying in response to extreme stress or chaos in her life is important toward understanding how such events might play a role in the experience of aging. She continued her response to the question with,

The thing that has aged me the fastest in the last 9 years was having my son deployed to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once. The stress and worry about him being in war was overwhelming to me. As my worry increased, I noticed my face showed age more and more – the weight increased and so on. He has been out now for one year, and there was instant relief. The day he told me that he wasn't going to re-enlist was a joyful moment.

Apart from the vast majority of women who dyed their hair, there were women who dyed their hair at home or stopped dying for economic reasons. Responses regarding the economic cost of dying hair routinely, helps showcase how cost might play a role in how women deal with aging. Michele earlier talked about going back and forth with dying her hair over the years, and finally she decided to take an alternative route to covering up greys. When asked about hair, she said, "my husband does it [dye hair]; he's super. It's only like five dollars /vvvvvvvvvvvlk, and it is one reason I quit going to a salon because it

was like \$70 and I was like, no.” A similar response about the expensiveness of dying hair routinely at salons was given both by Melanie and Helen. Melanie still gets her hair colored at a salon, but a much more reasonable one. She noted,

I get my hair colored once a month and I started by going to a salon and have the stylist do it and stopped doing that for a while, because it was way too pricey, and then within the last year I have just figured I found someone that’s really good and very reasonably priced and I liked her doing it so that’s where I go now.

Helen used to highlight her hair frequently, but has stopped in the last couple of years. She responded, “I started coloring it around my mid-thirties. Four years ago I stopped coloring it...too hard to keep up and expensive.”

Valerie discussed earlier how she does still dye her hair, but she said that she hasn’t dyed it in a while for economic reasons. When asked if she would eventually go let her hair completely go, and stop dying it all together, she said, “eventually I will and originally I said I’ll answer that question again when I’m 60, and now it is close!”

Though different than the other responses given about hair dying, Vanessa’s take on hair as an anti-aging beauty regimen was equally interesting. She responded by discussing how she doesn’t dye her hair at all. Vanessa articulated that, “I don’t dye it,” and the biggest reason behind her not dying it is because she hasn’t greyed at all yet! She noted that she occasionally finds grey

strands, but it's among a sea of thick beautifully rick dark brown hair. Both learning how often and possible catalysts as to why women dye their hair, as well as how economics might play a role in hair dying, help shape understandings of what women specifically do about aging.

Clothing. Just as important as understanding how hair plays a role in what women do about aging is discussing clothing in terms of another socially constructed attribute associated with women. In terms of clothing, many women commented on the following: comfort, same style or positive change, purposeful clothing choices, and "age appropriate" clothing critiques.

Many women discussed comfort being their number one priority in relation to how clothing has changed for them as they've aged. Emilia's response was, "I wear a lot of trousers and clothes that go out of style like professional pants...over time it's about comfort and practicality and what's going to last." Megan echoed similar perspectives toward clothing when she noted that, "most of the time I'm in a jeans and tee shirt...it's moved to more comfortable." Haley also discussed being more inclined to purchase and wear comfortable clothing and even shoes as well. She even related her clothing preferences to online shopping in terms of convenience and ease. She explained it when she said,

I think in clothes, the change is more comfortable. I hate suit jackets because there's no give, and sweaters are great because there's more give to them. I also sew, so I have found patterns that are bigger and more comfortable. I don't need to have tight clothes. Shoes...they're lower now, because it's all about comfort and balance now. I've lost a lot of balance from the arthritis and nerves in my knees, so I need the extra support. I buy most of my clothes online from Lands' End, because I just click it and it shows up, and it's about the value. I buy something, and I want it to last and those clothes do. For shoes, I buy Dr. Scholl's and Clarks online; all the styles there are great. It all comes down to comfort, ability, and the ease of going online and shopping.

Aside from gearing clothing choices to be more comfortable and practical, women also responded that they either have the same style as they've always had, or a positive change in clothing choices through age. Both Jacquelyn and Valerie commented on how they basically think their style is the same as it has always been, and that they do not get rid of clothing as they have aged.

Jacquelyn showed this in her response when she said,

Yeah, I'm not a clothes horse. I have a lot of the same clothes I've had for years...sadly [laughter], but I do think at some point I really just need to dress more professionally. I do look at clothes in the store and think "those are old lady clothes and I don't want to wear them, and those are teenager clothes and I don't need to wear them either" and sometimes there's just not a lot of option. My kids have always been very honest about my clothing; they'll give me the thumbs up and thumbs down, and be honest which is fine. I'm ok with that.

Valerie's response, on the other hand, was two fold in that she does feel inclined sometimes to rid herself of the clothing she has worn for years, but has a

hard time letting it go. Her response provides insight into another possible way women deal with aging, which is holding on to items that remind them of their youth or past. Valerie said,

I would love to have Stacey London come to Cedar Falls and help me, but in fact there is someone in this area who does something like that, because I just feel kind of tired about my clothing, but yet I get attached to my favorite things, and so I don't clear them out all that much. I don't want to get rid of my clothes.

Some women noted that in terms of clothing, their preferences have changed for the positive as they have aged. Lola illustrated this well when she said, "I never used to wear dresses, but since I turned 50, I actually wear dresses occasionally, so that's new! My sister finds it awesome!" The idea of age playing a role in clothing choices is best represented by Melanie who responded,

I think it has changed for the positive. I'm much more aware of fashion, and veer away from kind of the middle of the road mature look. I think that the way designers approach mature women 50 and up as dowdy or staid. So I am more inclined to either feel very comfortable shopping with my daughter, or I just think I have more options because I do keep myself in shape, and again, it comes back to attitude. I just do, I think there are so many incredible beautiful women out there of this age, and they just don't know it, I really do. My heart just breaks when I talk with one, and it's like "god...you don't know how wonderful you are."

Melanie's positive outlook, not only on her own aging process in terms of clothing, but on other women, is a real testament to how important support is throughout the aging process.

Several women indicated that clothing choice was purposeful and associated with perceived impressions from others. The first type of purposeful clothing discussed among women was that of being more cognizant about what is chosen and how it might be seen by others. Helen commented on this when she responded, “um...I am probably more likely to wear long sleeves to cover up imperfections,” and when asked if it was associated with aging, she said, “I don’t know. I think it is because I am colder now than I used to be. It might be more subconscious than conscious.” Karen also spoke to a change in clothing, and even shoes as she has aged. She said,

I would say that I wear shorts less, and I don’t wear short skirts. One of my step-daughters had told me that because I was short (5’5”) that I should always wear heels to make myself appear taller. Well...in the last year I have decided I’m not going to do that anymore.

Emilia also touched on both shoes and clothing, but for clothing she almost provides a recommendation of sorts. She articulated that,

I feel like open neck sweaters are “younger” than a turtle neck; lighter colored clothes against the skin bring light up, so there are those things I think of. Also, with shoes, I don’t wear pointy shoes, those are good when you’re 20 but not at my age. My daughter jokingly makes fun of me for wearing crocks, but they’re comfortable.

Apart from being more cognizant about what is chosen and how it might be seen by others, the second type of purposeful clothing choice, was women

who indicated that they now choose clothing based upon if they are meeting with someone at work or if there is pressure to dress professionally. When asked if her clothing choices and style have changed as she has aged, Ana responded,

Yes, even since I've been here, and based on who I'm meeting with. I have to meet with a lot of people that expect you to wear nicer clothes, so I have changes come of that. It would only be on those days when I have meetings on a day like today; otherwise I like to wear jeans.

Similar to Ana's concern about dressing depending on who she is meeting with at work, Vanessa echoes similarities when she responded, "if I'm in court or meeting with an attorney or client, I always try to look professional, and it's my own interpretation of professional. It could be a really cool jeans outfit that has got gold embroidery." Kari also discussed clothing choices in terms of being a public figure, which lends itself to additional pressure to dress professionally.

She noted:

Yea definitely of course I love clothing, and I go for more of a conservative look always with an edge, a lot of jewelry and fun shoes, and my wardrobe on the weekends is much more contemporary I would say than what you'd see me wear in work. In my role, because I'm such a public figure, that I do think that during business hours I should be more professional, but I like clothes and I like different styles of clothes.

In the same vein of liking to wear different types of clothes, Liz replied, "I like to wear different young stand out types of clothes," when asked about her clothing style.

Clothing in terms of comfort, keeping the same style or changing styles for the positive over the years and purposeful clothing choices have all helped illuminate how beauty regimens can help explain what women do about aging.

