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Fashion and Age:
The Role of Women's Magazines in the Constitution of Aged Identities

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Introduction

Since the 1970s women's magazines have been the focus of work exploring the role of the media in the constitution of women's identities under late capitalism. Initially such analyses, rooted in the feminism of the second wave were highly critical, presenting women's magazines as key sites in the reinforcement of women's subordination, entrenching inauthentic and oppressive versions of femininity. In the 1980s and 90s, however, these gave way to more nuanced accounts influenced by post-modernism that acknowledged the polysemic nature of women's magazines; their capacity to reinforce traditional gender identities at the same time as offering critiques of them. (Winship 1987, Hermes 1995, Aronson 2000, Gough-Yates 2003). Reception studies, led by Hermes, unpacked the complex ways in which women consume these cultural products, the distinctive and bounded ways in which they fit into their lives, and the interpretations they bring to their consumption.

We are, thus, familiar with arguments concerning the role of women's magazines in the constitution of gendered - and to some degree classed - identities. There has, however, been little work that extended these understandings to the constitution of aged ones. Partly this reflects the wider neglect of age within sociological theorising. Though Age is indeed one of the master identities like gender, class and 'race' (and possibly others), it has not received the same analytic attention, and is often excluded from the debate on intersectionality (Maynard 1994, Anthias 2001). In many ways we are in the same position in regard to age as we were in the early 1970s

in regard to gender: something so assumed, so naturalised in biology, that we could not see its significance or its socially constituted character. But the neglect may also reflect a sense that identities in young women – and most of the work on magazines focuses on young, often teen aged women – are fluid, capable of being molded by the cultural productions of capitalism, whereas those of older women are more fixed, the product of lives already lived, rather than in process of being formed. This may, however, be a mistake, arising in part from a concept of identity as something formed in youth and carried forward into later life, as opposed to something that develops over time, unfolding and changing through the life course in interaction with cultural structures, including those in relation to age (Andrews 1999). It has also been increasingly argued that identities, including aged identities, have become, under conditions of post modernity, more optional, less socially entrenched - more the product of agency and choice in which patterns of consumption can play a significant role. Consumption is also significant for the potentially integrative role it plays within individuated culture, acting to link people together within a common culture of life style (Giddens 1991, Bauman 2000). Engagement with consumption thus offers older people the possibility of counteracting the cultural exclusion traditionally associated with age. As a result, Gilleard and Higgs (2000) and others argue, older people - at least those with resources - are more closely integrated culturally with the rest of the population than was the case in the past, (though there is also a countervailing trend whereby older people have become more disparate – certainly in relation to income - as a group). Much of the work on consumption focuses on the purchase of consumer durables or aspects of leisure and travel. But perhaps more significant in relation to the constitution of identities are clothes, for these mediate between the naked body and the social world. They are the vestimentary envelope that contains our bodies, presenting them to the wider world (Entwistle 2000). They are central to identity, and as such one of the means whereby social expectations in relation to age - and other social categories - are made manifest at a bodily level. They are thus central to the ways older bodies are experienced, presented and understood within culture (Twigg 2007).

Methodology: Clothing the Body and Dress

The chapter explores the role of fashion coverage in the constitution of age. It is based on qualitative interviews and content analysis of three UK magazines aimed at older women. It forms part of a larger ESRC funded study of clothing, the body and age (Twigg 2011

forthcoming) based on interviews with older women (55+) and key representatives of the Fashion System (Fine and Leopold 1993) in the form of designers, retailers and journalists. As part of this, four magazines were selected for analysis. The three reported here represent journals aimed at different sectors of the older market: *Woman & Home*, as a general woman's magazine aimed at those in late middle/ early old age; *SAGA Magazine* as a proponent of Third Age lifestyles; and *Yours*, as a mass market magazine broadly aimed at women over sixty. Here the task was to understand how fashion fitted into such publications, and to explore their possible contribution in the cultural constitution of age. A fourth magazine, *Vogue*, was also selected as representing the premier UK fashion magazine. Here the task was slightly different, to explore how age was presented, but also effaced, within a fashion magazine that has – like fashion and consumption culture generally – a youthful focus. This is the subject of a separate article (Twigg 2010).

