INTRODUCTION

Drs. Meredith R Gringle & Deirdre A Dingman

Places for work to live – suggestions welcome in the chat!

The connections between gender, appearance, social value / worth through the life course

• For women aging is still implicated in a loss of both beauty and power

Common approaches / messages around women’s aging

• Individual responsibility and attitudes are emphasized
• Healthy aging often situated as non-aging
• Anti-aging products, “ageless” role-models
• “Embracing invisibility”

 Traumatizing patriarchal norms around how women (are meant to) look/age

More in-depth exploration of experiences of women who are aging

SETTING THE PERSONAL STAGE

A history steeped in patriarchal beauty norms

“The package pleases me not…” internalization

Process of resistance, compliance and disruption

Aging as a “lifequake” – loss of agency, loss of “the usual methods”

Resistance to the available solutions (“anti-aging”/ invisibility)

CONNECTIONS TO WOMEN’S HEALTH

Expansion of narratives around aging

Critique of how social norms infiltrate understandings of gender and health

Gaps around perceptions and understandings of aging

Paradigm shift: illuminating, (re)visualizing, recontextualizing aging as a societal-level prerogative

POETRY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Poetic methods

Poem both describes and performs author’s ambivalence around aging

Poetry allows for the visceral to immediately coexist with the explanatory

Personal + political expression of aging

IF “THE FACE” DIDN’T GIVE ME AWAY

A poem read by Dr. Deirdre Dingman
If “The Face” didn’t give me away -

I want to matter but I am afraid to be seen.  
You must be seen to matter 
I want to - not be seen. 

And yet not invisible – I want to matter 
But appearance does 
if it doesn’t, it’s because I’ve aged out 

I don’t want to be the age where appearance doesn’t matter 
When appearance doesn’t matter 
You are invisible 
I want to matter, but not be seen – as I am 
Aged 
Appearance ALWAYS matters 

… 
You are beautiful ‘inside and out’ silly 
Said a friend, who didn’t understand 
Oh no, never look in the mirror with your glasses on – 
Said the nurse aesthetician 
Back away from the mirror, see the whole 
Said a therapist 
(If only there were no mirror – ) 

Fillers are the only thing that will work on the sagging and the vertical wrinkles, 
but I don’t recommend it. I’ve seen them go wrong 
Said a nurse aesthetician 
Botox didn’t work because it’s like when you drive a car over grass again and again and again, 
the grass can’t bounce back up. 
There are ruts. You need filler AND Botox 
Said a plastic surgeon 
I have RUTS on my face 
I said to myself. 

Oh I would never consider plastic surgery, I love the look of a life lived 
Said another friend 
A life lived…. a life lived - in the past when you were young – and visible and mattered 
A life now over 

…….. 
I did ALL THE RIGHT THINGS 
to be the healthy, active old person. 
I mean I am not old yet, 
Is 50s old? 
but I did the things... I lost weight and maintained it (for power and for health), 
I exercised daily and lifted weights (for looks, strength and confidence),
I learned which foods were better for me and why and I ate them.
I did ALL THE RIGHT THINGS
and my face got old and my skin still sagged.
I cannot – could not - exercise, learn or nourish my way out of an aging body.

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If no one knew my age –
if my face (and neck, and arms) didn’t give me away
I could still matter… contribute, feel passion, know love
But
My mother said, you look old
My mother said, you don’t look that bad
My mother said, I didn’t mean it that way
People don’t see what you see
Said a friend
People don’t see what you see
Are you fucking kidding me?
People don’t see what you see
Doesn’t make what I see any less real

I WANT to look young (younger) – I want it everyday
I’d pay for it – but I don’t
I’m paying for not doing it – in angst and despair
And wanting to be seen not seen – with this face

The end

Deirdre A Dingman

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