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### Citation for published version

Twigg, Julia (2018) Fashion, the Media and Age: How Women's Magazines Use Fashion to Negotiate Age Identities. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* . ISSN 1367-5494.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417708432>

### Link to record in KAR

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### Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

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**Forthcoming in European Journal of Cultural Studies,**

**Fashion, the Media and Age:  
How Women's Magazines Use Fashion to Negotiate Age Identities**

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**Abstract**

The article explores the role of women's magazines in the negotiation of later life identities, focussing on the treatment of fashion and dress. It locates the analysis in debates about the changing nature of later years with the emergence of Third Age identities, and the role of consumption in these. Focussed on the treatment of fashion and age, it analyses four UK magazines: three chosen to represent the older market (Woman & Home, Saga, Yours), and one to represent mainstream fashion (Vogue). It is based on interviews with four editors and analysis of the content of the magazines. The article analyses the media strategies that journalists use to negotiate tensions in the presentation of fashion for this group and their role in supporting new formations of age.

**Keywords:** ageing, fashion, dress, lifestyle, consumption, identity, media, women's magazines, Third Age.

**Introduction**

Fashion is now ubiquitous in the media, its presence buoyed up by the rise of soft news and the shift towards lifestyle journalism focussed around consumption. Increasingly this journalism addresses the lives of older people, aiming to co-op them into the new culture of consumption supported by the media. As a result the field of fashion and dress within magazines has become an arena for the enactment of new versions of age.

Dress has always played a central part in the enactment of identity, mediating between the body and its social presentation. It is a significant part of self fashioning, and for many women is a source of pleasure, anxiety, interest and concern. Increasingly these concerns have been extended to older women also, as part of the wider development of consumption culture. We can observe this reflected in the media, and in particular in magazines aimed at older women. This article explores the tensions raised within media culture by questions of age and dress. Fashion is traditionally a central feature of women's magazines, providing the element of visual treat, while at the same time as offering advice and guidance on the presentation of self. But, as we shall see, the values of the fashion system are in many ways at odds with the processes of ageing and their cultural estimation. How these tensions are managed within the magazine sector is the subject of this article.

### **Magazines and constitution of identities**

Since the 1960s, women's magazines have been the focus of feminist analysis that has explored their role in the constitution of women's identities. Initially such analyses, rooted in the feminism of the second wave, took a largely negative view, seeing such magazines as sites reinforcing women's oppression, promoting an inauthentic and restrictive version of femininity. These accounts, however, were soon succeeded by more complex analyses, that acknowledged the multiple ways in which women's magazines operated and fitted into the rhythm of women's lives offering, in addition to their traditionalist gender messages, spaces for pleasure, escape and fantasy (Winship 1987, Aronson 2000, Gough Yates 2003, Gill 2007). Reception studies pioneered by Hermes (1995) questioned the textual determinism of earlier work, emphasising the ways meaning is created as much by the reader as the text. Subsequent work within cultural studies has to some degree destabilised the earlier confidence of feminist analyses (Gill 2007) pointing to the polysemic nature of these productions, containing as they do both traditional and radical messages. As a result media studies now see women's magazines as much more ambivalent cultural productions that was initially understood, with multiple meanings and diverse possible interpretations.

These developments were paralleled within wider feminist thinking by the shift within post feminism or feminism of the third wave towards greater acceptance of the role of expressivity and pleasure in gender performance. Developments in the analysis of dress reflect this. Feminism of the second wave tended to regard fashion as oppressive, supporting a false version of femininity that diverted women's energies and rendered them subject to an

objectifying male gaze. (Friedan 1963, Greer 1971, Daly 1979, Evans and Thornton 1989, Bartky 1990). Since then, however, there has been a reclaiming of spheres like fashion, with the recognition of dress as part of a distinctive women's culture, a source of aesthetic pleasure and self fashioning. Writers like Wilson (1985) influenced by post structuralism, and in line with work around the body and embodiment more generally, point to the inescapability of questions of style and cultural formation in relation to the body and appearance. There can be no natural form of dress, any more than there can be a natural body: cultural formation is inevitable. These developments find parallels in the more general shift towards a focus on identity, performativity and self fashioning, both in academic analysis and the wider culture.

