

**“I AM THE WAY I AM, AND I DON’T WANT TO LOSE THAT”: RUSSIAN IMMIGRANT  
WOMEN’S NARRATIVES OF BEAUTY WORK, IMMIGRATION, AND AGING**

by

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**B.H.K., The University of British Columbia, 2007**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS**

in

**THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Human Kinetics)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)**

**October, 2009**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the beauty work practices of Russian immigrant women and their understandings of beauty and femininity in later life. The research was guided by the following questions: (1) What are the beauty practices of older Russian immigrant women living in Canada?; (2) Why do older Russian immigrant women pursue these practices?; and (3) How are older Russian immigrant women's beauty practices shaped by their social locations as immigrants, Canadian residents, former citizens of the former Soviet Union, and women?

The study utilized data from in-depth qualitative interviews with 10 immigrant women from the former Soviet Union. The women ranged in age from 52 to 75 (average age of 61) and had immigrated to Canada between 1992 and 2004. The majority of the women were well-educated, married, able-bodied, and self-identified as heterosexual, but differed in terms of their socioeconomic status and country of origin within the USSR. Each woman was interviewed twice for a total of 19.8 interview hours. The majority of the interviews were conducted in a mix of Russian and English, and later translated into English. The data was analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) concepts of open and axial coding.

To date, research has shown that North American, white, middle-class women frequently engage in beauty work due to the repercussions of their non-compliance with feminine beauty ideals to their vocational success, heterosexual partnerships, and social acceptance. My findings revealed that similar to white North American women, older Russian immigrant women held negative attitudes towards their bodies, and engaged in a variety of beauty practices to conceal and correct their bodies' deviations from the slim and youthful beauty ideal. These beauty practices included skin care, non-surgical cosmetic procedures, makeup, hair care, fashion, dieting, and exercise. The women's beauty work choices were framed by their socialization within Russian cultural values that privileged conventional gender roles and feminine appearance, their assimilation into Canadian culture, their resistance to Canadian views of beauty and femininity, and their feelings about their aging bodies. I discuss these findings in relation to the extant research and theorizing regarding beauty work and aging.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am greatly indebted to the numerous individuals who have helped me at various stages of the research and preparation of this manuscript. I wish to offer my sincerest appreciation of the patience, understanding, and wisdom that my supervisor, Dr. Laura Hurd Clarke, has shown throughout this process.

Additionally, I would like to offer my gratitude to the members of my committee, Dr. Wendy Frisby and Dr. Patricia Vertinsky, for their insightful suggestions and comments.

I owe many thanks to my family, my friends, and my partner for their continued support and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank my participants, who welcomed me into their homes and into their lives, and did not hesitate to share their stories and invaluable advice.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Even as new technologies of the body promise to render the body and self malleable and transcendent of biographical and historical constraints (Bordo, 1993), the body remains a material entity, situated at a “congested crossroad of forces” (Craig, 2006, p. 160). A simultaneously public and private entity, a means of self-determination, and a locus of social control, the many meanings attributed to and understandings of the female body and the embodiment of femininity often include beauty work. Beauty work can be defined as the bodily interventions individuals engage in with the goal of achieving an idealized, culturally acceptable appearance (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Beauty work practices can include, but are not limited to, skin care, hair care, makeup use, dieting, exercise, as well as surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Brumberg, 1998; Wolf, 1991). Analogous to doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), beauty work contains an element of performance, allowing individuals to express how they perceive themselves and how they wish to be perceived. However, while women’s beauty work reflects a series of personal choices, these choices are frequently framed by hegemonic ideologies and cultural understandings of age, class, gender, privilege, and race, as well as “social stereotypes regarding women’s nature and capabilities” (Weitz, 2005, p. 221). The immigrant female body provides a particularly interesting example of the ways in which beauty work is influenced by women’s conceptualizations of beauty and femininity, their social locations and cultural identities, and their negotiation of cultural norms and dominant aesthetic ideas.

Following the passage of the Immigration Act in 1975 and the subsequent legal and economic liberalization of its immigration policy, Canada has experienced a large, steady influx of immigrants and refugees (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). Today, it is estimated that Canada’s

population is comprised of more than six million foreign-born residents (Statistics Canada, 2006). The extant research, which has focused mainly on the integration, assimilation, and marginalization experiences of Hispanic, Asian, and African-American immigrants, has indicated that newcomers encounter multiple stressors as they arrive in and adapt to their host countries. Even as acculturation can evolve into positive biculturalism (Espin, 1999), new immigrants nonetheless frequently face such hardships as familial fragmentation (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2008), barriers to labour market assimilation (Bloom, Grenier, & Gunderson, 1995; Chiswick & Miller, 2008; Ferrer & Riddell, 2008; Reitz, 2007a; Reitz, 2007b), psychological stress (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Ataca & Berry, 2002; Dunn & O'Brien, 2009), and ethno-cultural identity conflict (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009).

Recent feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the gendered nature of transnational migration, bringing to light the unique resettlement experiences of female immigrants as well as the various ways in which immigration processes and policies are informed by gender, sex, privilege, and sexual discrimination (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). This research has given emphasis to such issues impacting immigrant women as spousal and familial abuse (Anitha, 2008; Merali, 2009; Morash, et al., 2008; Yick & Oomen-Early, 2008), motherhood and childrearing (Sigad & Eisikovits, 2009), occupational downgrading (Akresh, 2008; Mojab, 1999), ethnic and gender identity negotiation (Shi, 2008; Suh, 2007), and the transformation of traditional gender roles (Bhalla, 2008; Menjivar, 1999; Park, 2008). Moreover, research focussed on the inscription of immigration policies and experiences on migrant women's beauty practices has begun to contribute to existing feminist explorations of North American, white, middle class women's body image and their body practices (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). This research has called attention to the diffusion of such forms of beauty work as female genital cutting (Androuss, 2005; Gruenbaum, 2005; Reason, 2004) and veiling (Afshar, 2008;

Ahlberg, et al., 2000; Ruby, 2006) into Western culture and the ways in which these practices are underscored by discourses of gender ideology, the contestation and re-negotiation of cultural boundaries, the rights of minority groups, and the assimilation and acculturation of immigrant women (Atasoy, 2003; Killian, 2003).

Despite the emergent diversity in the field of immigration studies, North American academic literature has tended to focus on women of visible ethnic minority groups and their experiences of marginalization and drastic cultural adjustment (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Pedrazda, 1991). Few studies have explored the resettlement experiences of Russian-Canadian immigrant women, even as a significant population of over 64, 000 Soviet émigrés currently resides in Canada (Ontario Immigration, 2006). Davey et al. (2003) hypothesized that little research has examined the immigration experiences of white minority groups due to the invisibility of their minority status, as well as wide-spread understandings of whiteness as a marker of dominance and privilege. Similarly, Chiswick (1993) contended that Russian émigrés in particular may have attracted little academic attention due to their rapid vocational and linguistic advancement in comparison to other refugee groups. The academic disinterest in Soviet immigrants may be additionally explained by their seemingly smooth transition into North American middle class culture (Gold, 2003) and their relatively low levels of political activism with regards to immigrant rights and grievances (Kishinevsky, 2004).

However, research conducted in the United States and outside of North America has shown that Russian immigrants face numerous challenges as they attempt to integrate into their host societies. For instance, following immigration, many Soviet immigrants are confronted with downward socio-economic migration as a result of institutional and cultural barriers to employment, as well as the difficulties of language acquisition and vocational re-specialization (Remennick, 2003a; Vinokourov et al., 2000). Chiswick (1993) found that as a highly-skilled

refugee population who made intense efforts at linguistic and vocational skill acquisition, Russian immigrants nonetheless had difficulty attaining occupational success that was comparable to their pre-immigration status. Russian immigrants' occupational adjustment was further complicated by their socialization within a culture of inter-dependence, compliance, and collectivism, coupled with their unfamiliarity with Western values such as self-motivation and self-reliance (Shasha & Shron, 2002).

Research has additionally shown than Russian newcomer women in particular face numerous difficulties following immigration. Remennick (2003a) noted that older Russian immigrant women were frequently disadvantaged by their age, gender, and immigrant status as they attempted to re-enter the work force in their host countries. Moreover, Russian immigrant women experienced greater resettlement stress as they often remained the sole child- and elder-care providers for their families, even as they continued to fulfill their roles as equal breadwinners. At the same time, Russian immigrant women's care giving responsibilities were regularly coupled with a loss of social support networks as a consequence of their immigration (Remennick, 2001). Although Russian immigrant women, and in particular older immigrant women, displayed significant signs of psychological distress and depressive mood as a result of these increased demands of immigration (Aroian & Chandler; Miller & Chandler, 2002), counselling or medical help was rarely sought due to the stigmatization of mental health disorders in Russian culture (Fong, 2004).

### **1.1 Situating My Research**

Given the sizes of the Soviet immigrant populations in the United States and Canada, and the unique issues impacting Russian immigrant women, it is surprising that little qualitative research has examined the subjective experiences of Russian immigrant women in North America (Kishinevsky, 2004). In particular, the everyday life experiences of older Russian

immigrant women living in Canada have largely been ignored. It has been noted that the images of femininity and ideal beauty that abound in Russian culture have become “an intrinsic part of Russian women’s perceptions of themselves and *their roles*” (Kay, 1997, p. 79, own emphasis). Thus, there is a strong need to investigate older Russian immigrant women’s understandings of beauty and femininity, their experiences of the material constitution of multiple selves through their everyday bodily practices (Majumdar, 2007), and the ways in which these practices and perceptions are situated within societal, historical, and ideological contexts.

In this study, I examined the experiences of transnational migration, aging, and beauty work among Russian immigrant women over the age of 50. Using qualitative methodology framed by a feminist interpretive perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with women from the former Soviet Union who immigrated to Canada between 1992 and 2004. The study drew on feminist readings of Foucault to examine the negotiation and embodiment of practices of power in older immigrant women’s everyday lives. In particular, the study aimed to supplement existing work in feminist gerontology by considering the impact of the cultural, historical, spatial, and chronological aspects of older immigrant women’s lives on their beauty work practices and attitudes towards their bodies. This study’s emphasis on older, Russian immigrant women’s beauty practices provided fertile ground for an examination of the manner in which the “interlocking categories of experience” (Anderson & Hill Collins, 2001, xii) of gender and age informed older women’s experiences of immigration, cultural enactments of femininity, and the aged and gendered body.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In order to explore the beauty work practices of older Russian immigrant women and how these were framed by their understandings of beauty and femininity, as well as their

experiences of migration, cultural transition, and later life, my research project was guided by the following research questions:

What are the beauty work practices of older Russian immigrant women living in Canada?

Why do older Russian immigrant women pursue these practices?

How are older Russian immigrant women's beauty practices shaped by their social locations as immigrants, Canadian residents, former citizens of the former Soviet Union, and women?

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

I will begin by reviewing and locating my study within the existing knowledge concerning Russian and immigrant Russian women's experiences of beauty work practices and understandings of femininity. I will further situate my research within the extant literature and theorizing regarding aging, femininity, and women's body and beauty work practices.

### **2.1 Russian Immigrants**

While freedom of movement was strictly prohibited under Stalinist rule, repeated appeals were made thereafter by the United States (US) and Western Europe for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to ease its restrictive emigration policies (Fassman & Munz, 1994). In 1973, the US Congress insisted on the relaxation of immigration law as a precondition for the reduction of trade barriers between the two countries (Fassman & Munz, 1994). The signing of the Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Final Act<sup>1</sup> in 1976 forced the USSR to recognize the right to freedom of travel and movement (Fassman & Munz, 1994). Consequently, the USSR experienced a large surge of emigration in the 1970's, as well as a second wave that followed Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalization of Russian emigration policies in 1987 (Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i & Ritterband, 1997). Between 1990 and 1991, at the height of the Fifth Wave of emigration, approximately 700,000 individuals left the USSR, their emigration driven mainly by the social and economic instability that resulted from the break-up of the former Soviet Union (Fassman & Munz, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Final Act, also known as the Helsinki Final Act. While the USSR saw the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act as an opportunity to induce greater economic cooperation between the East and the West, the United States used the Final Act to intensify pressure on the Soviet bloc regarding human rights issues, including the rights to freedom of movement (Brett, 1996).

Researchers studying the Russian immigrant population have generally focused on individuals of Russian Jewish descent, the predominant cultural group that comprised the outflow of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i & Ritterband, 1997). This research has found that although the underlying motivations for Russian immigrants were various and many, the most commonly invoked grounds for emigration had to do with economic factors (Brym, 1993; Salitan, 1992). As a result of its focus on military and industrial production, the Soviet Union “achieved modernity without acquiring many of the conveniences of most societies” (Ripp, 1994, p. 54). Long food lines and housing shortages were a regular, if not daily, occurrence in Soviet Russia (Kishinevsky, 2004). Due to the shortages of food, the average Soviet woman normally spent two hours a day in food line ups (Smith, 1976), while the little de facto buying power of Russian money necessitated the creation of complicated systems of bartering for goods and favours, all procured with great difficulty (Bruno, 1997). The collapse of state socialism and Russia’s transition towards a market economy did little to ameliorate Russian people’s living conditions. Perhaps the most tangible consequences of the economic and political reforms, known as perestroika<sup>2</sup>, were aptly summarized by Mamonova (1994) in this way: “Whereas communism meant waiting in line for an hour to buy bread, capitalism means waiting a year to be able to afford it” (p. xv). The direst effects of the tumultuous political, social, and economic transformations that were instigated by the perestroika seemed to impact Russian women’s lives the most (Buckley, 1997; Mamonova, 1994). It is estimated that between 70 and 85% of all worker lay-offs involved women (Mamonova, 1994). In addition to suffering more severe job losses, Russian women also experienced a sexualization of labour hiring practices, whereby female job applicants could be

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<sup>2</sup> *Perestroika*, meaning “restructuring” in Russian, is the expression used to describe the economic and political reforms instigated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. These reforms were intended to decentralize the Soviet economy and democratize the political system, but instead led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Buckley, 1997).

overtly discriminated against based on their gender and appearance (Mamonova, 1994), as well as reduced provisions of state support, decreased political representation in the Russian government, and increased rates of domestic violence (Buckley, 1997).

