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On going grey

Caroline Holland and Richard Ward

Introduction

Greying hair is one of the definitive physical markers of advancing years. Indeed the phrase 'going grey' is common metaphor for ageing itself: while efforts to soften or lessen the visibility of grey, such as the blue rinse, have in the past served as a symbol in the stereotyping of older people. The process of greying, from the discovery of the first few grey hairs, through the 'salt and pepper' stage and on to fully grey or white hair is gradual and commonly takes place over many years. Yet going grey is often presented as a socially and personally significant 'moment', cast in advertising and other cultural representations of ageing as a threshold or a point of transition. We are spurred to act at the sight of grey and the way we respond often serves as an indicator of the meanings that we attach to later life and the extent to which we accept or resist dominant constructs of greying.

In this chapter we consider how media images of hair and discourses on the appearance, condition, length and colour of hair contribute to the normalisation of particular attitudes to the appearance, particularly of older women, with whom the main focus of the following discussion lies. Older men are not immune to discourses on grey-ness, but here the messages have long been more ambiguous, and have included notions of 'maturity' and 'distinction' alongside negative connotations of ageing: 'the glory of young men their strength: and the beauty of old men the gray head' (Proverbs 20:29). Our discussion includes consideration of the commonplace construct of greying as transition; a point of entry to a stage in the life course that is implicitly unwanted and where the language of resistance, fighting and even war is deployed in support of rejecting old age. Coupland (2003; 2007) has also referred to this discourse in relation to anti-ageing skin care advertising. In particular, we are interested in the role played by grey hair in what Bytheway and Johnson (1998) have

described as ‘the sight of age’ and its often anticipated potential as a trigger for age discrimination (Bytheway 2005). Hence we explore how these constructs of greying are received and negotiated in the course of everyday living and what influence, if any, they have upon routines of hair care and management and the uptake of hairdressing services for people as they age. While such a preoccupation may at first seem trivial and even perhaps an unnecessary distraction from the more serious challenges sometimes associated with ageing, data from our research have shown that appearance plays a crucial role in the politics of ageing and is a focus in many types of discriminatory experience related to age (Bytheway, Ward, Holland and Peace 2007, Symonds and Holland 2008, Ward, Jones, Hughes, Humberstone and Pearson 2008).

In the following discussion we consider attitudes to ageing hair and what different approaches to dealing with it say about attitudes to ageing in general. We draw on data from a preliminary empirical study that arose from a wider investigation of age discrimination in the UK: the ‘Research on Age Discrimination’ (RoAD) project¹. This involved recruiting older people as trained and paid co-researchers (Bytheway et al, 2007). The primary aim of the RoAD project was to uncover evidence of age discrimination based upon accounts contributed in various forms by older people. We discuss the project and the methods used in greater detail later in this chapter. Data produced in this process allows us to consider the subjective responses to and interpretations of discriminatory experiences which included those that focused upon the older body and appearance. We also draw on recent media representations of approaches to ‘ageing hair’ - in UK magazines, TV, and advertising.

The body, image, and identity

Our discussion of the dilemmas revealed by these preliminary investigations is positioned with the literatures of cultural gerontology and sociology in relation to image, identity and the ageing body. We argue that the gulf between media images of ‘good’ hair and older people’s own self-image is mediated by cultural attitudes to ageing and shared discourses of age appropriate appearance and behaviour. Featherstone and Wernick (1995) point out that older people rarely have control over

the representation of later life, with the imagery of ageing often focused upon the body, highlighting bodily characteristics that mark older people out as different. By portraying older bodies as visibly less competent and less controlled (leaky, dishevelled, unclean) such portrayals can invoke responses of disgust or pity. This imagery underpins processes of discrimination and the stereotyping of old age. Conversely, positive portrayals of older people in the media tend to present the protagonists as looking younger than their age - and therefore distanced from real ageing.

The RoAD data highlighted that it is important not to conflate the (normative) popular and consumer culture images with personalised meanings attached to outward appearance in later life (Oberg 2003). However, grey hair can shape our social experiences because of how others respond to the sight of it. Often, as Bytheway and Johnson point out, the appearance of an older person is deconstructed, using a 'vocabulary of ageism ('grey', 'wrinkled')' and it is 'when this vocabulary is used to disaggregate the image, to isolate the various symbolic elements, that we are able to recognise the image of age' (p.248, 1998). Yet, little is known about how older people respond to these images or how they mediate everyday living.

