

The Anti Aging Trend: Capitalism, Cosmetics and Mirroring the Spectacle

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Judgments based on personal appearance are powerful forces in contemporary American culture. Multiple studies link personal appearance to positive reactions from others, including friendship preference, romantic attraction, promotion and success in business.¹ To experience this connection and enjoy social favor, many individuals look for ways to improve their appearance and reflect popular notions of beauty. The cosmetics and grooming, diet and fitness, and plastic surgery industries all successfully cater to the demand for aesthetic enhancement. Over the past several years an unprecedented desire to preserve youth has developed, building upon existing preoccupations with appearance in shaping identity in American culture. As with beauty, an entire industry now exists to perpetuate the anti-aging trend.

In some cultures aging is embraced, and the experience and wisdom of elders is held in high regard. In American culture, however, signs of aging are met with increasing resistance. Appearing old has become undesirable. The growing distaste for wrinkles is one manifestation of this. The skin's facial lines, spots, and loss of elasticity that develop with age are represented in the media as occurrences to be treated. Increased consumption of wrinkle-reducing cosmetic products, and higher rates of plastic surgery and non-surgical treatments (such as Botox) suggest that the public agrees. If aging is an inevitable, biological process to be experienced by all, why are visible signs of aging met with such resistance? Concerns with aging are certainly not new. Ponce De Leon's search for the Fountain of Youth dates back to the 1500s. Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory of the 1600s is said to have bathed in the blood of young virgins in attempts to retain her youth. What is unique to the current historical moment is an anti-aging trend supported

¹ See M.A. Collins and L.A. Zebrowitz, "The contributions of appearance to occupational outcomes in civilian and military settings," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25 (1995): 129-163, and D.M. Buss and D.P. Schmitt, "Sexual Strategies Theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating," *Psychological Review* 100 (1993): 204-232.

by modern technological advancements that make visual age defiance possible. This paper proposes three forces behind this anti-aging trend. The first force involves capitalism and the relationship between youth and vitality: young people have energy, and energy level reduces with age. In a capitalist society such as America, where an individual's worth is often measured by his/her capacity to produce, energy is highly valued. Not only do the young have more years ahead of them to work, but it is assumed that they are more productive during actual working hours. In producing themselves as workers, individuals become commodities, and a youthful appearance can increase their exchange value in the job market.

A second force behind the anti-aging trend is the representation of youth and beauty promulgated by image-oriented media. Through media, the masses reach an ideological consensus on what types of appearances are desirable. Most popular television and film content centers around attractive and youthful characters. In such presentations, actors and actresses are well dressed and *made up* for the audience. These performers have access to and make use of anti-aging treatments to look the way they do, yet these treatments are not directly addressed in this type of content. Likewise the majority of lifestyle magazine advertisements include youthful models. Even if advertisements do include the appearance of middle-aged models, photo editors will often digitally alter their appearances, for instance to diminish any noticeable wrinkles. The public's notion of what defines beauty is based on such images in the media. Yet these images do not reflect the truth about aging – namely that it is unavoidable, irreversible and physically manifest. The result is an aesthetic ideology characterized by untruth that results in unrealistic standards of appearance.

The third reason for the anti-aging trend roots in the current generational shift in America. American baby boomers are presently reaching middle age and beyond. Beginning with the post-World War II rise in consumption, boomers have been surrounded by commodities and advertising throughout their lives. In consequence, they are receptive to the calls of mass messaging. Boomers are still in the job market, many are still in or are back in the dating pool, and they have the money to spend on their wants. Recent advancements in technology provide an influx of new products and procedures to meet these demands. When members of this demographic are convinced that looking younger will provide them an edge at the office or interpersonally, they have the money and options to act on this desire and, thus strengthen the anti-aging market.

Capitalism's valorization of vitality, the media's representation of youth, and the influence of consumer culture on baby boomers mold an American environment that is ultimately inductive to anti-aging sentiments. Capitalism's need for youth influences a spectacle ripe with youthful images. In response, participants in mass culture embrace the spectacle's values and consume accordingly. The following paper investigates these influences in further detail. It ultimately suggests that as cosmetic technologies improve and access to such technologies widen, the anti-aging trend will only grow stronger.

