

**An exploratory study of how older Irish women  
engage with anti-ageing beauty advertising and  
the meaning they attribute to their beauty work.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The pervasive obsession to look younger has reached new heights resulting in newfound attention from marketers towards the older female consumer. Media messages saturated with the ubiquitous portrayals of flawless female perfection, creates false needs for consumers and can result in severe pressures for women and lasting health consequences. Although it represents an increasingly lucrative target market, a gap in the literature has been identified whereby further research is required to provide an understanding for marketing practitioners of how media messages are affecting older women and the motives behind why women purchase anti-ageing products.

The research objective is to understand the lived experiences of how older Irish women engage with anti-ageing beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. The author used a phenomenological approach utilising in-depth interviews, with six women over fifty years of age. Thematic coding was used to highlight key themes relevant to the research objectives. Results highlight that the women in the study reject the stereotypical images of models and call for more inclusive and diverse portrayals of females in the media. The women were accepting of the ageing process and just wanted to look well and be healthy. The purchase of anti-ageing products was to enhance their appearance and not necessarily look younger. Women also reported an interesting paradox whereby they described only wanting to look good for themselves but also appeared to succumb to societal pressures.

Marketing practitioners can consider these findings to develop an appropriate marketing strategy that will resonate with this customer group. Consideration also needs to be given by this industry to the detrimental effect that the representation of 'ageless perfection' may have for some women, unintended consequences that marketers should be cognisant of.

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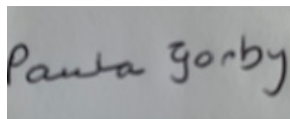
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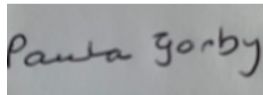
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# **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 - AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to anti-ageing beauty work. Attention is given to how women perceive the media interpretation of youthfulness and the lived experience thereafter in relation to anti-ageing activities. The literature review has highlighted that this is an area that warrants further investigation (Calasanti, King, Pietila and Ojala 2016; Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan, Basu, Ng and Lim, 2018; Muise and Desmarais, 2010) This study offers insights into the pursuit of beauty by older women and marketing of anti-ageing products. The questions which emerged from the literature are central to the aims of the study:

- How do older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty as dictated by marketing communications?
- What activities do women consider to be anti-ageing beauty work, what activities are performed and why are they performed?
- How do older women view the ageing process and does growing older impact how they are seen in society?
- What is the meaning attributed to anti-ageing beauty work? Is this work liberating, are women compelled to do this and what is the lived experience if they resist?

## **1.2 - CURRENT RESEARCH SITUATION**

Compelling evidence from a massively profitable anti-ageing industry draws attention to the fact that women place a great deal of importance on their appearance and looking younger (Madan et al 2018). A rapidly growing ageing female population, together with their increasing economic





wealth provides a key market segment for anti-ageing beauty products. However, there has been delayed realisation of this so called lucrative 'grey market' (Peterson 2018).

Advertising is the core pillar of the cosmetic and fashion industries for spreading the portrayal of images of 'flawless perfection' of young women (Gill 2007). Beautiful young women are used in advertisements to impact psychologically on the consumer in the hope of increasing the effectiveness of the message (Sinh 2013). There has been extensive analysis of print advertisements for anti-ageing products, highlighting promissory discourse using scientific approaches to the reversal of ageing (Ellison 2014; Searing and Zeilig 2017) and advertising strategies promoting hegemonic beauty (Rosso 2017). Despite these messages from companies, little can be done to reverse the ageing process (MacGregor, Peterson and Parker 2017). Although these types of campaigns are used almost universally, there is evidence that women reject the stereotypical images of models (Benbow-butenhuis 2014) with calls for more inclusive and diverse female imagery in advertising (Pounders 2015).

The ubiquitous presence of perfect beauty in advertising is potentially detrimental and can lead to continuous beratement of women if they do not achieve their aspirations (McRobbie 2015; Stuart and Donaghue 2011), unintended consequences of which marketers need to be aware of when advertising to this more vulnerable group. The personal and social consequence of ageing are particularly significant for women (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008; Judge, Hurst and Simon 2009; Paustian-Underdahl and Walker 2016; Davidenko 2019). Much of the research in this field focuses on how older women perceive and experience the ageing process (Saucier, 2004; Clarke and Griffin 2008; Muise and Demaris 2010; Ong and Braun 2016; Calasanti et al 2016). The dominant reason cited for the use of anti-ageing products by women is to look younger and hide their age (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Ong and Braun 2016).

The literature additionally provides an insight into the lived experiences for women in relation to their beauty work choices. Increased societal pressures and a global beauty culture may mean that the cost of deviating from participating in anti-ageing practises is socially damaging (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). While acknowledging that anti-ageing practices may be considered an enjoyable activity, critical analysis draws attention to an interesting paradox where it is possible that women experience varying degrees of both agency and repression (Stuart and Donaghue 2011).

### **1.3 – GAPS IN THE LITERATURE**

Even though the so called ‘grey market’ is a key demographic in the beauty business (Peterson 2018), further research is required to understand the motives of older women when purchasing anti-ageing products and their perceptions of marketing messages. A limitation of the existing research is that very few studies have examined older women specifically and appears to be due to the delayed realization of this lucrative market of older women (Peterson 2018). This is problematic as the interpretation of advertisements is complex, requires agency and varies with at different stages of the life cycle (Millard 2009).

Further qualitative research is needed to provide meanings of how media messages are influencing and affecting older women (Rosso 2017). It is also important to understand if a new-found resilience by women responds to a more recent approach to advertising that encourages female empowerment and embraces imperfections. It has been suggested that “we know little about these older consumers and what they consider to be anti-ageing products and services” (Calasanti et al 2016, p.234). Further exploration is also required on the nuances of women’s feelings about the beauty work in which they engage, specifically in a variety of cultural settings (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan et al 2018). This is because marketing messages are more effective using culturally appropriate content rather than considering all cultures to have the same requirements (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017).

### **1.4 - RESEARCH RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION**

Research into this topic is important because current figures for the global anti-ageing market reflect a massive global consumption of these goods and services (Madan et al 2018). This is an outcome of the global ‘beauty culture’, a sociocultural symptom of the image-saturated and media-driven anti-ageing industry (Benbow-Buitenuis 2014) ensuring that images of ‘ageless perfection’ are portrayed as the ideal for all women to achieve.

There has been delayed realisation of this lucrative market, with global economic reports highlighting the requirement for marketers to have empathy with the older female consumer to understand their differing demand characteristics (Fung Global 2016). Marketing practitioners need to be cognisant of how the representation of beauty ideals affects marketing

communications, so they can use specifically formulated advertising and messaging to target this consumer group.

Finally, the research is also motivated by a wider social context, as academics have drawn attention to the negative consequences that media messages can have on older women (Meng and Pang 2012; Mair, Wade and Tamburic 2015). Marketers need to consider the social and ethical consequences of propagating ubiquitous images of beautiful women to this vulnerable group.

## **1.5 – STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

### ***Chapter 1 – Introduction***

The first chapter consists of a brief introduction to the chosen research project. The objectives of the dissertation are discussed and gaps in the literature are highlighted as supporting justification for the research topic.

### ***Chapter 2 – Literature Review***

The literature review systematically examines key research journals in the disciplines of sociology, women's studies and media studies literature together with an examination of the anti-ageing consumer market to critique material relevant to this study. The aspects of the literature reviewed include: the commercialisation of beauty, marketing of anti-ageing products, ageing, ageism and the interpretation of beauty work.

### ***Chapter 3 – Methodology***

The methodology chapter gives an in-depth overview of the objectives of the research and the rationale of the methodology selected for this study. An explanation is given of how the research was carried out in a robust manner, including details of the sample and rationale of the research instrument chosen. This section will also discuss ethical considerations, limitations of the study and details of the data analysis procedure.

#### ***Chapter 4 – Findings***

This chapter presents the overall findings of the research study. The results are based on thematic analysis identifying themes emerging from the interviews and are relevant to the research objectives of the project. The findings will contain direct quotes from the participants in the study to allow for a clearer understanding and reflection on the phenomenon being investigated.

#### ***Chapter 5 – Discussion***

The discussion chapter critically reflects on the findings from the research study. These findings are reviewed in conjunction with key evidence from the literature review to provide a theoretical understanding of the research results. Limitations of the study will be identified together with practical considerations for the research findings.

#### ***Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations***

The final chapter concludes on the findings of the research and highlights whether the aims and objective of the project were achieved. Attention is drawn to the salient point of the research, together with consideration of the financial practicalities of the findings. The researcher will also recommend areas for further investigation.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 – INTRODUCTION**

The literature review systematically examines key research journals in the disciplines of sociology, women's studies and media studies literature together with an examination of the anti-ageing beauty consumer market to critique material relevant to this study. The commodification of the anti-ageing market will be discussed, including why marketers should understand the needs of this consumer group. Next, the media representation of idealised images of youthful beauty will be examined (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014; Searing and Zeilig 2017; Ellison 2014). Past research has identified several factors which cause women to engage in activities to mask their ages, including sociocultural pressures (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008), ageism and sexism (Marcia, Duboz, and Cheve 2015; Peterson 2018) ageing anxiety (Hurd Clarke 2008; Slevac et al 2010) and depleted body image (Grogan 2017; Sinh 2013; Pounders 2018) Studies in relation to these fields will be critically examined. Finally, work in relation to neoliberal discourse and agency will be explored to help further understand women's' motives in relation to anti-ageing work (Elias and Gill 2018; Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015; Hakim 2010; Winch 2012). Gaps in this research will be identified to form the basis of the author's study.

### **2.2 - THE COMMERCIALISATION OF BEAUTY**

#### ***2.2.1- The Global Beauty Market***

The notion that age can and should be transcended underlies a massive profitable industry (Ellison 2014; Smirnova 2012). The global anti-aging market was valued at USD 42.51 billion in 2018 and is growing at a rate of 5.3%, to reach USD 55.03 billion by 2023. Unlike many other markets, it appears to be immune to economic fluctuations as the drivers for this market are attributed to a growing ageing population and increased consumer awareness of the availability of anti-ageing treatment options (GloveNewswire 2018).

However, what comprises the anti-ageing sector is not straightforward and reflects the complexity of the cultural constructs of ageing (Calasanti et al 2016). The “age-management” market describes a diversity of appearance-enhancing products and procedures including easy to access and affordable anti-ageing options such as anti-wrinkle creams, cosmetics, hair colour, eye products, anti-stretch mark remedies and sun-care. Extensive beauty routines have emerged, some including up to ten steps, using a variety of exfoliants, serums, toners and moisturisers. Non-surgical treatments, such as dermabrasion, skin peels, laser rejuvenation, thread lifting, and body contouring have transformed this segment (Euromonitor 2017). It is noteworthy that the beauty industry is guided by consumer driven trends (Nielson 2018). A current example is the desire for the ‘instant fix’ - products that provide instant gratification for customers to see improvements in skin bags or facial lines (Forbes 2018).

A further category of anti-ageing work is radiofrequency devices which perform skin tightening, target cellulite, aesthetic procedures and body contouring. There has been a significant increase in the use of injectables, including Botox, fillers, skin tightening technologies and procedures for targeting cellulite (Euromonitor 2017). Anti-wrinkle products dominate the anti-ageing market, the growth mainly driven by the increased uptake of Botox and fillers (P & S Intelligence 2019). Additionally, cosmetic surgery is carried out to enhance the aesthetic appearance of the body and has become a huge growth sector. It is expected to reach \$21.97 billion by 2023 and predicted to grow at a rate of 7.8% during the next five years (Medgadget 2018).

### ***2.2.2 - Marketing of Anti-ageing Products and Services***

Older women are the target of this study because of the growing importance of this social group in a quickly ageing world. There has been delayed realisation of this so called ‘grey market’ with companies now seeing large financial benefits (Peterson 2018). Up to recently, older consumers were thought of as the poorest market segment and were therefore, unattractive to companies (Metz 2006). The now rapidly growing ageing population, together with their increasing economic wealth in the western world has stirred up the interest of marketers who lack the experience of understanding and targeting this sector (Gupta 2017). Estimates have predicted that this new market will be valued at \$15 trillion by 2020 (Pal 2018).

Global economic reports have drawn attention to the fact that marketing practitioners want to tap into the lucrative anti-ageing market, they need to have empathy with the older female consumer, understand their differing demand characteristics and how they will react to marketing campaigns (Fung Global 2016). This is collaborated by academics who propose that more work should be done by marketers to understand the behavior and needs of older consumers in relation to anti-ageing products (Calasanti et al 2016). Yin and Pryor (2012) advise the following concepts are addressed:

“If beauty is to be a manageable and measurable feature of marketing and advertising in a global economy, it must be made theoretically meaningful, less subjective, and social and cultural factors accounted for” (p.124).

Brand managers need to relate brand personality to women’s purchasing motives and perceptions of facial images to select the most appropriate marketing strategy (Jamal and Goode 2001). This is more important than ever because the concept of beauty is increasingly evolving and malleable (Yin and Pryor 2012).

Marketing messages are more effective using culturally appropriate content rather than considering requirements to be the same across all cultures (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017). Advertising messages can then be formulated to target each cultural group. Marketers need to be cognisant that older people are viewed differently in societies. In Western societies there is a negative perception while in Eastern cultures traditionally, older people are revered (Chonody and Teater 2015). Two significant studies support the need to understanding the social constructs of beauty (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan, Basu; Ng and Lim 2018). These researchers found that the motivation to engage in beauty work stems from women’s need for social acceptability which is determined within a cultural context. Both studies suggest more cultures should be explored to further understand how the pursuit of beauty is affected by nation identity.