The three magazines

SAGA Magazine is a general lifestyle magazine aimed at the affluent retired, promoting Third Age lifestyles. It is an offshoot of a large travel and insurance corporation that has been prominent in shaping and providing for the older market in the UK. Fashion only developed as significant in 1999, and it remains a relatively small part of the offer (about 6 pages per issue). Partly this is because the magazine is aimed at both men and women. It has relatively high production values with glossy paper and a spine, and it includes fashion shoots that mirror those in mainstream fashion magazines. The coverage reflects that found in colour supplements and other lifestyle magazines. The circulation data in Tables 1-3 is taken from British Rate and Data (BRAD 2008): 100 represents the population norm for the sub group and values above and below a bias toward or against that group. This shows that the readership of *SAGA* is indeed heavily concentrated among older people, particularly those over 65. It is however a prosperous readership, biased towards those in As. (The socio-economic classification is that of National Readership Survey in which A and B are upper and mid middle class, C1 is lower middle, C2 skilled working class and D subsistence.)

Table 1: SAGA

Age	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	2	4	8	47	206	308
Socio-economic status	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
	225	145	113	67	44	60

The target readership is described as: ‘ABC1 50+ readership. People in and approaching retirement’ with a circulation of 653,657. The interview was with Lesley Ebbetts, the free lance Fashion Editor.

Woman & Home is a classic women’s magazine with a typically strong emphasis on beauty and fashion, which occupies about a fifth of the editorial space. The treatment is upbeat and glamorous, with both classic fashion spreads and extensive make over sections. There is a strong emphasis on being positive, on new beginnings, and the potential role of clothes in this. Fashion is seen as a central part of the ‘treat’ of the magazine. It is printed on glossy paper, with a spine, and produced by IPC from their main London office in conjunction with a range of fashion and other titles. The readership is slightly younger than SAGA, centring on those in late 40s to 60s, and predominantly middle and lower middle class.

Table 2: Woman & Home

Age	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	17	47	67	141	207	128
Socio-economic status	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
	167	132	120	79	46	64

Target readership: ‘ABC1 women 35+’ with a circulation of 336,888. The interview was with Angela Kennedy, the Fashion Editor.

Yours is a mass market publication aimed at older and less affluent women. It is a fortnightly, printed on cheaper, non glossy paper and stapled. It is published by Bauer who own *Heat* and *Grazia*, but it is edited from their Peterborough office, in conjunction with other special interest magazines, and not from London where the more directly fashion oriented magazines are produced. The magazine is less glamorous and aspirational than *Woman & Home* or *SAGA*. It does not do fashion spreads as such, but covers fashion mostly through showing readers what is currently available and stylish, and how it might be worn. They do makeovers, though of a more modest sort than *Woman & Home*, for whom glamorous restyling is a central part of the magazine. Clothes tend to be cheaper, concentrated on UK high street staples like Marks & Spencer and the value retailers. There is a warm, homely tone; and the magazine has a particularly close relationship with its readers who regard it as a ‘friend’: the editor receives over 750 letters and emails per issue. Circulation data confirms that it is heavily read by women over 65, and with a socio-economic profile weighted towards lower middle and working class.

Table 3: Yours

Age	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	7	10	24	48	125	342
Socio-economic status	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
	31	58	110	128	94	153

Target readership: ‘targeted at women aged over 50. 51% ABC1C2’ with a circulation of 337,639. The interview was with Valerie McConnell, the Editor.

All three journalists had worked for a variety of magazines and national newspapers; and their careers mirrored their lives in the transition through the age related journals that they worked for.