Hair is undoubtedly important in terms of such imagery, underlining the representational role of the body, but it also has particular resonance in relation to the performativity of age. Our routine activities of grooming and self-presentation can serve to uphold gendered norms, and speak of income and class while positioning us culturally (Bourdieu 1984). The selling of hair and beauty products invokes identities and lifestyles as vehicles for marketing in what has traditionally been a highly gendered industry. Thus, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) note that hairstyling products are presented through advertising as acting upon the disembodied parts of passive female consumers.

At the same time hair is 'of the body', playing an important part in the embodied experience of ageing. With age, hair changes in colour and consistency, and can become more difficult to manage. To maintain a controlled appearance it may need to be tended regularly. Where the ageing of the body also involves the onset of limiting conditions such as arthritis, maintaining control over the hair can become a problem -

for many people, this means recourse to hairdressing as well as, or instead of, self-management (Twigg 2006).

Representations in media and advertising

In contrast to those images of great(er) old age which have been used to elicit sympathy and action on behalf of older people, positive media depictions of maturity in hair product advertising tend to lean on images of people (especially women, and often very well-known women) in late middle age to early old age.

[photo 1 - A UK 'Women's Magazine']

In the first quarter of 2010 we selected and periodically scanned a range of accessible visual media in the UK - TV and poster advertisements, advertisements and articles in magazines for mid-life and older women (as opposed to those aimed at very young women) and websites relating to 'health, hair and appearance', some of which were connected to established print newspapers and magazines) and publications targeted at those in the hairdressing industry. Our searches revealed that magazine articles, while often mentioning individuality, tend to promote similar solutions to ageing hair in terms of styling and colouring. This was reflected in the comments of RoAD respondents, for example by one diarist who discussed with a RoAD fieldworker the advice in a newspaper's Sunday Style supplement to 'cut grey hair short'. She recalled her own past experiences, while she had been employed as a supply teacher and still wore her grey hair long, of being called 'a witch' by young boys.

In recent years popular media, have begun to reflect the notion that 'ageing is changing' – people, women especially – are looking younger for longer, and women should have the courage to retain their individuality and personal style rather than conceding to the calendar (e.g. Turner, 2010).

[photo 2 – A mature worker who has chosen to keep her long hair after greying]

Yet the issue of grey hair continues to raise the spectre of embodied and obvious ageing, even during a brief period in 2010 when fashionable young women were streaking their hair with grey:

Fashionistas desperate for something new and bold, and whose colour palette is nearly exhausted, have faded to grey in what they are calling "granny chic"..... The appearance of a silvery streak on a famous woman's head used to scandalise observers of celebrities. When actress Nicole Kidman let her grey shine through in 2008, at the premiere of her film Australia, the story went around the world, with one commentator accusing her of breaking the "last taboo". Jennifer Aniston declared in 2007 that she sobbed when she found her first grey hair....Grey hair is in - but not if it's down to ageing: Salon demand surges for 'skunk streaks' and 'steel' dye, but it's a trend only for the young.

(McVeigh, 2010, in *The Observer*)

The message seems to be that a woman can 'be who she wants to be', as long that is, as she wants to be clearly as young and attractive as possible. For instance, Gerike (1990) has argued that dyeing hair is as a form of 'passing' which allows women to retain an association with a group that enjoys greater privilege and prestige.

[photo 3 - A display of hair products in a UK chain store]

However these considerations do not exclusively concern women. An anti-age doctrine newly extended to men has made its appearance in the UK, in dubbed adverts for products such as *Just for Men*. Here discourses of mid-life decline, have become integral to the advertising of male grooming products (see Gullette 1997). The appearance of ageing is presented as problematic to hegemonic masculinity, albeit in a manner intended to avoid any charge of narcissism, with solutions presented in the language of discretion, privacy, and 'undercover' action:

Specifically for men this is a better way to fight grey, taking it 'undercover' as much or as little as you like... and ensuring a natural and low maintenance result... Colour Camo is a discreet procedure that takes place over the wash basin in a private area of

the store and simply looks to others as if you are having a hair wash and scalp massage. (Jacks of London, men's barbers, <http://www.jacksoflondon.com>)

We argue that the heterogeneous nature of later life means that older women and men receive such images and messages about the acceptability of different types of image in different ways. The population aged over 60 includes at least two generations and several cohorts with differing experiences and expectations, in addition to differences in wealth and class, cultural background, gender and sexuality, and all of these factors have an impact on how people receive messages about age and appearance, which can be at best ambiguous, and at worst demoralising.