Critics of the ubiquitous imagery of female beauty in advertising communications have identified the negative consequences it can have on some societal groups (see section 2.3.2). Zeilinger (2015) states:

“The relentless pursuit of beauty ideals has led to a worldwide surge in objectification, face and body shaming, body-related disorders, and an obsession with plastic surgery...”  
Zeilinger (Online article, no page number).

As a result, this study takes into consideration the wider social context of marketing of anti-ageing products to older women, to highlight potential unequal social outcomes. These are unintended consequences marketers need to be aware of from a moral and ethical viewpoint and thus warrant consideration when developing marketing campaigns.

## **2.3 - ADVERTISING TO OLDER WOMEN**

### ***2.3.1 - Beauty Culture and Advertising***

The term ‘beauty culture’ describes the sociocultural apparatus of an image-saturated and advertising driven beauty goods industry (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). Advertising is the core pillar of the cosmetic and fashion industries for disseminating the portrayal of beauty ideals (Pounders 2018; Yin and Pryor 2012). Highly attractive young models are used in marketing promotions for beauty products to impact psychologically on the consumer in the hope of increasing the effectiveness of the message (Sinh 2013).

The media is portrayed as playing a significant part in the construction of beauty ideals and gender ideologies (Gill 2008). Critical analysis of the ubiquity of young female beauty in media images draws attention to the tactics of advertisers who try to dupe consumers. Williams (2005) describes advertising as a magic system where the advertisers are magicians who trick consumers as they distract from the reality of what they are advertising. This magic ritual narrative created by marketers results in false needs, disorders and desires for these products. Many brands target customers through carefully construed advertising images with the average woman viewing 5,000 digitally enhanced photographs of models every week, normalising extreme standards of beauty (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014).

An example of advertising as fantasy is the use of promissory discourse involving guarantees that there will be an alteration to the ageing process if anti-ageing products are purchased



(Peterson 2018). Yet, according to the Consultant dermatologist Frey (2018), science has not yet revealed a single ingredient that permanently undoes ageing, as the ageing process is a gradual and unavoidable process. Providing support to this claim is the media content analysis of the legitimacy of ‘anti-ageing treatments’ by MacGregor et al (2017) who conclude:

“The news media has placed a crucial role in establishing legitimacy for the ‘anti-ageing treatment’ market, through authorising and rendering commonplace products that derive their value largely from what their portrayals promise rather than what they deliver.

These include products that have no proven medical evidence... and may be equivalent to other, less costly alternatives” (p.64).

Further evidence of promissory discourse can be found in Ellison’s (2014) study of one hundred and sixty-four print advertisements for anti-ageing skin products. Findings unveiled that a scientific approach to the reversal of ageing employed techniques such as graphs and before and after images of models. This is further collaborated by a small-scale study (Searing and Zeilig 2017) showing that the language of beauty advertisements has changed to include a greater use of scientific jargon promoting medical properties of products, falsely implying they will be effective. Finally, research by Rosso (2017) on the exploration of advertising tactics used by beauty magazines, draws attention to further examples of advertising as a fantasy:

“...advertisement strategies implement pseudoscience, heteronormativity, hegemonic beauty and body ideal to establish an idealised version of middle-aged womanhood” (p.185).

### **2.3.2 - The effects of Beauty Adverting on Women**

The concept of homogenisation in the advertising world advocates for one ideal body type that women should strive for, no matter how unrealistic the ideal may be. The image in the western world is of a woman that is white, young, slim and beautiful (Calasanti et al 2016). This type of media portrayal can exploit anxieties that women have about the ageing process (Meng and Pang 2012; Mair et al 2015). The media also celebrates examples of celebrities such as Helen Mirren, Demi Moore and Sharon Stone who have successfully managed to ‘age well’ and are held as an example for older women to aspire to.

Social Comparison Theory provides an insight into the effects of advertising by proposing that individuals have an instinctive drive to evaluate their own abilities and appearance by comparing themselves to others, in turn affecting how they act (Festinger 1954). Women often engage in upwards comparisons to beautiful women in advertisements, a standard which is impossible to obtain (Pounders 2018). This upward comparison can have negative consequences such as: insecurity, reduced self-confidence and lasting health consequences (Martin, Veer and Pervan 1997) ageing anxiety and body dissatisfaction (Slevic and Tiggemann 2010). A study by El Jurdi and Smith (2018) draws on social comparison theory to show how young Lebanese women make comparisons between “self” and “others” to interpret their own beauty. Social comparison, although previously more confined to younger women now increasingly effects older women too, due to greater exposure to societal influences and an increased number of advertisements targeting older women (Pruis and Janowsky 2010). Critical analysis of marketing campaigns using flawless images of beauty highlights the emotional damage this form of advertising can have on women: female university students felt anger, disgust, distress and shame, when they compared themselves to models in advertisements (Sinh 2013).

### ***2.3.3 - Interpretation of Advertisements***

Interpretation of advertisements is complex, requires agency and varies with individuals (Millard 2009). The role of the media in the encoding and creation of cultural beauty aspirations is well documented (Elias and Gill 2018; Hakim 2012; McRobbie 2015). The encoding and decoding model of communication by Hall (1973) is an important area of study which describes how advertising messages are produced, disseminated and interpreted. According to Hall (1973) individuals can derive their own meaning from messages as they are interpreted according to audiences’ experiences and backgrounds. A dominant reading occurs when a message is accepted by an individual and is obviously the preferred reading of an advertiser. A negotiated reading is when the individual interprets the message in their own unique way and an oppositional reading is when the audience completely rejects the message.

It is imperative to highlight that while advertising may attempt to persuade consumers to purchase beauty products by embracing certain ideologies, women have the power to ultimately decide which marketing message to accept or reject (Hurd Clarke 2011). Studies illustrate the

complexity of the interpretation of beauty images, showing that not all women ‘buy into’ advertising notions and are reflective and critical of the content (Szmigin and Carrigan 2006; Turnaley et al 1999; Hogg and Fragou 2003). Hurd Clarke (2011) asked older women to reflect on the body and faces of media beauty images. The women in question, expressed conflicted opinions, although aware that the images were digitally altered, many still felt pressure to consumer these products to be more socially desirable. Similar findings emerged from a study by Benbow-Buitenhuis (2014) on the attitudes to the commercialisation of beauty by Australian women aged 18-60. The women recounted complex feelings of both pleasure and anxiety towards media representations of what they called ‘flawless perfection’. The women did not feel victimized by the images but strongly aspired to be like them. The following study by Muise and Desmarais (2010) is also noteworthy. Their study of 304 Canadian women highlighted an interesting paradox where most of the women did not believe that anti-ageing products worked, yet they still purchased them. The authors suggest that this was to maintain a control over the ageing process as doing something may be thought of as a better strategy than doing nothing at all.

#### ***2.3.4 - Alternative Approaches to Beauty Advertising***

There have been requests for more varied images of women in the media and evidence of female displeasure of stereotypical portrayals (Millard 2009). In 2004, Dove responded to market research on women’s dissatisfaction with idealised images of beauty in advertising and successfully launched the ‘Real Beauty’ campaign. As part of the campaign, real women in various shapes and sizes were used with the objective of improving body satisfaction in women. The resounding success resulted in several other companies copying this marketing format. A follow up study by Millard (2009) found that women perceived that the campaign provided a way to join the fight against impossible standards and simultaneously allowed women to feel better about their own physical appearance. However, the commercial agenda of this enlightened marketing cannot be ignored. Critical analysis of the Dove campaign draws attention to some women who consider it to be a gimmick, are skeptical of the hidden sales agenda (Millard 2009) and object to the commodification of feminism (Taylor, Johnson and Whitehead 2016). It is suggested that although the company purports to care for women’s wellbeing, they are still

channeling consumers towards using new products rather than challenging the commodities associated with maintaining beauty ideals (Taylor et al 2016).

## **2.4 - SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING**

### ***2.4.1 - Ageing and Ageism***

Aging is inevitable but as a human experience it takes place in a social world and acquires meanings from the norms, mores and cultures of that society (Szmigin and Carrigan 2006). The ageing process is associated with a slowing down of the body, mind and inevitably, death. It causes significant changes to physical appearances, including weight changes, loss of hair and colour, changes to skin texture and quality and changes in body shape. There is agreement between authors that most western societies view these physical signs of ageing in a negative way (Garnham 2013; Macia, Dubox and Cheve 2015; Calasanti et al 2016; Peterson 2018).

The appearance of others is extremely important in society as it is used to make a judgement of social status, gender, race and personal qualities (Clarke 2018). The cultural politics of ageing endorses a dominant ideation that works to stigmatise 'older' people and position 'older' as 'other' (Garnham 2013). The term ageism originated from Robert Butler (1969) who described it as 'systematic stereotyping of, and discrimination against people because they are old'. The philosophy of anti-aging is viewed by Vincent (2006) as stemming from the biological sciences which premises that getting older is a defect that can and must be bettered through medical intervention.

### ***2.4.2 - Ageing and Women***

A double standard of ageing is said to exist where women are more harshly judged than men on their looks, making ageing for women a more negative experience (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Muise and Desmarais 2010). As men are valued for their rational, intellectual minds, they benefit from growing older because experience improves this type of knowledge (Saucier 2004). From birth, women learn that they are valued primarily for their appearance, specifically their ability to approximate the feminine beauty ideal (Grogan 2017). Consequently, ageing is viewed

predominantly as a negative experience, particularly so for women as it is associated with a loss of beauty or attractiveness (Ong and Braun 2016; Calasanti et al 2016). A study carried out by Chonody and Teater (2016) on over a thousand university students in the United States, England and Australia found that women had greater fears of looking older than men, thus reflecting the more negative experience that women may encounter.

The personal, social and economic consequences of looking old are complex and far-reaching for women. Studies illustrate that older women's experience of discrimination in the workplace is connected to their appearances and sexuality (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008; Davidenko 2019). Moreover, attractive women are more likely to gain employment (Paustian-Underdahl and Walker 2016; Judge, Hurst and Simon 2009) and conversely, looking older reduces the likelihood of securing employment in retail and customer services divisions (Bowman et al 2017) and senior positions (Jyrkinen and McKie 2012).

### ***2.4.3 - Why Women Engage in Beauty Work***

A limited number of academic studies have examined why older women choose to engage in anti-ageing activities (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2007; Calasanti et al 2016; Muise and Demaris, 2010; Macia, Duboz and Cheve; 2015). Most studies have focused on younger women and the pursuit of beauty (Ong and Braun 2016; Madan et al 2018; Samper, Yang and Daniels 2017; Clarke 2018). Other lines of research have focused on the nuances of how culture influences beauty work (Madan et al 2018; Hounaida 2018), women's experiences of ageism (Bowman et al 2017; Davidenko 2019) body image and beauty (Grogan, 2010; Cameron et al 2019; Jansowski, et al 2016 ) and the effect of representations of beauty ideals in the media on women (Sinh 2013; Searing, 2017; Zerosa 2019; Ellison 2014).

A small body of research demonstrates that women pay less attention to their appearance as they get older (Pliner, Chaiken and Fett 1990; Thompson et al 1998). Later studies show evidence to the contrary, drawing attention to changes in sociocultural norms over the last twenty years. These more recent studies conclude that older women use beauty interventions to conceal their age (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Slevac et al 2010; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Garnham 2013; Ong and Braun 2016; Jurdi 2018) and that the use of anti-ageing products and services is associated

with socio-cultural philosophies including a broader discourse around agelessness (Muise et al 2010) and as a response to beauty portrayals in advertising (see section 2.3.1). Clarke and Griffin (2008) interviewed forty-four women aged 50 to 70 years to understand their perceptions of beauty work and how they experienced ageist beauty ideals. The women described the social expectations that require women to be both young and beautiful and how ageing results in a feeling of invisibility and loss of self-esteem. This study highlights the pressure on many women to engage in beauty work to feel valuable in society. Interestingly, despite the opinion that patriarchy is responsible for centering women as objects of scrutiny (Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz 2016) some women in engage in beauty practices to be accepted or to compete with other women (Stuart and Donaghue 2011) and judgmental looking between women is pervasive (Winch, 2012). Critical analysis notes that both studies were on younger women and these findings may not be generalisable to an older population. See section 2.5.4. for further discussion on how women conform to beauty work.

Older heterosexual women can feel disadvantaged when looking for a potential partner. Consequently, beauty work is undertaken to attract new partners, maintain attention of current mates and bolster self-esteem (Hurd, Clarke and Griffin 2008). Using a ‘mating market’ concept, women who are more attractive and younger in appearance, have a stronger ‘bargaining hand’ and may be more selective when choosing partners (Fales, Frederick, Garcia, Gildersleeve, Haselton and Fisher 2015). Furthermore, attractive women are perceived to be more socially desirable (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Judge et al 2009) have more competent spouses, happier marriages and overall have better prospects (Dion, Berscheid and Walster 1972).

Recent research by Calasanti et al (2016) is noteworthy as it brings to the fore an unexpected motive for engaging in anti-ageing beauty work. The participants in the study attributed their activities to the maintenance of health and associated a youthful appearance with an active and responsible lifestyle. The authors draw attention to the possibility that admission of use of anti-ageing products could align the individual with the stigmatised group of those who are old and will be unlikely to say they use them for anti-ageing purposes. These results are aligned to that of Mair et al (2015) who found that although women used a variety of anti-ageing regimes, they just wanted to look ‘better for their age and not necessarily younger’.

#### **2.4.4 - Ageing anxiety**

While ageing is experienced by everyone, the experience can vary depending on gender, ethnicity and culture (Calasanti 2016). Critical literature has identified a recurring theme of ageing anxiety, particularly relevant to middle-aged women who choose to mask their age (Slevec et al 2010). Ageing anxiety is defined as:

“...concerns and worries about growing old, reflecting one’s fear of anticipated threats and losses that may be experienced during the ageing process” (Sargent-Cox, Rippon and Burns 2012, p.1).

