

Body Image and Old Age. Descriptive Study of the Spanish Social Reality

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Abstract

This article describes the relationship between body image and aging for Spanish people older than 50. To detect the participant's discourse, focus groups methodology has been implemented. In order to configure the four focus groups proposed, two dichotomous variables have been selected: gender and the presence of a stable romantic relationship. Other variables also considered in the research are the age, the marital status, the opinion of the romantic partner and the place of residence (rural or urban). Considering the discourses shown by the participants, it can be concluded that the gender is the most determining variable regarding appearance concern and body image. Marital status has an opposite effect in men and women and the appearance concern is linked to sexual factors and social pressure for women but only to sexual factors for men. These differences provoke a higher appearance concern in women than in men when both are aging.

Keywords: Body image; aging; focus groups; stable relationship; beauty ideal; old age.

1. Introduction

Body image is a very recent field in psychological research, in spite of the fact that the concern about our own physical appearance is part of the essence of the human being since the beginning of civilizations. Until the 60s, researches related to this construct did not had enough scientific entity to be considered as an enclosed and important scientific field. Body image researches were scarce and its conclusions were mixed up with other psychological constructs, such as self-esteem or self-concept (Rosen 2006, Sánchez & Maganto, 2009). Nowadays, body image research is in its heyday due to several social circumstances related to the current beauty model that have provoked public concern. Disorders such as eating disorders in teenagers (anorexia and bulimia nervosa), which were scarce until four decades ago, the increasing of plastic surgery in both young and old people and the rise of businesses related to aesthetic and body image, such as gyms, have provoked that scientifics of different areas (medicine, psychology, sociology, history, etc) have started to look for causes and solutions to the problems related to the development and maintenance of a negative body image.

The emphasis of beauty as a social value would have a limited effect on society if this required image was easy to get by most of the population. Nevertheless, the main aim of advertising is the sale of its products directly or indirectly and an idealized and unreal beauty image is used to make products more desirable for intended buyers. The negative result produced by this process is that the media offer a distorted reflection of society. This distorted reflection causes problems to the members of western society who are most susceptible to this manipulation (Rodríguez & Goñi, 2009; Ramírez et. al. 2015).

The social group of teenagers have had priority in body image researches. Motives are clear and important, as this group has a higher prevalence in the most grave and serious problems related to body image and eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa (Peláez, Labrador & Raich, 2013).

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These disorders imply a great complexity that makes it necessary to do a deep research in several fields, such as social, psychological, medical or related to the family. Even nowadays, important gaps still exist in these disorders and researches in this field will continue for a long time (Thompson, 2004; Rosen, 2006; Garrido & Sala, 2015).

The seriousness of the problems related to body image in teenagers provokes that other problems related to body image in other social groups go unnoticed. One of the social groups who receive less attention from the scientific community are the elderly, despite being a social group with special relevance and importance in our current society. This relevance makes body image and old age research particularly interesting (Tiggemann, 2004; Yanguas, 2006; Sánchez & Maganto, 2009).

On one hand, the elderly still bear a high social pressure about their physical appearance, with the distinctive feature that this pressure is based on a young physical ideal from which they are drawing away gradual and inevitably as they get older. On the other hand, the role of the old age involves several negative social preconceptions that provoke that the own aging perception is usually seen with fear and anxiety, making it worse that aging is detected mainly through the physical aspect (Gubrium & Holstein 2006; Vilhena & Novaes, 2009). The consequences of a negative body image in this group have still not been deeply researched; this new research tries to contribute to enlighten this matter of high social importance, as there is a clear tendency towards population aging in the Spanish society (Abellán, Vilches, y Pujol, 2014). In order to describe the social reality and find out the social discourse made by a certain group, qualitative research methods must be used, specially focus groups (group discussion or in Spanish “*Grupos de Discusión*”). Focus groups is the most suitable qualitative method to reveal social discourses and describe the social reality of an identifiable group (Gutiérrez, 1999). Through Focus Groups, the social discourses of people older than 50 are detected. The effectiveness of the focus group relies on taking the social discourse directly from the participants, without intermediaries. People participant give sense to the different social facts (Gutiérrez, 2001).

2. Material and methods

2.1. Scope of research

The use of Focus Groups tries to “*get to know the psychosocial reality of body image for Spanish people older than 50 and its relationship with the current social beauty ideals based on thinness and youth*”. People chosen for the Focus groups must be representative of the population to whom they are representing. Therefore, people chosen have the following features: people older than 50 years old without any important health problem, no physical disability but the typical at their age and residents in rural or urban areas in Spain.