THE WORKER AS A COMMODITY

When describing the nature of capitalism Marx wrote, "There is nothing which can escape, by its own elevated nature or self-justifying characteristics, from this cycle of social production and exchange."² The individual is no exception. In the job market, hiring corporations are consumers with employment demands to be met and aspiring

² Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed and trans. by David McLellan (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 94.

workers are products that enter ‘free’ competition to meet this demand. Individuals can develop themselves in any way they choose, but most realize the cultural value of molding their identity as a marketable member of the workforce. After all, there is social prestige attached to promotion and success in the workforce. Marketability also helps an individual to obtain a higher salary. One’s salary level is perhaps the most concrete exchange value attached to the *production of one’s self as a worker*.³

It may seem that individuals are not paid for the production of themselves as workers, but that they are rather paid based *solely* on measurable output for their employers. Yet, these two types of production – of the self qua worker and of measurable output - are inextricably linked. Since the exchange value of an employee is established before a worker begins to work, it is in an individual’s best interest to communicate their production potential to the greatest extent. This is true with cases of promotion as well. Though a worker may have demonstrated productivity at a lower level, it is actually anticipated performance that warrants a higher rank and salary. Therefore, presenting the self as a productive worker is equally as significant as traditionally recognized forms of labor.

Although both of these forms of labor are important for the worker to receive wages, neither act of production seems to be in the true interest of the individual. The traits developed in order to become a “productive worker” help that individual to be competitive in the job market specifically. This competition ultimately does not benefit the worker, but the production process. Marx notes this disparity:

³ In *The Body and Society*, Bryan Turner expands upon Marx’s notion that an individual becomes an active agent, self-conscious in the world by transforming an object of nature into the subject of his needs, Turner suggests that “the body is both a means of labour *and* an object of labour; We realize ourselves through labour on our bodies and this labour is a social practice,” (in Bryan Turner, *The Body & Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). As such, in an increasingly information-based economy such as America’s, where one’s work does not necessarily produce a tangible entity, a transformation of (or work on) one’s appearance becomes a commensurate activity.

Given that everyone works for himself but that his product is not created for himself, he must of course exchange it not only in order to obtain a share in general productive capacity, but in order to transform his own production into a means of subsistence for himself ... The individuals are subordinated to social production, which exists externally to them, as a sort of fate.⁴

Enhancing one's exchange value as a worker initially seems desirable for the individual, but through the social production process the individual is objectified as a commodity. Concurrently, as the individual produces him/herself as a worker-commodity, he/she is alienated from the object of his/her labor: namely, him/herself. Still, if pursuing the goal to increase exchange value, the individual works on him/herself to enhance his/her product as worker. Obtaining skills and experience relevant to a vocation is one way to do this; molding one's appearance is another.

Perceptions of potential productivity are often based on appearances. For example, if one attends an interview well-groomed, an employer may perceive that labor toward appearance will translate to attentive and diligent vocational labor from the potential employee. In a similar sense, if choosing between an experienced 50-something candidate and a slightly less experienced candidate visibly ten years junior, it may follow that the more youthful worker will be hired by the employer. Though both of these contenders would likely suffice, the production capacity of the younger candidate is assumed to be greater in terms of vitality and future labor hours. In cases where older workers are preferred in value of their experience, it is probable that they will nevertheless be expected to work with the vigor of youth. In manual and industrial labor this older worker must physically deliver while in information industries or white-collar jobs. Long hours and 'real time' demands mandate an able body and an even sharper mind.

⁴ Marx, 67-68.

Although many attributes can be added and altered to increase the exchange value of a worker, age is not one of them. The *appearance* of age, however, can be altered to affect one's market value. An exhibition of energetic personality is one method of appearing young. The actual reduction in the visible signs of aging is another, more recent approach. Signs of aging do not naturally concern an individual; such concerns are socially constructed. As a member of a capitalist society where money is a necessity, one must submit to popular standards to remain competitive. A younger appearance may not enhance one's self for the sake of self, but it can enable subsistence in society.

As the individual fights to retain his/her youth in order to succeed within the confines of capitalism, a respect for the idea of nature is lost. According to Marx, in this process:

Nature becomes for the first time simply an object for mankind, purely a matter of utility; it ceases to be recognized as a power in its own right; and the theoretical knowledge of its independent laws appears only as a stratagem designed to subdue it to human requirements, whether as the object of consumption or the means of production.⁵

On a grand scale, capitalism seeks to surpass any boundaries that may impede its growth, whether they are geographic, religious or traditional. On an individual level, particularly in the case of the anti-aging trend, capitalism pushes for the resistance of human-natured obstacles that may impede its growth. The exploitation intrinsic to capitalism draws the most from workers' time in the production cycle and welcomes pressures felt by workers to perform with youthful vitality. Workers are motivated to resist the signs of the biological aging process because they believe that displaying the ability to work at youthful production levels is in their best interests. In this case, a youthful appearance *signifies* high productivity.