Even as many Soviet citizens emigrated to escape these adversities, they faced numerous problems upon their arrival in their receiving countries. For instance, following immigration, many Russian immigrants with high educational attainments and professional backgrounds realized that there was little demand in their occupational fields, and, therefore, found themselves jobless or forced to enter the labour market in lower grade vocations (Chiswick, 1993; Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i & Ritterband, 1997; Remennick, 2003a; Vinokourov et al., 2000). Older Russian immigrant women, who were triply burdened by their age, gender, and immigrant status, were particularly disadvantaged in their attempts to re-enter the workforce (Remennick, 2003a). Finding little vocational opportunity in their countries of destination, older Russian women who had trained in traditionally “masculine” professions such as engineering and technology under the declared equality of the socialist mandate often found it necessary to retrain in more “feminine”, unskilled labour vocations such as aesthetics, hair dressing, and elder care provision (Remennick, 2003b). Additionally, Russian women had experienced a paradoxical place within the Soviet public and private spheres which served to make them especially vulnerable to acculturative stresses and marginalization in their host countries (Ashwin, 2000; Voronina, 1994). Under state socialism, nearly 90% of Russian women worked full-time outside the home and enjoyed a slightly higher educational level than Russian men (Voronina, 1994). However, Russian women pursued their educational and professional goals at the same time that they were required to fulfill the majority of the domestic responsibilities, a reality made possible only with the support of their multi-generational, frequently female family members (Aroian, 2002). Matriarchal households held not only great cultural significance in Russian culture, but also provided significant financial, social, and spiritual support for working

women (Kishinevsky, 2004). Unable to sponsor family members into their receiving countries, many immigrant women lost these support networks, requiring them to face the challenges of increased domestic responsibility while attempting to integrate into a foreign labour market alone (Aroian, 2002).

In addition to the acculturative stresses posed by the challenges of labour market integration, Russian newcomers faced unique difficulties that stemmed from their socialization within Soviet culture. In his conversations with Third Wave Soviet émigrés in the United States, Ripp (1984) found that many were disillusioned with their experiences of immigration and their lives in America. The author contended that America's long-occupied, simultaneously glorified and vilified "place in the Russian national fantasy...a dizzying image constructed of two centuries of misinformation, myth-making and propaganda" (Ripp, 1984, p. 12) lead many Soviet immigrants to feel disenchanted when faced with a cultural reality that was quite different from the America of their dreams. For instance, following a decades-long immersion in communist society, Russian immigrants had to adjust their expectations of their host countries when they were faced with the reality that basic living necessities were no longer the purview of their government (Gold, 1995). Additionally, as will be further discussed in the following section, Russian immigrants' attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality often conflicted with those of their receiving societies, making full cultural absorption difficult, especially for Russian women (Birman & Tyler, 1994). Due to ingrained patriarchal attitudes towards women and an emphasis on the importance of women's domestic and care giving responsibilities in Russian culture, Russian immigrant women often experienced greater identity conflict and alienation than did immigrant men, as they found it difficult to redefine themselves as the "Western" women they perceived to be so lacking in the feminine qualities they valued (Birman & Tyler, 1994). Russian men, on the other hand, could reassert their masculinity at home and in the workplace, an attitude compatible with both Western and Russian ways of thinking. Finding it nearly

impossible to reconcile the two contradictory definitions of femininity, Russian women frequently struggled to integrate Russian and Western beauty ideologies, their husbands' wishes, as well as their own internal standards of feminine appearance (Birman & Tyler, 1994).

## **2.2 Russian Women and Cultural Ideals of Femininity**

In the wake of Soviet-style state socialism, which formally declared, but never accomplished institutionalized gender equity, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian women's understandings of gender and femininity were and continue to be qualitatively different from those of North American women (Ashwin, 2000). To reinforce its political strength and undermine the social foundations of pre-communist Russia, the Communist Party instituted several policies that attempted to transform traditional gender relations (Ashwin, 2000). These policies aimed to extend communism's influence on women by integrating them into the Russian labour force and transferring their dependence from their male-dominated households onto the state (Ashwin, 2000). From its inception, the Communist Party recognized women as a disenfranchised group and used the "perceived backwardness" (Wood, 1997, p. 3) of the female population to gain power over Russian society by invalidating the long-established tradition of the male-led household. However, the aim of the new gender order was not to liberate women; rather, the Communist Party problematized traditional women's gender roles within the family, labour market, and society "in order to subject them to the fulfillment of the communist order" (Aristarkhova, 1995, p. 22) and to enlist new workers in its rapid efforts at industrialization (Popova, 1999). This new gender order, at its most extreme, "treated women's bodies as no more than instruments of the state's reproductive requirements" (Verdery, 1996, p. 65). While patriarchal attitudes towards women abounded in the home, the state had also embraced the image of traditional father-figure to become "a universal patriarch to which both men and women were subject" (Ashwin, 2000, p. 2).

In addition to dictating the roles of women in society, the Soviet government propagated a new feminine beauty ideal (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996; Kay, 1997). While ‘Western’ cosmetics and beauty rituals were held in contempt and derided for symbolizing decadence and bourgeois preoccupation with wealth and status, the new populist ideology valorized the unpainted face and short hair of the modest, simple, and self-effacing Communist woman (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996). Ironically, at the same time as shorn hair was politicized in Western culture as a symbol of women’s rebellion and non-conformity<sup>3</sup>, Russian women were compelled to wear their hair cropped to better uphold the image of “purposefulness and sanitized physical energy” (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996, p. 98) that befitted the societal ideals of communism. Notably, the moral meanings attached to the plain female face and body also masked the shortage of consumer goods in the newly-formed Soviet state (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996). However, the state-dictated pressures and prohibitions only served to arouse Russian women’s interest in the art of beauty, albeit in secret (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996).

Behind the façade of declared gender equity and the state-promulgated images of Russian women as potent workers and activists, women in the Soviet Union were limited in the career paths they could choose and the occupational advancement they could achieve, particularly if they were of Jewish descent (Remennick, 2007). Despite their high levels of education, Russian women normally only attained lower- and mid-level career positions, with little access to decision-making power (Voronina, 1994). Moreover, even with near-universal employment, women in Russian society were still perceived primarily as homemakers, and had to continue to shoulder the majority of the domestic responsibilities (Ashwin, 2000). The final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in an extensive transformation of gender relations in Russia, which included the contestation of the institutional and ideological underpinnings of Soviet-

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<sup>3</sup> The feminist movement too was declared an indulgent bourgeois pursuit by the Communist Party (Remennick, 2003b).

approved gender roles, the rehabilitation of the traditional family, and the redefinition of work and motherhood as private responsibilities (Ashwin, 2000). These changes left Russian women feeling conflicted and confused by the roles they were expected to fulfill and by the futures they hoped to shape for themselves. On the one hand, Russian women desired to maintain their positions as strong, able mothers and workers who could take pride in their abilities to both manage their households and provide for their families. On the other, women longed for and felt pressured to support a “new traditionalism” (Ashwin, 2000, p. 21) that involved the reintroduction of traditional gender divisions in the Russian workforce and the domestic sphere.

Corresponding to their tentative embrace of conventional gender roles, Russian women welcomed Western ideals of femininity and beauty (Remennick, 2007). Several factors influenced Russian women’s acceptance of these views and the accompanying beauty work they demanded. Firstly, de-Stalinization<sup>4</sup>, allowed Russian women to abandon the much-reviled Communist beauty ideal of the unadorned female body, and resulted in the increased (albeit still limited) availability of beauty services and products in the former Soviet Union (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996). Secondly, whereas both government and popular cultural representations of Russian women had previously portrayed plump, round-faced women as the populist ideal, the slow introduction of Western goods and media advanced the image of slimness into Russian culture (Kishinevsky, 2004). Finally, by the late 1980’s, the Russian media was saturated with messages endorsing a so-called return to ‘natural’ femininity for Russian women (Ashwin, 2000). The final collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the permeation of an even greater amount of beauty products and media imagery into the Russian marketplace in the 1990’s.

Kay’s (1997) study of Russian women’s perceptions of idealized femininity exemplifies these newfound attitudes in Russian culture. Kay (1997) found that alongside with stressing the

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<sup>4</sup> De-Stalinization refers to the time period in the 1950’s and 1960’s following Stalin’s death, during which the Stalinist political system and cult of personality were gradually dismantled (Filtzer, 2002).

importance of looking and behaving in a feminine manner, the majority of her respondents had also internalized the idea that women were unequal to men. Thus, the women's view of idealized femininity involved not only the achievement of an externally feminine appearance, but also a more profound acceptance of traditionally feminine traits, such as weakness, passivity, and submissiveness. While the cultural acquiescence to an image of womanhood that identified femininity with fragility, beauty, and fashion was in part a rejection of the Soviet past, Kay's (1997) participants additionally perceived it to be a mark of progress into a more civilized and Westernized society. These changes in Russian attitudes towards beauty and femininity had both positive and adverse effects on Russian women's lives. On the one hand, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the subsequent sexualization of hiring practices made it a necessity for Russian women to care for their appearance. At the same time, many Russian women now regarded beauty work as a release from the austerity of the former Soviet Union and a form of regaining what was perceived to be a correct gender identity that communism was feared to have destroyed (Kay, 1997).

Russian women's inequitable experiences under the former Soviet Union's declared egalitarianism and its co-existence with chauvinistic ideas of womanhood continue to shape their attitudes towards feminism, femininity, and the body today. For instance, the legacy of the unjust "producer and reproducer" (Popova, 1999, p. 75) role that rejected gender differences in the labour market even as it reinforced stereotypical gender roles in the domestic sphere has lead many contemporary Russian women to embrace conventional gender ideologies (Henderson-King & Zhermer, 2003; Kay, 1997; Mamonova, 1984). Studies have shown that many Russian women (Popova, 1999) as well as Russian immigrant women (Goldenberg & Saxe, 1996) hold strong beliefs regarding the essential differences between men and women. Despite a recent growth in the Russian women's movement, including extensive campaigns against domestic violence and for increased government support of older women (Lipovskaya, 1997), most

Russian women do not self-identify as feminists and do not embrace Western feminist values (Henderson-King & Zhermer, 2003). Thus, the beauty practices of Russian women must be contextualized within the historical and cultural distinctiveness of Soviet attitudes towards gender roles, femininity, and the female body.

### **2.2.1 The Beauty Practices of Older Russian Immigrant Women**

Relatively little research has been devoted to studying the subjective experiences of older Russian-Canadian immigrant women. Indeed, the majority of the research concerning Soviet émigrés has been undertaken by Jewish community associations and as such, has focussed on Russian Jews' experiences of various Jewish issues, involvement in Jewish organizations, and post-immigration experiences of acclimatization in Israel and the United States (see for example, Birman & Trickett, 2001; Byrman & Tyler, 1994; Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport, 2001). The few existing exceptions include the work of Kishinevsky (2004), whose study of Russian-American girls and women revealed that the longer former Soviet women had resided in the United States, the more they had internalized Western beauty ideals. Of the five mother-daughter-grandmother triads interviewed, the middle-aged mothers seemed to feel the most conflicted about the ideals and demands of their new society and the cultural inculcation they had experienced living in Russia. These women reported feeling negatively about weight gain and the overweight body, even as these attitudes contradicted their learned cultural appreciation of food and eating. Feeling burdened by their mounting care giving and work responsibilities, the women frequently engaged in dieting practices that were severe by North American standards in order to maintain a slim body weight.

Similarly, in her large ethnographic study of middle-aged and older Russian women living in the United States, Remennick (2007) argued that Russian immigrant women faced singular challenges stemming from cultural disparities in Russian and Western definitions of

femininity, feminine appearance, and acceptance of traditional gender roles (Remennick, 2007). For instance, Remennick (2007) found that most of the women in her study were reluctant to soften their hyper-feminine dressing and makeup styles, and reminisced about their former lives in Russia, in which they recalled feeling more womanly and attractive. Some of the women also found sexual harassment policies in American workplaces to be stifling, as they were no longer complimented on their clothing, makeup, and hairstyles as they had previously been in Russia. Others found it necessary to change their appearances in order to better accommodate the dressing styles of local women (Remennick, 2007).

At the same time, older Russian women's attitudes towards and experiences of beauty work were further complicated by ageist preconceptions of older women's roles in society and within the family (Kay, 1997; Remennick, 2007). Both Kishinevsky (2004) and Remennick (2007) found that older women were expected to act in accordance with a strong tradition dictating that they retire from both occupational labour and feminine beauty work at the onset of menopause or at age 55 (the age of retirement in Russia), and thereafter dedicate their lives to helping their children and grandchildren. For older Russian women, physical signs of aging and the onset of menopause denoted the beginning of a time of progressive decline and the end of active life (Remennick, 2007). Women from the former Soviet Union were also expected to quietly endure the symptoms of menopause, as reproductive issues were considered unmentionable among respectable women (Kay, 1997). On the other hand, Remennick (2007) found that while some older Russian immigrant women still espoused Soviet ideologies regarding menopause and old age, others adopted more positive, North American attitudes towards aging as a "fresh start"(p. 333) and a new life stage. Indeed, many of the older women interviewed by Kishinevsky (2004) relished their newfound opportunities in American culture, including the possibility of spending less time performing housework and more time engaging in pleasurable activities.

## **2.3 Theorizing Beauty Work: Agency and Determinism**

Feminist theorists have suggested that the female body is a historical and political construction that is a focal point of gendered power struggles (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). However, the feminist literature has disagreed on the ways in which individuals experience and negotiate these struggles. On the one hand, radical feminists characterize women's bodies as objectified entities, which are socialized to internalize cultural representations of beauty that place a high value on hegemonic femininity and physical attractiveness (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). Pointing to ubiquitous representations of the thin, toned, young, and white female body, these theorists argue that the pervasive feminine beauty ideal contributes to women's body hatred and determines women's beauty work activities (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). Dworkin (1974) argues that in modern culture, beauty practices are inflicted upon every part of a woman's body and that these practices constitute "the most immediate physical and psychological reality of being a woman" (p. 113). Similarly, Bartky (1990) asserts that in order to construct the "feminine body subject" (p. 34), women must diet and exercise to control their weight, remove all bodily hair even as they wash, colour, and style the hair on their heads, ensure that their skin is smooth, soft, and supple, apply make-up, cream, perfume, and nail-polish, and dress in an appropriately feminine fashion.

Radical feminists have drawn from the work of Michel Foucault (1979), and in particular, his conceptualization of disciplinary practices and his thesis on panopticism. Foucault (1979) proposes that in modern societies, Bentham's panopticon provides a generalizable model for the relationship between power and visibility in individuals' everyday lives. Comprised of a central watchtower that is surrounded by the cells of inmates who are continually observable, and yet unaware of their observers, the panopticon is an idealized disciplinary apparatus that transforms individuals into self-policing "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1979, p. 138) that are

responsible for their own subjection and discipline. Foucault (1979) contends that disciplinary power is productive rather than repressive, exercised from the “very foundations of society” (p. 207), and marking the minute details of everyday life. Foucault (1979) states that power is exercised “from below” (p. 202), in the way that an individual “inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (p. 202).

