

“THE FIGHT AGAINST AGING!” SOCIOLOGY SURVEY

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Abstract and Purpose of Research

The following research examines individual outlooks on physical signs of aging such as greying hair, wrinkles, and sagging skin. I interviewed two participants for this study, a 51 year old man and a 74 year old woman. Both participants were asked similar questions, including: Which aspects of your appearance would you alter and why? What pressures, if any, do you feel you have to look more youthful? In your opinion, are anti-aging products largely the fault of societal standards, the media and advertisements, or peer pressure? The participant responses were then analysed through the lens of three sociological theories: the life course perspective, feminist theory, and successful aging theory.

Thesis

I expect each participant to have unique opinions regarding the physical signs of aging. Specifically, I expect the female participant to feel greater pressures into purchasing anti-aging products more-so than the male participant.



Methods

Using ethnographic research techniques, I interviewed two participants on their opinions regarding their own personal signs of aging. I then analysed their responses through the following sociological theories:

Life Course Perspective: This micro-level analysis considers the individual journey through life based on personal knowledge and experiences.

Feminist Theory: This theory assumes that gender affects how a person experiences the process of aging. For example, marketers heavily target women with anti-aging advertisements.

Successful Aging Theory: This reflects one's personal satisfaction and achievement in life. Based on the Rowe and Kahn Model, there are three major aspects to successful aging (quality of social life, lack of illness and disease, and physical/mental capabilities).

Research Findings

Participant #1: The 51 year old male participant exhibits multiple physical signs of aging including baldness, greying facial hair, wrinkles, and dark circles under the eyes. He strongly believes that the media is largely at fault for perpetuating unrealistic images and expectations about the aging process. The participant places greater importance on overall health as opposed to outward beauty. The participant admits that he has been pressured by peers and family members who use anti-aging products to dye his goatee over the past several years. Greying facial hair is the only physical sign of aging that makes the participant look older than he feels.

Participant #2: The 74 year old female participant is a First-generation Canadian who grew up on a farm in Europe. She acknowledges herself as a senior citizen; however she does not physically feel as though she is old. The participant continues to complete the same daily activities she did as a young adult (sewing, cooking, cleaning). Unlike the male participant, she has never felt the need nor has she been pressured to use anti-aging products.

Conclusions/Future Studies

Contrary to my initial assumption based on feminist theory, the male participant felt more pressure to use anti-aging products whereas the female participant did not feel the need to alter or mask any of her physical signs of aging. The interview responses demonstrate that the process of aging is an individual experience and that there is no singular definition of successful aging in later life. The differences in lifestyle, upbringing, social circles, and generational gap between the participants may have contributed to their differing perspectives toward body image.

Future research on the sociological effects of anti-aging products would be beneficial since seniors make up a large portion of Canada's total population. Seniors are, and will continue to be, an integral part of the functioning of society and thus merit further studies.