The first step to design these focus groups is to define the subject of research using a map of elements and its relationships. The map of the participant elements in the development of these Focus Groups is presented in Figure 1. This map shows the factors that, *a priori*, are thought to have influence on the impression that people taking part in the Focus Groups have about the social reality they are asked about. (Figure 1 in the next page). This map of elements is designed *ad hoc* for these Focus Groups. Therefore, the level of truth of the concepts and the relationships between them have to be understood dependent on the usefulness that this distribution has to perform the groups. The design of Focus Groups requires the proposal of several indicators to find out which the ideals of beauty for people older than 50 are, how these indicators have influence to create a positive or negative body image and how this body image is understood.

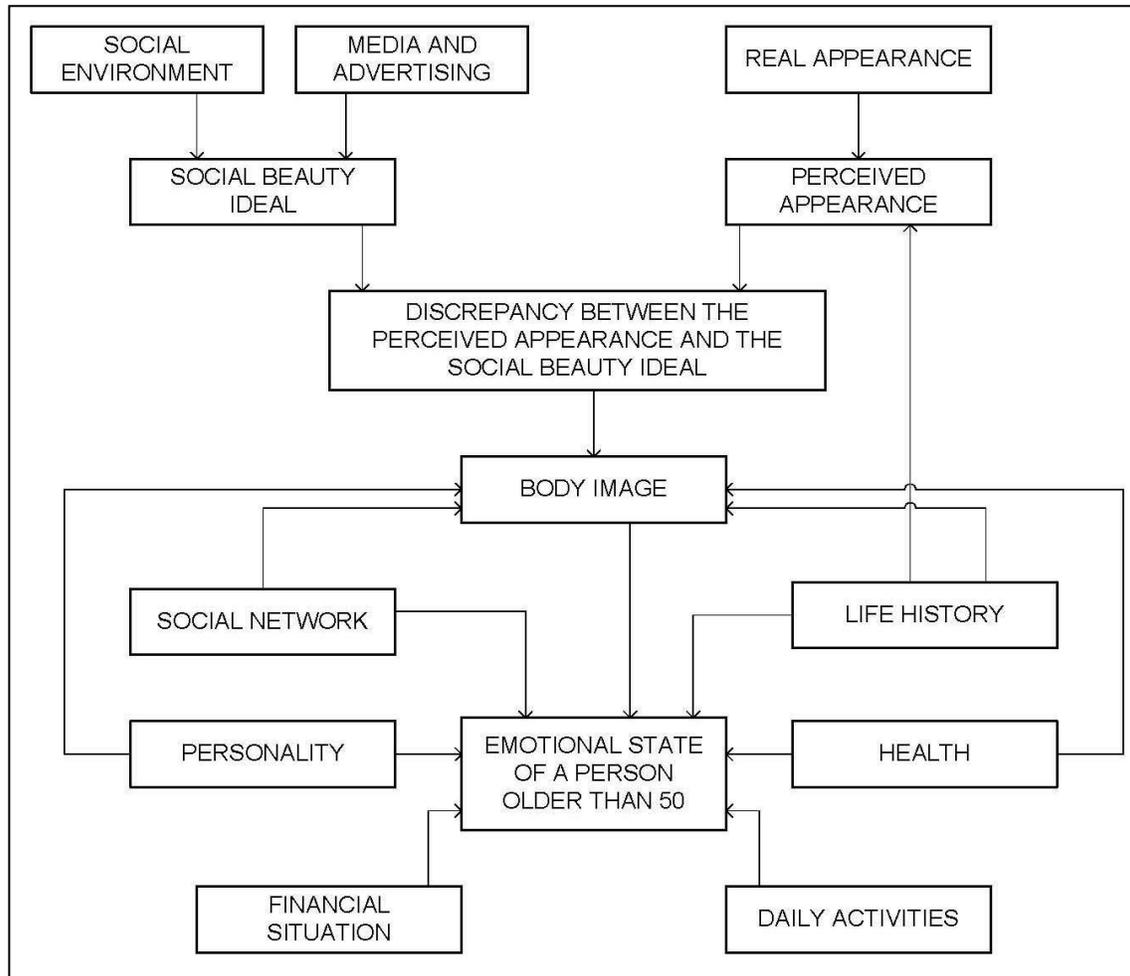


Figure 1. Map of the participant elements in the development of the Focus Group

A priori, the following indicators are proposed. These indicators will be assessed and evaluated:

