



## Masquerading their way to authenticity: Does age stigma concealment benefit older women?

Vanessa Cecil, Louise F. Pendry, Katherine Ashbullby & Jessica Salvatore

To cite this article: Vanessa Cecil, Louise F. Pendry, Katherine Ashbullby & Jessica Salvatore (2022): Masquerading their way to authenticity: Does age stigma concealment benefit older women?, Journal of Women & Aging, DOI: [10.1080/08952841.2022.2128245](https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2022.2128245)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2022.2128245>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC



Published online: 29 Sep 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 69





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Masquerading their way to authenticity: Does age stigma concealment benefit older women?

Vanessa Cecil<sup>a</sup> , Louise F. Pendry<sup>a</sup>, Katherine Ashbullby<sup>a</sup>, and Jessica Salvatore<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Department of Psychology, College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom; <sup>b</sup>Department of Psychology, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA



### ABSTRACT

As women age they can be subject to both sexism and ageism, and consequently be stereotyped as low in competence and irrelevant despite having a relatively young subjective age. Drawing on theories of stigma, we conducted a survey study of older women ( $N = 184$ ) with a strong interest in fashion and their visual image. We used template thematic analysis to understand their experiences in relation to their age-changed appearance. Two major themes were identified: unfavourable experiences of ageism and efforts to evade these experiences through attention to appearance. Our participants employed masquerade to conceal or reduce the visible evidence of their age—both to avoid ageism and to align their outward appearance more closely with their inner, felt, authentic selves. We interrogate the benefits and penalties of concealment for a group whose stigmatised condition is dynamic, changing as their appearance grows increasingly dissimilar to societally favoured youthfulness. Masquerade may for this group of women produce more positive than negative outcomes, via effects on felt authenticity.

### KEYWORDS

Appearance; authenticity; gendered ageism; masquerade; stigma concealment

The world's population is ageing (United Nations, 2017). This is a temporal and physical process, but also a socio-cultural one, as old age is a stigmatised condition (Chasteen & Cary, 2015). Ageing entails acquiring physical (and other) stigmatising attributes (Goffman, 1963) that expose older people to ageism, often defined as a negative stereotype, prejudice, and/or act of discrimination (Ayalon et al., 2019). In western societies, ageism is endemic and escalating (Jackson et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). The consequences of ageing and ageism can be more profound for women than for men, some of which are rooted in societal expectations that women retain a youthful appearance, even as they inevitably age (Åberg et al., 2020). They can be judged unfavourably whether they do (Hurd Clarke et al., 2009) or do not (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008) make efforts to comply. In the present paper, we explore how older women experience and navigate this impasse, with a focus on strategies they use to conceal or reveal their age (by means of clothing, make-up and hair, or cosmetic surgery, for example), and discuss the theoretical implications for their felt authenticity and wellbeing.

**CONTACT** Vanessa Cecil  [vc241@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:vc241@exeter.ac.uk)  Department of Psychology, College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom

© 2022 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## Gendered ageism

Women feel the social effects of ageing more keenly than do men (e.g., Handy & Davy, 2007), experiencing greater discrimination in areas of employment (House of Commons, Women & Equalities Committee, 2018; Neumark et al., 2019), finance and poverty (Jones, 2011; Brown et al., 2016) and healthcare (Chrisler et al., 2016). They also report experiencing societal invisibility and erasure from public and social life, more frequently than do men, (Ward et al., 2008). Thus, some older women pay considerable attention to their appearance expressly to avoid ageism (e.g., Hurd Clarke, 2011). This may entail using cosmetics, undergoing surgical or non-surgical procedures (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008), attending to hair (Cecil et al., 2022) and/or carefully selecting clothes (Twigg, 2013) in order to retain a younger appearance (Hurd Clarke, 2018).

Pressure on women to conform to unrealistic appearance norms—namely to appear perpetually youthful, thin, and toned (Rodgers et al., 2019)—can conflict with fear of being derided for looking like “mutton dressed as lamb” if they try to conceal their aged appearance (Bytheway et al., 2007; Hurd Clarke et al., 2009). This common expression in the UK, Australia, and Canada ridicules a woman for trying to look younger than her age. On the other hand, not to engage in any beauty work at all risks being judged to have “let herself go”—another common, disparaging expression—or simply rendered invisible and of no account (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008). To do so could expose a woman to others’ perceptions of them as derelict, incompetent, moral failures (Twigg, 2013). As appearance (amongst other things) assigns older people to a low-status social group, they often take measures to distance themselves from the category “old” (Chasteen & Cary, 2015).

Self-group distancing is a coping response where individuals seek to improve their personal situation by moving away, psychologically, socially or physically, from their stigmatised group and towards a higher status one (van Veelen et al., 2020). This may account for older adults’ tendency to report feeling younger than they are. A recent meta-analysis found that people over 60 felt, on average, 10.74–21.07 years younger than their chronological age (Pinquart & Wahl, 2021). Studies suggest it is a manifestation of self-group distancing (Weiss & Lang, 2012; Weiss & Freund, 2012) that may allow older adults to believe themselves not the target of stereotypes and discrimination (Giasson & Chopik, 2020). In view of the aforementioned additional impact on age discrimination of gender and appearance expectations, this may particularly apply to women.

## Authenticity and perceived competence

Feeling younger aligns with the concept of a mask of ageing (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989), according to which a person’s aged appearance masks their self-perceived, youthful, true self so that the image in the mirror and how others see them do not correspond to how they feel. By distancing from old age, individuals may be attempting to retain a younger identity that not only helps them avoid discrimination but also better fits their self-perceived true self.

There are competing definitions of authenticity (Baumeister, 2019) and lack of definitive empirical conclusions about the underlying reality of the “true self,” with some claiming that it does not exist (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Strohminger et al., 2017). Nonetheless, on the whole, people *believe* a true self does exist and that they have one (Schlegel et al., 2009). Psychological investigations tend to take an existentialist (vs. essentialist) view of authenticity and hold that it is a state (vs. trait) or ongoing process of self-authentication and congruence between behaviour and feeling true to self (Newman, 2019; Sedikides et al., 2017; Sutton, 2020) and it is when people feel aligned with their perceived true self that they feel authentic (Sedikides et al., 2019).

Feeling authentic is associated with health and wellbeing on a range of measures, for example, psychological health (Sedikides et al., 2019). A recent meta-analysis of 51 studies concluded that there are medium-to-large positive associations between authenticity and subjective wellbeing, irrespective of gender or age (Sutton, 2020). However, achieving authenticity may be more problematic for women than for men since it can be generated by feeling competent (Sedikides et al., 2017), which may be compromised by others' perceptions of one's competence. This is particularly relevant for older women.

Individuals encounter discrimination due to stereotypes assigned to their stigmatised group. According to studies of social perception, stereotypes fall along two principal dimensions: competence and warmth (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Fiske, 2018). Old people and women of any age (unless subtyped as feminists or career women) are considered low in competence but high in warmth. Accordingly, older women can find themselves obliged twice over to combat perceptions of low competence (Cuddy et al., 2008). This is likely to affect self-group distancing, which can involve not only dis-affiliation from one's group but also attempts to pass as a member of a more favourable one (Goffman, 1963). Passing as younger may appeal to older women, who are considered incompetent and undeserving of opportunities such as employment (Martin & North, 2021). However, the degree to which they may do so successfully will be contingent on a number of factors, and they may instead choose other related strategies, as discussed in the following section.

