

Studying the Art of Growing Old with Metchnikoff, Hauser, Lowman, and Thompson:
Advice about Aging, 1900-1960

by

Ann Walton

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Carleton University
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Ann Walton

Abstract

This work explores shifting attitudes about aging in the first half of the twentieth century by tracing the rise of four figures, and by examining discussions that surrounded their work on aging in the press. Bacteriologist Élie Metchnikoff, food scientist Gayelord Hauser, and advice columnists Josephine Lowman and Elizabeth Thompson were seen as authorities on their subjects and wrote during a period of significant change: increased longevity, the advent of retirement, and growing scientific interest in aging produced a plethora of press discussion that plunged into the “problem” of old age. Their ‘prescriptions’ captivated attention in both Canada and the United States, illustrating the growing search for management and improvement that dominated discussions of aging. It is argued that while aging became the specialization of experts who studied it objectively, popular messages relayed that there was an “art” to growing old, its success determined by preparation, attitude, and personal will.

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INTRODUCTION

“A part of the problem is philosophical. In this country we have not developed the art of growing old.”

-“Problems of the Aged,” *The Globe and Mail* (1962)

In one short sentence, the quote above highlights two themes that permeated press coverage on old age for much of the early to mid-twentieth century in Canada. Those who addressed the subject of aging did so to discuss the growing problem it posed, mostly for statesmen and scientists. But part of the problem was indeed philosophical. Coverage entertained the subjective “art” of growing old, how to approach it, what it might look like, and what its qualities and regimens should be. From news articles on the growing science of aging, to advice columns on *how* to grow old, both the study of aging and the meaning of aging often intersected and overlapped.

This work explores shifting attitudes and perceptions about aging in the first half of the twentieth century by tracing the rise of four figures who wrote on old age, and by examining discussions that surrounded their work in the press. It begins by exploring bacteriologist Élie Metchnikoff (1845-1916), whose research examining the relationship between nutrition and longevity inspired a flurry of press reaction and world-wide consumption of sour milk. It assesses the rise of popular “food scientist” Gayelord Hauser (1895-1984), whose self-help books based on science offered readers the “five wonder foods” to looking younger and living longer. It explores the advice of two women columnists who wrote on aging between the 1930s and early 60s. Josephine Lowman (1899-1983) offered health advice on remaining youthful in her column *Why Grow Old?* while “Elizabeth Thompson,” the fictitious name behind the column, “Mrs. Thompson

Advises,” engaged in lively dialogue with her ‘old timers’ about their changing roles, and how best to plan for the future.

With an interest in how aging was discussed, how ‘brands’ of advice varied, and what topics were given emphasis and *where*, this study draws from a variety of newspapers, including *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*. From front page news stories on scientific discoveries, to advice on aging in the women’s section, newspapers provide insight into how aging was *treated*, who the authorities were assumed to be, and what aging persons themselves brought to the growing dialogue of problem-solving. This study also draws from Metchnikoff’s *Nature of Man* (1903) and *The Prolongation of Life* (1907), as well as Gayelord Hauser’s *Look Younger, Live Longer* (1950). As we shall see, these works reflect the growing interdisciplinary interest in aging that grew throughout the period. Their ‘prescriptions’ captivated attention in both Canada and the United States, and help to illustrate a growing search for management and improvement that dominated discussions of aging. It is argued that while aging became the specialization of experts who studied it objectively, popular messages relayed that there was an “art” to growing old, its success determined by preparation, attitude, and personal will.

Following cultural historian Thomas R. Cole, this study employs the terms *old age* and *aging* broadly. It does not reflect a specific age ‘group’ or focus on chronological age, but instead refers very broadly to the second half of life. Like Cole, I see the stages of life as dangerously narrow categories of understanding.¹ Instead, this study delves into

¹ Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xviii.

the process and experiences of aging. Borrowing from sociologists, it explores what has motivated people to age as they do.²

But why study these figures in particular? The decision to explore Metchnikoff, Hauser, Lowman, and Thompson is not an arbitrary one. All were seen as authorities on their subjects. All, except Lowman, encouraged a great deal of public discussion or reaction. Moreover, they wrote during a period of significant change. The growth of an aging population, increasing life expectancy, changes to older workers, the advent of retirement, and growing scientific interest in aging produced a plethora of press discussion that plunged into the “problem” of old age. For these reasons, assessing their work and its reaction helps to chart changing perceptions about aging over time, as well as the role of experts in constructing social norms and purposes related to aging. In Thompson’s column, her ‘old timers’ were eager to join the conversation, and their voices are integral here, too. Although important institutional turning points (such as the emergence of the Old Age Pension Program) are explored here, they are treated to assess how and in what ways the *surrounding* discussion and advice literature contributed to an evolving albeit unofficial education on how to grow old. Scholars like Lisa Dillon point to an important challenge in doing so: assessing qualitative documents produced by writers, philosophers, and artists paints the historian into a corner; consulting images of old age produced mostly by members of the literate elite, for instance, limits a study’s ability to speak to diversity in old age.³ While partly true, I take historian Georges Minois’ position on sources: “That they reflect the ideals of a certain social category only

² Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25.

³ Lisa Dillon, *The Shady Side of Fifty: Age and Old Age in Late Victorian Canada and the United States* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 14. A similar point was raised by Simone de Beauvoir. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1972), 88.

makes them more valuable,” he writes, “so long as one never forgets to allow for their environment and origin.”⁴ The figures explored here, for instance, produced a range of responses across class and gender. The two-dimensional quality of advice columns in particular, apart from being highly gendered spaces, provides additional insight into the diverse and subjective quality of both the study of aging and aging advice. Although this study focuses on aging through the work of four writers of mid to upper-class origins, why and how their messages found resonance is given emphasis.

An interest in images of old age initially sparked interest in this project. In particular, it grew from an interest in historicizing the impact of what Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth describe as the “mask of aging:” the “strategy of concealing or masking inner feelings, motives, attitudes or beliefs,”⁵ or, when “the outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self.”⁶ In their essay “The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course,” their sociological investigation explores the “disguise” of age. In one example, author J. B. Priestley describes the process first-hand: “It is as though, walking down Shaftesbury Avenue as a fairly young man, I was suddenly kidnapped, rushed into a theatre and made to don the grey hair, the wrinkles and the other attributes of age, then wheeled on stage. Behind the appearance of age I am the same person, with the same thoughts, as when I was younger.”⁷

⁴ Georges Minois, *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 48.

⁵ Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth, “The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course,” *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 378.

⁶ Mike Featherstone, “Post-bodies, Aging and Virtual Reality,” in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone & Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 227.

⁷ Featherstone and Hepworth, “The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course,” 379.

In many ways, the following pages reflect on the *impact* of this disguise by assessing what circumstances drew aging persons to the periphery of society. An anecdote illustrating this impact is found in Gabrielle Roy's *The Road Past Altamont* (1966), where the young protagonist describes her grandmother as "a poor old oak, isolated from the others, alone on a little hill."⁸ But grandmother had not always been "alone, on a little hill." Her old age was linked undeniably with her isolation. Why did isolation in old age occur? Was it unique to the twentieth century? Like Roy's fiction, advice literature of the early to mid-century describes aging persons in particular settings, gradually highlighting their transition away from community (and usefulness) to spaces of social isolation. The aging widow "Mary," discussed in Chapter 3, for instance, describes feeling torn from her regular life and habits through no fault of her own, based on external perceptions related to her age. By the 1960s, aging women workers in particular feared their employers would think they were getting "too old for the job." As a result, "Mary" told Mrs. Thompson she did everything to present a "good appearance" in order to distance herself from being *thought of* as old.⁹ Indeed, once individuals were considered old by external actors, there was no turning back to their old lives and roles. Historicizing perceptions of old age and its accompanying qualities, then, is an integral component of this study. As psychologist G. Stanley Hall wrote in *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (1922), "when we are once thought of as old, whether because of mental or physical signs or by withdrawal from our wonted sphere of activities, we enter a class

⁸ Gabrielle Roy, *The Road Past Altamont*, trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1966), 28.

⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Working Widow Tired of Struggle," *The Globe and Mail*, May 4, 1962, 11.

more or less apart and by ourselves.”¹⁰ As “Mary” and Hall attest, the theme of the *social exit* in old age crosses, gender, class, and professional discipline, and permeates much of the discussion on aging in the first half of the twentieth century, both explicitly and implicitly.

Aging bodies *and* the people inside them are both of interest here. Exploring the mask of aging requires historicizing both a physical process and individual experience. To that end, the questions underlying this study arise from a cultural position: What does growing old mean? How does one relate to it? As cultural historian Thomas R. Cole explains in *The Journey of Life* (1992) when he borrowed the questions above from T. S. Eliot, there are two different kinds of problems in life: the first kind begs the question, *What are we going to do about it?* The second asks, *What does it mean?* Aging in the twentieth century was often approached with the first question; it was treated like a puzzle requiring scientific management, technical backing, and pragmatic solutions.¹¹ Cole’s cultural history of aging in America describes aging’s *de*-meaning over time, exploring how the *mystery* of aging, including philosophical and religious sources of meaning were gradually surpassed by the *puzzle* of aging. Cole draws from poetry, sermons, essays, and iconography to explore the quickening pace of life over time: westward migration, the growth of cities and manufacturing, and the creation of transportation, communication, and financial networks revealed liberal capitalism’s economic power.¹² As communal forms of life waned, rapid material progress, in Cole’s

¹⁰ G. Stanley Hall, *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), ix.

¹¹ Cole, *The Journey of Life*, xxiii.

¹² For an example, see Cole’s discussion of Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” the story of a man who fell asleep prior to the American Revolution and awoke twenty years later to find an alien world. According to Cole, it describes the disruption to identity as a result of rapid social change. See Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 75.

words, “revealed its dark side –fear of decline, of degeneration, of being left behind.” In the mid to late-nineteenth century, individual enterprise, independence, and affection for material wealth surpassed the values of the old world of Puritan patriarchs, hierarchy, and communalism. In a new and highly competitive, and increasingly urban culture, middle-class moralists created ideals that would command popular morality throughout the nineteenth century. These ideals of “civilized morality”, founded on internalized self-restraint and personal responsibility, would have important consequences for how old age was perceived and approached.¹³ At the end of the nineteenth-century a dualistic vision, infused with these principles, split later life into “sin, decay, and dependence on the one hand, and virtue, self-reliance, and health on the other.”¹⁴

The legacy of the sharp emphasis of either negative or positive images of aging is a central theme in the pages that follow, and one that our contemporary culture inherits today. The “art” of growing old is still discussed endlessly, its success often tied to personal responsibility and the *right* attitude. In her article discussing Active Aging Week in the fall of 2015, Maureen Hagan writes, “I like to think you are only as old as you feel,” adding, “We must realize, response to exercise is not age-dependent, it’s mind dependent.”¹⁵ In advice given to aging readers beginning in the 1920s, messages were not altogether different. Emphasis was placed on drawing one’s youthfulness out with the right exercise routine, beauty regimen, or attitude. The assumption that individuals could sculpt and shape their own bodies through personal will and hard work was a recurring prescription of advice columnist Josephine Lowman, in particular. The title of her

¹³ Ibid., 77.

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵ Maureen Hagan, “You Can Master the Art of Active Aging,” *Huffington Post*, September 26, 2015.

column, *Why Grow Old?* suggested readers did not have to. Although Thompson's column focused more on social issues related to family, marriage, and work, she too carried the assumption that virtuous individuals could avoid the negative aspects of aging. This framing of negative and positive aging would carry important consequences for individuals in the twentieth century, especially as scientists, statesmen, and health reformers put strong emphasis on the *puzzle* of aging. Repeatedly asking, *What do we do about it?* reinforced its "problem" and solidified its "stage" as one worthy of fear, avoidance, and contestation. Moreover, because of the pragmatic position in which old age was approached, it was increasingly framed within discussions of improvement and the search for solutions.

The search for solutions in the early to mid-century took place within complex social, political, organizational, and epistemological conditions. Beginning in the 1980s, sociologists in Canada and Britain began their work highlighting the social construction of the life course (the ordered sequence of developmental stages) as well as the role of western modernization in producing more 'age-relevant' societies.¹⁶ Featherstone and Hepworth have explored how historical factors (including industrialization, the growth of the state, and the 'panopticon society' described by Foucault) subjected the life course to increased surveillance, control, and normalization. The result, they argue, was more extensive institutionalization of the life course socially structured into an ordered sequence of psycho-social development.¹⁷ In the 1990s, sociological analysis continued

¹⁶ Featherstone and Hepworth, "The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course," 372.

¹⁷ Featherstone and Hepworth discuss deconstruction, which, following Derrida, is "the way in which the structure or 'architecture' of a phenomenon is built up in order to reveal the underlying principles of its construction." See Featherstone and Hepworth, "The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course," 371.

to explore topics related to aging and culture, the body, and the formation of gerontological knowledge, all while acknowledging the postmodern blurring of chronological divisions. Following Foucault, Stephen Katz's *Disciplining Old Age* (1996), for instance, has assessed how the study of old age and the sciences of geriatrics and gerontology emerged as a discipline in western society, and how the development of pensions and retirement, social surveys, and the technologies of old people's homes disciplined old age, bringing it into the realm of power/knowledge relations, and demarcating *the elderly* as a "problem population."¹⁸ Andrew Blaikie's *Ageing and Popular Culture* (1999) questions the "new landscapes" or "lifestyle enclaves" of old age, including the role of retirement resorts and other aspects of consumer culture in further blurring the division between mid and late-life.¹⁹

Sociological analysis has helped immeasurably to highlight the social construction of 'old age' and 'the life course' as labels employed to classify people. This work, drawing from theorists like Foucault and his analysis of madness, points to how the criteria used to classify people shifted over time according to changing ways of thinking and writing about insanity.²⁰ Their studies of aging also reinforce Max Weber's assertion that "social life and individual action are grounded in meaning, yet meaning is always and everywhere a cultural construct."²¹ Lastly, sociologists like Featherstone reinforce Cole's historical analysis on the dualistic vision of aging, but transpose it into contemporary culture: "we tend to find two sets of images," Featherstone writes. "In the

¹⁸ Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 75-76.

¹⁹ Blaikie, 175-177.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

first place there are the ‘heroes of aging’, those who adopt a positive attitude towards the aging process,” and the others who “experience severe bodily decline through disabling illness to the extent that the outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self.”²²

Although the history of aging in Canada may still be considered a new field, historical work over the last several decades, including that of James Snell, Lisa Dillon, and Edgar-André Montigny adds to our historical understanding of old age considerably, but with very different priorities. Snell’s *The Citizen’s Wage* (1996) assesses pension policies in twentieth century Canada, and provides much to our discussion of obsolescence in the pages that follow by allowing a closer look at the lives of aging workers. Snell assesses the social structures that more clearly defined the period of retirement in Canada, and which contributed to a paternalistic attitude towards elderly people. In the late nineteenth century, aging workers did not abruptly stop working at sixty-five, but gradually *transitioned* into old age, many controlling how and when they would do so. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the rise in size of many businesses and industries produced a working environment where individual needs, including those of older workers, were less easily addressed. Snell charts how changes in an increasingly complex workplace and new standards in management led to discussions of work-place efficiency. The new management principles of Frederick Taylor, known as Taylorism, for instance, connected productivity with physical efficiency and the quick repetition of simple tasks. As Snell has described, Taylorism privileged physical ability

²² Featherstone, “Post-Bodies, Aging and Virtual Reality,” 227.

and discounted skills and knowledge. In short, it attacked the physical weakness of older workers and legitimized their removal from the workplace.²³

In keeping with the impact of government policies on elderly people, Edgar-André Montigny's *Foisted Upon the Government?* (1997) explores the shifts in government policy towards older people in late nineteenth century Brockville, Kingston, and St. Catherine's, including their economic status and family obligations. Montigny has concluded that the bulk of elderly people he studied lived independently with financial means comparable to younger people.²⁴

A more recent work is Lisa Dillon's *The Shady Side of Fifty* (2008), which draws from the nominal censuses of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Canada and the United States. Examining it as both a quantitative and qualitative source, and integrating social science analysis with a discourse analysis, she explores age as both a "concept and as a lived experience." In this way, Dillon's analysis of the construction *and* experience of old age represents an important historiographical shift away from studies emphasizing the significance of modernization on the status of older people, towards research more concerned with their diversity and lived experience. As seen already in the work of sociologists, this dual focus highlights an interdisciplinary interest with the social construction of age, apparent in Dillon's choice and treatment of sources, and in her observation that "research results based on census data must be interpreted in the light of the original construction of the census by census officials, census

²³ James Snell, *The Citizen's Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 26-27.

²⁴ Edgar-André Montigny, *Foisted Upon the Government? State Responsibilities, Family Obligations and the Care of the Dependent Aged in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

enumerators, and census respondents and in the light of the construction of census microdata.” This, Dillon asserts, is key to uncovering the “hidden history of old age.”²⁵

The historiography of old age in the United States is also important to address, in that its themes often cross boundaries and borders. As previously mentioned, this study follows American cultural historian Thomas Cole, whose treatment of old age considers how the meaning of age has changed over time. But the field of the history of old age in the United States is indeed older and more diverse, giving Canadian students of history a wider appreciation of its differences and challenges. In the 1970s, historian W. Andrew Achenbaum charted the experience of growing old in nineteenth-century America and the influence of modernization on the status of older people. Exploring the development of social security, and institutions and organizations to help older people, Achenbaum posited that by the early twentieth century, “older men and women were eventually engulfed by the long-term and large-scale forces reshaping American society,” and that they “became prime targets and agents of social and cultural changes.”²⁶ Throughout the 1970s, historical work drew from Achenbaum and other historians of the time, producing work with a similar emphasis on status, and which presumed its decline by the end of the nineteenth century. These studies, as Dillon suggests, were “top-down” approaches that emphasized status and social control at the expense of elderly people’s diversity and agency.²⁷

²⁵ Dillon, 6, 7, 31.

²⁶ W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 89.

²⁷ Dillon points to several examples. See David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Tamara K. Hareven, “The Last Stage: Historical Adulthood and Old Age,” *Daedalus* 105 no. 4 (Fall 1976): 13-23. See also Dillon, 6.

Little by little, American historians increasingly confronted “top-down” approaches to aging, challenging the emphasis given to declension, and attempting to offer histories “from below.” Such studies began to highlight the diversity of older people. Some approached diversity in their studies of the life course, including Howard Chudacoff’s and Tamara Hareven’s “From Empty Nest to Family Dissolution: Life Course Transitions into Old Age.”²⁸ Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the field of aging continued to evolve, its emphasis placed increasingly on diversity amongst aging persons, and the “new social history.” Brian Gratton’s *Urban Elders* (1986) and Carol Haber’s and Brian Gratton’s *Old Age and the Search for Social Security* (1994) are two examples of research that directly challenged historical narratives of dependence and decline, and sought to highlight the elderly’s own agency.²⁹ Edgar-André Montigny’s research offered a similar social historical approach in a Canadian context. Drawing from the diary entries of two elderly elite women from Toronto, Montigny’s research contradicted the popular images of the passive or boring elderly, and suggested that “women’s activities as kin keepers were a vital part of an upper class family’s survival strategies.”³⁰

Amidst a growing interest in social history, family history, and historical demography in the United States, scholars including Thomas Cole, Sally Gadow, Kathleen Woodward, Andrew Achenbaum, Harry Moody, and others, began more closely considering the cultural meanings of aging in their edited volume, *What Does it Mean to*

²⁸ Howard Chudacoff & Tamara Hareven, “From Empty Nest to Family Dissolution: Life Course Transitions into Old Age,” *Journal of Family History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 69-83.

²⁹ Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston’s Aged* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 4-5. See also Carol Haber & Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³⁰ Montigny presented his paper, “Upper Middle Class Women and Aging: The Writings of Wilmot Cumberland and Ellen Osler,” at the Canadian Historical Association’s Annual Meeting in 1995. For a more detailed summary see Dillon, 14.

Grow Old? (1986). The essays, evident in the volume's subtitle, *Reflections from the Humanities*, have explored *the* twentieth century predicament: an absence of shared meanings of age and old age. The new inquiry into meaning and old age, the contributors have explained, requires an appreciation of its inherent ambiguity: the concept of meaning as both theoretical and existential. "Theoretically, many philosophical, cultural, and psychological writers stress the centrality of meaning and meaning systems in human experience. Existentially, meaning refers to lived perceptions of coherence, sense, or significance in experience." As Herbert Fingarette has explained, the concept of meaning contains a "point of intersection from which one may move either into living or into theories about living."³¹ *What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* represents an historical and philosophical wrestling with the social impoverishment of old age over time, and reflects on the *puzzles* and *mysteries* (and T. S. Eliot's *two kinds of problems*) that Cole would later discuss in *The Journey of Life*.