The sight of age: greying as a threshold

Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2008) discovered in their research with older women in Canada that 'beauty work', including hair dyeing, was often cast as a response to everyday experiences of ageism and in particular the anticipation and experience of social invisibility which is tied to the acquisition of outward signs of ageing. Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2010) described how even women who had at a younger age begun to dye their hair for reason of fashion acknowledged a point where the intention was masking of grey hair and ageing. The sight of age can provide a vehicle for the expression of ageism. In the media, efforts to engage consumers and/or readers sometimes use ageism as a framework to construct the meanings of grey hair. For instance, one Mail Online journalist chronicled over a number of months her transition to grey commenting 'Grey hair makes you invisible. People barge into you on the streets'. Her report begins with her waking from 'a nightmare' in which: "... I turned to look into the window of Zara [a high street clothing chain store] and caught my reflection. It had to be my reflection because unless the little old lady on her Zimmer frame, stooped and shuffling, short grey hair coiled like icing on a wedding cake, had stolen my clothes and shopping bags when I wasn't looking, that little old lady was me."

Here the sight of grey hair is linked directly with a fear of ageing: the account of the dream serves as an example of the ‘vocabulary of ageism’, used to isolate various symbolic elements to create an image of old age. The picturing of grey hair coiled like icing is used, like the stooping and shuffling gait, to signal the othering of old age, presenting later life as a negative and unwanted state. The journalist concerned portrays herself as an almost heroic figure, bravely crossing a threshold into the ‘space’ of middle age: “I hope you will join me on my journey into the unknown, as I report on life and love on the 50s front.”

(Kelsey 2009, in *The Daily Mail*).

Faircloth (2003) argues that ‘the vocabulary of ageing, or its discourse, provides the aged with limited potential for the expression of their subjective, personal feelings, separate from prevailing stereotypes of the elderly’ (pg. 17, 2003). However, there is evidence to suggest that people make sense of their subjective experience of ageing through available cultural narrative tropes such as the mask of ageing (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991). Notions of a threshold to ageing seem though to be particularly resonant for accounts of going grey – as Gullette points out, such a motif makes midlife ‘localizable’: ‘through familiar spatial metaphors like ‘transition’ or ‘entrance’, time becomes a space; the midlife, a bad space’ (pg 159 1997). Hence, arguably, Kelsey’s narrative of journeying into the (nightmarish) unknown of later life.

As technology facilitates different ways of accessing print journalism, supporting more participative ways of engaging with the media, a more dialogic form of journalism has arisen where readers are able to comment upon articles and see themselves quoted. Where ageing and greying are concerned this more accessible approach to reporting illustrate the varied ways in which people receive and make sense of dominant notions of what it is to have grey hair and the perceived need to fight the signs of ageing. A representative piece from the Observer reiterated the idea of greying as a threshold:

“Since when did hair colour become such a big deal? Our grandparents went grey as a matter of course, but dyeing is so common these days that if a woman sacks her expensive hairdresser, it is seen as an act of rebellion.”... “I’m fixated because I know

it won't be too long before grey hair becomes a live issue for me. I didn't have the first clue whether I was going grey until recently, because hairdressers pile on so many artful streaks and lowlights. Then it struck me that having stripy caramel hair was like hanging a sign on my head saying: 'Middle-class woman. About 40. Probably going grey.'