Women also discussed clothing in terms of what they deem as “age appropriate.” The strongest response from a woman regarding what she calls “age appropriate” clothing choices was by Nicole who felt strongly about the association between age appropriate clothing and credibility. Once she mentioned age appropriate clothing, I asked her what that meant - and she said,

I would say the only thing negative about women and aging, as far as perceptions would be, is if a woman does not dress age appropriate. Credibility scale falls for me if they’re not dressed age appropriately. A woman in their 50’s probably shouldn’t be showing their cleavage in the media and probably should be watching the length of their skirt. Women in their 40’s and early 50’s, if they’re pregnant and wear the tight fitting clothes while pregnant, bothers me a little as far as credibility. [Interviewer: Has your style changed as you’ve aged?] Yes, in the last 10 years it has, I don’t show cleavage anymore...It’s just not cute [laughter]. ... I always have worn very tailored clothing because of my work career, and I still continue to wear tailored clothes, just standard tailored suits in the workplace. When I’m not in the workplace, I wear jeans, and I wear them tight like I always have. I don’t know how appropriate that is but I do cover the top of me more than I used to [covering up cleavage].

Similarly, Emilia made a comment, which highlighted her perceptions of other women on how much skin they show in relation to age. She said, “it has changed over time, some people my age should not be showing off so much skin

because they have varicose veins and it is God's way of saying 'stop showing it off.'" Both Nicole and Emilia spoke to their perceptions of other women in terms of clothing and age and what bothers them or loses credibility with them.

Michele commented on how she chooses clothing specifically to dress more like her age or age appropriate. She replied,

Um...yeah I am kind of...I'm careful of the clothes I pick. My size there are zippers clear down here [indicates belly button] and the skinny legs. I have a hard time finding pants, but I'm conscious when it comes to that because I don't want to look like I'm 25 when I'm 57.

Alida commented specifically on her own style and how she does not want to dress too young or old. She also humorously reflected on her budget for clothing when she said:

I try not to dress too young. With the fashion magazines and stuff, this is good for 20's, this is good for 30's, and so on down the line and I don't want to dress too young, but I don't want to dress too old. Too young would be me sporting a mini, and no more minis for me [laughter]. To old is me thinking of my grandmother like the very boring nice shirts and pull overs but very conservative pants...and this girl has never been conservative. I like to push the line. I have a champagne taste on a beer budget. I love good quality clothes and I like to look like I'm dressing up.

Having a high taste for clothing on a limiting budget is important to understand for Alida when it comes to attempting to find the middle ground between dressing "too old" and "too young." This really highlights a struggle that seems to be apparent in some of the women in terms of being frustrated

with how to find middle ground for clothing choices. This seemed also the case for Valerie who spoke to not liking styles that are in the stores because they don't represent trying to find the middle ground. She said,

Sometimes I just don't like the styles that are out, and I really have to look hard to come up with something, and so it's not been something that I've studied you know, and I know what I like when I see it but I have to work at putting stuff together.

Uncovering the perceptions of women regarding perceived significance of beauty routines (hair, nails, and clothing) provided new insight into the conversation about aging. These results help identify alternative ways in which women discuss aging in relation to socialized beauty routines.

Alternative Ways of Working Through Aging Insecurities

Apart from disclosing product usage, experience with products, and beauty regimens, a theme emerged of alternative ways of working through aging anxieties that several women discussed. Two sub-themes arose from women's responses: (1) healthy lifestyle changes related to exercise and food choices, and (2) poking fun at getting older. A majority of women agreed that healthy life style changes like exercising and being more cognizant of food, was the number one way in which they have dealt with getting older besides using products.

Exercise. The first sub-theme of exercise will be highlighted using multiple exemplars. Liz illustrated this theme well when she said, “I work out as much as I can when I can.” Samantha responded similarly, in terms of general exercise regimens:

I am more concerned about health simply because of my family history, and so I am trying to exercise more and drink more water and try to do all of the things that they say that are healthy lifestyle changes.

Many of the women described their specific exercise routine. Lola said, “I exercise every day, mostly walking. I stay active.” Similarly, Michele noted that, “on a good week, four days. Otherwise, it’s two to three days a week. I’m going to say three days a week. I also line dance, couples country dancing. It’s good exercise.” Michele offered a glimpse into how she makes exercise fun by line dancing with her husband often. Nicole discussed her exercising routine when she identified that, “in the last two years I’ve been exercising three times a week,” which was echoed similarly by Karen who mentioned “...I work out at the gym probably five times a week, and that’s both weight training and cardio.”

Apart from specifics in terms of a workout regimen, two women mentioned participating in yoga as a “phenomenal” exercise that allows for “calming and centering” of self. Kari was the first to mention yoga as an aging stress outlet when she said,

I do yoga and I have found yoga in particular is the best thing I've ever done from core strength to balance, and it's just incredible. Yoga is amazing, and I do more of a power yoga, which is a little bit more of a workout, but it's phenomenal. When I was doing yoga about five days a week before I started this job and my daughter came home and did it with me and I could do a handstand, she was just dumbfounded [laughter], but I couldn't do that today because it takes discipline. Unfortunately this job doesn't give me a lot of free time.

Congruent with Kari, Alida also discussed how important yoga is in her life in terms of dealing with aging and life pressures in general. She said, "...yoga is the most amazing exercise in the world. It helps you calm and center yourself. In the job that I work with [laughter] you can lose your mind in a second."

Other women, who talked about exercising as a way to deal with getting older, gave more in-depth responses of the role of exercise in their lives. Megan was a good example of this when she mentioned how it helped with her pain associated with her rheumatoid arthritis:

I exercise every day, and that has been a struggle. I'm always happy when I'm done. We have a beautiful treadmill in our basement, and then going three flights of stairs just to get to the treadmill! Once I'm there I'm fine, and then I feel good after. I have always been really active, but as time has gone by, I got more sedentary and stagnant. I realized that I was in a lot of pain, and exercise helped.

Another example of an in-depth response revolving around exercise can also be seen through Melanie's response. She discussed her exercise regimen in

relation to a major medical event that reinforced her will to workout. She said, “...well definitely striving to stay healthy. I had a double mastectomy six or seven years ago so I have always been healthy and that was a good wakeup call, so I work out three or four times a week.”

A similar in-depth answer was also given by Emilia, who not only talked about the role of exercise in her life, but touched on her underlying reasons for her gym selection and the constructed pressure associated with aging and being physically fit. She responded with,

I take a morning exercise class four or five times a week women who are teaching it are close to my age, and I purposefully chose a gym that doesn't have a lot of 20 something year olds, because first of all, the older women are great role models. They're all women in their 50's who are in great shape, and also we're in it together. You see women in their 50's who are all working together to have a healthy lifestyle. I do feel pressure, though, from that perspective, to be physically fit, and I believe in the mind body connection so I understand it, but there is pressure at my age to be physically fit. If I feel better and take care of myself, I'll look better.

Insight was provided into how women leverage exercise for physical enhancement, stress relief, and medical purposes. Such insights provide increased understanding of alternative ways in which aging is dealt with.

Healthy food choices. The second sub-theme of healthy food choices was mentioned by many women as being important toward dealing with aging.

Many women discussed being more cognizant of food choices as an important

facet toward healthier lifestyle changes. Some women commented on particular food choices as being a priority. Melanie commented on working toward a healthier lifestyle through food when she noted, "...trying to eat fairly well I mean I'm not a vegan or vegetarian, but I think I do a pretty good job of being reasonable, but not excessive."

Megan spoke to being cognizant of food in a more in-depth way by discussing her background with food as well as her current relationship with it. She said:

I come from a meat and potatoes fat eating family, and it's been a struggle to adjust the mind to, "wait a minute, you can't do that all the time. It's a lazy way of eating." Adjusting the mindset to more healthy, like doing stuff for bone health, fruits and vegetables. I've also noticed that my digestion is completely different than it was in the olden days. We talk about that a lot during lunch here to, but I have to be careful about what I eat. I used to never care about drinking soda and coffee, and now I have to limit those things because they have bad effects down the line. I eat a lot less now a days but it doesn't seem to affect my scale going down. When I was young, I used to be able to eat whatever I wanted to eat and do whatever I wanted to do and never gain weight, but now it is like everything sticks with you.

Emilia's response was similar to Megan's in terms of realizing the importance of healthy food choices as another way in which to deal with age. Emilia discussed food choices with respect toward working to avoid health ailments down the road when she said,

I am more conscious about food choices; you are what you eat. Also, I went to the doctor last week, and she made sure to check my cholesterol and looked at my eye sight, so just going into the doctor really makes me think about age. Talk about pressure of realizing age, because of the decreased amount of estrogen, there are higher risks for cancers and other health problems. Doctor visits are getting much more serious and checking for more serious potential issues, which reinforce age awareness.

Women who indicated that they were working toward a healthier lifestyle in terms of exercise and food choices, provides more insight into what else women do to confront their own aging.