In many ways, exploring the figures described at the beginning of this chapter allows for a deeper analysis of how meaning in old age was articulated in the early to mid-century. Because this study relies on and addresses the important notion of advice and the dialogue of problem-solving, these conversations can be read as a search for meaning in old age, but one which remained captivated – at least publicly – by its puzzles. Lowman and Thompson, for instance, often encouraged readers to "keep busy." This recurring prescription, viewed within the historical theme of obsolescence, is explored more deeply in the following chapters. Activity became an integral part of the

³¹ Thomas R. Cole, "The Tattered Web of Cultural Meanings," in *What Does it Mean to Grow Old? Reflections from the Humanities*, eds. Thomas R. Cole & Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 4-5.

search for solutions, crossing from nutritional advice, to beauty advice, to retirement planning. Activity represented not only physical health but an *approach* to life, seen in Hauser's work. Activity was key to Lowman's advice as the topic of *youth* infiltrated new cultural industries. And it was Thompson's common answer to her readers' questions about retirement, marriage, and family troubles. This is perhaps the most strikingly ambiguous message from the period: while aging became a subject of serious scientific and medical inquiry, it also became an art that individuals were taught they had to master. Moreover, science and art often overlapped. As interest in the mental aspects of aging intensified, having the *right* outlook on life, including a positive attitude, was steadily recognized as a significant factor in physical health.

Assessing the conditions that made the prescription of self-improvement appealing requires insight from the humanities. Although the work of sociologists is central to the research here, this study adopts a historical sensitivity sometimes lacking in the work of social scientists. Insight into the history of meaning in aging, Cole explains, is found when both the *scientific* questions of meaning are explored in conjunction with *existential* questions of meaning. Doing so takes into account the collective, biological *process* of aging, as well as the individual, subjective *experience* of aging. Until recently, he argues, "Western culture has relied on two archetypal images to represent intuitions of the wholeness or unity of life – the division of life into ages (or stages) and the metaphor of life as a journey. These fundamental images, therefore, are the essential cultural forms for the history of the meaning of aging."³²

³² Cole, *The Journey of Life*, xxx.

Although the cultural images of life's stages dominate Cole's analysis of the seventeenth to early twentieth centuries, this study does not aim to again trace the waning of communal traditions around aging, or the rise of the middle class or Victorian morality. Its use and treatment of sources, instead, reflects an interest in assessing the impact of dwindling communal traditions from the early to mid-twentieth century. In this way, it explores aging's *de*-meaning through to the early 1960s, including the rise of a paternalistic attitude that saw elderly people as "more to be pitied than blamed."³³ Moreover, by assessing the Canadian political and social conditions affecting older people, it illustrates that self-improvement through activity became a new source of meaning by the mid-century, even if it was an imposed one that largely rejected old age.

Within negative assumptions and perceptions of old age, including social policies that encouraged a social exit, it is not surprising that messages bent on avoiding old age found resonance. As Harry Moody describes, in the "therapeutic culture" of the twentieth-century, aging has become not a time for contemplation or "summing up," but a time for pursuing interests, activity, and engagement.³⁴ This has important historical consequences. By the mid 1960s, gerontological leader Robert N. Butler coined the term *ageism*, putting a name to the discrimination and bigotry that aging persons faced.³⁵ In this way, the study that follows also provides insight into the years preceding the rise of the positive aging movement, and its subsequent attack on ageism. As Cole notes, the new positive mythology of older persons as "healthy, sexually active, engaged,

³³ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Boys Worry to Queer Old Woman," *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 1958, 17.

³⁴ Harry R. Moody, "The Meaning of Life and the Meaning of Old Age," in *What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* eds. Thomas R. Cole & Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 12.

³⁵ Stephen Katz, *Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 13.

productive, self-reliant” perpetuated the same “existential evasiveness of its Victorian forebears.”³⁶

As the field of aging in history continues to grow, this study complements Canadian scholarship by providing a cultural and social historical perspective.³⁷ Although its figures and topics are not rooted solely in Canada, the personalities discussed here captivated a great deal of Canadian press interest, coverage, and discussion. Themes that resonate within their work, including paternalism, obsolescence, and self-development, therefore, were not confined to one setting or place.

Although this study in many ways is a “top-down” analysis due to its large scale emphasis on perceptions and social control, its aim is to highlight the role of lesser known and unofficial sources of aging information in shaping popular ideas over time. Moreover, it underscores the conversational quality of many of these sources. Aging persons themselves joined the conversation, often in highly gendered spaces like the women’s section of newspapers. Assessing the mask of aging within a historical perspective provides insight into why some readers sought to distance themselves from being thought of as old. Others, as we shall see, tried to adapt to what others expected of them. More broadly, this study reflects on how the art of aging became synonymous with active living.

³⁶ The positive aging movement, led by academic gerontologists, humanists, health professionals, social workers, and others, attempted to confront the “myths” of aging by replacing negative images with positive ones. They hoped to reform cultural sensibilities towards aging. See Thomas R. Cole, “The “Enlightened” View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key,” in *What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* eds. Thomas R. Cole & Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 129.

³⁷ A recent contribution includes Helen Zoe Veit, “Why Do People Die? Rising Life Expectancy, Aging, and Personal Responsibility,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (2012): 1026-1048. See also Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012).

CHAPTER ONE

Metchnikoff and Hauser: Prescriptions for a *New Old Age*, 1903-1950

“We have all seen very old trees, the appearance of which proclaims their age. The trunk is decayed, the bark gnarled, the branches shriveled, and the leaves scanty. Some kinds of trees live for hundreds –possibly thousands– of years, while others age with comparative rapidity.”

-Élie Metchnikoff, *The Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy* (1903)

“It is a marvelously sturdy motor car, this body of yours– marvelous in its ability to maintain and rebuild itself. Given care, consideration and respect, it will function smoothly, on and on.”

-Gayelord Hauser, *Look Younger, Live Longer* (1950)

Director of the Pasteur Institute in Paris and creator of the terms *gerontology* and *thanatology*, bacteriologist Élie Metchnikoff (1845-1916) studied old age and death to improve upon the last period of life.¹ “Just as every effort is made to relieve the sufferings of a woman in labour,” he wrote in *Nature of Man* (1903), “so it is natural to try to suppress the evils accompanying old age.”² His early professional background in zoology gave his interest in aging an interdisciplinary curiosity. Why did signs of age, for instance, appear in some species of animals and not others? Why did some age with rapidity while others did not? In the aging body Metchnikoff noted that a very literal battle took place. He argued that in cases of senility, “higher and specific cells of a tissue,” were replaced by “hypertrophied connective tissue.” Phagocytes (white cells), consisting of macrophags, attacked microbes, healing injury and fighting off infection.

¹ W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23.

² Élie Metchnikoff, *Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell (New York: Putnam, 1903), 244.

But they also played a vital role in bringing about senile decay. Clustering around organs in large quantities, they replaced normal tissue with connective tissue. “In the brains of old persons and animals,” Metchnikoff wrote, “it is known that a number of nervous cells are surrounded and devoured by macrophags.”³ He suggested that the “disturbance of the digestive tract” could be responsible for the problem of senility. Human intestines, he argued, contained an abundance of bacterial flora, which produced “fermentations and putrefaction harmful to the organism.” These harmful “poisons,” once set loose in the body, sent the immune system into overdrive, attacking its own weakening tissues as a result. The phagocytes not only attacked the invading bacteria, but ravaged hair, nerve, liver, and kidney cells, producing the degenerating manifestations of old age.⁴ If old age was due to “poisoning of the tissues,” wrote Metchnikoff, it was clear that “agents which arrest intestinal putrefaction must at the same time postpone and ameliorate old age.”

When Metchnikoff suggested the consumption of bacteria-producing lactic acid (lactic acid bacilli), found in foods such as sour milk, might impede putrefaction and subdue the toxins made by harmful bacteria, consumption of sour milk soared. Despite his cautionary tone, the press seized upon “Prof Metchnikoff’s” argument that consumption of lactic acid could lead to longer life.⁵

Self-help author and nutritionist, Gayelord Hauser (1896-1984) began delivering lectures on health and nutrition in Chicago in the 1920s. It was a time that saw the “machine-tender” gradually displace the experience and skill of the “apprentice-master-

³ Ibid., 240-242.

⁴ Élie Metchnikoff, *Prolongation of Life: Optimistic Studies*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell (New York & London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 29; Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 189.

⁵ Metchnikoff documented cases of longevity in cultures where consumption of lactic acid was common, including Bulgaria. See Metchnikoff, *The Prolongation of Life*, 180-183.

craftsman system.” Age was gradually seen as a handicap in the workplace, and no longer a sign of accumulated productive knowledge. As historian Stuart Ewen has described, the 1920s saw not just the rise of youth in the new industrial workplace, youthfulness became an important commodity of national advertising brands; it became “a language of control.”⁶ The language of youth was integral to Hauser’s appeal. He toured the United States and Canada with messages on how to stay youthful. In the 1930s, he began publishing books as part of the ‘Little Library of Food Science’ series. From the beginning, the self-described “doctor of natural science” wrote of the digestive system, stressing that eating the *right* foods could lead to longer life. But attitude was equally important. Hauser believed age was chiefly a “psychological matter” and that those with “happy dispositions” lived the longest.⁷ By 1950, Hauser’s popularity soared with the publication of *Look Younger, Live Longer* which quickly became a best-seller in the United States and Canada. In it, Hauser outlined his ‘five wonder foods’ for long life, suggesting his plan was more than a diet but “an adventure into new ways of thinking.”⁸ From the opening lines he challenged his readers to forget everything they knew about growing old, and suggested that the growing science of nutrition could help people lead active, useful, and youthful lives, even at the age of one hundred.

This chapter traces the ideas of Metchnikoff and Hauser to historicize how the future of aging was approached (and handled) by two different, yet equally influential experts, in the first half of the twentieth century. I argue that Metchnikoff and Hauser

⁶ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, Twenty Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 141-142.

⁷ Gayelord Hauser, *Look Younger, Live Longer* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1950), 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

shared – with variations – a belief in the *acquired* character of health. Their ‘plans’ satisfied a particular need for their audiences for different reasons. For followers of Metchnikoff, the sour milk plan reflected wider perceptions that old age, like disease, could be treated. For followers of Hauser, the popularity of the ‘five wonder foods’ suggested a belief that youthfulness could be *achieved*. Moreover, tracing the rise of both plans in the press allows for a closer look at how the ideas on the problem of old age evolved.

Assessing Metchnikoff and Hauser side-by-side charts the growing interest in the *mental* or psychological aspects of aging. While Hauser was not a psychologist, his work remained preoccupied with emotions and the role of self-perception, often drawing from psychologists like Dr. Lillien Martin, Dr. George Lawton, and psychoanalyst Dr. Carl Jung in his own work.⁹ Although Hauser lacked professional credentials in the field of psychology, the language of psychology played a significant role in his work. As sociologist Eva Illouz explains, while “psychology is undoubtedly a body of texts and theories produced in formal organizations by experts certified to produce and use it,” it is also “a body of knowledge diffused worldwide through a wide variety of culture industries.”¹⁰ Following Illouz, psychology here is treated as simultaneously professional and popular. Self-help books like Hauser’s contributed to a new ‘body of knowledge’ on aging, one that asked new questions and approached the problem of aging with an interest in the self. Largely unexamined is how this growing psychological interest in aging became integral to messages of popular advice. As we shall see, the ‘problem’ of old age

⁹ In one case, Hauser discusses Martin’s exercises for retaining mental flexibility in his chapter on living “The Balanced Life,” and even expands upon them. See Hauser, 190-191.

¹⁰ Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 7.

did not recede; how the ‘problem’ was handled, including the questions and answers it was assigned, however, did change. To borrow Suzanne Langer’s term, the ‘technique’ for handling the problem changed, even if the subject remained the same. In *Philosophy in a New Key* (1957) she writes: “Every society meets a new idea with its own concepts, its own tacit, fundamental way of seeing things; that is to say, *with its own questions*, its peculiar curiosity.”¹¹

In the winter of 1903, Metchnikoff ascended the stairs of a Paris flat to interview an old woman. Mme. Robineau, the *Star* explained, was living comfortably through her 105th winter, surrounded by the people she loved. Was her memory good? Metchnikoff wondered. “Yes,” she replied, but added that her “clearest recollections were those of her earlier years.”¹² Metchnikoff made careful notes on the woman’s physical status, writing that “The skin of her hands had become so transparent that one could see the bones,” and that “she could see only with one eye” and “her hearing was her best means of relation with the external world.”¹³ Regarding diet, “she ate and drank little, but her diet was varied. She took butcher’s meat or chicken extremely seldom,” he wrote, “but ate eggs, fish, farinaceous food, vegetables, and stewed fruit, and drank sweetened water with a little white wine, and sometimes, after a meal, a small glass of dessert wine.” After documenting other details, including Mme. Robineau’s pulse, blood pressure, the sound of her lungs, the analysis of her urine, he wrote that, notwithstanding physical weakness,

¹¹ Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 6.

¹² “Should Live a Hundred Years: So Says Prof. Metchnikoff, Who Has an Interesting Talk with Old Lady,” *Toronto Daily Star*, January 21, 1903, 4.

¹³ Metchnikoff, *The Prolongation of Life*, 6-7.

“all these facts testify to her general health.” Next he noted her family history: “It has sometimes been thought that duration of life is a hereditary property. There was no evidence for this in the present case,” he observed. “Mme. Robineau’s relatives had died comparatively early in life, and a centenarian was unknown in her family. Her great age,” wrote Metchnikoff, “was an acquired character.”¹⁴

Not only did Metchnikoff observe old age in human beings with an interdisciplinary perspective, doing so revealed the power of Mme. Robineau’s influence over her own body. She ate and drank moderately and her life had been “extremely regular,” he noted. Moreover, she had avoided stress. She had lived a comfortable life in a Paris suburb, and “her character was gentle and affectionate,” he wrote.¹⁵ In this way, Mme. Robineau’s great age appeared a personal achievement, one that encouraged a close scrutiny of her body, her history, and her personal habits.

At the turn of the twentieth century, and on both sides of the Atlantic, people were bemoaning the obsolescence of old age. Amidst growing pessimism in scientific and popular circles, Metchnikoff “dared to offer hope that life expectancy even in adulthood might be extended through proper hygiene as well as scientific advances.”¹⁶ Historian Thomas Cole explains that Metchnikoff thought life could be both extended *and* improved. Living in France while statesmen argued about the cost of supporting its growing elderly population, Metchnikoff engaged in the question of whether to prolong life. What would the ramifications of a larger, potentially sicker population be on society? To these fears Metchnikoff insisted that *modifying* old age would have to come

¹⁴ Ibid., 6-8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶ Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers*, 32.

before prolonging it.¹⁷ Although he believed that more study had to be done on the influence of diet and the benefit of soured milk, he wrote that, “in the meantime, those who wish to preserve their intelligence as long as possible and to make their cycle of life as complete and as normal as is possible under present conditions, must depend on general sobriety and on habits conforming to the rules of rational hygiene.”¹⁸

Cole observes that an Enlightenment tradition of obedience to benevolent natural law lay at the root of Metchnikoff’s pursuit of orthobiosis – a completely fulfilled life cycle, managed only by reason and knowledge. Metchnikoff’s ideal, according to Cole, had its origins in the early modern search for the orderly and protected course of life. Although “disharmonies” of the evolutionary process, according to Metchnikoff, had materialized to hinder the normal course of longevity and natural death, in modern science he saw an opportunity to turn those “disharmonies” into “harmonies.” Assessing the decline of shared meanings of life, and the rise of new sources of inspiration in the early twentieth century, Cole writes that “For those without religious consolation, who despaired over the irrationality and conflict of human life, Metchnikoff’s work offered hope.”¹⁹

In the fall of 1904, press interest in Metchnikoff started to build. An article printed in *The Globe* wrote that “anyone desiring to attain a ripe old age is recommended by the professor to follow the example of the Bulgarians, noted for their longevity,” and who “consume large quantities of this cheap and easily obtained beverage.”²⁰ Following

¹⁷ Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 187.

¹⁸ Metchnikoff, *The Prolongation of Life*, 183.

¹⁹ Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 187.

²⁰ “The Elixir of Life: Sour Milk Said to be Nearest Approach to it,” *The Globe*, September 21, 1904, 2.

the publication of Metchnikoff's *The Prolongation of Life* (1907), media interest with sour milk and its link to longevity soon turned to frenzy. "Prof. Metchnikoff," as he was often called by the press, became frequently discussed in American and Canadian newspapers, his position at the Pasteur Institute in Paris lending his scientific "advice" about sour milk greater credibility. "Paris is full of plans for living forever these days," the *Washington Post* reported. It mentioned the "yogurt or sour milk plan," as well as other plans, backed by science, which were steadily becoming popular with the public.²¹ Others reported that "the use of sour milk as a wholesome food," had rapidly increased over the last few years, "especially in Europe," where sour milk sales skyrocketed, "not only for hospitals, but as an article of daily diet." It attributed the popularity of milk consumption to the "investigations by chemists and bacteriologists in the laboratory."²²

In Canada, news pieces related to longevity also increased, especially in reports on extreme longevity and its link to the "simple life." Press reports looked across the Atlantic to reinforce its growing optimism about what the future promised. Some reiterated the importance of milk and cited the yogurt-loving Bulgarians.²³ But many also discussed figures who had reached a 'ripe old age' simply by obeying the rules of moderation. Lord Strathcona, at eighty-seven, swore by his "two meals a day" theory, and was a "champion of the simple life." Breakfast consisted of porridge and milk, toast

²¹ Some plans included the sea water plan, the vegetarian plan, the fruitarian plan and an electrical plan. The electrical plan originated with Professor Jacques Arsenc D'Aronval, who argued sclerosis (hardening of the walls of the arteries) could be prevented with the application of electric currents of high frequency. See "Grow Young Electrically, But Only For a Few Weeks at a Time," *Washington Post*, March 22, 1908, E2.

²² "The Sour Milk Fad: Scientific Basis on Which Popularity of the Beverage Rests," *Washington Post*, November 27, 1907, 9.

²³ Bulgaria is often mentioned in relation to other European countries. The large proportion of centenarians (3,883 out of 4.5 million) is attributed to the eating of "juart" or yogurt. See for example "Bulgarians Live Long," *Minnedosa Tribune*, December 4, 1913.

and marmalade,” while dinner included “soup, fish, fowl,” and no “stimulant.” Nothing was said to tempt him from his “simple, nourishing diet,” which kept both mind and body “in harmony.”²⁴

Similarly, Professor Goldwin Smith’s ‘secret’ to living long was that “he had no secret to impart.” In reality, he followed a similar plan as Lord Strathcona or Mme. Robineau: moderation. Smith, also eighty-seven when asked for his secret to longevity, remarked: “I have never observed any particular rules of diet except that of moderation. I have always,” he went on, “avoided working late at night. I have taken a good deal of outdoor exercise. When younger,” he said, “I wandered on the Alps, went out shooting, and rode with foxhounds.”²⁵ In other words, just as Metchnikoff connected Mme. Robineau’s longevity to habits of moderation, the press increasingly discussed examples of virtuous individuals in their treatment of the ‘secret’ to longevity. More often than not they had reached a ‘ripe old age’ through individual decision-making so closely connected to the “simple life.”

Public discussions emphasizing both the science of food and the “simple life” of moderation were symptoms of social and cultural change that linked premature death with modern life, but which saw solutions in the future of science. Specialists and their scientific theories began to shape popular perceptions about old age in the early twentieth century. Influenced by nineteenth-century scientists such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Metchnikoff continued to discuss the link between old age and disease.²⁶ Approaching

²⁴ “Strathcona and the Simple Life,” *The Globe*, August 17, 1907, 11.

²⁵ “Secret of Longevity,” *The Voice*, November 5, 1909, 5.

²⁶ Charcot’s 1867 study, *Leçons cliniques sur les maladies des vieillards et les maladies chroniques*, explored the relationship between old age and disease among inmates at a large public hospital for women in Paris. It was allegedly an influence on Metchnikoff’s work. See Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*:

the problem within the language of pathology opened up ample room for public discussion of age prevention. Newspaper coverage latched onto the ‘science’ behind the food as a kind of safety net. In 1908, *The Globe* championed the “modern methods” of the twentieth century by comparing them to the “dark days of magic.” Today, it reported, “our philosophers wear well-cut clothes and are smooth-shaven.” Instead of searching for the elixir in the “strange and misty crystals,” they now search “through the pin-hole of a microscope.” Men like Metchnikoff, in other words, were the new philosophers, men whose scientific, modern methodology would find the “the secret of much premature death.”²⁷

But Metchnikoff continued to possess a cautious scientific outlook. His research sought to improve upon the *quality* of later life, not its duration. For although Metchnikoff’s “elixir of life” (or soured milk) would frequently be referenced by scholars, journalists, and other experts during his lifetime and long after his death, he made no absolute claims about its ability to prolong life. “In a question so important,” he wrote, “the theory must be tested by direct observations.” Moreover, he suggested that “systematic investigations should be made on the relationship of the intestinal microbes to precocious old age, and on the influence of diets which prevent intestinal putrefaction in prolonging life and maintaining the forces of the body.”²⁸ In other words, milk was not a ‘cure’ but a means of ensuring the complete and fulfilled life cycle, including a healthy old age.

As press discussion of the “elixir” continued to grow, scientists, professors,

The American Experience Since 1790 (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 42-45.

²⁷ “Can Human Life be Prolonged?” *The Globe*, May 2, 1908, A9.