(Sutherland 2008 in *The Observer*)

The report was linked to the newspaper's webpage and attracted 17 responses from online readers which revealed a range of opinion from a largely 40-something female audience, relating to resistance to the pervasive presence of ageism, including in the workplace:

"I'm 44 - my hair is - or would be - mostly grey. No not grey, WHITE. I am just not ready to be treated like a pensioner yet, so I dye my hair. Lets face it, you see someone with grey or white hair - especially women - and you think old dear! where's you[r] tartan shopping trolley and sensible shoes?! One day, maybe when I'm 50 and the kids have all left home I shall be grey. But right now, nobody thinks I'm 44, so I shall keep my shares in L'Oreal and buy jumbo packs of rubber gloves ..."

And also to resistance to social pressures to maintain the illusion of non-grey hair:

"What a relief, not having to bother with touch-ups after 25 years of hair hassle every 2 months or so. The other bonus is that my head truly feels chemical free; my hair is much softer and less dry. I do get compliments on this 'new' look of mine and am proud of my natural grey/white/silver/brownie mane."

*"I can't be f*cked to worry about the ever-increasing grey army in my fringe. If you have time to dye every 6 weeks or so, to keep aging at bay - you have waaaaay too much time, and too much money, to hand."*

"women with grey/white hair are stigmatised in both the work and dating scene. My response - get over it and stop colouring your hair. The more we do it, the easier it gets for the next generation."

"i stopped dyeing my hair nearly 20 years after i found my first grey (white) hair at age 25. to be honest - at my age - it really doesn't matter. i agree with the comment

that we are invisible anyway so its more important to feel comfortable in our skin than worry about what other people think. i really don't think it has made any difference to how people see me - or maybe i just don't care anymore!!”

The women in these exchanges talk about maintaining a busy engaged life and about being socially marginalised; matters of health, time and money; and resistance - to age itself, to ageism, and to the conventional remedy for both, 'staying young', which is encapsulated in covering the greying hair. These newly emerging dialogues between readers and journalists are notable for the overall absence of contributors over 70 years of age, a reflection perhaps of the restricted access to the internet and communication technology in general among older cohorts (Morris 2007) despite the active engagement of a minority of older people with the internet. What has been dubbed the 'grey digital divide' means that many people in their 70's and 80's are absent from this virtual debate on image and appearance so that few insights into their perspectives and opinions can be gleaned from such online exchanges.

The RoAD study method

The RoAD study was a multi-method investigation of experiences and perceptions of 'everyday' intentional and unintentional age discrimination. It was a highly participative study, aimed at discovering how older people experienced instances of such discrimination as they went about their daily lives. The initial phases of the study involved an open call where older people were invited to write or to submit 'accounts of experiences of discrimination', defined in their own terms. This included an online form for those who did use the internet. A group of twelve older co-researchers was also recruited to work with up to three 'diarists' each. They would support the diarists in producing accounts of day-today experiences of what the diarists felt was actual or possible discrimination, before interviewing them and reflecting on these experiences. During the course of the RoAD research the issue of 'the pensioner's hairdo' was raised in un-elicited comments from participants, and the interest of two of the older co-researchers led them to investigate this further through two 'sub-projects'. One involved observation and interviews in a local salon in south Wales; the other video-taped interviews with older women mainly in their homes. Transcripts of the

interviews and field notes were analysed by the authors working with the co-researchers (Symonds and Holland, 2008). In parallel with these specific investigations, as the RoAD research progressed regular newsletters were being delivered to over 400 older people, in which they were presented with vignettes of some of the instances of discrimination that had been reported, and they were invited to respond with comments. Table 1 indicates where issues of hair and appearance arose within the RoAD study.

Table 1: Hair and appearance in the RoAD Project

Phase of the RoAD research/method	Number of discussions about hair and appearance	Total number of accounts of discrimination (all forms)	Gender of contributor(s)
<i>Open call</i>	5	153	All women
<i>Diaries</i>	8	39	7 women, 1 man
<i>Discussion groups</i>	Discussed in 2 groups	4 groups held altogether	Mainly women
<i>Consultation on hairdressing and the dilemmas of image</i>	81 responses	-	72 women, 9 men
<i>Vignette on dress and appearance in later life</i>	66	-	46 women, 20 men
<i>Sub-projects</i>	2 discussed image and appearance	7	Mainly women

Hair dilemmas: just age, or age discrimination?

