

Ageism in the Fashion Industry

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Abstract

Age related stereotypes have greatly influenced the availability of employment opportunities for older women as well as their representation in different fields of work. One such field of work is the fashion industry, where ageism has been rampant, as many women above the age of 40 have been neglected and feel unrepresented. In this paper, different dimensions of ageism and how they affect the employment as well as the representation of older women in the fashion industry have extensively been discussed and analyzed. It is estimated that about 2 billion people, including women, around the world are to be aged over 60 by the year 2050, and hence, it is necessary to put an end to age related discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices [i].

Keywords: Ageism, Fashion Industry, Women.

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INTRODUCTION



Source: <https://news.yale.edu/2020/01/15/harmful-effects-ageism-older-persons-health-found-45-countries>

“Old is a meaningless social construct that boxes an amazingly diverse array of people. Might as well try to group horses, oranges and orangutans. Problem is it drives social policy and, worse, can internalize the expectations that come with the label” – Dr. John Beard

Ageism is when people or groups of people are stereotyped or discriminated against because of their age. While ageism might affect the youth, it has greater implications on the older population of the world. The Fashion and Cosmetics industry is actively involved in

the propagation of a youth oriented beauty standard, which not only affects the self-concepts of the elderly women, but also creates perpetual fears in the minds of the youth towards aging (A.L.Guerrero). It also leads to considerable alienation of older women in the fashion industry, as they no longer adhere to the ideal beauty standards required and expected by the society, which is further validated by the industry and its specifications of beauty. Ageism is an evil and hence, it must be done away with, because “Ageism is a prejudice against our own future selves.”

¹<https://expertfile.com/spotlight/6827/defying-ageism-in-the-beauty-industry>

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research based on secondary data collected from books, journals, website, and newspaper and so on. Women above the age of 40 have been the focus of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ageism

The term Ageism was coined by Robert Butler, who stated that Ageism is characterized by a wide range of prejudices, stereotypes, myths and practices which discriminate against the elderly in employment, housing, and all kinds of services. Ageism may also be linked to a lack of ability to have one's interests represented or rights recognized in society, among other things. It is a form of prejudice or prejudgment, similar to racism and sexism, which aims at oppressing the older population of the world. It restricts the lives of elderly people and plays a major role in shaping the perspectives of both the young and old. Ageist views can exist in both young and old people. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has defined ageism as "a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young, thereby failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of older persons."

According to ageism, older individuals do not match the societal standard of youth fullness and are thus treated as "less," and as a result, they are undervalued and invisible. They are reduced to a second-class status, and their wants and lives are handled as though they are unimportant and insignificant. Anti-equality and anti-social justice is valid criticisms of ageism. According to Butler, aging has always been associated to 3 Ds- Disease, disability and death, as a result of which the younger generation fails to identify them with the grey haired. Invisibility, marginalization, and social exclusion are all examples of ageism. Ageist ideas are so ingrained in our belief system that they extensively influence our attitudes and outlook towards the elderly. It also has an impact on how the elderly see themselves in a world dominated by young [1].

¹<https://www.lco-cdo.org/en/our-current-projects/a-framework-for-the-law-as-it-affects-older-adults/older-adults-funded-papers/ageism-and-the-law-emerging-concepts-and-practices-in-housing-and-health/ii-ageism-concepts-and-theories/>

Gendered ageism



Source:<https://medium.com/moderated/ageism-could-cost-billions-to-the-fashion-industry-c2e5cfcfd837>

While both sexes are affected by ageism, women experience higher prejudice in different aspects of life. Older women are much more likely to experience feelings of invisibility and isolation from the social and public life, and this can be attributed to the youth oriented beauty standards which are propagated by the media.

The fashion industry has a major role to play in the transmission of such representations of women by the media. The unrealistic societal and cultural standards of female physical attractiveness, including, youthful, slim, fair, and toned, are further exaggerated by the fashion industry. This can be seen in the gradual alienation of older women from the industry, once their youthful appearance is missing. According to a visual content analysis of eight fashion publications, the fashion industry continues to focus its advertising efforts on youthful consumers, with images of women over forty appearing seldom, in spite of the presence of a large number of older women as its audience [2]. Older women are rarely, if at all, seen as beauty models due to preconceived notions of beauty.

As per the George Clooney Effect, men appear to be charismatic and distinguished as they age, however the same is not true for women. Women's value and importance is determined by their appearance and looks, and this can be recognized as a significant form of inequality not only between men and women, but also between younger women and older women. According to the functionalist perspective of aging and age related inequalities, which states that inequalities based on age helps to maintain societal stability by establishing a range of roles and expectations for a certain age group, the entry of young women into the fashion industry and the gradual disengagement of the older women from business is something which is important to their societal roles and expectations. People enter and exit a set of roles throughout their

²https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251600760_Awakening_to_the_desires_of_older_women_Deconstructing_ageism_within_fashion_magazines

lives, according to the disengagement theory, and thus, this shift is normal and functional for the society.