Marcia et al (2015) identify three principal stigmas associated with an ageing body: skin distension, formation of wrinkles, changes in the body and graying hair, features that women go to great lengths to conceal. As women move towards middle-age, a gap starts to develop with many perceiving a disconnection from their ageing bodies and how they feel inside (Schiffman and Sherman 1991; Barak and Schiffman 1981). As a result, some women refuse to identify their age, even going so far as to avoid interacting with others that are old (Townsend, Godfrey and Denby 2006).

As women navigate the social realities of ageing, studies show that ageing anxiety is a unique forecaster of motivations of anti-ageing activities including make-up (Hurd Clarke and Bundon 2009), cosmetic surgery (Slevec and Tiggeman 2010; Garnham, 2013) and dyeing hair (Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko 2010). Unsurprisingly, Muise et al (2010) in their survey on Canadian women found that higher levels of ageing anxiety and the greater importance of appearance are associated to a higher probability of purchasing anti-ageing products and are more significant factors than income and age. The decision to purchase these products was due to dissatisfaction with the physical changes associated with the ageing process.

#### **2.4.5 - Body Image**

“Body image relates to a person’s perceptions, feelings and thoughts about his or her body and is usually conceptualised as incorporating body size estimation, evaluation of

body attractiveness, and emotions associated with body shape and size” (Grogan 2010 p.757).

A positive body image is important as a negative self-perception can lead to adverse behaviours such as emotional distress and low self-esteem (Cameron et al 2019) and the desire for cosmetic surgery with possible adverse outcomes (Von Soest et al 2006). Although much of the academic research on body image and self-esteem has focused on younger women (Cameron, Ward, Mandville-Anstey and Coombs 2019; D’Alessandro and Chitty 2011), studies highlight that ageing females also have body image anxieties (Clarke et al 2008; Calasanti et al 2016; Macia et al 2015; Garnham 2013). For example, a study by Jankowski et al (2016) suggests that body image is important to older women regardless of cultural differences.

The work done by Grogan (2017) in this field is significant as it brings together perspectives from several academic disciplines to assess what is understood about the social construction of body image. In other words, body image is socially created so it must be examined within its cultural context. Grogan (2010) proposes that while women are encouraged to compare themselves to youthful role models, the discrepancy becomes increasingly obvious as women group older, resulting in a lowering of their body image. This perspective sheds light on the important connection on how the ageing process causes women to seek out anti-ageing strategies to remain relevant and confident in the society in which they live their lives. A further perspective from Grogan (2010) which is relevant to this research, is that women who reject mainstream appearance ideals may be less vulnerable to body image dissatisfaction due to consequential self-ideal discrepancies.

## **2.5 – INTERPRETATION OF BEAUTY WORK**

### ***2.5.1 - Introduction***

While acknowledging that anti-ageing beauty practices may be considered an enjoyable activity by some women (Stuart and Donaghue 2011), critical analysis of this practice should not be precluded. There is much debate in the feminist literature as to the nature of women’s intentions in engaging in beauty work. Because of the complexities of the concepts, the two sides of the debate will be discussed in separate sections below.



Theories interpreting the nature of beauty work are often polarised, on the one hand viewing women as passively adopting hegemonic cultural beauty norms or alternatively viewing women as being empowered and actively taking steps to make sure they are not at a disadvantage in society. An understanding of how women interpret their choices in relation to beauty work is important as it explains the motives behind the selection of products and how consumers respond to media narratives of beauty ideologies.

### ***2.5.2 - Women and agency***

Critical literature concerning the quest for beauty suggests that females do not participate in beauty work because of an interest in beauty per se but as a means of retaining social capital and contesting a gendered ageist society (Ong et al 2016). In a post-feminist context, it is feasible to see women as acting with agency as they choose to undergo expensive and painful laser cosmetic surgery or skin resurfacing treatments. Third wave feminists counter the idea that beauty work is interpreted as oppressive to women (Edut 2003; Steenbergen 2001), with neoliberal discourse depicting beauty work as an unproblematic expression of the autonomous, self-managing and self-choosing female (Gill 2008; McRobbie 2008). Winch (2015) illustrates this perspective eloquently:

“In the invisible landscape of popular culture, the body is recognized as the object of women’s labour: it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy” (p.21).

The neoliberal citizen rejects all notions that his or her actions are bound by external forces such as societal constraints, media or government (Stuart and Donaghue 2011). The responsibility for wellbeing is wholly attributed to the acts and autonomy of the individual and advocates for any activity which facilitates agency, choice, confidence and pleasing oneself (Gill 2016).

Most of the literature on female agency is centered on the ‘sexualisation’ of culture and femininity (Hakim 2010; Gill 2012). There are limited studies on how women conceptualise anti-ageing beauty work in light of choice. In one such study (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008), older Canadian women showed feminist understanding of agency and resolve by actively masking ageing so as to compete for partners and work. Most of these women accepted ageist definitions

of beauty, even though they knew they were problematic. Consequently, their lack of resistance to stereotyping meant that the women continued in a vicious cycle, ultimately reinforcing the loss of social worth they struggled to retain. Another study by Stuart and Donaghue (2011) highlighted that young Australian women position themselves as freely choosing to engage in beauty practices which helps them obtain status by competing with other females and increasing their confidence. This study is contrary to feminist critique that women carry out beauty work to appease men, as they did it simply for other women to like and accept them. Critical analysis denotes that the participants were aged eighteen to forty-two, and the focus was on beauty work, not anti-ageing work per se.

### ***2.5.3 - Erotic Capital***

According to Simone de Beauvoir (1970) “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. De Beauvoir separates sex from gender, viewing gender as a feature of identity which is progressively acquired. Building on this viewpoint, femininity and sex appeal is a performance that is achieved through practice. Hakim (2010) presents a theory of erotic capital as a personal asset for women which they possess and should use to their advantage. She describes erotic capital as “a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness to all members of society, but particularly to the opposite sex, in all social contexts” (p.500). Hakim states that women will invest more in attractiveness in the future as there are social and economic benefits such as a better choice of partner, improved job prospects and a better social life. Because erotic capital is mostly held by women, Hakim suggests that men belittle women who parade their beauty or sexuality, by condemning their intellect and contribution to society. Historically, attractiveness was mainly innate and there was little that could be done to alter it. However, in contemporary prosperous societies, women have many opportunities to improve themselves, even though patriarchal and feminist theory would morally prohibit these actions (Hakim 2012).

Green (2010) is critical of Hakim, pointing out that erotic capital “lumps together feminist theory and patriarchal authority as co-conspirators in the disempowerment of women” (p.138). Additionally, feminists condemn erotic capital as women are reduced to their sexual value and time spent on beauty work redirects women’s attention from more productive endeavors such as

education, thus placing them at a disadvantage in a male dominated society (Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015)

#### ***2.5.4- Conforming to Beauty Work***

Critics of neoliberal and postfeminist discourse suggest that by engaging in anti-ageing beauty work, women are surrendering to ageist and sexist views, thus complicity reinforcing ideal beauty images (Elias and Gill 2018; Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015). Although post feminism implies that any differences between men and women are due to individuals exercising free will, women are judged against crushingly cruel beauty expectations (Stuart and Donaghue 2011). For all its freedom, western culture places serious pressure on women to conform to the stereotypical ideals of beauty and the cost of deviating from participating in beauty culture may be socially damaging (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). Furthermore, by attempting to mask signs of ageing, women themselves reinforce the negative perception of ageing by unwittingly contributing to the cultural vilification of agedness (Hurd 1999).

McRobbie (2015) in her work on competitive femininity in neoliberal times argues that patriarchy has become ‘reterritorialized’ in the beauty arena, resulting in unbearable pressures for women, resulting in bullying, eating disorders and suicide. Real world examples of this are epidemiological projections for Ireland which estimate that about 188,895 people will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives, with 85% of these being female (BodyWhys 2019). Additionally, a recent Irish study highlighted that 38% of student girls admitted to being bullied with the majority tormented over their weight or appearance (O’Brien 2018). McRobbie (2015) argues that success for women is equated with complete perfection in every element of their lives, this notion of the perfect is potentially detrimental and can lead to continuous beratement of women if they do not achieve their aspirations (McRobbie 2015; Stuart and Donaghue 2011).

While some scholars contest that patriarchy is responsible for positioning women as objects of scrutiny, judgmental looking between women is pervasive (Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz, 2016). For example, Winch (2014) describes women’s friendships as increasingly undertaking the function of mutual self-policing for the obtainment of an ideal body. The author describes the ‘girlfriend gaze’ by which women control each other’s bodies, ultimately leading to women

maintaining discourses of misogyny and are thus complicit in their own disempowerment. McRobbie (2015) proposes that women need to bear some of the responsibility as the neoliberal pursuit of excellence creates competition between each other and is embraced through social media, particularly the 'selfie'.

There are a limited number of studies which show how women conform to beauty work. Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2008) in their study of older Canadian women found that despite the knowledge that ageism and gender roles are outdated, many beauty practices are carried out to please others, thus reinforcing patriarchal gender norms. These women acknowledged the traditional definitions of beauty no matter how damaging these definitions were. By engaging in behaviours to hide ageing, they were unwittingly partaking in an activity which exploited these interpretations. Similarly, in a study of Russian women (Davidenko 2019), while the women were frustrated with having to use anti-ageing products, they were still ready to conform to gain competitive advantage in the workplace and avoid being ill-perceived in society. This conflicted approach was mirrored in a study of older women's perceptions of grey hair where most respondents found the appearance of grey hair 'ugly' and argued that it rendered them socially invisible (Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko 2010). These women attempted to mask their age by dyeing their hair, hitherto embracing female beauty ideals.

### ***2.5.5 - Scope for Resistance***

It is possible that women experience varying degrees of both agency and repression, whilst engaging in beauty work. Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2008) suggest that when these two arguments are polarised the discussion loses some of the complexities of choice. Feminist scholars draw on the insights of Foucault (1993) who conceptualises that individuals draw on these sociocultural norms to form ideas of how to understand themselves and how their bodies should look. The result is disciplinary power, where people conform to societal norms and engage in self-surveillance and self-regulation, while still believing they are acting with agency. The encoding and decoding model (Hall 1973) as discussed in section 2.3.4, explains how individuals derive their own meaning from marketing messages and this ultimately depends on their knowledge, experience and background. Resisting the dominant portrayals of beauty ideology and

questioning the negative connotations associated with deviant physical appearances such as ageing, may be a way to resist power relationships (Taylor et al 2016).

Muise and Desmarais (2010) suggest that further exploration is carried out on the nuances of women's feelings about the beauty work in which they engage, specifically, is there capacity for women to resist and if so what are the implications? The author was unable to find any studies on the lived experiences of these women, how they are perceived by others and is therefore an area that warrants further investigation.

## **2.6 - Literature Review Summary**

There is compelling evidence from the multibillion anti-ageing industry that women place a great deal of importance on their appearance and looking younger (Madan et al 2018). The literature has highlighted that advertising is the core pillar of the cosmetic and fashion industries for disseminating the portrayal of beauty ideals (Gill 2007; Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). These media messages are based on the creation of false needs and desires for consumers (Williams 2015) and can result in unbearable pressures for women resulting in bullying, eating disorders and suicide (McRobbie 2015).

Despite the financial importance of this market segment, several gaps were identified in the literature as to how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to the beauty work they carry out. Further qualitative research needs to be carried out to provide meanings of how media messages are influencing and affecting women (Rosso 2017). It has been suggested that “we know little about these older consumers and what they consider to be anti-ageing products and services” (Calasanti et al 2016, p.234). Further exploration is also required on the nuances of women's feelings about the beauty work in which they engage, specifically in a variety of cultural settings (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan et al 2018, Muise and Desmarais 2010 and El Jurdi and Smith 2018).

As a result of research gaps identified in the literature, the author has identified the following key questions that warrants further investigation:

How do older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty in advertising and are these images successful in encouraging them to purchase?

What anti-ageing beauty work is being carried out, do women enjoy this work and have they a choice?

Can older women opt out of beauty work and what happens if they do?

The above research gaps will be developed into more explicit questions in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 - INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the methodological considerations of the study. The structure of this chapter parallels that of the research onion as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). The first section outlines the research objectives and research questions which have been identified. Following this, there is an overview of research paradigms, values and philosophy adopted and then the research approach is detailed. The methodological approach is discussed together with an overview of the research strategy. Next is a description of the research instrument selected, time horizon, information on the sample chosen and ethical considerations for the research. Finally, there is a discussion on the method of data analysis and consideration is given to the limitations of this study.

### **3.2 – RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Researchers need to have a very clear idea about the research aims and objectives of a study to make an informed decision of how best to address these. This is important because the research question determines the adopted methodology approaches and data collection tools and techniques for a study (Sim and Wright 2000). This section will explain the rationale for the research questions for this study resulting from the literature review.

The over-all research aim of this dissertation is to describe how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. It is hoped that this study will provide an insight into how older women perceive portrayals of idealised beauty in advertising and the lived experiences thereafter in relation to the beauty work they engage in and their interpretation of this. Additionally, it will assist with theorising female agency in light of choice of beauty work as has been the subject of recent feminist literature images (Elias and Gill; 2018, Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015; Stuart and Donaghue 2011). These insights will assist marketing practitioners to use specifically formulated messaging to effectively and ethically target this consumer group. The cosmetic business in Ireland has grown significantly with research showing

that females over fifty are now the biggest buyers of skincare products (Escentual.com, 2015). Consequently, research into women in Ireland is particularly relevant at this time.