²⁸ Metchnikoff, *The Prolongation of Life*, 182.

bishops, healers, and New Thought writers were anxious to weigh in on the relationship between modern life and premature death. As R. Marie Griffith explains in her research on “New Thought” perfectionism in the early twentieth century, diet and physical activity became articulated as vital steps on the road to health, wealth, and happiness.

Overlapping with American Christianity and culture, advocates of New Thought formed fresh interpretations of ancient scriptures, contemporary eugenic and hygienic literature texts, encouraged to act by what they perceived as the degeneration of modern urban life. Modern life, they insisted, “turned men into milksops and healthy bodies into mere repositories of disease and sludge.” The crusade for purification and power included the quest of diet reformers to “demonize flab” and “preach brawn” as necessary to economic and spiritual salvation.²⁹ These cultural influences account for press articles of the time that pointed to cases of longevity attained by simple means (in one case, by eating onions twice a day for one-hundred-and-fifteen-years).³⁰

It is in this context that a wave of authorities emerged to offer their prescriptions of sour milk to their own audiences, many pointing to “Prof. Metchnikoff” to validate the food’s alleged benefit. New Thought figure Florence Brewster Hudnall, for instance, presented a lecture entitled, “Why We Grow Old and How to Defer it” at Carnegie Hall in 1908. Seemingly invoking Metchnikoff, Hudnall pointed the finger at disease: “One grows old from disease,” she told her audience, suggesting the process could be prevented by *living* on sour milk.³¹ Similarly, Bishop Fallows, reportedly a “great

²⁹ R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 110.

³⁰ “Do You Want to Live Long? Eat Onions Twice a Day – “Aunt Becky” Did it and She Died at 115,” *The Globe*, June 1, 1909, 1.

³¹ Similar to Metchnikoff, Hudnall encouraged eating raw food. She advised that apples, cabbage, carrots, and onions could be added to the sour milk diet. See a review of her lecture, “Be a New Thoughter and

believer” in Metchnikoff’s research, offered his own “rules” for long life, which included drinking sour milk three times daily, having a clear conscience, and loving God.

Moreover, he believed that Metchnikoff’s elixir offered an antidote to modern life:

“Metchnikoff points out that the reason men do not live to a great age is because under modern conditions the arteries harden with advancing age, due to deposits of calcareous substances. He has discovered that the antidote for this condition is sour milk,” he advised, adding that, “the sheaths of the arteries are softened by the milk.”³²

Metchnikoff, hugely popular and called one of the greatest living men in 1911, continued to stress that more research needed to be done.³³ But viewing his rise in the press shows how little his objections influenced the dominant messages that were read by the public, however inaccurately relayed. “Contrary to what many journalists have made me say, I have never, in any of my publications on the subject asserted that curdled milk is able to prolong life.” Although he stressed the favourable role of lactic microbes, he reiterated that precise facts still had yet to be gathered.³⁴ As sales and advertisements of milk soared in the United States and Canada, he threatened legal action against advertisers wanting to use his name in their promotional materials.³⁵ As Cole explains, when Metchnikoff claimed that the “disease of old age might be eliminated by harnessing bacteriology to the service of hygiene, he unwittingly offered quackery a new market.”³⁶

Live to 100: Sour Milk, White Corpuscles, and a Pink Diaphragm Will Do it, Mrs. Hudnall Says,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1908, 9.

³² “Long Life in Sour Milk,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 1908, M1.

³³ “The Ten Greatest Men Living,” *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2657 (December 2, 1911): 1496.

³⁴ “Sour Milk and Longevity: Dr. Metchnikoff’s Denial Fails to Dispose of the Theory,” *Washington Post*, November 1, 1909, 6.

³⁵ “Sour Milk Dealers Warned, Prof. Metchnikoff Refuses to Allow Use of his Name as Advertisement,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1909, 7.

³⁶ Cole, *Journey of Life*, 188-189.

After 1914, a plethora of scientists, essayists, social and natural scientists, and self-help writers approached the problem of old age as one worthy of collective concern. Some writers attempted to counterbalance the negative image of old age. They wrote books with older readers in mind, promoting new positive identities through lifestyle choices that reflected modern living. Remaining useful, cheerful, living moderately, and keeping busy were common themes.³⁷ Meanwhile, medical researchers throughout the 1920s and 1930s tested different theories in their effort to save people from the pathological disorder of old age. As Andrew Achenbaum explains, some took inspiration from late nineteenth century pioneers. French surgeon Serge Voronoff and Austrian physiologist Eugene Steinach followed Brown Séquard's hypothesis that the breakdown of reproductive glands caused old age; they each attempted to graft the glands of younger animals to older ones in their effort to restore youthfulness. Others, like French surgeon Pierre Delbet followed Metchnikoff and searched for an antidote to old age; his prescription was magnesium chloride. Although all were failures, many researchers in the interwar period continued to view old age as a period of pathological decline requiring a "cure." Other American scientists, meanwhile, like anatomist Charles Sedgwick and zoologist Charles Manning Child, hypothesized that old age arose from "cumulative changes in the properties of cells and tissues as an organism matured." It was within a similar scope that Austrian physician Dr. I. L. Nascher argued against the view that old age was a pathological state of maturity. Old age was *physiological*. Nascher insisted that medical researchers begin to assess old age from a perspective they had not yet considered. Instead of attempting to restore the health of middle age, he advised doctors

³⁷ Examples include Walter Pitkin's *Life Begins at Forty* (1932), and Lyman Pierson Powell's *The Second Seventy* (1937). See Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, 117-118.

to restore the elderly patient's body to a condition of health normally found in later life. While Nascher encouraged his colleagues to consider the study of senility and senile pathology a specific branch of medicine, even assigning the discipline the name 'geriatrics,' scientists continued to disagree on whether senility was indeed a pathological disorder or physiological process.³⁸ According to Cole, the founding gerontological texts, including Nascher's *Geriatrics* (1914) represent an important cultural shift. The view of aging as an existential problem was gradually seen to represent a scientific or technical problem. As medical research on aging and disease continued throughout the 1920s and 30s, its collective body of work helped to both institutionalize and standardize the course of life.³⁹

By the time Hauser began lecturing and publishing in the 1920s, the scientific study of aging was no longer in its infancy. While scientific theories of aging continued to emerge and evolve, Hauser's rise in popularity coincided with a growing interest among psychologists in the *mental* aspects of aging. The first Old Age Counselling Center opened in the 1920s in San Francisco, spearheaded by psychologist Dr. Lillian Martin and staffed by psychologists, vocational guidance experts, aptitude testers, and rehabilitation experts.⁴⁰ Similarly, one of G. Stanley Hall's last published works offered a wholly psychological contribution to the study of aging. In *Senescence: The Last Half of*

³⁸ Ibid., 119-120.

³⁹ See I. L. Nascher, *Geriatrics: The Diseases of Old Age and Their Treatment* (London: Kegan Paul, French Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1919); Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 195.

⁴⁰ George Lawton, "Old Age: First Person Singular," in *New Goals for Old Age*, ed. George Lawton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 163. Hauser also discusses New York University's 'Worry Clinic,' a clinic he describes as similar to Martin's. "Men and women who are not happy... or who want to develop other talents for the second half of life, are given scrupulously careful, objective analyses of their aptitudes and personalities." See Hauser, 200.

Life (1922) he suggested that older people pass their lives “in review,” in order to “draw its lessons” not only for “greater mental poise and unity” but for the benefit of “immediate descendants.”⁴¹ In other words, the inner experience of aging minds gradually and assuredly entered the realm of expertise. How the ‘problem’ was handled and measured began to shift and change.

Hauser moved to the United States from Germany at sixteen, studying at the Chicago College of Naturopathy, and the American School of Chiropractic in New York. When he began delivering lectures on health and nutrition in Chicago in the 1920s, he was billed as the ‘Internationally Famous Young Viennese Scientist: Bengamin Gayelord Hauser’. As Catherine Carstairs explains, the link with Vienna was likely designed to avoid anti-German hostility engendered by the First World War. For although Vienna was a capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its association with music, high culture, science and medicine distanced it from the horrors of war. Moreover, Vienna had become known as a leading site of new ideas and research, especially amidst the growing popularity of psychotherapy in the 1920s.⁴²

Delivering his lectures to thousands of people and wearing a white lab coat, he was charismatic, stylish, and funny; his performances ‘mesmerizing,’ ‘electrifying.’ Hauser made vegetable juices on stage. He was accompanied by the ‘Chemical Man’ – a model of the human digestive system that he had invented in a Viennese laboratory. Prior to the performance, the Chemical Man was filled with the “chemicals of which the human body is composed.” Throughout the lecture, Hauser added foods to the Chemical

⁴¹ G. Stanley Hall, *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 117.

⁴² Catherine Carstairs, “Look Younger, Live Longer: Ageing Beautifully with Gayelord Hauser in America, 1920-1975,” *Gender & History* 26, no. 2 (August 2014): 336.

Man to illustrate what occurred when they converged with the stomach juices. He warned the audience that what was put in Chemical Man could be the end of him, ‘for what humans willfully or ignorantly put in their stomachs would be the ruin of him. He would surely “blow up,” he said.⁴³

In 1930, he followed his lectures with the publication of a series of books, including, *Food, Science and Health*, *Harmonized Food Selection*, *Types and Temperaments* and *New Health Cookery*. In keeping with his lectures, the books were stylish, and focused on the digestive system. They explained his eliminative feeding system, a seven-day cleansing regimen of fruits and vegetables that would empty the body of accumulated mucus. They also encouraged readers to eat according to their ‘type,’ an approach to diet that promised better and longer physical health. Whether one was a ‘phosphorus type’ or ‘potassium type,’ each was not only linked with certain personal attributes (the potassium types were gregarious, the phosphorus types were cultured) but with a celebrity. Henry Ford was a calcium type for his ability to ‘carry out his dreams.’ As Catherine Carstairs explains, the well-known ‘types’ that Hauser identified were not only in mid-life or older but highly gendered. Keenly aware of how his male and female audiences might envision themselves, Hauser chose figures that would appeal to both men and women. In the interwar period, these were figures representing the ‘self-made man,’ the sophisticated, athletic, and thin woman.⁴⁴

Hauser’s subsequent books, including *Eat and Grow Beautiful* (1936), incorporated food advice and beauty tips. The ‘Cosmetic Plan’, a diet rich in vitamins and

⁴³ Ibid., 337.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 338.

minerals was designed to address a host of beauty problems, including dry and wrinkled skin, brittle nails, and varicose veins. His advice to older women that they could live longer and look younger through diet appealed to grandparents of the baby boom generation, people who had grown up with advertisements that sold them products meant to enhance their desirability, and which linked beauty with femininity.⁴⁵

In the years that followed, Hauser's popularity only grew, leading to the publication of *Diet Does It* (1944) and *Look Younger, Live Longer* (1950), the latter earning a spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over a year, and subsequently translated into more than a dozen languages.⁴⁶ Hauser's positivity and charm followed him off the stage and onto the written page, where he asked, "How can we apply the scientific findings which promise us vigour and health throughout the years of life? The answer is surprisingly simple," he wrote. "Apply the basic rules of the Live Longer diet."⁴⁷

The *Look Younger, Live Longer* plan was more than a diet; it was "an adventure into new ways of thinking." Hauser told his readers to forget everything they knew about growing old. "Do you want to live one hundred years if, at the age of one hundred, your body will not be racked with aches and pains? Your face will not look like a dried-up apple? You can still be of definite use in the world? Then come along with me," he wrote.⁴⁸ His invitation was meant not only to draw his 'students' towards a new meal plan, adopting the diet meant adopting a *way of life*, which was a distinct outlook on the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 332.

⁴⁷ Hauser, 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

future. Yes, the secret to good health was a balanced diet, but it was also balanced *living*. Hauser encouraged readers to ‘balance their personalities.’ “The well-balanced, mature person is neither introvert nor extrovert; he is something of both.” The second half of life, he insisted, was for balancing one’s *self*. “The circumstances of your life have decided, up till now, which side of you should be developed first... Whichever side of yourself has been developed by the first half of your life, well and good,” he wrote. “Now is the time to balance your personality. This is your big opportunity, your challenge, your adventure, to release and develop the submerged side of yourself.”⁴⁹ “Whatever you have always wanted to do, you can do *now*.” For hesitant readers Hauser suggested turning to Old Age Consultation Clinics for aptitude testing, pointing to experts such as psychometrician Johnson O’Connor who had developed tests to “indicate which abilities are retained, which are declining, which are on the upgrade.” “If you wanted to be a pianist and life made you a housewife, take piano lessons,” Hauser urged. “Whatever your activities are, do not consider them mere hobbies... the thing you love to do is the thing you will do successfully and well.”⁵⁰

The secret also lay in *what* to eat, asserted Hauser. His ‘five wonder foods’ – based on the contributions of science – were: powdered brewers’ yeast (plain or flavoured), powdered skim milk, yoghurt, wheat germ, and black treacle. “*Any of these five foods,*” insisted Hauser, “*used daily, can probably add five youthful years to your life.*”⁵¹ “Accept the idea of living to be one hundred,” he urged his readers. “It is simple acceptance of scientific fact. Science has increased your life span beyond your wildest

⁴⁹ Ibid., 188-189.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 192-193.

⁵¹ Ibid., 32.

expectations.”⁵²

While eating the right foods was important, adopting the right outlook was an essential element of the *Look Younger* plan. He encouraged his readers to dance on the beach,⁵³ adopt adventurous spirits, and “concentrate on agelessness.”⁵⁴ “Say to yourself, I am this person sitting in this room, in this chair – I am a young person.”⁵⁵ As Carstairs has pointed out, Hauser’s technique was a nod to Emile Coué, the French psychologist who rose to fame in the 1920s using a programme of auto-suggestion. Coué’s popular saying was: ‘Every day, in every way, I’m getting better and better and better.’⁵⁶

Within a similar spirit of possibility, Hauser told his followers that *his* study of aging was different; it incorporated many fields, including nutrition, medicine, endocrinology, biology, psychiatry, philosophy, and physical culture. He had found inspiration from the great teachers of ancient, medieval, and modern times.⁵⁷ He had studied the works of the French scientist, Charles Edouard-Séquard, and one bacteriologist, Élie Metchnikoff. He had read Voronoff, he had devoured Steinach. Science, in short, had proven that life could be prolonged indefinitely, he told readers. Speaking to the seemingly narrowed, albeit important contribution of their work, Hauser argued: “the answer lies not just in the glands, the colon, the arteries, the connective tissues, the blood, or in any *one* part of the body,” he wrote, “but in the whole body.”⁵⁸ In short, he argued that he had acquired the benefit of perspective. Nutrition was indeed the

⁵² Ibid., 21.

⁵³ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁶ Carstairs, 341-342.

⁵⁷ Hauser, 16.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

secret to long life; it helped to fight off infectious disease, the scientists had *proven* it. A wisely fed body could reach one hundred, asserted Hauser, “without any vital part wearing out.”⁵⁹

As Carstairs has explained, the addition of scientific discussion in Hauser’s later work was likely of significant appeal to women born at the turn of the century. Not only did they have higher levels of education, many had inherited a deep respect for science that had infused the era.⁶⁰ Moreover, ‘rules’ around nutrition at the state-level began emerging in the early 40s, just as Hauser’s popularity was intensifying. The state-led programs, initially an acknowledgement of war-time rationing, formally articulated the importance of *educating* the public on the role of nutrition. In Canada, the Official Food Rules, published in 1942 (now Canada’s Food Guide), and the United States Department of Agriculture’s ‘Basic 7,’ in the year that followed, outlined dietary standards. These formulated the “essential nutrients” considered adequate for most people. Science underpinned the recommendations by linking the essential nutrients to specific foods or food groups.⁶¹ The importance of learning about the *right* foods to eat, in other words, was an important topic of public concern when the *Look Younger* plan emerged.

Always eager to confront the ‘myths of aging’ (its presumed characteristics of decline and weakness) Hauser wrote that there was, “no *good* reason why people should tire more easily” as they grew older. Fatigue, like hearing loss, arterial sclerosis, diabetes, heart trouble, stroke, and digestive problems, were not *normal* in old age, he suggested,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁰ Carstairs, 341.

⁶¹ Ibid., 240. See also “Canada’s Food Guide from 1942-1992,” *Health Canada*, accessed 16 July 2016, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/context/fg_history-histoire_ga-eng.php

but caused by nutritional deficiencies, and scientific experiments were proving it to be so.⁶² *Learn* about vitamins and minerals, he urged, and you will *like* eating them, because, “every mouthful you eat either does you good or harm,” he wrote. Drawing again from science, he suggested that if readers ate intelligently they would savour their new roles as “kitchen chemists” rather than “kitchen slaves.”⁶³ In other words, scientific discussion was integrated as a self-empowering tool. As readers armed themselves with the latest scientific research, they could eat their way to better health. Not only were they buying a particular ‘health’ food product, their up-to-date knowledge of its healthful associations made them smart consumers.

Although Hauser’s scientific discussion in *Look Younger* likely granted him a degree of credibility, it also presented nutritional ‘values’ in static, black-and-white terms, free of ‘advice’ and full of fact. “The world over, scientists studying the extension of life are finding more and more evidence that the fountain of youth is *good nutrition*,” he reiterated.⁶⁴ Hauser not only relayed the nutritional facts – and their role as “aids to beauty” – his plan made readers essential components of its success. Followers of the *Look Younger* plan represented Hauser’s new, idealized vision of the future of old age but as active, self-empowered, and *youthful* participants.

The press announcement that Hauser would give a lecture in Toronto was printed in *The Globe and Mail* in January 1951. “Author of *Look Younger*, *Live Longer*, will

⁶² Hauser, 45, 63, 111, 127.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

address Women's Canadian Club, Eaton Auditorium, Feb. 1," it read.⁶⁵ Reviews, published the following day, relayed that more than a thousand members of the Women's Canadian Club had attended, with the "overflow accommodated in the foyer." Hauser had detailed his diet and approach "based on an experience of more than 30 years in nutritional research."⁶⁶ One reviewer wrote that Hauser addressed reporters with the confidence of someone who "knows all the questions before they are asked." Apparently refusing to divulge his real age, Hauser stressed that some were old at 30, others young at 70, but that everyone was justified in using "all known artifices to retain the appearance and feeling of youth." His mission, relayed by the reporter, was to contribute to the growing field of geriatrics, by using nutrition to combat decay and illness.⁶⁷

But as the popularity of Hauser's *Look Younger* plan intensified, others raised the alarm. News pieces and advertisements about Hauser's plan had previously only occupied the women's pages, illustrating the highly gendered character of Hauser's particular 'technique.' In the mid-century diet and nutrition were domestic topics, and the jurisdiction of women as caregivers; the subjects did not often grace the pages of other newspaper sections.⁶⁸ But a week following Hauser's Toronto lecture, a front-page article publicly questioning his credibility appeared in *The Globe and Mail* on February 7, 1951. Speaking directly to the "current vogue" of eating the five 'wonder foods,' and of the "large Toronto meeting last week," Dr. E. W. McHenry, University of Toronto professor

⁶⁵ "The Fly Leaf," *The Globe and Mail*, January 27, 1951, 14.

⁶⁶ "The Smaller the Waistline the Longer the Lifeline," *The Globe and Mail*, February 2, 1951, 13.

⁶⁷ Lotta Dempsey, "Person to Person," *The Globe and Mail*, February 2, 1951, 13.

⁶⁸ The aim of many nutrition experts was to educate Canadians – and especially mothers – on proper food habits. See Franca Iacovetta and Valerie J. Korinek, "Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker," in *Home, Work, and Play*, eds. James Opp & John C. Walsh (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2015), 97.

of public nutrition, called the plan “rubbish,” a “silly dietary fad.” “Dietary fads are never founded on scientific information,” the professor argued, “and can do harm by encouraging self-medication.” “Any nutritive values supplied by these foods,” he went on, “can be obtained more pleasantly from everyday foods like meat, milk and eggs.” Canadians were better served with the guidelines of Canada’s Food Rules, the professor noted. “*It should be the basis for nutrition education in Canada.*”⁶⁹

A similar complaint had been directed at Hauser in the United States some years before. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* called him “as elusive as a rabbit,” lacking in “academic knowledge,” and “certainly not a scientist.”⁷⁰ Such criticism does not seem to have had an impact on Hauser’s growing audience. It is interesting to note, however, that only coverage concerning the ‘science’ of his plan was deemed serious enough for front-page coverage, while the *mental* and *health* aspects of his plan remained confined to the women’s pages. The “Homemaker Column,” for instance, stressed that his book was not “faddy,” but made the “progress to a longer and better life seem interesting and adventurous.”⁷¹ Other followers of Hauser came abruptly to his defense in the wake of Dr. McHenry’s comments.⁷² Greatest of all endorsements, however, were Hauser’s book sales which continued to climb. *Look Younger, Live Longer* sold more than 450,000 hardcover copies in just two years, and was the top-

⁶⁹ “Won’t Yield to Yogurt: Dietary Fads ‘Rubbish’, Draw Scorn of Nutritionist,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 1951, 1.

⁷⁰ “Bureau of Investigation, Benjamin Gayelord Hauser: Fruits, Vegetables –and Nuts,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 108, no. 16 (April 17, 1938): 1359.