### Concealment–disclosure continuum

If passing as younger seems unlikely to succeed (as it increasingly will, with time), women may employ other strategies to mitigate their age status. Some scholars view concealing and disclosing an identity as binary activities, but others suggest a more nuanced conceptualization (Jones & King, 2014). Clair et al. (2005) proposed a continuum of concealment/disclosure strategies that Berkley et al. (2019) organised into a conceptual model indicating antecedent conditions that foster or inhibit disclosure, and also the extent to which strategies correlate with feelings of authenticity. Starting with the most concealing and least authentic, these strategies are: *fabrication*, or hiding a stigmatised identity and also concocting an alternative non-stigmatised one (e.g., giving a fictitious date of birth); *concealment* of the stigmatising attribute (e.g., attending to one's appearance); *discretion*, or not actively denying one's identity but avoiding it coming into people's awareness<sup>1</sup> (e.g., avoiding references to fashions of one's youth); *signalling*, or dropping hints to test the water before or instead of full disclosure (e.g., deliberate but subtle references to the fashions of one's youth); *differentiating*, or presenting one's identity as different from and as equally valid as others' (e.g., espousing the value of age-related experience); and *normalising*, or revealing an identity and also making it seem commonplace, thereby minimising its stigma (e.g., multigenerationalism).

For many women a common strategy to pass is to attend to their ageing physical appearance (e.g., Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008). In doing so they are performing a *masquerade* (Woodward, 1991) to mask or to conceal their age. Masquerade is a variant of *social masking*, an activity performed by everyone but particularly when marginalised, as older people often are (Biggs, 2004). Thus, this mask, deliberately adopted to conceal or camouflage ageing, differs from Featherstone and Hepworth (1989) unwanted, imposed mask of ageing and may be better designated *masque* to distinguish it. Since it may correspond with the inner, felt, younger self, mask and masque are not incompatible: as Woodward said, a mask (or masque) “may express rather than hide a truth” (Woodward, 1991, p. 148).

We use the term *masquerade* in this paper to stand for the fully or partially concealing strategies used by women to avoid age discrimination.

---

<sup>1</sup> Discretion is similar to Goffman's *covering* (1963), whereby a known about identity is neither concealed nor disclosed but played down.

## Concealability

Goffman (1963) distinguished between stigmas that are obvious and unconcealable (e.g., some physical appearances) and those that are hidden and concealable (e.g., mental health status) but ever in danger of discovery. However, there are also stigmatised conditions that are subject to change, known as the *course* of the stigma (Jones, 1984) as it moves, for example, from easily concealed to highly visible. This will affect the strategies used to manage the identity over time. Jones and King (2014) use the term *dynamic* stigma to describe, for instance, pregnancy and certain health conditions. This would equally be applicable to ageing and the changes in appearance that accompany it.

Research tends to focus on concealable rather than visible stigmas, and the effects of concealment or disclosure (Chaudoir et al., 2013) or active disclosure versus non-disclosure (Camacho et al., 2020). Results are mixed but generally indicate that, although concealment can protect against discrimination and reduce stress (Major & Schmader, 2017; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018), it is often associated with negative outcomes, such as *increased* stress and ill health (Ragins, 2008), reduced quality of life (Quinn et al., 2017), and loss of support due to distancing from one's identity group (Van Laar et al., 2014). Each social interaction will require a new decision whether or not to conceal (Goffman, 1963) and this can have significant negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes (Pachankis, 2007; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) and the continual fear of exposure cultivates a high need for vigilance (DeJordy, 2008) and increases cognitive load (Jones & King, 2014).

Furthermore, concealing restricts authenticity in social interactions and produces incongruence between the projected self and an individual's own sense of self (DeJordy, 2008; Jones et al., 2016), reduces coherence (Bosson et al., 2012), and feelings of authenticity and belongingness (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Concealing in order to masquerade as a member of another social group requires self-control to resist expressing one's authentic self and consequently reduces self-esteem (DeJordy, 2008).

## The current study

In researching older women's experience and responses in relation to age stigma and appearance, social psychological or multidisciplinary literature has tended to address issues of body image, particularly body mass index, hair, and beauty practices (Cameron et al., 2019; Hurst et al., 2016; Hurd, 2000; Lee & Damhorst, 2021; Macia et al., 2015; Winterich, 2007). Attitudes towards dress have largely been addressed from a sociological perspective (e.g., Hurd Clarke et al., 2009; Twigg, 2018). Psychological literature on stigma has included old age within a large range of other stigmatised conditions (Pachankis et al., 2018) but, to our knowledge, has not addressed the issue of appearance-related stigma and authenticity.

The aim of the current study was to describe and understand the costs or benefits of a widely practised strategy, masquerade, for a group of women who have a marked interest in their appearance. In particular, this study sought to better understand whether their enjoyment of fashion and visual image affected their concealment strategies in response to stigmatising appearance change.

We took a critical realistic perspective (Bhaskar, 1975). This philosophical approach aims to find the "best fit" explanation for a phenomenon, taking into account any factor that may be causal, including social structures, attitudes and beliefs. As the literature demonstrates, age is partly a function of chronology and partly socially constructed and ageism, particularly gendered ageism, plays a role in women's experiences of their appearance change. Critical realism considers such factors when attempting to explicate phenomena.

## Method

To recruit participants for a survey study, we approached a Facebook group for women over the age of fifty who discuss fashion, clothes and style. As online social groups tend to be highly visual, they encourage sharing of images and are thus popular with women wanting to discuss appearance, compare experiences, and seek and give advice. Such use of online forums applies throughout the life span: While older people are often stereotyped as seldom being online (Mariano et al., 2021), in the West this is not the case. For example, 94.6% of people aged 55–64 were recent users of the internet in the UK, as were 96% for those 50–64 in the US (Office for National Statistics, 2021; Pew Research Centre, 2021).

## Materials

The Facebook group in question had a large membership of (at the time of data collection) close to 300,000. In order to answer our question, *How do women with an interest in their visual image experience, respond to, and feel about age-related changes in appearance?* we developed a questionnaire, to which we posted a link with the approval of the group's moderator. A sample question was: *How do you feel about the changes in your appearance that come with ageing (for example body shape and size, hair, skin)?* The questions were modelled on those used by Cecil et al. (2018, 2022) who investigated older women's declination to use hair dye and were intended to be open and non-directive. Thus, while we were interested in how appearance affected their feelings about themselves, we did not refer to authenticity. In addition to questions about their experiences, responses and feelings, we asked participants for demographic information and about any alteration they perceived in how other people responded to them, for example, *Do you think that other people view you or treat you differently as a woman as a result of changes to your appearance as you get older? If so please explain* (see [Appendix A](#)).