- *High or low discrepancy between the social ideal and the perceived self-appearance:* It is an indicator of the existence of a too high or rigid social ideal, a negative perception of their own body or a joint of both situations if this discrepancy is high and provokes a certain grade of social frustration.
- *Life history with higher or lower importance of beauty:* If physical attractiveness has been a pillar for self-esteem and skills for a person, when aging this person might lose most of their source of social satisfaction.
- *Quantity and quality of their social network:* Quantity and quality of a person's social network might be the best indicator of attractiveness. A person who usually receives many displays of affection is not likely to have a very negative body image or emotional problems related to their body image. Having or not a romantic relationship and the opinion of their partner about their body image might have a great importance.
- *Personality:* Certain personality traits might have a critical contribution to the development of body image. As a general rule, it might be said that people with more rigid personality traits tend to age worse regarding this matter and people with more flexible personality traits tend to age better.
- *Daily activities:* The lifestyle a person has or if they like their life or not, are great indicators of the current affective status of a person. For instance, a person with a depressive or melancholic mood will tend to reduce their social activities.

The number of Focus groups to be performed depends on the variety of confronted or too heterogeneous discursive approaches in the same focus group, as these different approaches would not come to an agreement. This research proposes that two dichotomous variables are the kind of variables that create the most heterogeneous opinions in focus groups. That is the reason why it is convenient to split the groups according to these variables in order to avoid too confronted opinions that would prevent the group from working properly. The referred dichotomous variables that take part in the different discursive axis are:

- **GENDER:** Due to the different gender social skills and the important social and cultural separation created by society for people of both genders, opinions would be so different that it is not convenient to gather men and women in one focus group (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Murray & Lewis, 2014).
- **PRESENCE / LACK OF A PARTNER:** Having a romantic partner means a life together and a deep emotional intimacy as a couple. Therefore, this aspect has a great influence on having a positive or negative body image. To isolate this factor in the focus groups will help to determine its influence on the body image. If this factor is not analysed separately, it might provoke a new different discourse in the group and very confronted positions (Meltzer & McNulty, 2010; Gagnon-Girouard et. al., 2014).

Besides the discursive axes proposed, another variables are considered to have influence on the discourse of the participants in the focus groups. These other variables have to be considered when creating the groups. The most important variables are:

- **MARITAL STATUS:** It is supposed that there are differences between people with a stable romantic relationship and people without it because of being widowed, divorced or single. Therefore, it would be advisable to include at least one person of each type in the final group of people without a stable romantic relationship.
- **OPINION OF THE ROMANTIC PARTNER:** The opinion of the romantic partner might be, in many cases, decisive to create a positive or negative body image. Therefore, variability in this aspect have to exist in the focus groups of people with a romantic relationship.
- **PLACE OF RESIDENCE - RURAL OR URBAN AREA:** This factor might have a great influence. Therefore, every group have to include a significant percentage of all these conditions.
- **AGE:** Discourses of Spanish people older than 50 years old are taken. However, the older people are, the worse the physical decline is and the less social pressure people bear. Therefore, people around their 50s and people older than 70 have to be included in every focus group.

Therefore, the four focus groups considering the two discursive axes and the variables with influence, will have the following composition:

- **Group “women with a stable romantic relationship” (Group 1):** This group will be composed of 6 to 10 people, including at least 2 people with a positive support from their partner, at least 2 with few or scarce support from their partner, at least 2 from an urban area, at least 2 from a rural area and finally, at least 1 of them will be older than 50 and younger than 60, another one between 60 and 70 and another one older than 70.
- **Group “women without a romantic relationship” (Group 2):** This group will be composed of 6 to 10 people, including at least 1 divorced woman, 1 widow and 1 single, at least 2 from an urban area, at least 2 from a rural area and finally, at least 1 of them will be older than 50 and younger than 60, another one between 60 and 70 and another one older than 70.
- **Group “men with a romantic relationship” (Group 3):** This group will be composed of 6 to 10 people including at least 2 people with a positive support from their partner, at least 2 with few or scarce support from their partner, at least 2 from an urban area, at least 2 from a rural area and finally, at least 1 of them will be older than 50 and younger than 60, another one between 60 and 70 and another one older than 70.
- **Group “men without a romantic relationship” (Group 4):** This group will be composed of 6 to 10 people, including at least 1 divorced man, 1 widower and 1 single, at least 2 from a urban area, at least 2 from a rural area and finally, at least 1 of them will be older than 50 and younger than 60, another one between 60 and 70 and another one older than 70.