Age and age slippage

How do these magazines present themselves in terms of age? Women's magazines since the 1950s have become increasingly market segmented, with magazines closely targeted on specific readerships (Gough-Yates 2003). Though these are often described in terms of lifestyle, the reality of much marketing and product development is that it is based on age categorisation. The two parameters on which BRAD provides data are socio-economic status and age, and this points to their significance for the sector. In terms of age there is a systematic tendency across the magazine sector as a whole to describe target readership as younger than the actual age profile. Magazines are aspirational goods which typically aim to present readers with a visual world that is younger than the one they inhabit, and allows them to identify at a fantasy level with a younger, more affluent and generally successful self. Maintaining a younger appearance is also important for the magazine's visual status, avoiding the negative connotations of age.

This systematic pattern of age slippage is evident even in these magazines that are aimed at an older readership. Kennedy (*Woman & Home*) commented: 'Theoretically our magazine is aimed at the 35 plus, but I expect our median age is probably 45'. In fact as the data show, it is significantly older. Ebbetts divided the *SAGA* readers into the 'new old' and the 'war old'; and saw her task when appointed as fashion editor to respond to the interests of the first, as part of a process of lifting the magazine visually. *Yours* is similarly described as 'aimed at 50 plus' though its readership is heavily in the category over 65. The editor noted, however, that this is 'a huge demographic to cover', and she lamented the ageism implicit in the view that 'you can lump together all these women, when actually you've got a huge diversity there.' Kennedy, however, was very alert to the ways in which the nature of age has changed, and she believed that *Woman & Home* had been successful because it had recognized this:

we've actually changed the magazine quite radically to move with the times, because women of 55 are not the same as women of 55 a few years ago. And obviously everybody knows this, and we've taken this onboard. So *theoretically* we're aimed at the 35+ market. Age slippage thus means the systematic process whereby features of a culture are labeled as younger than the actual audience for them. It has its roots in ageism whereby customers and providers are jointly concerned to move away from older age designations and to 'move

younger'. We will return to this systematic pattern of age slippage when we look at the responses of retailers to these age categorizations.

The role of fashion in the magazines

Fashion is now ubiquitous in the media. Once confined to the women's page, it has become a staple element across the magazines and newspaper sector. This is partly because of a general trend towards lifestyle and other feminised forms of 'soft news', but reflects also a wider cultural shift towards interest in the self and the role of appearance and consumption in this. Magazines aimed at older women reflect this trend. *SAGA* only started covering fashion seriously in 1999 with the appointment of Ebbetts. McConnell similarly brought fashion to *Yours*. She explained how ten years ago they would not have covered it, but now: 'I just felt that this is part of how women live their lives today. They are still interested in looking good.'

The spread of fashion and fashionability to the older age group is also part of wider changes in the Fashion System in the early twentieth-first century, with the influx of mass cheap clothing resulting in the search for new markets in the form of older people and children (Twigg and Majima forthcoming). As a result it has become increasingly possible within the world of women's magazines to imagine directly the older woman:

in the last few years [...] people are going, 'Oh it's all right to be 60. Oh it's safe to mention 60. It's safe to mention sexy at 60.' (McConnell: *Yours*).

'Decades' shoots that feature fashions on a series of different age groups: twenties, thirties... and so on, have steadily extended their range so that they now encompass those in their fifties, sixties and beyond. Even a high fashion magazine like *Vogue* now includes the seventies in such features (Twigg 2010). Overwhelmingly magazines present this development in up beat, positive terms – offering new opportunities for older women, new forms of recognition and engagement in culture - though as we shall see this is not the whole story.

Within these magazines, fashion performs a number of functions. First and foremost it is central to the 'treat' element. Women's magazines sell on their capacity to be a 'treat', a purchase, like a box of chocolates, aimed at personal enjoyment, often snatched in the midst of the demands

made by others (Hermes 1995). They are strongly visual in their appeal; and beautiful fashion images are a key part of this. They offer readers what Kennedy (*Woman & Home*) describes as: ‘a lift...a bit of a tonic’. The element of aesthetic pleasure is important here. For many women, fashion, together with home decoration, provides access to a creative, aesthetic dimension of being, missing in the rest of their lives. It also allows women to escape into an idealized version of themselves, enabling them to occupy an imagined self that to some degree compensates for the realities of their lives (Winship 1987, Hermes 1995). But, as we shall see, magazines have to tread a fine line between the dream like world they create for, and reflect back to, women, and the realities of their lives, looks and bodies. Too far a stretch and the process of identification on which their sales depend cannot work.