⁵ Marx, 94.

Capitalism essentially positions aging as a problem to be solved through its own devices, i.e. consumption. As with the creation of material products, external resources are called upon during the individual's production of self as worker and these resources provide their own contributions to the perseverance of capitalism. The growing group of workers concerned with losing advantage to younger competitors can rely on an anti-aging industry for solutions. Technological developments have generated various anti-aging skincare products, plastic surgery advancements, and non-surgical cosmetic treatments. The increasing demand for these products and treatments serves as evidence that the anti-aging trend is quite real. In the last decade, popular cosmetics brands have developed product lines devoted entirely to anti-aging. Suggestive product names such as Anti-Gravity Firming Lift Crème, Line Chaser, Absolute Anti-Age Spot Serum, Extra-Firming Age Control, and Stop Signs all use language suggesting that signs of aging need to be controlled, stopped, chased down and worked against.⁶

More obtrusive, lasting and expensive measures of age resistance such as plastic surgery and non-surgical anti-aging cosmetic procedures are also expanding their reach. According to The American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (ASAPS), nearly 6.9 million surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures were performed in 2002, an increase of 23 percent since 1997. Botox, a treatment that specifically targets age lines, ranked first among all surgical and non-surgical procedures in 2002, up approximately 2400 percent from 1997.⁷ Based on 2001 statistics, non-surgical procedures with age-defying benefits captured the top four procedures among all, with Botox ranking first,

⁶ See Clinique, Estee Lauder, Origins and Clarins anti-aging products online at www.gloss.com. For specific product description example see Clinique Stop Signs and Clinique Anti-Gravity Firming Lift Crème:

<http://www.gloss.com/family/index.jsp?categoryId=1116318&cp=1116296&page=2&pageBucket=0>.

⁷American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) [online] [cited 11 December 2003], from www.surgery.org.

followed by chemical peel, collagen injection and microdermabrasion. Blepharoplasty, or cosmetic eyelid surgery, which provides the eyes with a younger, more alert appearance, was the top ranked facial surgery reported.⁸

The same report shows that concerns with aging are not exclusive to one gender. Though women made up approximately 88 percent of cosmetic procedures in 2001, an increase of 311 percent from 1997 to 2001, the remaining 12 percent were undergone by men, an increase of approximately 256 percent from 1997 to 2001.⁹ These figures illustrate an increased cultural demand for anti-aging treatments among both genders. Though men are more likely than women to say they want facial cosmetic procedures for work-related reasons, women cite this influence as well.¹⁰ One Botox enthusiast, a pharmaceutical sales representative, admits that she uses the wrinkle-reducing treatment to look her best for her job. “That’s corporate America for you,” she says. “I have a lot of energy and I just want to look good.”¹¹ It seems that this worker, like many, makes a value judgment about looking youthful for a job. In this view, looking young equals looking good and this augments one’s value in corporate America. The individual’s perceived need to appear youthful is strongly rooted in capitalism. The prevalence of anti-aging sentiments in American culture is a clear reflection of the subordination of the individual to capitalism.

⁸ASAPS, www.surgery.org, 2003.

⁹ASAPS, www.surgery.org, 2003.

¹⁰ American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery 2002 Membership Survey: Trends in Facial Plastic Surgery [online], April 2003, [cited 11 December 2003], from www.facemd.org.

¹¹ Carol Lewis, “Botox Cosmetic: A Look at Looking Good,” *FDA Consumer Magazine* [online], July-August 2002, [cited 11 December, 2003], from www.fda.gov.

THE SPECTACLE OF YOUTH

Work is not the only social space where appearances of youth are highly valued. Interpersonal relations are also affected by appearances; beauty is proven to draw positive reactions from others. If a youthful appearance is part of the cultural definition of beauty then the anti-aging movement is based, in part, on a belief that retaining one's youth enables the continued attraction of others. In romantic and friendly endeavors, attractive people enjoy greater social advantage.

As with all ideologies, shared standards of beauty are communicated through the popular media. Images in mass media expressly demonstrate, for all, what beauty looks like. Guy Debord defines the social relationship between people that is mediated by images as *the spectacle*.¹² He states:

In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life.¹³

If the spectacle is the prevailing model of social life, as Debord suggests, then the values communicated in the spectacle can be considered values of society. Advertising and entertainment images in the spectacle clearly value youth and advance a youthful appearance as part of the definition of beauty.