## Participants

We posted a message on the Facebook group explaining the study and inviting members to click a link to access the questionnaire. All participants were assured of anonymity. We specified no age range but assumed that, due to the nature of the group, most would be over 50 years old, which proved to be the case. We asked for their age within a ten-year band, their occupation if working, and their nationality. They were invited to write as little or as much as they wanted in response to questions.

Of the two hundred and forty-five women who started the survey, 61 exited before giving answers, leaving 184 participants in the study. Three were in their 40s, the majority were in their 50s ( $n = 75$ ) and 60s ( $n = 84$ ) and the remainder were over age 70 ( $n = 22$ ). They came from across Europe and the Americas with most being from the USA ( $n = 102$ ) or UK ( $n = 37$ ). Thirteen were from Canada and the remaining participants came from 18 different countries, one identified as Black and all answered in English. Forty-one were not working and the remainder worked largely in professional, administrative or service sectors.

## Analysis

We carried out a template analysis (King, 2004). This approach sits between qualitative analyses with predetermined codes (e.g., content analysis, Weber, 1985) and those with no predetermined codes (e.g., grounded theory, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, it is an appropriate analytical tool for a critical realist stance towards the nature of the social context, namely, one that is characterised by ageist and sexist assumptions, in which our participants conduct and make sense of their lives.

**Table 1.** Major and subthemes.

Major themes	Subthemes
1. Unfavourable experiences	1.1 Antipathy towards ageism 1.2 Invisibility 1.3 Presumption of low competence 1.4 The double bind
2. Evading ageism through Masquerade	2.1 Camouflage: clothes, cosmetics, surgery, hair 2.2 Compensatory effort 2.3 Effects on Authenticity 2.4 Role of enjoyment

Template analysis begins with a set of provisional codes which are subsequently amended and refined during the analytical process. As this allows for early organisation of the data, it is particularly useful when analysing large data sets such as in this study.

We assigned pseudonyms to each participant, imported the data into NVivo 11 software and began analysis with a template of codes derived from published literature and our main areas of interest (experiences of ageing and appearance change, feelings, third-party responses, and participants' behaviours, including concealment strategies). The initial template was modified throughout the analytical process. The data were repeatedly read and codes were defined, collapsed, or omitted and new codes added until they were judged to effectively represent the data. From these we developed themes to best reflect the underlying patterns in the participants' responses in relation to theories of stigma, concealment and disclosure.

## Findings

Two key themes were identified (see Table 1), which we explore in detail below: firstly, unfavourable experiences of ageism and, secondly, evasion of ageist experiences through masquerade.

### Theme 1. Unfavourable experiences of ageism: "society's view ... is demoralising and a barrier"

While our participants reported some positive experiences of being older, the majority of experiences were unwelcome. Within this theme we identified four subthemes: *antipathy toward ageism*, *invisibility*, *presumption of low competence*, and the *double bind* of age-in/appropriateness. Participants were alert to ageism, negative stereotypes and discrimination, and expressed their antipathy. They reported being rendered societally invisible, which they mostly found objectionable, and similarly, being considered incompetent, both physically and mentally, despite retaining full capacity. Many expressed confusion and frustration around what society considers an age-appropriate appearance.

#### *Antipathy toward ageism*

Most participants had had direct experience of stigma and discrimination, resented it, and were keen to resist its effects, as a couple of typical extracts illustrate: "I want to continue to be relevant and not be stereotyped based on age" (Alex, 60–69); "People tend to want to help you, think you are stupid, that you never read a book in your life, condescending, and yes I hate that part of ageing" (Olga, 60–69).

Several participants reported benevolent ageism in the form of unwanted terms of endearment:

I've noticed more people call me Dear ... that is a hateful term, it's patronising and makes me feel old ... I just want people to treat me the same ... don't assume I'm incapable, over the hill etc. (Tracey, 60–69)

Others received unwanted offers of assistance, for example, “Once I stopped dyeing my hair and let it go naturally white I was aware I was being offered seats on trains. Bags were offered to be carried. I am a triathlete!!” [sic] (Elsa, 60–69).

Hostile age discrimination was also encountered: “[P]eople overlook me... think I don’t have long to live... they tell me I have lived my life and young people are more important” (Oona, 50–59); “Students are vicious to older women. Co-workers can be dismissive of an older person’s opinions” (Tara, 50–59). An artist described how people could be dismissive before seeing her work, suggesting passive ageism, “[People] don’t take me seriously [...] until they see what I do.[...] Some can be so condescending, I ignore those and have another glass of wine” (Philippa, 60–69).

Our participants were aware that appearance-based ageism can be particularly potent for women: “Aging is scary. It makes you insecure about the future as a woman since so much of who you are and how you are taken is judged from your appearance” (Polly, 50–59). Such judgement can mean older women being discounted or rendered socially invisible by virtue of their appearance.

### **Invisibility**

The data included numerous comments on becoming unseen, ignored or metaphorically invisible as participants got older. Some mentioned age difference as a factor: “I really feel invisible to younger people” (Una, 60–69); “I feel invisible to a majority of the population - ones that are younger than I am. People my age, they do notice me... Younger men, look right through me like I am not even there” (Ellen, 60–69).

Invisibility was often experienced as belittling, e.g., “It’s like we become invisible and this started in my early sixties. I am either treated condescendingly, dismissively, mansplained to death... or looked right through as if not there” (Dawn, over 70). Alternatively, invisibility was experienced as being rendered inconsequential, e.g., “You are made to feel less relevant. There are days when you feel you are a ghost and not noticed” (Jackie, 50–59).

Several referred to invisibility to men, perceiving sexual irrelevance: “Aging women are invisible in our society. They become asexual” (Genevieve, 50–59). Some noted that this is an effect of ageing specific to women: “... I think men have it easier. They just move on to younger women, while older women just disappear” (Briony, 60–69).

While invisibility was largely deplored, some participants were ambivalent or welcoming: “The male gaze is directed elsewhere. Sometimes I’m glad of that and other times I feel invisible, especially when with younger friends or colleagues” (Wynne, 40–49); “I sometimes really enjoy being more invisible publicly. I travelled to India alone last year and despite being warned of harassment I was just ignored. Perfect!” (Sylvia, over 70).

On the other hand, when *not* feeling invisible, our participants often experienced being presumed incompetent.

### **Presumption of low competence**

A number of participants reported that their aged appearance meant that when they *were* noticed by others, they were seen as incompetent, e.g., “They don’t expect me to be able to exercise or do everything I do” (Jess, 50–59); and Karin said,

... with me not coloring my hair. Younger people talk louder and slowly to me. What? I got older not stupid! Ugh! The best is when they show me where to put the chip for my credit card in the payment machine. I’m older, not retarded - is what I want to scream. The opposite effect happens when I color my hair to cover the gray. (Karin, 60–69).



The requirement to look competent was particularly important at work; for example, “[T]here is still a stigma that older people do not stay knowledgeable about current trends, business practices, technology, etc.” (Kate, 50–59); and “Perceptions of age lead to age discrimination in the workplace. Students and co-workers sometimes view an older appearance as archaic and out of touch” (Tara, 50–59). Furthermore, as Rebecca (60–69) said,

I had a 36 year very successful career. I was the #3 sales manager in the country. I was laid off and my company kept a 40 year old male with less experience and far poorer results [ ... ] I’m not working because of age discrimination.