Bordo’s (1993) feminist appropriation of Foucault’s work compares the modern female body to Foucault’s prisoner: “Women glory in their subjection...Taught from their infancy that beauty is a woman’s sceptre, the mind shapes itself into the body, and, roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (Wollstonecraft, as cited in Bordo, 1993, p. 18). Bordo (1993) argues that contemporary disciplinary practices compel women to engage in a multitude of beauty rituals that “train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands” (p. 38). Power is embedded in the small details of everyday life: Women’s supposedly trivial concerns with bodily appearance often bear the heaviest consequences upon their lives, as non-compliance with normative standards of beauty can frequently result in the denial of a woman’s vocational goals, heterosexual partnerships, and social acceptance. Foucault’s work is particularly illuminating of women’s motivations to engage in often-painful, crippling beauty work. Insisting that women are not “cultural dopes” (p. 20), Bordo (1993) argues that women’s primary motivation for partaking in disciplinary practices is to enhance their social and economic market value. Women engage in practices that are at times dangerous and unpleasant because they “have correctly discerned that these norms shape the perceptions and desires of potential lovers and employers” (Bordo, 1993, p. 20) and recognize that a culturally-accepted appearance is necessary if they are to be successful in life.

At the same time, interpretive feminists have sought to reposition feminine beauty work as a tool of personal empowerment. This perspective aims to capture the varied meanings of women's everyday life experiences as these are created through interpersonal interactions (Jansen & Davis, 1998). For example, Beausoleil (1994) contends that "women may experience pleasure and creativity as well as satisfaction in wearing makeup and doing appearance work" (p. 46). According to this perspective, beauty practices are performed by women who are "savvy cultural negotiators" (Gimlin, 2000, p. 96), so that while some women may be subjugated by the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991, p. 4), others may take pleasure in it, reproduce it, or ignore it altogether. Women who choose to utilize beauty practices in ways that may benefit them in a beauty-privileging culture are conceived of as agentive subjects, as well as objects who internalize "a narrow range of accepted embodiments" (Gagne & McGaughey, 2002, p. 819). Thus, "body projects" (Brumberg, 1997) are seen as a negotiation of the various costs of beauty work against the social benefits of a normatively accepted body (Gagne & McGaughey, 2002).

Interpretive feminists draw on the work of Goffman (1976), who examines how individuals use a variety of strategies to present and manage their gendered identities. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that individuals construct gender through their social and embodied performances of femininity and masculinity, which entail careful management of everyday practices in light of normative standards of gender-appropriate behaviour. While successful gender displays in general depend on an array of recognizable, learned gender-specific behaviours in varying circumstances, social categorization as male or female is based firstly (but not entirely) on an individual's outward appearance, such that a female gender can typically be determined by a woman's feminine dress and demeanour (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that beauty work is both assigned to the female realm, and seen as a confirmation of its performer's "essential nature" (p. 21) as a woman. In this way, beauty

work embodies the gendered meanings that reinforce a structure of dominance and subordination, which is established on the premise of the dichotomy and distinction of the two sexes (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

## **2.4 Extant Research Concerning Female Beauty Work**

A wealth of research framed within both the interpretive and radical feminist perspectives on the female body and feminine beauty work has shown that societal discourses of beauty and femininity figure prominently in Western women's lives. For instance, research has found that poor body image and body dissatisfaction in women are strongly related to dieting and disordered eating (Griffiths & McCabe, 2000; Phares et al., 2004; Stice & Shaw, 2002), as well as body modification procedures such as cosmetic surgery (Didie & Sarwer, 2003).

Additionally, it has been found that popular media representations of the female body engender negative feelings towards oneself in young and middle-aged women (Field, et al., 2001; Monroe & Huon, 2005; Stice & Shaw, 1994), and that negative self-perception is associated with low self-esteem and feelings of depression (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Stice & Bearman, 2001).

Other research has explored the beauty practices of Western women, although this literature has tended to focus on extreme and dangerous pursuits, such as cosmetic surgery (Bayer, 2005; Davis, 1995; Jeffreys, 2005), and eating disorders (Bordo, 1993; Gimlin, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 1996). For example, Hesse-Biber's (1996) examination of the "cult of thinness" (pg. 5) revealed that women's preoccupation with various forms of weight management and exercise is shaped by a cultural discourse that ascertains a woman's worth by her achievement of an appropriately feminine physique. Hesse-Biber (1996) argued that women are encouraged to internalize a North American view of fitness and ideal body size that is imbued with moralistic notions of fatness as a reflection of weak morals, laziness, unattractiveness, and poor health (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Moreover, the beauty practices women utilize to control their weight are equally

moralized, as exercise is deemed to be far more appropriate than other methods of weight loss like dieting (Reel, et al., 2008). Similarly, in her examination of cosmetic beauty work in *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf (1991) has argued that cosmetic surgery has emerged as a modern means of medicalizing women's bodies and negotiating new meanings of illness and health. Wolf (1991) suggests that older women in particular feel pressured to emulate youthful beauty standards through cosmetic surgery, as physical ideals that privilege youth and a misogynistic culture that associates a woman's worth with feminine appearance instil an apprehension of and disregard for old age and aged bodies.

In contrast, Davis (1995) suggested that women's motivations to undergo cosmetic surgery correspond to a need to normalize their bodies to established socio-cultural norms, rather than imitate a prescribed beauty ideal. Basing her work on interviews with female cosmetic surgery patients in the Netherlands where cosmetic surgery is covered by healthcare, Davis (1995) argued that women undergo cosmetic surgery with the primary justification of achieving normality rather than exceptional beauty, desiring their outer selves to embody their true inner identity. Similarly, Kaw's (1991) interviews with female Asian-American cosmetic surgery patients revealed that the women's primary motivation for undergoing cosmetic surgery was the enhancement of their appearances, with the goal of advancing their economic positions and securing heterosexual relationships. Kaw (1991) found that Asian-American women resisted the medicalized view of the surgically-modified body, and instead regarded their choice to have surgery as an exercise of free will and a rejection of their often-stereotyped 'natural' bodies.

Due to the seemingly trivial nature of feminine beauty practices (Twigg, 2007), a lesser amount of academic work has examined women's everyday beauty practices, such as makeup (Beausoleil, 1994; Hurd Clarke and Bundon, 2009), clothing (Twigg, 1007; Hurd Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha, 2008), suntanning (Garvin & Wilson, 1999; Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko,

2009), use of beauty salon services (Black, 2004; Gimlin, 1996) or hair care (Weitz, 2001). This research has explored women's everyday resistance and accommodation of dominant power structures through their use of various beauty work interventions, and has attempted to portray women who chose to engage in beauty work as neither "pleasure seeking, liberated individuals, nor...over-determined ciphers pushed along by social forces beyond their understanding" (Black, 2004, p. 188). Extant research that has addressed the everyday beauty work of older women will be reviewed in further detail in the following section.

## **2.5 Older Women's Beauty Practices**

Despite widespread cultural perceptions of older women's bodies as asexual and unappealing (Wolf, 1991), the research suggests that for women, beauty and femininity continue to play a significant role throughout the lifespan (Chrisler & Ghiz, 1993; Hurd, 2000, 2002; Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990). While both older men and women are negatively stereotyped as dependent, frail, and incompetent, and ageist beliefs construct old age as an inevitable period of mental, physical and social decline (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1995), the experience of aging is underscored by sexual difference (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Sontag, 1997). Sontag (1997) proposes that a mixture of traditional sex role expectations and ageist societal beliefs combine to create an unequal "double standard of aging" (p. 20), which is expressed through discriminatory practices and attitudes that disadvantage women more so than men. The double standard of aging denounces women as sexless and useless when their bodies can no longer be objectified, and when their reproductive and child care-giving responsibilities are diminished at midlife (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Sontag, 1997). Brown and Jasper (1993) argue that since "women's social value has been inseparable from their bodies...the way women's bodies look bears greatly on how other people relate to them and is directly connected with women's economic value in society" (p.18). Thus, ageist beauty norms that idealize health,

fitness, and youthfulness, as well as cultural perceptions of older women as frail, weak, and inactive underlay older women's beauty practices (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Calasanti, 2001; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007). Likewise, modern aesthetics, supported by the industries of anti-aging cosmetics, fashion, diet, and exercise, sustain societal beliefs that regard aged bodies and skin as deviant and undesirable (Bayer, 2005; Calasanti, 2001; Wolf, 1991). Older women may be particularly sensitive to cultural portrayals of idealized beauty due to their experiences of the natural bodily changes that accompany menopause (including weight gain, skin and hair changes, and breast changes) that remove them further from the slim and youthful beauty ideal (Dillaway, 2005; Tieggeman, 2004). Research has shown that older women often view menopause and its accompanying physical changes in a negative light, and engage in beauty work in an effort to manage their "unruly menopausal bodies" (Dillaway, 2005, p. 16).

Several studies have examined how older women's beauty work is intrinsically related to the physical signs of aging, health in later life, and dependence/independence concerns. In a study of women over the age of 50 and their experiences of menopause and later life, Fairhurst (1998) examined how older women constructed the aging body through clothing, and in particular, the phrases 'aging gracefully' and 'mutton dressed as lamb'. Individuals who were described with the phrase 'mutton dressed as lamb' were typically derided for their desire to retain a youthful appearance through age-inappropriate or colourful apparel and excessive jewellery (Fairhurst, 1998). At the same time, the majority of the participants expressed as a desire to appear younger than their chronological ages, as they perceived aged appearance to be related to cultural images of old age as a time of dependence, physical decline, and approaching mortality (Fairhurst, 1998).

Twigg's (2007) article reflected on the meanings of clothing in constituting identity, agency, and cultural expectations of older women. The author argued that clothing could be

viewed as a mediator between one's body, identity, and the social world, creating cultural understandings of the process of aging and displaying the social constructions of old age on the body. Twigg (2007) additionally asserted that age-related physical changes were reiterated and resisted through clothing, which strongly symbolized gender and personal expression, and which was often modified in later life to accommodate changes in physical ability and health. As such, older women negotiated their bodily changes, the aesthetic representation of femininity, and their symbolic departure from mainstream culture through dress (Twigg, 2007).

Similarly, Hurd Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha (2008) used data from multiple interviews with 36 women aged 71 to 93 to examine older women's attitudes towards a range of beauty work practices in later life. When asked to describe their use of fashion, the participants identified appropriate clothing styles for older women, disparaging styles that appeared to be too youthful and revealing. The women frequently utilized their clothing to conceal the visible signs of aging that had occurred in their bodies over time, such as weight gain and wrinkled skin, as well as age-related health issues, including varicose veins, arthritis, and osteoporosis. Moreover, the women's clothing choices reflected their changing, increasingly casual lifestyles. While some of the women felt liberated by the choices of attire made acceptable for them to wear as they aged, many were also frustrated by the fashion industry's persistent inattention to older women's bodies and clothing needs. In addition, some of the women used fashion as a means of resisting ageist stereotypes, and expressed their fears of being mistreated and discredited if they were to appear older. The women appeared to have internalized cultural assumptions regarding old age and aged bodies as unattractive, and struggled to negotiate societal notions of idealized femininity and stereotypes of old age within the means and resources that were available to them (Hurd Clarke, Griffin, & Maliha, 2008).

Likewise, Morganroth Gullette (1999) has theorized about older women's engagement with fashion using a life course metaphor. The author has proposed that far from a trivial occurrence, the fashion cycle can be viewed as a social practice through which North American women construct their identity and attribute meanings to the aging process. In both the life spans of women and their clothing, youth and newness are oftentimes privileged, while decline is deemed outmoded. In the realm of fashion, which for many women represents pleasure, material wealth, upward mobility, gender identity, and an opportunity for female bonding, positive connotations are naturally associated with the purchase of new garments, whereas out-of-style clothing is routinely rejected and discarded (Morganroth Gullette, 1999). Echoing Bartky (1990), Morganroth Gullette suggested that the fashion cycle must constantly degrade the bodies of those who engage in it, particularly bodies that do not conform to the youthful and slim ideal, in order to encourage individuals to continue their attachment to the capitalistic system. In rejecting old possessions and replacing used apparel, women relinquish objects that at one point comprised a part of their identity, and in the process disavow their prior history. In this way, older women learn to recognize their advancing age, and its cultural association with unfashionable irrelevance (Morganroth Gullette, 1999).

As well as clothing, existing research has investigated several other aspects of beauty work, body image, and aging. For example, Hurd Clarke's (2002b) in-depth interviews with 22 women aged 61 to 92 revealed that older women tended to describe their bodies in negative terms in congruence with cultural perceptions of aged bodies as unattractive and undesirable (Hurd, 2000). In particular, the women indicated that they were predominantly discontented with their weight, pointing to a lack of willpower to diet and/or exercise as the reason for their failure to attain their desired body shape (Hurd Clarke, 2002b). At the same time, the women emphasized healthiness, and not appearance, as their primary motivation to control their weight

(Hurd Clarke, 2002b). To cope with the depreciation of their looks, a large percentage of the women interviewed defined the aging process as a natural, unavoidable occurrence, which resulted in bodies that did not necessarily reflect their perceived inner selves, or their abilities to shape and control their bodies (Hurd, 2000). Likewise, many of the women highlighted the importance of their bodies' functionality and good health over their outward appearances (Hurd, 2000). Indeed, many of the women mourned the loss of physical mobility and energy over the loss of physical attractiveness (Hurd, 2000).

Utilizing interview data from 44 women aged 50 to 70, Hurd Clarke and Griffin's (2007) article explored older women's narratives of aging. The authors found that the participants defined ageism as both the societal fascination with youth, and the stigmatization of older adults. Many of the women equated beauty with youth, and thus held negative views of their aging bodies. Several women discussed the marginalization they perceived they had experienced in their lives, particularly in the context of the workforce and potential romantic relationships. Consequently, many of the women elected to engage in beauty work to fight the societal invisibility they faced, to increase their chances of attracting a partner, and to retain or gain employment (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Others maintained that their secure relationships, retired status, and/or supportive social networks protected them from the pressure to engage in anti-aging beauty practices. The women accepted ageist conceptions of beauty, even as they understood that these societal attitudes towards aged appearances were an integral part of their experiences of ageism (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008).

Lastly, Furman's (1997) ethnographic study of a beauty salon frequented mainly by an older Jewish clientele showed that older women's feelings towards their bodies were often multifaceted, coexisting as an amalgamation of shame, acceptance, and resistance. The study revealed that the beauty shop created a communal space for older women who shared similar

concerns regarding feminine appearance and the physical realities of aging (Furman, 1997). In addition, Furman's (1997) research illustrated how older women simultaneously engaged in normalizing beauty practices, while exercising a form of agency in their attempts to shape their social interactions with others through their appearance. The women were able to identify with dominant cultural attitudes, as well as with their own perceptions as a marginalized group (Furman, 1997). While most of the women internalized conventional beliefs that painted the aging body as unattractive, others resisted ageist beauty ideals by questioning the idolization of thinness, fitness, and youthfulness in popular culture and contested unrealistic societal expectations of older women (Furman, 1997).

