<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Journal of Women & Aging*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Krekula, C. (2016)

Contextualizing older women's body images: Time dimensions, multiple reference groups, and age codings of appearance

Journal of Women & Aging, 28(1): 58-67

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2015.1013829>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-41202>

Krekula, C. (2016) Contextualizing older women's body images: Time dimensions, multiple reference groups and age codings of appearance. *International Journal of women and ageing*, 28:2, 58-67.

<http://dx.doi.org.bibproxy.kau.se:2048/10.1080/08952841.2015.1013829>

*Contextualizing older women's body images: Time dimensions,
multiple reference groups and age codings of appearance*

Abstract: The article sheds light on older women's body images and problematizes assumptions that women's ageing is more painful and shameful than men's ageing since they are not expected to live up to youthful beauty norms, the so called double standard of ageing hypothesis. Based on 12 qualitative interviews with women from the age of 75 from the Swedish capital area, I argue that older women have access to a double perspective of beauty which means that they can relate to both youthful and age related beauty norms. The results also illustrate that the women's body image is created in a context where previous body images are central and that this time perspective can contribute towards a positive body image. Further, the results show how age codings of appearance-related qualities create a narrow framework for the older women's body images and point to the benefits of shifting the analytical focus towards a material-semiotic body where corporeality and discourse are seen as interwoven.

Key words: Age coding, beauty norms, body appearance, body image, body dissatisfaction, body satisfaction, embodied ageing, gendered ageing, double standard of ageing, material-semiotic body, reference groups, women's ageing

INTRODUCTION

Recent research on body images and embodiment in later life has developed an understanding of current conceptions of ageing in an almost revolutionary way (Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011). In studies of body images, i.e. individuals' conceptions of and behaviours with regard to their own bodies (Grogan, 1999; Muth & Cash, 1997), it is women's experiences of and relation to their appearances that have received attention (Cash, 2004; Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011). Because the socio-cultural context equates youthfulness, smooth skin and thin energetic bodies with beauty and sexual attraction, and simultaneously portrays older bodies as unattractive (Furman, 1997; Calasanti & King, 2005), research has largely focused on aspects of appearance and their importance for identity, well-being and everyday life (Tulle, 2003; Grenier, 2005; Krekula, 2006). Appearance has also been described as an important aspect of older women's experiences of ageism (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Furman, 1997; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008).

Commonly, ageing is also expected to be more painful and more connected to shame for women than for men (Sontag, 1979, see also Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Furman, 1997; McDonald & Rich, 1983; Olson, 1992). According to this double standard hypothesis, first presented by Sontag (1979), it is claimed that men are judged on the basis of performance while women are primarily evaluated according to outward appearances. As a result, it is said that women and men have different experiences of ageing. While men can attain prestige and power, and rise to high levels in their profession, women become socially

invisible and their ageing is suggested to be characterized by reluctance and shame, largely due to changes in appearance (Sontag, 1979). In her acclaimed ethnographic study of women in beauty salons, Furman describes this as “inhabiting an older body – *being* an older body – comes to rob older women of respect and public visibility” (1997, p. 167, italics in the original).

Because considerable research has illustrated that contemporary ageing takes place in a society in which youthfulness is the norm, an understanding of women’s ageing must also be based on analyses of what youthful beauty ideals mean for old women’s experiences as well as for their well-being. Earlier research has shown, however, that the assumption of double standards simplifies matters and is only weakly linked to older women’s lived experiences (Krekula, 2007). As such, relations between the body and well-being need to be further problematized through other theoretical frameworks and through reflecting upon the scholarly endeavours that bring forth and dissolve older women’s subject positions.

