Beauty, Fashion and Ageism

*“After 40 nobody is young, but one can be irresistible at any age”*

*Coco Chanel*

The beauty industry has always had extreme standards for women and for many year’s age and beauty have been intrinsically linked. The older community have often felt ignored and irrelevant by the industry, simply because of their age (Bassett, 2017). Bad experiences when shopping and the bombardment of youth based advertisements, have left women feeling older. Race, gender and size have all been addressed, although change has been a slow process. Yet models mainly past the age of 20 are largely excluded from catwalks, adverts and discussions (Okwodu,2016). It is common for women in their 20’s to promote anti-aging creams or be spokeswomen for anti-aging campaigns. Often magazines will ignore older women in their editorials, occasionally older celebrities are featured, yet the fashion articles are centred around a young model (Okwodu, 2016).

Women over the age of 50 spend the most amount of money on products, however the industry continues to treats them as if they are non-existent. Many feel that once over the age of 40, adverts are no longer talking to them anymore; they are fundamentally invisible (Hirons,2017). This issue has gathered momentum in the past few years, with famous figures such as Helen Mirren discussing the issue in the public eye. In an interview with Allure in 2017, she spoke about the problems she had with L’oreal and the term ‘anti-aging’. *“This word – we are getting older, you just want to look and feel as great as you can on a daily basis”.*

Former fashion editor Alyson Walsh started a blog ‘That’s not my age’ 10 years ago, celebrating women over 40 and catering to the fact she didn’t relate or connect to anyone in the media*. “I wanted to celebrate the fact that older people are cool too and you don’t just disappear off the radar once you’re over 40*” she states in an article with the Guardian in 2017. Although age is still a huge problem in the industry, positive changes are happening. Model Lauren Hutton aged 73, was featured as a model for Calvin Klein’s lingerie campaign, along with walking down the catwalk for fashion house Bottega Venetta. While designer Simone Rocha along with casting director Piergiorgio Del Moro, invited older models to showcase her autumn collection (Kay,2017).

The over 65’s age group spend over £6 billion on clothing every year, yet it is only recently that this has been reflected in the advertising. Thanks to the power of social media, there has been a surge of online blogs and mature influencers, gives consumers the chance to find their own style icon; a real life one. Opposed to professional models in glossy magazines and editorials.

Debra Bourne creator of All walks beyond the catwalk, is an advocate for diversity in the fashion industry and has been reassured with the amount of older faces she has seen, believing the internet has been a force of good for this cause. *“It’s exciting to see a whole generation of older self-selected ambassadors who have become digitally literate, with a lot to say (Bourne,2017).* Although she is impressed with the industries growth, she would still like to see more adverts and marketing shift towards less appearance based promotions, particularly in the over 50’s (Kay,2017).

Helen Mirren, Tilda Swinton, Jessica Lange and Charlotte Rampling are women over 50 who have been featured in beauty campaigns over the past few years. Arguably, this suggests that attitudes are changing and we are becoming more open to the idea, that brands truly want to represent older women and connect to their generation. However, whether it is a trend or becoming the norm, only time will tell.

By Jessica Broadbent.