In the course of the project one 87-year old diarist, 'Moira', drew attention to what she dubbed 'the pensioner's hairdo'. When interviewed about her recorded experiences by

a fieldworker she was asked about her own hairdressing routines. She began by describing the local salon that she first visited, having moved to the area. The assistants were all trainees, she said, who ‘just gave you a nondescript sort of hairstyle.’ She went on:

‘Later when I started going to the hairdressers more regularly, I found that pensioners’ days were the ones to avoid. Everyone has the same sort of hairdo: white hair that looks a bit like cotton wool, all in tight curls with a back brush. White hair all curled up and I came out looking like that. I went into town and found a hairdresser’s that had no reduction and you paid like everyone else. This was better but still not the same. Admittedly I have my hair set in rollers, they put you under the hairdryer and there you go. But with the young girls they hover round them for hours and I thought they don’t leave that young woman for a minute. They are fussing round them until the hair is finished. And I’m paying the same money.’

The fieldworker who conducted this interview wrote a short piece for the newsletter about ageing and appearance, she described this interview and commented on the term ‘mutton dressed as lamb’, which more than one diarist had referred to. Readers were invited to respond to these comments and indicate whether they thought the ‘pensioner hairdo’ was a discriminatory phenomenon. The responses ranged across the spectrum from those who thought that age discrimination definitely was demonstrated, to those who disputed that this signaled ageist practices. We analysed the responses thematically and present here illustrative examples of the range of responses, which we have characterized as:

1. age discrimination doesn’t exist, or isn’t the point
2. age discrimination, if present, can be resisted
3. age discrimination exists, but bodily ageing is also an issue
4. age discrimination exists, and it adversely affects service to older people

1. Age discrimination doesn’t really exist or isn’t the point: how you are treated depends upon your own character:

'Dreariness' is an attitude of mind! I would not dream of putting up with a 'sheep's wool' hairstyle (w 62)ⁱⁱ

This is about self esteem not the clothing or hairdressing industry

I never have a perm, and have a wash and blow dry weekly with a trim about every 6 weeks, so my hair usually looks sleek and certainly not curly or frizzy. If you do not ask for what you want, to make the most of your own natural style, then you only have yourself to blame (w 72)

I do go to the hairdresser, but he only cuts my hair – I don't have a perm or 'white blobs' (although I have white hair) – so far as I am concerned there is no age discrimination (w 78)

It is entirely up to us to get the hairdresser to style our hair as we want it. If you don't like your hairdresser, change it. (w 79)

I find it hard to believe that any person is not in charge of their own appearance (m -)

2. If there is an element of age discrimination, it can be resisted: it's your choice – as an individual if you don't like the treatment you are receiving you can make a stand, or pay for better service:

(Hairdressing) is a one to one activity. If you don't like what's done say so and if still not happy then go elsewhere (W -)

My wife indicates you get what you pay for. She has no difficulty with our up-market salon (M 75)

Money can buy one's way out of discrimination but time and opportunity presumably are important (W 64)

3. Discrimination does exist, but even so the real problems of ageing hair must be accepted: older hair usually can't take a better style, or these particulate styles are more manageable:

Some older people have fine hair which can only be dealt with as indicated

I think generally speaking we do have a 'pensioners hairdo' but most of us have got very thin hair by now and can't improve it much unless we have plenty of money to go to the professionals regularly (W 80's)

Hair does have a curly fashion for many, short easy to manage, however this doesn't need to be the case. There are plenty of styles to choose from. (W -)

Shortly after reading this item I found myself queuing for a cup of tea at a tea dance amid a whole group of ladies with the uniform tight white curls. It prompted me to do a spot of market research and I found that a major factor was that it is a style relatively easy to control. One lady said she had experimented with straight hair but it needed a lot of attention to keep looking up to scratch. (M 87)

4. Different treatment based on age does exist, and it is discriminatory:

I left my hairdresser after fifteen years because despite asking her to change my hairstyle for over a year I was still being churned out like every other old age pensioner. I was going mostly every week. I repeatedly told her we were like peas in a pod. The style was a perm on top and shingled at the back. Her excuse was that my hair was too thick and it would not like any other way. (W 70's)