In this article I will problematize double standard hypotheses of ageing and argue that older women have access to a double perspective of beauty, where they can relate to both youthful and age-related beauty norms. I will also illustrate the existence of a time dimension, which means that women’s body image is created in a context where previous body images are central and can contribute towards more positive descriptions of appearance. Finally, I will present arguments for a more complex understanding of the body by demonstrating that older women’s body image is created in a discursive context where terms describing appearance and facial features are age-coded, which is why positively charged descriptions of appearances are not always seen as applicable when describing an older woman’s appearance. Although earlier research (Reboussin, 2000; Krekula, 2006, 2007) has shown

that it is fruitful to address both appearance and physical aspects of embodiment, I will restrict myself to discussing issues on appearance.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The double standard hypothesis departs from the notion that older women's failure to live up – or down – to norms of youthful beauty, results in problematic experiences. When the thesis was originally launched it was based on theoretical arguments, provided no definition of what was meant with the category of older people and the reasoning was not based on their experiences (see Sontag, 1979). This taken-for-granted perspective on relations between elderly women's bodies and their lived experiences of ageing has been met with contradictory empirical support. Among others, Halliwell and Dittmar's (2003) interview study with women and men aged 22-62 offers support for the thesis. They found that men tend to focus on functionality, while women focus more on display. According to Halliwell and Dittmar, both women and men continue to be concerned about the appearance of their bodies through adulthood, but it is mainly women who are concerned with, and worried about, looking young/younger, as an indication of their value and attractiveness. Studies have also shown that older women regard wrinkles and grey hair as negative signs of old age and that they think that these changes make them less attractive (Furman, 1997; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). In her survey of women aged 20-80, Wilcox (1997) however, did not find support for the double standard of ageing in self-perceptions, but she suggested the similarity and importance of body attitudes across the adult life span. It is also argued that dissatisfaction with one's body appears quite stable across the life span (see e.g. Grogan, 1999; Tiggemann, 2004; Grippo & Hill, 2008; Slevin, 2010). Studies also show that older people demonstrate greater body satisfaction than younger people both with respect to body function and body appearance (Reboussin et al., 2000), that older women are more content

with their bodies than are younger women, and that older women are just as content with their bodies as are older men (Öberg & Tornstam, 1999). In a similar vein, studies focusing on body weight have shown that older women are less dissatisfied with their weight than younger women (Franzoi & Koehler, 1998), and that there is no difference in the prevalence of body image dissatisfaction among women aged 19–23 and 65–74 respectively (Bedford & Johnson, 2006). Likewise, studies show how assessments of the body vary depending on the focus area, for example that women over 60 years of age can be unhappy with their weight but happy with other physical aspects (Liechty, 2012).

Thus, while research both supports and contradicts the double standard hypothesis's first premise that older women have low body satisfaction because they deviate from youthful beauty ideals, it is more difficult to find empirical support for the hypothesis's second premise that low body satisfaction has negative consequences for their well-being. The varied data show that even though women agree with negative values on old bodies, this does not necessarily entail a corresponding effect on their own identities.

The one-sided focus on women's negative judgments of their bodies is also challenged by studies that show that women can have different attitudes towards their own bodies, and that they are not necessarily influenced by the negative ones. Krekula (2006, 2007) found that older women talked about their bodies in various ways. At the same time wrinkles and sagging bellies were described with negative words, these changes were accepted and the body was also talked about with pride, and described as a source of joy and pleasure when relating to for example sexuality, physical exercise and when dressed in beautiful clothes. In a similar vein, research has argued that appearance is less important as you get older because

other aspects, such as health and physical ability, become more important than appearance (Franzoi & Koehler, 1998; Hurd Clarke, 2000; Krekula, 2006, 2007; Tiggemann, 2004).

In the general assumptions about women's embodied ageing, the role of context has rarely been problematized. This de-contextualisation is challenged theoretically by arguments that social location, e.g. gender and age, becomes contextual and spatial on the subject level (see e.g. Staunæs, 2003) such that embodied identities can be negotiated and therefore influences outcomes (Crossley, 2001; Goffman, 1959). De-contextualised descriptions of older women's body image can also be questioned against the backdrop of perceptions of everyday life. One example is how the singer and song-writer Dolly Parton has received attention by presenting herself as a "woman of cartoons" with big hair, big breasts, tight dresses and high heels, a staging which she has compared to a ventriloquist who can watch her doll (Miller, 2008). Parton's staging distinctively sets itself apart from the strategies which have been identified among women in academia in Sweden, where female doctoral students instead try to signal credibility and to appear professional by choosing clothes with gender-neutral attributes (Carstensen, 1997).