2.2. Sample

The final distribution of the four focus groups is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Sample distribution of Focus Groups

Focus Groups	Marital Status	Rural / urban area	Age distribution (years old)	Support from their romantic partner	Final size of the group
Group Women with a stable romantic relationship	All of them married	4/5	2 between 50 and 60, 4 between 60 and 70 and 3 older than 70	5 few / 4 enough	9
Group Women without a stable romantic relationship	Widow 3 / Single 2 / Divorced 1	4/2	3 between 50 and 60, 2 between 60 and 70 and 1 older than 70	-	6
Group Men with a stable romantic relationship	All of them married	3/4	4 between 50 and 60, 2 between 60 and 70 and 1 older than 70	3 few / 4 enough	7
Group Men without a stable romantic relationship	Widower 4 / Single 1 / Divorced 1	2/4	1 between 50 and 60, 3 between 60 and 70 and 2 older than 70	-	6
Total	15 married / 7 widow-widower / 3 single / 2 divorced	13/15	10 between 50 and 60, 11 between 60 and 70 and 7 older than 70	8 few / 8 enough	28

3. Results

3.1. GROUP I. Group of women with a stable romantic relationship

The way this group create their social reality around the importance of their physical aspects in their lives is a complex matter. In this group several contradictions have arisen as well as many agreements, partial agreements or confrontations. The discourse can be divided into two types, the manifest content (what the group clearly reveal) and the latent content (what has influence on what they are saying or what they are unconsciously revealing). Hereafter, both meanings are presented.

- Manifest content:
 - Physical appearance has little importance in their lives.
 - Physical appearance has no psychological consequences for them.
 - No social resources have disappeared because of aging and the decrease of their physical attractiveness.
 - The concern about the physical aspect is an exclusive matter of youth.
- Latent content:

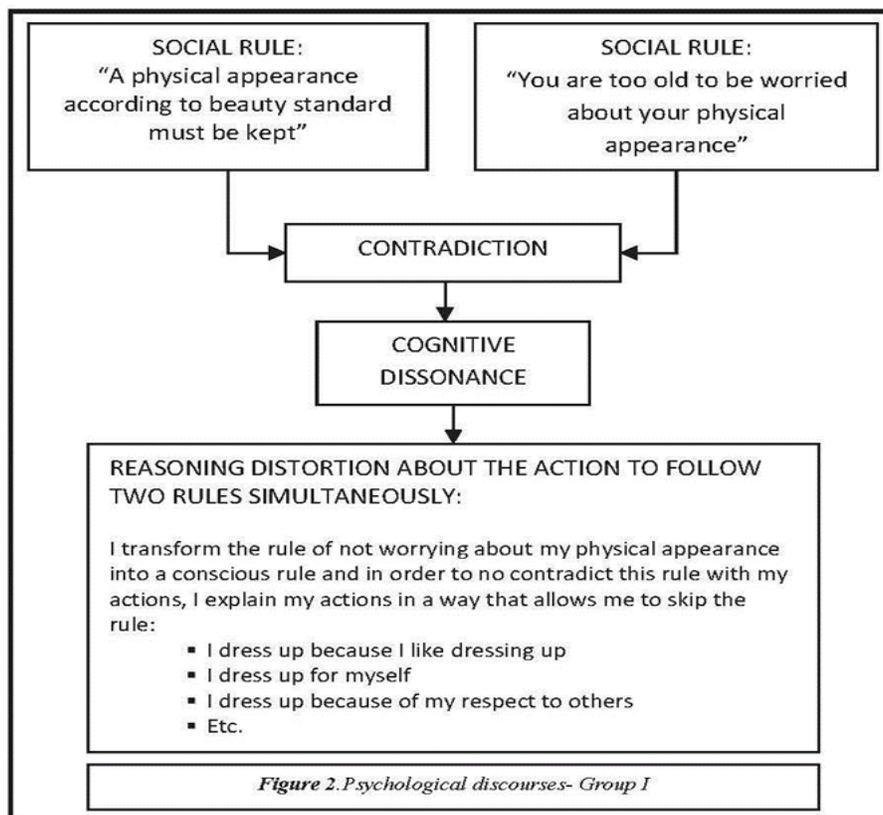
Although they say that their physical deterioration does not psychologically affect them, they also claim to get sadder when they realise they are getting older or they find grey hair or wrinkles. They claim as well to feel anguish because they are aging and they do not fancy doing some activities they did when they were younger. All that implies that, even if physical appearance does not have a decisive importance on their mood, their physical appearance is a constant source of dissatisfaction that joined to other problems or situations might cause a psychological-emotional problem easier than to another person in the same situation. Although they claim to not have missed any kind of social advantage because of aging, they say that even if other people see them as “beautiful women”, they are also seen as “older than before” and they are proud to say “I’ve still got it; some things stay with you to the grave”. All that joint to the melancholy of remembering their young physical aspect, show that they have not missed any basic social advantage but they have missed a certain influence or usual benefit in their self-esteem due to the disappearance of some of their social appealing as they are aging.