Though feminist scholarship has focussed on women's magazines as a distinctive genre, an alternative way of approaching the area is through the concept of lifestyle journalism (Fürsich 2012, Hanush 2012). This is often presented, rather negatively, in terms of its contrast with 'real' journalism, which is rooted in an idealised concept of 'news', and focused on investigation and exposure, particularly in relation to the public world of politics and the economy. Life style journalism, however, represents a significant and growing part of the media. Characterised as 'news you can use', it blends information, advice and guidance, with entertainment and relaxation. Its rise is often associated with the wider feminisation of the media. According to Fürsich (2012) its three classic activities are: review, advice and commercialisation. It provides what she terms, drawing on Bourdieu, 'judgements of taste' that guide and shape the responses of readers, enabling them to engage effectively with the expanding world of consumption. Central to the role of such soft lifestyle journalism is the reaffirmation of class and gender structures. Increasingly, as we shall see in this analysis of women's magazines, it performs this role in relation to age also.

## **Methods**

The findings presented here form part of a larger ESRC funded study, Clothing, Age and the Body that explored the changing cultural constitution of age through an exploration of dress. It was based on: interviews with older women; with design directors of major UK retailers; and with journalists, together with content analysis of their magazines (Twigg 2013)

The media part of the study focussed on an analysis of four UK magazines. Three were chosen to reflect responses to different parts of the older market. Woman & Home is a classic

women's magazine, largely aimed at middle-class women in late middle age (readership peaking in 55-65 group) many of whom are in employment. The circulation data in relation to age that is listed below is taken from British Rate and Data (BRAD 2008) for the period when the main interviews were undertaken. A value of 100 represents the population norm for the age category, and figures above and below 100 display a bias toward or against the category.

<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
17	47	67	141	207	128

Saga Magazine is a general lifestyle magazine aimed at the affluent retired: it is an off shoot of Saga, a travel and insurance company for older people. It has a slightly older readership, peaking in 65+ group.

<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
2	4	8	47	206	308

Yours is a women's magazine aimed at older, working class women, in their 60s and over. Its treatment is less glossy and more down to earth.

<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
7	10	24	48	125	342

The task in the case of these three publications is to understand how fashion operates in magazines aimed at the older audience.

The fourth magazine is Vogue, representing an elite mainstream fashion magazine. Its target readership is described as 'concentrated in the ABC1 20-44 demographic group. A high proportion are in some kind of job or profession and are in the higher income groups.' (BRAD 2008)

<b>15-24</b>	<b>23-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
215	124	92	88	52	39

Here the task is slightly different: to understand how age could be fitted into a magazine focussed on high fashion.

Interviews were undertaken with the editors of *Vogue* and *Yours*; and with the fashion editors of *Women & Home* and *Saga*. They were recorded, transcribed and analysed using traditional methods that involved: listening and correcting, repeated readings to develop thematic categories; coding and linking material; developing and integrating initial analytic responses to themes and material; building up thematic narratives. The analysis drew its informing concepts from the larger study and from the literature reviews that underpinned this. The content of the magazines was systematically reviewed over three years, sampling every second issue in the case of *Saga* and *Woman & Home* and every fourth in the case of the bimonthly *Yours*. The extent of fashion coverage was measured in terms of pages; and the content noted and analysed. *Vogue* since 2007 has featured an age related issue every July: all of these were reviewed. In addition, all covers of UK *Vogue* since 1947 were reviewed to assess the presence - or otherwise - of age related text and images. The determination of this inevitably involved a subjective element since age is often referred to in the media and beyond in an oblique fashion. This is all the more the case in earlier decades when covers featured fewer 'sell lines'. The current age related issues published every July are always identified by the tag 'Ageless Style'. This work formed part of a separate sub-study exploring the changing historical treatment of age in this magazine (Twigg 2010). Although a different part of the study explored the views of older women themselves, the scope of this did not allow for a systematic analysis in the tradition of reception studies.