⁷¹ Mona Pursor, “The Homemaker: Author Discusses Food in Stimulating Manner,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 21, 1950, 11.

⁷² Paul Destin, “St. Thomas Man Gives Testimony,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 13, 1951, 6.

selling nonfiction book for 1951 in the United States.⁷³ In Canada, it remained a top seller throughout 1951, and was frequently listed on the Toronto Public Library's "Popular Books" list, published monthly by the *The Globe and Mail*.⁷⁴

While Hauser developed a strong business out of confronting the "myths of age," he wrote and spoke of growing old only to express his fierce rejection of it. Hauser's generation had likely grown accustomed to the largely negative images of aging prevalent in the early twentieth century. As Andrew Blaikie explains, the prevailing image was one of "surviving the shipwreck."⁷⁵ "Who wants to hang on to life – frail, dried-up, useless, just for the sake of proving it can be done?" he asked. "Who, indeed. Not I," he replied. Hauser rallied against that *old* way of thinking.⁷⁶ Instead, he sought to replace it with a new idea, one that consisted of health, good looks, youth, vitality, and the joy of living.⁷⁷ In other words, it was a refusal to grow old at all. *Look Younger, Live Longer* replaced negative images with new positive ones which reflected a heightened commitment to youthfulness that could be recognized both inside and out. Avoiding the negative image, then, meant avoiding its physical characteristics of decay and decline; he wrote of drawing that inner youthfulness *out*. "Within you the real You – the youthful You – is clamouring 'Let me out!'" he wrote.⁷⁸ Although he often emphasized the importance of a

⁷³ R. Marie Griffith, "Body Salvation: New Thought, Father Divine, and the Feast of Material Pleasures," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 11, no. 2 (2001): 126, 149.

⁷⁴ For an example, see "Popular March Books" at Toronto Public Libraries," *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 1951, 12.

⁷⁵ This is a reference to G. Stanley Hall, who wrote, "Many of those who attain advanced years are battered, water-logged, leaky derelicts without cargo or crew." See Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.

⁷⁶ The view of aging that prevailed in the late nineteenth century was one of decline, weakness and obsolescence. See Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, introduction to *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 7.

⁷⁷ Hauser, 17-18.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

youthful *inwardness*, including possessing a gentle and positive outlook, he just as often touted the benefits of outward, or conventional beauty, giving tips on skin, hair, makeup, and endorsing plastic surgery.⁷⁹

Hauser's commitment to youthfulness must be read within the rise of *youngness* as a "desirable and salable commodity."⁸⁰ Hauser, like the audience that followed him, had witnessed the evolution of American industry in the 1920s and 30s. As Ewen has described, youth became the industrial ideal as well as a budding category of modern work and survival. It represented not only an evolving corporate interest in daily life, pursuing youth meant rejecting the old; it meant embracing individualism and malleability as valuable roles. Ads that focused on youth in the 1920s, for instance, did not really target children. The *idea* of youthfulness thrived as a symbolic representation of cultural change. "A boy of nineteen may, after a few weeks of experience on a machine, turn out an amount of work greater than his father of forty-five." Corporations that ordered youth onto the production line began offering *youthfulness* in their products, all with messages designed to make consumers *feel* and *look* young. To a cosmetics sales team, Helen Woodward said, "Remember that what we are selling is not beauty – it is youth." This particular kind of youthfulness was mass-produced and could only be *bought*.⁸¹

That Hauser's youthful messages found an audience, in this way, is not surprising. The idea that youthfulness could be *achieved* through consumption – as Ewen has explained above – formed a key part of Hauser's plan. 'Buying in' meant not only

⁷⁹ Ibid., 155.

⁸⁰ Ewen, 149.

⁸¹ Ibid., 145-147.

adopting a new outlook on life; it meant purchasing Hauser-endorsed products to ensure the plan's success. On the final page of *Look Younger*, for instance, Hauser added a helpful note: "If you have any difficulty in buying the foods and products mentioned... please write to the publishers enclosing a stamped addressed envelope."⁸² Viewed within the rise of popularity of *Look Younger* in 1950, Hauser tapped into and directly targeted a demographic that had both witnessed the transformation of domestic production and consumption, and the rise of a culture that celebrated and idealized youth. As Featherstone and Wernick have noted, the universal consumer image of desirability, in this context, was the eroticized youthful female body.⁸³

Hauser's overly positive messages masked real fears about that *old* idea of age, and it necessarily avoided the complexity and ambiguity of old age itself. By so valiantly pushing against the negative associations of old age, he left little to no room for those whose experiences might have conflicted with the *Live Longer* sense of optimism. Telling his Toronto audience that "you might as well be dead as confined to a wheel chair,"⁸⁴ was likely intended as comic relief and not scorn. Whatever the case, assessing his comments illustrates how Hauser both stigmatized and shamed those beyond the point of being *saved*. His repeated emphasis that illness in old age was due to malnourishment put the power – and the blame – squarely on the shoulders of his followers.

But to linger on what Hauser avoided also somewhat misses the point. Tracing his rise in popularity and his prescriptions for longevity must also consider the audience for whom such messages clearly resonated. As Cole explains, the key to understanding any

⁸² Hauser lent his name to specific foods. See Hauser, 300; Carstairs, 332.

⁸³ Featherstone and Wernick, 7.

⁸⁴ "The Smaller the Waistline the Longer the Lifeline," *The Globe and Mail*, February 2, 1951, 13.

mythology (or controlling image) about age is in exploring why it satisfies (or does not satisfy) the human quest for meaning in a particular context.⁸⁵ Amidst the boom of gerontological literature, the creation of research centers, and the growth of state pensions and public education initiatives on nutrition, the *Look Younger* plan offered followers both a collective and individualized platform for engaging in what the future of age might look like. He told his followers: “be glad that you are in the second half of life.”⁸⁶ He encouraged self-awareness, to take up new interests –not as ‘hobbies’– but for joy and meaning.⁸⁷ Perhaps more importantly, the language of youth satisfied a particular need among his followers, who in it saw possibilities of endurance and opportunity that could be individually pursued and achieved.

Just as Metchnikoff provided hope to people who no longer found meaning in old age through religion or philosophy, Hauser’s vision of the future fifty years later was new and exciting. Their shared belief in the acquired character of health won them each large audiences eager to reimagine the future alongside them. Regardless of discipline or intention, something in their messages proved *optimistic*, finding audiences sometimes even in spite of them.

Their nutrition ‘plans’ emerged within press discussions on the ‘secret’ to longevity, but each ‘plan’ reflected a different ‘technique’ to growing old. Metchnikoff was part of the growing science of aging which continued to shift and evolve in the early

⁸⁵ Thomas R. Cole, “The “Enlightened” View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key,” in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old? Reflections from the Humanities*, eds. Thomas R. Cole and Sally A. Gadow (Durham University Press, 1986), 119.

⁸⁶ Hauser, 177.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

twentieth century. His work on aging, so closely associated with disease, emerged while press coverage lamented the perils of modern living but which pointed to the possibilities that the future of science presented. Enthusiasm over “Prof Metchnikoff’s” “elixir” reflected popular perceptions that old age, like illness, could be treated, and that it represented a scientific problem.

When Hauser began lecturing in the 1920s, his technique reflected a larger cultural devotion to youthfulness and a growing interest in the psychology of aging. When his *Look Younger* plan emerged in 1950, he drew from the previous fifty years of scientific research to give his art of aging important support, and to arm his ‘students’ with knowledge. The science of nutrition may have given his plan credibility, but the plan’s approach was largely psychological. Looking younger and living longer meant trying new things, staying positive, and letting the submerged self out. The plan reflected larger cultural and social change related to the evolving science of aging, the evolution of industry, and the rise of corporate interest in daily life. Despite growing interest in the aging *individual* in the mid-century, Hauser’s plan – and related topics like nutrition, health, and outlook – remained largely the ‘women’s’ domain in newspapers. Throughout the 1940s and 50s women advice columnists would adopt a technique akin to Hauser’s, replying to letters of a distinctly personal character.

CHAPTER TWO

Drawing the Youthful Self Out: Escaping the 'Mask of Ageing' in the Advice Literature of Josephine Lowman, 1938-1960

"Happy thoughts lift the contours of the face and the corners of the mouth as well as the spirit. Optimism, hope and faith pull the corners of the mouth upward, while worried thoughts cause drooping wrinkles and hard tense lines."

-Josephine Lowman, "Why Grow Old?" (1945)

Advice literature was not a new phenomenon in the twentieth century. Appearing in the women's section of newspapers, Canadian and American readers sought guidance from experts of etiquette and morality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, turning to columnists such as Abigail Van Buren, Ann Landers, Miss Manners, the Mayflower Madam, among others.¹ Topics were almost always domestic in nature, including home decoration, cooking, and social etiquette. Advice columnists sometimes delved into matters of bodily health, but almost always to speak of fashion, cosmetics, or new beauty treatments. Beginning in the 1920s and 30s, the problem of the aging body began to attract the interest of advice columnists such as Katherine Kent, Antoinette Donnelly, Esther Roberts, and Josephine Lowman. Advice promoted youthfulness through self-improvement in the battle against time.

In the first half of the twentieth-century old age increasingly became a topic of public debate and concern. Scientists once fascinated with longevity turned their focus to the diseases of old age; researchers such as George Beard and William Osler conducted

¹ Valerie Matsumoto, "Desperately Seeking 'Deirdre': Gender Roles, Multicultural Relations, and Nisei Women Writers of the 1930s," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 20.

studies on the link between age and efficiency.² The ever-expanding lifespan and the growing interest in the limits of human achievement seemed to suddenly and publicly collide. Advice columnists offered tips on regaining youthfulness, all while medical inquiry into degenerative diseases captured the news headlines. News reports increasingly discussed old age as a time to be feared, avoided, and interrupted. As aging drew enhanced public concern, advice columns including Josephine Lowman's "Why Grow Old?" called upon readers to assess their thoughts and feelings about their bodies, drawing upon a Victorian morality to champion the benefits of hard work and positive thinking.

Since aging involves both the passage of time and the body, historicizing the aging body can reveal how time has been perceived and understood. As scholars such as Norbert Elias and Bryan Turner have noted, the loneliness of the aged is revealed in this distinction, in the transition from community to isolation.³ Newspapers and magazines increasingly discussed the art of growing old; in essence, of leaving one life behind for another, through planning, preparation, and self-care. Although conduct literature on aging appeared as early as the eighteenth-century, the twentieth-century transition to individualism reveals a new level of anxiety about this 'art' of growing old. As self-development and progress became important cultural priorities, the aging body became a site for improvement, intervention, and management. But it reveals too that the passage

² W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 46-47.

³ See Bryan S. Turner, "Aging and Identity: Some Reflections on the Somatization of the Self," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 253; Norbert Elias, *The Loneliness of the Dying* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

of time – its quality, value, and management – continued to captivate a great deal of interest.

The themes of time and aging bodies have been studied before, and have tended to focus on social and economic policies, the family cycle and individual life course, or consumer culture.⁴ I prefer to explore ideas about the aging body by historicizing the “mask of age,” when “the outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self.”⁵ The “mask” not only conceals individual differences, bodily appearance becomes an indicator of need and behaviour. As self-development became emphasized in news reports and advice columns, the idea of the elderly as a distinct social group gained more ground. Aging individuals were given messages that both reinforced their status as members of an aging ‘group’, and techniques for postponing or even reversing this status. I argue that escaping the aging body through self-improvement became a recurring prescription. Through preparation, aging became an *opportunity* for interrupting the passage of time, for rejecting the status of ‘aged’, and avoiding the road to isolation. This chapter explores such tension more closely. It examines how the aging body became articulated as a problem in the press and medical literature, and how advice columnists of the 1930s and 40s – Josephine Lowman in particular – offered aging readers an alternative message, one meant to draw their youthfulness out.

⁴ For a study with a focus on social and economic policy see James Snell, *The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). For a study with a focus on the life course see Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For a study that examines consumer culture and aging see Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth, “The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course,” in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth (London: Sage, 1991), 371.

⁵ Mike Featherstone, “Post-Bodies, Aging, and Virtual Reality,” in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and A Wernick, (London: Routledge, 1995), 227.

In 1898, an advertisement in *The Evening Star* for “Abbey’s Effervescent Salt” described old age as a symptom of “these days of busy progressiveness.” “Old age,” the ad warned, “seems to creep more quickly upon us than it used to.” The ad attributed digestive trouble and “ageing marks” to “the wear and tear of business life,” “irregular meals,” and suggested Abbey’s treatment to “regulate the system.” The advertisement included an illustration of two men: a young businessman, standing tall and dressed sharply looks over his shoulder at his future self. An old man with hunched shoulders, resting his weight on a cane and dressed in rags, looks pleadingly at his younger self. The old man’s filthy body is the picture of poverty, illness, and helplessness. The younger man, clean, wealthy, and confident, appears ready to leave *that* image of old age behind him. “The young man of to-day is the old man of to-morrow,” the ad warned.⁶

Although the ad reinforces what some have argued – namely that modernization led to a decline in the status of the aged –⁷ it is perhaps a better example of how aging and bodily health became reflections of either personal achievement or failure. In other words, the bodily image was portrayed as reflecting the interior self. In the *Toronto Daily Star*, H. Addington Bruce, author of *Self-Development* (1921) went so far as to conclude that the “vague aches and pains” of old age were “not so much a matter of passage of years as it is of a change in the mental attitude on life.” Bruce attributed those with good physical health to their “insistence on remaining mentally receptive and ardently

⁶ “Old Age Creeps Upon Us Quickly,” *Evening Star*, November 15, 1898, 5.

⁷ As a theory of aging, modernization theory suggests factors like urbanization and industrialization led to the decline in the status of older people. The theory has been widely criticized for its lack of complexity and its view of the old as honoured in preindustrial societies. Some studies using modernization theory include Cowgill and Holmes (1972), and Palmore and Manton (1974). See Harry R. Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2000), 316.

interested in their world,” and suggested that mental attitude had a, “tonic effect on the whole system,” adding that it could “delay the inroads of time.”⁸

Although the “mask of age,” was first articulated by Featherstone and Hepworth in the 1990s, it carries implications similar to what Erving Goffman called the “spoiled identity” in the 1960s. This “mystique of the aged,” the characterization of older persons as ‘senile,’ ‘useless,’ and ‘inefficient,’ began to emerge in popular literature in the United States in the late nineteenth century, just as many were beginning to be forced out of the labour force at age sixty-five.⁹ This should not imply a sharp change in status of elderly people prior to the twentieth-century, that a “golden age” once existed, only to be replaced by the “mystique of the aged.” This stated, many social, cultural, and demographic factors in pre-industrial society meant that old age – or any stage of life – had not yet become so rigidly defined. As Tamara Hareven explains, “Adulthood flowed into old age without institutional disruptions. The two major adult roles – parenthood and work – generally stretched over an entire lifetime without an ‘empty nest’ and compulsory retirement.”¹⁰

By the early twentieth century, however, old age was increasingly viewed as a distinct period of life and framed as a distinct ‘problem’ by the press. In one letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, and fueled with the courage of Scotch, the writer felt compelled to “stand up for honorable old age.” “Now let me tell you that I am an old man,” he wrote, “but never in my youth did I apply hot and rebellious liquors to my

⁸ H. Addington Bruce, “The Really Old,” *Toronto Daily Star*, December 3, 1923, 16.

⁹ Tamara K. Hareven, “Changing Images of Aging and the Social Construction of the Life Course,” in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and A Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 131.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

blood, nor did I with unbashful forehead woo the means of weakness and debility; therefore my age is like a lusty Winter, frosty but kindly enabling me to take three sniffers [sic] without turning a hair, and to stand up for honorable old age and its natural accompaniments – honor, love, obedience, troops of friends.”¹¹

The writer came to the defense of old age, even linking it to his personal character. That he felt the need to do so was likely related to emerging psychological studies of the time that explored the link between age and efficiency. The 1874 study by psychologist George Beard, for example, concluded that the majority of creative works were accomplished by the age of forty-five.¹² A few decades later, Canadian physician William Osler seconded Beard’s view of old age, and, having examined the link between age and efficiency, went even further, concluding the relative uselessness of men over sixty. The real work of the world, he insisted, was completed between the ages of twenty-five and forty.¹³ The growing emphasis on *the* elderly quantitatively assigned collective creative and bodily qualities to any person over sixty. Its effect – part Victorian in its desire to classify – and part reflection of the advancing medical research responsible for lengthening the average human lifespan, seeped into many areas of social and cultural life.

The *New York Times* writer’s desire to “stand up” for old age bears a striking similarity to the emotional tenor of G. Stanley Hall’s narrative in *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (1922). In it, Hall confronted the Beards and Oslers of his day in a work he

¹¹ “Concerning Old Age,” Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*, *New York Times*, April 27, 1902, 6.

¹² Hareven, “Changing Images,” in *Images of Aging*, 120.

¹³ Osler’s ideas are commonly referred to as the “fixed period.” In 1905, his address to the Johns Hopkins University Medical School sparked considerable controversy and was even linked to as many as twenty suicides. See Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170-171.

began, “not chiefly for others, even for other old people, but because the author felt impelled upon entering this new stage of life and upon retirement from active duties to make a self-survey, to face reality, to understand more clearly what age was and meant for himself, and to be rightly oriented in the post-graduate course of life into which he had been entered.”¹⁴ Seeming to directly challenge those ‘efficiency studies’, the psychologist and former president of Clarke University devoted an entire chapter to literature written *by older people*, something for which he was criticized. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* called *Senescence* “sentimental,” writing, “He devotes a special chapter to famous writers who have done work after 60 years of age; while he includes such literary hacks as Amelia Barr, he neglects to mention such able writers as William Hudson, De Morgan, or Sir Harry Johnston.” The reviewer added that “A book on old age written by a young man would possibly be more scientific.”¹⁵

Although Hall intended *Senescence* as a psychological contribution to the study of aging, it is also the reflections of an aging man working through his feelings of being cut off from his former life, of being *thought* of as old, of wearing the ‘mask.’ Hall articulated how perceptions of him began to change as he aged, how he felt set apart, different, removed from his past life. He did not call it the “mask of age,” but its weight was clearly felt. He noted the looks of suspicion from friends: “Shortcomings that date from earlier years are now ascribed to age,” he wrote. “We feel, often falsely, that we are observed or even spied upon for signs of its approach, and we are constantly tempted to do or say things to show that it is not yet upon us.”¹⁶ Hall noted the transition to oneness

¹⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), viii.

¹⁵ “Book Notices,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1922): 1872.

¹⁶ Hall, xi.

that accompanied the suspicion: “the fact is that when we are once thought of as old,” he wrote, “whether because of mental or physical signs or by withdrawal from our wonted sphere of activities, we enter a class more or less apart and by ourselves.”¹⁷

That the aged were “set apart” was a fact that Hall both challenged and reinforced. He united older people in membership by both angrily noting the injustice of generalization and calling upon his “fellow oldsters” to act, noting their unique function in the world. “We have a function in the world that we have not yet risen to,” he wrote, “and which is of the utmost importance – far greater, in fact, in the present stage of the world than ever before.”¹⁸ Writing *Senescence* in the shadow of the Great War, the psychologist believed age brought wisdom, perspective, and sound judgment. “[The aged] can best weigh facts and ideas in the scale of justice,” wrote Hall. “The moral faculties ripen more slowly,” he added. It was the aged that could “be the keepers of the standards of right and wrong and mete out justice with the impartiality and aloofness that befit it.”¹⁹

Although Hall united older people in his study (often using the pronoun ‘we’), his class, status, and educational background afforded him both time and money to solicit professional medical advice. Upon retiring, Hall took “careful stock” of his own physical condition, visiting with numerous physicians who all encouraged him to “eat moderately, slowly, oftener, less at a time, sleep regularly, cultivate the open air, exercise till fatigue came and then promptly stop, be cheerful, and avoid “nerves,” worry, and all excesses.”

¹⁷ Ibid., viii-xi.

¹⁸ Ibid., ix.

¹⁹ Ibid., 425-426.

But, following these general prescriptions, Hall noted that “agreement ceased.”²⁰ Hall’s hygienic survey reinforced that “the lives of nearly all the centenarians I have been able to find show that they owe their longevity far more to their own insight than to medical care, and there seems to be a far greater individual difference of needs than medicine yet recognizes.”²¹ At a time when the majority of studies on aging were examined through the lens of pathology and focused on longevity, Hall’s work surely encouraged reaction, especially his wish to act as his own doctor, or ‘expert.’²²

In this way, Hall was miles from the ‘everyman.’ As a psychologist, he doubtless was trained in synthesizing a large breadth of information and advice. He had the financial means to visit with numerous doctors in his effort to ‘take stock.’ Not all aging individuals would have had these opportunities. This said, as we shall see, the ‘mask’ had a democratizing effect, erasing differences under the seamless category of ‘aged.’ Where Hall could afford expert advice, average people likely sought advice and recent information about old age from books, and in the press. Perhaps common reflections on self-development or ‘stock-taking’ played out in the most trivial and unsuspecting of places: in the women’s section of newspapers, and in advice columns.

When Josephine Lowman’s column, “Why Grow Old?” appeared in the mid-1930s, the topic of old age had already captured a great deal of scientific and professional interest. Her column’s emergence, however, should be seen as an indication that

²⁰ Ibid., xv.

