

# Aging: Rewriting the Narrative

By Leah Favela

I recently turned 40.

Now, don't get me wrong, though I am surprised at how quickly I got to this age, I don't think 40 is old. But I've noticed that lately I've been spending a little more time in front of the mirror and being more critical of what I see. I worry about the increasing number of fine lines around my eyes, the dimple on my chin that I swear is getting deeper and more pronounced, and the grey hairs that are steadily growing in.

And I find myself thinking, "How can I stop this? How can I get my 20-something skin back? How can I stop the greys? How can I look younger?!"

The answer is, "I can't."

And if I'm starting to worry about aging now, at the young age of 40, then the next several decades of my life are going to be a hell of a mental challenge.

I began to think a lot about how society views aging and how the majority of women are so concerned about aging. They worry

about looking old largely because of the way aging is regarded in western society, as nothing more than lost youth.

In our society, we're often led to believe that our value comes from our youthful and attractive appearance. We are constantly bombarded with negative messages and images about aging. Hollywood regularly casts 20- and 30-something-year-old women to play the love interests of men almost twice their age while aging starlets are busy injecting Botox and getting facelifts, hoping to stay relevant in an industry rarely interested in women past the age of 40.

Skincare lines sell "anti-aging" cosmetics and "anti-wrinkle" creams. They make impossible promises that have consumers spending money in a constant search for eternal or at least extended youth. All of these messages cleverly imply that people, especially women, diminish with age and lose their power and their worth.

The world's population is in the grip of unprecedented aging. A report titled [An Aging World: 2015](#), stated that 8.5 percent of people worldwide (617 million) were 65 or older. This percentage is projected to jump to nearly 17 percent (1.6 billion) by 2050. With people having fewer children per household, or often choosing not to have a family at all, the growth of the aging population is outpacing that of people younger than 40. There is some concern as to what effect the aging population will have on the economy, however, it is still widely agreed that

so far medicine's most significant contribution to the human race is longevity.

Yet, despite this rapid aging of the world's population, men and women over the age of 50 are still widely ignored or misrepresented in media and advertising. Society perpetuates the message that aging is not cool, that old people are frail, sick, boring, unattractive, and irrelevant.

But it's the older generations who are embracing life with ambition, purpose, and money in their pockets. And they're beginning to rebel against what society tells them; that once they no longer have the beauty of youth, they no longer have any beauty at all. They're rebelling against the idea that once they've retired from work, the door to a meaningful life becomes shut forever.

Aging is a gift denied to millions. Yet we fear and wage war against any physical evidence of this gift. The years we live make their mark upon our bodies in countless ways, and we often curse every wrinkle, every dark spot, and every gray hair.

But what's the alternative?

Brands and marketing, especially in the beauty industry, push the idea that the alternative to aging is "turning back the clock" or "reclaiming your youthful appearance". Yet this is impossible and only encourages us to strive to attain the unattainable.

In 1980 the term “anti-aging” was coined to sell more products to women over the age of 40 who were starting to feel vulnerable about their appearance and the onset of age. “Anti-aging” imparts the idea that you should be against an inevitable and natural process of life, that aging is the enemy in the mirror rather than something to be celebrated.

In September 2017, Allure Magazine publicly announced it would stop using the term “anti-aging”. In a [letter from the editor](#), Michelle Lee wrote, “No one is suggesting giving up retinol. But changing the way we think about aging starts with changing the way we talk about aging.” Lee goes on to write, “Repeat after me: Growing older is a wonderful thing because it means that we get a chance, every day, to live a full, happy life.”

The September issue featured Helen Mirren on the cover and praised the actress’s ability to be sexy at the age of 73, something which is quite brave in a world where we are so often told that our sexiness rapidly declines, or disappears altogether, after we pass the age of 50.

Allure Magazine was credited for beginning a palpable shift in our psyche about the way we view and talk about aging. And though I’m in no way downplaying the contribution Allure has had in changing what aging means, there are a number of brands and entrepreneurs who were working hard to rewrite the narrative of aging long before magazines began putting older models on their covers. [BOOM! By Cindy Joseph](#), founded in 2010, is the first cosmetic and skincare line to use the term

“pro-age” and focus on the beauty of women at every age. Cindy Joseph, who sadly died of cancer in 2018 at the age of 67, was a make-up artist for decades and then became a silver-haired model at the age of 49.