Fashion also has a distinctive role to play in its capacity to enshrine the idea of new beginnings. It is in the nature of fashion that it allows women to present themselves in new, refreshed guise every season. Its language of cycles and seasons draw on the metaphors of rebirth and renewal. Extending such imagery to older women enables them to engage with a sense of renewal, despite and against the erosions of age. But such processes, as we shall see, also come with less positive aspects.

Much of the presentation of fashion in these magazines is in the form of guidance and support in relation to the difficult matter of self presentation. As Clarke and Miller (2002) argue dress, though a realm of pleasure, is also one of anxiety with, in Simmel’s (1904) terms, the competing desires to stand out and to fit in are weighted significantly towards the latter. McConnell comments: ‘we’ve all got so much more conscious of what we should be wearing and what we shouldn’t be wearing.’ In relation to older women, there are added pressures of dressing in an age appropriate way. The fear of being inappropriately dressed is strong. All three editors referred to the old cultural trope of Mutton Dressed as Lamb and women’s fears in this regard (Fairhurst 1998). Many older women lose confidence how to dress as their bodies change and as cultural expectations in relation to age press in. As Kennedy commented: ‘I’ve seen a lot of women who [...] have lost their way’. Offering guidance on how to negotiate the difficult cultural territory of being older was a central part of what the magazines offer: ‘It’s our job to edit for people. That’s what we do.’ Part of the task is to steer women away from unflattering styles, which in this context usually means styles that deemed inappropriately young:

I want to shoot them all, these women who are really elderly and they've got puffed sleeves. You know you actually can't do that over the age of 18.' (Ebbetts).

Puff sleeves represent a particularly girlish style, and adopting them in later years emphasises the discrepancies of age. At the same time, editors see their role as encouraging women to be more adventurous and to recognise that they need not be as restricted as they think:

You know the word that is vital in all this is *permission*. And I honestly believe that, you know, when all these lovely things come out and you're going down the rail and saying, 'It's not for me, it's not for me, I'm not allowed this.' And then you suddenly come across an absolutely stunning shirt [...] And you think I love that, but you know there's still this nagging thing, but it's not for me. [...] Somebody has to say to these women [...] You have the right to join in.

For these fashion editors it is axiomatic that there is always a way for older women to wear the latest styles – though Ebbetts concedes that certain trends, for example, 'Neon, Boudoir', are very difficult. The purpose of the fashion sections is to concentrate on what can be worn by older women, and to show readers how to do it. They thus help construct an older woman who is still linked into mainstream consumption, actively engaged in it, but in what is felt to be an 'appropriate' way.

Fashion is also valued by the editors for its role in counteracting cultural exclusion. Engagement with dress is presented positively as part of resisting the cultural invisibility experienced by many older women. As we saw above Ebbetts in this context refers to 'the right to join in'. Here fashion is presented in terms of asserting that the individual is still part of the social world, still aspires to look good, be noticed. As McConnell explained:

that's one of the reasons why we do fashion. Because it's saying you're not disappearing. You're out there in the community. Whether you're a Gran, whether you're a carer, you might still be working, whatever you're doing, wanting to make the best of yourself is part of that. And that's what fashion helps you do. (*Yours*)

Yours also runs features in which readers send in pictures of themselves in the past wearing glamorous clothes. Or they take a current look – bubble skirts – and show how 'we' did it first, and by implication better, in the 1950s. These allow the reader to imagine herself back in her youth and to assert her value as someone who did once look different and better. They draw on

the evocative nature of remembered clothes, and the power that lies in such material artifacts of the past with their intimate, embodied connections (Weber and Mitchell 2004). The magazine, thus, offers an opportunity to assert the memories and values of the group in the face of the cultural erosions of age, and what Vincent (2003) has described as the sense becoming exiled in one's own culture. As McConnell comments:

we are a positive magazine. We are about somewhere – you know, if you want to go somewhere that is a better place, and that's going to make you feel better by the end of reading this magazine, then come here.