²¹ Ibid., xv.

²² Hall was not criticizing experts on aging in a general sense, but was intrigued by the diversity of emerging viewpoints on treatment. Hall’s aim was, through Socrates’ influence, greater self-knowledge in his own old age. “So much I gathered from the doctors I saw or read. Their books and counsels cost me a tidy sum but it was well worth it. I now know myself better than they.” See Hall, xv.

authorities on aging were not exclusive to professional research circles. It is my view that women advice columnists, in particular, rose in popularity because their techniques for regaining youthfulness found an eager audience. On their pages, aging was at once removed from the impersonal generational approach of state and medical inquiry, and brought into the fold of friendship, community, and youth. “All of us dislike growing old,” Lowman confided in 1938. “We talk ourselves into the idea that lines give our faces character and then fall into despondency when we discover crinkles around our eyes,” she wrote. Following articulation of a ‘problem,’ Lowman offered readers the solution, all in a manner that was both cheerful and empowering. She championed the benefit of “facial exercise,” for example, arguing that the “drooping of the facial muscles” could be, “to a great extent prevented,” adding, “If you wish to try out my scientific exercises for the face, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request.”²³

Josephine Lowman (1899- 1983) was born in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and studied physical education at the Western Kentucky Normal School. She was head of the physical education department for several years before moving to Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1930s. Once in Tulsa, she taught a physical fitness class at the local gym, and soon started writing a health column for the *Tulsa Tribune*.²⁴

Based on the popularity of Lowman’s column, “Why Grow Old?” was quickly picked up by Canadian and American dailies, and ran for nearly 50 years. Her collected works – similar to advertisements like Abbey’s Effervescent Salt – positioned growing

²³ Josephine Lowman, “Fanny’s Faces Funny but Not Aid to Charm,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1938, 11.

²⁴ “Hall of Distinguished Alumni. Mrs. Josephine Cherry Lowman (Inducted in 2010),” *Western Kentucky University Alumni Association*, accessed 13 June 2016, <http://alumni.wku.edu/s/808/media.aspx?pgid=1799&gid=1>

old not as inevitable, but as a choice. One could fall into decline or rise to the occasion. To borrow Featherstone's analogy, one was either a 'hero of aging' (with a positive attitude and 'forever youthful' disposition) or in such bodily decline that the outer body imprisoned the inner self (two images that remain popular today).²⁵ Lowman's column's title, "*Why Grow Old?*" suggested readers did not need to. With the right course of self-improvement, whether through exercise, diet, or skin care regime, readers could proactively take their aging bodies into their own hands, all with the energy and spirit of youth.

The growing emphasis on aging in advice columns coincided with changing societal perceptions about old age. "There is within sight a revision of the outlook upon old age," reported *The Globe* in 1924. Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, delivered his prognosis on 'life expectation' in his 1923 annual report: "the 'average man' was likely to enjoy a longer life span than that enjoyed by his 'average grandfather.'" This new gift in years would become expected, common, even a right. "Not much longer will this period be regarded as a gambler contemplates his unexpected winnings," it reported. "Old age will be counted on, like youth and middle age." As the *idea* of an extended lifespan took root in the minds of the public, portrayals in the press of its 'gift' and 'curse' appeared side-by-side. At one end was medicine's gift of more years; on the other, the uncertainty of their function, quality, merit. These fears found expression in prescriptions that proactively 'challenged' or rejected old age. If more years were the result of evolving science, this same research represented a direct challenge to the idea of "growing old gracefully." *The Globe* article hammered down the

²⁵ Featherstone, "Post-Bodies, Aging, and Virtual Reality," in *Images of Aging*, 227.

point: “Indeed it is rejection of that doctrine of passive resistance to the inevitable,” it wrote. “To have planned the later years as the earlier are planned is to have filled them beforehand with the spirit of enterprise, which is the spirit of youth. It is a refuse to grow old at all.”²⁶

Focus in the daily news steadily turned to the medical study of degenerative disease, to reports on the rising aging populations of both the United States and Canada, and to a new branch of medicine devoted entirely to elderly people. “A whole new specialized department of medicine is growing up under the title of geriatrics – the study of the aged,” one article read. “This field,” the article continued, “is expected to rival the older established field of pediatrics – the study of young children.” According to the reporter, “the postwar problem which will become more serious is what to do with old people. Within the next 85 years the number of persons over 65 on this continent is expected to be more than tripled.”²⁷

While the term gerontology was not in use in Canada until the late 40s, its emergence followed several decades of growing interest, concern, and uncertainty about the ‘problem’ of aging. As James Snell explains in *The Citizen’s Wage*, “senior citizens as a whole were beginning to be perceived as a significant social group with their own varied characteristics and needs.”²⁸ Although this had positive implications, including an enhanced level of interest in mental health and social conditions, and a higher standard for aging persons’ physical environment, popular perceptions of ‘growing old’ continued

²⁶ “Growing Old,” *The Globe*, October 25, 1924, 4.

²⁷ Ivers Kelly, “New Deal for Aged Urged by Scientists,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 11, 1945, 17.

²⁸ James Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 215.

to emphasize bodily decline, further accentuating the “mask of age.” As Dr. Hinman told *The Globe* in 1947, “The attitude toward old-age has changed,” he said. “Age is not revered as formerly, but is more or less tolerated. In consequence,” he added, “almost everybody dreads the thought of growing old. The idea of dependence of the aged is spreading,” he went on. “When medical science keeps people alive another 60 years or more (up to age 120 or more), what a mob of dependents there will be then,” he concluded.”²⁹

That youthfulness found such an audience during this period must account for several factors. The efficiency studies, as previously mentioned, investigated the relationship between aging and efficiency and drafted negative comparisons between the old and the young. This influence was felt in the early twentieth century scientific management movement which ultimately changed the workplace. Capitalist industrialization, and its evolving technologies of production, transformed domestic production and consumption. As Featherstone and Wernick have described, it idealized *youth*. Within this context, the eroticized youthful female body emerged as the universal consumer image of desirability. In contrast, the value of acquired life experience – and its indicator of social status – declined.³⁰

In the 1920s in the United States, within the exploding mass culture of magazine and movie industries as well as the spread of advertising, a consistently popular topic of the time was youth. Scholars such as Laura Davidow Hirshbein have noted that public

²⁹ “Our Virile Elders: May Outnumber Youth as Life-Expectancy Rises,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 8, 1947, 4.

³⁰ Mike Featherstone & Andrew Wernick, introduction to *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 7.

attention was captivated with a new, younger generation.³¹ By examining discussions of youth and old age in popular magazines of the 1920s, Davidow argues that consolidation of older people into their own distinct age group occurred partly in *opposition* to the age grouping of young people in the 1920s.³² Journalists and popular writers of the 1920s, for instance, drew from age-based stereotypes to portray the characteristics of young and old generations within popular literature. The younger generation, born in the twentieth century, was portrayed as energetic, middle-class, and consumers of modern technology. While portrayals of young men underscored their “abandonment of social niceties,” portrayals of young women emphasized their “short hair and shorter skirts,” and even their new right to vote. In contrast, representations of the older generation were often parents or grandparents born in the nineteenth century; they remained sentimental about the past, and faithful to Victorian morality. Older men were portrayed as having conservative outlooks on politics and dress, while older women were associated with dated ideas about morals and manners. As Davidow has described, these portrayals had only the faintest resemblance to real social cohorts. The representations of the older generation, for instance, did not translate to a specific demographically identifiable group at all. Rather, these images of generational conflict were expressions of social change, helping to shape the cultural categories of youth and old age in the process.³³

³¹ Laura Davidow Hirshbein, “The Flapper and the Foggy: Representations of Gender and Age in the 1920s,” *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 113.

³³ Davidow has pointed out that popular writers of the 1920s often focused on representations of four typical figures: the older woman, the younger woman (the flapper), the young man, and the older man (the foggy). Readers were encouraged to consider which figure (or generation) they positioned themselves with. See Davidow, 114-115.

In advertising, these new cultural categories became increasingly distinct. As Stuart Ewen has described, ads frequently portrayed adults as incompetent in adapting to modernity. They were told to look toward youth for an “in-step” understanding of what was appropriate for the new age.³⁴ As Ewen explains, the idealization of youth reflected new corporate priorities; it became a conduit for consumption. “All surfaces and orifices were potential gardens in which *youth* might be rekindled,” he writes. In one example “Resinol Soap told its users they might expect to *look* like a new person!”³⁵

Indeed, when advice columnists began *refusing* old age in the 1920s, they did so within a period of social change, mass production, the emergence of new cultural industries, and within public discussions of generational conflict. The ‘spirit of youth’ served as an essential component in the rejection of old age, echoed by an aging reader interviewed for Katherine Kent’s 1920s column, *The Homemaker’s Page*. The aging woman complained that she hated “to watch the years taking toll of my face, my figure, my brightness, as they do,” she said. “Don’t dare tell me that it doesn’t matter, or prate any of that foolishness about the loss being imaginary. I know better,” she said, “by the hurt of it, and the bitterness of it... I have lost my youth.” Although sympathetic, Kent did not attribute the loss of youth to the inevitable passage of time, but to the old woman’s inability to stay young. In essence, the old woman had *allowed* youth to slip through her fingers, she had not foreseen its approach. “She is to be pitied, poor lady,” Kent wrote. “The years she complains of have never taught her the secret of keeping young,” she wrote. “Youth lends color to the cheeks, sheen to the hair, gives the rounded

³⁴ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, Twenty Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

curves and the shining eyes, but it is in the spirit that youth lives, in the soul that it grows – or fades. And oftener than not the fading is the result of neglect,” she explained.³⁶

“Will you be good enough to advise me,” wrote another reader to columnist Esther Roberts in 1929, “as to the best treatment for a neck that is getting old looking?” Roberts replied unwaveringly, “The following treatment will help you have a beautiful throat,” she wrote. After prescribing cream and massage for the face and neck, Roberts instructed the reader to “place the heels about three inches apart with the toes pointing straight ahead and arms hanging relaxed at the sides. Stretch the torso to its full height and tilt the head backward a little and then go through an exaggerated chewing motion while slowly counting to one hundred,” she wrote.³⁷

Antoinette Donnelly advised similar exercises in the effort to “see the wisdom of thinking without wrinkling.” “To prevent wrinkles is the perfect cure, as has been said of other things,” she wrote. “But if they are there already a new facial habit has to be adopted for use with serious mental processes. There’s no use using creams and wrinkle lotions if we keep on furrowing the brow as we think,” she wrote. The prescription offered was facial exercise and massage. “If you get to massaging that brow morning and night you will be more conscious about the lines,” she advised.³⁸

Beauty expert Elsie Pierce similarly suggested that worry took a toll on the face. “The marvelous mother who is laughing at life may have tiny, becoming little lines, character lines, around her mouth and eyes,” she wrote, “but she is definitely keeping the

³⁶ Katherine Kent & Jean Blewett, “The Homemaker’s Page: Keeping Young,” *The Globe*, August 18, 1921, 8.

³⁷ Esther Roberts, “This Business of Living: A Column for Everyone,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 11, 1929, 34.

³⁸ Antoinette Donnelly, “Eradicate Wrinkles with Daily Massage, Your Hat Demands it,” *Toronto Daily Star*, May 5, 1931.

deep, ageing, unlovely worry wrinkles away! And I am sure you agree,” she went on, “that’s an accomplishment, these days.”³⁹

Although columnists collectively viewed wrinkles (whether ‘tiny character lines,’ or ‘worry wrinkles’) as signs of looming old age, techniques for interrupting the aging process had to be explained, learned, and mastered. Too much powder, for instance, not only accentuated one’s age, it highlighted inexperience, or lack of mastery. “Almost any time you go out,” Antoinette Donnelly wrote, “there is an older woman across from you in the bus, or street car, or you pass her by on the street and powder is what you are conscious of – on rather an old face,” she wrote. “The older one gets,” she explained, “the more sparing one must be with the hand that wields the powder puff. Too thick a coating of powder is ageing.” To achieve balance, Donnelly advised the older reader to “cream her face and let a wee gloss remain on the skin, for youth’s sake.”⁴⁰

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Lowman’s advice linking the inner self with the outer appearance became more pervasive. She called upon readers to assess their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about old age. Over a writing career that spanned almost a half-century, she wrote often of psychological age, or ‘age consciousness,’ and returned time and again to the relationship between looking old and *feeling* old. “Age consciousness is terrifically destructive to a woman’s personality, health, happiness, and personal appearance,” she wrote. “The feeling that she is old, or no longer young, is

³⁹ Elsie Pierce, “Be Beautiful,” *Toronto Daily Star*, August 9, 1932, 19.

⁴⁰ Antoinette Donnelly, “Hint of Powder Better than Mask for Aging Face,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 31, 1920.

reflected in her mannerisms... Our emotions and thoughts have a great effect on our health and physical habits.”⁴¹

Lowman’s remarks bore a tone similar to Gayelord Hauser’s warning that “you may have become bald or grey because you expected to.”⁴² Suggesting that one’s thoughts alone could improve external circumstances resembled the tenets of New Thought writers who believed that “barriers, checks, and limitations” were “self-erected consciously or subconsciously” and had only “the power we give them.”⁴³ Although it is unclear whether Lowman herself was influenced by New Thought, in the early twentieth century positive thinking began to be institutionalized in the emerging welfare state. Schools, hospitals, and courts incorporated feeling management as an integral part of their mission. During World War Two, pop psychology (and its attention to issues of identity and self-esteem) became an important tool of domestic and foreign policy.⁴⁴ And as others like Eva Illouz have explained, a new way of viewing the relationship of the self to others began to emerge. This new therapeutic emotional style “drew on residues of nineteenth-century notions of selfhood, but it also presented a new lexicon to conceptualize and discuss emotions and self in the realm of ordinary life.”⁴⁵ In other words, a wide interest in psychology, the self, and the power of positive thinking intensified.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Feeling Old Influences Looking Old,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 13, 1953, 9.

⁴² Gayelord Hauser, *Look Younger, Live Longer* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1950), 99.

⁴³ Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America’s Obsession with Self Fulfillment* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 15.

⁴⁶ This is a reference to the popular self-help book. See Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Touchstone, 1952).

In this context, Lowman often directly connected the ‘problems’ of aging bodies with aging minds (or outlooks.) She prescribed keeping busy and finding new interests, all to draw out one’s inner youthfulness. “A woman of 50 should be in the prime of life,” she wrote in 1942. “In most cases she will have finished her more arduous duties as a mother, she will have more leisure time and, if she has been wise, she will possess the vigor of youth,” she explained.

“Tragically,” she went on, “this period is too often an unhappy time, and leisure leaves her restless.” This restlessness, according to Lowman, was because she had, “failed to develop personal interests.” No matter. “If your personal tastes are buried under the weight of years,” she wrote, “start out rehabilitating yourself by beginning a course of self-improvement or getting interested in a hobby.”⁴⁷

For those readers with too little time to spend on themselves, Lowman offered time-saving solutions. She encouraged readers to use their time efficiently. “Some people think of a taxi simply as a mode of transportation,” she wrote, “it is also an opportunity for exercise.” “Gymnastics While You Wait” was the topic of one week’s column, which included instructions for sitting exercises that could be performed in the back of a taxi. Lowman reasoned that the “many minutes during the day which, if used when they appear add up to a very nice amount of time.”⁴⁸

By adopting good habits – and breaking old ones – readers could keep old age at bay. Lowman attributed certain “unlovely” characteristics as evidence of its approach. “Many women detract from their beauty by acquiring the stooped shoulder habit,” she

⁴⁷ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 18, 1942, 11.

⁴⁸ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Exercises in a Taxi Do Not Stop Traffic,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 11, 1939, 12.

explained. “Not only is this a most unattractive figure fault but it also leads to other aging and unlovely characteristics,” she wrote. “For instance, the chin protrudes forward and the head settles into the neck, thus causing lines, a straggly neck, or a double chin,” she wrote. “Today’s space,” she encouraged, “will be given to helping women who have been careless about round shoulders.” But she cautioned, “If you are extremely humped forward you may need help in correcting this fault.”⁴⁹

“Don’t rot away in a rocking chair, a car and at the desk,” Lowman urged readers trouble by wrinkled skin. “Sometimes you no doubt feel that you would like to crawl right out of your skin when you look at it in the mirror. This is impossible, but in a way, your skin does crawl right off you, although this is a gradual process,” she wrote. “When you take a bath,” Lowman advised, “be sure to rub your body with a rough towel until it is pink,” she wrote. “Too many women think of their skin as simply a covering for the body, not a part of it and they hope to dunk all sorts of concoctions on it with marvelous results,” she wrote. “These products are tremendously helpful,” Lowman suggested, “but the way you live and eat, and even the way you think, also have a potent effect on your complexion.”⁵⁰

In 1947, Lowman interviewed George Lawton, psychologist and author of *Aging Successfully*, and editor of *New Goals for Old Age*, a collection of lectures delivered in 1940 to an audience of old age professionals in New York City. The lectures were designed “to deal with the mental aspects of old age,” and to be “as practical as possible” given the diversity of professionals in attendance: superintendents of old age homes,

⁴⁹ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Stooped Shoulder Habit Unattractive Figure Fault,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 2, 1947, 11.

⁵⁰ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Hard Scrubbing Freshens the Skin – If You Can Take it,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 10, 1950, 13.

social workers, and persons, “directly connected with the care of older people.”⁵¹

Although Lawton’s edited volume is a testament to the growing professionalization of old age taking place in the 1940s, it also reflects a growing interest in the *mental* health of aging persons. In Lawton’s lecture, he attempted to present the aged, “in the first person singular.” “Let us throw on a screen, as it were,” he suggested, “a number of these real older people and exhibit a miscellany of their problems in family and institutional living just as *they* see them,” he urged. “Our first impulse is to think of old people as *old* people,” Lawton posited. “They are not that,” he slammed. “They are old *people*: men and women of such and such an age,” he said.

Providing first-hand accounts of the various obstacles facing older persons, Lawton argued that “within our lifetime... old age guidance centers will be common throughout the century.” He was referring to the first Old Age Counselling Center opened by Dr. Lillian J. Martin, in the 1920s, in San Francisco. Such centers, suggested Lawton, would soon become more common, their goals more widely appreciated. “When people reach sixty,” he argued, “they should have a chance to go somewhere for a stock-taking of their abilities and resources: intellectual, social, emotional, and recreational. In our later years,” he went on, “we will want to know what losses we have undergone and what gains we have made. Objective findings showing how we compare with our contemporaries, with young people today, with our youthful self are essential if we are to realize any kind of vocational and avocational plan adapted to the needs of our older self,” he argued.⁵²

⁵¹ George Lawton, introduction to *New Goals for Old Age*, ed. George Lawton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), vii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, “Old Age: First Person Singular,” 163.

But when Lowman sat down to interview the psychologist following the publication of *Ageing Successfully*, her questions seemed trivial given Lawton's expertise. "I asked him many questions about what makes men like women," Lowman began, "and how women can best achieve lasting love." Lawton's reply appeared equally shallow: "In a nutshell," he said, "any woman who has a sense of humor and likes to be kissed has an unbeatable combination." Of Lawton's prescription for lasting love, Lowman suggested that "it contains many basic psychological truths. The woman with a sense of humor is fun, and she is easy to live with," she argued. "She is in love with life and does not take herself too seriously or exaggerate worries. She sees life in balance and is likely to be tolerant of others."

Lowman drew upon her own expertise to speak directly to Lawton's prescription for love and happy marriage. According to Lowman, love, life, and aging were best confronted in the same manner. "The prescription for happy marriage is also a good one for remaining young as well," she argued. "Worry and tenseness and intolerance all take their measure of health and beauty. Sometimes in our own society girls learn to distrust and fear men, to fight for their rights and to get the best of the bargain. These attitudes handicap their success in creating a happy marriage," she warned.

Although Lowman interviewed Lawton about love, from it she drew a picture of old age that could spring from thought. Not unlike New Thought writers who saw the body as a "site of transformation" that could disclose the inner truths about the human self, Lowman equated youthful thoughts with a youthful exterior.⁵³ The aging body, then, served as evidence that the mind had already succumbed to it. It was the same thematic

⁵³ R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 108.

return to the subject of age consciousness. “You know how old you are in years,” she suggested. “Do you want to test yourself to find out how old you are psychologically? There is sometimes a great discrepancy between the two. If you would like the questionnaire Dr. Lawton uses in determining the psychological age of his clients, so you can score yourself, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request,” she wrote.⁵⁴

Much of Lowman’s advice, then, sought to postpone the passage of time through the modification of thought and behavior, by shedding or adapting habits that were either a hindrance or a help. “Perhaps you have subconsciously taken on some of the mannerisms of age,” she wrote. “This is a very subtle thing. Do you twitch nervously in your chair or drum your fingertips on the table or duck your head in a defensive manner?”⁵⁵

Lowman was clear that mannerisms of age were mostly the result of self-perception, not time. “If you think of yourself as a “little old woman” or a “middle-aged matron” you are sure to adapt movements, mannerisms and postures, which are subconsciously identified in your mind with the age group in which you place yourself,” she wrote, adding, “It truly seems that with their thoughts women sometimes speed the aging process, and surely give the impression of age. You have seen women who were old at 30 and then seen others who were young at 70. The difference lies partly, of

⁵⁴ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Humor, Tenderness Win for Women,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1947, 10.