Two participants summed up the views of many: “I feel like our society discounts people over 50” (Kate, 50–59); and, as cited in the heading above, “Society’s view on aging and older people is demoralising and a barrier” (Debbie, 60–69).

These sentiments, though, were not universal. As Pattie (50–59) put it, “One gets more respect just for being older ... The younger people are, the more they have inaccurate expectations. It’s hard to be a sweet old thing instead of a hot broad!” Pattie indicated the predicament faced by older women in relation to others’ expectations about what is considered age-appropriate or -inappropriate.

### ***The double bind: fearing old, fearing young***

Although lack of attention to looking young(er) and looking kempt ran the risk of being judged incompetent, participants noted that excessive or incautious attention to appearance could also be problematic, as succinctly expressed here: “I do not want to look like mutton dressed as lamb” (Claire, 60–69). Anxiety about looking inappropriate and thus foolish, appeared repeatedly in the data, for example:

I worry about looking the best that I can and balancing that with being age appropriate. I don’t want to appear to be a 70 year old woman who is sadly trying to look like she’s 15 (Ruth, over 70)

As another participant said, “It’s a fine line to look well-groomed and contemporary or looking ridiculous (trying too hard to look young)” (Olympia, 60–69).

How to walk a line that does not breach conflicting imperatives to look neither old nor inappropriately young was a baffling dilemma, which was mentioned repeatedly: “I love to dress well but am often confused about what looks too old and too young for my age” (Lesley, 50–59); “[I] try not to dress as a teenager but don’t want to look like an old lady.” (Chloe, over 70); “[I am] still trying to find balance between not dressing too young or trendy and old and boring.” (Selina, 60–69).

In trying to dress “appropriately” many found themselves thwarted by difficulty finding clothes that they considered both appealing and suitable and some expressed their frustration forcefully, “There is not much out there for mature women especially magazines show such crap you just want to put on your yoga pants and eat a bag of chips.” (Olga, 60–69); “Choices are SO limited. It doesn’t help that I live in a rural area ... Clothes are too trendy or downright BORING.” (Vivienne, 60–69). These reports contrasted with considerably fewer from participants who found it easy to find clothes they liked: “Still plenty to choose from.” (Hayden’ 50–59). While we did not ask whether participants lived in urban or rural environments, their place of residence may be a factor in this differential, along with others like affordability, personal preference, and body size.

The fact that older women’s body size and shape tend to differ markedly from those of fashion models was noted by several participants, e.g., “They make very cute clothes if you’re a SMALL size built ... for me [it is] hard to find something I think is sexy for my age ... I think they need more LARGE size clothing” (Lisa, 50–59).

## Theme 2. Evasion of ageism through masquerade

In response to the ageism they encountered and the conflict and confusion they experienced, our participants engaged in masquerade, using clothes and beauty work (cosmetics, hair, surgical procedures, etc.), to navigate a path through societal appearance strictures and to further their interests. We identified four subthemes: Masquerade largely consisted of *camouflage* as participants tried to conceal or disguise their aged appearance, which at times involved *compensatory effort* to mitigate aspects that could not be concealed. They experienced incongruence between their appearance and their inner selves, captured in the subtheme *effects on authenticity*. Although many found vigilance around their appearance an effortful but necessary evil, some experienced the masquerade as pleasurable, described in the subtheme, *the role of enjoyment*.

### Camouflage

In response to our asking if they took measures to alter their appearance so as to look younger, a large number said that they did, using the terms “camouflage,” “hide” or “disguise.” We present illustrative examples of their responses related to four areas: clothes, cosmetics, surgical procedures, and hair.

#### Clothes

For some, clothes were deployed to hide unfavoured aspects of the ageing body, “I choose [clothes/accessories] to camouflage my faults, i.e. too fat” (Wendy, 60–69);

I am trying to just ROCK IT every day and be proud of myself. But I admit I get a little self-conscious when I feel like my clothes aren't fitting or flattering to my arms or tummy. I dress to camouflage what I can and what makes me feel comfortable (Adrienne, 50–59)

Sarah summed up the priorities of many, “I choose clothes for comfort, style and camouflage!” (Sarah, 60–69).

#### Cosmetics

Cosmetics were often referenced. While they had been used by some throughout adulthood there was a reassessment of their use in relation to participants' older appearance, for example, “I have changed my make up routine somewhat to accommodate my changing face.” (Alex, 60–69); I wear makeup more often now than when I was younger” (Sylvia, over 70). Makeup was not always increased but sometimes decreased, “I have started to reduce the amount of makeup I wear. For me its feels better looking more natural. ... Now I don't use ... eyeliner and take care to choose a more natural color lipstick.” (Bernie, 60–69).

For some, cosmetics included those that were permanent (tattooing), which Odelle believed helped her retain visibility “[I] had my lips, eyes and eyebrows enhanced with permanent makeup. Best choice ever ... I feel much better. My face is brighter and more alive ... I'm not visually fading anymore. (Odelle, 60–69)”. Camouflage was also enacted through more invasive, surgical procedures, which were frequently cited.

#### Cosmetic surgery

A few were not in favour of such interventions, and emphatically so, e.g., “Nothing surgical! !!” (Prue, 60–69), but many more had undergone surgery, were planning to, or regretted that they could not for lack of funds. This applied to 41 of the 47 women who mentioned it. Several used botulinum toxin [Botox] and other “non-invasive” procedures, for example, “Botox and Juvederm [filler] twice a year” (Fran, 60–69); “I use a little Botox and filler. I had Ulthera [skin tightening]”

(Jane, 60–69); “Dermabrasions, Retin A [anti-ageing skin treatment], Juvederm” (Willa, 60–69). A number described the interventions they would like if they could afford them financially. These included both the less invasive, “If I could afford Botox I would probably get it [on upper lip]” (Carol, 60–69); and also the more invasive, “If I could afford it I would have a neck lift and lower face lift. But I can’t. So I don’t” (Ruth, over 70).

Several had already had surgery and others said that they were thinking of it: “[I have had] Botox....[Now] considering more drastic plastic surgery” (Helen, 60–69). For one participant contemplating finding work, cosmetic surgery was a necessary means to an end and not considered a major procedure: “If I have to find a new job before I retire (which is a possibility) I’ll consider a lower face/neck lift... “freshening” facelift. Nothing drastic—just lower face and maybe neck” (Briane, 60–69).

### **Hair**

Greying hair was another area where participants expended considerable effort on camouflage. Of those who mentioned their hair colour ( $n = 120$ ), half said they dyed it and half said they allowed it to go grey (61 vs 59). Those who dyed mentioned the frequency of the procedure, and/or their dislike of grey, and/or the visual improvement they perceived through dyeing. Barbara expressed all three when she said, “I have my hair done every month, I colour my hair I do not want to go grey. I have highlights it makes my skin look better” (Barbara, 60–69). Others engaged in heavier use of dye to camouflage extensive grey, for example, “I color my hair, which is now 80% gray” (Lillian, 50–59). With some irony one participant made apparent the effort involved in attending to ageing hair when she said, “I dye my hair. I’d like to stop, but I don’t have enough gray to go gray without just as much work! (Vivienne, 60–69).