The academic literature has highlighted that advertising is the core pillar of the cosmetic and fashion industries for disseminating the portrayal of beauty ideals (Gill 2007; Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014). There are calls for further research into this phenomenon as understanding consumers' perceptions of beauty in a global market has become progressively more strategically imperative (Yin and Pryor 2012). The following research objectives will be explored to fulfil the research aim:

### ***3.2.1 - Research Objective 1***

Research objective one seeks to understand how older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty as dictated by marketing communications.

There is a dearth of research showing how older women relate to media images of flawless beauty and how successful these images are in encouraging women to purchase these products. This is specifically important in the beauty business as the concept of beauty is constantly evolving (Yin and Pryor, 2015). The limited research on the topic highlights that women display “complex attitudes of both pleasure and anxiety towards the corporate ideal of what they call ‘flawless perfection’ in the media imagery” (Benbow-Buitenhuis (2014) and warrants further investigation.

There are similarities to this research objective and that of Benbow-Buitenhuis (2014). The researcher investigated how women respond to the beauty cultural directive as depicted by the media. This Australian study is one of the few seeking to explore the insights of older women on this topic and hence warrants further exploration in Ireland to provide another cultural perspective. Furthermore, Rosso (2017) in a textual analysis of beauty related magazines aimed at middle-age women, suggests that further qualitative research needs to be carried out to provide meanings of how media messages are influencing and affecting women. Additionally, the new-found resilience by women appears to be responding to advertising that encourage female empowerment and embraces imperfections (Millard, 2009) and warrants further investigation.



Although marketers are encouraged to reflect on how customers interpret images and messages in advertisements (Pounders 2018) it is clear from the literature review that more work needs to be done in relation to older women's perceptions of beauty advertisements.

### ***3.2.2 - Research Objective 2***

Research objective two seeks to investigate which activities women consider to be anti-ageing beauty work, what activities are performed and why are they performed?

Understanding the nuances of these activities will allow marketers to understand women's motives for carrying out beauty work, thus facilitating products and advertisements to be tailored to this group.

The literature review supports further investigation of this research objective. Calasanti et al (2016, p.234) in their study of the motives of middle-aged consumers of anti-ageing products suggests that further research is carried out as "we know little about these consumers and what they consider to be anti-ageing products and services". The literature has highlighted predictors of women's likelihood to engage in beauty work such as: ageing anxiety (Slevec and Tiggeman 2010; Garnham 2013) self-esteem (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2007) and the stigmatising of older women (Garnham 2013; Beauvoir 1970; Gill 2008). However, a research gap exists in relation to an understanding of this phenomenon in a range of cultural settings (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan, Basu; Ng and Lim 2018) and warrants investigation in an Irish context.

### ***3.2.3 - Research Objective 3***

Research objective three asks how older women view the ageing process growing older impact how they are seen in society?

The literature review reveals an abundance of research on how older women view the ageing process. It is seen as predominantly a negative experience for women as it is associated with a loss of beauty (Ong and Braun 2016; Calasanti et al 2016) discrimination in the workplace (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008; Davidenko 2019) and women are judged more harshly than men (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Muise and Demaris 2010; Saucier 2004)

For the overall context of the proposed study it is important to gain an insight into the lived experiences of ageing for the women in this study to allow for interpretation of the overall data generated. The women's lived experience of ageing in both an individual and societal context will reflect how they view portrayals of beauty in advertising and subsequent engagement in beauty work.

#### ***3.2.4 - Research Objective 4***

The fourth objective is to understand what is the meaning attributed to beauty work? What is the meaning attributed to anti-ageing beauty work? Is this work liberating, are women compelled to do this and what is the lived experience if they resist?

This phenomenon warrants further investigation as theories are often polarised, either viewing women as passively adopting hegemonic cultural beauty norms (Elias and Gill 2018; Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015) or women as being empowered (Hakim, 2010, Stuart and Donaghue, 2011). Yin and Pryor (2012) in their review of beauty in the marketing literature suggests that more research needs to be done around the concept of beauty as power and beauty as capital.

Research by Muise and Desmarais (2010) into women's perception and use of anti-ageing products suggests further exploration needs to be carried out on the nuances of women's feelings about the beauty work in which they engage. Additionally, examination of the discursive complexities of choice in relation to feminine beauty practices found that Australian women position themselves as freely choosing (Stuart and Donaghue 2011). However, the participants were undergraduate students ranging in age from 18 to 42 and the findings may differ in an older age group and in a different cultural context.

The literature highlights that it is difficult for women to 'opt out' of anti-ageing work (Davidenko 2019; Clarke and Griffin 2018). While women resist cultural values of ideal beauty, they are still held accountable to them and judged harshly (Calasanti et al 2001; Clarke and Griffin 2008). The author will attempt to examine this phenomenon in Ireland as research suggests more work should be done in different cultural contexts (Calasanti et al 2001; Ong and Braun 2015).

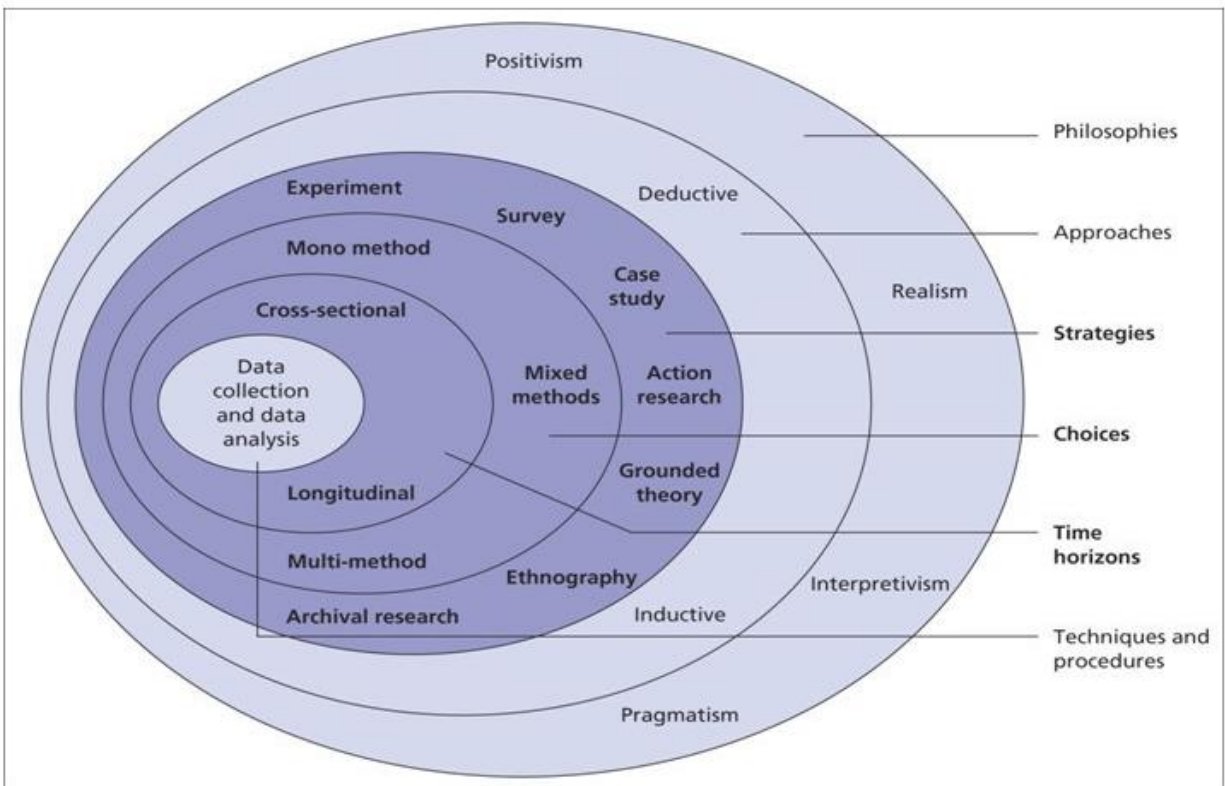
### 3.3 - THE RESEARCH ONION

The research process consists of various stages detailing several tasks researchers need to carry out to obtain valid and reliable information for a study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p:107). These stages are set out using a 'research onion' framework (Figure 1) which is used to illustrate the research process for this study and consists of six layers:

- Research philosophy
- Research approach
- Research strategy
- Choices
- Time horizons
- Techniques and procedures

The following sections of this chapter will reflect the structure of the Research Onion.

**Figure 1. The Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012)**



### **3.4 – RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

Academic research studies are guided by a philosophical framework that underpins the research (Quinlan 2011). The practical benefit of understanding a philosophical position is that it helps to comprehend the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world works, and these can be examined and challenged when necessary (Saunders et al 2015). Reflecting on a research philosophy is important as it allows for the defense of the philosophical approach chosen and an understanding of why alternate choices were not used (Johnson and Clarke 2006).

Two aspects of research philosophy which guides the choice of framework are ontology and epistemology, both reflecting different viewpoints which influence the way the researcher approaches the intended research. The pragmatic position suggests that the most important determinant of the epistemology and ontology adopted is the research question (Saunders et al 2015).

#### ***3.4.1 - Ontology***

Ontology is the theory of being and refers to what is meant about the nature of existence (Gomm 2009). It is concerned with questions relating to the kinds of things that exist in our society. Ontology examines whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality separate to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the view points and actions of social actors (Bryman and Bell 2011, p. 20). Using feminist issues in this study as an example, ontology examines the concept of ‘being’ and emphasises the existence of patriarchal social relations and the negative implications these have for women (Jupp 2011).

Subjectivism and objectivism are two key aspects of ontology. Within the realms of ontological perspectives, objectivism views social phenomena and their meanings as having an existence that is independent from social actors (Bryman 2015). The approach uses that of the natural sciences and seeks to discover ‘the truth’ about the world by using measurable, observable data from which law-like generalisations can be developed (Saunders et al 2019).

Positivism views reality as being in a constant state of revision as a result of the strong influence from social interaction (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009) and contends that social phenomena and related meanings are continually being achieved by social actors (Bryman 2015). Remenyi et al (1998, cited in Saunders 2005 p.111) state that it is important to study “the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them”, a concept which is called constructionism. Subjectivism acknowledges that individuals view situations and experiences in diverse ways. In relation to the proposed study on older women and anti-ageing strategies, it is necessary to understand the subjective reality of these women in order to make sense of their interpretations and motivations about beauty work.

### ***3.4.2 - Epistemology***

Epistemology is what is considered to be acceptable knowledge in a field of research (Saunders et al 2015) and examines how we know what we know (Gomm 2009). The two more commonly used epistemological view points are positivism and interpretism.

### ***3.4.3 - Positivism***

Positivism is a research paradigm that stems from a scientific philosophy that values research that can only be measured with absolute clarity. This stance is orientated towards collecting data about observable realities so as to establish regularities and cause and effect relationships (Gill and Johnson 2010). Because of the nature of the philosophy, positivism uses a quantitative research design, generating data that can be subject to statistical analysis. A principal of this paradigm is that the researcher should remain distanced from what they study so that the results are based on the research findings and not on the personality, beliefs and values of the researcher (Payne and Payne 2004). However, the concept of neutrality is critiqued by academics who argue that scientists cannot avoid being drawn into a study (Saunders et al 2015). Additionally, Saunders et al (2015) note that “the decision to adopt a seemingly value-free perspective suggests the existence of a certain value position”.

A positivist stance would not be appropriate for this study as the intention is to understand the lived experiences of the participants through conversation. The objective is not appropriate for statistical analysis or to be generalised to other research settings. The social world is too complex to lend itself to theorising in the same way as the rigid structure of the natural sciences (Saunders et al 2015).

#### ***3.4.4 - Interpretivism***

Interpretivism acknowledges that individuals view both physical and social realities in different ways and there is no one objective truth. Meaning in research is constructed through the interpretation of individuals as “social actors” (Saunders et al 2010) and allows for research to discover a socially constructed representation of reality (Ang 2014). Interpretivism favours a qualitative research approach where research findings are interpreted subjectively as researchers develop empathy and rapport with the participants. Critical analysis of this less structured approach proposes that different interpretations and investigative bases can result in greater variation of results (Hallebone and Priest 2009). An interpretivist approach to this study is deemed to be appropriate for this research study as it acknowledges that rich insights into the perceptions of women in a complex society will be lost, if these are reduced to a series of law-like generalisations (Saunders et al 2015).

#### ***3.4.5 - Phenomenology***

The phenomenological movement emerged as a descriptive philosophical viewpoint challenging analytical and deductive philosophies (Englander 2012). Phenomenology influences the interpretivism philosophy and describes how humans have their own perceptions and views on the world in which we live (Schuta 1970). Interpretive phenomenology is the research methodology that is used to provide an insight and understanding into the experiences of individuals in their daily lives.

“Phenomenological research begins with acknowledging that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the view of the lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it” (Englander 2012, p.15).

The researcher is considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions of the research phenomenon with the researcher explaining any bias and integrating them into the results (Robson 2011). This is because the researcher reflects on their own experiences of the phenomenon in order to open themselves up to the lived experiences of others (Giorgi 2017).

### **3.5 - QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative and quantitative are research paradigms with very different ontological and epistemological foundations. An overview of the features of both paradigms will be discussed however it should be noted that it may be problematic to see qualitative and quantitative research as binary options, but rather as a continuum (Saunders et al 2012). For example many qualitative researchers make quasi-numerical claims about what usually happens to people and quantitative researchers always begin research with some qualitative initiatives as to what may happen in the study (Gomm 2009).