### **The fashion system, age and identity**

Age and fashion – certainly high fashion – are often perceived to be in discordant relationship. This results in tensions within the fashion system when it attempts to respond to this sector of the market. The fashion system represents the nexus of commercial, design and media influences that together provides the principle sources of changing aesthetic judgements about dress, determining choices available in the market and providing goods to satisfy these (Fine and Leopold 1993, Braham 1997, Entwistle 2000). Though far reaching in its commercial applications, encompassing as it does the dress of whole populations, at its elite fashion core, its values are more narrowly focussed. This core, which defines the values of the system more generally, is centred around youthful beauty. High fashion is designed for, and presented upon, very youthful - and extremely slim – bodies: theirs are the images that are featured; theirs the bodies that designers aspire to design for. This prestigious core sets the values of the system as a whole. As a result little status attaches to designing for the

older market, which is regarded as marginal, and of little fashion significance, though it has not inconsiderable purchasing power. As a result, fashion editors of magazines aimed at the older market face difficulties in presenting fashion in their magazines. For example, the journalists reported here often found it difficult to obtain samples to feature in their fashion spreads; brand managers were at best uninterested in magazines aimed at an older market, and at worst, averse to the connection (Twigg 2013). There is, thus, a cultural disconnect between the core values of the fashion system epitomised by its high fashion heart, and the ageing market. We will explore how journalists finesse this issue below.

### **Dress and age**

The role of dress in the expression of identity is a long established theme in writings in sociology and social anthropology (Entwistle 2000, Crane 2000, Hansen 2004, Gonzales and Bovone 2014). Clothes as Breward (2000) argues are one of the key means by which social difference is made concrete and visible. We are accustomed to this in relation to identities like class, gender, race, which have been the centre of much sociological writing (Polhemus 1994, Evans 1997, Davis 1992, Tarlo 2010), but it applies also to age. Clothes have a long history of being age ordered, by which I mean the systematic patterning of cultural expectations in terms of an ordered and hierarchically arranged concept of age (Twigg 2013). Certain forms of dress are deemed appropriate – or more significantly inappropriate - for people as they age, for this is a system that is largely defined negatively, in terms of what should be avoided. Clothes for older people are typically darker, more covered up, with longer sleeves and higher necklines and looser, longer cut, sober, not sexy or attention grabbing. In my study (Twigg 2013) there was clear evidence for the persistence of such cultural meanings in the responses of older women and the retail fashion industry. However there was also clear evidence of change - of new attitudes and expectations in relation to dress by older women, and new responses and initiatives by the fashion industry. These changes need to be set in the context of two different developments: the emergence of Third Age identities; and changes in the production system with the arrival of cheap, fast fashion.

### **Third Age identities**

The emergence of Third Age identities is part of a wide set of changes within culture in relation to identity. With the rise of late or post modernity there has been a shift in the locus of identity from production to consumption. Traditional identity formations such as class and gender - and with them age – have become more fluid, more optional, less socially

entrenched, more the product of agency and choice (Giddens 1991, Bauman 2000). This has impacted on the constitution of age, which moves from being a relatively defined state to one marked by flexibility and optionality (Phillipson and Biggs 1998, Gilleard and Higgs 2000). Here patterns of consumption become increasingly significant in the narration of the self and the formation of social identities, performing an integrative function within a common culture of lifestyle.

These changes have opened up the possibility of the Third Age as a new cultural space. Characterised as a period post retirement, marked by leisure, enjoyment and the pursuit of personal fulfilment, it maps onto early old age. Though not defined chronologically, it broadly approximates to the late fifties to mid seventies. Gilleard and Higgs (2002) have theorised the Third Age as a 'cultural field', shaped by the cultural habitus of the current cohort of the young old whose own life experience has been imbued with expectations of consumption, individuality and self expression. Though the concept of the Third Age has been subject to critique for presenting an aspirational account of the lives of a section of the old – the affluent middle class; for projecting all the difficulties of old age into dark Fourth age of disability and decline; and for providing, through its emphasis on agency and choice, implicit ideological support for the neoliberal restructuring of old age (Phillipson 1998), it has become widely influential. Increasingly it has shaped media representation of this group, in particular through its common association with the Baby Boomers, a key cohort in the view of the media and many analysts (Phillipson 2007).

Consumption here is seen to offer older people – if they can remain healthy and relatively prosperous – an opportunity to remain part of the mainstream, countering the marginalisation that is traditionally associated with age. This is significant since a central part of the dynamic of Third Age identities is resisting and pushing away the Fourth Age, defined in terms of frailty, exclusion and loss. Gilleard and Higgs (2010) have characterised this in terms of a black hole in which all agency and subjectivity is denied. Remaining actively engaged with life and - in this commercialised version, with the visible trappings of consumption - becomes a significant marker of resistance to this, something that it is important for older people to engage with if they are to avoid such a fate.