Several refused to countenance grey hair, “[I] dye my shoulder length hair—won’t accept all gray hair until I’m in my 80s” (Willa, 60–69); used dye to look younger, “I remain blonde to hopefully look young!” (Claire, 60–69); particularly in relation to work, “I’m okay with my hair but I do dye it due to that fact that women with gray hair in the workplace are considered old. I will quit dying [sic] when I retire” (Marion, 50–59).

Most participants *not* dyeing their hair said that they enjoyed their natural colour, “I let my hair go grey and I love it!!!” (Quinn, 60–69), and some referred to the reduction of effort, “... colouring it is too time consuming and expensive.” (Norrie, 60–69). Most, however, appeared to spend considerable effort on their appearance by one means or another.

### **Compensatory effort**

Some participants with undyed hair felt a consequent need to make more effort in other areas. Quinn who, as quoted above, loves her grey hair, said, “Since I’ve gone grey... red lipstick!!!” (Quinn, 60–69); and another said, “I decided to stop getting highlights and have looked at ways to stay more stylish” (Rosie, 60–69). In place of dye they were employing a different variant of camouflage to compensate for grey hair that signalled “old” and some were explicit about the effort involved, “When I am meeting people I always make an effort and I would never leave the house without makeup as I want to present as having an enthusiasm for life... I do try hard to look put together” (Brenda, 60–69). Brenda was indicating an effort to give an impression of continued relevance, engagement and competence.

Many participants suggested that they employed compensatory beauty work in an effort to mitigate appearance changes that they described as “concerning”, “distressing” and “disappointing”. Other examples include, “Some days are very depressing.” (Sheila, 50–59); “I resent [age-related changes]. I hate the way my appearance is changing and that I can’t control

it... Sometimes ageing makes me panicky” (Wynne, 40–49). Some of their distress was with regard to a mismatch between their self-image and what they saw in the mirror,

I’m starting to feel less attractive. I can see myself losing my youth and it’s something I grieve over. My self-image and worth is so tied up in how I look that I am beginning to have a hard time liking myself— or being afraid I won’t like myself in ten more years. (Genevieve, 50–59)

### **Authenticity**

Such incongruence between inner felt self and outer appearance, illustrating the mask of ageing (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989), was also expressed by others: “I feel quite active and young until I see myself in the mirror, can be a little depressing!” (Donna, 50–59); “I feel young on the inside and can’t get used to seeing lines on my face” (Claire, 60–69). The discrepancy between their appearance and their self-perceived authentic selves was consistent with the disparity between their actual age (within a ten-year bracket) and how old they felt. Of the 161 who specified a felt age, two gave an age in the following decade (both citing poor health) while the remaining 159 averaged feeling 1.46 decades younger than their chronological decade. The disparity was experienced as upsetting, for example,

Sometimes it is hard to acknowledge the changes because the vision in my head is so different from the one in the mirror... I don’t like pictures of me and avoid mirrors.... Quite honestly, if I could afford to, I would do some cosmetic work on my face. (Alex, 60–69)

Some reported distress while also valuing the life experience that preceded an aged appearance,

I still feel the same but at the same time am more comfortable with who I am which I feel was earned through life experiences and aging. But I do struggle with the changes in my appearance because I don’t think they reflect how I feel about myself. (Lena, 50–59)

Still others were content to accept that their outer appearance did not represent their true selves, “I feel satisfied with the life I chose, and I am too busy to worry about... physical changes that don’t change who I am” (Val, over 70).

A number of participants did not think that they would resemble their inner self by dressing or wearing makeup as they had when young, but would only run the risk of being judged to be inappropriate “mutton dressed as lamb.” Paradoxically, then, trying to appear as their true, authentic selves would in fact render them appearing *inauthentic*. Some tried to simultaneously evade such censure *and* align with their perceived authentic selves by choosing clothes with caution, “[You] just have to be careful when you shop and try to find items that aren’t too young or aren’t too old. Looking for items that reflect current place in mind and body” (Alice, 60–69).

Personal, individual style was important. This further indicated that participants wanted their outer appearance to reflect their true selves that they believed had endured over time. For example, “I am known for my quirky style, and that hasn’t really changed.” (Briane, 50–59); Polly reported on how she saw herself and how she wanted to present herself to others,

I started as a commercial artist and will always think of myself as such. I like creativity, but realize that as I age, I must wear classics or else things may look wakadoodle. So, I try to mix a classic tweed with a motorcycle jacket... I want my appearance to represent me more than just an age. I still want to look fit and strong, sexy, smart and to stand out as a woman of fashion. (Polly, 50–59)

Some participants found it not harder but easier to dress in their style as they aged as they no longer felt the need to follow trends as when they were younger. For example, “I feel bolder to wear “My Style”- I don’t feel the need to meet trends” (Tina, 50–59).

## **Enjoyment**

The importance of individual style indicates participants' enjoyment in crafting a public image that is congruent with their self-perception. Enjoyment of fashion persisted for many and, despite the difficulties they indicated, they repeatedly mentioned the pleasure they derived, as two examples illustrate: "I love fashion!" (Rae, 60–69); "I love clothes and dress up every day" (Amanda, 60–69). However, this was often tempered by the imperative to avoid violating societal proscriptions, "I love the way I dress... very fashion forward. I never wear anything inappropriate, too tight or too revealing" (Julia, 50–59).

For some participants enjoyment of fashion did not merely endure but increased: "I'm probably having more fun with clothing choices than ever. Feel more "in style" than ever." (Tricia, 60–69); and some did not feel constricted on choices, "I choose what makes me happy. There are no restrictions" (Aimee, 60–69).

## **Discussion**

This study identified our participants' (mostly) unfavourable experiences of ageism, their strategies to try to evade them through masquerade, and how this related to their subjective authentic selves. Despite literature indicating that concealing a stigma tends to threaten wellbeing, our data suggest otherwise. It may be that for some women, concealing their stigmatised age through a masquerade that corresponds with their felt authentic selves is, in fact, beneficial.

### ***Experiences of ageism***

Participants' experiences of age discrimination and stereotyping elicited strong antipathy. They were aware of perceptions of low competence, in line with the stereotype content model (Fiske, 2018), and that they could be subject to hostile, benevolent or passive ageism (Cary et al., 2017; Chonody, 2016). They were also aware that rectifying the situation by means of how they looked was problematic when societal appearance norms require that they neither present as "too" young, nor old and frumpy or, worse still, self-neglectful (Bytheway et al., 2007; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Hurd Clarke et al., 2009; Twigg, 2013). They expressed confusion and frustration at this double bind and how to navigate a path between these two stigmatised ascriptions, particularly when available clothing seemed to be designed for precisely the two ends of the age range with which they felt incompatible.

### ***Responses to experiences of ageism***

The bulk of the data related to participants' responses to their largely negative experiences. They engaged in masquerade to compensate for their aged appearance and thus avoid discrimination. The imposed mask of ageing that bore little resemblance to their self-conception (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989) was itself to be obliterated as best it could by a masque.