## **2.6 Summary of the Literature**

Focusing primarily on the white, middle class woman, extant feminist research and theorizing of the female body and its embodiment of societal notions of beauty and femininity has conceptualized beauty work as both an act of patriarchal subjugation and a means of empowerment and self-determination. Several studies exploring women's utilization of a variety of forms of beauty work have shown that while most women internalize and attempt to comply with dominant notions of idealized beauty, their decisions to engage in these forms of beauty work are underscored by their recognition of the societal advantages of attractiveness and the pleasure they derive from taking care of their bodies. Additionally, research has shown that older women's beauty work is frequently influenced by their concerns regarding the invisibility and devaluation of older women in Western society, as well as their fears regarding their current and future health and independence. However, few studies have examined the lived experiences of Russian immigrant women. The existing research has shown that Russian immigrant women's engagement in beauty work is framed by their reconciliation of conflicting cultural attitudes towards gender roles and beauty in Russian and Western cultures. Furthermore, older

Russian immigrant women's beauty practices are complicated by negative cross-cultural attitudes towards later life and the aging female body. Given their unique life experiences, Russian immigrant women's views of beauty work, femininity, and the aging body must be contextualized within their socialization in a distinct political, cultural, historical, and ideological climate.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

Given that little research has studied older Russian immigrant women in Canada, I elected to employ qualitative methodology in order to better explore these women's attitudes towards aging, beauty, and femininity. Informed by feminist interpretive methodology, the use of multiple, in-depth interviews allowed the participating women to highlight those subjects that were most pertinent to their narratives of immigration, cultural assimilation, and beauty practices. Ten immigrant women aged 52 to 75 who relocated to Canada from the former Soviet Union were interviewed twice regarding their engagement in a variety of beauty practices, their experiences of immigration, and their perceptions of the ways in which their age and cultural surroundings have influenced their past and current beauty work. The interviews were translated and transcribed, and later analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) concepts of open and axial coding. The following sections further detail the theoretical framework, study design, recruitment strategies and criteria, as well as the data processing methods that were utilized in the study.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study was theoretically framed by feminist interpretive inquiry, which can be defined as a research methodology that rejects positivist research methods as androcentric and hierarchical, and instead aims to explore the narratives and personal understandings of individuals' everyday lives (Jansen & Davis, 1998). Thus, feminist interpretative methodology emphasizes the importance of correcting "both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1988, p.71, emphasis in original). In viewing "the everyday world as problematic" (Smith, 1987, p. 88),

feminist interpretive inquiry brings to light hierarchical relations within women's lives, including the relationship between the researcher and her participants (Jansen & Davis, 1998; Oakley, 1981; Smith, 1987). Additionally, this research methodology stresses rapport building with participants, sensitivity to feedback, and reciprocity (Oakley, 1981). The use of this perspective was particularly important during the data gathering, transcription, and translation phases of the study, in which I attempted to focus both the interview questions and their subsequent translations on the participating women's own understandings and articulations of the subjects discussed.

### **3.2 Study Design**

As previously mentioned, the data for this project were derived from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten Russian immigrant women. Each woman was interviewed twice for a total of 19.8 interview hours. Following the first interview, a second meeting was typically scheduled four to eight weeks after the first, in order to allow adequate time for the transcription of the interviews, as well as the preliminary analysis of the data. The interviewees were invited to choose both the location and the language(s) in which the interviews were to be conducted. Although a variety of locations were proposed to the participants, all of the women preferred to be interviewed in their own homes. This environment likely aided in facilitating openness by providing a familiar, and, therefore, comfortable setting for the participants to share their personal narratives.

Prior to being interviewed, the participants were informed of the study's purpose and asked to read and sign a consent form, in which they indicated their agreement to participate in two digitally recorded interviews (see Appendix B). Participants were also asked to fill out a biographical data form, in which they were asked to specify several aspects of their personal

backgrounds as well as certain information regarding their immigration from the former Soviet Union (see Appendix C). Their answers were later used to prompt and aid the women in conveying the stories of their lives in the former Soviet Union and in Canada.

I chose to question the women using multiple, in-depth interviews so as to uncover their frameworks of meaning and avoid imposing my own assumptions on their narratives, an approach consistent with feminist interpretive methodology. The interview schedule provided a framework for the interviews, yet allowed for flexibility in each woman's narrative (see Appendix A). The women were asked to discuss a set of questions regarding the central themes of the study, namely their beauty work regimens (including hair, make-up, diet, exercise, fashion, suntanning, and nail care), their reasons for engaging in these practices, and the ways in which their socialization in the Former Soviet Union and their subsequent emigration to Canada had shaped their understandings of beauty and their beauty practices. The majority of the questions were open-ended, and permitted the women to direct the conversation to those aspects of the subjects discussed that they considered most important. Further questions were based on the participants' replies, consisting mostly of questions for clarification and probes for detail. I aimed to maintain a flexible approach to the research, open to the possibility that the concepts I identified as being important and recurrent in the data might differ from those predicted at the outset of the study (Pope & Mays, 2000). Using a multiple interview format allowed the interviewees to continue to reflect upon the research themes and elaborate on previously discussed information during the second interviews (Hurd Clarke, 2003). At the same time, this approach afforded me the opportunity to review the interview transcripts, amend and refine my interviewing techniques, and revisit the first interviews with questions that would allow the interviewees to elucidate and expand on their earlier responses.

### **3.3 Participation Criteria**

In the process of selecting participants for the study, I initially established the following criteria: Firstly, I looked for Russian women who fit the definition of an “immigrant”, or “a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities” (Statistics Canada, 2001). Secondly, I looked for immigrant women who had emigrated from the USSR in the late 1980’s to early 1990’s and had resided in Canada for at least five years. These women, who comprised the so-called Fifth Wave of immigration from the Soviet Union (Lewin-Epstein, Ro’i & Ritterband, 1997), would have had some exposure to Canadian culture and sufficient time to overcome their experiences of “culture shock” (Öberg, 1960, p.177). These women would have also been the most likely to experience Russian life under the Soviet regime, as well as the effects of the *perestroika*, the fall of communism, and the westernization of the former Soviet Union. Thirdly, I sought out women who were English-speakers because I aimed to avoid the drawbacks of using multiple languages in an interview, as this practice has been shown to complicate and cause discrepancies in data coding and analysis (Small, et al., 1999). Specifically, I attempted to prevent the misrepresentation of the women’s stories through the translation of their words by conducting the interviews in English. Fourthly, I looked for Russian immigrant women over the age of 55, which is the age signifying retirement and thus transition into later life in the USSR. The third and fourth criteria were later altered to better accommodate the study’s participants and aid the recruitment process, as will be discussed in the following section. Finally, I endeavoured to interview Russian women from varying geographic origins within the former Soviet Union, sexual orientations, religious and spiritual affiliations, occupations, abilities, and socio-economic strata.

### **3.4 Recruitment Strategies**

Making use of my contacts within the Russian immigrant community, I began the recruitment process by attempting to gain access to potential participants by word of mouth. Specifically, I approached several family friends and acquaintances in the hopes that they might put me in contact with interested English-speaking immigrant women over the age of 55. These contacts received copies of the study's Letter of Information (see Appendix D) and Consent Form (see Appendix B) and were encouraged to pass them along to women with whom they were acquainted and who met the study's recruitment criteria, so that these women might contact me directly by telephone and set up an appointment for an interview. However, my initial efforts only yielded a single participant, as most of the older Russian women who were contacted by my acquaintances in the Russian community did not possess sufficient linguistic fluency to enable them to be interviewed in English. Consequently, I decided to change the recruitment criteria to include women over the age of 50, reasoning that younger women would be more likely to be able to give interviews in English. I also informed potential participants of my willingness to conduct the interviews in Russian. These modifications to the recruitment criteria proved to be successful, and a second attempt at generating interest in the study through personal connections helped me recruit six additional participants. These participants then referred me to three other women who agreed to participate in the study.

### **3.5 Interview Translation**

Although all of the participants had some knowledge of conversational English, most counted Russian as their mother tongue and only two were comfortable enough to conduct interviews solely in English. Three preferred that we converse entirely in Russian, while six additional interviews were conducted in a mix of Russian and English. Thus, the majority of the

interviews required some translation from Russian to English. I chose to translate the interviews as they were being transcribed in order to preserve the meaning and spirit of the interviewees' narratives to the best of my abilities. In this process, I utilized the concepts of somatic and dialogic translation. Robinson defines somatic translation as "an intuitive, gut-level sense of the 'right' word or phrase" (1991, p. 257) and dialogic translation as the varying, often unpredictable interaction of the researcher/translator with the speaker and the audience. My goal was to transcribe the interviewees' words in a way that best conveyed the meanings I perceived in their narratives. When participants used Russian words or expressions that had no corresponding English correlates, I transcribed the words verbatim and provided an explanation of the approximate use of the aforesaid word or expression. I transcribed and translated the interviews as soon as was possible in order to preserve the full meaning of the interviewees' words. The second interview allowed me to clarify my translation of phrases I was unfamiliar with, although this was often unnecessary; the participants viewed me as a non-native Russian speaker, and thus frequently clarified the meanings of their words without my prompting. Despite my own and the interviewees' apparent reservations, my fluency in the Russian and English languages and familiarity with both cultures was more than sufficient to adequately understand and translate the participants' responses.

### **3.6 Sample and Rationale**

For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term 'Russian immigrant women' to describe the group of women that took part in the study. There has been some confusion with regards to the terms used to describe my participants' cultural backgrounds, since the majority of individuals who have immigrated from the former Soviet Union have been Jewish, but were of differing nationalities originating in different parts of the USSR (Kishinevsky, 2004). Cass (1997) notes that Russian émigrés are typically defined as individuals who were "born in the region formerly

known as the Soviet Union, and their children. This definition includes not only Russians, but others with a variety of ethnic identities including Armenian, Chechen, Ukrainian, Azeri, and Jewish" (p. 142). Since the participants in my study were of varying religions and geographical origins within the former Soviet Union, I will refer to them simply as 'Russian immigrant women'. The remainder of this section details the sample characteristics, and the commonalities and differences among the women interviewed.

The sample of participating women was diverse with respect to age, country of origin, years in Canada, and income (see Table 1). Ranging in age from 52 to 75 (average of 61 years of age), the ten women's incomes varied from less than \$10,000 per year to more than \$60,000 per annum. Additionally, the women had originated from diverse regions in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia, and Belarus. The women had made their immigrations to Canada between 1992 and 2004, and had resided in Canada for periods of time that ranged from five to 14 years. Half of the women had previously immigrated to Israel, living for four to 12 years as Israeli citizens before making a second immigration to Canada.

The women were relatively homogenous with respect to their educational attainment, marital status, physical ability, and stated sexual orientation. Thus, most of the women were married and all were well-educated, able-bodied, and self-identified as heterosexual. The majority of the women had grown children, save for one woman whose daughter was in her last year of high school. Most of the women had immigrated to Canada with their children, or with the help of their children's sponsorship. Although it is difficult to compare the Russian and Canadian education systems, all of the participants indicated that they had graduated from a post-secondary educational institute. Prior to immigrating, half of the women had been employed as engineers, while the other half held various white collar jobs. Two of the women identified their religious affiliation as being Jewish, two others as Christian, and the remaining

six participants identified themselves as agnostic, atheists, or did not provide a response. The women were all light-skinned and self-identified as white.

Canada's partiality towards highly-skilled and educated workers, as well as the prioritization given to applicants with family members living in Canada may help explain the study sample's homogeneity. Historically, Canada has shown preference towards immigrants who displayed the greatest potential for contributing to the country's economic, social, and cultural development (Man, 2004). This was particularly the case following the passing of the 1967 Immigration Act and the changes made to the Canadian immigration framework that included the introduction of the point system (Man, 2004). Under the regulatory point system, applicants without family ties in Canada were assigned points based on their age, education, vocational training, language proficiency, and occupational demand. Applicants with family ties in Canada received extra points on their applications (Green & Green, 1995). Thus, the majority of applicants who are accepted for immigration are highly educated and hold professional positions, are proficient in English, and immigrate with or to their families. Given the extreme invisibility and marginalization of people with disabilities in the former Soviet Union (Grigorenko, 1998), the number of Russian women who are disabled and who are able to immigrate abroad is likely very small, and thus, it is unsurprising that the sample included only able-bodied women. Additionally, due to the stigmatization of homosexuality in Russian culture and the air of taboo surrounding the subjects of sex and sexuality (Mamonova, 1994), it is doubtful that any of the women would have divulged their non-heteronormative sexual preferences in our conversations.

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics (n=10)**

<b>Age distribution</b>	n
50-55	3
56-60	3
61-65	1
66-70	2
71-75	1
<b>Marital Status</b>	n
Currently Married	8
Divorced	2
<b>Education</b>	n
College/University Degree	10
<b>Income</b>	n
Under \$10,000	1
\$10-20,000	2
\$30-40,000	1
\$40-50,000	3
\$60,000+	2
Decline to say	1
<b>Number of years in Canada</b>	n
5-10	3
11-16	6
17+	1
<b>Country of origin (within the USSR)</b>	n
Russia	3
Ukraine	6
Belarus	1

### **3.7 Sampling Challenges**

At the start of the study, I had set out to recruit 12 to 15 female Russian immigrant participants over the age of 55. The initial sample size was based on the only other qualitative study of Russian immigrant women's beauty practices that I could locate. This study, which involved interviews with five grandmother-mother-daughter triads concerning their attitudes towards dieting, body weight, and sociocultural images of slimness, yielded a wealth of data with strong and homogenous thematic concepts (Kishinevsky, 2004). Although the sample of ten participants I achieved was smaller than my anticipated sample of 12 to 15 women, the analysis of the data showed definite trends and commonalities of thought among the women. Even though a larger sample size would have been preferential, I was also limited by the resources available to me as a Master's student and the necessity of completing the project in the allocated time. Amber and Adler (1995) noted that the intensive study of a small sample of cases can be used to generate explanations for cause and effect relationships. Flick (1998) additionally observed that "it is their relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness, which determines the way in which the people to be studied are selected" (p. 41) in qualitative research. In this way, informants are to be selected for the ways in which they may better enable the examination of the behaviour or phenomenon of interest to the researcher (Mays & Pope, 1995).

The challenges I experienced during the recruitment process stemmed mainly from the original recruitment criteria I had established at the outset of the study. In particular, I found it extremely difficult to locate Russian immigrant women over the age of 55 who were willing to converse entirely in English. I can only conjecture that just as my earlier criterion for English language aptitude was motivated by my own apprehensions regarding my Russian language skills, the participants' discomfort with the English language may have contributed to their lack

of willingness to partake in the study. After changing the criteria to include women over the age of 50 and expressing my readiness to conduct the interviews in Russian, I was able to recruit the remaining majority of my sample. However, as a result of my inability to locate a significant number of willing participants using the initial recruitment criteria, the recruitment process took six months rather than the three months I had originally estimated, and my efforts yielded only 10 participants, rather than the 12 to 15 I had intended to recruit.