### **Changes in the production system**



These changes in relation to identity formation have also been influenced by material factors. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a major growth in productive capacity consequent on the globalisation of manufacturing, resulting in an explosion of cheap fashion (Jones 2006). This has produced in the early twenty-first century, a democratisation of fashion, in the form of widely available fashion oriented dress, within reach of the majority (Twigg and Majima 2014). The expansion of production also resulted in the clothing industry seeking new markets, seeking to extend fashionability and with it the cycle of fashion, to ever larger social groups. Notable among these have been children and the older people. As a result older women have been drawn into faster shopping cycle, to the extent indeed that women over 75 in the UK in the early twenty -first century shop as frequently for clothes as did those aged 16-34 in 1960s (Twigg and Majima 2014)

With these opportunities to consume, however, have come new demands, new disciplinary requirements. Older people as they are drawn into the culture of consumption, are increasingly required to respond to the new demands, imposing new forms of bodily discipline and self surveillance that display commitment to resisting age through such practices as strenuous dieting, beauty interventions, or up to date clothes. Ageing well, as Katz (2001) and others have pointed out, is increasingly interpreted as ageing without appearing to do so. Clothing and dress have increasingly been drawn into this moral enterprise, with the result that older people find themselves monitoring their dress to avoid out-of-date, unfashionable or ageing looks that might signal failure in this new culture of positive ageing. Just as men, according to Katz and Marshall (2003) in relation to Viagra, are required to be ‘forever functional’ in regard to sexuality, so women are under pressure to be ‘forever fashionable’, or at least to be willing to display a continuing engagement with acceptable forms of (aged) femininity.

### **Negotiating age relevant life styles**

Women’s magazines, particularly those aimed at the older market are firmly located in life style journalism (Fürsich 2012, Hanush 2012). Their role, as Fürsich (2012) suggests, is to address personal problems through review, advice and commercialisation; taking general social problems – here the problem of getting older – and providing lifestyle solutions that emphasise self improvement within the context of consumption. Here journalists act as cultural mediators responding to, but also shaping and reformulating, the lives of their readers. They do this by means of advising, warning and guiding (Fürsich 2012) .

### **Advising, warning, guiding**

The four magazines studied were very aware of the new demands and new opportunities offered to older women, and the potential role of dress in this. All four editors recognised the tensions presented by fashion in the context of becoming an older woman; and they saw their role as one of helping readers negotiate these difficult waters, through the classic journalistic processes of advising, warning and guiding. All four were themselves in their fifties or sixties. Those working on the three magazines aimed at older women had during their careers moved progressively through the age structure of the magazine sector. They could thus empathise directly with the dress dilemmas of their readers.

There was a general agreement that dress was now more important in older women's lives. As the editor of *Yours*, the magazine aimed at older working-class women, explained:

we've all got so much more conscious of what we should be wearing and what we shouldn't be wearing. [...] We're so judged all the time about how we look.

As a result readers need help. This is something she saw as a central to the magazine's role:

we're the kind of magazine that's going to help you live your life to the full, now that you're over 50. And that's going to be every area of your life, and so part of that is making you feel good about yourself.

That is why they include fashion:

And so that's why we do fashion now because it's just part of who you are really, part of your identity, part of helping you live your life and not disappear.

She added that ten years ago, they would not have done fashion, but now they recognise that appearance and remaining visible is important, even for distinctly older women that the magazines caters for. Covering fashion is part of:

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

The journalists saw themselves as friends, as companions in the business of getting older. This was particularly marked in the case of the editor of *Yours*, which has a very close relationship with its readers (they receive on average 750 letters and emails per issue). As the editor explained:

I've always been in women's magazines and always felt that the relationship that they have with their readers, and the amount of trust and advice that you can have there, is tremendously underrated. And the amount of good that you can do by answering people's problems, giving them the advice and information that they need to get on with their lives. It's a wonderful thing to do.

As women became older they faced problems over dress. The fashion editor of *Woman & Home* explained that:

I've seen a lot of women who [...] have lost their way.

Many had faced the changing room moment, in which they realised that styles that had once suited not longer did. As the editor of *Vogue* explained.

so there are things that you might have always looked good in and thought was your style, and suddenly [...] that just doesn't work anymore. I think that's a big kind of problem for women, that suddenly they can't wear what they always looked really kind of lovely in. And they don't know what to do, how to change.