An example of the spectacle's use of youth and beauty is visible in its misrepresentation and distortion of female aging. It does not take intense analysis to notice that young models and actresses outnumber middle-aged and older models and actresses in popular media. Television and film content is filled with women in their twenties and thirties blessed with beauty, full social lives and romantic opportunities.¹⁴

¹² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995) 12.

¹³ Debord, 13.

¹⁴ In their 1997 analysis of the 100 top-grossing movies of the 1940s through the 1980s, titled "the Aging Woman in Popular Film: Unwanted, Unattractive, Unfriendly, and Unintelligent," Bazzini, McIntosh,

Few actresses find romantic lead roles available to them once they pass a culturally proscribed age boundary.¹⁵ Representations in lifestyle and beauty advertisements also lead one to believe that women over the age of forty have less of a social and romantic life and are not a part of the definition of beauty.¹⁶ Though alternative images emerge that depict older women's lives as more exciting than traditional images, these are less frequent and, some would argue, equally unrealistic. It is no surprise that women believe that they must resist and reduce the signs of aging in order to continue to be considered attractive.

Debord specifically identifies such presentations of aging, or lack thereof, to the individual in the spectacle:

Immobilized at the distorted center of the movement of its world, the consciousness of the spectator can have no sense of an individual life moving toward self-realization, or toward death ... Elsewhere, under advertising's bombardments it is simply forbidden to get old. Anybody and everybody is encouraged to economize on an alleged "capital of youth."¹⁷

The anti-aging cosmetic product names mentioned earlier in this paper (Stop Signs, Anti-Gravity, etc.) are prime examples of advertising's forbiddance of aging. The spectacle provides ways of addressing dissatisfactions with aging and encourages the denial of its reality. Debord, drawing from Marx, describes how the production process exploits dissatisfaction: "Dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of

Smith and Harris found older individuals of both genders to be portrayed as "less friendly, having less romantic activity, and enjoying fewer positive outcomes than younger characters at a movie's conclusion. As compared to men, older females were perceived "as less friendly, less intelligent, less good, possessing less wealth, and being less attractive."

¹⁵ The 2002 documentary titled *Searching for Debra Winger*, directed by actress Rosanna Arquette, addresses the experiences of actresses in Hollywood who have reached "that certain age." In the film, Arquette interviews several of her colleagues, among them Whoopi Goldberg, Diane Lane, Teri Garr, Holly Hunter, Vanessa Redgrave, Charlotte Rampling, Meg Ryan, and Sharon Stone, who tell of their own personal experiences with insensitive producers and casting directors who tend to think of over-40 (and sometimes over-30) actresses as being suitable only for mother, "other woman," and "hero's girlfriend" roles – if they cast these actresses at all.

¹⁶ In their book titled *Women and gender, A feminist psychology*, Unger and Crawford advance that depictions of women over 40 are relatively absent from advertising that uses physically attractive people to build product appeal.

¹⁷ Debord, 115.

affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material.”¹⁸ Dissatisfaction expands the economy and it expands the spectacle. As a result of growing dissatisfactions with aging, more messages to reduce the signs of aging are presented in the spectacle, adding new imagery for consumption. This imagery captivates, as it simultaneously presents the retention of youth as attainable and realistic for everyday people.

In the past, plastic surgery and other appearance-altering methods were veiled in secrecy and available only to the privileged. Youthful appearances in middle age and beyond were commonly attributed to good genetics and luck.¹⁹ With the expansion of the spectacle to include images of plastic surgery, the cultural climate has changed. Plastic surgery and aesthetic enhancement are now hot topics in contemporary media and more acceptably considered by the public for use by both men and women. Many celebrities openly discuss procedures they’ve undergone, while other celebrity procedures are often “outed” by the media. Cher, Pamela Anderson, Sharon Osbourne, Rosanne Barr and Kathy Griffin are just a few celebrities who speak candidly about having undergone aesthetic enhancement procedures. In a 2002 *Time* magazine article, both Carrie Fisher and Danny Bonaduce freely admit to using Botox.²⁰ At the same time, other celebrities such as Michael Jackson, Meg Ryan, Michelle Pfeiffer and Arnold Schwarzenegger have refuted accusations of undergoing certain surgical and non-surgical anti-aging cosmetic procedures. Recurring tabloid headlines tell of plastic surgery scandals and capitalize on the “did they or didn’t they” curiosities of the public. Through celebrity admissions and exposures in the spectacle, ordinary people are made aware that certain levels of youth

¹⁸ Debord, 38.