Yours offers a space into which older women can escape.

Not all women however welcome this renewed emphasis on fashion and appearance. *Women & Home* is largely bought by women who still want to engage with these fields, but both *Yours* and *SAGA*, possibly because their slightly older readership, have experienced more ambivalent responses from readers that suggest resistant or counter readings. Some readers of *Yours* have responded with annoyance, seeing the inclusion of fashion as an imposition:

‘Oh, for goodness sake! I really don't need all that. I'm fine in elasticated trousers [...] I really don't need all this silly nonsense.’ (McConnell: *Yours*)

The spread of fashionability to older women has meant the spread of new demands as well as new opportunities, making it harder abdicate from these areas of life. The pursuit of fashion can be seen as a treadmill as much as a form of renewal, a pointless process of planned obsolescence that underlies consumption culture and enables the fashion industry to sell yet more clothes to people who already have wardrobes full of them. Fashion thus draws older women deeper into consumption culture, endorsing the idea that purchasing things will make them happier and more loved. These tendencies are particularly marked in the field of cosmetics which occupy a large part of the editorial and advertising space in women's magazines (Coupland 2003).

Images: celebrities, models and make-overs

Magazines are a highly visual medium; and much of their meaning is found in the images. Who is illustrated and how is, therefore, significant in the way in which age is presented and imaged

in them. The covers of women's magazine traditionally focus on a single face, whose role is to draw the reader in, and reflect back to her a woman's gaze that is powerful, calm and contained (Winship 1987). Over the last decade this gaze has increasingly been provided by celebrities, who now dominate the covers of all women's magazines, even those strongly focused on fashion like *Vogue*. This is reflected in the magazines analysed here, all of which draw heavily on a relatively small range of older female celebrities familiar in the UK including Helen Mirren, Judy Dench, Cherie Lunghi, Felicity Kendall, Emma Thompson. Their function is to present a successful version of the older women: looking good (and part of this means, younger) and the focus of attention. They assert the continued value and status of the older woman, placing her fully in the public eye, styled up in glamorous clothes and make up, fully integrated with younger celebrity culture. The image is designed to draw the reader in and confirm her – idealized - identification with the magazine through its presentation of the older women. But such celebrities can sometimes provoke resistance and annoyance among readers, if their glamorous image seems too unreal or too privileged. Readers note that such women are rich, and lead easy lives. McConnell reports the response:

Don't tell me to get the style secrets of somebody who has got lots of money, time and energy to spend on themselves, and to spend looking young. That's not reality for me.

Magazines have as always to tread a fine line between fantasy self identification and the real lives of their readers.

The tension between the realities of becoming older and the role of fashion in the magazines is also illustrated in the issue of models. *SAGA* only uses models who are over 40; and Ebbetts felt that she had been pioneering in her pursuit of this. They are, however, still models, and present characteristically idealised and aspirational versions of the older women - typically ones that show little in the way of age. *Women & Home*, by contrast, does not use older models in their fashion shoots. Kennedy justifies this by her account of fashion as a 'beautiful, inspirational moment'. Seeing older models would erode this, disturb the visual field of fashion which is essentially youthful, and undermine the element of fantasy projection by which readers identify with the youthful images: 'They know they're 55, but they just still see in their head this, you know, other woman.' In this way fashion is preserved as a site of fantasy and youthfulness. But, at the same time, the magazine is aware of the need to reflect more directly the situations of their

readers. They use makeovers and other reader focused features to do this. Kennedy explained how these are:

very big thing of the magazine. It's our USP [unique selling point]. So I get very, very involved with the four or five women every month that we feature in the fashion section. So we have our glamorous fashion. Then we have our five women, who wear those clothes themselves, and they're across the ages[...] that's really why our magazine is so successful, I think because it's real in that aspect.

