

BABY BOOMERS, AGE, AND BEAUTY

“This book offers an important contribution to the discussion on our approach to age and ageing. The author makes us understand that it is both the universal and the particular that determine how we behold beauty, and how these perceptions are generationally shaped.”

Prof Dr Roberta Maierhofer,
University of Graz, Austria

“Fluently written and sensitive to context, nuance, and the humor of her aging respondents, Woodspring’s book gives a lively tour of our disparate responses to the common urge to remain forever young, in a generation that lives longer than any before. She shows how masculinities, femininities, and gendered ideals of beauty shift with new divisions of labor, as age brings greater self-awareness of the limits of roles of the past. This book weaves into that analysis a rich array of insights from studies of art, taste, psychology, history, sociology, and feminist scholarship from many disciplines.”

Prof Neal M. King, Virginia Tech,
College of Liberal Arts and
Human Sciences, USA

“In the context of an ageing population, Woodspring reminds us of the tyranny of the omnipresent stereotypes of what successful (ie, glamorous) ageing looks like. This book is a timely reminder that the perspectives of older people are also of crucial value to current debates in this field and should no longer be ignored.”

Emerita Prof Nichola Rumsey OBE,
UWE, UK

BABY BOOMERS, AGE, AND BEAUTY

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

In memory of Nick Shipton
You taught me so much about beauty

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Image 1. Roman Egyptian funerary portrait.



Source: British Museum.

Notes: (AD 140–60; tempera on wood) Roman Egyptian funerary portraiture depicted people as they appear. Her face speaks of a lifetime of experience. The artist captured an intelligence in her eyes that must have been full of life. Are the lines between her brows from worry or a long habit of thought/contemplation? Of course, we see her through our contemporary eyes and we can only imagine her presence 2000 years ago.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PROLOGUE

My dinner companion looked up from her plate and questioned why I was researching and writing a book on aging and beauty. “I’m just aging. I don’t think much about it”, she said in a challenging tone. She went on to declare that she never thought about her appearance and rarely looked in the mirror ... she preferred to look and age “naturally.” There is much embedded in this statement, – choice, class, morality, history, technology, and vanity are among its riches. Despite my companion’s declaration, her hair was obviously well cut and styled with care and her face bore all the marks of being well looked after. This book is an exploration of those issues as expressed through our faces, or, from the neck up. How we age, our imaginings about who we are and how we look, how we present ourselves, and beauty are addressed in these chapters. These ideas are shaped by the culture we live in. Our notions about beauty and appearance are both universal and particular. There is always an interaction between our seemingly unique selves and our culture and society in both obvious and subtle ways. My dinner companion’s declaration was very much of her time and place.

INTRODUCTION

*I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.*

I am not cruel, only truthful. (Plath, p. 173)
Suddenly they could recognize themselves. They were shocked – some ducked their heads and turned away, came back for another look, ducked away again. Eventually they could hold their gaze on the picture, mesmerized, trembling with tension. Some slipped away, photo clutched to their chest, to find a private place for closer inspectionThese people were confronting their visual image for the first time, and were stunned not only by its novelty, but also by the potency of such an icon – a representation of themselves that perhaps carried the power of their soul; or essence, their deepest identity. (A description of the indigenous Papua, New Guinea tribespeople seeing their own faces for the first time. The Polaroid photos were taken by anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter. From Bates & Cleese, 2001, p. 53)

We rarely think about the potency of our faces. We may consider our ‘good looks’ against the mirror’s reflection but rarely do we consider the power of our faces. We gaze at ourselves in the mirror and arrange our hair or shave or double check that we look okay before stepping out into the world where our faces will, most likely, be the first thing people notice about us. We bump into a neighbor or a friend when we are out and about and they recognize us, as we recognize them, as familiar faces. We are introduced to someone new, and as we appraise their face, they are picking up the cues about our gender, race, age, and, attractiveness. Is our smile warm, eyes bright, or do we meet this new person with a suspicious cold look? All this, the exchange of looks and information gathering, happens within seconds, if that. These are core human behaviors, repeated over a lifetime – none of which change with age. Our faces do, of course, change slowly, continually, and almost imperceptibly until the collective changes catch our attention in the mirror. The sight of our old faces generates a raft of emotions and meanings for us and others. Many of us are surprised by the old face in the mirror but we adapt to the reflection that is primary to our acknowledgement of becoming old.

THE RESEARCH

This book delves into the meanings, emotions, thoughts, and behavior entangled with our aging faces. Appearance is a primary human concern

and comes from our sense of self-awareness. We have, as humans, painted and primed from our early distant past – for our gods, for ourselves, and for each other. Appearance, attractiveness, and beauty are wound together in such a way that notions of appearance cannot be separated from beauty – it is part of appearance. The chapters delve into interviewees speaking about facial appearance and, at the book’s core, their definition of age and beauty. As a culture/society aging beauty, particularly in women, for some people, could be described as an alien idea. There has been much media buzz about the rise of older models and celebrities. Their strenuous beauty regimes which include non-invasive procedures and esthetic surgery is part of the reportage as their “new look – fabulous or not?” is given the thumbs up or down. Public celebrity aside, phrases such as, “she was a great beauty,” or “he’s gone to seed,” are commonplace. Though I had heard those notions of beauty in the past tense throughout my life, as I stepped into the phase of life as an old woman, I heard that description from a different perspective and that set off my curiosity.