This range of responses highlights that discrimination on the grounds of age can be a matter of interpretation and that efforts to define it are by no means certain. We discovered in the course of the research that a focus upon everyday experiences such as appearance and hairstyling could serve as a catalyst in generating discussion of the experience of discrimination and a means to gain insights into how people judged potentially discriminatory social encounters. The responses above underline the heterogeneity of later life and in particular the different ways in which older women

and men make sense of their changing experience as they age. Experiencing repeated small (and often subtle) acts of discrimination on the grounds of looking older can have a cumulatively demoralizing effect, although this may well vary considerably from person to person. Prevailing cultural values with relation to old age and concepts of appropriate behaviour may both affect how people incorporate a sense of chronological, biological, or social age into their self-identity,

Hairstyling as a space for resistance and redefinition: choosing identities

Hair salons in one form or another feature regularly in the lives of many women and men. In these settings, as people go about expressing something of their identity through their hairstyle, small battles are played out daily between the reproduction of culturally current expectations of 'appropriateness', and resistances to them. Black hair salons for example have been recognised as spaces of resistance to normative constructs of what is beautiful: "Black hair as an object has its own cultural biography, in which the history and ideologies of Black politics have shaped what surfaces as Black hairstyles, how they are valued and the feelings attached to them across the centuries and across the diaspora (Tate, pg. 49, 2009). A parallel industry developed as a response to Black women's exclusion from mainstream salons and in the US became spaces for Black women to develop as entrepreneurs (Harvey 2005).

As Furman (1997) reveals, salons exist that target older consumers and play an integral role in the patterns of social activity and related expenditure for large numbers of older women. Their function as spaces where older people gather and where questions of image and ageing come to the fore remain largely unexplored, with little understanding of the meanings these settings have in the lives of older people. In a survey study carried out in the US which examined hairdressers' relationships with their older clients the authors highlighted the potential for hairdressers to play the role of informal community gate-keepers who by virtue of their often long-standing relationships were able to note changes and support needs in their clients (Anderson et al 2010). That study highlighted the unique quality of the relationship between hairdressers and older female customers and the opportunities

that existed in the context of hairdressing encounters for ‘troubles-telling’ and offering support.

“The relationships between stylists and clients are both close and well maintained due to the regularity of their interactions. In addition, older adult clients may be more willing to share intimate details of their lives with stylists [...] stylists appear to be concerned about the well-being of their older adult clients, adept at recognizing problems in their older adult clients’ lives, and more than willing to offer support.” (Anderson, Cimbali, and Maile 2010, p378)

The fieldworker who conducted the original interview with 'Moira' and who had then written this up for the RoAD newsletter went on to carry out a small-scale sub-project focusing on a hairdressing salon frequented mainly by older women in south Wales (Symonds and Holland 2008). Many of the interviewees highlighted the personal importance of a visit to the hairdressers. Emphasis was placed upon a desire to maintain a certain look or style, often in the face of physical deterioration and chronic limiting conditions such as arthritis. Many of the interviewees revealed that they had kept the same style for years, demonstrating a rather different approach to managing their image than that outlined by Gimlin (1996) in relation to younger generations of women – where changing styles communicated cultural capital.

The study uncovered different types of salon-based encounters and exchanges in the hairstyling of the older women who frequented these commercial premises. Against a back-drop of considerations of budget, access, health and disability the research explored the meanings attached to hairstyling and hair-related activities. The interviews showed that such salon spaces provided social and relational opportunities that marked out a visit as something more than an occasion to style hair. For some, style was secondary or sat alongside other considerations – trips to the salon were social opportunities, and importantly those salons that catered to older clients were seen as distinct social spaces, free of discriminatory encounters, and upholding differing notions of beauty than might be encountered in 'younger', more threatening salons. Comments were often made about the social aspects of these spaces and their pleasantness as spaces of belonging: for example

I meet a lot of people here it's like having a get together every week.

They're pleasant here and we always have a laugh. It's so friendly.

They're very friendly and you don't feel out of place. These modern ones I feel out of place in.

The quotes suggest a sense of emplacement tied to comfortableness and belonging which was important because the work being done in them was full of personal meaning. Listening to these older female customers, a degree of agency is apparent as a product of local, embodied social relationships. Compared to young/fashion salons where they felt the premium to be on youth, new looks, and consumption, in these salons the participants felt themselves to be 'in place' rather than 'out of place'.