Drawing on her own experience she reflected:

I've always loved those kind of vintage tea dresses and things, and suddenly I look really tragic in them now. But they're still in my wardrobe because I like the dresses. I won't get rid of them because they're part of my identity as the person that always wore them. And it's hard really to confront those things that you can't wear.

Part of the journalist's role here was to steer readers through these difficult waters.

Sometimes this meant warning them against styles that no longer worked. As the fashion editor of *Saga* retorted:

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.

But at the same time she was clear that many older readers were far too nervous of trying new styles. What they needed was encouragement, help and, at times, permission:

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. Then you put it on and everybody

says you look wonderful in it. It's like somebody has to say to these women [...] You have the right to join in.

Dress can thus play a significant role in enabling older women to remain part of the mainstream, avoiding the marginalisation and cultural exclusion traditionally associated with age.

### **Age as a disruption in the visual field**

Featuring fashion in a magazine for older women, however, presents problems. Within media culture, age is a disruption of the visual field. This is particularly significant in relation to fashion since such spreads lie at the heart of women's magazines, providing a central part of the visual treat. Here fashion offers readers what the fashion editor of *Woman & Home* called a 'lift... a bit of a tonic'. But, as we have noted, fashion is an aesthetic system centred around youthfulness, in which ageing represents a form of Kristeva's abjection, a dereliction, something to be rejected, cast away into darkness (Kristeva 1982). In this, it links to the wider visual culture in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries that has become increasingly centred on bodily perfectionism. We are familiar with the malign effects of this on young women through growth of eating disorders, bodily dysmorphia, anxiety about appearance and acceptability (Bordo 1995). But such preoccupations have spread to older women too. The vast multi billion anti-ageing industry is predicated on the widespread fear of ageing and the signs of ageing. As we noted, the new ideal of successful ageing in this commercialised media world is ageing without appearing to do so. As a result the visual worlds of magazines and advertising are ones in which age has been largely erased. We are unaccustomed to old faces or old bodies in the media. Where they do appear they tend to be confined to certain roles (grannies, endorsers of food products (Ylänne 2015)). By contrast older men – or at least those in late middle age – are more familiar through their links with power and status. As a result fashion images showing older women produce a sense of slight shock: they are a discordance in the visual field. How do the journalists finesse this issue?

### **Effacing, diluting, fragmenting, endorsing**

Each of the magazines deployed visual techniques that are familiar across in the print and fashion media. Here, however, they took on an added significance as a means to dilute, fragment or evade the visual presentation of age. The first technique centred around effacing or excluding. Two of the magazines – *Vogue* and *Woman & Home* - avoided using older

models altogether, as part of a strategy of protecting the visual magic of fashion. As the fashion editor of *Woman & Home* explained:

on fashion we do that, because it's just a sort of beautiful, inspirational moment, and people like that treat factor.

Fantasy projection is central to how readers relate to this part of the magazine. They do not, she argues, want to be confronted with the disjunction of older faces and bodies:

they know they're 55. But they just still see in their head this, you know, other woman as well.

*Women & Home* balance this, however, with a heavy use of real – though glamorised – older women in the form of celebrities or make-overs.

In the case of *Vogue*, rooted in the world of high fashion, the avoidance of older models is less surprising. As the editor explained:

I don't think people do want to look really at older women as kind of exemplars of fashion and beauty.

As a result when she did feature older women they were always real women, not models. In neither case, therefore, was age allowed to appear visually in the prestigious core of the magazine in the form of the fashion shoots, thus preserving the ideal of fashion in its pristine form. *Saga* by contrast did feature older models, and had indeed been pioneering in their use; as did *Yours*, though this magazine in general avoided full fashion shoots as they are expensive and less appealing to their older and less affluent readership.

The second set of techniques are those that seek to dilute the visual presence of age. Decades shoots which show clothes on women who are 20, 30, 40...are a way of including, but diluting, the presence of age. The end point of such shoots - which are common across the print media – has progressively got older: *Vogue* now shows up to 70s. Family groups, pioneered in lifestyle advertising by brands like Ralph Lauren, are another way to dilute the visual presence of age, showing how elegant and fashionable items can be worn at all ages, while at the same time focussing more prominently on younger models. In this way the clothes are presented as capable of being worn by older people, but not defined by that categorisation.