Beautiful Everyday People

This book is a result of that curiosity and addresses the possibility of beauty in the older people around us, not in the sense of beauty within but the embodied beauty in some everyday older people. A few people mentioned older celebrities in passing but that touting of public beauty was not the concern of interviewees. Their interest was in the people around them – friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers. Instead, interviewees discussed their thoughts and feelings about aging appearance, their own and others, what might be called everyday people. These thoughts and feelings about appearance and age are significant in their own right, but they also open the door, they act as an entrée into, a definition of age and beauty. The descriptions give a context to an understanding of age and beauty through the eyes, the perceptions of the research participants.

The Interviewees

Much has happened in my life that set me on this journey, not the least of which as I have stated, was a deep curiosity about aging and beauty. This

wondering about aging faces, and if old people could be beautiful and how that might be defined, led to the research. In many ways, it was an extension of the earlier research I had conducted on time and aging bodies. The result of that work, *Baby Boomers, Time and Aging Bodies* (2016), informed the research I conducted for this book. *Baby Boomers, Age, and Beauty* draws extensively on interviews carried out with 31 adults from the UK and the US. This diverse group of participants were all born between 1945 and 1955 – the first wave of the baby boom. Eleven of the original interviewees (from the first study on aging bodies) agreed to be interviewed again for this project on age and beauty. The rest of the other 20 people were not part of my first project on aging bodies. The participants were racially and ethnically diverse, gay and straight, from working to upper class backgrounds, and lived in urban and rural areas.

As an American immigrant to the UK, I was curious about my compatriots on both sides of the ocean. Yes, of course, there are cultural differences, but the roots of our Western construction of beauty and appearance come from the same sources. For the most part, our sense of beauty and our current ideas about appearance are generated from the same or similar influences.

Systems Theory and Thinking

From theory to methodology, the research was approached from a systemic perspective. That meant exploration of the data looking at, and for, context, relationships, connections, and patterns. Additionally, the interviews were based on systemic communications theory (coordinated management of meaning). Bateson describes systems thinking as “an aggregate of ideas or ecology of ideas” (1972, p. xxiii). Systems thinking invites one to look at the whole and how the parts work together to influence the whole. As a result, the scholarship employed throughout the book is drawn from a wide variety of multidisciplinary sources – gerontology, appearance studies, gender studies, visual culture, sociology, history, fashion history, cinema studies, media and cultural studies, literature, art, and more. Cinema studies, media, and cultural studies scholars have had some focus on aging femininities, neglecting an exploration of masculinities (with the exception of Dolan, 2018). Though this work is largely tangential to these chapters, they did provide points of departure especially in

clarifying the divergence of patterns of meaning between celebrity and everyday people's appearance and notions of beauty.

BOOMERS

Context, Faces, and Influencers

What is it about those baby boomers? And, why the first wave of that generation? Each generation grows up under a unique set of circumstances tied to the history, the times they were born into (Woodspring, 2016). Those times significantly shape our lives in a multitude of ways – from our perspective (Elder, 1999; Kynaston, 2007) on to the world to the food we eat (Gopnik, 2012). Context, or time and place, influences appearance ideas and ideals, but evolutionary mating theory also plays a part in our notions of attractiveness (Etcoff, 2000; Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Our cultural/societal ideas and ideals of facial appearance are not entirely stable, though appearance research has demonstrated some basic facial characteristics that are recognized as attractiveness standards. Extending beyond those basic precepts, facial appearance is, in part, predicated on the context of the times interacting with other aspects of whatever the cultural dictates are at the time and vice versa. There is a give and take between people's desires or preferences that influences the tastes or dictates of the times. Taste makers or influencers come from the usual assumed sources such as corporate media, but also from surprising sources such as youth street culture.

The Importance of Adolescence and Memory

I turn now to the context of adolescence in the contemporary life course. Adolescence and young adulthood is a critical time in our lifespan (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). We develop a growing sense of self-mastery (Shanahan & Bauer, 2004) among many other psychological and physical developmental milestones that will carry us throughout our lifespan. It is a time of 'firsts'; we are rehearsing our adulthood through the novel/first time adult experiences. Our memories of teen and young adult years are disproportionately large. It is so substantial that it has been named the

‘reminiscence bump’. Middle-aged and older people’s memories of adolescence and young adulthood are ‘remembered best’ – it is “their own era” (Neisser & Libby, 2000, p. 319). Each generation develops and contains their own memories that are formulated as ‘their’ time in history, ‘their’ era, influencing how they were and are in the world (Misztal, 2003).