As has also been emphasized by Wilcox (1997), a contextualization can be applied to older women's body image by problematizing the question of who they compare themselves with when they define their body image. I will contribute towards such a contextualization by use of the concept of reference groups. In their studies of reference groups, both Merton (1967) and Shibutani (1961) argue that these can be of different types. They can be comprised of groups one regards oneself to be a member of, those one does not belong to, and fictive groups. Merton (1967) points out that some reference groups are used for comparisons while others are more normative and are used as frames for individuals' actions. As a special

concept within reference group theory he mentions relative deprivation, which refers to how individuals' satisfaction or dissatisfaction in a given situation is dependent upon which group one compares oneself with. By comparing oneself with those one regards as worse off, one's personal situation will seem relatively good, and vice versa, in relation to those who are better off one will feel one has drawn the shorter stick (Tornstam, 2011). In my analysis, I have not focused on given groups but aimed to find the reference groups that transpired in the women's stories.

DATA AND METHODS

The analysed data in this work are derived from 12 individual qualitative interviews with women 75-90 years old. In order to recruit informants I contacted pensioner associations and voluntary organizations with a large number of older female members. All of the informants lived in the region close to the Swedish capital Stockholm. Among them there were widows, wives and singles. Some had experienced physical limitations, and others had not. Some of them had lived their entire lives in Sweden, others were born in Sweden but had lived abroad for many years and some of them had moved to Sweden as adults. None of the women were born outside of Europe. In terms of socioeconomic status, the majority of the women could be described as middle class. All of the informants described their relationships as heterosexually orientated. The limitations of this sample are partly a result of the age limit of the study and the fact that I recruited the informants via organisations. In many of the organizations that I turned to, it was simply difficult to find women in this age group.

The interviews addressed questions of how identities have changed over the life course. Descriptions of their appearance and what this meant to them was a central theme. In order to, as far as possible, base the analysis on women's own understanding of phenomena such

as beauty, they were also asked to describe a person that they thought were beautiful. By doing so, it transpired, among other things, that a beautiful smile was seen as a sign of beauty, i.e. a definition of beauty which is not limited by age. As the interviews were made retrospectively, I also used a visual data collection method, according to which the women were asked to select private photos from periods in their lives that they regarded as important to them. These photos were used as a hook to trigger their memories and as a point of departure for our discussions (see Pink, 2001). The method provided me with a deeper understanding of the bodily changes that the informants had gone through, for example I observed how an informant who at the time of the interview could neither sit nor walk without aid, ten years previously had been able to move without hindrance and leisurely stretch across an armchair with her feet over the armrest. The body theme was also explored by giving the informants a mirror and asking them to describe what they saw. The method highlighted differences in terms of how the women described their body and their face respectively. For example, the woman who complained about her wrinkles and sagging eyelids, could also express pride over her posture and being able carry off a nice-looking coat. Put together, these mixed methods contributed towards depicting varying and contradictory discourses of their body images.

RESULTS

According to double standard assumptions, older women are supposed to regard younger women as their reference group and as a result judge their body image negatively. In light of studies that show that older women renegotiate norms of beauty (Dumas, Laberge & Straka, 2005; Krekula, 2006) and that women's experiences of growing into old age are also described as the best time in their lives (Krekula, 2006; Petry, 2003), or at least as good as middle-age and as far surpassing life as a young person (Miller, 2010), the relation between

social norms and an individuals' subjective ageing emerges as far more complex than suggested. In this section I will illustrate that double standard assumptions on women's ageing are simplified since they neglect the existence of a time dimension in women's body image and that valuations of appearance are also dependent on chosen reference groups, and that the assumption is based on a narrow understanding of bodies and embodiment.

A time dimension which affects the body image

In my material, a time perspective emerges as the women's body image is chiselled out, i.e. the backdrop is also made up by notions of previous body images. This is illustrated in the following quote in which an 83 year old women describes what she sees in her mirror reflection; *"Well, then I see an old lady. I've got so many wrinkles. I don't like it."* The expression "I see an old lady" illustrates how she sees gender and age when looking at the reflection of her face. She also stresses that she "has got" wrinkles, that is, she describes a change, and thereby illustrates body image as interpreted over time. Such a time perspective means that an earlier tendency to regard herself as successful, friendly, etc. helps to stress some aspects of her current body image that mediate these earlier descriptions, and it also demarcates changes.