¹⁹ For example, a woman’s great skin is often attributed to her mother having had the same. Similarly, Asian women’s clear skin has been attributed to the porcelain-natured skin of their racial heritage.

²⁰ Richard Corliss, “Smile – You’re on Botox!” *Time*, 18 February 2002, 59.

and beauty, if not biologically possessed, can be bought. Representations of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic enhancements are also found in television and film content. Entire television series exist around the subject of plastic surgery, including ABC's *Extreme Makeover* and FX's *Nip/Tuck*. FOX, Vh1, E! and MTV also air programming dedicated to the subject. References to Botox have been made on *Saturday Night Live*, *Friends* and in the recent film *Daddy Day Care*.

Representations in fictional content tend to satirize and stereotype cosmetic procedure recipients. Reality-based programs promote cosmetic procedures to viewers and attempt to provide glimpses of 'real people,' like them, undergoing plastic surgery. Yet these 'realistic' representations reduce the serious and sometimes complicated nature of such procedures by offering only a partial view of the process. Both reality TV and traditional fictionalized television and film content desensitize viewers to surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures and de-stigmatize their consumption. When an individual supports his/her decision to undergo a cosmetic procedure by saying, "... and you know, all the movie stars are doing it,"²¹ an increase in acceptance is directly linked to media representation. Media content advances cosmetic procedures as viable options for the masses to alter their appearances, reduce signs of aging, and more closely mirror the spectacle.²²

²¹ K. Schneider, "Botox: 'Naturally' Wrinkle-Free," American Council on Science and Health [online], 23 April 2003, [cited on 15 December 2003], from www.healthfactsandfears.com.

²² In his psychoanalytical work, Jacques Lacan conceptualizes the "mirror stage" in which an individual's ideal self is formed precisely through seeing one's own reflection in a mirror at a young age. Lacan's notions of the imaginary, recognition/misrecognition and identity certainly deserve further exploration in relation to the appeal of youth and beauty imagery in the spectacle.

BABY BOOMERS - FEAR OF AGING

Historically, people who have reached or passed middle age have lived with wrinkles and without anti-aging procedures. At present, many people in these age groups are not satisfied with accepting the biological progression of their appearance. Although some believe facial wrinkles create character, many want these reminders of aging erased. Even the word “wrinkles” is used less frequently in present American discourse and is often replaced with terms like “lines” or “creases.” These terms are less negatively associated with growing old. Right now, the fear of growing old seems to resonate most strongly with baby boomers and within this group, anti-aging procedures are most frequently administered. Baby boomers are commonly defined as people in the 39 to 57 year-old age range. According to the 2002 U.S. Census this group represents 27.5 percent of the population, at approximately 77 million people.²³ A demographic profile prepared by MetLife’s Mature Market Institute reports the estimated annual spending power of baby boomers is 2.1 trillion dollars, and their annual average income is \$56,000- \$59,000 per year. If boomers are persuaded that they need to look younger, they are able to spend money on that need.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that baby boomers’ 14.6 percent divorce rate is higher than prior generations.²⁴ Also, the percentage of boomers who have never married is significantly higher than prior generations.²⁵ A greater number of baby boomers are dating in mid-life than in prior generations, and continue to be concerned with appearances and romantic attraction. As the so-called “TV generation,” boomers look to

²³ Factfinder, Age groups and sex: 2000. US Census Bureau [online report] [cited on 15 December 2003], from www.census.gov.

²⁴ 14.2% of Boomers are divorced, compared to 13.9% of people age 55-64, and 6.5% of people age 65 and older according to US Census Bureau, 2000, “Demographic Profile, American Baby Boomers,” [online report] [cited on 15 December 2003], from www.metlife.com.

²⁵ 12.6% of boomers never married, 5.2% of those 55-64 never married, 3.9 of those 65 and older never married according to US Census Bureau, 2000, from “Demographic Profile, American Baby Boomers,” 2003.

the spectacle for images of beauty to replicate. As noted, these images often do not reflect the true beauty of people this age. In March 2002, 77 percent of men and 63 percent of women aged 55 to 59 were in the civilian labor force. Among people aged 60 to 64, these portions averaged near 50 percent.²⁶ If these trends continue, many boomers can expect to be working into their 60s. They mix and compete with workers of all ages, many younger than themselves. The actual or perceived pressure to be as energetic and youthful as their coworkers provides boomers with more reason to resist the signs of aging.