Kishinevsky (2004) notes that older Russian women are especially difficult to recruit due to their deeply ingrained suspicions of figures and institutions of authority, an attitude rooted in the Stalinist culture of fear many older Russian women observed growing up. Thus, my affiliation with the University of British Columbia may have actually deterred older Russian women from agreeing to partake in the study. Although I cannot be sure that the women I did not recruit showed little interest in the study due to their mistrust of my intentions, the majority of the women who did volunteer for the study were under the age of 65, and thus born after or near to Stalin's death. Only one woman over the age of 70 agreed to take part in the study. In addition, I noted that women were far more likely to agree to participate in the study if we were already personally acquainted or had been introduced through a mutual social contact.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data involved three phases, namely data management, coding, and in-depth analysis. During the data management stage, all interviews were transcribed and translated, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym to preserve their anonymity (see Table 2 in the beginning of the Findings chapter). After reviewing each transcript, the interviews were imported into a computer program (NVivo 8) used to manage and analyze qualitative data. The coding of the data was informed by Strauss and Corbin's (1998) models of

open and axial coding. Open coding is the process of identifying, naming, and categorizing the fundamental ideas, events, and interactions in the data, while axial coding helps to develop a deeper understanding of the data through connecting together various data categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Each transcript was read and re-read several times to form an impression of the women's realities and identify broad categories (codes) of analysis within the data properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Three major themes emerged from the data corresponding to my research questions, namely: Beauty Work, Aging, and Experiences of Immigration. Within the Beauty theme, I identified the following open codes: Fashion, Skin Care, Make Up, Diet, Hair Care, Exercise, Other Forms of Beauty Work, and Socialization. An additional five codes were ascertained within the Aging theme, namely: Physical Signs of Aging, Resistance and Acceptance of Aging, Health, Old Age, and Beauty and Sexuality. Finally, seven codes were identified within the theme of Experiences of Immigration, including: Othering/Otherness, Assimilation, Family, Language Barriers, Re-entry into the Labour Market, Financial Concerns, and Positive Experiences of Immigration. The open codes were further reduced to axial or sub-codes, each containing up to 10 sub-codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which were analyzed in relation to each woman's social position (e.g. age, educational attainment, historical background, income, and marital status).

### **3.9 Reflexivity**

Utilizing the practice of "reflexive inquiry" (Smith, 1990, p. 4), I aimed to situate myself within the project as a white, young, middle class Russian immigrant female, in order to understand older immigrant women's subjective experiences as exclusive of my own social position (Acker, et al., 1983; Majumdar, 2007). My simultaneous insider and outside status within my interviewees' socio-cultural group acted as both an advantage and a disadvantage throughout the study. At the outset of the study, both my former associations within the Russian

community and my social location as a young, Russian immigrant woman aided me in enlisting the help of acquaintances in the process of recruiting and persuading older Russian immigrant women to participate in my study. In fact, I was frequently introduced as and called by an expression which would roughly translate to “our girl” or “one of us.” The participating women viewed me as one of their own, often comparing me to their own sons and daughters (many of whom were around my age, and had moved to Canada at a similar age), and welcoming me warmly into their homes. I used these associations to my advantage, asking the women to describe and elaborate on aspects of Russian lifestyle and cultural practices I was unfamiliar with, or was too young to remember. I also used this approach to question the women about historical events, practices, and institutions in the former Soviet Union.

However, my social position also presented me with several challenges. The first involved the widespread attitude of respect and reverence towards one’s elders in Russian culture. Thus, as a young Russian woman who was conversing with older women, I found it difficult at times to challenge and probe my participants’ responses without being perceived as discourteous. Gaining the women’s respect and co-operation was particularly important from the standpoint of the feminist interpretive perspective that framed the study’s methodology. Moreover, on a practical note, it was also important to maintain rapport with the women in order that they agree to participate in a second interview. I also found it difficult to broach subjects such as sex, sexuality, menopause, as well as the personal details of my participants’ lives, given that these are rarely discussed among Russian women. I attempted to approach these subjects with tact and sensitivity, so as to not appear intrusive or disrespectful, while at the same time allowing each woman’s narrative to unfold with sufficient clarity and detail. In order to bracket off my own experiences and opinions of immigration, beauty work, and femininity, I kept notes detailing my impressions, thoughts, and reaction of the interviews and the participants following

each interview. My awareness of my own perceptions made my record of my attitudes towards the interviews a necessary part of my attempt to reduce my “insider” bias within the processes of listening to, observing, choosing, and interpreting the data.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

This chapter begins with a description of the present-day beauty work practices of the Russian immigrant women participating in my study, including their skin care, hair care, makeup, fashion, diet, and exercise habits. Next, I examine the women's motivations for their various beauty work decisions. I explore the influence of the women's perceptions of later life and the aging body, as well as their understandings of cultural and gendered ideas of beauty on their beauty work decisions. Finally, I discuss the women's experiences of immigration and acculturation and the ways in which these frame the women's understandings of beauty, femininity, and beauty work.

### **4.1 The Beauty Work Practices of Russian Women**

Even as the women showed varying levels of interest in beautification, all of the participating women engaged in at least one form of the beauty work (please see Tables 2 and 3). The most commonly performed type of beauty work among the women was the use of skin care as all ten women indicated that they employed facial and body creams. Five of the women reported that they specifically sought out anti-aging creams when selecting skin care products. These women tended to be younger and have higher incomes than the women who did not use anti-aging products. Indeed, a few of the women who did not use anti-wrinkle creams remarked that their finances simply did not allow them to do so. Valeria, who was retired, opined: "If I was living under different circumstances, I would buy more...creams for mature skin. But right now, when I look at the price, I just can't buy it. I can't pay \$100 for a cream." Similarly, two women disclosed that they had utilized the services of a dermatologist, and another two had undergone non-surgical cosmetic procedures, specifically Botox injections and a laser skin

**Table 2: Individual Beauty Work Practice**

Name	Age	Beauty Work Practices
Anna	53	Skin care use, makeup use, hair dye, fashion, dieting, exercise
Daria	70	Skin care use, makeup use, hair dye, fashion, dieting
Katerina	63	Skin care use, non-surgical cosmetic procedure, makeup use, hair dye, fashion, dieting, exercise
Lydia	58	Skin care use, makeup use, hair dye, fashion, dieting, exercise
Maria	58	Skin care use, makeup use, hair dye, dieting, exercise
Oksana	52	Skin care use, exercise
Polina	52	Skin care use, non-surgical cosmetic procedure, makeup use, hair dye, exercise
Sofia	75	Skin care use
Valeria	69	Skin care use, makeup use, hair dye, fashion, dieting, exercise
Vera	59	Skin care, makeup, hair dye, exercise

**Table 3: Summary of Beauty Work Practices**

<b>Beauty practices</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Skin Care</b>	
Used body and skin creams	10
Used dermatological services <sup>5</sup>	2
Had non-surgical cosmetic procedures	2
<b>Makeup use</b>	
Used makeup	8
Used no makeup	2
<b>Hair Care</b>	
Dyed their hair	8
Did not dye their hair	2
<b>Diet<sup>6</sup></b>	
Engaged in dieting	7
Did not diet	3
<b>Exercise</b>	
Engaged in physical activity	8
Did not exercise	2
<b>Fashion</b>	
Interested in fashion and clothing	5
Not interested in fashion and clothing	5

<sup>5</sup> I defined the use of dermatological services as the utilization of spa services such as facials, or the consultation services of a dermatologist. I excluded non-surgical cosmetic procedures such as the use of Botox, fillers, and laser treatments from this definition.

<sup>6</sup> Diet was defined as the reduction of caloric intake or the consumption of particular foods with the goal of reducing or maintaining one's body weight (Timko, Perone, & Crossfield, 2006).

treatment. These four women were among the five women who had the highest incomes among the study's participants.

Of the eight women who wore makeup, some used various products sparingly, while others enjoyed using numerous, expensive cosmetic products. The women's makeup use largely depended on their lifestyles, with six of the women opting to only wear makeup when socializing with friends or for special occasions and three women wearing make-up at all times. For instance, Lydia did not wear makeup every day, but said that she dedicated a great deal of time to her makeup application when she visited her friends or went out: "If I'm going somewhere, I start two hours before I go out...I make up my eyes...[I put on] liner, mascara, lipstick of course. There all kinds of subtle things that need to be done." In contrast to the other participants, the two women who wore make-up all the time were heavily engaged in their communities, and partook in numerous volunteer, professional, social, and cultural activities on a daily basis.

Similarly, eight of the women dyed their hair. While one woman frequented a hair salon, the majority of the women dyed their hair in their own homes and objected to the high prices of professional colouring services. Lydia, who was the only woman to have her hair dyed professionally, had one of the highest incomes among the women interviewed. While six women decided to dye their hair a colour that approximated their hair tone before they had greyed, two women decided to lighten their hair. These two women argued that dyeing their hair blonde made them appear more youthful and suited their aging faces better than darker hair.

Sofia, one of the two women who did not use hair dye or make-up, indicated that her beauty work choices were strongly influenced by her socialization in Soviet Russia. For example, she had this to say about hair dye: "Dyeing your hair wasn't acceptable at all, at all. [Some people] used peroxide to lighten their hair, if they wanted to go blonde, but proper girls

didn't do these things...Then it was only prostitutes who dyed their hair." In contrast, Oksana indicated that her choice to not use make-up or hair dye reflected her acculturation to differing cultural beauty norms in Canada, which will be explored in more depth later in the chapter. Additionally, Oksana stated that the inconvenience of hair colouring was a strong deterrent: "When you start [dyeing your hair] you cannot stop. If I started dyeing my hair, I would have to keep doing it every month, or maybe even more." Nevertheless, Oksana was seriously considering beginning to colour it in the near future.

Half of the women expressed a strong interest in fashion and appearing fashionable while the other half suggested that their clothing choices were more practical in nature. The former group of women emphasized the importance of fashionable dressing and the superiority of European clothing styles. Lydia, who enjoyed experimenting with her sartorial choices, opined: "I love to dress nicely, I buy nice clothing, and I change it frequently. And my friends all know that I love fashion. I like to look good, and I try to look good in any situation." Similarly, Katerina simply stated: "I just like very much to be well-dressed... I never wear the same thing twice." In contrast, those who were less interested in fashion stated that they had begun to pay less attention to the way they dressed following their immigration to Canada in order to adapt to what they perceived to be the more casual Canadian style of dressing. For instance, Polina asserted: "I buy more practical things that are comfortable for me, and I don't look at what other people are wearing...it's much easier this way...and I like it this way. I like that I'm able to not worry about it."

All of the women displayed negative attitudes towards overweight and seven engaged in some measure of purposeful dieting or controlling their food intake. These women made comments similar to those of Oksana, who contended: "Everybody wants to be slim, right? Nobody wants to be fat, that's for sure." The women described various methods that they

utilized to maintain their weight, which ranged from a focus on “healthy eating” to more extreme forms of dieting. For example, Daria asserted that she tried to eat healthy foods that were not too spicy, not too salty, and not overly fatty. Other women resorted to more drastic measures, such as Anna who underwent a food chemistry test in order to determine which foods were best metabolized by her body and which she should avoid, or Katerina who put herself on a “very aggressive diet” after she became concerned about her weight. Katerina recalled her exceptionally strict diet: “I ate 850 calories daily, no more. I ate 200 grams of carbohydrates, almost nothing, 200 grams [of protein] daily and a half kilo of different vegetables, two fruits daily and one piece of whole wheat bread.”

The three women who did not diet were the two youngest women (Oksana, aged 52, and Polina, aged 52) and the oldest woman (Sofia, aged 75) in the study. Even though they indicated that they did not diet, Polina and Oksana discussed their displeasure with the appearance of their bodies, and their need to “take action” to ameliorate the current condition of their bodies. For instance, Polina described trying to eat healthy food and limiting her food intake as she had gotten older, saying, “My metabolism is slower, I don’t need that much now, and I have to eat less. But it’s not a diet. I’m trying to adjust to a new stage of my life.” Likewise, Oksana noted, “I never diet and I kind of have a strong feeling that I cannot stop eating, I cannot force myself just kind of to eat less...but I kind of feel guilty every time I eat ice cream.” In contrast, Sofia had grown up after World War II, at a time of extreme deprivation in the USSR. Sofia recalled:

We didn’t even have an understanding of diets because we didn’t have anything to eat most of the time. There was nothing to eat...if there wasn’t any milk, if there wasn’t any bread, you had to stand in line...I remember back then, even in the 1980’s, not even to mention the hungry 1960’s, a neighbour would come running, saying, “This store has eggs!”, “This store has sour cream!” And so it started. What diet? There was no talk of diets.

Although Sofia later learned of dieting when she moved to Israel, she observed that her long-ingrained habits were hard to break and it was still difficult for her to consider dieting given that she had grown up in a time of tremendous scarcity.

Finally, eight women engaged in some form exercise including walking, going to the gym, yoga, skiing, hiking, swimming, snow shoeing, and tai chi. For instance, Oksana enjoyed swimming and yoga, saying: “Especially now that my children are grown up and I have time to spend for myself. I always prefer to spend it doing some exercise.” Maria said she tried to exercise every day: “I do exercise each morning, for 20 to 30 minutes, depending on my mood. But I always start the day with exercises...as a rule, every morning, I exercise.” Valeria reported that she attempted to keep fit with walking: “I just try to walk a lot. I walk to my son’s house, and [to] my friends’ houses. I try to walk for about an hour a day...I’m always walking, running to the bus, then I walk some more.” Anna remarked: “I try to do a little bit [of exercise] every day...it’s very good for you. I like to walk, to hike, it’s a good workout for all your muscles, and I do yoga.” The two women who did not engage in physical activity were the two oldest study participants. Although Sofia was a gymnast in her youth, she said she never gotten into the habit of exercising once she immigrated to Canada, remarking: “I’ve just gotten used to not doing any, and I don’t feel like I need it.” Likewise, Daria stated that she had never liked exercising and has not been tempted to try since her immigration to Canada.

#### **4.2 Russian Immigrant Women’s Motivations for Performing Beauty Work**

When asked to explain their reasons for engaging in various forms of beauty work, the women noted that their socialization within Russian culture and their perceptions of later life strongly influenced their beauty work decisions. The following section explores how the women’s past and present beauty work practices were informed by their understandings of

Russian cultural definitions of beauty, femininity, and sexuality, as well as the importance of beauty work in Russian culture. Secondly, the section examines the ways in which old age and the women's experiences of their aging bodies framed their current beauty work practices.