The central role of the time dimension in the processes where the women's body image takes shape also means that the beholders' different perspectives have to be problematized. One knows how one used to be, and one might have similar knowledge about one's nearest and dearest, but lack a similar notion of how strangers' bodies change over time. The access one does or does not have to time aspects in relation to a body in question gives us different frames within which one constructs actual body images. Views of one's own body are generated through a screen of notions of how one used to be. A stranger, on the other hand,

observes the body without such a time dimension. Accordingly, body image emerges not as a singular phenomenon, but as dependent on the observer. The double standard assumption does not take this complex time perspective of older women's body image into consideration, but start out from a more limited stranger's perspective.

My results show further that the time perspective can contribute towards a positive body image. This emerges in the way an 81 year old informant describes her face in her mirror image, and states that "*She is not beautiful, but very wrinkly*". Thus, in line with what has been reported on in earlier studies (Furman, 1997) she expresses a negative view of her wrinkles. She also states that "*My face looks terrible, but it doesn't look so different from the faces of others either, it will do*" and comments upon her changed appearance, including wrinkles, in the following way:

Yeah, I don't think it matters so much because I never thought I was better. But when you see the photos now, I don't think I was really as ugly as I felt.

In this quote the informant compares her current appearance with her outward appearance of earlier periods in her life. Her current opinion does not depart from that of when she was younger. She does not feel she is beautiful now, but neither did she feel beautiful earlier. Her logic thus follows earlier research that has found that women's (dis)satisfaction with their bodies is relatively stable over the life course (see e.g. Grogan, 1999; Tiggemann, 2004; Grippo & Hill, 2008; Slevin, 2010).

The informant's revelation that she felt ugly when she was younger suggests that her present body image is based on her perception that she did not live up to the ideals of beauty she

ascribed to, regardless of what those were. In her present judgement, she states that her appearance does not deviate much from that “of others”. In turn, she suggests that in terms of appearance she now deems herself to be more on the same level as the women she compares herself with and does not feel she is uglier than them. As such, her judgement of her appearance is the same over time, it is the way she views her reference group which has changed. While she regards herself as ugly today, just as she did earlier, those she compares herself with have slipped to her level. In other words, the distance to the beauty ideals she relates to has *diminished* – not increased, which is the basis for the double standard assumptions.

Multiple reference groups and double perspectives of beauty norms

The double standard hypothesis that elderly women’s deviance from youthful beauty norms results in shame and lower levels of well-being is challenged by my results which show that older women use more than one reference group and thus do not only compare themselves with youthful beauty norms.

An example of this transpires in the way that one of the informants states “*But nowadays I think you can look any way you want to when you are old.*” In this way the informant also confirms that on the basis of her position as “old” she has the right to “look any way” she wants to. By claiming that the right to have lower expectations and demands with respect to appearance are reserved for elderly persons she demarcates that other norms apply to younger people. She therefore sketches out the presence of not one but several age related beauty norms. By constructing a category of elderly and identifying herself with this, she indicates that she associates with a frame of reference that she regards as applicable to

elderly persons (cf. e.g. Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Tajfel, 1982 on how assumed collective identities also involve the adoption of common perspectives and norms).

The informant thus judges her appearance through a comparison with other elderly women – not with younger women as would be postulated by the double standards hypothesis (see Sontag, 1979). In this case the comparison with age peers contributes to an acceptance of the change in appearance (see also Krekula, 2006). This outcome offers empirical support to Grogan (1999) and Wilcox (1997) who have suggested that elderly women may shift their body comparisons to age-appropriate peers as they age, rather than to the thin and youthful ideals portrayed in the media. They also reveal the distinction between evaluation and importance of the body, which Tiggermann (2004) has also noted. Accordingly, the presence of social norms praising youthful beauty does not necessarily mean that the women regard these norms as valid for themselves. Rather than resulting in relative deprivation, a comparison with other women of the same age might result in a relative advantage, and accordingly in a positive evaluation of their body image.