Koppel and Rubin (2016) attribute this memory bump to this critical period of our lifespan and the many firsts we are enacting at that time. We are doing what is of relevance to our adult lives and that underlines those experiences and events, making them most memorable. The context of our teen years, the period in history when we live out our adolescence, shapes us throughout our lifespan. In turn, some generations exert a force on the changing shape of the culture/history. The first wave of the baby boomer generation and their coming of age in the Sixties may well be one of those generations. Each generation makes its mark but some generations more so than others; some generations are more important than others (Timoneon, 2015).

The First Wave of the Postwar Generation

The first wave of the postwar generation, those people born between 1945 and 1955, were young enough in the Sixties to have limited independence and old enough to have become relatively independent by the end of the Sixties. They were removed from the influence of the Second World War.

I also think ours was the first generation that hadn't been obsessed by the war, we were in a way selfish in that respect. It didn't matter to us at all, I looked at my older brothers and they were all fucking shell-shocked – they knew their place, we didn't give a shit. (Quoted in Rawlings, 2000, p. 50)

The coming of age of the postwar generation was a considerable departure from the air raids, bomb shelters, and evacuation or shipping out overseas experienced by their parents and grandparents. How we have come to think about our bodies and how we live in them has been profoundly influenced by the history of our generation or the times we have been born into (Woodspring, 2016). The postwar generation entered their teen years in the shiny new times of the Sixties, and they left their mark on the times as it left its mark on the generation.

Birth Rates, Times, and Marketing

Though there was a postwar baby boom in the US, in reality, the UK experienced a brief peak in the birth rate in 1946. In the UK, the baby boom did not occur until 1964. Regardless of the actuality, the media named the generation on both sides of the ocean the baby boomers and it has stuck. Peter Townsend, The Who lead guitarist and the guy who penned the words to ‘My Generation,’ described the bulge this way:

There was a bulge, that was England’s bulge. All the war babies, all the old soldiers coming back from the war and screwing until they were blue in the face – this was the result. (Quoted in Szatmary, 1987, p. 102)

Birth rates were not the only differences between the nations during the boomers’ childhood and adolescence but there were also significant similarities. Perhaps, central to the boomer cohort, is the sense of identity and cohesion as a generation. Of course, the Sixties, ‘London Calling’, Haight Ashbury, antiwar protests, and all that was the landscape to their coming of age. The first wave of the baby boomers, those people born between 1945 and 1955, had limited experience of independence as children in the 1950s but they were old enough to have at least some sense of independence during the Sixties. A small number were at the core of the Sixties social rupture and many more of their generation were influenced by the doings of that period. They were the first cohort to have experienced an entire lifetime of the defining term ‘teenager’ and that was to shape their identity as they entered their adolescence. First developed as a marketing strategy, the idea of teenagers was devised by New York Madison Avenue advertising firms and quickly exported to the UK. Twiggy was the fashion model that represented adolescence at that time:

Twiggy came along at a time when teen-age spending power was never greater. With that underdeveloped, boyish figure, she is an idol to the 14- and 15-year-old kids. She makes virtue of all the terrible things of gawky, miserable adolescence. (Dalgleish, 2010)

The Influence on a Generation

A few of the research participants self-identified as being involved in one or another in the subcultures that marked the Sixties, but most of the participants were not part of that small group of people who raised a big ruckus. That does not mean that interviewees were not influenced by the ruckus, danced to the music, didn't "trust anyone over 30," or wore some version of the garb or rolled up their skirts at the waist (as soon as they were far enough from home to not get caught), in an approximation of mini-skirts, that marked the Sixties — they did. The big doings centered around London and, in the States, the urban areas. The interviewees came from around the UK, though most of the American participants lived in Chicago. Despite the location of their growing up, the vast majority of interviewees stated that the Sixties was an influence on their lives as teenagers and beyond. So what was the Sixties and its influence on the generation — a generation whose members refer to themselves as "we" or "us" — the baby boomers.

EMBODIED SIXTIES

The baby boomers came of age in the Sixties. This section provides an understanding, the background to attitudes and ideas that the generation has carried with them for their lifetimes and has influenced how they are thinking about aging, their construction of the concept of old, and their sense of their embodied selves. By understanding the background to the critical teen years of the baby boomers, we shed light on their ideas about age, appearance, and beauty.

Throughout the trajectory of history, earlier times have influenced how subsequent events and ideas come into being. In the 1800s, the young Romantics espoused a freewheeling lifestyle that included drug use and bodily freedoms that was taken up again in the 1920s by the flappers and swept across the globe during the Sixties. Generational differences are not only revealed in experience and life attitudes but in the very sense of our physical beings.

What follows is a brief summary of the Sixties social rupture. It is by no means a full accounting of the time. Instead, it is what was influential in forming the baby boomers' notions of physicality, aging appearance,

and beauty. Underlying this section are the underpinnings of the ‘influences’ that have created their sense of themselves as a generation.