When they claim that the concern about the physical appearance is a youth exclusive matter, it seems more a wish or a social imposition than a reality. They also show concern about their diet, weight and physical appearance as younger people do but there is some kind of social repression to avoid this concern being evident or conscious. A convergence of factors of diverse origins (social, psychological, etc.) seems to be responsible for the cognitive dilemma shown in this group. The cognitive performance in this group seems to answer to a classic process of double bind (Bateson et. al., 1956).

The double bind process offers a compulsory choice between two actions, any answer is punished and there is no possibility of omitting an answer, as observed in researches with several groups (Riebschleger, 2002; Lau et. al., 2009). On one hand, society makes it compulsory to put an emphasis on beauty and people who do not follow this implicit rule is punished. On the other hand, society stipulates that when reaching a certain age people have to stop worrying about their physical aspect and it is frowned upon for people to continue worrying about it. As both rules are in force at the same time, this situation creates a social repression for beauty concern and a punishment for not having beauty concern. Although it seems a stilted and complex thought, this argument explains why a social discourse is said and the taken actions are the contrary ones. Sometimes, this contradiction is denied because it is the only way of keeping both contradictory rules and not keeping a high cognitive dissonance. So, expressions such as “I dress up because I like dressing up” or “I dress up for myself, not for others” would be rationalisations made by the person to not be conscious of their concern about their physical aspect and not have conscious contradictions to reach a high cognitive dissonance. This discourse is clearly shown in figure 2.

3.2. GROUP II. Group of women without a stable romantic relationship

At first sight it might be said that the physical appearance is something these people are not much worried about. However, the negative conception about people who care about their physical appearance seems to point to something else. They admit that physical beauty is very important in society, although it should not be this way. They consider people who care about their physical appearance (especially at their age) as “immature people”.



This definition is socially used for people who have not still learned something or who do not have enough skills to overcome a negative situation. It shows that they have untied themselves from the concern about their physical appearance in a certain moment previous to the present one and this change was positive for their lives, up to the point of considering it is a personal maturity step that everybody should face someday.

This group claims that people should not be assessed based on their physical appearance, even if they admit that in our society this is the common behaviour. They consider that the concern about the physical appearance have to be restricted to people with a public life and young people, or, depending on the way you look at it, “immature people”.

This maturity process might be related to the process described by Ellis and Velten (1998) to reach an optimum aging. According to these authors, a person has to leave the distresses and beliefs that work as a burden of youth and prevent them from enjoying the current vital moment when aging. It is an adaptation of the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) (Ellis & Harper, 1975) to the psychology of aging. REBT claims that a person might develop certain dysfunctional social beliefs, meaning that if something against these beliefs happens (high probability), this event might make the person to collapse and develop psychological problems. According to Ellis and Harper (1975), the solution is to replace these dysfunctional beliefs with some more functional beliefs that assess the event in a no such catastrophic way. This process is very similar to the concept “maturity” the group is talking about. The concern about their physical appearance is a dysfunctional belief that, in case of a negative event such as aging, becoming a mother, splitting up or not being physically attractive for others, provokes psychological stress or discomfort. The maturity process would work as the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy by Ellis, untying the concern about the physical appearance and reaching an image of themselves more satisfying and positive. The connection between the reasoning of this group and the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy by Ellis makes the original scheme of Ellis compatible to show the discourse claimed by the group schematically. This is due to the fact that the concern about their appearance works as an example of this scheme and has many similarities with what the group expressed. See figure 3.

The fact of defining “beauty slaves” at their age as “immature people” might mean that when they were younger they were worried about their physical appearance as most people in society do, but in some moment in their lives they had a detachment process from these aesthetic ideals and as a result they got their current way of thinking.

Reasons for this detachment from the social aesthetic ideals can be very varied. However, all the group having this uniform reasoning might mean that the fact of not having a romantic relationship has some influence on the development of a positive body image and self-esteem, out of the social beauty ideals. This conclusion has also been presented in other current researches (Hall, 2012).

3.3. GROUP III. Group of men with a stable romantic relationship

It is evident that in our society the construction that men create about matters related to beauty is qualitatively different from that created by women, at any age and time. This is not due to biological, hormonal or gender reasons, but cultural reasons, as the levels of social demand are very different between men and women. Women usually bear more social pressure to be as beautiful as possible in the presence of others. This is something admitted by men, as this group claims. This pressure is provoked not by men but by other women, being both victim and executioner.