### ***Masquerade—concealing or revealing?***

What do the data tell us about women's masquerade as strategies of concealment or disclosure and their relationship to authenticity? By concealing or diminishing their aged appearance, our participants were trying to thwart ageism and retain relevance, visibility and status that aligned with their self-concept. They used various levels of masquerade or concealment strategies ranging in intensity from surgery to reducing make-up. They were attempting to conceal and pass (e.g., when looking for work), or to be discreet or non-disclose (e.g., avoiding dressing "old"), or signal

their age (e.g., with grey hair) but compensating (e.g., with make-up) so that the signal was muted (Camacho et al., 2020; Clair et al., 2005; Goffman, 1963).

The strategies on Clair et al.'s (2005) continuum merge one into the other and can be difficult to distinguish as their differences may be subtle, making a selection unlikely to be simple but contingent on a number of factors. One, for example, is the need to avoid looking "inappropriate" and risking further stigmatisation (Bytheway et al., 2007; Hurd Clarke et al., 2009). Another is differing usage across domains (Ragins, 2008). In the workplace, for example, ageism and the importance of appearing competent can make it difficult for older job-seekers, women in particular, to find work (Neumark et al., 2019). Consequently, full concealment may be chosen, as illustrated by participants who would consider surgery in the belief that it may improve their job prospects. In addition, age stigma itself is dynamic (Jones et al., 2016); it changes with time and thus masquerade will also do so.

Our participants, then, were selecting strategies germane to their individual circumstances and the majority reported using variants of concealment or masquerade. Although concealment (of other stigmas) can protect against discrimination, it tends to be maladaptive in the longer term and result in poorer wellbeing outcomes than disclosure (e.g., DeJordy, 2008; Jones & King, 2014; Pachankis, 2007; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Quinn et al., 2017; Ragins, 2008; Van Laar et al., 2014). This is due in part to misalignment between the projected self and the felt inner self and thus the loss of wellbeing that is associated with authenticity (Bosson et al., 2012; DeJordy, 2008; Jones et al., 2016; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). However, we query whether this is always so in the case of age stigma.

Our data suggest that masquerade at different levels—conceal, be discreet, signal, non-disclose—can counter the mask of ageing (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989) and achieve greater congruence with participants' perceived, true selves. Aligning their appearance with their inner, decades younger, selves suggests both motivation for and possible outcomes of masquerade: increased felt authenticity. The use of camouflage and display through cosmetics, surgery and clothes not only allowed them to continue projecting their (self-perceived) authentic selves onto their outer appearance but also to continue the enjoyment they had always obtained from fashion, style and self-grooming.

Consequently, we suggest that for women with a particular interest in their appearance it may be that the process of concealment is pleasurable and, furthermore, enhances their felt authenticity and is protective of their wellbeing, rather than detrimental. This would run counter to the literature to date. If masquerade supports and enhances feelings of authenticity, then it could be critical to older women's wellbeing.

If, in line with existentialist approaches, authenticity is a state, or process of congruence to achieve a coherent self-concept (Sutton, 2020), then it can only ever be partial, subjective, and open to change. The true selves that our participants felt themselves to have, and some wished to present through their individual style, cannot be absolute and immutable but perhaps need only be perceived to exist in order to have positive wellbeing outcomes. Our data suggest that masquerade might serve to enhance perception of authenticity and consequently support wellbeing.

### ***Limitations and future directions***

This study answers some questions and raises others, with indications for future research. The nature of our participants was both a helpful and a limiting factor. It allowed us to examine the experiences and responses of women who were invested in their appearance and thus likely to take measures to ensure that it corresponded as closely as possible to their preferences. Hence, we have been able to understand some of the ageism and experiences motivating women to choose concealment strategies, how they do so, the difficulties encountered, and the role of enjoyment. It is limiting, however, as the findings are specific to women sufficiently concerned about

their appearance to join an online group to discuss it. Future research could investigate the strategies of women of, for example, different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, work status, and levels of appearance investment and age group identification.

The current study's data were from a large number of survey responses and it would be useful to examine in more depth, through interview, women's motivations for and expectations of their use of masquerade. This could shed further light on the relationship between choice of strategy and women's perceptions of their authentic selves. Not only may this differ with e.g., socioeconomic group but also with chronological age. It would be interesting to interrogate the utility of positioning concealment and disclosure as oppositional poles through research with participants in late old age. What may be considered concealment in middle age/early old age may in fact coexist with disclosure when age has become unavoidably evident. For example, women who declare their very late age while also wearing exuberant fashion (e.g., Cohen, 2012) may represent a playful aspect of masquerade that both is and is not an agent of concealment.

## Conclusion

This study explored gendered ageing amongst a sample of women for whom appearance was an important factor. Through a qualitative approach, we were able to identify themes that best described their experiences of ageism and responses to it. This yielded insights into their perceptions of being treated as if incompetent or invisible, and the mismatch between such treatment based on how they looked and what they perceived to be their true selves.

The considerable trouble participants took with their appearance was a response to gendered ageism that ascribes to older women characteristics such as incompetence or irrelevance (and thus, invisibility). This represents the causal mechanism, in critical realist terms, that best explains firstly, the effort expended on distancing themselves from the stigmatised category, old, i.e. avoidance of discrimination, and secondly, attempts to realign their appearance with their self-perceived, younger, competent, authentic selves, i.e. achieving coherence. To do so they employed masquerade in various forms. These ranged from full concealment to minimal covering or discretion, which may be explained, in part, by a further causal mechanism, namely, the dynamic nature of age stigma with its unvarying course that can only be, at best, temporarily interrupted.

Our findings contrast with stigma literature that indicates that concealment impairs felt authenticity rather than enhances it. There may be a case for considering old age to differ from other stigmatised conditions in this respect. This could have implications for older women's wellbeing if artfully deployed, context-appropriate concealment strategies bolster authenticity, which is in turn positively related to subjective wellbeing.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr. Hazel Mycroft, University of Exeter, for her early involvement in data analysis, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

## Ethics statement

Ethics approval for the study was obtained (from the College of Life Sciences, University of Exeter, ethics committee, approval number: eCLEPsy000171 v2.1).

## Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

## ORCID

Vanessa Cecil  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7410-4078>

Jessica Salvatore  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1223-7008>

## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, VC, upon reasonable request.