Defining the Sixties

The ‘Long Sixties’, is the period beginning in 1958 in the UK with the first appearance of the mods and ending in both the UK and the US in 1974 with the oil crisis and recession. In the US, there is more debate among historians about dating the beginning of the period, but it was around the same time as in the UK. Many historians agree that the period was marked by a “social rupture” (Donnelly, 2005; Green, 1999; Marwick, 1998; Sandbrooke, 2007). Though the postwar period that they were born into was significantly different between the US and the UK, by the late 1950s, those differences had diminished. They are a generation that experienced unprecedented levels of affluence and largesse from the previous generations. The Sixties was not only a US/UK or the Western industrial world phenomenon, but was a worldwide event from India to Mexico and throughout the global South. Change was the order of the day. In the UK, the Sixties social rupture was primarily cultural. In the US, the central underpinnings were political.

Music has come to be an important signifier of the Sixties. It was an invitation to move one’s body that was hard to resist. At the time, perhaps more than anything else, it bound together the baby boomers. The music, for many, represents the atmosphere of the Sixties and the good times of their adolescence. The music was shared across national boundaries and cultures. Though the music was a central point of coherence, each country from India to Mexico had their own specific Sixties rupture (Marwick, 1998). Much of the music also carried an overt message of rebellion to the political and social order of their parents and grandparents. In the UK, it was a cultural revolution finally laying the Victorian era to rest. In the US, the civil rights movement kicked it off, followed by the Vietnam War and universal conscription. It was ‘the draft’ that galvanized the generation and created a political focus to the social rupture. Of course, not everyone who was a member of the postwar generation would characterize themselves as hippies, mods, rude boys, or was directly involved in the Sixties doings. Someone once described their experience of the Sixties to me as a time when they were “looking for

the party but they never found it.” It is the influence of these times, the ideas that were generated, and the generational narrative along with the many legislative and cultural changes that have had an impact on the generation. This is highlighted by the media’s retelling of the story through music, image, and language. In speaking with baby boomers about the Sixties, aging, or any number of subjects, interviewees used the plural, “we” rather than “I.” It is a point of identity – being part of that cohort whether they had directly participated in the doings of the day or not.

Beyond the Boomers

In the UK, throughout the Sixties, there were a number of liberalizing reforms that relaxed the government’s control over the physical bodies of its citizenry. Among the reforms were the abolition of capital punishment, decriminalization of attempted suicide, relaxation of Sunday drinking laws, lowering of the age of majority, reform of the divorce laws, decriminalization of abortion, reformation of homosexuality laws, and a significant change in the censorship laws. The National Health Service (NHS) made its debut in 1948 with the mission of providing good healthcare for all. The founding of the NHS signaled that care of the body was a right and not a privilege. Government free milk and orange juice programs and national campaigns with an emphasis on eating fresh fruit and vegetables contributed to the importance of care of body. Throughout the industrialized West, similar changes were enacted, though there was a failure in the US to put in place universal healthcare within a NHS-type structure. There were ‘indigent’ funds and many hospitals and physicians were willing to operate on a sliding-scale fee basis but it was a far cry from the NHS. Medicaid legislation was instituted which provided care for poor families but, again, it was inadequate for the needs of the population. The death penalty remained and continues to remain a punishment in some American states. In the UK, the Church of England adopted a more liberal stance as did a number of religious institutions in the US. The introduction of the Pill which decoupled sex from procreation came at the onset of the sexual lives of many members of the postwar generation. The first picture of the Earth from space was broadcast around the world as Earthrise, changing the way we perceive

the Earth/body we all live on and our connection to each other and the environment (Poole, 2008).

THE KIDS

As the baby boomers were the beneficiaries of these changes during their childhood and adolescence they, too, as a generation, were responsible for societal and cultural changes. The impact of the gay/lesbian, and feminist liberation, and black liberation and civil rights movements has had significant societal and legislative reverberations. Though the black liberation movement in the UK did not have the same traction in the Sixties as it did in the US, it was to wield its influence in the eighties and beyond. That is not to say the issue of racism and injustice was not a part of the landscape of British society, but the social conditions were different between the two countries. As one London Black Panther stated:

Fundamentally the Black British and the Black American experience was different, right from the source. Black Americans were dragged, screaming and kicking, from the shores of Africa to an utterly hostile America, whilst my parents, they bought a ticket on the 'Windrush' bound for London! (British Black Panther member, Don Lett, quoted in Whitfield, 2013)

Dance, transgressive drug use, free love, and a political awareness focused on social justice, to name some of the contributing factors that led to the social rupture of the Sixties.

The Importance of Self-presentation

From prehistory up to the present moment, there is evidence of an interest, perhaps a need, to adorn oneself, to beautify, to delight in our self-presentation. It is part of the physical expression of our identity that we present to the world. The postwar generation was and is no exception to this very human endeavor.

The images of long-haired hippie men and women in long skirts and beads, mods in beautifully tailored suits, and perfectly coifed hair are

instantly recognizable. Self-presentation – clothing, hair, jewelry – was a means of separating the generations and signaling one’s alliances.