In the quote above, the informant describes herself as ugly without showing signs of shame or discomfort (“She is not beautiful, but very wrinkly”). This conflicts with studies that state that deviations from beauty ideals result in underdog shame since beauty is said to make up an attribute that is good not only for the one possessing it but also for society as a whole (see e.g. Lehtinen, 1998). The informant’s identification with an elderly collective also deviates from the social gerontological fact that the elderly tend to distance themselves from the category ‘elderly’ to a great extent and claim that they do not feel old (see e.g. Barak, 1987; Kaufman & Elder, 2002; Thompson, Itzin & Abendstern, 1990; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). A possible assumption is that the informant in this case uses the age category as an

interactional/discursive resource, i.e. to gain some form of advantage (c.f. Krekula, 2009, Nikander, 2000). She does so by creating a story along the lines of “it is not me who is ugly, all old people are ugly”. Hence, she does not deviate personally from the demand to be beautiful, rather it is a matter of her position as belonging to the category of old people. The non-desirable feature, to be wrinkled and ugly, is ascribed here to the larger collective of old people and thus does not depend on her person. Such an interpretation of age identification as a strategy (see Krekula, 2009) presents the informant as conscious of the reigning norms of beauty; she relates to these and uses her age identity to negotiate shame.

The comparison between people of the same age, described above, does not necessarily involve a disregard for existing beauty norms that emphasize youthfulness. On the contrary, my informants are aware of these as well. Their strategies, e.g. walking with good posture to flatten their stomachs, like Hurd Clarke’s (2000) informants who wore long-sleeved blouses to hide their wrinkled and “sagging” arms, show that they relate to existing youthful beauty norms. Their awareness of these norms is also visible when someone cries while commenting upon her appearance and also in the informants’ common references to having an acceptable appearance “*in spite of*” their age. All in all, at the same time the informants identify with age peers, they also articulate an awareness that they deviate from dominant beauty norms.

These manifold beauty norms in action can be understood as a *double perspective*. On the one hand, the women judge their appearance from an inside perspective, where they gaze at themselves and at other old women based on their own experiences, demonstrating that one can regard oneself as old *and* beautiful. On the other hand, when making comparisons with youthful beauty norms, they do so from an outside perspective, regarding their appearance

from a social perspective, structured by age and gender. Thus it is not a question of either or, but of both. Both youthfulness and age related beauty norms are available to the women and these are used in relation to situation and context.

Body image as constructed by age codings of appearance

According to double standards assumptions about older women's body image, the body is regarded as a problematic object, as a surface that creates problems for older women regardless of context. This notion is contradicted by my results which show that body image needs rather to be understood as a complex process where multiple aspects participate when the individual reflects on their body and define their body image. Above, I illustrated the time dimension as such an aspect and now I will take it one step further by showing that age codings of physical features (cf. Krekula, 2009) are also central in these processes.

The following excerpt from an interview with an 82-year-old woman points to the oversimplification of assumptions that the body image makes up a simple expression of the body as "it is". In this part of the interview, we are discussing a photograph of her that was taken several years earlier.

A: I think I look so terribly old.

Interviewer: In what way, then?

A: Old, yes a bit sad and when I saw it I thought "My God, I look old", you know?

Interviewer: hmm. Did you feel that way too?

A: No, I don't suppose I did but this outfit was too big even then.

Interviewer: So, it is the clothes that contribute?

A: Yes, and I think it is the expression on my face, I'm not exactly perky.

When the informant describes why she thinks she looks old – that is to say what for her in this context are signs of a body that has lived a long time – she mentions two things. She begins by saying that she looks old because she looks sad and continues thereafter by talking about her outfit being too big. Accordingly, what for her indicate age markers, and what in this case are being used as markers of a body that has lived a long time, are partly emotional characteristics and partly a way of dressing. Even if none of these signs, which are used here as age markers, are synonymous with having lived a specific number of years, they are taken as a point of departure for age categorizations. In this way she presents these phenomena as age coded, i.e. they are presented as associated with and applicable to defined ages (for further definition and problematization of the concept, see Krekula, 2009).