#### **4.2.1 Beauty Work and Russian Culture**

##### **4.2.1.1 Russian ideals of beauty and sexuality**

Many of the women reflected on the differences they perceived in the ways that Canadian and Russian women understood femininity and sexuality, and how these understandings had a bearing on contemporary Russian women's beauty work practices. For example, Lydia observed that while Russian women focused more on the achievement of a feminine appearance, Canadian women had different priorities: “[Canadian women] are focused more on their career, and one’s career rarely depends on your outward appearance, right?” Anna explained that while North American women fought for the right to work alongside men, Russian women underwent no such struggles. She went on to describe how gender equality in the Russian workplace impacted women’s approaches to beauty work: “In Russian beauty, maybe there isn’t that aggressiveness. Women could be more feminine, their approach to life and their way of life were calmer...so a woman dressed nicely and always looked after herself.” Anna additionally noted that Russian culture defined feminine beauty as a reflection of a woman’s sophistication:

Russian women tried to develop their inner beauty, because practically all women were very well educated...practically everyone was interested in culture, in art. Going to the theatre was a very popular activity...[Russian] women were very cultured in many respects. They were always interested in literature, culture, theatre, art...and I think that this was reflected in their outward appearances, in their behaviour, and in their looks.

At the same time, some of the older participants in the study discussed the concept of “Russian beauty”, or the beauty ideology espoused by the Communist Party. For instance, Lydia

described this beauty ideal in this way: “Soviet beauty is very harsh. They never showed us that you needed to put on makeup. They never told us to put on lipstick... The Soviet girl had to be very modest, not made up, on good behaviour.” Sofia recalled that her mother, who was a member of the *komsomol*, or the Communist Union of Youth<sup>7</sup>, was directly influenced by the communist idea of beauty that was propagated before and during World War II: “Mother was a very beautiful woman, but she grew up during the revolution, and because of that, she was a *komsomol* worker and they had a very severe style of clothing...and it wasn’t an acceptable thing to use makeup.” Although Sofia did not internalize this image of the ideal communist woman, she remembered how her mother, as well as many of her friends’ mothers, held on to this view of beauty throughout their lives. She recollects: “We were a little embarrassed to do [beauty work] in front of my mom, so she wouldn’t see if we had to pluck our eyebrows...other girls hid it from their parents too, so they wouldn’t think we were vain.” The communist beauty ideal did not directly affect the women in the study, who were too young to be affected by post-World War II communist rhetoric. However, this ideology impacted the availability of images of beauty and beauty products in the former Soviet Union, and thus the women’s engagement in various beauty work, as will be discussed more fully in subsequent sections.

#### **4.2.1.2 Media images behind the Iron Curtain**

In addition to Russian cultural norms, the women described how their beauty work practices were strongly influenced by their access to media images of beauty, as well as the availability of various beauty products and services. Even though women in the Soviet Union had limited access to film and television representations of beauty, their beauty work practices were nonetheless inspired by both popular images of Russian beauty and the “Western” media

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<sup>7</sup> The Communist Union of Youth, abbreviated as *komsomol* in Russian, was the youth wing of the Communist Party. The *komsomol* functioned mainly to inculcate young Russians with the values of the Community Party (Gooderham, 1982).

that made its way into the Soviet Union. The women who discussed the impact of media images on their beauty work reminded me that Russian women aspired little to emulate American actresses and styles due to the lack of American media in the Soviet Union. Oksana had this to say: “You know, America for us never was as an example for beauty or anything....maybe economic, how you could be successful and have money...but not dressing, not beauty.” Instead, Oksana asserted that Russian women defined “Western” as German, French, or English, and looked to Western Europe for ideal representations of beauty and fashion. Anna explained why European values and fashions appealed so much to Russian women: “There was also this mentality - Europe was nearby, all the European news, magazines, television shows. And everyone wanted to imitate this. Russia has always respected foreigners and everything foreign, and has tried to emulate them.”

Although the women recalled there being little foreign media from Western Europe in the Soviet Union, films and beauty products from Eastern European Soviet nations, like East Germany and Poland, impacted the women’s perceptions of beauty work. For instance, Sofia spoke of the influence of foreign European films on Russian women:

[Russia] was very insular, and when [women] saw pictures, or films, or magazines of foreign actresses, they thought that these women were so successful, and we wanted to be like them. And people thought that this was the way people abroad lived and that was how they dressed, so they thought, “If I wear something similar, then I’ll look so clever and rich, and all the boys will look at me.” And if you were older, then “Everyone will tell me how beautiful I look.” And when the borders opened up, these sentiments still remained - that you had to look European, like a foreigner.

Sofia said she came to learn about various beauty practices “from foreign magazines, from films... We had some foreign films, from Germany...[We learned] how you should paint your lips, how you should make up your eyes, how to pluck your eyebrows, that was all from the movies.” Similarly, Lydia who grew up in a small town and whose mother did not engage in much beauty work, first found out about feminine beauty work from foreign movies: “When I

turned about 16, 17...I saw these beautiful women in films, and they made me want to also be like them...and I absorbed this idea of beauty." Katerina remarked that following Stalin's death, more foreign culture and films made their way into Russia. She reflected on how watching foreign films and attempting to emulate the actresses' appearances were ways for Russian women to glimpse and enact an unknown world:

When we watched a movie, I still remember that I was less concerned about the content...I was mostly looking at the detail of their everyday life, because that life was closed to us. And it's not only me, all my friends were watching foreign movies, and almost everyone was watching the same way as I did. We paid attention to small details: the furniture, the clothes, how they behaved...what that life that was totally closed to us looked like. Because we thought that people abroad had much more freedom.

Valeria elaborated: "In Russia, for a very long time there were no connections to the outside world. We almost never went abroad...of course, we emulated them to the extent of what we could see of the outside world." Some of the women, like Lydia, were additionally inspired by Russian films. Lydia had this to say: "Russia was a very closed country, but there were Russian movies and Soviet films, and they had their own kind of beauty, Soviet beauty...and it made you want to look after yourself so you could look that way."

#### **4.2.1.3 The availability of beauty products in Soviet Russia**

All ten women recalled how the scarcity of beauty products and services in the former Soviet Union influenced their attitudes and performance of a number of beauty work practices. For instance, Lydia expounded on the difficulties that Russian women had experienced when they attempted to procure cosmetic products in the 1970's and 1980's:

There was no selection [in the stores]...sometimes, there were even creams that we used and we had to wait in line to buy them. There were special stores that sold imported cosmetics but it was only for foreigners, for the children of diplomats, for people who were related to officials. They were called *Beriozka* stores where things were bought on *valyuta*<sup>8</sup>, with hard currency. And when someone got a hold

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<sup>8</sup> Valyuta, or hard currency, was a form of currency available only to foreigners visiting the USSR.

of something from those stores, they sold it on the [black] market. It was very expensive at that time.

Similarly, Sofia explained that the limited products that were available were often of lower-grade quality: “There weren’t any products available...If you wanted some lipstick, there was only one kind available, very rarely...Powder, we only had loose powder, and it was like chalk, but there wasn’t anything else, there just wasn’t.”

The women relayed particularly vivid recollections of the difficulties they had faced in acquiring clothing, and how this contributed to the value they attributed to their stylistic choices. For instance, Daria recalled constantly discussing methods of obtaining clothing items with her co-workers: “We all talked about where to get [clothes], where to buy, where there were importers that you might bribe to buy something fashionable. [Buying clothes] was a very big problem in my day.” The majority of the women discussed how government stores were often empty and contained pricey merchandise. Katerina mentioned: “At our stores there was nothing. They were empty, or things were so ugly. Because mostly the budget of the whole country went to weapons in the Soviet Union, so there was nothing in the stores.” Daria recalled how women often wore the wrong size shoes because of the difficulty they had in acquiring footwear in the Soviet Union: “There were no shoes in the stores at all. So all Russian women, if you pay attention, their feet are all bent, because we bought not what fit us, but what was in stores....It was a terrible time.” In addition, store-bought clothes were often unattractive and identical in style. Sofia noted: “Even if something did show up in the stores, it was all the same thing. For example, if some coats came into the stores, they’d all be the same and everyone would end up wearing the same thing.” Oksana shared the following anecdote:

It was my birthday and we decided to go out to dinner in a really fancy restaurant....and two weeks beforehand, I bought a really nice dress in the store, and when I came into this restaurant, I saw my friend coming in, in exactly the

same dress. Because everything in every store was the same, right? If something fancy and nice came in, everybody started wearing the same thing.

Often, when things became available in stores, the women recalled having to stand in line for hours because of the demand for clothing. For instance, Polina stated: "It wasn't easy to find good things...you had to hunt for them in the stores, look where they sold things, and when they started to sell it there was usually a huge line up to buy something." Valeria told me of how she once stood in line for two hours in frigid weather for a pair of boots:

This one time, I was living in Moscow, and I had this one pair of boots, and winters are very cold there, and my boots had a big crack in them, right across the front...I had money for new boots, but I couldn't find any boots anywhere. There just weren't any boots in the stores. And so one day I was walking around Moscow and I saw a line up of 50 or so people, maybe a 100, and when I came near I saw that they were selling boots. So we stood there bundled up. It was so cold! And when I was closer to the front, my heart was just beating, "If only they'd have some left in my size!" And when I finally bought those boots, I was in heaven! Dry feet! When I came out of the store, I tossed my other boots in the trash and wore my new ones.

Many of the women saved up for months to buy a single item of clothing. Sofia remarked: "People would save money all year to buy a fashionable pair of boots. You could save money for a year, because boots would cost a month's pay." Additionally, women resorted to making their own clothes or modifying garments that were already in their possession to keep up with the trends. Valeria remembered trying to look nice with very limited resources: "I had this one black dress, and I made different collars for it so that it would look nicer, and...at work the men always said that I was the best dressed...but in actuality, I only had two dresses." Katerina recalled: "We were all trying to make something from nothing. I remember that I knitted very well and made myself lots of sweaters...and we all were trying to do something from nothing, otherwise, we wouldn't have anything." Anna explained why Russian women were very often adept at sewing and tailoring:

A Russian woman, whoever she might be, she could do something with her hands, that's just what life forced her to do. Practically everyone could sew and knit, because we earned little, clothing cost a lot of money, and what you could buy, no one wanted to buy.

Like cosmetics, clothes could also be bought through *spekulancy*, or profiteers, who were able to import clothing from abroad and sell them for a large margin of profit. Katerina noted: “*Spekulatzya* (profiteering) was also very popular. There was a certain group of people who could go abroad...so they were trying to bring something in to sell for double the price or even ten times more expensive.” Anna particularly enjoyed her government position, as it gave her access to imported items that were otherwise inaccessible to regular Russian citizens: “Imports, you could rarely get your hands on them. That's why I worked in the trade business - because that's where everything came through...and you might have been able to find something for yourself.” Similarly, Daria recalled this story:

It was very difficult to buy something in the shops, because there was just nothing to buy. And we over-paid *spekulancy* so that we could buy things. In Moscow, I fantasized about buying a fur coat...but there weren't any in the stores. I earned fairly good money, I could allow myself that purchase, but there weren't any for sale. And so, they brought me a Yugoslavian fur coat, the price was 600 roubles, and they offered it to me for 1,500, that is, more than twice the price. And I bought it because I really wanted it, and there weren't any for sale. And we practically bought everything like that

In the 1970's and 1980's, many of the women turned to buying clothes on the black market. For example, Oksana recounted the following: “In stores we didn't have enough clothes, so we bought a lot of clothes on the markets. But the market was much, much, much more expensive, because they weren't really allowed to sell it.” Lydia also procured clothes on the black market: “They sold many things from Turkey...on the market, not in the stores. Because the government wasn't interested in these things.” Sofia additionally mentioned that

some women resorted to stealing in order to supplement their income and thereby afford to dress more fashionably or live more comfortably:

People didn't just make money at work, there were other ways to do it, you know? Shop girls were always dressed very well, but if you were a shop girl, it was considered to be an underachieving sort of position...but they stole a lot, so their salaries stayed untouched. Let's say, someone worked as a school cook. It was taken for granted that she wouldn't buy her own groceries, she'd just bring them home from work, so her salary stayed untouched and she could buy things with that money.

As a result of the difficulties that the women faced when attempting to buy clothing, Lydia said that Russian women valued the garments in their closets much more than Canadian women currently do: "We didn't change clothes so often there. You bought things and you wore them for a very long time, because they were very expensive, and you didn't throw things out. We wore things out. We really did." Anna added: "People had a completely different approach to clothing. Here, you can't wear the same thing twice in a row, but there people didn't...have that much money. But the good thing about it was that they bought good things." Valeria explained how she thought these difficulties affected Russian women's attitudes towards fashion, saying: "Russia underwent so many misfortunes, one war, the Second World War. People were destitute. People couldn't find food or proper clothing. And maybe because of everything people lived through, it became a part of their identity to look good." Katerina rationalized Russian immigrant women's focus on appearance in this way: "You had to be extremely creative to look good...this is what makes us pay so much attention to our looks...because we all grew up in a country where there were no nice things, no good shoes, there was nothing."

The interviewees reflected on how the combination of the lack of available goods and prevailing attitudes towards fashion in Soviet society defined the importance of tasteful and

elegant dressing in Russian culture. For example, Polina explained that the Russian collective mindset encouraged women to dress fashionably:

We teach children in Russia that you have to be the same as everyone else – don’t stand out, don’t speak your mind. Maybe that is why Russian people all try to look the same and when there’s something that is in style, something popular, everyone is buying it and wearing it and you have to do the same. And if someone doesn’t do it, it looks weird and it’s like something is wrong with him or with her. And maybe they wouldn’t hire you, or wouldn’t promote you. So you are weird, you are not normal.

However, Katerina speculated that dressing up and fashioning their own clothes with limited resources had also afforded Russian women a degree of individuality in an atmosphere that encouraged conformity. Recalling how government stores were filled with identical-looking clothing, she had this to say: “When I grew up, it was so difficult to find something better, something different than what other people wore...[this is] why we all liked to be well-dressed.” Since the majority of people lived in deprivation, fashion became a form of expression of taste and individuality. Sofia echoed this sentiment: “[The desire to look good] probably comes from being poor, because everyone there was poor. So to differentiate oneself somehow...you probably couldn’t differentiate yourself in any other way. How else could a woman differentiate herself other than by her clothes?” At the same time, Russian women’s opportunities to dress well were indeed dependent on their socio-economic status. Because of the difficulty of procuring unique, well-made clothing, Russian women’s outward appearances quickly became reflective of an individual’s class and wealth at a time of collective dispossession. As Sofia noted: “Workers were dressed very badly because the pay was just meagre...they dressed very badly in anything at all...the women who dressed well were the more educated women....it was a segment of the population that could do it, not everyone.” Thus, a woman’s social status was continuously appraised based on her clothing.