Poking fun at aging. The third sub-theme of poking fun at aging was solidified by some women who made it a point to tell me that poking fun was a definite response toward alternatively dealing with aging. Vanessa talked about poking fun at aging in terms of how she used age to act as a humorous placeholder for inadequate technological skills. She said, "I use age as an excuse for not being tech savvy, and I use it jokingly to explain to people why I don't understand what they're talking about why I forget things." Similar to Vanessa, Haley also poked fun at aging when she replied,

I poke fun at getting older all the time. I know I'm old; I am excused I don't have to do this anymore. I make cracks about being old all the time. I make fun of my dad getting old all the time too, and we both joke about it. I want to grow up and be an old lady, so I can tell people off. Those old crotchety ladies who can say whatever they want - I can't wait to be that lady in my 70's.

Apart from Vanessa's and Haley's perceptions of how they poke fun at aging, Megan's comment is the perfect example of how to inject some humility into a somewhat taboo topic among women. When asked what she does to help deal with age besides using products, she said, "...being able to laugh about it. Shit just doesn't hang in the same spots as it used to, it's just the reality [laughter]."

Understanding what women do about aging related to anti-aging product use, anti-aging beauty regimens, and alternative ways of dealing with aging insecurities illuminate answers for research questions 3 and 4. Other responses, not present enough to be considered sub-themes, included getting better sleep, reducing sun exposure, traveling more, using cleanses and or enemas, and taking vitamins or prescribed medication.

Women's Overall Recommendations Regarding Aging

The fourth and final category of responses was women's overall recommendations regarding aging. This final category, although not tied directly to any of the research questions, illuminates additional perspectives on how to deal with pressures associated with aging. In terms of women's overall recommendations to other women, responses fell easily into three themes:

embrace yourself and acknowledge that beauty is fleeting, stay active and healthy, and keep a friend circle and stop being so mean to each other.

Embrace Yourself and Acknowledge that Beauty is Fleeting

The first theme of embracing self and acknowledging that beauty is fleeting was touched on by the most women in response to the question concerning recommendations to others. The first example to highlight this is from Samantha when she said,

I think it's the same thing I tell my clients, you've got to like yourself. You gotta just like yourself for who you are and that you are the most beautiful you there is. Once you can embrace that, that you are beautiful just the way you are right here right now, you'll be happy. Beauty isn't just about the face and body, it's who you are; it's your character; it's what you bring to the table in relationships. And you gotta like yourself, and once that happens, then all the other pressures fall away. They really do.

Keeping Samantha's response in mind, other women also touched on self-acceptance and embracing age. Kari also spoke to this when she noted that, "I think we have to start getting comfortable with who we are and that the aging process is a natural thing...if you're comfortable with who you are, then it's all good." Vanessa also spoke to embracing self by recommending the use of humor: "if you can't laugh and if you can't laugh at yourself, you need to go away, because I am a perfectionist at laughing at myself. Why take it so seriously?" Jacquelyn also recommended:

I think that you just need to find yourself in a good place, and I think that a lot of women do as they age and they fight it a little bit, especially if they are a little vain, but I think a lot of women I know are in a good place when they get to be in their 40's and 50's - more comfortable with themselves, and families, and careers, and so their life becomes a little easier for them. You either work hard and struggle to try and be somebody you're not, or you say "screw it, it's who I am and I accept what I look like." I still think you should brush your teeth at least twice a day [laughter]. I think you should try to take care of yourself, and it's important that you don't let yourself go, and I don't think you should do that, but I also think that as you age, you just need to accept it gracefully.

Still within the framework of embracing self, a couple of the women spoke to a positive shift in mindset when it comes to embracing age. This was seen in the response by Valerie who noted, "I am going to feel younger and I do feel younger." This positive mindset was similarly echoed by both Melanie and Jacquelyn. Melanie recommended it not just in terms of embracing self, but also in relation to being flexible in values and beliefs. She said:

You're only as old as you think you are...I think it is being able to separate yourself at times from dogma or training or values you grew up with, and if you have found that they aren't held true. Also being comfortable disagreeing with popular opinion, and I think it's a journey for a woman to feel secure in their own skin, and when you see one, it's an inspiration.

Jacquelyn recommended embracing self when she suggested, ".....age is what you make of it...it is what it is." Nicole also recommended embracing self with regards to internalizing encouragement received from others. She said, "I'd love to tell them what my husband and parents tell me - that 'you are beautiful'

and 'go with it and wear it well.'" Similar encouragement was also mentioned by Alida who recommended,

You can only please yourself when you look in the mirror; you need to be kind and I struggle with that to. My husband looks at me and tells me I'm not fat, that I'm beautiful...I feel that it's harder [the aging process], but yet I get encouragement from my coworkers who have turned 50, and they're a little older than me; I get encouragement from my husband, but then I look over at my mom who is 71, and she does not look 71...also my 94 year old grandmother doesn't look 94.

Aside from embracing self was also the recommendation of acknowledging that beauty is fleeting and that aging is going to happen regardless. Helen spoke to this by recommending to "just let it go, it's going to be what it is." Similar sentiments were shared by Kari who discussed her upbringing in relation to embracing self when she responded:

I was also raised with a father way before his time and so was my mother. She was a career woman before it was big, but at the same time you know my dad taught us that beauty is fleeting, it really is. You can do all the stuff you want and you choose to date or be in a relationship with someone where that's important, there will always be someone there to take your place, no offense.

Stay Active and Healthy

The second theme of recommendations for those who might be struggling with aging pressures was to stay active and healthy. This was a common recommendation by many of the women. Staying active was touched on by Michele who said:

Workout...I think exercise of some type is very important. I think it's real important like I said to exercise and eat right, because I see so many people my age that are just so unhealthy, and ... I'm glad that I've taken care of myself.

Staying active was important to many of the women as was being healthy.

Michele also recommended, "probably eat good; I guess I eat pretty decent."

Ana's response to asking about recommendations for other women was,

I would also say do try to get healthy. I think that has been the best helper to me. You feel so much better, you've got more energy, and I do some research and read books and things like that nonstop, but I do like to get a background on things that will help with staying healthy.

Another facet of recommending health as a priority were women who provided specifics in terms of things they have done personally to set an example of what it means to be healthy. Karen said that for about 20 years she has been, "taking supplements like a multivitamin, calcium, and fish oil are good things to help protect your health." Furthermore, Kari discussed what healthy means to her when she stated,

I've tried to cut out as much processed food as possible, it absolutely makes a difference because I don't eat a lot of bread and processed food. I eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and I think I could almost be a vegetarian, and I don't eat a lot of meat anymore.

Valerie's recommendation for other women, who might be struggling with aging pressures, touches on other healthy lifestyle choices. She recommended:

To take care of your health inside, and just like you would make deposits in a bank account, make deposits in your health account...eating healthy, getting the junk foods out and sugar, white flour, eating more whole grains. Some people, it would be helpful to do away with wheat, which I have. Just being more conscious about what you put in your body. I'm not a huge exerciser, because I'm very active anyway, but I'm not a class person so I'd rather just do it on the fly, but exercise is very helpful, and sleep.

Stop Being So Mean To Each Other

The final theme which many women spoke to in their recommendations was that women should keep a friend circle and stop being so mean to each other and instead - be each other's advocates. Some of the women do this through their current friend circles, noting that as a recommendation for other women. Lola said, "keep your friend circle strong," which echoes Vanessa's response when she said:

Never lose touch with friends...if you move, find really good girlfriends, and I don't have those here, and I really miss that. I have a client who I did her divorce and she moved to Minneapolis, and I watched her

absolutely bloom when she moved there and made new friends. Every year I go up and spend one day with her and her girlfriends, and it is frickin' fun, and I so miss my girlfriends because they're in different parts of the country, and you still have them as friends but you don't get to do that interconnection thing. You don't go places together, you don't shop, you don't call them every other 15 minutes - there's so much I miss about my girlfriends. My girlfriends usually just joke about me not having grey hair, which has been fun.

Melanie also touched on the importance of a circle of friends, when she recommended, "I think it's having a support system or sisterhood, a few key women that you can really be yourselves with."

However, several of the women recognized that women can be mean to each other, and that there is posturing for other women. Kari replied:

I think we try to do it more for other women than ourselves...I think it's for women why we use the anti-aging things. Part of it's for myself, but sometimes it's for other women [use of anti-aging products]; it's like a social game. I think men's expectations are lot lower than we think. Even if you look at your body you know, I'm to the point where I can walk around naked, because at 52 you can do whatever, but being with a man for 30 years and having a great marriage, I was not as free with my body even around my husband, even though he would look at it and say "you're gorgeous," but I think we're much more critical of ourselves than others see us.

Liz also touched on the idea of posturing, and went further by recommending that women stop being so mean to each other in relation to aging.

She said,

Look, we as women have to stop being so mean to each other! We judge other women, and it seems like we're almost in competition with other women most of the time! That type of attitude gets projected onto children, and we just have to stop being so mean to each other. We're all in it together.

Liz's recommendation of getting the women to acknowledge that "we're all in it together" really underlies all of the recommendations overall. Emilia summed up most all of these recommendations for women as they age, when she stated:

I think if you feel good, then the rest doesn't matter. I do think that being in good health and taking care of yourself and working out, eating healthy, being around positive energy people is important. My perception has changed totally, and things that I would have gotten worked up over at 20 are not that important anymore. I appreciate wiser people now.