⁵⁵ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Feeling Old Influences Looking Old,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 13, 1953, 9.

course, in physical condition but the impact of individual outlook also plays an important role,” she wrote.⁵⁶

Lowman warned readers about nervous mannerisms, which were always signs of aging. She urged women to check themselves, arguing that aging mannerisms were often seen in younger women. “Some women twitch and turn this way and that,” she wrote. “They may drum on the arms of the chair with their fingers. They may rub their noses or scratch their heads, swing their feet back and forth violently, lift their eyebrows and change positions constantly. It makes us feel jumpy just to watch them,” she wrote. Instead, she encouraged her readers to adopt “a restful, relaxed approach.” It makes others feel that we are in control of ourselves and of the situation in which we find ourselves,” she explained.⁵⁷

Although historians may have at one time doubted the capacity of evidence like Lowman’s advice column to reveal historical attitudes about aging, her collective works are invaluable in historicizing the “mask of age.” Lowman’s advice on growing old consistently drew upon her conviction that a youthful inner self was inside the aging shell and that age prevention through self-improvement could draw it out. “Why Grow Old?” was the chorus of her career. Framing age within a question underscored the choice that Lowman perceived. Readers did not need to grow old at all, and in many cases, barriers to youth were self-imposed.

⁵⁶ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Feeling Old Influences Looking Old,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 13, 1953, 9.

⁵⁷ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: Nervous Mannerisms are Signs of Aging,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 8, 1960, 14.

Within the historical context which saw studies questioning the efficiency of older people, negative comparisons between young and old further differentiated distinct age ‘groups.’ As the value of acquired life experience declined, the rise of industry, mass production, and new cultural industries increasingly idealized youth. Youthfulness became an important topic of discussion *and* a product, seen in advertising from the period. Growing old in the 1920s, as G. Stanley Hall did, was to adorn a new identity which hid the inner self. As Hall described, it was to have one’s “shortcomings ascribed to age.”⁵⁸ Lowman’s techniques were designed to prevent this. By turning the “clock of age back” readers could reveal what had always been there, but which age (and carelessness) had concealed.⁵⁹

Lowman’s advice column was doubtless meant to empower and inspire, but, when assessed historically, it went far in fueling greater stigmatization of older persons. Advice that consistently offered tools to guard against old age, which associated bodily signs of aging with decline, dependence – even a negative mental outlook – served to solidify the loneliness of age. Discussing age as a choice validated old age as a time to be feared, contested, and avoided. In other words, its intended audience were those ‘aging heroes’, people who – like followers of New Thought – believed that barriers were self-imposed. Although Lowman sought to draw the youthful self out, enhanced articulation of old age as ‘problem’ likely *discouraged* older persons from revealing their inner selves, their questions, needs, fears, and desires as they grew old.

⁵⁸ Hall, xi.

⁵⁹ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old: War Against Aging Day-By-Day Battle,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1960, 25.

CHAPTER THREE

Stepping In and Out of Character: Growing Old in the Advice Column of Mrs. Thompson, 1954-1960

“Work is often a source of great joy and sense of achievement, so finding useful, rewarding work is essential to living successfully.”

-Mrs. Thompson, *The Globe and Mail* (1959)

Women advice columnists of the early to mid-twentieth century, including Josephine Lowman, offered aging readers advice on beauty, fitness, and staying young. Others, like Elizabeth Thompson, addressed old age by discussing lifestyle, and drawing lessons from the experiences of others. While Thompson and Lowman shared a devotion to keeping fit mentally and adopting a positive attitude, Thompson’s column differed in important ways. It responded to letters on retirement, finances, relationships, and travel. “Mrs. Thompson,” as she was called, offered self-improvement advice often tied directly to the active, busy lifestyle. Her advice carried assumptions about the role of aging persons, and more specifically, the loss of usefulness among aging women.

As greater scientific and medical interest grew in the topic of aging, public policy in Canada began to recognize the universal needs of the elderly. This universality, however, came at a cost. By the mid-century, people were judged ‘old’ at sixty-five, without regard to class, race, or gender.¹ This chapter explores the impact of changes to the collective “elderly” but through an assessment of how advice literature addressed individual concerns, particularly among women living through these changes. As the history of old age evolved in important ways, Thompson and her readers discussed day-

¹ James Snell, *The Citizen’s Wage: The State and the Elderly in Canada, 1900-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 8.

to-day concerns about the character of old age, what changes they experienced, what pressures they felt, and how they imagined the future. How did Thompson respond to her aging women readers? What issues did aging women raise? What did Thompson and her readership bring to the conversation typically occupied by experts?

The following chapter explores only fragments of conversations: readers' edited letters, and Thompson's sculpted replies. But where the treatment of the dialogue from the outset must be imperfect, it reveals how Thompson herself balanced the conversation, what she chose to emphasize, publish, and prescribe. In this way, the column, "Mrs. Thompson Advises," provides a rich archive for exploring how older persons were seen in the mid-century. But it also gives voice – however imperfectly – to older women's thoughts about their changing roles as wives, mothers, and workers. As Andrew Blaikie explains, although differences exist according to class, health status, age, and cohort, differences in later life experiences must also be influenced by gender, race, and ethnicity.² In this way, the following discussion historicizes the consequences of having one's inner character made invisible by the "mask of ageing."³ For aging women, growing older often involved dramatic and disruptive changes that came at a high personal and professional cost.

In the late summer of 1954, the *Globe and Mail* printed an article in which it announced a forthcoming advice column, "Mrs. Thompson Advises," and invited readers to submit their letters. The column "will consist of all kinds of personal and family

² Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 78.

³ The 'mask' is when the outer body imprisons or misrepresents the inner self. See Mike Featherstone, "Post-Bodies, Aging, and Virtual Reality," *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 227.

problems as well as matters of etiquette and good taste,” wrote *The Globe and Mail*. The writer charged with overseeing the column and offering responses was said to be “a well-informed Canadian woman of wide sympathies who has lived on a farm, in a small town, and in five Canadian cities. She has been writing such a column for more than 25 years and has amassed a great deal of information in the course of answering her varied letters. She has advised and helped people from all walks of life,” *The Globe and Mail* reported.⁴

“Mrs. Thompson” was in fact the pen-name for Manitou-born writer, Isabel Turnbull Dingman, who, over the course of a long career in journalism, had been a music and art critic, an editor, and writer of the popular advice column “Personal Problems” in the 1930s. She was also the first female editor of *The Manitoban*, the University of Manitoba’s student-run newspaper, appointed to the position in the final year of the First World War. Isabel Turnbull would eventually marry James Dingman and move to London, Ontario, but not before completing her master’s degree and taking a job at the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Following her years as advice columnist, she helped to organize a new school of journalism at the University of Western Ontario, which opened in 1948.⁵ Turnbull recalled her early days at the Free Press, where the popularity of her advice feature, “Personal Problems” was soon picked up by several papers under the new title, “Mrs. Thompson Advises.” “My University friends,” recalled Turnbull, “were most impressed with the advice feature, where under a pen-name suggesting gray hair and

⁴ “Can We Help You?” *The Globe and Mail*, September 13, 1954, 21.

⁵ Marjory Lang, *Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada, 1800-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 90.

wisdom, I gave authoritative opinions to thousands of people on Life and Love,” she explained.⁶

The column, “Mrs. Thompson Advises,” hugely popular and published daily except Saturdays, outlived the Manitoba writer, who died in 1960. Advice given in the 1950s, however, was likely still Turnbull’s, whose direct style and unapologetic sensibility had some readers questioning whether “Mrs. Thompson” was in fact “Mr. Thompson.” “If you read the column regularly,” she quipped to one reader, “you will see that I am often accused of being cruel to women if I suggest they are in the wrong,” she wrote, adding, “I have several times been accused of being a man, because some readers think I always favour the men,” she wrote.⁷

Although many writers likely occupied the pen of Mrs. Thompson, the emphasis of the discussion that follows remains on the public platform of the column and the sense of community it established, which was both multifaceted and multidimensional. My interest remains with the authority of the “Mrs. Thompson” persona, the letters submitted to her, and the conversation they encouraged. In the early months following *The Globe and Mail* debut, Thompson had already earned a great deal of public trust. Lotta Dempsey of *The Globe and Mail* wrote that Thompson “does know a lot about Canadians... all sizes, all ages, from all parts of the country... in Vancouver or Newfoundland.” Thompson’s sound advice was credited to her personal history, which had lent her perspective: “[Thompson] is a widow who has kept a house and a job,”

⁶ “The Manitoban Goes Suffragette,” *The Manitoban*, Convocation Issue, Vol. 20, 1933, 9.

⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Keeping Old Snaps Not Approved,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 8, 1956, 25.

explained Dempsey... “a mother, she understands the problems of every age of child from babyhood to the young working daughter.”⁸

In this way, Mrs. Thompson possessed a different sensibility. Unlike Josephine Lowman, Thompson’s column covered a variety of topics beyond old age, and addressed an audience of men and women, young and old. Romantic relationships, family troubles, financial advice, even sexuality, nothing was out of reach or off-limits to the columnist, including the topic of growing old. In contrast to Lowman, Thompson’s advice was not influenced by an education in health or fitness; it was a newspaper column foremost, targeting a wide audience of varied interests. Old age as a physical process was secondary to the column’s focus of preparing for a new stage of life, of addressing living arrangements, finances, retirement, and inter-generational issues. Thompson gravitated to issues of lifestyle, often rooted in the home, and to promoting and educating readers on the importance of self-awareness and preparation as one imagined the future. She heard from many aging readers with questions and concerns, and Thompson responded in kind. Moreover, she often explicitly invited her readership to join the conversation and send in their own thoughts and advice, which they did so eagerly. “If any readers can suggest ways of improving the situation, I wish they would write,” she replied to one writer.⁹ In any given publication, Thompson included the letter requesting her advice, her advice on the particular problem, as well as letters from other readers addressing a previous day’s problem. Some took Thompson to task, criticizing the advice offered, and contributing their own diagnosis. Others offered Thompson their praise, using the conversational

⁸ Lotta Dempsey, “Person to Person,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 12, 1954, 15.

⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Farmer’s Invalid Wife is a Problem,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 14, 1960, 13.

platform to share the wisdom of their own experiences. In this way, Thompson's advice column was a kind of 'Facebook' or 'Twitter' of its day, where individuals from a variety of backgrounds offered their expert opinions and prescriptions under the veil of relative anonymity.

Although readers of Thompson's column doubtless wrote in because they desired her advice, a paternalistic attitude, especially towards her aging readers, ran throughout her replies. In one case, Thompson's advice to the daughter of an aging mother occupying the living room on too regular a basis, sparked much debate among readers. Thompson replied to this: "I too felt sorry for Perplexed," she confided to one writer, "but thought she should be realistic. After letting her mother monopolize the living-room for 11 years, she could hardly expect her, at 78, to change these habits of her own accord. The habits," she went on, "should never have been allowed to develop. Whenever possible," she added, "there should be both a sitting-room and bedroom for the older person. The understanding would be 'This is your room, where you can entertain your friends, and get away from the family whenever you like,'" she wrote.¹⁰

Thompson's approach, however, was not only a reflection of her role as advice columnist, but also a symptom of much wider, far-reaching, and changing attitudes towards older people within society. These changes had been building throughout the first half of the twentieth century, quietly simmering as state-run programs and charitable residential institutions, designed to help the needy of any age, became more age-specific. Prior to the twentieth century, society depended on families to act as safety nets for those in need, regardless of age. But as programs grew and increasingly became age-specific,

¹⁰ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Old Mother is Centre of Stage," *The Globe and Mail*, November 10, 1955, 27.

they also began characterizing elderly people as clients of a particular need or disadvantage. As historian James Snell explains, most of these early programs offered minimal subsistence, and the elderly were soon identified as one such target ‘group,’ observed as both dependent and in need. In contrast, the first state run program of the twentieth century, the 1908 annuities program, was based on the view that “workers could be trained to help themselves and to protect themselves against poverty in old age.” What both approaches amounted to, argues Snell, was a paternalistic attitude to the elderly.¹¹

The paternalism that developed towards older persons can be traced to changes in how aging persons were recognized by themselves, society, and the state, and this, in itself, has a complex history. Far from being passive objects of public policy, aging persons themselves organized to reshape the OAP program, promoting the idea of a basic level of support, and arguing that the state had a duty to ensure the economic welfare of its elderly citizens.¹² Canada only established pension program legislation in 1927, almost two full decades after the United Kingdom founded its program in 1908. State-funded, non-contributory, and means-tested, the citizenship and residency requirements, as well as the maximum allowable income underwent considerable changes over the program’s first two decades. Pressures from aging persons and their families, including greater public awareness and political debate, led to the OAP program’s reform. In January 1952, a basic level of support was automatically granted to all persons seventy and over, and those sixty-five to sixty-nine remained eligible for assistance under the

¹¹ Snell, 7-8, 218- 220.

¹² Some examples include the Old Age Pensioners’ Organization, the Old Age Pensioners’ Benevolent Association, the Canadian Pensioners’ Union, the Senior Citizens Community Club, and the Old Age and Invalid Pensioners’ Association. See Snell, 90, 154, 177, 219.

means-tested Old Age Assistance scheme. In other words, more individuals than ever before were eligible to receive the benefits of the Old Age Security program by the mid-century. This meant that old age, as Brian Gratton has observed, was gradually seen not just as a personal or family issue, but also a social one.¹³

Shifting social attitudes did not stop with the pension program reform. As old age captivated scientific interest, state support for research on aging, once non-existent except in areas directly connected to government responsibility, increased significantly. In the mid-century, public funds became paramount in advancing research on aging. As historian Andrew Achenbaum has explained, government funding was critical to the academic research performed in universities and other higher education institutions in the Anglo-Saxon countries following the Second World War. Teaching grants from the U.S. Administration on Aging, for instance, ensured that faculty and students could explore ideas and develop new approaches to the study of later life.¹⁴ In Canada, graduate programs in social work began in the 1940s, and a small number of students at the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto, and McGill University chose to research the elderly as part of their programs of study. In the same decade, in institutions such as the University of Toronto, courses were developed with the goal of assembling experts from related fields, and educating social workers in current

¹³ Following implementation of a pension program in the United Kingdom, Newfoundland implemented its program in 1911, and Nova Scotia considered following suit. Canada formed a parliamentary committee but did not adopt legislation until the spring of 1927. See Snell, 10-11; Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston's Aged* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 4-5.

¹⁴ W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 187.

knowledge related to aging (at the University of Toronto, 135 practitioners and students registered for the first course).¹⁵

In the mid-century, then, both aging persons and the ‘topic’ of aging were viewed as subjects of need, requiring attention, intervention, research, and expertise. As topic, it became both social problem as well as an area of academic study. More importantly, these changes, combined with the implementation of a universal state pension program, reinforced a group identity based largely on need. As Snell has described, “singling out the elderly as automatically in need of aid encouraged paternalism and legitimated ageism.” “While the automatic benefits removed some of the stigma of old age,” he writes, “the universality of the programs carried new implications about the allegedly inherent characteristics of the elderly – frailty, economic need, and an age when gender, race, and class were no longer significant factors.”¹⁶

When Thompson’s column debuted in *The Globe and Mail* in the 1950s, the history of old age had evolved in significant ways. What warrants closer attention is what issues aging persons and their families raised amidst these changes. Many of the letters that Thompson addressed about old age were of conventional concern: retirement planning, financial problems, Old Age Security, and Canadian bonds are some common examples. But the vast majority of letters from aging readers concerned fundamentally more private matters: marriage in later life, living arrangements, work concerns, and thoughts on growing old. Readers called upon the columnist, whose name suggested

¹⁵ Snell, 214.

¹⁶ Ibid., 220- 221.

experience, Anglo-Saxon origin, and a middle-class upbringing, to deliver trusted advice. Thompson embraced her ‘old timer’ readership, who provided not only a host of letters to consider, but contributed their own insight. “I am pleased when the old timers write,” Thompson wrote, “because they usually have something worth saying, something learned by a lifetime of experience with people.”¹⁷ But as Thompson reinforced the value of the ‘old timer’s’ experience, she also regularly perpetuated assumptions about the qualities of age.

Aging men and women discussing love or contemplating a second marriage produced a plethora of advice underscoring a key assumption of the columnist: relationships in later life provided a very practical solution to the problem of loneliness or financial insecurity. Aging readers themselves seemed to be aware of this perceived attitude. In one widow’s letter that confessed to “keeping company” with a man of 62, she wrote, “Foolish as it may seem to others, we do truly love each other.”¹⁸ Another spoke of a similar scenario. “I lost my husband six years ago, and really thought I would have a companion and a man I could love,” she confessed. “I am all broken over the affair...I can’t sleep,” she wrote. Thompson replied: “Try to be honest about the whole thing,” she advised, “and decide whether his daughter may have been right in saying you weren’t suited,” she wrote. “Did you get along well and enjoy each other’s company? Or were you just lonely and looking for security?”¹⁹

¹⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Items Made in Home for Aged Recommended for Gift Shoppers,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 1965, 11.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Sons Oppose Mother’s Marriage,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 24, 1958, 24.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Children Oppose Father’s Marriage,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 19, 1955, 18.

The widow, “Mrs. S. M.” wrote in to find out where she might meet an unattached, eligible bachelor. “I suppose I am a bit of a dreamer,” she wrote, “but I feel that surely somewhere in this big wide world of ours there must be some gentleman who is just as lonely, and would enjoy companionship as much as I would,” she wrote.²⁰ A self-described “old bachelor” expressed a similar feeling, telling Thompson he was feeling as “timid” as a nineteen-year-old girl, but still flirting with the idea of marriage.²¹

Many aging readers responded to the widow “Mrs. S. M.” and the timid “old bachelor,” eager to offer their own advice. “Imagine all that wealth of character planning to waste itself in an institution,” wrote one woman to “old bachelor.”²² Another wrote in, telling “old bachelor” of several people he knew who had married in old age and were very happy. Some even asked Thompson if she might play match-maker: “Surely there are men who would jump at the chance to have someone like the widow Mrs. S. M. for company,” one man wrote. “I was thinking you should have a lost and found column for lovers,” he suggested to Thompson, who politely disagreed.²³

To these letters expressing a desire for love, Thompson regularly prescribed a positive attitude and active living, such as joining a club or organization. These were seen as solutions to problems associated with a growing lack of usefulness in later life. But in both letter and reply, the subject’s *age* was given special emphasis, suggesting an awareness of its significance to both parties. To “Mrs. S. M.,” Thompson advised that

²⁰ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Widow Would Like to Marry Again,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 31, 1959, 9.

²¹ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Bachelor, 56, Timid About Marriage,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 1, 1955, 22.

²² Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Marriage Late in Life Can be Happy,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 12, 1955, 17.

²³ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Views on Position of Widows,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 8, 1959.

she, “join some organization.” she wrote. “You are lucky to be working – at least you aren’t bored,” she commented. “Clubs devoted to political activities, stamp collecting, bridge, music, or sports might fill in some of the empty hours, besides unearthing some eligible men.”²⁴ To “old bachelor’s” timid feelings she offered encouragement: “The percentage of happy marriages among those contracted in later life is high,” she urged, because “the escape from loneliness creates a warm feeling of gratitude.”²⁵

Thompson’s advice to older women in particular must be read within its historical context, for as Snell explains, problems affecting elderly people in the mid-century in Canada had a highly gendered character. Although demographically there were slightly more old men than old women, old women were more likely to become widowed. Left without their spouses, their problems of poverty, isolation, and dependence were exacerbated. Women who became widowed – particularly in the first decades of the twentieth century – could claim few benefits of property, and were more likely to require economic assistance.²⁶ In one case, a writer told Thompson: “the position of a widow of 60 years is not an enviable one,” she confessed. “She is too young to receive any type of old age pension, yet is too old for employment. She has worries enough, just keeping herself alive.”²⁷ Another widow wrote in about family troubles that had left her homeless. She had found a room, she explained, but “no steady job as yet.” Thompson replied sympathetically, “I hope you get a job soon,” she wrote. Still, Thompson attributed the

²⁴ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Widow Would Like to Marry Again,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 31, 1959, 9.

²⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Marriage Late in Life Can be Happy,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 12, 1955, 17.

²⁶ Snell, 25-26.

²⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Views on Position of Widows,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 8, 1959, 11.

widow's family trouble to her unemployment. "When you are busy and feel useful you will be less likely to rub your children the wrong way," she wrote. "Try to see things from their point of view."²⁸

The 'empty hours' Thompson referenced were regularly attributed to the changing role of aging women within the family. As women aged, Thompson explained, a feeling of uselessness accompanied the departure of grown children. "No longer are they busy, feeling important and useful," she wrote. "With no special hobbies or interest to fall back on, they sink into a dull sort of apathy," she warned.²⁹ She cautioned older women about developing the "peculiar quirks" of old age, which made them difficult to live with and susceptible to mental illness. As she commonly did, Thompson suggested activity, such as taking up a sport, or going to night school.³⁰ In one reply Thompson wrote, "worry over growing old, not being needed any more, etc., may coincide with the menopause."³¹

Thompson's prescription of usefulness through activity was her response to the wide-ranging changes influencing older women in all facets of their lives. It too may have been a reflection of Thompson's own widowhood. Whatever the case, as Hockey and James explain, changes in family roles must be considered within the historical emergence of individualism. The introduction of compulsory education in the late nineteenth-century, the course of industrialization, and later the welfare state, resulted in the exclusion of children, women, and older persons from the workplace. As women

²⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Old Mother Left Out in the Cold," *The Globe and Mail*, January 31, 1956.

²⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Wife Cold After 30 Years of Marriage," *The Globe and Mail*, November 11, 1954, 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Obeying Moral Code is Best," *The Globe and Mail*, February 6, 1959, 11.

became caregivers for new categories of dependent people, and as participation in the labour force became increasingly linked with one's personhood, the departure of grown children – or the death of one's spouse – signaled more than mere change to the family makeup.³² As Thompson's women readers attest, it also meant changes to their *role*.

Still, aging women's perceived lack of usefulness went beyond the home. In many cases, the perception blended seamlessly at home and at work. Although many wrote to seek Thompson's advice on personal affairs, a changing work culture was also encouraging discussion. Throughout the 1940s, the idea of mandatory retirement at sixty-five steadily gained ground, influencing the daily lives of many workers. Older women workers in particular had little sway in the labour force, and – in contrast to men – were deemed 'retirement age' at sixty instead of sixty-five. As the census reports of 1941 indicate, less than 1 per cent of older, unemployed men recorded that they no longer had an occupation, compared to 30 per cent of older unemployed women.³³ Throughout the decade and into the 1950s, older working people were increasingly seen only as 'casual' labourers, filling positions better suited to their declining physical abilities, and working only to supplement income derived from pension plan earnings, or for extra "pocket money."³⁴ In this way, older women were seen as subjects of disadvantage from a variety of angles.

It is not surprising then that Thompson's advice presumed a deficit in usefulness among aging women, many of whom were no longer employed or acting as caregivers.

³² Jenny Hockey and Allison James, "Back to Our Futures: Imaging Second Childhood," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 138.

³³ Snell, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

The death of a spouse or the departure of children meant the end of one's role.

Thompson's advice to the timid "old bachelor" contemplating marriage, for instance, was that many aging women needed "an interest in life and someone to look after. You would be the answer to their prayers," she wrote.³⁵

Due to changes which encouraged a perceived lack of usefulness among older women, the attempt to *appear* young 'in character' (or inwardly) was raised in letters to Thompson. These often came from women nearing (and fearing) retirement age. One way of escaping old age was to keep working, which challenged invisibility and helped workers stay young by "staying active."³⁶ A 60-year-old widow named "Mary," for instance, explained that she felt taken for granted, that from the outside she appeared, "a person without problems." "I mustn't admit to weariness for fear my employer will think I'm getting too old for the job," she explained. "I need the job," she went on, "so I do everything possible to present a good appearance, and I never take time off. But I wish right now that I could lean a little on someone." She asked for Thompson's advice on preparing for retirement, but more importantly, to express "the need of more tenderness and consideration from my family."

Thompson spoke to "Mary's" 'performance' in her reply. "Even if I had a solution, I doubt if you could now step out of character," she wrote. As Thompson often did, she isolated the lesson that could be gained from the problem posed. This often included advice that was all but redundant to the person in question. "You would have been well advised to carry some type of personal annuity or private pension plan during

³⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Bachelor, 56, Timid About Marriage," *The Globe and Mail*, December 1, 1955, 22.

³⁶ Leisa D. Sargent, Mary Dean Lee, Bill Martin, and Jelena Zikic, "Reinventing Retirement: New Pathways, New Arrangements, and New Meanings," *Human Relations* 66, no. 1 (2012): 13.

your earlier years, part of which you could have claimed in filing your income tax,” Thompson explained. “At 65, you may apply for Old Age Assistance, which involves a means test, and in the meantime why not be more frank with your daughters,” she wrote.”³⁷

Despite the redundancy of Thompson’s advice, she continued to argue that “A retired woman of 60, with fair health and adequate means can make a pleasant life for herself provided she has some interests and hobbies.”³⁸ Her advice echoed Josephine Lowman’s assertion that “A woman of 50 should be in the prime of life.”³⁹ Although Thompson differed in the kinds of problems she treated, like Lowman she underscored the importance of personal responsibility. Unlike Lowman, however, Thompson delved into real, practical issues affecting *older people*, a reflection of social change. Regaining youthfulness may not have been a top priority for Thompson, but, like Lowman, her prescriptions targeted her readers’ mental states. She regularly prescribed lifestyle changes that would encourage feelings of usefulness. Her advice to keep active was a reflection of what many scholarly studies, self-help books, and government reports expressed following the Second World War: that people could still contribute to society and guard against premature decay so long as they continued to grow mentally and psychologically beyond middle-age.⁴⁰

³⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Working Widow Tired of Struggle,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 4, 1962, 11.

³⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Some Women Dread Retirement Period,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 1960, 21.

³⁹ Josephine Lowman, “Why Grow Old,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 18, 1942, 11.

⁴⁰ W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 118.

Thompson was not the only one encouraging her aging readers to be active and to develop new interests. Older people themselves weighed in on the merits of feeling useful, often writing in to encourage others who were feeling lonely. “H. B.” wrote, “As the years change our lives, most of us miss being needed.” “Adjusting to old age is hard for many people who have been busy,” wrote another. “Helper” added, “My advice is... don’t stay home too much.” They all agreed on the benefit of interests, hobbies, and being of service to others. The widow “H. B.” was seeking a housekeeping job, she said, “That is really what I would like best,” she wrote. Another said that, “Everybody should have a hobby or interest of some kind, take part in some church or community work, and make a habit of being friendly.” “Helper” wrote that she went “down south each winter,” where she met “a lot of lovely people.”⁴¹

Others, however, were clearly living within different economic realities, and wrote in to say as much. “Not everybody who is lonely can afford to go south,” wrote one reader.⁴² Another responded in kind: “Do they realize all these things take strength and money?”⁴³ Still, others wrote in saying that their doctors had suggested they go “down south,” in order to “move in a different environment.”⁴⁴ Thompson herself suggested it, although not consistently. “Some retired women I know have a wonderful time taking trips in groups of two or three,” she wrote to one reader.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Money Alone Not Enough for Old Age,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 8, 1956, 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Grandma Needs Love and Respect,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 29, 1955, 13.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Mutual Drive Creates Problems,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 24, 1956, 19.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Some Women Dread Retirement,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 7, 1960, 21.

Thompson's general rule, however, was to treat loneliness with activity. She conceded that some of her readers had financial struggles, but that recreations and hobbies offered a "feeling of importance and fulfilment," she wrote. Problems arose, she explained, because, "many people are so busy or have such a struggle for existence that there is little time for pleasure or recreation until their declining years," she wrote.⁴⁶ In this way, although she attributed the problems of old age to changes in work and home life, Thompson and many of her readers cast old age as a distinct time for pleasure and self-development, with little regard to class differences.

Despite the rich and interactive forum that Thompson's column encouraged, it also highlighted a duality: one could either embrace the new 'character' of aged – with its accompanying qualities and activities – or hold steadfast to their previous, increasingly unrecognizable roles. For although "H. B." wrote that she missed "being needed," it was not the "changing years" but her changing *role* that had influenced her perceived usefulness. In multiple replies, for instance, Thompson reinforced that possibilities for improvement were always present, so long as readers prepared for the "declining years." In other words, the idea of transitioning to a *new* role as one aged became normalized, its success or failure pinned increasingly on individuals. It borrowed but accentuated what others like Dr. Nolan Lewis had said in the previous decade, that some found "little if any difficulty in making the adjustments necessary to old age," while "others are reluctant to relinquish the activities formerly pursued."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Woman, 60, Has Right to Some Frivolity," *The Globe and Mail*, December 2, 1959, 13.

⁴⁷ Nolan D. C. Lewis, "Applying Mental Health Principles to Problems of the Aging," in *New Goals for Old Age*, ed. George Lawton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 96.

It is worth briefly exploring another but crucial part of the conversation found in Thompson's column. While aging readers wrote in about their lives, Thompson also replied to letters from younger readers. Grown children wrote in about their aging parents, the financial and familial challenges of opening their homes to in-laws, or to seek advice about disputes with "quirky" elderly neighbours. Thompson's advice was varied, but often described older persons as "queer,"⁴⁸ or "set in their ways."⁴⁹ And, although compassionate, Thompson's empathy for aging persons veered into a paternalism that was steadily building in society throughout the 1950s. According to Thompson, families were less likely than before to get along amicably because "government aid had lessened the feeling of clan responsibility."⁵⁰ Because of this, she regularly addressed letters about familial disputes between generations, often using older persons as examples to highlight the 'lessons' present in all problems. In other words, problems offered "food for thought" to her readership, a roadmap of sorts on how – or how not – to plan for the future.⁵¹ She used these lessons to encourage preparation, but in doing so, highlighted that the aged were "more to be pitied than blamed."⁵²

The social spaces and conditions of this time meant that many aging persons sought to distance themselves from being *perceived* as old. They escaped the stigma of old age by keeping their "chin up" to family and employers, and by not voicing their true

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Boys Worry to Queer Old Woman," *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 1958, 17.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Aged Parents Prove Handicap for Family," *The Globe and Mail*, August 9, 1960, 11.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Grandparents Welcomed in Family," *The Globe and Mail*, April 2, 1958, 23.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Finances Confuse Woman, 83," *The Globe and Mail*, June 29, 1959, 18.

⁵² Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Boys Worry to Queer Old Woman," *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 1958, 17.

feelings which may have revealed a vulnerability.⁵³ Others, like the widow “Mrs. S. M.” and the timid “old bachelor,” gave voice to their inner-most desires for love, but with language that betrayed an anxiety about appearing “foolish.” Although they had stepped out of character, from the outside their desires were “explained away,” often because of their age.⁵⁴

Others gave important testimonials into the personal consequences of appearing old ‘in character,’ or, to borrow Featherstone’s and Wernick’s term, of wearing the ‘mask.’ “I notice that one of your correspondents thinks old people should live in homes and this would solve all their problems,” wrote one nursing home resident to Thompson, but “there is no love or interest shown,” she went on.⁵⁵ An 80-year-old woman wrote to Thompson about a similar problem: “If old people share a home with young people, an intelligent plan must be worked out for the comfort of all those in the house,” she wrote.⁵⁶ Another expressed a similar feeling: “If children ask a parent to share their home, let it be sharing. How could anyone call it sharing if the parent has to take to the doghouse every time a visitor calls, or even when the family gathers in the living room?”⁵⁷ In other words, a shared feeling of being removed from one’s former role is evident, particularly

⁵³ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Working Widow Tired of Struggle,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 4, 1962, 11.

⁵⁴ In a 1976 study examining elderly residents of a slum hotel in the United States, sociologist Joyce Stephens confronted gerontological literature which suggested behaviours like passivity and dependence were emblematic of the elderly. She argued that the alienation of the hotel’s residents could not be “explained away” by the normal process of aging, and in fact was discredited by the residents themselves, who, in their quest for personal security actively adopted coping strategies of “noninvolvement.” See Joyce Stephens, *Loners, Losers, and Lovers: Elderly Tenants of a Slum Hotel* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 94.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Life In Home For Aged Dreary,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 4, 1959, 13.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Thompson: “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Woman 80 Finds She’s Sorry for Young Folks,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 15, 1959.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Thompson, “Mrs. Thompson Advises: Grandma Needs Love and Respect,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 29, 1955, 13.

in letters on living arrangements. They all echo what one woman relayed in Lawton's *New Goals for Old Age* (1943): "My family think I am old," she said, "and that it is enough for me to just sit where I am put. But," she confided, "it is unbearable for me to do nothing."⁵⁸

On at least one occasion, Thompson even advised an aging reader to *appear* old to avoid being mistreated by an abusive son-in-law. Addressing the granddaughter in her reply, Thompson wrote, "Make it very clear to your grandmother that you love and honor her," Thompson urged. "Tell her not to pay any more attention to what your father says, or suggest that she pretend not to hear!"⁵⁹

What is historically intriguing about the conversations above is their capacity to contribute to a larger understanding of later life as a distinct time linked to particular needs, qualities, or activities. As Cole explains, by the mid-century "this "new" phase of life was becoming a mass phenomenon." The startling growth of an aging population, increasing life expectancy, the advance of retirement, and the spread of Social Security benefits reconstructed old age into the last stage of the institutionalized life cycle."⁶⁰ Although elderly people before the twentieth century were not presumed to share common physical or social characteristics, by the twentieth century they had emerged as members of a social category, and regarded largely as obsolescent.⁶¹ As Achenbaum

⁵⁸ George Lawton, "First Person Singular," in *New Goals for Old Age*, ed. George Lawton, 163.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Gives Advice: Alcoholic Mean to Mother-in-Law," *The Globe and Mail*, November 17, 1955, 20.

⁶⁰ Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 223.

⁶¹ In the late nineteenth century, the status of the elderly changed significantly. The impact of scientific, bureaucratic and popular ideas collided with developments in medical practice, the economy, and society. See Snell, 4; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 40.

further explains, popular perceptions which had dominated earlier in the century remained prevalent in the mid-century: the elderly were not viewed as typically active, alert, efficient, or contented.⁶² Thompson's rather uniform responses to her 'old timers' suggests that all of these changes were factors in her assumptions about later life. More importantly, it is also apparent that they influenced how aging persons themselves viewed their lives.

But while readers often expressed a desire for the right plan or roadmap for their retirement years, it seems they also expressed a desire to be heard. A reader, describing herself as "Just Living" in her nursing home, voiced a similarly hidden desire as "Mary:" to be treated with tenderness. "It isn't wise to write what I wish were known," she wrote to Thompson. "The aged need love, warmth, and interest that they never get here," she wrote.⁶³ "It isn't fair to blame the home entirely," Thompson replied. "No institution can possibly give love and warmth to order for dozens or hundreds of residents, like turning a tap," she wrote. Thompson inquired about the nursing home's recreational activities, suggesting if it did not offer any, the woman might consider a move. Some homes, she explained, "offer handicrafts, music, cards, and comfortable common rooms. I have even heard of arthritics going to them, almost crippled, who became so interested in doing things that their ailments became less. Wouldn't that be a thrill?"⁶⁴

⁶² Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 163.

⁶³ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Life In Home For Aged Dreary," *The Globe and Mail*, September 4, 1959, 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Mrs. Thompson's advice column, hugely popular in the 1950s, and often treating day-to-day concerns, became both a destination for advice and a forum for other readers to communicate with each other. At a time when old age was increasingly seen as a collective issue, Thompson's column offered a space for individual expression, becoming a platform for people to both voice specific issues and receive targeted answers from Thompson and other interested readers.

While the column encouraged individuals to express themselves within a space of relative anonymity, Thompson's 'old timers' could not quite escape the stamp of generalization. Aging women, in particular, were often seen as past their useful roles as mothers and workers. Aging widows bore an additional marker: their useful roles as wives were also complete. Thompson routinely responded with prescriptions that targeted the useless voids left by their suspended roles. She endorsed marriage in later life, and suggested activities, interests, hobbies, and travel to treat feelings of boredom and uselessness after children had gone. Although she had similar prescriptions for aging men, their previous roles as workers and fathers received little attention. Marriage in later life was a benefit because it cured loneliness in men and reinforced women's role as caregivers. In this way, Thompson's advice about aging was highly gendered. Moreover, she addressed individual concerns by applying collective solutions with little regard to differences in class or social conditions.

Letters also indicate that some readers sought to distance themselves from being thought of as old, largely because of its associations with uselessness, sickness, or frailty. As older women workers in particular were judged as retirement 'ready' at sixty by the mid-century, the necessity for many like "Mary" to distance themselves from the *outward*

character of age would have been profound. For older working women who were also widows – not a rare occurrence in the 1950s – this pressure was immense. It is not surprising then that Thompson’s advice emphasized planning for the declining years, that it pointed to lessons that could be learned, and that it so readily tried to encourage feelings of usefulness among her aging women readers.

CONCLUSION

“The problem of the aged isn’t loneliness. What they lack most of all is a future.”
-letter to Mrs. Thompson (1966)

Old age, its perceived norms and possibilities, was in a constant state of reinvention in the first half of the twentieth century, influenced by the growth of gerontology, state-run programs for the elderly in both the United States and Canada, and greater public concern for the elderly population as a new target ‘group.’ Fear, uncertainty, and even optimism existed about what the future of old age might entail. The proliferation of an assortment of professionals studying the *new* old age suggests the homogenizing influence that the ‘problem’ of old age began to pose. In this way, elderly people became the target ‘audience’ for a variety of scientific and cultural reasons.

In the early twentieth century, social roles in adulthood became increasingly uniform and expected; the advancement of universal age-homogenous public school as well as age-assigned public pension programs split the life course into three compartments: education, work, and retirement.¹ Its institutionalization underscored the distinct separateness of old age from other stages of life, while scientists, self-help writers and other professionals offered research that amounted to a new and evolving education on the future of aging.

In historical work, there has existed a tendency to value some sources above others. Advice and self-improvement literature, for instance, can be viewed as subjective, biased, unrepresentative, and therefore of lesser quality to serious historical investigation,

¹ Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

while government reports, scientific analysis, and medical data are accepted uncritically as objective, detached, and factual. While the stage of old age underwent its scientific and institutional transformation – which itself carried its assumptions – self-help writers and advice columnists were helping to educate the public, shaping beliefs, values, and perceptions of aging to no lesser degree. As scholars such as Laura Davidow Hirshbein have explained, representations of older people in public sources provide a useful way of examining changes in middle-class culture. Following historian Lynn Hunt, she suggests that public discussions not only describe opinion, they “help to shape reality itself.”²

The spread of paternalism, in all its facets, was particularly dangerous in the realm of self-improvement. At a time when the last stage of life was increasingly viewed as deficient in social purpose, advice writers offered tools to either regain youthfulness or prepare for the declining years. Josephine Lowman’s column “Why Grow Old?” rose in popularity as changes to industry, production and consumption, and cultural industries increasingly prioritized youth. By the mid-century, Mrs. Thompson’s advice – while she addressed older people directly – only reinforced that old age was a time to be feared and avoided, underscoring the image of obsolescence that had dominated a half century earlier. Within a budding interest in the mental aspects of aging, a homogenous *character* of age emerged, one associated with negative qualities and behaviours unique to its stage. Helpful advice meant to distance audiences from its image only underscored the solitude of the aged, what scholars such as Norbert Elias and Bryan Turner have observed as the

² Laura Davidow Hirshbein, “The Flapper and the Foggy: Representations of Gender and Age in the 1920s,” *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 112-113. See also Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: History, Culture, and Text,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 17-22.

transition from community to isolation.³

In replies to letters from a younger demographic, Thompson's perceptions about aging persons were illuminated. Here, her paternalism was exemplified, as when so often she asked the younger reader to see the solution in the problem where the older person could not. Calling older persons "poor dears," "quirky," "set in their ways," and even mentally ill, Thompson underscored perceptions of elderly people as tiresome, useless, and difficult.⁴ Just as older people in the 1920s were portrayed as sentimental about the past in popular magazines, or told to look to younger people for an "in-step" understanding about the new age,⁵ older people in Thompson's column could not quite shake their image as historical subjects in need of instruction. In the mid-century, the instruction they both sought and received championed the benefits of staying active. Such attempts reflected the prevailing view that one could avoid premature decline by staying active.

While Thompson tied activity to usefulness in the 1950s, advocates of 'positive aging' in the 1960s would harness its potential to combat ageism, championing a new image of aging in the process. By the late 1960s, a movement was underway by academic gerontologists, humanists, health professionals, and social workers to confront the "myths" of age and to introduce yet one more *new* image of age. The movement aimed to

³ Bryan S. Turner, "Aging and Identity: Some Reflections on the Somatization of the Self," in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), 253. See also Norbert Elias, *The Loneliness of the Dying* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

⁴ For examples see Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Boys Worry to Queer Old Woman," *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 1958, 17; Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Aged Parents Prove Handicap for Family," *The Globe and Mail*, August 9, 1960, 11.