#### ***3.5.1 Quantitative Research***

The quantitative research strategy is typically characterised as positivist which advocates the use of methods from the natural sciences (Jupp 2011). This research method examines cause and effect, generating data in the form of numbers or data that can be coded numerically (Quinlan 2011 p. 104) and uses a deductive approach. The research problems are specific and well-defined in advance of the study and the data is analysed using statistical and mathematical methods. Researchers using a quantitative approach choose methods such as questionnaires, surveys, observation and secondary data. The researcher seeks precise measurement and analysis and remains objectively separated from the study (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 40). Critical analysis of quantitative research argues that results generated may lack contextual detail (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 40) and ignore social meanings and the way the world is socially

constructed. Quantitative research was used in a smaller number of studies focusing on beauty work and ageing. Slevec and Tiggemann (2010) used the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005) to measure attitudes of middle-aged Australian women towards cosmetic surgery. Statistical analysis generated data showing multiple factors including body dissatisfaction and appearance investment, however the depth of information required by the present study would not be achieved using this approach.

### ***3.5.2 - Qualitative Research***

The qualitative research strategy is concerned with subjective social issues, emphasising the need to understand society as social actors perceive and interpret it and that interpretations can change according to the standpoint of the social actor (Jupp 2011).

Adopting an interpretivist paradigm will naturally lead to a qualitative research study (Hiller 2010). Qualitative research is indicated when an ‘in depth’ understanding of customer attitudes, behaviours and motivations are required (Barnham 2015). The approach uses multiple perspectives to understand reason, opinions and motives, with the results explained through words. The research process is flexible to allow for new themes to emerge during the study and allows for the understanding of experiences.

Qualitative data collection techniques usually include unstructured/semi-structured interviews, focus groups, ethnography/observation, case studies and participant observation. Critical analysis of qualitative research points to a lack of transparency in which the research process is carried out (Bryman et al 2011), reliance on the subjective interpretive skills of the researcher, lack of generalisability of research findings (Holliday 2007) and low reliability and smaller samples (Hair et al 2010). Qualitative research was used in several studies investigating beauty work and ageing (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2008; Szmigin and Carrigan 2006; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Benbow-Buitenhuis 2013; Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2016; Davidenko 2017) to elicit rich data using the participants own voices. Jones (1985) describes the benefits of participants voicing their own experiences:



“In order to understand other persons’ constructions of reality, we would do well to ask them... and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms... and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings” (p.46).

### **3.6 – MIXED METHODS RESEARCH**

Cameron (2011) notes that a mixed methods research design has become increasingly popular for academics across a multitude of disciplines. The approach involves the utilisation of both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. As both paradigms have strengths and limitations, the methods can be combined to develop a stronger understanding of the research phenomenon. Those in favour of this method suggest that it provides more thorough data and findings than either method by itself (Creswell 2014). However, critical analysis suggests that epistemological and ontological view points are too different to be effectively integrated into the same research context (Molina-Axorin et al 2012). Additionally, this method poses severe time challenges for researchers, as there is extensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data and the researcher is required to be knowledgeable in both. A mixed methods approach was not deemed necessary for this study as a qualitative approach will be sufficient to achieve the overall research objectives as mirrored by Mair et al (2015), Benbow-Buitenhuis (2014) and Ong and Braun (2016).

### **3.7 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE**

A research methodology refers to the methods by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena (Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi 2013). When planning a methodology for a study, a researcher needs to consider the philosophical assumptions they bring to the research, a research design that reflects this world view and the distinct methods or research that translates the approach into practice (Creswell 2019).

The purpose of this study is to understand how older Irish women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. Themes which emerged from the

literature include problematic portrayal of idealised images of women in advertisements, ageing-anxiety, loss of body image and polarised views on beauty work as an act of agency. The philosophical perspective selected by the author needs to allow for the emergence of these themes by acknowledging that individuals view situations and experiences in diverse ways. The study intends to provide an insight into the lived experiences of ageing which is a complex issue related to society, culture and a changing world (Calasanti et al 2016). Thus, a subjective interpretative approach is most appropriate for this study. Selecting an interpretivist paradigm will naturally lead to a qualitative based research strategy (Hiller 2010).

A positivist stance would not be appropriate for the author's chosen study as the intention of the research objectives are to generate emotions, feelings and perceptions through conversation and is not appropriate for statistical analysis or to be generalised to other research settings. The social world is too complex to lend itself to theorising in the same way as the rigid structure of the natural sciences (Saunders et al 2015).

One of the first methodological choices is concerned with whether a qualitative, quantitative or mixed method approach is used (Saunders et al 2012). As discussed in section 3.5.1, a quantitative approach is not appropriate to investigate how older women are influenced by advertising and their interpretation of beauty work. A positivist approach would not be able to address the research questions in this study as the data generated does not pay attention to social meanings and the ways in which the world is socially structured (Jupp 2011). Thus, an interpretivist-based approach using qualitative research methods is deemed to be the most appropriated methodology in researching anti-ageing beauty work.

### **3.8 - PHENOMONOLOGY**

A phenomenological stance is deemed the most appropriate as the researcher "seeks to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of those who have direct, immediate experience with it" (Wood and Hayes 2011 p.291). Using a phenomenological approach allows for the emergence and understanding of the lived experience of the themes which emerged from the literature review including: problematic ageing, loss of body image, conflicting viewpoints on acts of agency by women and the problematic representation of idealised images of women in

advertisements. Recommendations from the study by D'Alessandro and Chitty (2010) on media portrayals of body ideals suggests a phenomenological approach would be useful in telling us much about how women attribute causes about how they feel about their body image

While the findings from a phenomenology study can be invaluable, there are disadvantages to this approach which needs to be taken into consideration: questions need to be carefully selected and delivered to ensure the correct data is obtained, additionally the research process may be subject to bias from the interviewer and misconstrue the results (see section for how the study addressed this). A further challenge using a phenomenological approach is choosing the research method as there is no one authoritative phenomenological method and ultimately depends on the research objectives (Saunders 1982). This challenge is explored in section

### **3.9 – TIME HORIZON**

An important issue for researchers is adequately plan the time horizon during which a study is conducted (Saunders et al 2012). Research may be carried out as either as a cross section or longitudinally. Cross sectional research occurs when data is collected from samples at any 'point in time', while longitudinal research involves the collection of data over a period of time. This study uses a cross sectional approach as it is part of a master's dissertation and thus a longitudinal approach over a longer time frame would not be practical. The data in this study was collected over a two-week period and consisted of seven interviews lasting from forty minutes to one hour.

### **3.10 – RESEARCH STRATEGY**

It is important to select the most relevant research strategy to achieve the research objectives and is determined by the type of information required. When considering the research design, the type of data required, data collection method, sampling method and schedule needs to be examined (Hair et al 2010). An exploratory research design is most appropriate for this study as the aim is to gain a greater understanding of individuals motivations and behaviours which are

not easy to access using other research designs, such as descriptive and causal research (Hair et al 2010). Some of the possible research methods will next be discussed.

### ***3.10.1 - Focus groups***

Focus groups are a commonly used qualitative research method to gain insights for marketers. The method stems from the behavioral sciences and brings a number of people together to have an interactive discussion on a topic (Hair et al 2010). This can allow for rich and insightful information on attitudes, experiences and how and why people behave in a particular way. However, a disadvantage of this method is the possibility of *groupthink*, where some people in the group follow the dominant opinion and results are contaminated (Hair et al 2010).

Focus groups were not deemed appropriate for this study as perceptions of ageing can be a very personal sensitive subject and individuals may not want to discuss these concerns with a wider group. Example of possible apprehensions emerged from the literature review, including: ageing anxiety (Garnham 2013; Macia et al 2015; Calasanti et al 2016; Peterson 2018) negative body image anxieties (Clarke et al 2008; Garnham 2013; Macia et al 2015; Calasanti et al 2016) and lack of empowerment (Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko 2010; Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2018). Additionally, as some of the questions are on beauty work, participants in a focus group may feel unable to speak freely about the types of beauty work they engage in and the lengths they go to.

### ***3.10.2 - Interviews***

Interviews can be used for both qualitative and quantitative research, however they vary greatly in terms of the context, purpose and how they are structured and conducted (Jupp 2011). They vary from informal, unstructured, in-depth conversations to very structured formats with answers from a predetermined list (Jupp 2011). While more structured interviews or questionnaires are less time-consuming and less challenging to analyse as the responses are more standardised (Jupp 2011), these were discounted they are confined by a rigid structure and may miss out on additional findings relevant to the study.

A one to one in-depth interview format involves an interviewer asking a participant a set of pre-determined questions. A unique characteristic of this method is that the interviewer encourages the respondent to explain their responses, creating opportunities for a more in-depth discussion of the topic, thus revealing underlying attitudes, emotions and behaviours (Hair et al 2010). A semi-structured interview follows a list of questions to be asked but is also flexible as the questions do not need to be asked in order, allowing for the emergence of new themes and extra questions to be asked. This type of interview is generally conducted face to face and allows the researcher to also consider visual expressions and body language.

Critical analysis of the interview process is that the amount of data generated can make it problematic and time consuming for the researcher to analyse (see section 3.18) and there is potential for bias by the interviewer (Jupp 2011). Additionally, despite claims that interviews allows for rapport building, what is actually being reflected is the passive acceptance of the interviewee of the interviewer's goals and may affect answers provided (Oakley 1981). Bias was addressed by the author by ensuring that the questions were worded in a neutral format and the researcher didn't direct or lead the interviewee in any way. The author was careful in the data analysis stage to use only the words expressed by the participants and interpret the experiences of the women through their own particular lens.

In-depth interviews are the chosen research tool for this study and the rationale will next be discussed. In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews are an appropriate choice for finding out what is happening and providing insights into a phenomenon (Saunders et al 2015). The approach was also used by Mair et al (2015) and Jurdi and Smith (2018) in their studies on beauty and the media. Unlike focus groups, in-depth interviews allow rich details to emerge when focusing on one person at a time. Participants are more likely to be themselves as there is no one to impress and no-one dominating and preventing others from speaking (Hair et al 2015).

### **3.11 – DESIGN OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

A list of open-ended questions was developed to provide a flexible guideline for the interview (see Appendix 1). This approach was used in the marketing research carried out by Assawavichhairoj and Taghian (2019) when examining consumers pre-purchase decision-

making of anti-aging products. The authors stated that open-ended question allowed the participants to better explore concepts, clarify the topics more completely and expand on their expression of ideas considering the themes raised by other interviewees. from questions to be changed if required and new questions to be added if additional themes emerge. Each question was linked to a specific aspect of each research objective (see section 3.2). A pilot study was not required because of the inductive nature of the research, as new themes emerged, these were incorporated into the research findings.

### **3.12 – SAMPLING METHODS**

As it is impractical to obtain data from the entire population for a study, a sample needs to be chosen (Saunders et al 2015). The sampling approach depends on the research objectives and methodology selected and can be divided into probability or non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, the chance of each case being selected for the population is known and is usually equal for all cases and is more appropriate for survey and experimental design strategies (Saunders et al 2015). Non-probability sampling is generally based on the researcher's subjective judgement and includes: quota, purposive, snowball and convenience sampling.

Quota sampling is a non-random approach that ensures specific groups of the population are represented according to pre-specified criteria (Hair et al 2010). However, this method is more appropriate for large populations (Saunders et al 2015) and is not appropriate for the smaller sample numbers which a phenomenological study requires. Snowballs sampling is where a group of individuals are chosen, who then assist the researcher to identify further participants for the study. While this method is very helpful when it is difficult to identify participants, the problems of bias are huge as individuals may only chose others with similar views and life experiences as (Hair et al 2010). A convenience sampling method involves the selection of samples based on convenience and assumes that those selected are similar to the study target population. While this is a popular sampling method, those selected may not have experience of the phenomenon of ageing and choices in relation to beauty work and are thus not appropriate for this study.

### ***3.12.1 - Purposive Sampling***

A purposive sampling approach was selected for this study as it enables researchers to make a judgement to select participants that will best answer the research questions (Saunders et al 2015). The sampling approach to this study mirrors that of Slevin (2010) who used purposive sampling to explore the interpretations and strategies individuals use to make sense of the ageing phenomenon.

In phenomenology, the researcher asks, “Does the participant have the experience that I am looking for?” (Englander 2012). As this study requires participants who have a lived experience of the ageing process and beauty work, individuals that have knowledge of this phenomenon must be selected. Therefore, the researcher needs some understanding prior to the study of what the phenomenon is and what the expected parameters are, both of which are legitimate (Englander 2012). The method is particularly appropriate for smaller samples and when particularly informative insights are required (Saunders et al 2015). Critical analysis of purposive sampling draws attention to the fact that representativeness of a purposive sample and data generated should be interpreted cautiously (Hair et al 2010).

### ***3.12.2 Sampling Frame***

The approach to sampling for this study reflects the fact that the research is on individuals’ attitudes to media beauty ideals and insights into their anti-ageing beauty work. Women are the focus of the study as pressure to look younger is more relevant to their gender (Muisse and Demarais 2010). The sample additionally reflects that further research into this topic is warranted in Ireland. Purposive sampling was implemented by selecting Irish women over fifty years known to the author. Using a phenomenological perspective, the sample was selected based on: “Do you have the experience that I am looking for?” (Englander 2012). The women had a variety of occupations and came from middle-class backgrounds. All expressed that they participated in some form of beauty work and reported spending money on beauty products and services (see Table 1). Appearance investment appeared to be important to these women as they all wore make-up and dyed their hair. All the women had exposure to beauty advertisements in magazines, social media and television

**TABLE 1 Participant Information**

Participant 1 Age: 76 Occupation: Retired Annual beauty spend: €2,500	Participant 4 Age: 51 Occupation: Company vice-president Annual beauty spend: 3,400
Participant 2 Age: 55 Occupation: Librarian Annual beauty spend: €3,400	Participant 5 Age: 52 Occupation: Sales account manager Annual beauty spend: €4,900
Participant 3 Age: 56 Occupation: Graphic designer Annual beauty spend: €2,900	Participant Age: 59 Occupation: Hairdresser Annual beauty spend: €2,200

### ***3.12.3 - Sample Size***

A sample size was not defined prior to the interviews but was determined as discursive saturation was achieved. Discursive saturation occurs when no further new themes or insights emerge, an approach detailed in the methodology of Macia et al (2015) who researched the experiences of women in relation to body changes and beauty practices. Phenomenological research is not concerned with “how many” have had a particular experience but is concerned with depth of findings (Giorgi 2009; Englander 2012). Kvale (1994, p. 165, cited in Englander 2012) gives the following advice to phenomenological researchers: “Interview so many subjects that you find out what you need to know”.