The importance of self-presentation, of course, is not new. Humans have been engaged in self-presentation since the beginning of history (Ribeiro, 2011; Wilson, 2000). There were two aspects of the postwar period, in terms of appearance, that make it significant for the baby boomers. The first was clothing specifically designed for adolescents – up until that time teen wear was adult clothing in smaller sizes (Rawlings, 2000). The second significant aspect was the rise of advertising. There had been advertising firms in the past but the business grew rapidly during the postwar period targeting specific marketing groups. Teenagers were specifically marketed to. The advertising industry was the first, of multiple influences, to shape a sense of cohesion within the cohort. The sense of generational awareness was, in part, developed through the new ‘teen fashion’ and the advertising spin – creating teenagers as a unique marketing niche. That said, the mods created their own style from hair to tailored suits. Sociologist Stanley Cohen describes it this way, young mods of both genders did “not just consume but they created themselves” (Cohen, 1987, p. 151).

THE NAYSAYERS

As expected, there were naysayers, for the most part, adults who were opposed to the cultural and societal changes and appalled by the behavior of the young people. In the UK, Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge, both prominent public figures, spoke out about moral degeneration and the like in the most evocative of terms.

In the US, a number of public figures from the FBI to the police to popular television personalities railed against the “dirty hippies,” and declared to youthful antiwar protesters, “My country, love it or leave.” The ‘Establishment’ excoriation only added to the mystique of the movement. On both sides of the ocean, it was, ultimately, the perceived immorality of youth behavior that incited the angry attacks. Because the primary focus in the US was political, the youth movements and, especially, the antiwar/Vietnam organizing were seen as disruptive of, if not undermining, the ‘American way of life’. There was, indeed, moral panic on both sides of the ocean. In the US, though, the stakes were higher, with the advent of

universal conscription into the armed forces. Young men were forced to ship out to Vietnam regardless of their political convictions. Many refused to go, some fleeing to Canada and a small number chose incarceration rather than military service. For those young men who knew the war was unjust, it was not only a choice of conviction but also one of survival. Those choices, along with the civil rights movement, rocked American politics to its roots resulting in deep political and cultural rifts.

US AND THEM

The influence and relationship of multiple forms of media that create collective patterns and representations also cannot be underestimated. These become cohesive narratives or cultural mythologies through image, printed words, audio stories, and more. All these elements of remembrance, media, family, generation, and collective memories – both social and cultural – come together within the individual and, in part, shape our autobiographies. In the case of the postwar generation, it is the Sixties social rupture and the many changes engendered during that long decade that have been an ongoing influence in their lives.

We have seen how the baby boom generation, during their youth, left a powerful impact on the society and were, by the same token, impacted by the changes around them. Physicality and embodiment were central to the questioning and changes carried forward from the Sixties. The liberation movements, the governmental changes in State control over bodies, the pleasure in appearance, music, and dance, and more put bodies in the center of the Sixties. Appearance/beauty is an embodied manifestation.

What would the US and the UK look like if there had not been the liberation movements, the perceived freedom of expression, and all the rest plus the historic changes within the government and beyond? In 2010, the first group of boomers were asking the question the Beatles posed in their youth – “will you still need me, when I’m sixty-four?” In this next section we begin to look at the long-lived possibilities for the postwar generation.

THE LONGEVITY REVOLUTION

In 2011, overall age standardized mortality rates were the lowest ever recorded in England and Wales (Office of National Statistics, 2012) and

that trend has continued with a small upward fluctuation as reported in 2017 (Office of National Statistics [Office of National Statistics], 2017). In the US, the mortality statistics are similar with the lowest mortality rates reported in 2012 and remaining relatively stable through 2017 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2017). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, life expectancy has more than doubled throughout the West. There has been a gender gap with men dying earlier than women but that gap shows signs of closing (WHO, 2017). The shift in mortality rates has been a steady feature of the twentieth century, but now, large numbers of people are living well beyond retirement age. In the US, the fastest growing population is 85+ (WHO, 2017). In the UK, the ONS reports that 5% of the 65+ population are people over 90 years old.

Throughout their lifetime, the postwar generation has witnessed their parents, grandparents, family friends, and neighbors living longer lives. Standing as witness to longevity has directly shaped the generation's definitions and expectations of aging. They have internalized the possibilities of an extended lifetime and integrated that into their sense of lifespan (Woodspring, 2016). 'Deep time' is an internal sense that a full lifespan well beyond the traditional retirement age is possible. Deep time creates a sense of the possibilities – that a full lifespan could mean living well into one's eighties or nineties, or even beyond a hundred.

In the West, each country has some version of the phrase, "the graying of the nation." The media is full of speculation as to what that may mean in terms of the social, economic, and political consequences of an increasingly larger older population – the postwar birth bulge is now, in part, the graying of the UK and the US. The consequences of the longevity revolution have both a significant impact on society and the members of the postwar generation (and those who come after them). It has and will continue to have substantive impact on baby boomers' sense of their possible lifespan and how to live those years.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

In 1900, in the UK, people over 65 made up 5% of the population (Victor, 2010). The life expectancy for women was 50 and 46 for men. In the US, in 1900, just 4% of the population was 65+ (Chop, 2015). Old people were truly invisible because they were not there in large numbers.