The intertwining of body image and discourse was also evident in the previous quote in which the informant commented on her wrinkles, and thus connected the description of wrinkles with an evaluation of them without adding an explanation to this. I will illustrate these processes with another quote where a 76-year-old woman reflects on what she sees when she looks in the mirror:

B: [] at times I say “hi Lillan”, because my hair might be falling in a nice way or it's a good day. Then I see the little child.

Interviewer: What do you see then? What is it you see in Lillan?

B: Yeah, Lillan is the sweet child, the one that was liked [] so Lillan is the girl at home who is nice and happy.

In this quote the informant uses her nickname from childhood, Lillan, to describe her hair “falling in a nice way”, the “sweet child” that was liked and the girl who was “nice and

happy”. The mentioned characteristics are not inherently age related but are here coded by her to younger ages. Similar to what we saw above this illustrates the discursive dimension of the body. While the characteristics in question are coded to younger ages they do not exist as possible alternatives for the informant when she describes her appearance today.

The results above reveal that it is problematic to consider the body as a neutral object that moves between situations and contexts. Instead they underscore matter and language as parallel to one another. Haraway (1991) calls this concurrency a material-semiotic body and emphasizes that neither discourse nor flesh come first. Such an interpretation of the quotes above indicates that the women’s body image is not created by the body as matter but by the body intertwined with the age codings that are applied to it. In other words, individuals’ interpretation and descriptions of their body image also involve a limitation in language and fantasy which results in a lack of words to link together the sought after characteristics with the elderly body. Rather than only presenting elderly women’s bodies as problematic objects that deviate from youthful ideals of beauty, this interpretation directs attention to the discursive and cultural frameworks where they are judged. A shift from the body as surface matter and appearance to a material-semiotic body draws attention to the verbal power field that surrounds women’s embodied ageing, an element that should be included in problematizations of the processes where their body image is created.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Relations between youthful norms and gendered ageing are important areas of research and the complex results of earlier research, like Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2011) argue, indicate a need for further research on elders’ body images and on how they relate to subjective experiences of old age. I have contributed to this debate by conceptualising the

processes whereby women relate to dominant beauty norms. The themes I have discussed – time perspective, double perspectives of beauty norms and the semiotic dimension of body image – all direct attention to the importance of context and the discourses and age codings present.

The results reveal that a time dimension is central to an understanding of body image, i.e. the possibility to view changes over time. Despite the extensive discussion that has taken place on both elders' body images as well as on a concept of the body that fuses social and biological meanings (see e.g. Haraway, 1991; Colebrook, 2000), the time dimension has not received significant attention. On the basis of my empirical material I have revealed how body (dis)satisfaction is created through comparison back in time. The time dimension also encompasses a reasonable assumption that body image can also be viewed in relation to how one wants to be or thinks one will become in the future. This is another way of saying that reference groups can also be comprised of thoughts of who one could be, of so-called “possible selves” (for the term, see e.g. Baron & Byrne, 2003; Smith & Freund, 2002).

The article's argument for a contextual analysis of elders' body images also opens for studies of context and of how situational manuscripts and the organization of contexts create meanings of gendered ageing. Although research has shown, for example, that body image comprises a key element of women's experience of ageing in workplaces, among other contexts, a more systematic review of how this differs between organizations is needed.

The logic of the double perspective and several possible reference groups further indicates that questions about available groups for comparison can be a fruitful direction for analysis. Because this also varies with social location, the results of the present study support earlier

research that suggests an intersectional approach and that different meanings of body image can be dependent on class, for example. Also the results discussed above on age coded bodies and Haraway's material-semiotic body direct focus to discursive contexts.

Transcending general notions of the ageing body to engage in contextual analyses of time dimensions, reference groups and discourses and age codings can, I argue, contribute not only to a deeper understanding of body image, but also to how this relates more generally to engendered age relations.