A third approach is one where the bodies – older or otherwise - are themselves wholly absent through the use of spreads that feature fashion items in three-dimensional cut-outs on the

page. The clothes are present, but the surrounding bodies are not. Again this is a technique that is widely used in magazines, but it takes on special significance in relation to ones aimed at older readers. Yours in particular frequently uses this technique, as it avoids the disjunction that models - whether impossibly young or discouragingly old - present for readers who are distinctly older. It is also a relatively inexpensive way to cover fashion.

A different approach, and the one used most prominently by Vogue, is the promotion of the ideal of Ageless Style. Ageless Style implies that stylishness can transcend age, and can be achieved regardless of it. All the age oriented issues since 2007 have featured this banner on their covers and inside. This is not, however, how Vogue treated the issue in the past. From late 1940s to the early 60s, Vogue dealt with age through a fictional character, Mrs Exeter, who represented the older woman. I have presented a fuller analysis of her role in Twigg (2010): here I will simply note that Mrs Exeter was a regular feature in the magazine, including on the cover, up until the 1960s, after which she was swept away by the rise of the new youthful fashions. Described as unashamedly approaching her sixties and with no wish to look younger, during the 1950s she had a secure place in the structure of the magazine that reflected her secure place in the age – as well as the class and gender – structures of society. She was more defined - and confined - by her age, but also oddly more visible. By contrast the current treatment focussed on ageless style effectively obscures age by denying its relevance, presenting a form of agelessness that transcends age, and has as its goal seamless integration. Here the aim is to remain actively part of the world of appearance and consumption. In this way age is itself decentred, replaced by a concept of stylishness that transcends age, though it achieves this through effacing and obscuring it.

This dream of integration is not confined to Vogue but was also endorsed by the fashion editor of Women & Home who similarly believed in forms of style that could transcend age:

It isn't a question of age, it's more a question of attitude. That is very much the philosophy that I have always endorsed in anything I do with fashion.

It is noticeable, however, that the two magazines that were aimed at distinctly older readers emphasised this less, for it is an ideal that despite its claims works most effectively when readers are somewhat younger.

Make-overs offer another visual technique, though one that is, once again, a common feature across the magazine sector. It is particularly prominently used by Woman & Home who regard it as central to their approach. Make-overs are:

A very big thing of the magazine, it's our USP.

As we noted Woman & Home deliberately avoids older models. Instead, glamorously styled up make-overs enable them to cover fashion in a way that engages directly with readers, while at the same time preserving the fantasy projection of the fashion spreads.

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.

Vogue avoids make-overs as such, which are regarded as down market. But as we noted where it does feature older women it similarly features 'real' women, leading real lives, though in the way of things they are still Vogue lives, in other words highly aspirational and elite. Yours does use make-overs, though they are less glamorised than in Woman & Home. The editor emphasised the magazine's close connection with readers and its capacity to reflect back their lives in a positive way.

Part of that function as well, is our readers seeing women in their 50s, 60s and 70s. Seeing women like themselves in magazines looking okay, because [...] people feel is that they kind of disappear off the radar once they get to a certain age. And so they want to see themselves looking good.'

Finally, all the magazines analysed here made extensive use of older celebrities. The spread of celebrity culture across and through magazine sector has been one of the most prominent features of the media in the last 20 years (Fairclough-Isaacs 2015). The trend spread to Vogue as an international product under the editorship of American Vogue by Anna Wintour. It is now a staple part of women's magazines. Yours, Saga and Woman & Home all draw on a pool of older celebrities, familiar to readers from TV, films and media generally - though the editor of Yours noted that her readers hate the term and prefer to call them 'stars'. Helen Mirren and Joanna Lumley, represent recent examples of this celebrity combination of glamour, fame and accessibility. They often feature on the cover in the classic manner of women's magazines, where they act to draw the reader in, through presenting a single face,

calm, attractive, successful, the centre of admiration (Winship 1987). They assert the continuing value of the older woman (though typically they are younger than the core readership): visible, admired, feminine, styled up with glamorous clothes, the centre of the public's gaze. As such they are a direct repudiation of the marginalisation and invisibility that age often imposes on women.