The responses of the fashion industry: brands and adverts

To order to cover fashion, magazines need to borrow samples from manufacturers. All three editors, however, had experienced difficulties in doing this. Initially Ebbetts found no one would lend to SAGA and she was forced to buy the clothes on a credit card and return them the next day. Manufacturers :

considered that it wasn't a market. I think they thought at a certain point in a woman's life she didn't go out and buy clothes. Well, she might buy a sweater, but she wasn't interested in fashion.

Even more significant was the fear that the clothes would be indentified as aged:

there is a tearing worry at the brand manager's level that their brand could be associated with this age group. So they didn't want to be [...] seen in it, and certainly didn't want me put it on older models.

The others experienced similar problems. McConnell believes that retailers have: 'delusions of grandeur about who is buying their clothes'. All three reported that they had had some success in bringing round some retailers through their capacity to show how the magazines can deliver sales. This is a market that has often been neglected by retailers, with the result that featured items are often taken up very strongly. As McConnell notes, *Yours* has a 'response level that other magazines would kill for'.

A similar dynamic works in relation to advertising. None of the magazines secured high status or even extensive fashion advertising. They attributed this partly to the fact that the British fashion industry did not spend much on advertising, expecting to get its coverage free; but more strongly

to systematic biases in the advertising industry which is dominated by the young, who do not want to deal with magazines aimed at older readers. Status for the brand, and the brand manager, lies in securing space in magazines like *Vogue*, even though these might not sell the goods in the way that an advert in one of their magazines might. As a result the advertising that they did secure was noticeably older and less fashionable than the image presented in the editorial pages. Adverts were often for garments that were strongly age associated: for example, leisure suits in pastel colours, with machine embroidered floral detail, though these were often shown on very young models, who would not conceivably wear such garments. Though they struck a discordant note it was not one that appeared to disturb the advertisers. There is thus a notable disjunction between the message about age conveyed in the editorial pages and the advertising.

In regard to age slippage, the editors felt that retailers systematically present their clothes as aimed at a younger market than was the reality. Ebbetts remarked:

they won't say to me, 'This is for the over 50s.' They say, 'Oh we're looking at a 35 and up.' And you think there's no way a 35 year old would have any of this on the rail on their backs. You're trying desperately to think of any kind of young woman who gets to 35 and would choose to wear any of this.

This is partly a product of obfuscation but also of self delusion. As with advertising, status in fashion lies with addressing a younger age group. Designers are reluctant to design for the older market. But it reflects also the internalised ageism of the customers themselves who want to feel that they are buying youthful, and do not want to be directly addressed in terms of their chronological age. But this confusion means that many manufactures are, in the views of editors, failing to get their offer right. Both Ebbetts and Kennedy felt that, for example, Marks & Spencers's Portfolio range, launched in 2008 for the 50s and 60s was: 'a missed opportunity'. Ebbetts felt that it would really suit those in their seventies:

this is going to be a winner, a total winner for their plus-70 range, which is the Classic Collection. This is what the Classic Collection should be. I don't know how well the Classic Collection does, because they kept asking me to push it in the magazine, so obviously it doesn't do that well, but you know those ghastly granny blouses and those

appalling trousers in the most appalling fabrics. This range is going to be wonderful for them.

In a similar way she felt that the Cotswold Collection, a UK mail order company, was perfect for her mother in law who is 87: 'she loves it to bits. It's perfect [...] but they're calling it 40-plus.' Mark & Spencers's Per Una range was launched for those in thirties, but is heavily bought by women in their fifties. There is thus a persistent trend whereby manufacturers are imagining older and more staid women than is the actual market. Women as Kennedy noted have changed, and magazines need to take that into account. Ebberts in a parallel way realised that she was dressing the models too old. She had incident with model who arrived looking very good:

she came in a little [...] vest that had lovely lace. She had a marvellous little cardigan on. She had a little diamante belt in a jewel-encrusted pair of jeans. I took her clothes off. I put her in mine and she looked 104. She was in her early 40s. And I said to [editor], 'I'm not doing that again.'