Today, older people make up a sizable percentage of the population – 15% in the US (United States Census Bureau, 2017) and 18% in the UK (ONS, 2017b). The majority of older people are not in care homes but are, instead, out and about. This is especially true of the group called the ‘young old’, people 65–74 years old. That said, the majority of older people, 75+, carry on with life – shopping for groceries, going to the movies, and having a beer at the pub or dinner in a restaurant. Older people are out in force in public life and the numbers alone make them visible. There are, of course, gendered narratives about aging and visibility. These narratives will be discussed in Chapter 5.

For many in the postwar generation, later life expectations are different than that of their parents’ or grandparents’ generations. Many remain actively engaged in work, volunteerism, or some type of civic engagement (Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Woodspring, 2016). In lieu of plans to move to seaside or US-style adults-only retirement communities or warmer climes, baby boomers plan to remain active ‘in the last phase of their lives’ for the foreseeable future. This shift in attitudes also raises the issue of visibility. Many older people from all classes wish to remain engaged in the life of their community, the result being baby boomers are present/visible throughout their communities rather than self-segregating in retirement communities. Strict boundaries of age segregation are breaking down in both civic and personal relationships (Newman, 2011). Intergenerational programs from children spending time in care homes to housing have become more popular in recent years (Pinazo-Hernadis & Browdie, 2011). Grandparents are more likely to make the school run than in the past and, in general, take on child-care duties that take them into public spaces. This recent turn has the effect of younger people interacting with a variety of older adults and older faces out and about in the world.

OLD PEOPLE AND EVOLUTION

Although there is the current social discourse about the longevity revolution, some anthropologists, psychologists, and biologists note that there was an evolutionary longevity revolution dating back to the time of the Neandertals. Caspari postulates that a significant divergence between Neandertals and modern humans resulted in the upward shift in longevity

in humans (2011). She states that her research and that of her colleagues indicate that the significant rise in a grandparent-aged population occurred in tandem with the rise of a “dependence sophisticated symbol-based communication of the kind that underpins art and language” (p. 45). She goes on to write that:

These findings suggest that living to an older age had profound effects on the population sizes, social interactions and genetics of early modern human groups and may explain why they were more successful than archaic humans, such as the Neandertals. (p. 45)

Kristen Hawkes (2004) and other researchers have developed the ‘grandmother effect theory’. She explains that, from an evolutionary standpoint, grandmothers, postmenopausal women, increased fertility rates among younger women, and decreased child mortality through their contribution to childcare. Younger women’s chances of fertility and survival were enhanced by the assistance in food provision for children too young to handle their own food and other types of support provided by older women. This is now described as a cumulative “investment in juveniles” by early modern humans (Lee, 2003). These are some of the factors that led to our evolutionary success as a species. A number of studies have explored the importance of knowledge, experience, and wisdom transfer as central to the evolutionary development of longevity (Greve & Bjorklund, 2009).

At the core of the research is the conclusion that old people are essential to human life. Why this is critical to a book whose focus is appearance and beauty is threefold. As we will see, presenting stereotypes of old people who have little worth is a common cultural feature in the West. The vast majority of appearance research is focused on women of childbearing age and men who would typically be their partners because of the assumptions in regard to old people, appearance, and their perceived lack of importance in the evolutionary schema. Finally, understanding the importance of aging and the role that old people play in our development as a species lends a gravitas to notions of aging and beauty.

TIME AND HISTORY – CONTEXT, AGAIN

Time/history and culture are at the heart of what we have explored so far and what will be investigated throughout the book. Culture and society

are shaped by history, but there are also the forces of culture and society that shape history. The flow of time/history is always the context of our lives. We cannot escape it and its influence on our identity, or even the physicality of our beings (Woodspring, 2016). Our bodies are shaped by the labor we engage in and our leisure time activities (Bourdieu, 1984) which are tied to our moment in history. Few of us are now engaged in the type of physical labor that was a significant force in shaping bodies in the past. Bodies that face a computer all day are different than those of dock workers and farm hands. Those same bodies of knowledge workers who run, do yoga, or spend their evenings facing a screen are products of their own times. Faces and features change according to immigration patterns and subsequently marriage and procreation. Immigration patterns are interwoven with the history of countries, societies, and cultures. Skin color and status is part of the shifting sands of time. When the majority of the white population labored outside, white skin was a mark of aristocracy. With the rise of the middle classes and leisure culture, tan skin became a mark of distinction. In Africa, India, and other places that experienced white colonization, the preference for lighter skin tones became the norm. What was beautiful, or shapely, or desirable at one moment in time may not or, is most likely, not the case, at another period of time.