Marshall and Rahman (2015) have explored the growing significance of celebrities in the constitution of later lives, pointing to their role in resolving contradictions and tensions within social identities. Older readers share in the successes, struggles and lives of these exemplars, and are able to resignify and reinterpret their own lives in their context. Their very individuality is important since the individual represents the ideological centre of capitalist culture, so that 'the exceptional individuality that modern celebrities perform allows them to be used as a promotional "modelling" tool, securing the lock between individuality and consumerism' (p580). Thus celebrity culture serves commodity culture of capitalism through the promotion of consumer desire, presenting consumers with compelling standards of emulation, that promote an active, vital and consumerist version of later years.

## **Conclusion**

Women's magazines are ambiguous cultural phenomena that raise enduring issues for feminist analysis. Supporting a distinctive women's culture, they are sources of pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment for women, offering spaces of escape and desire. Yet at the same time they are closely connected with the commercialised world of consumption, with its restless search for markets and promotion of product-based answers to ills that the magazines are, all too often, complicit in sustaining. They offer individualistic solutions to the problems of women's lives, but do not, by and large, address the nature or sources of those problems. In relation to later years, this means that they do not challenge the essential ageism of the culture and, particularly in the context of the media, its emphasis on youthful beauty with its consequent devaluation and exclusion of older women.

As we saw, the journalists are familiar with the difficulties and tensions presented by ageing. Indeed part of their success as cultural mediators is that they have experienced these in their own lives, with the result that their responses are empathic. Their role here is to negotiate an acceptable form of femininity for their readers and, implicitly, for the commercial interests that lie behind the magazines. As we saw, journalists use a number of strategies to manage the visual tensions presented by age in the media context, deploying techniques that efface,



remove or dilute the visual presence of age; or that decentre age through the use of concepts like Ageless Style that suggest that stylishness can be expressed independent of chronological age. Or they show, through techniques like makeovers, how readers can re-imagine themselves in a new more stylish or fashionable form. Magazines here are part of negotiation of acceptable forms of later life femininity - ones that are not extreme, that accept the cultural limitations of ageist culture, that hear and endorse the warnings against over-youthful or inappropriate dress, but at the same time promote new forms of integration through consumption. These allow women to display continuing engagement with the disciplinary norms of acceptable, heterosexual femininity, maintaining the external signs of this through dress, make up and hair styles.

Women's magazines are by their nature upbeat and positive. That is how they sell. Women do not buy magazines to be depressed. They read them – according to the journalists – to be inspired, encouraged and lifted out of their circumstances. Magazines, as analysts like Hermes (1995) have shown, are consumed as a form of 'treat'. They offer space for fantasy, dream and escape, presenting images that allow women to re-imagine their lives in more positive ways. But at the same time, these positive ways are deeply imbued with the commercial interests of consumption, resting on the promotion of materialist solutions to generalised – and gendered - ills. In this, fashion plays a key role, providing the visual treat of the magazine. Through beautiful fashion spreads, magazines present images that allow older women to engage with the fantasy world of fashion and to take pleasure in its aesthetic realm. Through their use of glamorous celebrities and styled up make over shoots, fashion can be a focus for fantasy projection, allowing older readers to escape the day- to-day limitations of their lives, entering into a world of glamour, admiration and success. In this, the magazines draw on the kind of magical thinking that Moeran (2010) describes in his analysis of beauty pages.

The treatment of fashion in magazines does thus support the suggestion that the lives of older people - or at least younger and more affluent among them - have become more integrated into the mainstream through a common culture of life style. This has itself supported a shift in the nature of later years, creating an extended arc of middle years that extends unbroken until the irruption of serious ill health precipitates the arrival of the Fourth Age. These magazines are part of this new culture, offering a consumption oriented version of empowerment through which older women can experience new opportunities, new freedoms.

But with these have come new disciplinary demands. In order to be part of the mainstream older women need to engage with the requirement to be fashionable, to shape their appearance to the cultural norms of acceptable femininity. Magazines show women how to do this. In this they contribute to a particular discursive construction of later years, one that emphasises being positive, remaining part of the mainstream, endorsing the role of consumption. But by doing so they effectively silence or sideline other versions of being older, ones that rest on 'giving up', of embracing invisibility, of ceasing to value appearance, of accepting being and looking old. Their upbeat messages therefore need to be read against their shadow, which remains unarticulated, but operates as an implicit presence shaping the nature of their aspirations and dreams. The shadow is that of ageism and the exclusions and losses it imposes.

**Acknowledgement:** this article is based on work funded by a grant from the UK Economic and Social Research Council, RES 000 22 2079, Clothing, Age and the Body.

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