An Associated Press article titled “Boomers Seek Fountain of Youth” addresses some of these concerns. It states, “As many boomers are surrounded by younger colleagues or find themselves dating again, they want every part of their bodies to project an image of vitality.”²⁷ 50-year-old Beverly Ross supports this theory when she cites two incentives for looking her best – a job that requires her to interface with people in meetings, and the fact that she’s single and dating.²⁸ The same article quotes Dr. Herbert Weiss, an assistant professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Medicine as saying, “I think boomers have a dread of aging. They just want to be young forever.”²⁹ Kevin Poitras, M.D. says that his “patients aren’t satisfied with growing old gracefully. They say ‘I don’t feel old. I don’t think old. Why should I look old?’”³⁰ Patty Reimerdes, a divorced mother of two and user of Botox says she “doesn’t mind being 50. ‘I just don’t want to *look* 50.”³¹ In a testimonial found on BotoxCosmetic.com, a woman named Ricki states that she began Botox injections because “my daughter had said to me

²⁶ According to US Census Bureau, 2000, from “Demographic Profile, American Baby Boomers,” 2003.

²⁷ “Boomers seek fountain of youth,” Associated Press [online], 13 July, 2003 [cited on 15 December 2003], from www.CBSnews.com.

²⁸ “Boomers seek fountain of youth,” 2003.

²⁹ “Boomers seek fountain of youth,” 2003.

³⁰ Tamar Nordenberg, “Another Shot at Looking Young,” Discovery Health [online] [cited 11 December 2003], from www.Discoveryhealth.com.

³¹ Corliss, 2002.

that I was aging.”³² She says that when she looks in the mirror now (after her wrinkles have been reduced with Botox), she likes what she sees. Because a daughter likely knows a mother’s age, it is inferred that what Ricki perceived as being undesirable were the visible signs of her age.

Based on these statements, looking better seems to equate with looking younger, and there is a readily apparent fear of aging. Many American adults seem to be dissatisfied with their natural appearance. In an online poll, *Popular Demographics* asked adults to rank their level of happiness with their personal appearance, and on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being least happy), nearly half of the 2510 respondents (47 percent) gave themselves a score of 5 or lower. The poll found that:

87 percent of adults say that if they could change any part of their body for cosmetic reasons, they would; half would change multiple body parts ... Fewer than 1 in 7 Americans (18 percent of men and 10 percent of women) are happy enough with their bodies that they wouldn’t change a thing.³³

Statistics suggest that adults, particularly boomers, are dissatisfied and spending their income to make age-defying, cosmetic alterations in unprecedented numbers. When individuals make these changes, they continue to be subordinated by the dual forces of capitalism and the spectacle, working, of course, in tandem.

CONCLUSION

Aging is a fact of life, one that can be denied but not changed. Altering one’s appearance may help one hold on to youth a little longer, but it cannot stop biological progression. With Americans living longer lives, working for more years and dating at later stages of life than in the past, a perceived need to preserve the appearance of youth

³² Testimonials, Botox Cosmetic [online] [cited 11 December 2003], from www.botoxcosmetic.com.

³³ John Fetio, “Image is Everything,” *American Demographics*, March 2003, 10-11.

is understandable. Since youthfulness provides an edge in the capitalist workplace and because images of youth and beauty are inescapable, Americans' dependence on appearance is nearly inevitable.

Dependence on a youthful appearance when such an appearance is waning creates conflict within the individual and dissatisfaction results. This dissatisfaction leads to consumption and furthers interests external to the individual. Baby boomers are the first American generation to reach a relevant point in their lives when anti-aging messages and resisting products and services are ubiquitous but they will not be the last. As advancements in technology produce new options for age resistance, including less-intrusive surgical procedures and non-surgical products and treatments, a continued increase in such consumption is likely.

The anti-aging trend is a result of the growth of capitalism and the expansion of the spectacle. It serves these interests only. Images in the media foster an aesthetic ideology of the masses that drives the consumption of anti-aging products and services. While individuals are capable of resisting anti-aging messages and forming alternative viewpoints, this action is overwhelmingly discouraged. The American cultural environment unapologetically encourages submission to the anti-aging trend.

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