Other recommendations from the women were to stay out of the sun, get better sleep, try to find ways to lessen the stress load, seek therapy for self-esteem building, appreciate others, keep face moisturized, and learn to reconcile with death.

The recommendations to other women potentially dealing with aging pressures showcases coping mechanisms and various facets of support suggested by the women as ways to work through aging pressures. Understanding this is important in realizing how these women's personal aging experiences shape their recommendations for others.

Overall, the categories and subsequent themes and sub-themes of views of aging, influences on the views of aging, what women do about aging, and women's recommendations on dealing with aging answer all research questions posed and provide a better understanding of women's aging experiences.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study was done to gain insight into the lives of aging women. The results of my research provide a contemporary and intimate look into the multiple ways in which women process and experience aging. This chapter covers a summary of the findings, connections to literature in the field, a discussion of the limitations, and directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Four major categories were explored through this research: women's views of aging, influences on women's views of aging, what women do about aging, and overall recommendations to other women regarding aging.

Women's Views of Aging

The first category focused on were women's views of aging, which produced a breadth and depth of responses. Many responses revolved around a time when in which the women realized their appearance was changing. Through this retrospection, women provided an intimate look at the evolution of their aging experience and a glimpse of where it all began for them. Women discussed having physical aesthetic "ah-ha" moments like early onset white hair, skin changes, and the aftermath of weight fluctuations. Furthermore, women

discussed being momentarily disturbed by pictures of self and the challenges associated with accepting one's age.

One of the more notable results from this study revolved around responses of women who realized their appearance was changing through looking at pictures of themselves (current or old pictures and comparing appearances). With the drastic changes in technology, posting and viewing pictures of oneself online has never been easier to do – or more accessible. Moreover, such pictures are often stored in social media sites such as Facebook. Within a couple of clicks, a user has the ability to reflect on past pictures and draw comparisons between current and past images of self. According to writer Hulick (2013), there are, “300 million or more photos are uploaded each day to Facebook” (p. 14). I believe there to be an association between the simplicity of capturing and uploading an image, and women referring to the significance of looking at images of themselves as indicative of the realization of age.

Due to normalized social photo sharing and uploading online, I believe there is a higher probably that women *will* see pictures of themselves to reflect on. Research done by Ancu (2012) looked at the use of the social networking site Facebook among adults 50 and over, and notes that this demographic (50+) is rapidly jumping on board with the use of social networking sites. This increase

in usage helps explain how the use of social networking sites (ex: Facebook) provide easy access for women to reflect on images.

In addition to realizing they were aging, women also discussed their *concerns* about aging. Responses showed that there was either a very high concern for physical or mental health, or no concern at all. Many women expressed concern for physical health (ex: potential limitation or loss of ability and/or mobility). This concern might be explained by acknowledging the major role mobility plays in autonomous and independent living. According to mobility researchers Schrack, Simonsick, and Ferrucci (2010), “the capacity to walk independently is a central component of independent living” (p. S329). I believe the potential loss of independence underlies the responses of women concerned about the loss of mobility and physical health. Conversely, there were women who indicated that they were not concerned at all about a decline in physical health. A potential rationale for this discrepancy in responses is that some have accepted aging as inevitable, and therefore, do not stress or vocalize concern about the potential negative repercussions of aging - including loss of mobility.

Aging concerns aside, when reflecting on their own internalized views of aging, some women indicated that they did not feel or notice their age much, or

believed that they look younger than their actual age. There are a couple of ways to contextualize these responses.

First, it helps to understand the influence of aging comments on one's internalized views of aging. A majority of women who shared this response indicated they had been told by others at one time or another, that they did not look their age. Since there seems to be a societal aversion to the actual number of our age (like the seemingly dreaded number 50), comments about *not* looking that number are internalized, and consequently desired. I believe that because these women have been told by others that they do not look their age, it reinforces the need to continue to purchase and use anti-aging products because they *perceive* that they must be working. There is a cyclical nature connecting comments about looking younger (ex: you don't look your age), and actions taken to encourage similar comments (ex: purchase of anti-aging products).

The second way to contextualize the response of women who believed they looked younger than their age, is to acknowledge ageist undertones in what seems like a genuine compliment. Revered feminist activist, writer, and speaker Gloria Steinem (who has always been open about her age) had a famous encounter with a reporter who, with best intentions, commented on her age. In her book *Doing Sixty & Seventy*, Gloria Steinem (2006) writes,

When a reporter kindly said I didn't look forty (a well-meaning comment but ageist when you think about it), I said the first thing that came into my head: "This is what forty looks like. We've been lying so long, who would know?" (p. 9).

Gloria's experience highlights the ageist remarks underlying the well-intentioned compliment. Similarly, a blog titled *Ageism Hurts* (n.d.) discusses the need for more public education and awareness on the effects of ageism, and noted that,

Even a basic interaction with an older adult, wherein the person's age is revealed, can trigger what seems to be an innocuous response: "Really? You don't look seventy-eight!" As though first - there is a way one must look at seventy-eight and second - that it is a compliment not to appear so. What does a seventy-eight year old look like, and is it any better or worse than looking five or thirty-five? (p. 1)

Understanding how these ageist remarks reinforce and perpetuate an ageist stereotype that a woman should not look her age nor should she want to, illuminates how the women in this study internalize such remarks as positive affirmations of a seemingly youthful appearance.

Influences on Views of Aging

The second category of responses revolved around women's views of aging. This category hoped to uncover how, if at all, the media affected women's view of aging. A majority of women indicated that they were not necessarily negatively affected by media representations of women and aging. On the

contrary, many women expressed positive affirmations toward the media by discussing how aging women have been showcased more frequently and positively in recent years. Moreover, it was indicated that celebrity women like Betty White, Hillary Clinton, and Meryl Streep serve as positive aging role models in the media.

However, many women did reference the media in the context of a perceived double standard in the contrasting representations of aging men and women (especially in the context of celebrities). The double standard was explained in terms of representations of aging men being depicted as attractive and accepted for aging, whereas women seem criticized for any outward signs of aging (greying of hair, signs of wrinkles, weight gain, etc.). This finding is supported by research on perceptions of youthfulness done by Sarwer, Grossbard, and Didie (2003) who have argued that, "...standards for attractiveness for men are less stringent and less connected to youth than they are for women" (p. 83).

Alongside associated aging influences from the media, women also discussed the influence (both positively and negatively) of spouses, children, and friends on views of aging. Overwhelmingly, women indicated that their spouse was not a source of pressure for them, but were instead supportive and

advocates for self-acceptance of aging. Children, however, were found to either poke fun at aging, be of no significant source of pressure, or provide compliments regarding age. Similarly, friends were found to either not be a source of pressure, serve as validation and support, or found to make remarks around aging aesthetics (greying of hair, appearance of wrinkles, fluctuations in weight, etc.).

Though the media was found to not play a very significant role in the shaping of aging perceptions, there was a commonality among most women in having a strong support system (spouse, children, and friends). I believe such support seemed to offset any potential negative mediated messages. My research shed light on how women experience aging in the context of potential implications from mediated messages and influences from a spouse, friend, or child.

Confronting Aging

The third category of responses revolved around what women actually *do* to confront aging. Women discussed their anti-aging product usage in relation to factors influencing their purchase (cost, ingredients, and endorsements or other women's testimonials), usage specifics (product name and duration of use), and

overall experience with the anti-aging products used (like it/love it or no noticeable difference).

One commonality I found very interesting was the importance of cost as an influencing factor toward the purchase of anti-aging products. Some women indicated that they are willing to pay more for “better” results, while others indicated that they are not willing to spend a lot on products but believe they will receive a comparable anti-aging benefit without breaking the bank. Understanding the perceived benefit of a product can help explain the perception that spending more increases anti-aging results. Aging researchers Muise and Desmarais (2010) surveyed 304 Canadian women on their perceptions of the anti-aging industry, and found that, “while the effectiveness of the anti-aging products may be suspect, women may still purchase them just in case they turn out to be effective. In other words, doing something may be perceived as a better strategy than doing nothing” (p. 135).

This research finding of Canadian women shows that regardless of price, women still seem to purchase anti-aging products for their perceived *potential* benefit, even if critical of the promises made. I feel the women in this study who purchase expensive products truly believe the benefit is much higher than their less expensive counterparts. Conversely, the women who do not spend much on

their products are critical of the price yet are still buying into the perceived outcome. This finding really speaks to the pervasiveness of the drive to achieve a youthful appearance and the differing amounts women are willing to spend to tap into perceived benefits of an anti-aging elixir.