We can understand this pattern of age slippage in terms of the wider ageism of the culture. Manufacturers want to avoid the negative connotations of aiming their clothes at older age groups, and so persistently present them as aimed at a younger demographic, or on a undefined and vague one with no upper age point: 'over 35'. Customers are seen as being complicit in this through their pursuit of younger labeled dress. But the pattern can also be interpreted in terms of a failure of the designers and retailers to engage with the aspirations of older women, showing a failure of cultural imagination that once again reflects the ageism of their and the wider society, with the clothes they are aiming at for women in their fifties and sixties being, in the eyes of the editors, appropriate for much older women.

Conclusion

Magazines for older women – as for younger – are a deeply ambivalent cultural phenomena, both reflecting the wider cultural of ageism, and to that degree endorsing its meanings, and offering forms of escape from, and resistance to, it. The wider culture prizes youth, and it is not surprising that magazines present themselves in ways that reflect that valuation. This is why *Woman and Home* shows its fashion shoots on younger models, enabling them to present images that are consonant with wider visual culture. It is the reason why magazines persistently present their

target readerships as younger than they in fact are. We saw how similar processes of age slippage operate within the fashion industry when they define their market. Everyone in this field wants to 'move younger'. Their status in their own eyes, and that of customers, depends on it. As Katz (2005), Woodward (1991, 2006) and others have noted, successful ageing in modern consumer culture is ageing without giving the appearance of doing so. Much of the meaning of looking better in this context is looking younger, and dress can be part of this.

Like the magazines aimed at young women, these aimed at older women do present a particular discursive construction. It is one that is up beat, celebrationist, and that uses the techniques of consumption to assert the worth of older women. They show older women how to relate to the cultural fields of fashion and consumption, and to makes these work for them. They thus present a particular construction of later years. They show it, embody it and explain how to live your life in terms of it. Other discursive constructions – for example in terms of giving up, of not bothering, or embracing aged appearance and identity – are implicitly silenced.

The up beat character of the magazines is particularly evident in the makeover pages which include a prominent part of the fashion coverage, and the place where the magazines connect very directly with the readers and their aspirations for themselves. These features centre on making the best of yourself, being positive. They are about countering the pervasive negatives of later years, and the erosion of confidence that can come with these. All three magazines with their different demographics emphasized this. They thus offer older women ways of operating more successfully in ageist culture. But at the same time, like most women's magazines, they contain strongly escapist elements, presenting an idealized, aspirational world that allows older women to escape from the day to day limitations of their lives. But, as Hermes showed, we need to acknowledge how women recognize the escapist element, looking at magazines as diversions, as opportunities for pleasure unconnected with reality. They do not believe in, or act out, these messages uncritically. Fashion and fashion spreads are a central element in this escapism. But as we saw with *Yours*, magazines can also offer other forms of escape, taking readers into spaces where their values are endorsed, shared by a community of others, despite the cultural erosions around them, where their memories are shared and valued. Dress can be part of this, reminding readers of their past and the young and attractive person they once were, thereby enabling them to make a claim for attention on that basis. But once again the message is an essentially

conservative one, endorsing the wider cultural estimation of age, even though it attempts to soften the pain.

Women's magazines are not radical publications. We should not be surprised by this given their location within capitalist production and their close relationship with consumption culture. With their bright, consciously positive tone, they have to be read against the 'realities' of older women's lives and interpretations and evaluations within which these are embedded. In this context what they offer is an idealized, aspirational world that allows older women to imagine a different self and to escape from the day to day limitations of their lives. To this degree they send conservative messages to older women about the meanings of their lives and situations. But they do in conjunction with advice and techniques that aim to allow them to surviving more successful in that culture and, to a degree, challenge it.

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