Many of the women mentioned a Russian phrase that translated roughly to “When you meet a man, you judge him by his clothes; when you leave, you judge him by his heart” to exemplify the importance Russians attributed to first impressions. Katerina remarked on how good first impressions implied a higher social standing, and often influenced others’ behaviour:

People judged you by your clothes...you could tell right away what class you belonged to...it's not like here, where it doesn't matter how you're dressed. There, it was obvious, because if you were high class you were dressed much better than everyone else, you know? Here, it doesn't have the same meaning. Here, people don't judge you by your clothing, but it becomes a part of your personality to do so.

Sofia elaborated by stating: “There was this belief that if you looked good, you must be rich...They used to say, ‘Nobody sees an empty stomach, but everyone sees how well you’re dressed.’ So the first priority became looking good, and food became secondary.” Maria recalled how women placed greater importance on their looks, illustrating this view with an anecdote:

Our friend just visited her sister in St. Petersburg and told us this story. Her sister’s family lived in poor conditions. They didn’t even have money to buy a vacuum, you know. Their old one was broken and her sister just used a broom. So she decided that she would buy her [sister] a vacuum, and she gave her some money for it. The next day, her sister came with a new warm hat and she said to her, “But I gave you money for a vacuum!” And her sister said, “No one sees how I clean my house, but everyone sees it when I have a new hat.”

Thus, according to the interviewees, Russian women quickly learned to adjust their outward appearances in order to increase their opportunities in life. Katerina remarked: “If you looked well-dressed, you were treated better...and if you didn’t look good, you didn’t command respect. So we were taught that if we looked good, we would be given preference.”

Finally, while the lack of cosmetics and clothing in the former Soviet Union did not diminish Russian women’s interest in fashion, the women suggested that a lack of sporting

facilities encouraged an indifference towards physical activity among Russian people. Although many of the women were involved in athletics in their youth, they emphasized the general societal disinterest in physical activity as well as the shortage of fitness facilities and programs for adults in the Soviet Union. Many of the women recalled having been involved in sport in their youth, like Oksana who said: “We had physical education until the end of university. We still had physical education, all of those five years [we spent in university].” Sofia remarked: “I did rhythmic gymnastics while I was in school, I participated in competitions and everything, I had a trainer...but when I finished school that was it. It wasn’t customary for older people, when you were already working, to exercise.”

Like Sofia, the majority of the participants talked about the Russian tendency to decrease or even stop engagement in physical activity in later life due to the lack of proper fitness facilities. For example, Polina asserted: “[Sport] wasn’t popular. And we didn’t have enough facilities for it. It was too much hassle to find where to go and too far away from your home and not convenient, whereas here you have gyms on every corner.” Sofia added to this sentiment: “There was a lot of propaganda about sport, but it just wasn’t too effective because there weren’t any stadiums and the conditions just weren’t optimal for exercise.” The women additionally remarked that the lack of basic living necessities in the former Soviet Union made exercise redundant. Lydia noted: “In Russia, we had no cars and we walked a lot. If you walk, you don’t need any other exercise.” Similarly, Polina observed: “There, you didn’t have time for [exercise] if you had a family...you spent too much time cooking for the kids...so you didn’t need exercise. You were working much more than here and we didn’t have cars.”

#### **4.2.1.4 Beauty work practices in the Soviet Union**

The women's discussion of their beauty work practices in the former Soviet Union centred mostly on their use of hair care products, makeup, and clothing. This was likely due to a combination of two of the factors mentioned above, namely the high value placed on femininity in Russian culture and the societal meanings attributed to certain beauty practices in the former Soviet Union. All ten women described feeling pressured to dress fashionably and take care of their bodies while living in the Soviet Union. These women, like Polina, spoke of the significance of feminine beauty work in Soviet culture: "In Ukraine, [what you looked like] was a big deal. You always had to dress up for work and use makeup...you had to do it every day." The women said that they had paid much more attention to maintaining a feminine appearance though the use of makeup, hair styling, and fashion in the former Soviet Union than they did following their immigration to Canada. Oksana had this to say: "In Russia I used [makeup] a lot, because it's cultural - everybody there used [it]...you know, manicure, pedicure, eye shadow, everything...And if everybody is doing it, you usually do the same, right? You're just following the same direction."

In particular, the women mentioned the perceived importance of having an attractive appearance in the Soviet workplace, particularly given their middle-class status and employment in white collar, professional jobs. For example, Daria who worked in a large technical institute, asserted: "I used to always wear mascara and lipstick...because I worked in a research institute and I was surrounded by people who all looked very good. And it was like a habit for me. It was something necessary." Daria additionally felt obligated to display her sense of style at work: "Where I worked, in the research technology institute...it was just absolutely necessary [to dress well]. They'd look at you like they'd look at a white crow if you came to work dressed unlike everybody else." Similarly, Maria reminisced about the importance of having a

fashionable appearance in the Russian workplace: “We all tried to dress nicely, right?...And it was important, especially if you worked in the university, you couldn’t come in shorts and a t-shirt. It wasn’t a rule, but no one would come to work in jeans.” Polina, who also worked for a big company in the Ukraine, also described how her work environment necessitated that she dress well: “It was a fancy office in the centre of the city...so, all of the people [who worked there] were dressed up and I had to too. So I was always wearing high heels and suits and skirts.”

Although some of the women undoubtedly took pleasure in procuring and wearing fashionable clothing, most of the women in the study felt ambivalent about the importance of fashionable looks in Russian culture and particularly in relation to their middle-class, white collar employee status. The women’s concerns were chiefly financial, as fashionable clothing was often extremely expensive. For instance, Polina recalled grudgingly spending money on the stylish clothing she was expected to wear at work and when socializing with friends: “You had to buy expensive clothes if you went to a party, or even to work you would have to dress up, and you had to spend money on it, even if you didn’t have money for your kids.” Maria likewise remembered that she, like most women she knew, bought unnecessary items of clothing so as to not look inferior to other women: “In my city, winter wasn’t very cold, sometimes it could be minus 15, but only for a couple of days...but maybe 30, 40% of women had [fur coats] because most women didn’t want to look worse off than other women.”

#### **4.2.2 Old Age, Illness, Health, and the Aging Body**

While the women’s beauty work was influenced by their current and past cultural environments, it was additionally framed by their perceptions of and attitudes towards age and

the aging body. The following section describes the women's views of later life and their perceptions of beauty work as a response to aging.

#### **4.2.2.1 Negative Attitudes towards age and the aging body**

Many of the women reflected on the equation of beauty and youthfulness in Russian and Canadian cultures. Polina asserted: "I think it's everywhere. People don't want to get older in any country...looking younger is better." Indeed, the privileging of youthfulness was particularly evident in the ways that the women described their aging bodies. Using words like "haggard", "angry-looking", and "sour" in their colourful descriptions of aged appearances, the women revealed the negative views they held and the unpleasant character associations they made with a woman's aging looks. The women were particularly dissatisfied with the appearance of their own aged skin, which they equated with the look of "a shrivelled apple" and "cracked earth." In addition to being discontented with the appearance of wrinkles, the women were concerned about the sagging, drooping, age spots, and paleness that accompanied skin aging. Anna was especially disconcerted by the loss of elasticity in her skin: "If your muscles weaken, your jowls droop...these folds appear around your neck...And the neck always gives away a woman's age." Motioning a drooping action around her face with her hand, Maria added: "With age, you just see this difference in your face. And every woman wants to keep her face in a better condition ...you just want to see the face you saw years ago, right?" Katerina's comment echoed those of the other women: "Nobody is happy to see this - there's wrinkles here, there's wrinkles there. You don't like it, so you do anything you can to make this process less visible."

The women were also disparaging of the appearance of grey hair, which they viewed as a particularly visible sign of aging. Polina asserted: "I look older [with grey hair] and I don't

want to look older". Katerina elaborated: "Grey hair makes you look like a grandma... And moreover, if you have grey hair, if you have no hairstyle, it's terrible. You look like a beggar." Vera agreed, saying: "I don't want to look like my kids' grandmother...and when we you have grey hair, you look much older than you are." The women were especially critical of women who had long, grey hair. For example, Lydia asserted: "Women who walk around with long, grey hair, untidy hair, they just look like witches, it looks so unkempt...It's just awful ...this unkempt look, it's unsuitable. It's neither here nor there."

Additionally, the women connected their negative views regarding obesity and their own body weights with the aging process. The majority of the women recalled being thin or of average weight in their youth and early adulthood, and were taken aback by the weight gain they had experienced after menopause. Nine of the women expressed sentiments similar to those of Katerina, who stated that her life was a "permanent fight with weight" as she dieted in order to avoid looking "fat and ugly." Although Maria spoke of the inevitability of weight gain with age, she remarked that her recent weight gain had made her dislike the reflected image she saw in the mirror: "In the last maybe four, five years...after menopause, I started looking not as good as I did before...something changed in my body. I thought I was a normal weight all my life, but recently it's gotten worse and worse." Lydia, who had been very small framed and thin throughout her life, also found it bothersome to discover the menopause-related changes in her body:

My muscles became softer, and a little tummy appeared which isn't going anywhere ...and then these sausage rolls are appearing on all sides, and it's just not nice, you're putting on a dress, and it doesn't sit like you'd like it to. You're putting on a corset, and it doesn't hold things in anymore.

Similarly, although Oksana had not yet experienced menopause, she complained about the rapid weight gain she had experienced since turning 50: “I have fat everywhere, everywhere...I became puffy, and you know...when you’re going to buy some clothes, and you look at the size, it’s frustrating. Like, you look at the size and say, ‘No! That cannot be my size.’”

Although the majority of the women indicated that they had watched their weight throughout their lives, they asserted that this had become increasingly difficult. For instance, Maria was distressed by the changes in her body and her inability to easily lose weight as she had aged:

The last couple of years, I have just gained weight, and gained more, and I just feel that I’m not fighting it [enough]. I have to think about dieting, because with the years...it is really easy to gain weight, and it’s more difficult to lose weight. Before, if I wanted to lose five, seven kilos, I could do it easily, in two or three weeks. Right now, it is really difficult - it’s difficult to change.

Anna also commented: “I used to think...I was satisfied with my body, but now, when the muscle isn’t the same as it used to be...I want to look good, of course, but it’s not as easy anymore, it’s a process now.” Some of the women additionally noted that their desire to lose weight was counterbalanced by wanting to maintain a youthful appearance. For instance, Maria who was contemplating going on a diet, but was fearful that a rapid weight loss might result in the equally rapid aging of her facial features, noted that the weight loss process was “not easy when you’re older, you know, everything on your face immediately falls.” Oksana, who also expressed a desire for a thinner figure, remarked that her dieting practices were complicated by her aging body:

I understand that at my age, losing weight is probably not the best solution (because) losing weight means getting more wrinkles....especially if you lose weight in a short period of time, it will all wrinkle - which nobody wants, right? It’s like a choice. You could be slim and wrinkled, or you could be full and...have no wrinkles.

Even as the women the women identified their various concerns regarding their aging bodies, some of the women felt a disconnection between their aged appearances and their perceived youthful inner states. For instance, Oksana remarked:

My grandma, she was always saying, ‘I don’t understand how it’s happened, I’m looking in the mirror...and I can’t believe that it’s me. I feel much younger inside.’...I believe that our mind stays younger much longer than our body. And because of that, it becomes kind of inconsistent. When you’re younger, you don’t understand...but now I *do* understand...It’s hard to believe that I’m getting older and older and older, and my body is changing, everything is changing, but I feel that I’m still young inside.

Katerina s explained why she didn’t want to look older: “I think I would feel really dissonant with my look, because inside, I don’t feel like a grandma...That’s where the tragedy lies...We can’t accept the fact that as time passes, we change...because inside we’re still the same.”

#### **4.2.2.2 Beauty work and the resistance of aging**

Further supporting their disparagement of aging and aged looking appearance, all ten women indicated that they engaged in numerous beauty practices with the underlying purpose of fighting off the signs of aging. To begin, skin care products and facial treatments were part of the arsenal that the women used to ameliorate the appearance of age spots, drooping skin, dryness, and wrinkles. Asserting that their reasons for using various skin care products were rooted in their desire to appear more youthful, the women made comments similar to those of Maria who said she used facial creams “to keep the face maybe a little younger and to avoid wrinkles.” While Daria had not used use facial creams in her youth, she said that she intended to preserve what youth remained in her facial features through her use of skin care:

You know, when I was younger, it was not very important for me to use creams, because I did not have wrinkles - that’s why I didn’t pay much attention to my appearance...When I was younger, I didn’t think much about how to look younger, because when I was younger, I was sure that I wouldn’t get old.

Daria went on to say: "Without creams, I don't know what I would do, because [my skin] is very dry...It's like when you leave an apple out for too long...If you don't moisturize and nourish the skin, it becomes like a shrivelled apple." Likewise, Valeria remarked on the importance of looking after one's skin to maintain a wrinkle-free appearance:

When I worked [in aesthetics] in Israel, I had people come in [to the store] and their skin was dry, dry. I have wrinkles too, of course, I'm almost 70 years-old...but if you don't look after the skin, it dries out and these wrinkles look much worse, they resemble the cracks in dry earth, like the cracks that form in the sand when it hasn't rained.

While they questioned the validity of the claims made by the product advertisements for the various facial creams, half of the women additionally utilized anti-aging creams in the hopes of obtaining and maintaining younger-looking skin. For example, Polina explained why she bought anti-aging creams: "Maybe it's because of the advertisements everywhere...you don't know exactly if it will help but you wonder, what if it will? For me to spend an extra fifty dollars is not big deal, and if it helps, why not?" Similarly, Oksana stated: "I started to use anti-aging [creams], but I see no difference...I'm just trying [it out]. It's like, if you're using any moisturizer cream, why not use anti-aging, right?"

Additionally, two of the participants had tried non-surgical cosmetic procedures in an effort to appear more youthful. Katerina had recently become concerned with her facial wrinkling and had gotten Botox injections. She recalled her experiences:

I tried Botox twice, because I had lots of wrinkles here, in my forehead. Because I'm an emotional person...it's [all] expression lines. The first time I tried it I liked it so much. My forehead looked as if I was dead, you know? Dead people, they all have smooth foreheads. It probably looked better than when I was born.

When the effects of the second set of Botox injections wore off, Katerina reverted back to her former skin care regimen after weighing the procedure's high cost and short-term effects against its benefits. Polina had had a sun spot removed from her cheek using a laser procedure. She said that she was concerned about the associations between sun spots and oldness, and used various sun protection methods to avoid the recurrence of sun spots: "I'm so scared that I will get some other spots, so anytime I go outside I try to use sunscreen...because otherwise, they're very noticeable. They call it an age spot and I don't want to have *age* spots."