⁵ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, Twenty Fifth Anniversary Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 146.

both repair social conditions of old age and transform cultural sentiments toward aging. The campaign against ageism and the discrimination against older people helped to free older people, at least in part, from prejudice. By the early 1970s, health professionals, social workers, and researchers were rallying around this new image: that older people were “(or should be) healthy, sexually active, engaged, productive, and self-reliant.”⁶

But as Cole argues, the movement that rallied so fiercely against ageism knew little of its origins or historical development. Ageism and its critics, insists Cole, had much more in common than they realized. While many researchers in the 1960s and 70s began to emphasize the social and cultural “construction” of old age, they were blind to their roles in crafting an opposite mythology: that older people were healthy, independent, and engaged. In the historical context of the growth of social justice movements, advocates for positive aging embodied the same false dichotomies and health standards that had historically informed middle-class views. “The same drive for accumulation of individual health and wealth,” writes Cole, “the same preoccupation with control of the body that gave rise to ageism in the nineteenth century, informed the attack on ageism.”⁷

The danger in stressing either the negative or positive pole lies in the differences – both among individual experience *and* stages of life – that it fails to acknowledge. Psychologist G. Stanley Hall, for one, believed that old age, like adolescence, had its own “feelings, thoughts, and wills,” and that individual differences in old age were “probably

⁶ Cole cites several examples, including Alex Comfort, *A Good Age* (New York: Crown, 1976); Frances Tenenbaum, *Over 55 Is Not Illegal* (Boston: Houghton, 1979). See Cole, 228-229.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

greater than youth.”⁸ By the 1960s and 70s, social researchers pushing for equality discounted the relevance and significance of age. Without regard to historical development, they approached “myths” as if they were scientific hypotheses to be falsified. The “facts” were treated alongside the “stereotypes” yet could not account for the enduring quality of false stereotypes.⁹ In other words, in their attempt to highlight the absurdity of those myths of aging, research that discounted the relevance of age contributed to a host of *new* generalizations. More importantly, critical analysis of where ideas about aging *originated* went largely unexplored.

Despite the lack of historical specificity among critics of ageism of the 1960s and 70s, sociological studies from the period contributed highly valuable research. One of the most intriguing studies challenging the process of *normal* aging is the 1976 study by sociologist Joyce Stephens. Stephens checked herself into a slum hotel in an unnamed inner city in America to explore 110 of its elderly residents. Many had been living in single occupancy rooms for over a decade. They had developed daily routines and responsibilities around paying the hotel rent, eating at one of three local restaurants, drinking at the hotel bar, and collecting state assistance, Old Age Security, disability, or pension checks. In other words, for many the “Guinevere Hotel” was home. Impoverished, living in a high crime area in rooms without private bathrooms or kitchen facilities, the elderly residents Stephens discovered were fiercely protective of their independence and highly adaptive to change. Far from being a community that bonded in order to pool resources, Stephens discovered “lone wolves,” residents who, for the most

⁸ G. Stanley Hall, *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), 100.

⁹ Cole, 229.

part, went about their lives privately. “They are not passive victims of old age,” concluded Stephens. “They are alienated and alone, but not because “disengagement” is one of those behaviours that accompanies aging. The isolation, anonymity, and suspicion endemic to the world of our SRO [single resident occupancy] tenants are not accidental byproducts of urban conditions or old age; they are, however, the deliberate consequences of the active participation of these slum dwellers in the structuring of their social reality and, as such, are instruments to deal with the exigencies of this reality.”¹⁰

Beyond common desires for privacy and independence, the Guinevere hotel was a place where the “old-timers” could live authentically, where behaviours and routines were not subject to scrutiny (drinking and prostitution were not uncommon activities at the Guinevere). Many of the elderly residents chose to live in the hotel rather than with family. “I could live free in a house my niece has but I’ll stay here,” said one resident. “One good thing about living here is you can live your own private life, and no one will bother you,” said another.¹¹

More importantly, many of the residents compared their independent living arrangements with their suspicions of nursing homes. As Stephens explained, the residents viewed the two nursing homes in the immediate area as evidence of “society’s rejection of old people.” They called the nursing homes, “playpens,” where “they tell you when to get up, when to eat, where to go, and take your money,” one resident said.

¹⁰ Joyce Stephens, *Loners, Losers, and Lovers: Elderly Tenants of a Slum Hotel* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 93.

¹¹ Stephens, quoting residents, 8.

Another supported this view: “The homes are terrible places where they tell you what to do. And what you want doesn’t matter.”¹²

Although lacking historical discussion, Stephens’ study confronted gerontological literature that suggested “dependency” and “passivity” were emblematic of the elderly or could be “explained away” by the process of aging.¹³ Interestingly, Stephens believed that the “picture of what it means to be old” in the twentieth century was based heavily on *where* old people were studied. The institutionalized elderly were passive, terrified, dependent, Stephens wrote, and “they do slip away irrevocably from the world of the living.”¹⁴ Stephens’ hotel residents, on the other hand, were “actively involved in the perpetuation of their society,” and they did not belong to “the world of the old man, excluded from society, sitting and waiting to die in his overstuffed upholstery flowers.”¹⁵ But Stephens did not elaborate on the relevance of old age to the hotel residents or to the significance of her study. In fact, by confronting the *norms* of age, the ages of her residents became quite *insignificant*. Instead, alienation was traced to their “personal histories,” and to living lives as petty thieves, alcoholics, addicts, and “down-and-outers.” Their residencies were not the result of sudden tragedy. Instead, they had been “settling in for a long time.”¹⁶ In other words, Stephens’ showed residents living as they always had, in conditions quite inevitable, their chronological ages being of little importance.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid., 94.

¹⁴ Ibid., 92.

¹⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷ This is one of the myths that researchers tried to debunk. In the early 1960s, Robert Butler coined the term “ageism” (discrimination on the basis of age) and argued that chronological aging was itself a myth. See Cole, 229. See also Robert N. Butler, “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged,” *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65-76.

It is impossible to know whether residents who chose to live at the hotel rather than with family did so in order to avoid the mask of age and its accompanying scrutiny. Although Stephens argued that *place* had a great deal of influence on the findings of studies, by her account the “passive” and “terrified” nursing home residents were only by-products of their social surroundings. In the non-institutional setting, she seems to have implied, these characteristics would have likely subsided. Although social environments still must account, in part, for how people experience aging, her over-emphasis upon place discounted why they had been relegated to the social margins, as well as other factors that may have contributed to the characteristics concerned, like weakness, physical decline, and the end-of-life (in other words, the whole spectrum of their social and physical reality). Cole’s dualism becomes apparent in this sense; the insignificance of age reflected the 1970s historical context and Stephens’ assault on ageism.

Just as the residents’ “social worlds” heavily informed Stephens’ study, the theories of aging outlined by the figures in this work were informed by more than their disciplines or professional backgrounds. Their stated or unstated views about illness and death, for instance, reveal a search for meaning beyond the scope of their expertise. In *Nature of Man* and *The Prolongation of Life*, for instance, Metchnikoff studied the death instinct, which, he argued, appeared after a “normal life and an old age healthy and prolonged.”¹⁸ In such cases, fear of death was altogether absent, and a *desire* for death –

¹⁸ Élie Metchnikoff, *Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell (New York: Putnam, 1903), 283.

as one might desire sleep – revealed itself.¹⁹ This desire appeared not as a means to end suffering, Metchnikoff explained, but as a symbol of the normal, fulfilled life course. He had observed many old and dying people who clung desperately to life, thus challenging his theory. But these individuals, he concluded, experienced unhealthy, *abnormal* old age. Human life, he argued, was subject from the beginning to “pernicious disharmonies” in the constitution which only increased year by year. “It is not surprising,” wrote Metchnikoff, “that under such circumstances men wish neither to grow old nor to die.”²⁰

Hauser’s focus was similarly on attaining a healthy, *normal* old age, but with conceptions of health and end-of-life quite altogether different. His ‘People’ as he called them (always with a capital ‘P’) were happy self-starters who had reached old age standing tall and living as they always had.²¹ In other words, they possessed none of the conventional characteristics of old age, such as physical weakness or illness. Of one of his friends in her seventies, he wrote she had the “same quality that she had in her fifties... a quality not of youth but of youthfulness, of warm young dignity.” Her complexion was “soft and unlined,” and she believed in “the power of the mind to accomplish, little by little, the good it sets out to do.”²² Physical health, in other words, reflected an inner optimism that brought youthfulness to the surface. In this way, Hauser discussed disease and illness only as barriers to agelessness.

¹⁹ Metchnikoff discusses biblical references, and his own observations at homes for the aged. See Élie Metchnikoff, *Prolongation of Life: Optimistic Studies*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell (New York & London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 126.

²⁰ Metchnikoff, *Nature of Man*, 283.

²¹ Gayelord Hauser, *Look Younger, Live Longer* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1950), 26.

²² Hauser discusses his friend, Ann Astaire. See Hauser, 106-107.

Although Metchnikoff *did* write of death, his vision of its arrival after a fulfilled life course avoided any real discussion of illness or fear of death, in addition to greatly sentimentalizing it. This view reflected the early modern search for the secure and orderly course of life, informed by the Enlightenment tradition of rational obedience to benevolent natural law.²³ Moreover, Metchnikoff's view of death, itself written in old age, might not have carried its specific hypothesis had its author not lost three brothers to degenerative disease.²⁴ His scientific study may have shaped his theory of natural death, but it was also informed by the historical origins informing his view on the life-course, and by his own personal history as well.

In contrast, Hauser wrote of agelessness beginning in the 1930s, releasing his “scientific” handbooks in the wake of the founding gerontological publications. His theory that eating the right foods added years to life coincided with state-run programs directed at age-specific groups and greater societal awareness in Canada and the United States of old age as a social problem. In a climate of increasing paternalism throughout the 30s and 40s, Hauser's books replaced the old image of obsolescence with a new image of the self-made man. It enlisted the power of the individual to change and shape their own life; he spoke of limitations only to articulate how to overcome them. In other words, Hauser's work reflected a burgeoning interest in the mental aspects of aging.

Despite growing interest in the aging *individual*, solutions for old age were steadily observed as residing *outside* the inner self. The state-standardized emergence of food ‘rules’ seen in guides published in Canada and the United States in the 1940s further

²³ Cole, 187.

²⁴ Metchnikoff's brothers Ivan, Leo, and Nicholas all died prematurely from cancer or heart problems. See Gerald J. Gruman, introduction to Reprinted Edition, 1977, *The Prolongation of Life: Optimistic Studies*, trans. P. Chalmers Mitchell (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2004), xxiv.

reflected the growing value placed on solutions derived from *external* sources, often as a result of vigorous study. Hauser's nutritional advice was not blindly accepted by thousands of gullible middle-aged individuals. It is clear that many sought and found value in external sources of meaning and knowledge. His books which married science, philosophy, psychiatry, and physical culture emerged amidst the growing popularity of fields such as psychotherapy in the 1920s and 30s.²⁵ And when his most popular work appeared in 1950, 'the expert' had secured a rather privileged place in society. As Mary-Louise Adams explains, in magazines, newspapers, and on the radio, experts were increasingly seen as mediators. In a social system premised more and more on individualism, mental health professionals were particularly revered.²⁶

Hauser, like the other three figures explored in this work, desired to fashion a new image of aging, one that would improve upon the quality of life for aging persons. In this way, the written work of Metchnikoff, Hauser, Lowman, and Thompson amounted to an education on the art of aging, influencing and shaping popular ideas over time. Common themes and questions – How do we treat old age? What do we do about it? – crossed disciplines and time periods. Metchnikoff's studies even sailed effortlessly into the realm of advice and self-improvement literature, even if he would shudder now at the thought.²⁷

What binds them beyond common questions and topics are the audiences they each

²⁵ Catherine Carstairs, "Look Younger, Live Longer: Ageing Beautifully with Gayelord Hauser in America, 1920-1975," *Gender & History* 26, no. 2 (August 2014): 336.

²⁶ The appeal of 'the expert' is connected with their influence during the Second World War. Sociologists and medical doctors were often asked to diagnose social trends. See Mary-Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 31-32.

²⁷ Metchnikoff did not hide his contempt for old-age remedies promoted by quacks, journalists, and charlatans, and was harsh when he thought studies went beyond their evidence. See W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

accumulated; thousands were drawn to their particular forms of persuasion. Thompson's 'old timers' sought her advice and learned about old age, at least in part, through her column. Regardless of the validity of advice or the credentials of its author, her readership validated her role as expert. In so doing, Thompson and her readers contributed to larger understandings of old age, reinforcing its *new* role, and assigning it particular qualities and needs. Thompson, like many advice columnists, addressed such pivotal and private matters as love, marriage, and work, raised by the aged themselves and in their own words. Moreover, while elderly people were increasingly seen as subjects in need of professional and collective treatment, spaces like Thompson's column offered opportunities for dialogue. Perhaps in this way, seeking advice was also a means of raising a flag.

There is a limitation in much of the advice literature explored in this work: the premise of advice, at its foundation, represents a power imbalance, necessarily turning advice-seekers into vulnerable spectators. Even in Thompson's column, which published both letter and reply, we gauge only what older persons asked or felt through what Thompson and other columnists chose to prioritize. In this way, the strength of advice literature is in the meanings about life and death that it explored or avoided – however imperfectly – but not in how aging persons themselves lived through or experienced old age. It can only reveal common themes and perceptions of old age that emerged within such discussions. In this case, explanations of old age were formed, at least in part, from outside the self.

In recent decades, there has been a push among historians to explore both the shifting perceptions *and* the voices of aging persons in order to see “how the images we hold of later life and ageing are put together.” An important example is the edited volume *I Don't Feel Old* (1990), a British picture of old age from “the inside,” that includes interviews with 55 older men and women. Weaving among numerous transcriptions of individual expression, the collaborators place the experiences of a particular generation “against the longer perspective of time.”²⁸ In this way, its themes and methodology are reminiscent of Ronald Blythe’s *The View in Winter* (1979), an earlier oral historical exploration into the lives of select older persons living in a small British village.²⁹ In these two cases, the smaller scale of analysis affords a rich view into how older persons themselves understand and interpret their experience. Along a similar line, it underscores rather dramatically the influence of methodology and scale in shaping the analysis offered.

The influence of scale and place have become far more significant in studying old age, seen in historian Judith Ann Trolander’s recent work, *From Sun Cities to the Villages* (2011), and sociologist Stephen Katz’s examination of “elderscapes” in *Cultural Aging* (2005). Both assess the ‘active living’ lifestyle, the evolving image of “retirees” and the historical development of age-restricted communities. Most illuminating in our context is Katz’s analysis of the postmodern life course, and how retirement “villages” – increasingly common today – can mask the aging process entirely by recasting them as

²⁸ Paul Thompson, Catherine Itzin, and Michele Abendstern, *I Don't Feel Old: The Experience of Later Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2.

²⁹ Ronald Blythe, *The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age* (London: Penguin, 1979).

“continuously active,” “problem free,” and presenting agehood as “timeless.”³⁰ In other words, *spaces of age* in today’s context have a profound influence on masking the rigid divisions between stages of life altogether.³¹

While the social and political atmosphere of the first half of the twentieth century greatly contributed to perceptions of elderly people as members no longer in possession of their previous useful roles, the prescription to “keep busy, keep active” became the refrain, and endures today. Some scholars, as noted at the start of this work, have explored the relationship between meaning in late-life and a contemporary culture obsessed with development and the management of anxiety. Philosopher Harry Moody, for instance, used this framework to explore changes in late-life meaning over time, from ancient and medieval civilizations that “took for granted that the contemplative mode of life represented the highest possibility for human existence,” to the modern world that “since the seventeenth century, has favored a life of activity over a life of contemplation.”³²

The life of activity over the one of contemplation has only become more prized today, and requires more historical understanding. Like many of the paradoxes in the study of aging, ‘Life Review,’ the practice of “reminiscence therapy” introduced by psychiatrist Robert Butler in the 1960s, was an oral history session designed to have

³⁰ See Stephen Katz, *Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 209. See also Judith Ann Trolander, *From Sun Cities to the Villages: A History of Active Adult, Age Restricted Communities* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011).

³¹ In addition to spaces of age, Katz discusses how seniors marketing literature is a prime example of how the postmodern agenda for timelessness is deeply connected to new frameworks for growing older based on consumerism. See Katz, *Cultural Aging*, 195.

³² Harry R. Moody, “The Meaning of Life and the Meaning of Old Age,” in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old? Reflections from the Humanities*, eds. Thomas R. Cole & Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 12.

aging clients sift the meaning of their personal histories, and to face those histories before death.³³ But it emerged within the rise of positive aging movements and its attack on ageism. Moreover, the technique to encourage individual reflection was led by professional guides, and carried its own disciplinary limitations and intentions. Assessing how the positive aging movement influenced the practice, and how it encouraged and defined meaning, would be well worth historical investigation in the future.

In Canada, contemporary perceptions of old age continue to shift, always in a flux between two ends of a spectrum. Magazines like *Growing Bolder*, *Healthy Aging*, and *Zoomer*, celebrate hope, and getting “better with age.” Individuals with wide smiles and gleaming skin adorn their covers. Some, reminiscent of Hauser, are seen dancing on the beach, or clutching a bowl of fruit or bunch of carrots. Others give the “thumbs up.” *Healthy Aging* for instance, describes itself as a “premier lifestyle magazine for *all* ages.”³⁴ In keeping with Katz’s discussion of timelessness, these images reflect an idealized and ageless lifestyle, but they also alienate people who might actually be struggling. Although there are “positive examples” beyond the ones above, the rise of active aging materials is indicative of an old refrain of advice.

But there are also contemporary cultural examples of figures publicly endorsing a more contemplative mode of life. In a recent interview with CBC radio, eighty-year-old scientist and broadcaster David Suzuki told Anna Maria Tremonti: “Elders, I always say, have something no other group has: we’ve lived an entire life. So we’ve lived a life living

³³ Moody citing Butler, 24.

³⁴ Some examples include “Subscribe to Healthy Aging Magazine, the Premier Lifestyle Magazine for *All Ages*,” *Healthy Aging*, accessed 21 July 2016, <http://healthyaging.net/healthy-aging-magazine/>; “Rocker Jim Cuddy Debuts New Wine Band,” *Everything Zoomer Magazine*, accessed 21 July 2016, <http://www.everythingzoomer.com/category/legacy/zoomer-mag/>; “What is Growing Bolder?” *Growing Bolder*, accessed 21 July 2016, <https://www.growingbolder.com/about-us/>

mistakes and having failures and successes. Those things are life lessons,” he said. Just as Hall had done almost one hundred years ago, Suzuki suggested elders could be *teachers* to the younger generation. “I believe it’s our job to troll through our lives and to get those nuggets of hard-won lessons to pass on to young people,” he said, adding, “my lesson to my fellow elders is: get the hell off the golf course... Get on with the most important time of your life.”³⁵

Other similar examples exist, several of the most poignant found in contemporary cinema and fiction. Films such as *Mr. Holmes* (2015), *Youth* (2015), *Away From Her* (2007), and books like Kent Haruf’s *Our Souls at Night* (2015) portray older people, not “getting better with age,” but sorting through their memories – often while living with illness – in their quest for understanding. Instead of asking *What are we going to do about it?* the characters seem to be reflecting on Eliot’s second question, *What does it mean?* These are all deeply personal stories, ones which portray very private attempts to sort and understand, however imperfectly, the meaning of just one full life. Moreover, they seem to draw hope from the past instead of obsessing with the future.

The panic that ensued over a century ago about the ‘problem of aging’ continues with renewed intensity, as greater numbers of experts and policy makers confront “an uncertain future.” Policy discussions in Canada and OECD recommendations continue to bear a tone remarkably reminiscent of an earlier time, even if discussions now involve the elimination of early retirement incentives, the protection of older workers, and an

³⁵ Anna Maria Tremonti and David Suzuki, *David Suzuki Turns 80, Reflects on Eco-Morality and Mortality*, podcast audio, CBC Radio: The Current, accessed 21 July 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-23-2016-1.3503643/david-suzuki-turns-80-reflects-on-eco-morality-and-mortality-1.3503713>

emphasis on the “positive aspects of an aging population.”³⁶ The World Health Organization’s stance that “years have been added to life, now we must add life to years,”³⁷ echoes what Dr. Howard A. Rusk told the Ontario Medical Association at its closing session in 1949: “We have done much to add years to life,” he said, “it is our responsibility to add life to years.”³⁸

The flip side of a robust positivity in regards to aging, beyond its attempt to redefine – or in many cases sell – a new image of age, is that it lacks a recognition of the whole spectrum of the aging process. The continued emphasis on self-development and *looking ahead* gives renewed meaning to the value of what Gabrielle Roy’s protagonist uttered in *Street of Riches* (1957): “Without the past, what are we, Edouard? Severed plants, half alive! ... That is what I’ve come to understand.”³⁹

Although many experts continue to confront old age in their effort to offer renewed *explanations*, their enduring search for solutions – originating in the rise of the mid-century expert and the scientific management of old age – continues to prioritize health and development over meaning and understanding. One of Mrs. Thompson’s ‘old-timers’ offered his own advice on the subject: “the problem of the aged isn’t loneliness or the lack of old people’s homes plentifully supplied with ghastly crokinole boards,” he

³⁶ Townsend discusses the Canadian Government’s Policy Research Initiative project on aging which began in 1996. It looked at different ways that people might combine work, leisure, caregiving, and education over the entire life course. See Monica Townsend, *Growing Older, The New Face of Retirement* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2006), 29, 87-88.

³⁷ Townsend citing WHO, 30.

³⁸ “Adding Life to Years Said Duty of Doctors,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 26, 1949, 11. See also “Formula for Aged: Doctors Told to Add Life to Years,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 24, 1955, 17.

³⁹ Gabrielle Roy, *Street of Riches*, trans. Henry Binsse (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), 49.

wrote. "What they lack most of all is a future. When they were younger they could dream and plan."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson Advises: Decides Main Problem of Aging is the Shortness of the Future," *The Globe and Mail*, March 18, 1966, 13.

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