Apart from price, I also found an interesting commonality among women with regard to the duration of product usage. There were several women who indicated that they have been using their product for less than a year, or for one to five years. I believe this shows that some women who use anti-aging products like to test them out for a short time period to see if they like them or not. There were also many women who had the same product for six to 10 years, or 11 to 19 years. I believe women falling into that duration of product use have found a product they like and have been loyal to it for a longer period of time as compared to those who seem to be testing a product for less than a year.

Moreover, there were five women who indicated that they had been using the same product for over 20 years. I find that duration of product use significant for two main reasons. First, I believe it speaks to potential product loyalty based upon perceived results or even affordability. Second, these women noted that they have been using it for that long because they wanted to get an early start on the anti-aging process. These women began combating age at least 20 years ago

with the purchase and use of an anti-aging product, which speaks to the pressure starting early to be pro-active about aging. I believe acknowledging duration of product use is important because it provides readers with an intimate look at just how long women in this study have been confronting aging.

Price and duration of anti-aging products were important to highlight to uncover individual use among women in this study. I also found women emphasizing the importance of looking at ingredients as a factor for purchase of anti-aging products. A common ploy used among anti-aging marketing conglomerates is to “mask” an everyday product such as a moisturizer or serum, with promises of anti-aging benefits. This strategic marketing cover-up can also be referred to as cosmeceuticals. The concept of cosmeceuticals is becoming more popularly researched because of its effects on consumers purchasing patterns. Furthermore, it provides a context for why some women in my study made it a point to look at the ingredients of anti-aging products.

The term cosmeceuticals has and will continue to draw the attention of researchers for both positive and negative reasons. Muise and Desmarais (2010) define cosmeceuticals as, “cosmetic products with biologically active ingredients purporting to have medical or drug-like benefits. Often, these products are marketed as having anti-aging effects” (p. 127). A majority of women indicated

that they looked for ingredients on the anti-aging product because of sensitive skin concerns. Because of this, I believe that these women are being more critical consumers of the anti-aging products they are buying, and not totally buying into the cosmeceutical promises being made.

The final important commonality in terms of confronting aging was women's responses toward their experience with the anti-aging products used. A majority of women expressed that they either liked or loved their product. I believe this sentiment toward their product might help explain why so many women have used anti-aging products for long durations of time (10-20+ years). If a woman believes (ex: through either other's comments of her appearance, or positive self-talk/reassurance) that her product is working, it reinforces her appreciation of the particular product which increases the likelihood that she will continue to loyally use it.

Aside from product usage and experience, women also reported on their anti-aging beauty regimens as ways to confront aging. There were three main topics discussed among women in relation to anti-aging beauty regimens: nails (having a routine manicure/pedicure/fake nails, painting occasionally, or don't do or care about nails), hair (routinely professionally dye hair to fight greys, the use of home dye, or stopped dying for economic reasons), and clothing (comfort,

same style or positive change, purposeful clothing choices, and “age-appropriate” clothing critiques). Beauty regimens discussed were based upon aesthetics socially prescribed to women such as nails, hair and clothing choices.

In contemporary U.S. society, correlations are drawn between women and their physical appearance. This translates into pressure for the maintaining of beauty regimens (hair, nails, and clothing) as a normalized product of womanhood. Previous research has looked at shows like *The Swan*, which only serve to reiterate the constructed association between women and physicality. The premise is best articulated by Pliagas (2004), who described the show as:

In legends, Father Time can be kind. An ugly duckling can miraculously grow into a lovely swan as in Hans Christians Andersen’s famous Danish tale. Unfortunately, in real life, it seems Mother Nature needs help of a team of plastic surgeons, cosmetic dentists, fitness trainers, therapists, and life coaches. (p. 50)

The show follows women who begin as “ugly ducklings,” otherwise known as women who do not play into the socialized construction of beauty regimens (hair, nails, clothing) associated with women. Throughout the show, the “ugly duckling” woman is given free plastic surgery procedures, facial injections, makeup application, hair extensions, manicures/pedicures, and a new fashionable outfit, only to emerge at the end as a so called “swan.” The downfall of the show is that it perpetuates a constructed archetype of what is socially

viewed as attractive and beautiful for a woman, which in turn creates pressure to live up to such standards to be attractive. Shows like *The Swan* might be a factor in aging insecurity for some women, what ultimately provides a greater understanding of how constructed beauty regimes might be enacted to combat aging.

I found that the most popular constructed beauty regimen discussed among the women in this study was the routine dying of hair to mask greys and cover-up age. Through in-depth interviewing of 36 women, ages 71-94, Clarke and Korotchenko (2010) talked with the women about their perceptions of dying hair to mask greys. They found that, “the majority of our participants disparaged the appearance of grey hair, which they equated with ugliness, dependence, poor health, social disengagement and cultural invisibility” (p. 1011). Pressure associated with the greying of hair, and subsequent dying to mask such greys, is a struggle almost every woman in my study dealt with frequently.

The covering up of greys is not an uncommon method of combating aging in contemporary U.S. society. I believe that because women are so socially tied to their aesthetics and appearance, most women in this study routinely dyed their hair to mask the greying of hair which is seemingly synonymous with unattractiveness.

Another beauty regimen that many women discussed, was the importance and significance of clothing choice on their approach to a more “youthful” attire. When discussing clothing and whether choices in clothing have changed at all over time, a majority of women indicated that they now choose clothing that errs on the side of comfort and accessibility rather than being flashy and uncomfortable. Comfort aside, some women strongly noted their distaste for older women who they feel do not dress age-appropriate (ex: not tight fitting or low cut). This was particularly interesting to me because it played into the recommendations section in terms of women who need stop being mean to other women.

I am also critical of the construction of what it means to dress “age-appropriately,” and what that even entails. Future research could look more in-depth into where women learn what classifies age-appropriate clothing, and what does not. Recommendations published by Diego Dalla (2008) outline “clever tips to look younger” through routines like make-up application, hair dye/color, and even what colors work best with certain skin tones to give a more youthful appearance. In her clothing section, she says, “after turning 40 years old, it is natural to wish for the use of specific tips and measures to look younger

or at least to be proud of your age, without the risk of looking more mature” (p. 649).

Her publication is a great example of how aging constructions are circulated and perpetuated, even though academia. I believe women indicated that dressing age-appropriate was important because I think in U.S. society, often times appearances (including clothing, makeup, hair, etc.) are associated (positively or negatively) with qualities such as trustworthiness, competence, and even approachability. Acknowledging how clothing in particular plays a major role for women in terms of self-presentation provides insight into how multifaceted confronting age is.

The overall importance of beauty regimens (hair, nails, and clothing) for women in this study illuminates the nature of social constructions and how they play a role in the everyday lives of women. Moreover, this study reinforces the carrying out of such social constructions, even among a middle-aged group of women, in terms of how those social constructions are used to combat aging (for example, masking the grey hair with dye).

Women also reported the alternative ways in which they work through aging insecurities separate from anti-aging product use. A majority of women noted that working toward a healthier lifestyle was the number one way in

which they have dealt with getting older. This finding parallels a similar finding in the aging study done by Muise and Desmarais (2010), who surveyed 304 Canadian women and found that “while participants discussed using products to reduce fine lines and wrinkles, they more often focused on how using these products, in conjunction with a healthy lifestyle, helps them to both look and feel better” (p. 235).

It seems as though in my study and others, women are taking a holistic approach to confronting aging, including the use of anti-aging products *and* working toward a healthier lifestyle. A study done by Sims-Gould, Miran-Khan, Haggis, and Liu-Ambrose (2012) conducted two focus groups consisting of 84 older women (average age of 69.6) asking them about their exercise routines and consistency with maintaining such routines. When asked about the importance of exercise in their lives, it was found that “many of the older women knew that exercise was a means to sustain or even improve health and well-being. Even those women who struggled with adherence had an elevated understanding of the importance and potential benefits of exercise” (pp. 291-292).

Though older than the women in my study, the underlying understanding of the importance of exercise later in life is still important to acknowledge. Other alternatives discussed by women in my study were attempting to get frequent

exercise, being more cognizant about food choices, and generally poking fun at getting older.

Recommendations Regarding Aging

The fourth and final category of responses encompassed recommendations to other women regarding aging. A majority of women recommended the embracing of self and the acknowledgment that beauty is fleeting. In terms of embracing self, some of the women recommended continually internalizing encouragement from others (ex: spouse, children, and friends). I believe that internalizing positive remarks or encouragement about aging can help reinforce positive self-image and worth. Furthermore, some women also discussed the embracing of self by saying “it is what it is” and that the aging process is, after all, inevitable.

Other recommendations were to stay active and healthy, keep a strong circle of friends throughout the aging process, and to stop being so mean to each other. Many of the women strongly recommended staying active and healthy in terms of getting adequate and routine exercise, and working to maintain a healthy and sustainable diet. This recommendation really speaks to the holistic experience of aging in relation to not just the appearance side, but making mental and physical well-being a priority.