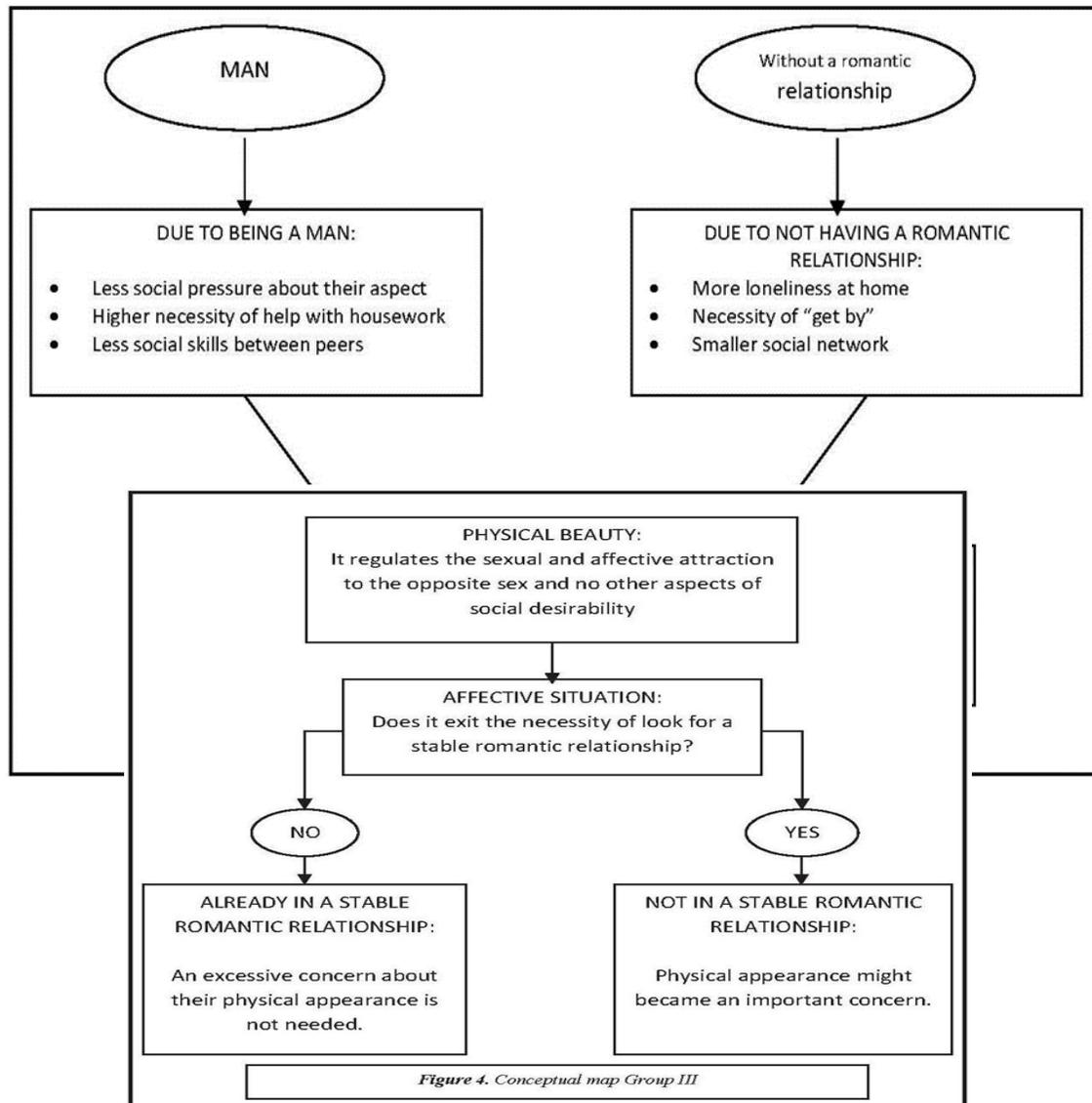
Men in this group are not very concerned about their physical appearance and they do not care about having grey hair or belly. They consider the concern about beauty as something for youth and women. For them beauty has a clear function of seduction in order to get a romantic relationship. Beauty helped them previously to find a romantic relationship and now its importance is very limited. The main differences between groups of women and this group of married men are the functions regulated by the physical beauty. For women, physical beauty regulates the function of attraction to the opposite sex and the social function that looks for the other's acceptance. For men, physical beauty only regulates the function of seduction with sexual intention. The social acceptance function, in the case of men, is regulated by other matters considered more masculine, such as physical strength or social power through the financial strength and territorial power. Due to all these facts, it is more complex that an old man is excessively worried about his loss of physical appealing when aging.