Past, Present, and Future... and Change Is Fundamental

We may hold nostalgia or a hope for return to past times in history. It is not because we can know those times but that we imagine them through the perspective of our own place in history. What that really means is that we cannot unknow what we know through the eyes of our own time. Looking back through history is always tainted by how our embeddedness in current times, history, and life as we know it is. This is not to say that the past was necessarily as Hobbes stated, “nasty, brutish and short,” but it was different, and will continue to be different. The forces that influence our lives are ever-changing. If the past is difficult to clearly discern, the future is even more so despite what the pundits would have us believe. So many possible factors influence the direction the future may or may not take.

Although it has limits, time/history provides us with a hold, a perspective on what came before us and where it came from, both personally and in the larger society and culture. We cannot turn the clock back since the

arc of time is ever taking in new history, making new time. We may dream of returning to easier or simpler times but the factors and configuration that made those times possible – assuming they ever existed – are gone with the flow of time. Instead, time/history is of great value in understanding our own times, both personally and in the wider world. That is not to say, that our times are a clean movement of history that has created who and how society and culture is now. Instead, there is a messy interpenetration of the past, present, and future. What we might begin to imagine as sequential is, rather, the now time influenced by the past and possible futures. All of that said, time/history is important in the understanding of current societal norms, in general, and the construction of our ideas that shape appearance, beauty, and old people today. In Chapter 2, we explore how time/history, appearance, and beauty are intertwined.

CORPORATE CULTURE

I turn now to ‘consumer culture’ which for some people is deeply bound to our current standards of beauty and appearance. In the social sciences, it is currently a popular idea to connect appearance, and even notions of beauty, to what has been named as consumer culture. It is important to address this at the front of this book. Consumer culture does not accurately describe this phenomenon. The desire of corporations to influence every arena of our lives from big pharma creating problems we did not know we had to the humble logo t-shirt. This pervasive attempt to capture our attention and, more significantly, our money is obvious and it creates, what would more accurately be described as, corporate culture. “The phenomenon is consumption but the organizing paradigm is corporatism” (Woodspring, 2016, p. 191). By using the term consumer culture, it implicitly names the consumer as the originator of this phenomenon rather than the receiver. The shift in labels to corporate culture lays the responsibility at the creators’ feet, global business. The term corporatism or the influence of corporations on culture will be used in this book rather than ‘consumer culture’. Corporate culture is but one, albeit large, aspect of our richly complex and layered culture and individual lives within this culture. Western culture is far more than interlocking conglomerates seeking to control our cash flow.

Yes, the creation of desire is omnipresent and seeks to seep into our mental landscape through multiple means from celebrities selling coffee, perfume, and sneakers to those ubiquitous advertising platforms. There is an assumption that we have become “cultural dopes” who are “living in a state of false consciousness” (Hall, 1981, p. 231) or, what Chomsky (2004) and others have referred to as the passive or docile consumers. These assumptions have been challenged by media and cultural studies scholars (Dolan, 2018; Hollows, 2000; Stacey, 1994). An example of the clash between the perception of the passive consumer and the reality is the discourse around surgical and non-invasive cosmetic procedures. Despite the public face and headlines praising or shaming various celebrities’ surgical interventions, older people, by and large, are not convinced that non-invasive interventions or aesthetic surgery are options they care to pursue. There are headlines and a moral panic focused on older people and cosmetic surgery despite the fact that in 2016, in the latest statistics available, people 65+ were the least likely adult age group to undergo cosmetic invasive and noninvasive procedures in both the US (ASAPS, 2017) and the UK (BAAPS, 2017, 2018). On the part of older people, there is no doubt an interest, and even an active engagement with the media, but that interest is filtered through experience and knowledge, class, race, and gender.

The baby boomers, the first generation to grow up as a generation under the banner of teenager, were the recipients of teen marketing and advertising in a myriad of forms [...]. They also used it to create their own teen peer culture of the Sixties. Further chapters in this book will show that a lifetime of exposure to corporatism has not produced a generation of media dupes but savvy, to one degree or another, media/marketing consumers.

There is no doubt that the pervasiveness of corporatism in our lives does have an influence over our notions of beauty but what is the influence, to what degree do older people take on board the ideas of attractiveness that are presented to them through the various forms of media that comes at them? There are those who say this is how we form our ideas, this is THE primary influence. The research participants, for the most part, would beg to differ. They instead have other perspectives on the influence of the media, celebrity, and corporatism, in general, that are expressed in the chapters.

THE CHAPTERS

This book consists of eight chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter 2, 'Shaping Appearance and Beauty', explores the concepts, events, and research that underpin our current notions of appearance and beauty. The subject of beauty is overwhelming and can be approached from myriad directions. In the development of this chapter, and, indeed, the book, I found myself making continuous choices as to what to include or exclude and what to include in my own understanding but leave out of the book. For appearance researchers, an interest in appearance began, in earnest, in the early 1960s and has been carried forward ever since that time. By and large, the majority of the research has been conducted on younger people. That by no means represents a lack of interest in appearance by older people but, instead, a bias on the part of researchers. Additionally, most of the research that has been developed focuses on women, and that work tends to be ahistorical. This chapter explores the historical and cultural events and beliefs that have influenced our present construction of appearance and beauty. We investigate the momentous development of two technologies – the mirror and the camera. Neuroscience, appearance research, and media are explored. Appearance from a gendered perspective is examined. Theories from feminist and masculinities scholars about the construction of gender and how that may impact appearance are investigated. A survey of some of the important Western philosophical formulations of beauty is delved into. Philosophy has been seminal in shaping our construction of beauty. Literature, cosmetics, and taste are considered.