Women also recommended to keep a strong circle of friends to lean on for support, and to stop being so mean to each other in terms of posturing and making comments to other women about their aging. This sentiment is shared by Huffington Post writer Juliette Fretté (2012) in her article deconstructing why women are so mean to each other. She writes:

As women, we need to stop fighting over the scraps that are left to us by those in power. Jealousy over looks is only a symptom of everything else we still do not have, one of which is the ability to shed beauty and body image as all-powerful dictators in our lives. (p. 1)

With many shares through Facebook, Twitter, and email, Fretté's (2012) article detailing why women need to stop being so critical and mean to each other should continue to be seen by a broad audience and shared among all.

Overall, recommendations became a way for the women in this research to reach out to other women who might be working to confront aging, and a way to project their hope for more bonding within and among the broader sisterhood of women. As one participant wrote, "we're all in it together."

Thematic Parallels to Outside Research

There are many bridges to be made between my research and that of past and contemporary literature on women, aging, and society. When discussing with the women the potential negative impact of mediated messages and images

on aging perceptions, I thought there would undoubtedly be a strong correlation between media portrayals and women's views of aging. Understanding the way in which the media reflects and furthers aging anxieties can be seen in the ever-changing showcase of what "beauty" is for the women to look to. Researcher Rosen (2010) describes the fluidity of "beauty" by saying, "beauty is powerful and essential. It is also unevenly distributed, difficult to maintain, and ever shifting in its standards, particularly in an image-conscious culture such as ours" (p. 38).

Our image-conscious culture is reflected through the media, especially in terms of the construct of beauty. Being continually exposed to such constructs can have an impact on our sense of self and perception. This assertion is reinforced by researchers Sarwer, Grossbard, and Didie (2003) who have extensively looked at the relationship between beauty and society. In an article deconstructing the term "beauty," they discuss product use among women by saying:

From the pages of magazines to music videos and television commercials, women are exposed to thousands of messages and images instructing them how to be beautiful. Cosmetics have become a profitable means through which women can attain beauty in Western society. (p. 89)

The idea that cosmetic use among women is based upon pressure from mediated messages to attain the societal constructed concept of “beauty,” parallels what I thought I would have found in terms of the women’s use of anti-aging products to conform to youthfulness, a subset of “beauty.” This assertion, however, was not the case. Instead, I found that although the women *are* consumers of anti-aging products for the perceived attainment of youth, the women did not believe mediated messages to have nearly the effect on their perceptions as I would have originally assumed.

Though the media can have a very persuasive impact on perception formation, the women in this study indicated that they have a strong support network (spouse, children, and friends), which I believe, offsets negative inferences from mediated messages about aging. According to Dijkstra and Barelds (2010), “individuals generally hold most positive views of the people they love the most – in particular their romantic partners – and least of the people they hardly or do not know” (p. 74). One of the most unifying responses across the board was the support spouses provided in helping their wives work through pressures associated with aging. Overwhelmingly, women indicated that their spouse was a source of support for them and had never made negative comments about their aging.

There is ample research done on the positive effects of spousal support on self-esteem and perception. In a fascinating study done by Oh and Damhorst (2008), 94 older married couples above the age of 60 took part in a survey focusing on body image and relational satisfaction. Their aim was to better understand how an “older person’s sense of body image or perception of their aging bodies may be influenced by their perception of how significant others such as a spouse view their aging bodies and appearances” (p. 43). It was found that the “husband’s evaluation of their spouses’ appearance had a positive relationship with their wives’ self-assessment of appearance” (p. 46). This research supports the importance of spousal support of self-perception, which played a large role in the coping of aging for the women in my study.

This finding is also echoed by research done by Herbozo and Thompson (2006), who studied the complementary nature of interpersonal romantic interactions for their influence on views of self. They found that more a woman is given positive compliments or feedback, the more she internalizes it (p. 259). It seems that the more the women in my study internalized the positive aging support and feedback from their spouses, the more unfazed they became by negative mediated messages or images regarding aging.

Apart from spouses, women also indicated that the media provided positive role models. The most commonly referred to celebrities were Betty White, Hillary Clinton, and Meryl Streep. In analyzing constructed cultural norms and women's body dissatisfaction, researchers Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, and Buote (2006) discussed the role of mediated celebrity images in shaping cultural norms of aesthetics. They argue that, "models and celebrities are powerful examples of the cultural norms for thinness and beauty in our society" (p. 213). Working from the framework of the role of celebrities in shaping cultural norms, it is easy to see the parallel between the women looking up to aging celebrities as role models. These women pointed to these celebrity aging role models and a strong support system to show how targeted negativity towards aging women can be confronted.

One of the major questions asked of the women revolved around recommendations they might have for other women potentially dealing with aging pressures. Upon deeper reflection upon results of this study, I was surprised to find that a majority of women recommended self-acceptance, yet themselves were consumers of an insidious societal anti-aging ideology. There seemed to be a contradiction between what the women were *recommending* about

aging, and what they were *doing* about aging, such as dying their hair and using anti-aging products.

There are a couple of different ways to interpret this discrepancy. First, it is possible that some of the women have re-framed how they think about aging expectations in terms of what they “ought” to look like. This is best articulated in an article by Tiggemann (2004) who notes in her research into women and self-acceptance:

As women grow older and inevitably move further away from the youthful and thin ideal, they adopt cognitive strategies such as lowering their expectations or reappraisal, which increases their acceptance of their aging bodies and more importantly, serves to maintain their self-concept and self-esteem. (p. 34)

It seems plausible that some of the women in my study are recommending self-acceptance because they accept themselves through lowering expectations or reappraising their aging expectations. They are genuinely promoting self-acceptance even though they are using anti-aging products, because they truly believe that they are embodying self-acceptance by purchasing products that they believe make them happier with their aging appearance. I believe it is cyclical in nature in that the reframing of product use, as a mode to increase self-esteem and acceptance, translates into the comfort of recommending self-acceptance to others.

The second explanation to the discrepancy is best understood when the media's influential power is broken down and examined. According to Strahan et al. (2006), "images and messages conveying cultural norms for weight and appearance are pervasive and arguably very salient to women" (p. 211). The messages sent through the media regarding women and aging are affecting women, even if they claim to have a critical eye for the messages sent. Despite being critical of the media by saying it is "misleading" or "limited," the women are still using anti-aging products which means that on some level, they *are* being affected by the messages sent.

The pervasiveness of mediated messages is best understood by beauty and society researchers Sarwer, Grossbart, and Didie (2003) who said, "regardless of how one understands the relationship between the mass media and these images, the images themselves are inescapable" (p. 85). A similar sentiment about the effects of mediated messages was noted by Strahan et al. (2006) who stated,

It may be that disagreeing with the norms will not always be enough to make one immune to their effects. There may be social contexts that communicate the cultural norms powerfully enough to influence even those who do not endorse them. Regardless of their own personal opinion, many people are painfully aware of the standards held by society against which they could be measured. (p. 225)

Thus the seemingly inescapable nature of media might be another way to explain why the women in my study who seem the most critical of the media still use anti-aging products.

Another way to understand this concept is through Muise and Desmarais' (2010) aging research, who found that, "caring about one's appearance and choosing to use certain products was not always perceived to be synonymous with accepting the media's messages about aging and beauty" (p. 134). This finding furthers the notion that the women are being critical of the media at the same time they are purchasing products, because they themselves do not believe there is a negative connection between the two. In other words, the women in my study promote being critical of mediated messages revolving around aging, but do not feel like that they are buying products *because* of such messages.

The third and final explanation is that the women might be so heavily indoctrinated into the "beauty myth" that they might not even be aware of the insidious nature of the media's negative messages communicated about aging. The term "beauty myth" was coined by feminist Naomi Wolf (2002) who writes prolifically on Westernized constructions of beauty, and how seemingly male dominated hierarchical positioning of attractiveness serves only to keep women subservient. In her book *The Beauty Myth* (2002), she argues that, "...women's

identity must be premised upon our 'beauty' so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem to the air" (p. 489). I am using the notion of beauty myth within the context of the impact of mediated messages (specifically targeted toward women) seen from a young age which might make a woman consciously aware of the messages sent.

This can be better understood by research from Rodin, Silberstein and Streigel-Moore (1987) who state, "...in fact, females' dissatisfaction with their bodies is so widespread that some theorists refer to it as 'normative discontent' ...which is evident throughout a woman's lifespan" (as cited in Strahan et al., 2006, p. 211). I think in all probability, the women in my study who recommend self-acceptance yet are anti-aging product consumers, are unaware of the deep impact and influence of mediated messages about aging. Since they are the target audience for the advertisements (white, women, middle-aged, middle-income, etc.), they are not consciously aware of a marketing ploy proliferating aging insecurities.