### **3.13 – ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethics in research is described by Saunders et al (2015) as the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of or are affected by the work. As this study involves people and examines human behaviour, ethical considerations are required. Consequently, the study met the ethics protocol of the NCIRL. The author read and completed the Human Participants Ethical Review application form and the Declarations Page. Informed consent was obtained as all participants have the right to know the following: that they are being researched, the purpose of the research and what will be expected of them (Jupp 2011). The participants were additionally assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. All data collected will remain safely in my care as per NCIRL guidelines.

### **3.14 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

The interviews in the study were carried out as recommended by Saunders et al (2015). A set of questions were developed as an interview guide and were asked using a conversational tone, flowing from more general to specific questions within each topic. The interviewees were given the choice of being interviewed in a private place in their own home or else the researcher's home. Probing open questions were used to get as much insight and discussion before moving onto the next question. The researcher during a phenomenological interview need to be careful not to "lead the participant" instead of "directing the participant" (Giorgi 2009, p. 123) and this was achieved in the following way:

"To achieve this result, the interviewer must create a completely permissive atmosphere, in which the subject is free to express himself without fear of disapproval, admonition or dispute and without advice from the interviewer" (Saunders et al 2015).

The interview was divided into four sections, reflecting the four research objectives (section 3.2) and the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (Appendix 1). Section one involved showing the participants four advertisements for anti-ageing products depicting images of idealised beauty (Appendix 2). Section two asked women about the anti-ageing activities they perform, section three involved a discuss about the participants views of the ageing process and

section four discussed meanings that women attribute to beauty work and scope to resist activities to mask ageing.

### ***3.15 - Rational for interview choice***

The over-all research aim of this dissertation is to understand how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. It is hoped that this study will provide an insight into how older women perceive representations of idealised beauty in advertising and the lived experiences thereafter in relation to the beauty work they engage in and their interpretation of this.

Research objective one seeks to understand how older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty as dictated by commercial ideal led advertising. Photo elicitation (see section 3.16 for discussion and rationale) and in-depth interviews were used as the research tools to address this objective. These are the two research tools as used by Benbow Buitenhuis (2014) to investigate perceptions of ‘anti-ageing’ beauty creams involving a discussion around four full-page colour advertisements and generated rich insights. Additionally, Rosso (2017) in a textual analysis of beauty related magazines aimed at middle-age women, suggests that further qualitative research is carried out to provide meanings of how media messages are influencing and affecting women, suggesting in-depth interviews as an appropriate method.

It was noted that in-depth interviews were used by many academics to understand the nuances of beauty work (Clarke and Griffin 2006; Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014; Calasanti et al 2016; Davidenko 2019). One of these academics, Calasanti et al (2016) advocates the use of interviews to gather data for the following reasons:

“A semi-structured interview schedule allows interviewers to use questions consistently across interviews, but flexibly, to allow for free flowing discussion of topics as they came up and for the emergence of issues that interviewees found personally relevant” (p.235).

In-depth interviews were also used by academics examining the phenomenon of ageing (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Calasanti et al 2016; Davidenko 2019). Grogan (2001) advocates the use of

using semi-structured or unstructured interviews to find out women's experiences of body (dis)satisfaction stating:

“The advantage of doing this is that women are given the freedom to express how they feel, and they can set their own agenda and address issues that are important to them, giving this technique more flexibility than questionnaire work” (p.31).

The question of female agency is a topical theme in feminist sociological literature and a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews is a very common choice for these academics (Ong and Braun 2016; Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz 2016). The meaning that women attribute to beauty work is one of the themes addressed by Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2007) who investigate the perceptions of ageing in relation to body work interventions. The author draws data from in-depth interview and uses “probing questions to elucidate the complexity and nature of the meanings that individuals attached to specific ideas and experiences” (Hurd Clarke and Griffin 2007, p. 190).

### ***3.16 - Photo elicitation***

Research objective one seeks to understand how older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty in advertising. In an interview setting, as women may not be easily able to recall advertisements for anti-ageing products, the researcher provided four advertisements featuring beautiful women. Additionally, by including photos of advertisements, visual stimuli can assist in understanding the experiences and emotions of the participant rather than imposing their own view of a topic (Bates et al 2018).

Using three advertisements for anti-ageing beauty products (Appendix 2,3 and 4) during the first section of the interview, the researcher asked questions as to how the participants felt about the advertisements and how it made themselves feel about their bodies. Photo elicitation was also used by Benbow Buitenhuis (2014) to investigate perceptions of ‘anti-ageing’ beauty creams and involved a discussion around four full-page colour advertisements. Millard (2009) also used this technique when researching women's reactions to Dove's ‘Real Beauty’ Campaign.

### **3.17 – STUDY LIMITATIONS**

One of the limitations of the study is the potential for researcher bias. Although the proposed study will allow the research question to be explored in depth and generate rich insights, the sample size is small and will not be generalisable. Additionally, the homogeneity of the participant's socioeconomic backgrounds further reduces generalisability of findings to the wider public (Fournier 1998). Finally, as some of the areas covered in the study were of a sensitive nature, it is difficult to tell if every question was answered truthfully by the participants despite attention being given to the format of the questions.

### **3.18 - DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

To illustrate the credibility and robustness of the study, the coding and data analysis will next be explained. The author implemented thematic coding and data analysis according to best practice as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006):

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p.4).

The data referred to in this study consists of interview scripts in conjunction with field notes made on body language and reactions of the participants, noted during the interviews. The initial phase involved listening to the recorded interviews several times and then transcribing the data to a Word document. The notes made on body language were also added to this document. The transcripts were then checked against the original recordings to ensure they were accurate. The author became fully immersed in the data by reading the transcripts several times and then started to look for meanings and patterns. During this period, initial notes were made with general observations and ideas for coding.

The next phase involved coding the information which involved selecting the most basic segments of the data that was interesting and could be interpreted in a meaningful way. Relevant codes were highlighted by grouping similar quotes together. Coloured pens were used to identify potential patterns in a long list of 120 codes generated. A mind map was then developed to illustrate visually how the different codes formed over-arching themes. A theme is something

important about the data in relation to the research question and involves some level of patterned response within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). These themes were divided into major and minor themes and then categorised in line with the four research objectives (see section 3.2). The entire data was reread to ensure that all the information was captured and that the themes were accurately generated. Data analysis is not a linear process but a recursive one, it develops over time and should not be rushed (Ely et al 1997). The themes which emerged are detailed in Section 4.

### **3.19 - SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed all the considerations which are needed to provide a sound and robust methodological basis for this research. The topic for this study is to understand how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. The author proposes that a phenomenological method using semi-structured interviews is the best approach to achieve the research objectives.

# CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

## 4.1 - INTRODUCTION

The central focus of this dissertation is to understand how older women engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. As detailed in the methodology chapter, six in-depth interviews were carried out between August 1<sup>st</sup> and August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This chapter will present a detailed description of the women’s narratives of their experiences of beauty work. The findings from the interviews are presented in thematic groups. Although presented separately, much of the information in the themes are intertwined with the other themes. The following sections include several numbers of direct quotes to allow for the accurate reflection of the information expressed by the participants.

## 4.2 – RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

<b>RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1</b> How do older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty as dictated by marketing communications?
<b><i>Themes</i></b> Media portrayal of beauty ideals Credibility of advertisements Self-esteem

The themes which emerged from research objective one are from the first part of the interview where participants were asked for their attitudes and comments on pictures of advertisements for anti-ageing products portrayal beautiful young models.

#### ***4.2.1 - Media Portrayal of Beauty Ideals***

Findings central to the objectives are that the women in the study viewed the portrayal of the models in the advertisements as completely unrealistic. When asked to reflect on the images, the participants' face looked incredulous, and they commented that the beautiful-faced models in the pictures were far too young to be advertising anti-ageing products. The image of flawless beauty was totally impractical because it was simply unobtainable. The participants made comments comparable to that of a 76-year-old retired woman who dyed her hair and wore make-up:

“I see these types of images everywhere. They're on television, magazines, social media, everywhere I look, it's hard not to get away from it. The models have beautiful skin but possibly photoshopped as well, it's almost like a painting. It's completely unobtainable” (interviewee 1).

A 55-year-old librarian made the following remarks:

“The women are just full of make-up. They are flawless, but do you know anyone without a flaw? There's nothing real about this” (interviewee 2).

The current approach of forcing beauty ideologies on women appeared to actively deter the women from purchasing these products. Several of the participants suggested that a more realistic image of women in advertisements would make them feel more favourable towards the product. Some of the women suggested the 'Dove' approach to advertising where 'ordinary' women are used in images, as it makes beauty standards more achievable for ordinary women.

This was clearly articulated by a 56-year-old graphic designer:

“We need real life. There's nothing worse than the falseness of younger beautiful women. Dove has a really good approach where they show women in all shapes and sizes and that makes me want to buy their products” I have seen a couple of campaigns of Facebook that reject the images of stick thin beautiful models and a lot of women agree with this. We are not as naïve as our parents used to be, we don't want to be fooled anymore (interviewee 2).

#### ***4.2.2 - Credibility of Advertisements***

A strong trend of suspicion of advertising messages was evident across the group. The participants were skeptical of the marketing promises and most commented that they would

examine the ingredients in products first before deciding to purchase. The mention of scientific evidence in the advertisements appeared to make the messaging more credible. Several of the women had a new-found knowledge of cosmetic ingredients, reflecting the new wave of information coming from social media:

“I watch a lot of YouTube videos on skincare now and know quite a bit about cosmetic ingredients. I know that hyaluronic acid is good for plumping up the skin and retinol is good for wrinkles and pigmentation. I follow a few dermatologists on YouTube and enjoy listening to them review products and ingredients” (Interviewee 5).

An interesting paradox was apparent whereby although the women didn't believe the promises that advertisements made to reverse ageing, they still purchased the products. While interviewee six, a 59-year-old hairdresser positioned herself as a rational citizen that understands that the aging process cannot be reversed, she still bought anti-ageing creams and serums:

“I don't believe the ads when they say they can do something miraculous, but I sometimes still buy the creams just in case they might work. I often wonder if you had two women side by side, one using these creams and the other not bothering, would there be any difference in their skin?”.

#### ***4.2.3 - Self-Esteem***

When asked how the images made the participants feel about themselves, there was a mixed response. Some of the women mentioned the ubiquity of the portrayal of beautiful women in the media and that there was no “getting away from it”. Two of the women appeared to be totally unaffected and interestingly, appeared to be the more confident of the participants, which the research observed from their confident manner of speaking and their body language during the interview. These women were able to look at the advertisements and ‘see them for what they are’ and not be affected in any way. They were completely aware that the companies were portraying images of beautiful young women, to tap into women's insecurities to generate sales.

The remaining participants had a conflicting attitude of aspiration and antipathy towards the models, at the same time, wanting to look like the models but also annoyed at the beauty



ideology portrayed. These women admitted that the images made them feel more negative about themselves:

“Makes me feel like I need to try harder...like I am not good enough almost which is never a good thing. If the model was older, I wouldn't feel as bad” (Interviewee 3).

“Affects self-esteem as ads are everywhere 24/7. There is more and more in the media about ageing, it's grey hair, it's like when you are over forty you are insignificant” (Interviewee 2).

“Makes me feel inadequate and a bit ugly I suppose. The images associate beauty with youth and I'm not young any more. It makes me want to look like them and I am obviously failing” (Interviewee 5).

### 4.3 – RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

<b>RESEARCH OBJECTIVE</b> What activities do women consider to be anti-ageing beauty work, what activities are performed and why are they performed?
<b>Themes</b> Purchasing of anti-ageing products and services Motives for beauty work

#### 4.3.1 - Purchasing of Anti-Ageing Products and Services

The imperative of looking well underpinned the interviews with all the participants frequently carrying out beauty work. All the women using beauty products, including dyeing hair, anti-ageing face creams and make-up. Other products and services that were used included Retinol, laser therapy, regular facials, Dermabrasion, dyeing of eyebrows and eyelashes, facial exfoliation, vitamin C, vitamin A, sunscreen, serums and anti-ageing moisturisers. The amount of money spent on anti-ageing beauty work was not insignificant, ranging from €2,200 (Interviewee six, hairdresser) to €4,900 (Interviewer five, sales manager) per annum. The comments from Interviewee was typical of the participants:

“I regularly have facials, the last one was a conduction face make with electric currents going through it. I did buy from that beautician vitamin A cream and Vitamin A tablets. I’ve also bought expensive moisturisers for more mature skin. When serums came out, I thought it was just a marketing ploy. However, I use them all the time now as I feel I need it as I get older and it’s a good base for under make-up”.

#### ***4.3.2 - Motives for Beauty Work***

The most common reason reported for using anti-ageing products was for the women to look good for their age and not necessarily ‘younger’. All the women said they had always maintained their appearance and set standards for themselves to ‘look well’. There was awareness that women are judged by their appearance and if someone looks well, they generally get on better in life. Statements such as the following were common:

“I don’t need to hide my age. I just want to look the best version of myself at my own age, not younger. If you look well, people just generally think more of you. A good appearance just helps generally all round. People are more drawn to you and think more of you” (interviewee 3).