Chapter 3, 'Women on Appearance', shifts to the voices of the women who participated in the research. They discuss their sense of aging and how that influences their reactions, emotions, and awareness of their facial appearance, hair, neck, and décolletage. Acceptance of their own aging and conversations with friends and family about aging appearance are explored. Photographs are discussed as a means to reach back into the past, both their own and that of family members and friends. Photos or a memory of mother's or father's face in the mirror can provide a sense of continuity. Identity, self-presentation, cosmetics, hair, and the notion of 'natural' are all discussed. The influence of the media, something that is written about at great length in feminist scholarship, is considered. Women actively see each other and that looking was part of the

conversation. Finally, we talk about the face in the mirror, what women see and know about themselves.

Chapter 4, 'Men on Appearance,' covers the same ground as the women's chapter but with intriguing differences. Aging appearance is, in some ways, laden with different meaning for men than it is for women and the men's responses to the same questions sometimes reflected those differences, sometimes not. Acceptance of the changes aging brings, vanity, and the face in the mirror were all explored. Hair was central to men's sense of aging physicality. The chapter investigates what men say about the reflection of their own aging faces and the aging faces of long-time friends.

Chapter 5, 'What We Know and What We See', explores visibility and invisibility – who is looking at whom and why and what they are looking at and for. The cultural narrative of older people presents older women as invisible. The invisibility of older women is stated as an article of faith, a truism. While the women interviewees question that story, the men discuss their own sense of invisibility. There is an interesting divide between who feels invisible and the reality of the cultural mythology. The concept of health monitoring is introduced and the significance of it in the eyes of older people.

Chapter 6, 'Living with Mortality', was an unimagined chapter when this research began. And, because it was unimagined, there were no questions about death in the interviews, yet interviewees discussed death or made allusions to death and, in most cases, both. Death was on the minds of this group of baby boomers or, the questions about appearance and beauty triggered comments and conversations about death. This chapter explores their thoughts, fears or mostly a lack of fear in regard to their mortality. We also look at some of the physical manifestations, reminders of appearance of the dead person that Western culture has created through photographs and death masks. Mirrors and death are discussed. An exploration of mortality leads us to an understanding of age and beauty.

Chapter 7, 'The Appearance of Beauty', is, again, predicated on the voices of research participants. They discuss current images of beauty – the exotic other. Beauty and youth are discussed. Though the majority of interviewees agreed that it was possible to be beautiful and old, not everyone was of that mind. Those voices of disagreement are also included in this chapter. Interviewees had much to say about the nature of age and beauty and, ultimately, with the exception of the few outliers, there is

agreement as to the nature of aging and beauty. 'Relational beauty' is introduced as something beyond the trite, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. The chapter ends with a section on aging and a lifetime of habitual expressions.

Chapter 8, 'A Passion for Life', is the concluding chapter. The threads of the research and voices of the interviewees come together to create a theory of age and beauty. The chapter also explores some of the primary themes that interviewees brought forward in their discussions of age and appearance. Current ideas of vanity and aging are examined. The majority of interviewees, especially the women, did not accept or participate in the morality debate but instead went their own way and admired others who also did. The chapter looks at the tensions between current definitions of masculinities and interviewees' sense of themselves and their appearance in light of those definitions. There may not be a universal definition of age and beauty, but it is the unique collective experiences of the postwar generation that allow them to perceive and acknowledge the presence of that beauty.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Language can be a tricky thing. This book was written for both academic and general readership. Many of the words used in this book, for instance, 'gaze', have specific meanings within academic disciplines. In this book, the common usage is employed rather than specialist meanings. The words beauty and attractiveness are used interchangeably. Body is never referred to as "the body" which is a linguistic trope that distances us from our bodies. The focus of this book is facial appearance or, appearance 'from the neck up', so the word appearance refers to faces, hair, etc. unless otherwise stated. Though the roots of beauty are the same throughout the Western Industrial World, notions of age and beauty are not homogeneous throughout. For example, attitudes toward older women and appearance are markedly different in Italy and France than in the United Kingdom or the United States; therefore, the themes of this book refer exclusively to the United Kingdom and the United States.

My aim in writing this book is, in part, to initiate a conversation about everyday women and men and age and beauty. This book is a beginning and, in some ways, a provocation. The way we look/see and the meaning

we attribute to what we see is not static. The pages of this book look at the changes, adaptations, and adjustments in our ideas of beauty and appearance, over the course of Western history. Change is afoot and my goal is to add a voice and, more importantly, the voices of my research participants, to the ways we think about aging, appearance, and beauty.