The women did not just suggest self-acceptance, however. They also advocated for maintaining a healthy lifestyle throughout one's life to confront aging. Broader implications of this finding can be better understood in conclusions made by Elavsky (2010), who studied 143 middle aged women

during a workout period of two years to analyze their self-perception toward attractiveness, post-working out for that duration of time. She found that, “middle-aged women can enhance how they perceive their condition and body attractiveness by continued participation in physical activity” (p. 862). The intersection of attractiveness and health can be seen through the women suggesting that exercise and healthy lifestyle changes were important key components in combating age. In hopes of attaining a youthful appearance aside from product use, the women emphasized the role of exercise in confronting aging, which plays into the idea of increasing attractiveness through maintaining physical attributes. Here again, we see the women being influenced by the pervasive notion of attractiveness and beauty, even though they did not recognize it as such.

Apart from what women are recommending about aging, I found it particularly interesting that the concept of “doing” gender arose throughout the results of my study. In “doing” gender, one enacts socialized or stereotypical qualities associated with a particular gender. For women, a common “doing” gender performance would incorporate being aware of physicality and appearance at all times. I believe the women in my study “do” gender in terms of the general purchase and use of the anti-aging products. In knowing that

appearance is highly regarded as important and socially synonymous with attractiveness, then the women in my study are “doing” gender by feeding the pressure for a youthful appearance through anti-aging product use.

Understanding the “doing” of gender in the context of the purchase and use of anti-aging products provides insight into how the socialized constructions of gender and femininity are enacted by the women in my study.

Alongside “doing” gender, the results of my study also highlight the concepts of “beauty work” and “social invisibility.” The notion of “beauty work” can be seen in the responses of women discussing their appearance enhancing daily beauty routines such as nails, hair, clothing choices. The underlying repercussion of “beauty work” is that it reinforces aging insecurities which can be seen in the way the women in my study continually dyed their hair to mask greys. As the women were dying their hair as an appearance enhancing mechanism for attractiveness, they were also at the same time subconsciously reinforcing aging insecurities through believing that somehow *leaving* the grey/white is unattractive.

The concept of “beauty work” is closely related to the concept of “social invisibility” and can be demonstrated through the results of my study. Social invisibility revolves around enactment of “beauty work” to make any signs of

aging more subtle, as to avoid invisibility associated with aging as a woman. As discussed, the women in my study used “beauty work” when discussing individualized beauty regimens and how they help combat aging. Body image and development researcher Dolexal (2010) discusses what she believes to be the bridge between social invisibility and the repercussion of enacting socialized beauty regimens by saying:

The visibility of the female body, as object, ironically engenders another type of invisibility: the female subject, in her efforts to fulfill the social expectations for her body, renders herself an anonymous, normalized subject, un-individuated and hence unnoticed and unobtrusive. (p. 357)

The women in my study utilized beauty regimens (hair, nails, clothing) in hopes of creating a subtle aging effect which reinforces the outcome of not wanting to be invisible through the showing of age. Overall, all three concepts -- “doing gender,” “beauty work,” and “social invisibility” -- relate to the results of this study, and should be further analyzed for their association with women and aging.

Implications of Research

On a theoretical level, this research adds to the body of knowledge on the intersection of women, media, and aging. More specifically, mediated messages about women and aging were found to not have a perceived impact on the

women's perceptions of self and aging. Understanding the role of familial (child & spouse) support in alleviating aging concerns was a common response among women.

There are two major recommendations I have which arose from the results of this study. First, from a media consumer standpoint, as the technology highway of the 21st century continues to evolve, it is critically important to question the messages seen and especially those regarding women and aging. The women in this study were critical of the media, but it takes a concerted effort to work to tune out mediated messages and constructions. Furthermore, remember that the advertising companies behind the messages have one goal: to sell products, not to make a woman feel better about herself. In fact, it is their hope that women will self-reflect and critique on "flaws" communicated as non-attractive (ex: wrinkles, greying hair, weight gain), and find an urge to become consumers to an unattainable and impractical ideal. Understanding the potential ramifications to society and self of the aging pressure put on women can empower women and provide for them tools needed to work through aging on their own terms and at their own discretion.

Second, I recommend that women try to keep a strong support system (spouse, children, and friends) in their lives, because this research has shown the

positive effect of having such encouragement and support. The influence of others can be paramount in the formation of our own self-perception and views of women and aging in general. For women in my study, it proved beneficial to keep that influence strong and positive.

Practical implications from this research include readers' ability to gauge other women's perceptions on aging through this research, and compare them to their own. Furthermore, women specifically can take away some sense of solidarity and deeper understanding of the experience of women and aging, especially when comes to the pervasive effects of media and outside influences (spouse, coworkers, children, friends, etc.). My favorite outcome of this research was the participants' recommendations, and in particular, the recommendation to embrace self and get comfortable with the aging process. This recommendation really resonated with me because as a 25-year old woman, I am starting to feel societal pressures to be *pro-active* about my aging as if I could actually *prevent* wrinkles and age spots? Not only do I not believe it, I have a fire within me kindled by the women's encouragement and recommendations of embracing self and being okay with the inevitable aging process. A quote that articulates this best is by Samantha who said:

I think it's the same thing I tell my clients, you've got to like yourself. You gotta just like yourself for who you are and that you are the most beautiful you there is. Once you can embrace that, that you are beautiful just the way you are right here right now, you'll be happy. Beauty isn't just about the face and body, it's who you are; it's your character; it's what you bring to the table in relationships. And you gotta like yourself, and once that happens, then all the other pressures fall away. They really do.

The recommendations have practical implications, because they serve as a reminder that beauty is a construction. We should work to create our own definition of what it means to be a beautiful aging woman. Furthermore, the recommendations are a great spring board for anyone feeling insecure about aging aesthetics, as a reminder that aging is a natural and inevitable process, and how we confront that process is completely up to us. However, we need to recognize that even by following these recommendations, we too are buying into the social constructed notion that we should maintain ourselves for as long as possible.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited to Caucasian women who were in their 50's, from the Midwest, married with children, and who currently use one or more anti-aging products, in order to get an in-depth look at the experience of aging for women. Furthermore, the choice of using a qualitative methodological approach to this research allowed for an openness of responses from women, and provided

a breadth and depth of insight into the aging experience. The downside of qualitative research, however, is that it is difficult to generalize on a broader societal level.

Future research might include additional methods to extrapolate different results. In addition, variations in age, ethnic, and sexual orientation groups could be studied for cross comparison. Moreover, results might prove different if done outside of the Midwest.

There were outliers in the participant pool who were still included in the overall research because of the perspectives they added to the study. One woman had never been married, one had never had children, and two were out of the age bracket (but not by much). One woman was just shy of 50, and one was just a little over 50. The discussed outliers were still vital to the research because they brought interesting perspectives; for example, the woman who was just shy of 50 brought in what it was like for a woman *about* to turn 50.

I also found it particularly interesting that some women discussed the perceived implications of the number 50 itself. The outlier who was *about* to turn 50, discussed her apprehension and nervousness toward accepting the number 50 as her biological age. It seemed as if there was an ingrained insecurity with the

number itself. Future research could focus on this particular component to see if there is an intersection between one's psychological perspective of the number 50, and the socialized construction of what the number 50 means. Do women innately feel anxious when approaching 50 or does the societal construct of what the number means promote anxiety? Are both happening? This would be an interesting area to uncover further.

Though I utilized purposeful sampling to homogenize the participant sample for increased richness of data, the participant pool became an aggregate of very similar women. Acquiring participants this way resulted in a very rich variety of responses and perspectives. Future research might focus on a different methodology to gain more participants with different backgrounds – like doing an easily distributable quantitative survey or questionnaire.

Limitations existed in the interview questions as well. I did not ask any questions about alternative forms of anti-aging services like plastic surgery - which one of the women in my study indicated they had done. Furthermore, through the audio taping of each interview, it may have made the participants uncomfortable and respond differently to questions due to the personal nature of the topic.

There are a multitude of avenues for future research on this topic. New studies could focus on non-Caucasian women who are much older than their fifties, not married, and not from the Midwest. Future research could also replicate this study but pull from a participant pool of non-heterosexual women about their experience with aging. Then, a comparative analysis could be done to see how, if at all, self-identified sexual orientation might play a role in a woman's aging experience.

Modifying this research to look at a much younger cohort of participants (20-30) would be extremely fascinating in terms of better understanding how, if at all, the media plays a role in fostering aging insecurities from a young age, and analyzing product use and duration as compared to older women. An article, revolving around health and beauty written by Levitt (2012) on *WebMD*, references aging perspectives of medical doctor Joshua Zeichner, the director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at New York's Mt. Sinai Medical Center. Dr. Zeichner acknowledges that he has seen a large increase in the number of 20-somethings that come to him for cosmetic plastic surgery or other anti-aging procedures like Botox. He also noted that he does not think the trend will be slowing down anytime soon, and in fact, he anticipates it to get much worse in the coming decades. This illustrates the need for research on this

younger demographic to uncover motives for pursuing anti-aging alternatives and product use.