The function his attractiveness was supposed to perform was performed when he got a romantic relationship during his youth and currently he has a stable romantic commitment. On the contrary, this man will be more overwhelmed with the loss of other capabilities considered more masculine, such as his physical strength, his resistance, reflexes or sexual capability. The conceptual map of Figure 4 shows some of the conjectures about the reasons why married men older than 50 stop worrying about their physical appearance. (Figure 4)

GROUP IV. Group of men without a stable romantic relationship

It is significant to appreciate how several factors affecting other groups are mixed in this group due to their common characteristics. On one hand, it seems that the fact of being a man affects them having a scarce social demand about a determined physical appearance and therefore their concern about their appearance is considerably reduced. On the other hand, it seems that the fact of not having a stable romantic relationship and, similarly to the group of women without a romantic partner, they have gone through a “maturity” process shown in this group as to focus their daily activities on living “with harmony” with their environment and on the search of social activities that make them feel comfortable.

However, this group is not only a mixture of other groups characteristics, but has its own different circumstances. This group shows, at least in widowers, a wish to live as a couple that makes them to have a concern about their appearance in some circumstances and to choose social activities such as social dance. This feature might be due to the fact that, in general terms, mature or old men have less social skills and a higher necessity of help for chorus at home (more pronounced in widowers). For these reasons, in this group the feeling of loneliness at aging is more evident. Figure 5 shows the main features of this focus group, as explained before. (Figure 5).



The main importance of this group relies on the confirmation of several aspects affecting the concern about appearance, specially, gender and presence/absence of a romantic relationship. It is proved that these aspects add a different approach to the personal situation and to the way to live their lives.

4. Conclusions and discussion

It has been asked how participants have been affected by the situations proposed in the focus groups. Aspects such as the beauty ideal in society or their own beauty ideal as a differentiated group have been arisen. Deeper questions such as how the participants have sensed the change of their beauty ideals along their lives joint to their own change through different social groups due to their age and special characteristics of their generation have also been analysed.

According to these focus groups, people older than 50 have a clear image of the social beauty ideal. This pattern, inferred from the media, is established as a good looking young person, tall and slim for women and with a muscled body for men, agreeing with most researches (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001; McCreary, Sasse, Saucier, & Dorsch, 2004; González, et. al, 2012). For them, the key feature is the youth, identifying beauty and youth and showing a clear idealization of youth; not only their own youth but also the youth of people considered as beautiful.

The view of the social beauty ideal for people older than 50 shows signs of possible conflicts derived from this view, as the idealization of youth gives a great importance to something they do not have anymore and they cannot have again. The feeling of loss usually ends up in recurrent negative thoughts and a decrease of self-esteem if this loss is considered important.

It has been detected in the focus groups, in a weak way, the existence of beauty patterns typical of maturity and elderly. These patterns are adaptations, more or less successful, of the youth beauty pattern to old people and adding their own special characteristics because a person can be considered attractive when they are old and not in youth or viceversa. According to the participants of these focus groups, this kind of beauty is considered a “second class beauty” because attractive people in maturity or old age miss the most important characteristic of beauty: the youth.

According to these focus groups, it can be concluded in general terms that people in a process of personal maturity or aging process with no important illnesses or disabilities, do not have a negative predominant perception of their own physical appearance. They do perceive a worse physical appearance that when they were younger and a part of the population are worried and anxious about their body changes. However, most part of these people get adapted and live with their situation, considering it as a “fact of life”. It means that there is some concern, but it usually does not provoke a negative predominant perception of their own body, specially for married women. It is important to note that it is usually not a basic concern for them. Regarding women without a romantic relationship, they have a positive perception of their body and they do not worry about their physical appearance in front of other people, except the fact of been “presentable”, according to their saying. Married men are not very satisfied with their bodies, not due to physical beauty, but for a matter of performance as they have realised their physical abilities are being reduced. Regarding men without a romantic relationship, the results are no conclusive because their concern depends on the vital moment when they are and they are concerned about their body image when it is an obstacle to find a romantic relationship, in case they wish to have one. Gender is, undoubtedly, the most influential factor of all the factors analysed. As expected, women show a significant higher concern about their physical appearance than men do. It is due to the different socialization and social pressure borne (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2006; Raich, et. al., 2011). Beside this, women have beauty ideals younger than men, as men assess as positive some aspects of the old age related to their physical attractiveness that women assess as clearly negative for them (Callow, 2005). For instance, wrinkles and grey hair are accepted as no indicator of physical deterioration for men in some cases.