## References

- Åberg, E., Kukkonen, I., & Sarpila, O. (2020). From double to triple standards of ageing. Perceptions of physical appearance at the intersections of age, gender and class. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 55, 100876. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2020.100876>
- Ayalon, L., Dolberg, P., Mikulionienė, S., Perek-Białas, J., Rapolienė, G., Stypinska, J., Willińska, M., & de la Fuente-Núñez, V. (2019). A systematic review of existing ageism scales. *Ageing Research Reviews*, 54, 100919. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arr.2019.100919>
- Baumeister, R. F. (2019). Stalking the true self through the jungles of authenticity: Problems, contradictions, inconsistencies, disturbing findings—And a possible way forward. *Review of General Psychology*, 23(1), 143–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268019829472>
- Berkley, R. A., Beard, R., & Daus, C. S. (2019). The emotional context of disclosing a concealable stigmatized identity: A conceptual model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(3), 428–445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.09.001>
- Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. Books.
- Biggs, S. (2004). Age, gender, narratives, and masquerades. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2003.09.005>
- Bosson, J. K., Weaver, J. R., & Prewitt-Freilino, J. L. (2012). Concealing to belong, revealing to be known: Classification expectations and self-threats among persons with concealable stigmas. *Self and Identity*, 11(1), 114–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2010.513508>
- Brambilla, M., & Leach, C. W. (2014). On the importance of being moral: The distinctive role of morality in social judgment. *Social Cognition*, 32(4), 397–408. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2014.32.4.39>
- Brown, J. E., Rhee, N., Saad-Lessler, J., Oakley, D. (2016). *Shortchanged in retirement: Continuing challenges to women's financial future*. National institute on retirement security. [https://www.nirsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/final\\_shortchanged\\_retirement\\_report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.nirsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/final_shortchanged_retirement_report_2016.pdf)
- Bytheway, B., Ward, R., Holland, C., Pearce, S. (2007). *Too old: Older people's accounts of discrimination, exclusion and rejection: A report from the research on age discrimination project (RoAD) to help the aged*. Help the Aged, London, UK. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/7281>
- Camacho, G., Reinka, M. A., & Quinn, D. M. (2020). Disclosure and concealment of stigmatized identities. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 31, 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.07.031>
- Cameron, E., Ward, P., Mandville-Anstey, S. A., & Coombs, A. (2019). The female aging body: A systematic review of female perspectives on aging, health, and body image. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 31(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2018.1449586>
- Cary, L. A., Chasteen, A. L., & Remedios, J. (2017). The ambivalent ageism scale: Developing and validating a scale to measure benevolent and hostile ageism. *The Gerontologist*, 57(2), e27–e36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw118>
- Cecil, V., Pendry, L. F., Salvatore, J., & Kurz, T. (2018). Women's grey hair as an abomination of the body: Conceal and pass, or reveal and subvert. In *Feminist interrogations of women's head hair* (pp. 124–140). Routledge.
- Cecil, V., Pendry, L. F., Salvatore, J., Mycroft, H., & Kurz, T. (2022). Gendered ageism and gray hair: Must older women choose between feeling authentic and looking competent? *Journal of Women & Aging*, 34(2), 210–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.1899744>
- Chasteen, A. L., & Cary, L. A. (2015). Age stereotypes and age stigma: Connections to research on subjective aging. *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 35(1), 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0198-8794.35.99>
- Chaudoir, S. R., Earnshaw, V. A., & Andel, S. (2013). “Discredited” versus “discreditable”: Understanding how shared and unique stigma mechanisms affect psychological and physical health disparities. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 35(1), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2012.746612>
- Chonody, J. M. (2016). Positive and negative ageism: The role of benevolent and hostile sexism. *Affilia*, 31(2), 207–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109915595839>



- Chrisler, J. C., Barney, A., & Palatino, B. (2016). Ageism can be hazardous to women's health: Ageism, sexism, and stereotypes of older women in the healthcare system. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(1), 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12157>
- Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & MacLean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(1), 78–95. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2005.15281431>
- Cohen, A. S. (2012). *Advanced style*. Powerhouse Books.
- Cuddy, A. J. C., Fiske, S. T., Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS MAP. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 40, 61–149. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0065-2601\(07\)00002-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0065-2601(07)00002-0)
- DeJordy, R. (2008). Just passing through: Stigma, passing, and identity decoupling in the work place. *Group & Organization Management*, 33(5), 504–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601108324879>
- Featherstone, M., & Hepworth, M. (1989). Ageing and old age: Reflection on the post-modern life course. In B. Bytheway (Ed.), *Becoming and being old: Sociological approaches to later life* (pp. 143–157). Sage.
- Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype content: Warmth and competence endure. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(2), 67–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417738825>
- Giasson, H. L., & Chopik, W. J. (2020). Geographic patterns of implicit age bias and associations with state-level health outcomes across the United States. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(6), 1173–1190. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2707>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/43.1.127>
- Handy, J., & Davy, D. (2007). Gendered ageism: Older women's experiences of employment agency practices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 45(1), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038411107073606>
- House of Commons, Women and Equalities Committee. (2018). *Older people and employment*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/359/359.pdf>
- Hurd Clarke, L. (2011). *Facing age: Women growing older in anti-aging culture*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Hurd Clarke, L. (2018). Women, aging, and beauty culture: Navigating the social perils of looking old. *Generations*, 41(4), 104–108. <https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=2ae4bc0f-dbce-4080-809d-9296a92a7d3d%40redis>
- Hurd Clarke, L., & Griffin, M. (2008). Visible and invisible ageing: Beauty work as a response to ageism. *Ageing and Society*, 28(5), 653–674. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X07007003>
- Hurd Clarke, L., Griffin, M., & Maliha, K. (2009). Bat wings, bunions, and turkey wattles: Body transgressions and older women's strategic clothing choices. *Ageing and Society*, 29(5), 709–726. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X08008283>
- Hurd, L. (2000). Older women's body image and embodied experience: An exploration. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 12(3–4), 77–97. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J074v12n03\\_06](https://doi.org/10.1300/J074v12n03_06)
- Hurst, M., Dittmar, H., Halliwell, E., & Diedrichs, P. C. (2016). Does size matter? In C. V. Jansson-Boyd & M. J. Zawisza (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of consumer psychology* (p. 232). Routledge.
- Jackson, S. E., Hackett, R. A., & Steptoe, A. (2019). Associations between age discrimination and health and well-being: Cross-sectional and prospective analysis of the English Longitudinal study of ageing. *The Lancet. Public Health*, 4(4), e200–e208. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(19\)30035-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30035-0)
- Jones, E. E. (1984). *Social stigma: The psychology of marked relationships*. WH Freeman.
- Jones, K. P., & King, E. B. (2014). Managing concealable stigmas at work: A review and multilevel model. *Journal of Management*, 40(5), 1466–1494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313515518>
- Jones, K. P., King, E. B., Gilrane, V. L., McCausland, T. C., Cortina, J. M., & Grimm, K. J. (2016). The baby bump: Managing a dynamic stigma over time. *Journal of Management*, 42(6), 1530–1556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313503012>
- Jones, R. L. (2011). Imagining old age. In J. Katz, S. Peace, & S. Spurr (Eds.), *Adult lives: A life course perspective* (pp. 18–26). Polity Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t895q0.8>
- Jongman-Serenio, K. P., & Leary, M. R. (2019). The enigma of being yourself: A critical examination of the concept of authenticity. *Review of General Psychology*, 23(1), 133–142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000157>
- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassel & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 256–270). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280119.n21>
- Lee, M., & Damhorst, M. L. (2021). Women's body image throughout the adult life span: A living history approach. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.2015197>
- Macia, E., Duboz, P., & Chev e, D. (2015). The paradox of impossible beauty: Body changes and beauty practices in aging women. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 27(2), 174–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2014.929403>