[BOOM!’s philosophy](#) states “We are committed to undoing the damaging myths we all carry about aging and encouraging each other to start living our truth-that as we get older, we get better.”

[Look Fabulous Forever](#) offers tutorials on choosing color palettes, applying make-up, and buying the right products for individual skin types to help older women feel comfortable and beautiful regardless of their age, while [Ayuna](#) replaced the term “anti-aging” with “well-aging” which they describe as “a modern and integrated approach to beauty which embraces a lifestyle that promotes aging gracefully.”

[Pause: Well-Aging](#) offers skincare products targeted to women experiencing peri-menopause and menopause, a time in women’s lives which can be quite difficult, yet is rarely spoken about. These products range from cooling mists that help relieve hot flashes to hydrating cleansers to combat dryness and breakouts that often accompany menopause. They also offer a community page where women can read, and share their stories, about the struggles and successes of menopause.

[Oldushka](#), based in Russia, and [Silverfox Management Company](#), based in New Zealand, are two of a rising number of

modeling agencies featuring maturing models. While Oldushka exclusively represents models over the age of 45, Silverfox Management Company uses models of any age and appearance who exude confidence and vitality.

[Ageist](#) is a media company and agency which “provides a new outlook on what people, young and old, should expect to achieve and experience in their life”. Among many other things, the company sends out a weekly newsletter profiling men and women over the age of 50 who are challenging ideas of aging by being adventurous, impactful, or entrepreneurial even in their “later years”.

Along with trying to change perceptions of aging, technology is developing to make aging a more comfortable, and even more independent, time in one’s life. [ElliQ](#) is a social companion robot and “sidekick for happy aging”. Rather than treating them as invalids, ElliQ is designed to interact with aging men and women respectfully and naturally. Unlike interactive devices such as Siri and Alexa, which are entirely reliant on the interaction of the user, ElliQ monitors and records behavior in order to know when to politely suggest going for a walk, listening to music, or playing a trivia game. ElliQ offers easy voice-activated calls and messaging, cognitive stimulation games, and daily routine reminders.

Like most new technology, ElliQ comes at a hefty price (\$1,499 US), and there’s a monthly fee that ranges between \$30 to \$50 depending on what extra features are added. However, the robot

companion's goal is to allow men and women to "age in place", letting them live independently in their home for as long as they're safely able. Considering the average senior can spend anywhere from [\\$3,500 to \\$10,500](#) a month to live in an assisted living facility, the previously mentioned prices and fees don't seem like a ridiculous amount to pay to postpone that move for as long as possible.

Our society has been filled with negative messaging about aging for so long that many of us believe crow's feet and grey hairs signify the beginnings of a downhill descent. But here's a bit of good news, according to the results of a study published in the journal, [PLOS One](#), people with crow's feet were found to have smiles which were believed to be more authentic and spontaneous. The study also showed that men and women with crow's feet were viewed as more trustworthy and more attractive.

In "[Going Gray](#)" by Anne Creamer, various studies were conducted with almost the same result across the board, people with gray hair were not perceived as less attractive than people without gray hair. In several of the studies, men repeatedly chose pictures of women with gray hair to be more attractive, stating they believed them to be more confident, comfortable, and authentic.

Slowly, but surely, the aging narrative is being rewritten. Forget about all those anti-aging products, the search for eternal youth, the message that your best self is a filtered photo that smooths

out every line. Life is a celebration and beauty comes from being confident and happy. Glow and sparkle, that “je ne sais quoi” that grabs attention and turn heads, is achievable at any age.

We don't need to start loving every new wrinkle or discover the secret to being perfectly okay with growing older. We don't have to immediately ditch the hair color boxes and become full-fledged silver sisters. But maybe we can stop being so worried about looking older and start focusing on *how* we grow older.

The aging chapters of our lives are being rewritten, and the last half of our book can be just as good, if not better, than the beginning.

How will your book read?