The oldest interviewee (76 years) said she accepted her age and didn’t entertain thoughts of looking younger. Having a good appearance was a sign of capability:

“My family and I have always set high standards for us to look our best, I’m not sure exactly why though, we just always did. I look after my appearance, I put on make-up and try to dress well. But it’s not about looking younger, I just want to look the best that I can. I want to continue taking good care of myself” (Interviewee 1).

The above comments illustrate an inherent need for some of the participants to look their best when out in public. It was something they did but were unable to articulate exactly why this was. There was evidence of the active management of the ageing process and being competent enough to look after oneself.

At times it was difficult for participants to distinguish between appearance maintenance and anti-ageing work. Some of the women said they were so used to doing these activities, they just saw it

as ‘normal’ and it was only on reflection they realised it was in fact to reduce the appearance of ageing. This was particularly relevant when dyeing hair and use of anti-ageing creams was discussed. Interviewee four, a 51-year-old company vice-present, was one of the women who said she did not want to look younger. However, the following comments show some evidence of a contradiction:

“I have monthly facials, get my eyebrows done, maintain myself. Anti-ageing creams and dyeing hair are necessities, I don’t class it as anti-ageing. I don’t feel I need to hide my age, but I like it when someone thinks I look younger” (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee five spent the most money on beauty work and was the only woman who acknowledged that she wanted to look younger and that she carried out beauty work for this reason. She did this to avoid being seen as ‘old and past it’ in her place of work and was increasingly using more extensive beauty work as she got older:

“I work in a dynamic sales company, it’s very competitive environment with mainly younger beautiful women. I don’t want to be seen as the ‘old’ woman, so I do everything I can to look as young as possible, so I can compete with them. I do lots of things including Botox and facial laser therapies. Botox and fillers have become commonplace where as in the past it was almost shocking if someone got them done”.

#### **4.4 – RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3**

<b>RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3</b>
How do older women view the ageing process and does growing older impact how they are seen in society?
<i>Themes</i>
Ageing and society
Ageing and health

#### ***4.4.1 Ageing and Society***

The interviewees predominantly asserted that ageing was viewed negatively by society and those who were older were at a disadvantage. Their richly articulated descriptions described how this felt:

“In western society, older women are becoming more unseen, it’s like society is becoming youth centric, it’s a big mistake. In other cultures, older people are more revered, their knowledge, wisdom and experience are appreciated” (Interviewee 2).

Some of the interviewees acknowledged the impact an ageing appearance can have on maintaining relevance and credibility in the workplace. Older women can be considered ‘frumpy’, ‘past it’, ‘menopausal “or ‘invisible’. Interestingly, the rank of a worker can affect how they are seen by their colleagues: According to interviewee four, a fifty-one-year old CEO of a multinational company: “Because I am senior, I am seen as a woman of power. If I was not in a position of leadership, it would be different: I would just be seen as old”.

Despite the acknowledgement of ageism in society, there was a general sense that growing older was something the women accepted gracefully and was eloquently voiced by Interviewee two:

“Some people don’t make it to old age, there’s something ungrateful about resenting it, some people die and don’t get to be older and have wrinkles and more than that. So, I have no real problem with ageing, each decade brings its good things. But you can’t help sometimes listening to that inner voice that society pushes on you as well”.

#### ***4.4.2 - Ageing and Health***

A surprise finding was that most of the women were unconcerned about ageing if they remained ‘fit and well’. In fact, feeling and looking young was associated with keeping the body healthy and remaining active:

“I’m happy in my skin about getting older. I’ve decided not to fight against it. I’d prefer my younger body but I’m not going to start buying creams to try and make me look younger. It’s about feeling well, so that means eating well and exercising and taking care of myself” (Interviewee 3).

Some of the women implied that there was a duty for the participants to actively age well by ‘managing’ the ageing process:

“As long as I am fit and well, I don’t really mind getting older. It’s my responsibility to take care of myself. Obviously, I would like to have a younger body, but I will do everything I can to keep as active for as long as possible. I want to be able to walk the dogs, do my housework and the garden too. There’s no point otherwise” (Interviewee 6).

Many of the women’s comments lead to an understanding that the overt use of anti-ageing products means admitting there is a concern about ageing, which most of these women did not appear to have. Reasoning in this way, the anti-ageing properties of the products were used by the women as more of a means of maintaining good health, than to reduce the physical appearance of ageing, a perspective that marketers may not have accounted for. A 76-year-old, retired lady, articulated the following:

“I don’t need to hide my age, I’m really proud that I’ve got to my age and am not on tablets. I manage my body, I want to be healthy and just do the right thing at right time. I really don’t care what other people think of me” (Interviewee 1).

#### **4.5 – RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4**

##### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4**

What is the meaning attributed to anti-ageing beauty work? Is this work liberating, are women compelled to do this and what is the lived experience if they resist?

*Themes - Major*

Active V Passive choices

*Themes - Major*

Impact of Resistance

##### **4.5.1 - Active V Passive Choices**

There was tension in the women's narrative of why they felt compelled to carry out beauty work. The women performed beauty work as part of their everyday lives and at first, said that in line with neoliberal discourse, they viewed it as an activity which was freely chosen and liberating. They generally agreed that there was a choice and it just depended if you 'cared about your appearance or not'.

"I don't feel pressure to do it. But saying that, I would never step outside the door without make-up. I just wouldn't. It helps me to give me confidence, to look more attractive I suppose. I also get my hair blow dried twice a week and will never stop having this done" (Interviewee 6).

Although the women positioned themselves as freely choosing, evidence of complex attitudes emerged. On reflection, most of the participants said that 'maybe they did feel some pressure' but countered this by saying that they did it to 'make themselves feel better'. It is noteworthy that the notion of putting on make-up is attributed by the women to feeling better about themselves rather than the false consciousness of a gendered ageist society.

The use of erotic capital described by Hakim (2010) was illustrated by interviewee five, who worked as a sales manager. Dressing her best and looking as attractive and young as possible helped her in the workplace to maintain a high profile and increased her chances of making sales:

"If I just went to work without make-up and nice clothes, I would be almost invisible. I need to look the part and that involves looking attractive and well made up. It's gets me further all-round".

Generally, the women saw beauty work as just another part of their day, the only pleasure they associated with it was when someone was performing the work for them in the case of getting their hair done or going for a facial.

#### ***4.5.2 - Impact of Resistance***

There was agreement amongst the participants that they admired women who deviated from beauty ideals. Examples were given of women who choose not to dye their hair or wear make-up saying that it can often look very well. However, there were caveats:

“It depends on the person though. If they don’t dye their hair or wear make-up but are outgoing and humorous they will be accepted. But it’s different for a more sombre person. They be a bit of an outcast and are definitely socially disadvantaged” (Interviewee 6).

This commentary suggests that while these women reject the notion of society dictating them to longer younger and beautiful, they are still held accountable to these standards. A paradox emerged where although the women admired others who rejected beauty norms, all said it was something they would never consider doing as voiced by interviewee five:

“Absolutely not. I just wouldn’t consider it. I’m not ready to go grey yet, if ever. It’s instant ageing and I just wouldn’t want to look like that”.

When asked if there was anything that would encourage them to ‘opt out’ of beauty work, one of the women suggested: “I would need to spend less time on social media or looking at beauty ads”. This commentary somewhat reinforcing the perception of the strong, often unperceived influence of beauty ideology that is perpetuated in multiple forms of media content.

#### **4.6 - SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an overview of the thematic presentation of the research findings of this study. It included the perceptions of and attitudes of older women to media portrayals of ideal beauty, the anti-ageing activities the women engaged in, attitudes of women towards ageing and the impact of agency and resistance of women performing beauty work. The author achieved the research objective by uncovering the lived experiences of women for each of the research questions. These insights will be further discussed in chapter five.

## **CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION**

The aim of this research was to broaden the understanding of how older women in Ireland engage with beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. Drawing on a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were carried out with six women over fifty years old. This chapter will recontextualise the key themes which emerged from the data analysis and explore them in relation to the literature review. The discussion will be under the four major themes which emerged in the previous chapter (see section 4.2). By completing the four research objectives described in section 3.2, the author proposes that the study aim has been achieved.

### **5.1 – BEAUTY IDEOLOGY IN ADVERTISEMENTS**

The literature highlights that more work needs to be done by marketers to understand older women and the relationship with anti-ageing products and advertising (Calasanti et al 2016). Findings in this study suggest that many older women do not positively engage with the portrayal of flawlessly beautiful young women in advertisements. In fact, most believed the advertisements were farcical as the young models clearly did not need the products.

Additionally, the beauty standards they depicted were completely unobtainable, thus supporting previous findings by (Benbow-Buitenhuis 2014; Mair et al 2015; Millard 2009).

The study showed evidence of a cultural shift whereby the participants called for more authentic women in the media, findings which are supported by Pounders (2018) and Millard (2009). Some of the women had alternate advertising suggestions that may be noteworthy for companies. The dominant recommendation was for more realistic images of women in advertisements to increase positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The participants liked the approach that Dove used in their Real Beauty campaign (2004) where real women in various shapes and sizes were used, as it made beauty standards more achievable for ordinary women such as themselves. Although, there has been some criticism of the Dove commercial agenda in the marketing literature (Millard 2009), the campaign was a resounding financial success. The author proposes



that it is not the intentions of Dove that matters, it is the fight against idealistic representations of women and the company's contribution toward the empowerment of females, that is important.

### *5.1.2 Credibility of advertisements*

It was evident that there was much cynicism regarding the marketing promises made in the advertisements about the ability of products to reversing ageing. Interestingly, a paradox was highlighted whereby although the women didn't believe the promises that advertisements made, all the women purchased anti-ageing creams. This theme was identified in a study on the rationale for anti-ageing activities by Muise and Desmarais (2010) whereby it was considered prudent to maintain some control over the ageing process and doing something was a better strategy than doing nothing at all. This finding can be viewed as part of the overall strategy the women used to manage their health. Because they couldn't be completely sure the creams wouldn't reverse ageing, they knew that as the very least they would moisturise their skin and keep them looking well. Also, it alludes to inevitable susceptibility of women to advertising, supporting findings from Calasanti et al (2018) and Mair et al (2013) who suggest that women are weakened by the pressures of advertising messages.

Findings in this study point towards a more empowered and educated consumer which marketers need to be cognizant of. Women commented on the need to examine product ingredients before purchasing, to see if they were effective. Furthermore, the mention of scientific evidence in the advertisements appeared to make the messaging more credible a finding supported by the rise of promissory discourse in advertisements, using scientific approaches to promote the reversal of ageing (Ellison 2014; Searing and Zeilig 2017). Most had a new-found knowledge of cosmetic ingredients, reflecting the wave of information coming from social media and appeared comfortable with the term's Hyaluronic acid, AFA's and Retinol.

“I watch a lot of YouTube videos on skincare now and know quite a bit about cosmetic ingredients. I know that hyaluronic acid is good for plumping up the skin and retinol is good for wrinkles and pigmentation. I follow a few dermatologists on YouTube and enjoy listening to them review products and ingredients” (Interviewee 5).

These findings point towards the necessity of information utility of product advertising, an important finding for marketers and collaborates research by Men and Pan (2012) and Muise and Desmarais (2010) where consumers reported needing more information on product efficacy and performance.

### ***5.1.3 Self-Esteem***

Marketers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that advertising messages do not result in harm to customers. In relation to anti-ageing messages, poor body image can lead to adverse behaviours such as emotional distress and low self-esteem (Cameron et al 2019; Grogan 2017) and may occur because of the stereotyping of female beauty in the media (Clarke 2018). This is a rapidly increasing problem in Ireland with epidemiological projections estimating that about 188,895 people will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives (BodyWhys 2019). Findings from this research indicate that some women are more susceptible to the negative effects of beauty ideologies in the media, admitting that the images made them feel more negative about their own appearance:

“Makes me feel inadequate and a bit ugly I suppose. The images associate beauty with youth and I’m not young any more. It makes me want to look like them and I am obviously failing” (Interviewee 5).

Interestingly, other participants were able to detach themselves and see the advertising “for what it is”, appearing to be the more confident women in the study. This variation of interpretations correlates with assertions that the understanding of advertisements is complex and depends on past experiences and backgrounds Hall (1973). Furthermore, the findings support previous research showing that not all women ‘buy into’ advertising notions and are reflective and critical of the content (Szmigin and Carrigan 2006; Turnaley et al 1999; Hogg and Fragou 2003). As the more self-assured women appear to be able to reject the images, this finding supports that of Meng and Pan (2012) who found that females with lower self-esteem are more vulnerable to the influences of cosmeceutical advertising.

Considering these findings, companies will have to rethink their strategy of how they portray female imagery in marketing messages, due to consumers calls for increased inclusivity and

diversity. Marketing practitioners need to comprehend how women will interpret marketing messages and the consequential acceptance or rejection of the product. This represents a challenge for marketers as the concept of beauty is continuously changing and requires ongoing market research to stay ahead of customer sentiments. Additionally, marketers have an ethical responsibility for how they negatively affect women with beauty ideology messaging and need to reflect and act on this during marketing campaigns.

## **5.2 - ANTI-AGEING BEAUTY WORK**

The majority of research concludes that older women use beauty interventions to conceal their age (Clarke and Griffin 2008; Slevic et al 2010; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Garnham 2013; Ong and Braun 2016; Jurdi 2018). However, the findings in this study are contrary and indicate that beauty work is not necessarily carried out for older women to look younger but because they want to look their best. This finding extends the research by Mair et al (2013) who propose that older women are generally happy with their appearance and just want to look well and not younger. Reasoning in this way, the participants associated looking good with staying healthy, eating well and being physically active and felt a moral obligation to do so. Women commented on having always maintained their appearance and set standards for themselves to 'look well'. Appearance was important to the women as it elicited respect and improved sociocultural capital, thus correlating findings by Mair et al (2013). Anti-ageing products were thus used as a means of enhancing appearance, rather than to reduce the physical signs of ageing, mirroring findings by Calasanti et al (2016)

The practical considerations of these findings for marketing practitioners provide an alternative understanding of why consumers purchase products denoted as anti-ageing. They may be thought of as contributing to health and maintaining an active lifestyle achieved through consumption and discipline (Calasanti et al 2016). These are concepts that can easily be incorporated into corporate advertising, with the prospect of increased brand preference.