- Major, B., & Schmader, T. (2017). Stigma as identity threat: Implications for health. In B. Major, J. Dovidio, & B. Link (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of stigma, discrimination, and health*. Oxford University Press.
- Mariano, J., Marques, S., Ramos, M. R., & de Vries, H. (2021). Internet use by middle-aged and older adults: Longitudinal relationships with functional ability, social support, and self-perceptions of aging. *Psychology and Aging, 36*(8), 983–995. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000643>
- Martin, A. E., & North, M. S. (2021). Equality for (almost) all: Egalitarian advocacy predicts lower endorsement of sexism and racism, but not ageism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 123*(2), 373–399. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000262>
- Neumark, D., Burn, I., & Button, P. (2019). Is it harder for older workers to find jobs? New and improved evidence from a field experiment. *Journal of Political Economy, 127*(2), 922–970. <https://doi.org/10.1086/701029>
- Newheiser, A. K., & Barreto, M. (2014). Hidden costs of hiding stigma: Ironic interpersonal consequences of concealing a stigmatized identity in social interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 52*, 58–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.01.002>
- Newman, G. E. (2019). The psychology of authenticity. *Review of General Psychology, 23*(1), 8–18. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000158>
- Office for National Statistics. (2021). *Internet users, UK: 2020*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/datasets/internetusers>
- Pachankis, J. E. (2007). The psychological implications of concealing a stigma: A cognitive-affective-behavioral model. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(2), 328–345. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.2.328>
- Pachankis, J. E., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Wang, K., Burton, C. L., Crawford, F. W., Phelan, J. C., & Link, B. G. (2018). The burden of stigma on health and well-being: A taxonomy of concealment, course, disruptiveness, aesthetics, origin, and peril across 93 stigmas. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 44*(4), 451–474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217741313>
- Pew Research Centre. (2021). *Internet/broadband fact sheet*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>
- Pinquart, M., & Wahl, H. W. (2021). Subjective age from childhood to advanced old age: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Aging, 36*(3), 394–406. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000600>
- Quinn, D. M., & Chaudoir, S. R. (2009). Living with a concealable stigmatized identity: The impact of anticipated stigma, centrality, salience, and cultural stigma on psychological distress and health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*(4), 634–651. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015815>
- Quinn, D. M., Weisz, B. M., & Lawner, E. K. (2017). Impact of active concealment of stigmatized identities on physical and psychological quality of life. *Social Science & Medicine, 192*, 14–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.09.024>
- Ragins, B. R. (2008). Disclosure disconnects: Antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *Academy of Management Review, 33*(1), 194–215. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.27752724>
- Rodgers, R. F., Campagna, J., & Attawala, R. (2019). Stereotypes of physical attractiveness and social influences: The heritage and vision of Dr. Thomas Cash. *Body Image, 31*, 273–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.01.010>
- Schlegel, R. J., Hicks, J. A., Arndt, J., & King, L. A. (2009). Thine own self: True self-concept accessibility and meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*(2), 473–490. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014060>
- Schmader, T., & Sedikides, C. (2018). State authenticity as fit to environment: The implications of social identity for fit, authenticity, and self-segregation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 22*(3), 228–259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317734080>
- Sedikides, C., Lenton, A. P., Slabu, L., & Thomaes, S. (2019). Sketching the contours of state authenticity. *Review of General Psychology, 23*(1), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000156>
- Sedikides, C., Slabu, L., Lenton, A., & Thomaes, S. (2017). State authenticity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 26*(6), 521–525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417713296>
- Strohming, N., Knobe, J., & Newman, G. (2017). The true self: A psychological concept distinct from the self. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(4), 551–560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616689495>
- Sutton, A. (2020). Living the good life: A meta-analysis of authenticity, well-being and engagement. *Personality and Individual Differences, 153*, 109645. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.109645>
- Twigg, J. (2013). *Fashion and age: Dress, the body and later life*. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174110x12792058833898>
- Twigg, J. (2018). Why clothes matter: the role of dress in the everyday lives of older people. In S. Katz (Ed.), *Ageing in everyday life: Materialities and embodiments*. Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447335917.001.000>
- United Nations. (2017). *World population ageing [Report]*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017\\_Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Report.pdf)

- Van Laar, C., Bleeker, D., Ellemers, N., & Meijer, E. (2014). Ingroup and outgroup support for upward mobility: Divergent responses to ingroup identification in low status groups. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 44*(6), 563–577. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2046>
- van Veelen, R., Veldman, J., Van Laar, C., & Derks, B. (2020). Distancing from a stigmatized social identity: State of the art and future research agenda on self-group distancing. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 50*(6), 1089–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2714>
- Ward, R., Jones, R., Hughes, J., Humberstone, N., & Pearson, R. (2008). Intersections of ageing and sexuality: Accounts from older people. In R. Ward & B. Bytheway (Eds.), *Researching age and multiple discrimination* (pp. 45–72). Centre for Policy on Ageing. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/27390>
- Weber, R. P. (1985). *Basic content analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Weiss, D., & Freund, A. M. (2012). Still young at heart: Negative age-related information motivates distancing from same-aged people. *Psychology and Aging, 27*(1), 173–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024819>
- Weiss, D., & Lang, F. R. (2012). “They” are old but “I” feel younger: Age-group dissociation as a self-protective strategy in old age. *Psychology and Aging, 27*(1), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024887>
- Wilson, D. M., Errasti-Ibarrondo, B., & Low, G. (2019). Where are we now in relation to determining the prevalence of ageism in this era of escalating population ageing? *Ageing Research Reviews, 51*, 78–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arr.2019.03.001>
- Winterich, J. A. (2007). Aging, femininity, and the body: What appearance changes mean to women with age. *Gender Issues, 24*(3), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-007-9045-1>
- Woodward, K. M. (1991). *Aging and its discontents: Freud and other fictions* (Vol. 13). Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x00004499>

## Appendix A. Survey questions

There are several aspects of this [topic] that we would like to investigate and would be grateful if you would share your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in response to the questions below. You do not have to answer them all, just as many as you are happy to share your views on. Please write as much or as little as you like (the text boxes will expand as you type if you want to give long answers).

1. How do you feel about the changes in your appearance that come with ageing (for example body shape and size, hair, skin)?
2. In particular, what are your thoughts and feelings about your choices of clothes and accessories?
3. Do you take measures to alter your appearance so as to look younger? If so, in which ways?
4. How old do you feel?
5. How old do you think you look?
6. How old would you like to look?
7. Do you think that other people view you or treat you differently as a woman as a result of changes to your appearance as you get older? If so please explain.
8. Do appearance changes affect your social life or your home life? If they do, can you explain how?
9. If you are working, whether paid or voluntary, do appearance changes affect your work life? If they do, can you
  - a. tell us in what way?
  - b. tell us what, if anything, you have done in relation to your appearance or behaviour as a result
10. Do you feel differently about yourself as you notice your changing appearance? If you do, can you explain further?
11. How do you feel in general about older women’s appearance?
12. How do you feel about the whole process of your personal ageing, and about ageing in general?