Regarding the influence of a stable romantic relationship, this aspect has a complex performance and joint to other special characteristics of each person, has a significant influence on their beauty ideal. Regarding women, the presence of a stable relationship shows a younger beauty ideal and a higher body dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction might be related to the loss of attractiveness in their relationship and to the social pressure received from their peers.

Women without a romantic relationship, on the contrary, reduce significantly their concern about their physical aspect, empowering other qualities. This might be due to the fact that this concern did not provoke many positive consequences in the past or that this new attitude gives them more benefits (all of them admit had had a concern about their appearance when they were younger).

Regarding men, both married and single, have a lower concern about their physical appearance than women do and there are no important difference between the two groups of men. Their concern is more connected to emotional or sexual necessities and therefore, if they have or don't need a romantic relationship, this concern disappears. They relate their physical attractiveness to sexual attractiveness. This conclusion seems key at differentiation between genders. In the case of women, this concern is related to social relationships and interaction with peers and therefore, it is very difficult for this concern to stop when aging (Kleinplatz et.al., 2013).

Regarding the age, as the body is aging is also moving away from the youth beauty pattern and the deterioration of their health is increasing. The older people are, the more they concern about their health and the less about aesthetic matters (Yanguas, 2006). It can be assumed that the main reason is related to matters considered urgent and important. The most important thing is their health and therefore, if they are not healthy they do not concern about their physical appearance. Beside this, their feeling of physical deterioration and the pessimistic view of their future physical aspect provoke a decrease of concern about their body image and other minor worries, covering up an initial positive body image satisfaction (Von Hippel, Henry, & Matovic, 2008). This effect is easier detected in women because men are less concerned about their body image and therefore, differences of interest in this matter are lower.

Regarding the place where people live, urban or rural area, it does not seem to have any important influence. Aspects such as sociability have a higher influence on both rural and urban areas. Although it was not an aspect to be analysed, it has not been detected any influence of the profession of the participants on the focus groups. According to the participant's opinions, people who has done customer-facing work should be more concerned about their appearance.

Regarding the social environment, it has not been proved that having a wide social network is related to a more positive body image. As a result, the opinion or presence of a wide social network does not have a positive influence on body image, but the interpretation that the person makes of this opinion or presence of social network (Ellis & Velten, 1998). It can be detected that people surrounding each person might strengthen or weaken a person body image, even if it is not the original intention, as this influence depends on each person interpretation. None of the focus groups participants admitted this in their own experience, surely to avoid social rejection but, all participants admitted that people with a life history more related to physical beauty might have a more negative body image when aging. They thought this is a key factor to increase their body image concern when they are getting old. Moreover, it was proved that people most concerned about their body image had an obvious melancholy about their youth.

A factor of great scientific relevance connected to each one life history is the feeling people have about the effect of the passing of time in their bodies and the meta-knowledge they show about the evolution of their expectations or beauty ideals through their different life stages. The focus groups participants shown clear ideas about the cognitive change they have had through their lives. They have described it as a gradual decrease of expectations and gradual increase of their physical appearance dissatisfaction when getting older. It seems to indicate that the decrease of expectations when getting older is considerably lower than their appearance evolution. It might justify the gradual increase of their corporal dissatisfaction. Moreover, it seems that the way of becoming conscious of their own physical change and the advantages related to the adaptation to the beauty ideal has been a negative learning process. It means, they realise the new situation by perceiving the things they have lost (Cooper et. al., 2013). Although it cannot be proved with theses focus groups, more rigid personality types should be related to a more negative body image at maturity or aging. It might be thought that a more rigid way of thinking is linked to a more rigid opinions and more extremist thoughts, both an excessive concern about their appearance and an excessive carelessness about their appearance and therefore intolerance to people with ideas different from theirs.

Another conclusion not proved is that people older than 50 with a negative body image might suffer from more negative emotional states, lower emotional stability, more psychological problems and less adaptation to the environment, as people more concerned about their appearance were, in general, more unsure and emotionally unstable (Sánchez, 2008). Regarding the own aging perception, it has been proved that the view of "aging as a mask" is general, mainly in women with a stable romantic relationship. This effect was firstly described by Gubrium and Holstein (1986) related to the self-perception of people with dementia.

However, it is easily applicable to normalised population because people refuse to admit their own image in the mirror as their real image and they see it as a mask or distortion of their own self that is an idealization of their youth image taken from pictures and previous memories. Finally, it is relevant to stand out several questions not answered in this research. For instance, some other aspects need to be analysed in further researches such as sexual orientation or ethnic differences, as they might have a great influence on the results. These aspects have not been included in this research due to the sample conditionants.

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