Early assumptions on double standards of ageing were not based on research on older people but rather on theoretical arguments which were founded on the fact that youthful beauty ideals dominate in Western societies (see Sontag 1979). Rich and partly contradicting empirical data has illustrated that the underlying theoretical arguments needed to be problematized. This is also confirmed by the research, with which this article aligns itself, which has shown that the central starting point that older women are assumed to only compare themselves with younger women does not have a solid empirical backing.

From an overall perspective, the debate on double standards of ageing illustrates, in my opinion, that it is not enough to give older women the role of research objects, i.e. to study their experiences (see Krekula, 2007). They also have to be subjects for the theories which are to explain their experiences. Subjective experiences of old age must thus be studied using theories with age potential. It cannot be taken for granted that theories have this, rather the testing of this remains a constantly topical research challenge.

References

Barak, B. (1987). Cognitive age: A new multidimensional approach to measuring age identity. *International journal of aging and human development*, 25(2): 109–128.

Baron, R. A. & Byrne, D. (2003). *Social psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bedford, J. L. & Johnson, C. S. (2006). Societal influences in body image dissatisfaction in younger and older women. *Journal of Women and Aging*, 18(1), 41–55.

Carstensen, G. (1997). Tror du Dolly Parton skulle kunna göra karriär på universitetet? In Könssorter(ing). Forskning om kön och makt. Festskrift till professor Eva Lundgren (Do you think Dolly Parton would be able to pursue an academic career? In Gender Categories(ation). Research on gender and power. A miscellany for professor Eva Lundgren), *Working Paper Series 1*. Uppsala: Department of Sociology, Uppsala University.

Calasanti, T.M. & Slevin, K.F. (2001). *Gender, social inequalities, and aging*. New York: Altamira.

Calasanti, T. & King, N. (2005). Firming the floppy penis: Age, class, and gender relations in the lives of old men. *Men and Masculinities*, 8 (1), 3 – 23.

Cash, T. F. (2004). Body image: past, present, and future. *Body Image*, 1, (1), 1–5.

Colebrook, C. (2000). From Radical Representations to Corporeal Becomings: The Feminist Philosophy of Lloyd, Grosz, and Gatens. *Hypatia*, 15, 2, 76–93.

Crossley, N. (2001). *The social body: Habit, identity and desire*. London: SAGE.

Dumas, A., Laberge, S. & Straka, S. M. (2005). Older women's relations to bodily appearance: The embodiment of social and biological conditions of existence. *Ageing and Society*, 25: 883–902.

Franzoi, S.L. & Koehler, V. (1998). Age and gender differences in body attitudes: A comparison of young and elderly adults. *International Journal of Human Development*, 47, 1, 1–10.

Furman, F. K. (1997). *Facing the mirror: Older women and beauty shop culture*. London: Routledge.

Gilleard, G. & Higgs, P. (2000). *Cultures of ageing: Self, citizen and the body*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin Book.

Grenier, A. M. (2005). The contextual and social locations of older women's experiences of disability and decline. *Journal of aging studies*, 19:131–146.

Grippio, K.P. & Hill, M.S. (2008). Self-objectification, habitual body monitoring, and body dissatisfaction in older European American women: Exploring age and feminism and moderators. *Body Image*, 5, (2), 173–182.

Grogan, S. (1999). *Body image*. London: Routledge.

Halliwell, E. & Dittmar H. (2003). A Qualitative Investigation of Women's and Men's Body Image Concerns and Their Attitudes toward Aging. *Sex Roles*, 49. 11-12, 675-684.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J. & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social psychology quarterly*, 58(4): 255–269.

Hurd Clarke, L. (2000). Older women's body image and embodied experience: An exploration. *Journal of Women and Aging*, 12(3/4): 319–332.

Hurd Clarke L. & Griffin, M. (2008). Visible and invisible ageing: beauty work as a response to ageism. *Ageing & Society*, 28, 653–674.

Hurd Clarke, L. & Korotchenko, A. (2011). Aging and the Body: A Review. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 30, 3, 495-510.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Kaufman, G. & Elder, G. H. Jr. (2002). Revisiting age identity: A research note. *Journal of aging studies*, 16: 169–176.