### 5.3 - OLDER WOMEN AND AGEING

The women in the study voiced a sense of injustice in the way that older women are viewed more negatively in Irish society. Additionally, older men are more respected than older women, a theme is in line with Clarke and Griffin (2008) and Muise and Desmarais (2010) who found that older women are judged more harshly on their looks than older men. Critical literature has identified a recurring theme of ageing anxiety, particularly relevant to women who choose to mask their age (Slevec et al 2010). Surprisingly, all but one of the women did not have any anxiety in relation to their age and accepted that they were growing older. Interviewee four spoke about her changing body:

“I would obviously prefer to have the body that I had when I was twenty. But I’ve accepted that I am getting older. I don’t really mind, as long as I am fit and well, that’s the main thing and I’m doing everything I can to keep it that way”.

These findings are contrary to those by Townsend et al (2006) where women avoided identifying their age and even went as far as avoiding interaction with other older people. Additionally, the women in this study rejected the narrative of the stigma of ageing and appeared to be empowered about how they proactively managed the ageing process. The lived experiences in relation to ageing appeared to reflect the quality of life the participants experienced as they got older. It was important that their health was good, and they could live their life fully. This outlook may explain why the women reported not use anti-ageing regimes to look younger but simply to feel better and look well.

There were however times when it was difficult for the women to distinguish between appearance maintenance and anti-ageing work. All the women, despite assertions of refuting a desire to look younger, used a full range of anti-ageing products. On deeper reflection, there was an admission that beauty work was at times carried out to reduce the signs of ageing. An example of this was that all the women used hair dye to appear more youthful and more attractive looking suggesting this an important aspect of resisting ageist discourses concerning older women, a theme which was also uncovered by Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2010). In this way, the women conceded they were not immune to the social pressures on women to look younger as evidenced in several studies (Slevec et al 2010; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Garnham 2013).

## **5.4 - AGENCY AND BEAUTY WORK**

How women interpret their choices allows marketing practitioners to understand the motives behind selection of products and services. As identified in feminist literature, beauty practices were construed as freely chosen activities (Stuart and Donaghue, 2011; Gill, 2008). Applying make-up and using anti-ageing creams made the women feel good and they enjoyed looking well. The work they performed showed evidence of disciplinary power where individuals conform to societal norms and self-regulation, while still believing they are acting with agency.

Their beauty work is in line with neoliberal discourse which advocates for any activity which facilitates agency, choice, confidence and pleasing oneself (Gill 2016). However, there was evidence of a feminine false consciousness whereby the women said they wanted to look good for themselves but were unable to explain exactly why they could not go out without engaging in beauty work. On reflection, the women comprehended they were vulnerable to social pressures to look good, with interviewee two voicing:

“Now that I think about it, why do I not wear make-up in the house, but I put it on when I am going out? It is obviously for other people that I want to look good and not myself. I never thought about it that way before”.

The above comment is illustrative of critics of postfeminist discourse who suggest that by engaging in anti-ageing beauty work, women are conceding to ageist and sexist views, thus complicity supporting beauty ideology and agedness (Elias and Gill 2018; Gill 2016; McRobbie 2015).

## **5.5 - STUDY LIMITATIONS**

Although this research study allowed the research question to be explored in depth and generate rich insights, the sample size is small and cannot be generalised. Additionally, the homogeneity of the participant's socioeconomic backgrounds further reduces generalisability of findings to the wider public (Fournier 1998). Another limitation may be in relation to the truthful expression of personal beliefs about ageing, self-image and beauty practices. It also should be noted that the

participants were all from middle class backgrounds in Ireland, therefore the findings may be culturally and class specific.

## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 - CONCLUSION

Recent years has witnessed a rapidly growing obsession to look younger, resulting in newfound attention from marketers towards older female consumers. Despite the financial value of this market segment, several gaps were identified in the literature as to how media messages are interpreted by older women (Rosso 2017). This is important information for marketers as the interpretation of advertisements is multifaceted and varies with age (Millard 2009). Additionally, it was identified that further exploration is required on the nuances of women's feelings about their anti-ageing activities, specifically in a variety of cultural settings (Assawavichairoj and Taghian 2017; Madan et al 2018).

The current study seeks to establish how older women engage with anti-ageing beauty advertising and the meaning they attribute to their beauty work. Women were the focus of this study as pressure to look younger is more prevalent in the lives of women (Muisse and Desmarais 2010). By completing the four research objectives described in section 3.2, it is proposed that the study aim has been achieved. The author used a phenomenological approach, utilising in-depth interviews, with six women over fifty years of age in Ireland to understand the lived experiences of how older women engage with beauty advertising and their perception of the beauty work in which they engage.

The author argues from the outset that the beauty industry must be cognisant of how the images of 'ageless perfection' can negatively affect women. This is because media messages saturated with the ubiquitous portrayals of flawless female perfection, creates false needs for consumers and can result in severe pressures for women and lasting health consequences.

The photo elicitation questions allowed an insight into older women's perceptions of female imagery in advertisements. The research clearly shows that women react negatively to media portrayals of flawlessly beautiful young women in advertisements. The images were thought to be unrealistic, the beauty standards they depicted were unobtainable and often led to poor self-esteem. There was evidence of a cultural shift, in part spurred on by social media, where women

are seeking inclusivity and diversity of women portrayed in the media. The Dove Real Beauty campaign (2004) was positively received, where real women in various shapes and sizes were represented, as it made beauty standards more achievable for ordinary women such as themselves.

The implication of these findings is that companies should not alienate their customers. The marketing goal for the beauty industry is generally to increase positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The finding lends weight to the consideration of a new approach by management to review marketing tactics and where possible, contribute to the empowerment of females. Companies should challenge themselves to not necessarily take the obvious and perhaps somewhat easier route, by conforming to stereotypical representations of female imagery.

Two key findings were of a surprising nature to the researcher. Although the dominant reason cited in the literature for using anti-ageing products is to look younger and hide their age (Clarke and Griffin 20018; Stuart and Donaghue 2011; Ong and Braun 2016), the women in the study just wanted to look well and not younger. Appearance was important for the women and was linked to good health, being fit and active and taking care of oneself. Anti-ageing products were purchased to allow the women to look their best and not to mask their age. The significance of this finding is that consideration should be given to the use of imagery associated with health, fitness and well-being, for the promotion of beauty products for older females. This may resonate more with consumers and have the additional advantage of improving consumer health as opposed to focusing on images that detract from the wellbeing of females.

The second surprise finding was the new-found knowledge of cosmetic ingredients, reflecting the wave of information women are receiving from social media. Women were extremely familiar with cosmetic ingredients, scientific information and efficacy details were key selling points. It was evident that there was cynicism regarding the marketing promises made in the advertisements about reversing ageing, yet the women appeared more likely to buy into the product if there was science evidence of promissory discourse. Additionally, their knowledge of the activity of different cosmeceutical ingredients indicates that companies need to ensure that new product formulations incorporate ingredients positively reviewed in the media such as Hyaluronic acid and Retinol. This information then needs to be communicated to the customer in a clear and effective way.



The beauty industry needs to comprehend how women interpret their anti-ageing beauty activities to allow for a complete understanding of the motives behind the selection of products and services. Beauty practices were reported as freely chosen activities and applying make-up and using anti-ageing creams made the women feel good and they enjoyed looking well. Interestingly, it was uncovered that the work they performed showed evidence of disciplinary power where individuals conform to societal norms and self-regulation, while still believing they are acting with agency. It was only on reflection that beauty work was a way to enhance their standing in society and to increase their cultural capital. This highlights the pressure on many women to engage in beauty work to feel valuable in society. Although the women somewhat admired other women who rejected beauty norms, they would never consider doing the same. This finding is relevant for marketers as although some women say they do not prescribe to social pressures to look good or younger, they may still be in part responding to media beauty ideologies.

It should be noted that due to the small sample size and homogeneity of the participants, this study cannot be generalized to the wider public. The research tool used in the study was in-depth interviews, although it was time consuming to capture and analyse the data, the method yielded rich data for the study. Additionally, the study was carried out in Ireland and findings may be culturally specific. On reflection, the author was unaware at the outset of the complexity of the research phenomenon and on consideration, the overall objectives were too broad. Future research should focus on either anti-ageing beauty advertising or how women perceive their anti-ageing beauty activities to allow for enough depth of understanding and accurate reporting of the findings. Because of the broad objectives, the author found it challenging to comprehensively analyse the research findings due to the word limit of this dissertation.

To conclude, this research extends previous research on the media portrayals of beauty ideologies and subsequent motives for women choose anti-ageing products and provides insight into an additional cultural setting. It is envisaged that the findings in this study will assist beauty companies, marketers, consumers and consumer representatives. Companies need to relate consumers' purchasing motives to select the most effective marketing strategy. As the concept of beauty is constantly change it is imperative that marketers keep abreast of consumer sentiments. The author has proposed some suggestions for marketing practitioners to consider when

developing product campaigns, although these may pose some challenges for the industry. It is acknowledged that tactics that are effective for one strategy may not work for all marketing strategies. There may be a cost to implement these recommendations as more extensive market research will be required; however, it is envisaged that the eschewing financial rewards will offset the initial financial outlay.

## **6.2 – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The findings of the research points to additional related research questions which warrants further investigation. Firstly, further research should compare women's reactions to two separate advertising campaigns for the same product. The first approach could use the standard media approach depicting beautiful young women and the comparison campaign could have an inclusivity approach with 'real' women in all shapes and sizes. Exploring both methods of advertising would be beneficial to further substantiate which method is best received by the target consumer.

As the findings in this study are specific to a small group of Irish women further examination of other cultures would be appropriate to ensure that marketing communications include culturally appropriate content. Finally, a more in-depth look at how women perceive health promotion messages versus anti-ageing messaging in media advertising would be beneficial. In doing so, this would assist marketers in the utilisation of a new marketing strategy to improve consumer sentiment and drive sales.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEWING TEMPLATE/GUIDE

### SECTION 1

Research objective one seeks to understand how older women perceive the portrayal of idealised beauty dictated by commercial ideals.

*The participants are given four pictures of advertisements for anti-ageing products portrayal beautiful young models (See Appendix 2,3 and 4).*

- What do you think about these advertisements?
- How do these advertisements make you feel about yourself?
- Do these advertisements make you want to buy the product?
- What is your understanding of what the company is trying to do when they product advertisements like this?
- Do you compare yourself to the women in these advertisements? How does it make you feel?
- What types of advertisement do you think are most effective to encourage older women to buy beauty products?
- How do you think women are portrayed in these advertisements?
- Do you believe that advertisements for beauty products deliver what they say they will?

### SECTION 2

Research objectives two seeks to investigate which activities women consider to be anti-ageing beauty work, what activities they perform and why do they perform these.

- What do you understand by anti-ageing beauty work?
- What kind of beauty work do you carry out?

- Can you tell me about why you carry out these activities?
- What are your thoughts about dyeing hair or putting on make-up as anti-ageing work?
- What are your thoughts about cosmetic surgery to reduce the signs ageing?
- Is your appearance important to you?

### **SECTION 3**

Research objective three asks how older women view the ageing process and how they feel ageing is viewed by society.

- What does the word ‘ageing’ mean to you?
- How do you think older women are seen in society?
- How do you feel about getting older?
- Do you feel your body changes as you get older?
- Do you think older men are seen in the same way as women?
- Do you ever feel you need to conceal your age?

### **SECTION 4**

The fourth objective is to understand the meaning that women attribute to beauty work. In other words, do older women find anti-ageing work liberating or are they compelled to do so?

- What do you understand by anti-ageing beauty work?
- Do you feel that you need to hide your age in any way?
- If so, how important is this to you?
- Is beauty work something you enjoy doing? Tell me more.
- If so, what do you enjoy about it? If not, do you do it at all and if you do, why so?

### **SECTION 5**

The final objective investigates if women have scope to resist activities to mask ageing and what is the lived experience thereafter.

- Is it your choice to carry out beauty work? Tell me more.
- How easy would it be to resist engaging in beauty work?
- If women choose not to engage in beauty work or mask their age, how would they be viewed?
- Tell me about someone you know that is older and chooses not to mask their age? Were there any consequences?

PROMOTION

OLAY

“Join me in the battle against ageing!”



I feel very proud to be a part of the brand that has made millions of women feel younger. Olay total effects carries everything that you would need for your complete skin care regimen and puts to rest 7 signs of skin ageing such as open pores, fine lines and dark spots. From moisturizing to sun protection, Olay total effects has everything that will make your skin glow and give it a youthful appearance. So why not try Olay total effects and join me in the battle against ageing!



7

- Dark spots
- Dry skin
- Dull glow-less skin
- Lines & wrinkles
- Sagging skin
- Open pores
- Uneven skin tone

TRY  
Olay total effects

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for visibly younger,  
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Pro-Xylane, Hyaluronic Acid & SPF 15

Pro-Xylane™ A patented molecule that boosts cell activity in top skin layers

Hyaluronic Acid Inspired by dermatological science, it helps re-plump skin

SPF15 Protects against sun-induced premature ageing

RESULTS  
In 4 weeks, your skin is re-plumped, tightened\* and illuminated

BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT.

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