The study revealed that hairstyles can have biographical meanings that may over-ride the broader messages or meanings attached to a particular image, and for some of these participants their regular salon catered for their preferences. The interview responses show the importance of taking into account personal hair-related practices and the meanings they hold. Pressures within the industry to constantly change a look, treating hair as part of the body project (Shilling 1993), are resisted. For these women, keeping the same appearance supported biographical continuity with links to an earlier self, and to significant others from the past. Here hairstyles could function both as self-representation and play a role in the process of remembering:

"I like to have it blow dried, I don't like my hair too tight. A blow dry makes you look younger. I always have the same blow dry, but I like it a bit curly. That's how my husband used to like it. He's been dead for 27 years now, but I keep it the same."

Beyond the conventional salon, there is the option of the mobile salon. While this can be in many ways a less sociable arrangement, for many older or disabled people who find it difficult or inconvenient to get to a salon it combines the ministrations of a regular hairdresser with the comfort and ease of being attended to at home. These arrangements bring hairdresser and client into an even more intimate relationship of

trust and knowledge, but there is very little academic understanding of the negotiations that take place in these circumstances and what visual references are being used to inform those negotiations.

McCarthy's (2000) exploration of small talk within hairdressing encounters was fairly unusual: hairdressing has until recently received only limited attention within the social sciences (Wolkowitz 2006). Unlike care, it is a form of body work and labour that has attracted little interest despite a growing recognition of the worth attached to explorations of everyday life and patterns of living (Silva and Bennett 2004). Yet, hairdressing offers a unique opportunity to explore the negotiated and fluid nature of identity and how related images are worked up through a particular form of embodied practice. There has been a neglect of the interactions that take place in the context of hairdressing service encounters and to date little has been published that contributes to a body of evidence in support of discussion and debate regarding the reproduction and negotiation of image in later life and particularly how this relates to pervasive images of resistance to ageing. Hints of the delicacy of these negotiations emerge for time to time. For example, drawing upon a narrative of transition, here McCracken signals the emotions involved when women come to the point where they choose a 'mature' style over a 'younger' one:

“Several hairdressers told me that they prepare their clients for the 'big haircut' with care and caution. Often they see the occasion coming well before the client and they make it their job to ease the transition, to get the client ready for this shift into maturity. Some hairdressers even have a kind of wake for long hair before it's cut. It is, say hairdressers and the clients, a sad farewell to youth” (McCracken, 1996, p.193)

Conclusions

The styling and management of hair takes place in a context of wider patterns of consumption and, as Bourdieu (1984) has argued, these constitute modes of social distinction. In an ethnographic study of hair salons, for example, Glimlin (1996)

found that styling could be used to protect and project a professional identity that points to status rather than income. It is argued that through hair, women enact social location, using beauty work to stress social differences. The appeal of this interpretation is that it emphasises how hair functions in women's social agency. However, with project participants whose ages ranged between 21 and 61 years, Gimlin left open to question what opportunities exist for older women to exercise a similarly strategic approach to social differentiation, or the possibilities of escaping the unwanted label of 'old'. In the case of older women - certainly for many of those in their seventies and older - the gulf between media representations of 'mature beauty' and their own everyday experiences of working with their bodily ageing is made explicit in the negotiations between clients and hairdressers in the production of hairstyles. A representation of the client's self-image is being created: for whom, for what purpose, and within what constraints? We argue that while hair care products and services in the UK have begun to take on board the needs of older customers and the strength of the 'grey pound', there remains a mismatch between media images of maturity and the lived experience of women and men as they manage their self-image in part through their hairstyle. Individual circumstances of age, health, wealth and culture often further distance older people from the images presented to them as aspirational representations of successful ageing.

Our discussion here has sought to underline the nuanced fashion in which appearance and hair in particular serve as a focus for discriminatory and even regulatory responses to old age. By drawing upon accounts offered by older people we have shown that despite dominant messages concerning the sight of age as something to be fought and resisted, their subjective and personal responses often reveal a strategic and agentive negotiation of the reflexive relationship between the body, self and society.

[Word count: 6245]

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ⁱⁱ w = woman, m = man, followed by age; - = age not given.