Krekula, C. (2006). *Kvinna i ålderskodad värld. Om äldre kvinnors förkroppsligade identitetsförhandlingar* (Women in a age-coded world. On older women's embodied identity negotiations). Dept. of Sociology, Uppsala University.

Krekula, C. (2007). The intersection of age and gender: Reworking gender theory and social gerontology. *Current Sociology*, 55, 2, 155–171.

Krekula, C. (2009). Age coding: On age-based practices of distinction. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 4:2:7-31, [<http://www.ep.liu.se/ej/ijal/>].

Lehtinen, U. (1998). *Underdog shame: philosophical essays on women's internalization of inferiority*. Department of Philosophy, University of Gothenburg.

Liechty, T. (2012). “Yes, I worry about my weight...but for most part I'm content with my body”: Older Women's Body Dissatisfaction Alongside Contentment. *Journal of Women and Ageing*, 24: 70–88.

MacDonald, B. & Rich, C. (1983). *Look me in the eye: Old women, aging and age-ism*. San Francisco: Spinster, Ink.

Merton, R. K. (1967). *Social theory and social justice*. New York: The Free Press.

Miller, S. (2008). *Smart Blonde. The Life of Dolly Parton*. London: Omnibus Press.

Miller, J. (2010). *Crazy Age. Thoughts on being old*. London: Virago Press.

Muth, J.L. & Cash, T.F. (1997). Body-image attitudes: What difference does gender make? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. 27 (16), 1438–1452.

Nikander, P. (2000). Old' vs. 'little girl': A discursive approach to age categorization and morality. *Journal of aging studies* 14, 4, 335–358.

Olson, L. (1992). Aging is a woman's problem: Issues faced by the female elderly population. In Gubrium J.E. & Charmaz, K. (eds), *Aging, self, and community* (pp. 265–276). London: Jai Press Inc.

Petry, H. (2003). Aging happens: Experiences of Swiss women living alone. *Journal of women and Aging*, 15 (4): 51–68.

Pink, S. (2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: Sage.

Reboussin, B. A., Rejeski, W. J., Martin, K. A., Callahan, K. Dunn, A. L., King, A. C. & Sallis, J. F. (2000). Correlates of satisfaction with body function and body appearance in middle- and older aged adults: The activity counselling trial (ACT). *Psychology & Health*, 15, 2, 239–254.

Shibutani, T. (1961). *Society and personality: An Interactionist approach to social psychology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Smith, J. & Freund A. M. (2002). The dynamics of possible selves in old age. *Journal of gerontology*, 57B, 6, 492–500.

Slevin , K.F. (2010). “If I had lots of money...I’d have a body makeover.” Managing the aging body. *Social Forces*, 88 (3), 1003–1020.

Sontag, S. (1979).The double standard of ageing. In Carver, V. & Liddiard, P. (eds), *An ageing population: A reader and a sourcebook*, (pp. 72–80). New York: Holmes and Meier.

Staunæs, D. (2003). Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concept of intersectionality and subjectification. *NORA*, 2(11): 101–110.

Tajfel H (1982). *Social identity and intergroup relations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tiggemann, M. (2004). Body image across the adult life span: Stability and change. *Body Image*, 1 (1), 29–41.

Thompson, P., Itzin, C. & Abendstern, M. (1990). *I don’t feel old: The experience of later life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tornstam, L. (2011) Åldrandets socialpsykologi (The Social Psychology of Ageing), 8th edition. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Tulle, E. (2003). Sense and structure: Toward a sociology of old bodies. In Biggs, S., Lowenstein, A. & Hendricks, J. (eds), *The need for theory: Critical approaches to social gerontology* (pp. 91–104). New York: Baywood Publishing Company.

Westerhof, G. J. & Barrett, A. E. (2005). Age identity and subjective well-being: A comparison of the United States and Germany. *Journal of gerontology*, 60B(3): 129–136.

Wilcos, S. (1997). Age and gender in relation to body attitudes: Is there a double standard of aging? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, 549–565.

Öberg, P. & Tornstam, L. (1999). Body images among men and women of different ages. *Ageing and Society*, 19: 629–644.