The Feminist Perspective of Aging, on the other hand, is a vehement opponent of the functionalist perspective of ageing, because according to the feminist perspective, the latter normalizes age-related prejudice and stereotypes. The Feminist perspective argues that women are expected to retain their glowing and wrinkle free appearance, since women are much more sensitive to cultural pressures to maintain their youth and as a result, are much more likely to encounter questions associated to their self-worth. This lowers their self-esteem and self-trust. According to Susan Sontag, men in the society are judged on the basis of their achievements and competence, however, women's worth is judged on the basis of their physical attractiveness. She further argues that women are under the pressure to fight ageing at all costs since they are unable to preserve their youthful appearance as they age. In spite of the unreasonable and impossible nature of these expectations, women attempt to preserve their youth, and this vulnerability to societal pressures is what benefits the fashion industry to a very large extent. Numerous anti-aging products are advertised and sold by the industry in the market, but their effectiveness is yet to be proven. The negative attitude towards grey hair is reflected in the efforts made by women to dye their hair, which again, allows the fashion industry to significantly reap benefits. The Feminist perspective argues that the Fashion and cosmetic industry responds to the youth and male-defined standard of beauty for women, and these ageist beauty norms have been internalized by a large number of women. In this context, Sontag stated that "Women are trained to want to continue looking like girls forever."

FINDINGS

- The fashion industry is hesitant to engage older women, even for items that appeal to an older female audience. As a result, many young models are seen promoting anti-aging products, making the older women feel even more alienated and unrepresented.
- Despite of the fact that women over the age of 40 are more likely to have more money to spend on beauty and fashion products, the fashion and cosmetic industries continue to ignore their needs out of fear of losing their younger customer base.
- Older women are frequently torn between wanting to maintain their youth and being their authentic selves. This dilemma often leads to cycles of lower self-esteem and self-belief.

DISCUSSION



Source: <https://www.creativemoment.co/is-british-vogue-and-loreals-special-edition-on-ageism-ageist>

A peculiar aspect of ageism in the fashion industry is that most of the cosmetic and fashion brands are aimed at a younger demographic, in spite of the fact that they have lesser money to spend. Most brands fail to recognize the fact that women over the age of 40 have a substantial purchasing power. One of the possible reasons why Fashion and cosmetic brands focus on younger consumers is due to their digital activity and presence on social media. In the fashion industry, it is often assumed that it is mostly the younger generation that engages and purchases online. However, this is not true at all. A large number of older women are active social media participants. According to a 2020 consumer study, 68 percent of those aged between 35 to 54 use Facebook on a daily basis, while nearly 40 percent use Instagram on a daily basis. When asked what influences their shopping decisions, over half of those polled indicated someone they follow on Facebook has an influence on them, while 41% said the same about Instagram. With the digitalization of the world, older women are expected to become as active on social media as their younger peers, if they are not already [3].

Another important aspect is that women are often expected to make a choice between being their authentic selves and looking presentable. Older women, those who belong to the fashion industry, are expected to look younger as per the guidelines of the industry, in order to appeal to the demands of the younger consumer base. As a result, they are coerced to adopt beauty practices which conceal their aging skin. Hence, in this case, their authenticity is compromised. However, many women, including older models and older consumers of fashion products, are willing to risk their grey hair and unmasked skin, in order to feel authentic. This reflects the conflict between an authentic appearance and cultural perceptions of ability that women face [4].

³<https://swaay.com/ageism-fashion-industry-older-women>

⁴<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08952841.2021.1899744>

CONCLUSION



Source: <https://www.eatmy.news/2021/04/how-disney-has-set-unrealistic-beauty.html>

Nowadays, consumers across the world are much more accepting and accommodating, as a large number of them, including the younger female population, not only expect the equal representation of women of different colour and sizes in the fashion industry, but also women of different ages. Hence, equal representation of older women in the fashion industry is a desire shared by many customers in the business. There are several beauty companies which are gradually catering to the needs of older women and are also engaging older models for different fashion related services. Maye Musk, a 69-year-old model with five decades of experience, was designated as the Cover Girl brand ambassador and has appeared in the company's print and television commercials. Allure Magazine declared in September 2017 that it will no longer use the phrase "anti-aging" in an issue with Helen Mirren on the cover. Several people now refer to wrinkles as wisdom lines, and companies like L'Oreal Paris are using taglines like "Now Makeup Doesn't Cover up Your Age, It Celebrates It." All these examples give hope for the eradication of ageism from the fashion industry.

It is encouraging to see businesses expanding their horizons and allowing models of various ages to walk their runways in order to make their customers feel welcome. However, despite these exceptions, the beauty industry as a whole has been incredibly sluggish to meet the needs of women over the age of 40 ^[5]. Despite having more years of experience compared to their counterparts, women in this category continue to suffer significant rejection in the business. Hence, it is high time for the industry to address the needs of older women in the business, so that they feel represented and included. At the end of the day, fashion is something individuals of all ages utilize to effectively communicate and express themselves ^[6]. Therefore, ageism must be abolished because "age is not a barrier, it's a limitation you put on your mind."

REFERENCES

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⁵<https://sixtyandme.com/is-the-beauty-industry-finally-paying-at-least-some-attention-to-those-of-us-over-50/>

⁶<https://nyunews.com/2017/02/06/ageism-plagues-in-the-fashion-industry/>