Another avenue for future research could be focusing solely on men and aging, and doing a comparison of the results from this study. Taking an in-depth look at how men experience aging (greying of hair, wrinkles, etc.) might provide a glimpse into male self-assessment of appearance and perceived worth through the aging experience.

Literature on men and aging predominantly focuses on lowering levels of testosterone and sexual dysfunction, but lacks in knowledge on topics like understanding how, if at all, the media has portrayed aging implications for men. An example of research analyzing how men are targeted with regard to aging was done by Calasanti and King (2007) who deconstructed 96 anti-aging websites directed at men focusing on potential thematic correlations among the sites. They found that anti-aging advertisements about men were “based on hormones, opposing womanhood, forestalling aging, competing and performing in sexual and employment realms, allowing men to dominate those around them” (p. 357). There seems to be a definite difference in the anti-aging mediated

messages sent between men and women, and uncovering such differences would provide a voice for the understudied male population when it comes to aging.

Limitations and future research aside, if I were to go back and modify my research methods, I would include an older (in her fifties) co-researcher to help collect interviews. This is because women discussing such an intimate and personal topic might feel more comfortable relating to an older researcher. I would also consider using alternative qualitative methods such as focus groups of women. This might open the door for a multitude of responses and insights because the women can converse and discuss aging topics as a group, instead of individuals. My final modification would have been to add a specific question in the interview of *how much* each woman is spending on their product(s). Having that monetary information would make for interesting comparison within product use and perceived benefit.

Personal Growth

Research on this topic has been equal parts eye-opening as it has been saddening. Through interviews with women discussing their aging insecurities, it was difficult to not break my role as a researcher, and simply let them know how beautiful they are -- inside and out. I was extremely surprised to find that

women believe they are not affected negatively by mediated messages of aging. With the media being so pervasive and integrated into most of our daily lives, I assumed that women would have been affected by negative aging mediated messages. I understand now that having a strong support network of loving individuals (spouse, children, and friends) can be extremely beneficial in increasing self-esteem and self-perception in the midst of aging changes. Furthermore, support came in the form of other women as well. I found the ability of women to support each other through the aging process to be truly inspiring. When women discussed the role of having a strong friend network in their lives, it became clear that the women are not alone, nor do they want to be alone, in experiencing the ebb and flow of aging.

The most baffling question that arose from the results of this study, revolved around why women who recommended self-acceptance would themselves be consumers of anti-aging products. I was forced to take a step back and deeply think about why there would be such a discrepancy between what women were *recommending*, and what women were actually *doing* in the context of aging. Outside research helped to piece together explanations, but I still feel slightly unresolved in my interpretation. Might there be other underlying factors, pressures, or insecurities that I may have overlooked? Additional research

should be conducted to focus primarily on this discrepancy, and to pinpoint the rationale behind it.

Overall, this analysis of women's perceptions, motivations, and rationale behind anti-aging product use, has added to the body of knowledge on women and aging. Though this study resulted in in-depth responses, there are still fine lines and wrinkles yet to be discovered and understood about the experience of aging. I hope to use this research as a launching point for a multitude of future studies, especially on younger women and men. The responses of women in this study have provided me with a strong foundation of knowledge and understanding on aging that will be a reference point for me as I traverse my own aging experience in life.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Direct contact with participants

Hello. My name is Clair Williams, and I am a third year graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa working towards my Master of Arts in the field of Mass Communication. My longtime area of interest is the formation and performance of identity, and how women perceive themselves in relation to social pressures and constructions. I am looking to do a sit down in-depth interview with 15-20 participants in their 50's, who would be comfortable and open to discussing with me personal experiences regarding the purchasing, usage, and experience with anti-aging products and outcomes. Each interview should last between 30 minutes to 1 hour and if you do choose to participate in the study, you will have the control to withdraw from the study at any time. At no time will your identity be identifiable except to the researcher who is involved in the project. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Would you like to participate in the study?

In-direct contact with participants

Hello. My name is Clair Williams, and I am a third year graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa working towards my Master of Arts in the field of Mass Communication. My longtime area of interest is the formation and performance of identity, and how women perceive themselves in relation to social pressures and constructions. I am looking for married women in their 50's with children who use over-the-counter anti-aging products, who might be willing to do a sit down in-depth interview with me about their personal experiences regarding the purchasing, usage, and experience with anti-aging products and outcomes. Would you be willing to forward this information to women you know in their 50's who use such products?

I am writing on behalf of Clair Williams, who is a third year graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa working toward her Masters of Arts in the field of Mass Communication. Her longtime area of interest is the formation and performance of identity, and how women perceive themselves in relation to social pressures and constructions. Clair is looking for married women in their 50's with children who use over-the-counter anti-aging products, who might be willing to do a sit down in-depth interview with me about their personal experiences regarding the purchasing, usage, and experience with anti-aging products and outcomes. If you'd like to participate, please contact Clair at Clair@uni.edu.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
 HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
 INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADULT
 PARTICIPANTS

Project Title: Behind the Mask: An Analysis of Women's Perceptions and Rational Toward the Purchase and Use of Anti-Aging Products

Name of Investigator(s): Clair Williams

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa as part of the university's Thesis MA requirement for graduate students. The investigators, on behalf of the university's policy, require that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: To investigate and analyze the perceptions of women in their 50's toward the purchase and use of anti-aging products.

Explanation of Procedures: You are invited to participate in my research study investigating perceptions surrounding being a women in her 50's who purchases and uses anti-aging products. In-depth interviews will be conducted that may last around 30 minutes to one hour where I will ask questions related to purchasing behavior, aesthetic routines, and recommendations for others potentially dealing with aging pressures, followed by general demographic questions.

Discomfort and Risks: Risks in participation are minimal (inconvenience, time). However, I recognize that the self-reflection required for the interview about being middle aged might cause a person to further critique themselves.

Benefits and Compensation: There will be no compensation for participating in the study. Benefits include increased knowledge in the field of body image and

identity formation among middle aged women, and a further analysis of the potential effects of the anti-aging industry on middle aged women.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Clair Williams (Clair@uni.edu) or my thesis advisor Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter (April.Chatham-Carpenter@uni.edu) at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-5901. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

 (Signature of instructor/advisor)

 (Date)

[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]

Demographic Information

Actual age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

SES (circle one): Low Income Middle Income High Income

Place of employment & role there:

Number of hours work per week, on average: _____

Number of children: _____

Marital status: _____

Length of marriage: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The broad questions will be asked, using the following questions as necessary.

Interview Questions

1. What products have you used in the past, or currently, related to anti-aging?
 - a. How did you get started using an anti-aging product?
 - b. Tell me about a time in which you were making a choice to buy a product. What happened? What made you desire to buy this?
 - c. Do you have a product of choice?
 - d. Approximately how long have you been using your anti-aging product/s?
 - e. How often do you use your product/s?
2. Why do you use them?
 - a. What has your experience been with those products? Explain.
3. What are your views on women and aging?
 - a. How, if at all, has the media (television, newspapers, magazines, online advertisements, phone advertisements, etc.) shaped your perceptions of aging?
 - i. Can you provide an example/s of such media?
 - ii. What are your perceptions of such media?
 - b. Do you think the media portrays positive aspects of aging?
 - i. Can you provide an example?
 - ii. How did you formulate this opinion?

- c. Do you think the media portrays negative aspects of aging?
 - i. Can you provide an example?
 - ii. How did you formulate this opinion?
- 4. Do you think age matters in your workplace? or social relationships? If so, how?
 - a. How do you think others see you, in terms of your age?
 - b. Have you experienced any pressures, related to age? If so, what?
 - c. Was there ever a time when you realized your appearance was changing? If so, when?
- 5. Do you think age matters in your social relationships? If so, how?
 - a. How do you think those in your social circle/s see you, in terms of your age?
 - b. Have you experienced any pressures from your social relationships, related to age? If so, what?
- 6. How do you see yourself in terms of your age? Why?
 - a. How old do you think you look? Why?
 - b. Are you concerned about aging? Why or why not?
 - c. What have you done to deal with these concerns, if you've had them?
- 7. What kind of pressures related to aging, if any, have you experienced from the following? If so, can you recall any specific conversations?
 - a. Spouses
 - b. Children

- c. Coworkers
 - d. Friends
8. Describe your morning routine in terms of getting ready.
- a. Make-up
 - i. Who taught you the potential/purpose/rules for it?
 - b. Hair
 - i. Who taught you the potential/purpose/rules for it?
 - c. Nails
 - i. Who taught you the potential/purpose/rules for it?
 - d. Clothes
 - i. Who taught you the potential/purpose/rules for it?
 - e. Other face routines (eyebrows, waxing, etc.)
 - i. Who taught you the potential/purpose/rules for it?
9. How else have you dealt with getting older, besides using these products?
10. What recommendations do you have for other women who are in your age group and are dealing with aging pressures?
11. Anything else you'd like us to know about your experience with aging?