In addition to skin care products and non-surgical cosmetic procedures, some of the women stated that they used makeup to conceal facial signs of aging. For example, Lydia discussed how she carefully and subtly applied her makeup to disguise the imperfections she perceived in her face: "Maybe I need to fix something here so that this wrinkle is not as visible, maybe there are some shadows on my face...I look in the mirror, [and I] fix whatever I don't like that day." Valeria remarked that she used blush to "make my cheeks a little rosy, because the colour in my face isn't what it used to be." Finally, Katerina mentioned that she used makeup to conceal the aging in her skin, in order to not look "like an ape."

Both women who did and those who did not wear makeup frequently framed their discussions of their makeup use in terms of appropriate makeup colours and use in later life. For example, Maria who wore little makeup and muted colours, elaborated on what she considered to be appropriate makeup use for her age:

I think that with years [makeup] shouldn't be really bright, because then everyone will see that the skin is not so young. I'm just thinking that with years you shouldn't try to keep attention on your face too much, you know? I think that [as you get older]...maybe you don't want this attention anymore.

Similarly, Oksana who wore no makeup, explained part of her reason for giving up makeup use: “You see, when you’re getting older, makeup doesn’t look right on old people...it doesn’t look natural.” She further reflected: “Makeup never looks natural, right? On younger people, it makes them look more beautiful, but for older people, it doesn’t make you look younger. I just dislike it.” Lydia, who continued to wear makeup, remarked on the importance of applying restrained makeup shades and avoiding bright colours, “so that your oldness doesn’t stare so brightly into everybody’s face.” For Valeria, who wore makeup very day, it was important to wear her makeup subtly so as to not give away her age:

We all have little cracks along our eyes and next to our lips and...when you use a shiny lipstick, it seeps into the cracks and it looks awful...And I say, at my age, you need to use a more muted colour for your lipstick. You don’t need to use something so bright and eye-catching. And it’s even better to line your lips with some pencil so that the lipstick doesn’t seep too much into these cracks.

Anna, who wore little makeup, thought that older women needed to be careful with their makeup colours: “When you’re young, you can wear any colour, but when you’re older, some colours don’t suit you anymore because they age you, because your skin tone changes and those colours accentuate how pale your skin has become.” She shared this advice: “Dark lipstick is always aging, so in later life, you need to use lighter shades, and not use makeup as aggressively, you need to use subtler makeup.”

The majority of the women held unfavourable opinions of grey hair and subsequently said that they dyed their hair. Valeria explained her reasons for using hair dye in this way: “Naturally my hair is as dark as tar, and now it’s greying as well, and white and black together is *very* aging...I started to colour it a lighter colour and I noticed that...the grey doesn’t show as much.” Similarly, Vera stated that she coloured her hair “because otherwise it would be completely white, like this chair. And white hair makes people look much older than they are.”

In addition to not using hair dye and letting one's hair go grey, Daria further observed that an inappropriate hairstyle could make an older woman appear unattractive: "I don't want to look younger, like I'm trying too hard. [Women] who let down their long hair...they look like they don't want to accept their age...it's not good for old people to have long hair."

Fashion was considered to be another means of masking what were perceived to be age-induced bodily flaws. Many of the women described choosing their clothes to strategically hide or accentuate particular body parts. For example, Maria explained her attempts to dress in a way that concealed the weight she had gained after menopause: "My figure changed a little bit with the years....with time, my waist became a different size...I used to like to use wide belts...but now, there's nothing more to accentuate, so I don't." Sofia tried to wear clothing that did not emphasize what she called her "biggest flaws", saying: "If you wear something with a low neckline, your skin is sagging...so it's better to wear something that would cover it up, all of those wrinkles...your stomach hangs out, so you wear something more covered up." As well as covering bodily flaws, the women's fashion choices reflected perceived age-related clothing norms. Katerina succinctly stated: "You can't wear everything when you're older." Anna similarly shared this advice:

There are many ways in which clothing can be used to [make a person] look younger or older...When you're older...you need to not reveal your décolletage, because your skin becomes different, you need to show less skin. If you feel like certain parts of your body still look good, you can show them off, but if you see that for example, your chest isn't as firm anymore, you don't wear dresses with a revealing neckline...and you probably don't wear short skirts anymore or very tight pants, so clothing offers a lot of choices in terms of concealing what flaws you have and accentuating your best features.

Daria said that while she still enjoyed high heels and smart jackets, she no longer wore short skirts because "there are some things old people should wear and some they shouldn't. And everybody can understand...what's appropriate for older people." Daria

found it difficult to dress in a way that expressed her stylish inclinations while looking age-appropriate: “I’m trying to be fashionable, too. Maybe, it looks strange for you, but I’m trying to look not too young, or like an old lady.”

Finally, many of the women discussed how exercise helped ameliorate the age-related changes they had experienced in their bodies, specifically weight gain and skin drooping. Maria explained why swimming was her preferred method of exercise: “I think that swimming really helps to hold up the legs and arms in good condition. Usually, after 45, the skin and body become droopy...so exercise, especially swimming, helps me to be in a better condition.” Lydia discussed how yoga helped her address some of her concerns about her body weight: “You know, when you put on a dress, I don’t like it when I have some [fat] hanging here or poking out, it’s unpleasant for me. So something had to be done, and that’s why I started doing yoga.” Anna, who also practiced yoga a few times a week, explained why she began to invest more time in exercise as she had aged: “I need to do more physical activity to strengthen my muscles now...naturally, your muscle becomes weaker...so I need to exercise more than I did before...to slim down and develop some muscle.”

#### **4.2.2.3 Positive attitudes towards later life**

Only three women discussed the positive aspects of aging and/or spoke of their acceptance of the aging process. It is interesting to note that two of the three women who asserted that they were accepting of old age were the youngest participants in the study. These two women had not yet undergone menopause, nor had they discussed experiencing any serious age-related physical ailments. For instance, Oksana, aged 52, contended: “I know that some people just don’t feel comfortable [with old age], but I’m fine with it....maybe in ten years I will be saying something different.” Likewise, Polina, aged 52, remarked: “Of course I don’t like

some of the changes...but people adjust to any changes in their lives...I'm okay with it - for now. I don't know, maybe in the future [I won't be]." Only two women, Oksana and Katerina, aged 63, talked about the potential advantages of aging. Oksana stated: "Getting older, it means not only bodily changes...You also feel that you did something with your life. You already raised your children...you did your job. And it's a nice feeling." Likewise, Katerina observed: "Any age has its advantages, you know? And I hope that one day I'll have grandchildren...I won't have to work. I'll be able to read however much I like. I'll be able to do what I want."

#### **4.2.2.4 The meanings of old age: Illness, dependence, and mortality**

Although the women mostly discussed the appearance effects of the aging process on their bodies in our interviews, ill-health and death was a common underlying theme in their narratives of the aging body. When I asked Valeria why she did not want to look older, she replied by linking her aging looks with her fears of sickness and dying, saying: "I don't want to grow older prematurely, and I don't want to leave this life prematurely. You're only here for so long, so I want to be healthy and look good." Daria added: "You know, nobody wants to die. The more wrinkles you have, the closer you are to the grave." Vera had a similar view of oldness and aged outward appearance, stating: "Why don't people want to look old? Because when you look very old, you look like one more step and you will be in the grave, and you want to be alive, that's why."

Several women discussed their general concerns about their health, including Oksana, who tried to keep in good health by exercising and eating well, but regretted not having taken her health into consideration earlier in life: "When you're young, you don't think about your health, it's only later on...My grandma said, keep your health from when you're young ...it's only later when you start to understand it's true...if you let it go, it will become uncontrollable." Lydia felt

strongly about preserving her health and body into old age: “[Old age] happens so quickly that if you don’t look after yourself, oldness just takes over very quickly. That’s why you have to look after yourself. You have to look after yourself as much as possible.” Likewise, Katerina stated:

I don’t want to lose my health. I don’t want to lose my teeth. I don’t want to lose my vision...Nobody knows their destiny, right? So of course, we’re all afraid of old age. I’m afraid that I’ll end up paralysed...I’m afraid of being dependent on someone. I don’t want anyone to be taking care of me.

Vera similarly noted: “We all want to live...when you get older, illness come out of nowhere ...that’s why we don’t want to age too quickly...There’s a time bomb in your body that will explode one day. And we want to postpone it.”

Moreover, a few of the women briefly discussed their specific health-related concerns both in the present and with respect to the future. Some women expressed sadness over the changes to their physical abilities that had already occurred. For example, Oksana had this to say: “I feel the limitations. I know that whatever I could do before, I couldn’t do right now. I could accept it, but I cannot change it back, that’s for sure...I’m not as flexible, I cannot run [like before].” Similarly, Sofia asserted: “You’re moving differently now. If you used to be able to sit down freely, you can’t bend anymore...you don’t have as much flexibility. You can’t walk as much anymore.” Other women described how menopause had negatively impacted their health and well-being. Lydia was particularly alarmed at how undergoing menopause had changed her body, saying: “When I hit menopause, I understood that my whole body changed...the reason I hurried up to join yoga and started exercising was because I felt that I was just catastrophically changing...I couldn’t keep my shape.” Anna similarly practiced yoga to overcome the hot flashes and weight gain she experienced: “Hot flashes are a big problem, it’s very upsetting. You get covered in cold sweat, and especially if they keep happening in a public places, it’s very unpleasant, and you don’t look very attractive and don’t feel well either.”

Finally, some women expressed fear about developing dementia in the future. For instance, Lydia stated: "I've noticed that in the past two years, even my memory has changed, it's become worse...everything changes." Similarly, Katerina contended: "The most depressing thing is the fear of losing your memory and your mind...so you have to train your memory, you have to train your mind, otherwise you can get Alzheimer's disease, and that's just the end."

Several women made the link between (ill) health and appearance, like Lydia, who had this to say: "[Maintaining your health] is important, especially with age...everything inside is all reflected on the outside. All your illnesses will become visible anyway, whatever you do. So it's very important to stay in shape, and try not to get sick." Polina likewise asserted: "Your health *is* your look. If you look healthy, you will look better...if you eat better, you look better... it's better for your health and your skin. Your eyes will look better. Your hair will be better." Anna stated:

I'd say that these issues are inseparable: If you want to look good, you have to be healthy...when a woman is sick, it's very difficult for her to look good. First of all, because she's probably not in the mood to be doing these kinds of things if she is constantly in pain...and secondly, she can't look good anymore, because all these illnesses that are inside are reflected in the face, in the skin, in the figure, in everything...so these things are connected, and to look younger longer, you need to maintain your physical health.

As a result, the women stated that they engaged in beauty work not only for its potential appearance dividends, but also to target the specific age-related bodily and health changes they had begun to experience. Lydia now exercised regularly in order to keep herself from feeling tired: "I started doing it a year ago... because your body changes, and in the mornings, when you wake up you're not as energetic as you used to be, so exercise is absolutely essential." Similarly, Oksana believed that exercise helped her remain more energetic: "I think it's good to spend time exercising, and I feel much better...I feel like I have more energy than I do sitting at

home reading...or browsing the internet or something." Anna asserted that exercise aided her in sustaining her general health: "If you're in bad shape, you start having all sorts of illnesses...and no one wants to be sick. So you need to look after your health and exercise. I, for instance, do yoga and it helps me a lot." Oksana also saw exercise as an important way to slow the physical decline she had begun to experience with age, remarking: "It's important for me to feel that I'm still fit, that I'm still able to walk or swim for a long time, or climb a mountain, like I could 20 years ago...that's why I [exercise]."

Similarly, some of the women stated that watched their weight for medical as well as appearance reasons. Valeria in particular stressed how important it was for her to maintain her current weight, stating: "In reality I'm always on a diet...I have type II diabetes, I have high cholesterol, and I'm quite full in figure. I don't want to fall apart, to not be able to fit into doorways and become even sicker." Other women, who were currently not suffering from any medical conditions, agreed that low body weight was an important preventative measure to preserve one's health. Maria remarked: "It's not only about aesthetics, it's also about health, you know? I understand that it's more difficult for my heart, for everything, that I've got these additional kilos." Anna concurred with this statement, observing that, "extra weight is an extra load. It predisposes you to diabetes, heart disease, [and] joint problems... so you need to help your body stay healthy."

#### **4.2.3 The Role and Influence of Male Partners and the Family**

Given the significance of familial relations in Russian culture, it is unsurprising that the women interviewed evoked the importance and influence of their families and partners in their narratives of immigration and beauty work. The following section details the role played by the women's families and male partners in their beauty work interventions.

It was clear from our conversations that all of the women had positive relationships with their mothers and daughters, and that many of the women's beauty practices were shaped by their female family members. Three of the women remarked on the ways in which their daughters had influenced their beauty work, including Katerina, who shared clothes with her daughter, and Oksana, whose daughter encouraged her to better her eating habits. Likewise, Polina had two daughters who continuously advised her on her hair style and fashion choices. Other women's stories exemplified how their mothers held sway over their past and current beauty practices. For instance, Maria contemplated why she spent less time on her appearance than other Russian women she knew: "I'm different because...my mom taught me that this is not so important...it doesn't matter how you dress...she always pushed me to learn more, rather than thinking about how to dress and how to make an impression on people." On the other hand, the beauty work of Polina's mother had inspired her to be attentive to her own appearance: "[My mother] is 82 now and she likes to look not that old, not that grey...I saw it all my life - that she takes care of her looks - and now I'm trying to do the same." Similarly, Valeria recalled how her mother had influenced her beauty practices: "[My mother] taught me by example. I saw before me a very put together woman, who looked after herself and was made up... she taught me by example, although she never sat down and talked to me about cosmetics."

Additionally, some of the women mentioned that their beauty work was tied to their desire to look attractive to men. Lydia, who carefully managed her appearance with makeup, fashionable clothing, and an updated hair cut, opined: "In Russia, we got used to looking good...we got used to men looking at us, at any age. It's natural. It's completely natural. And women exist for that reason - to delight men's eyes." During our interview, Lydia showed me photographs from a recent event she had attended, drawing attention to her attractive outfit and recalling the pleasure with which she had received compliments from her male acquaintances:

"It's nice when my friends' husbands come up to me and say, 'You look wonderful today.' Of course! And it's nice for my husband as well that next to him stands a woman who is worthy of praise." Likewise, Katerina felt very strongly about maintaining one's femininity and sexual appeal in later life:

The older [women] are, the less feminine they begin to look, and that's why they get depressed....and they are depressed because they aren't seen as women, but rather they're seen as sexless beings...if you give up on being a woman, then you start thinking that it's all behind you now. A woman's weapon is our charm, it's femininity...part of a woman's power is the ability to look good, to flirt, to capture people's attention...and if you give up these things, if you don't look after yourself, then the world rejects you too. You feel rejected if you stop looking after yourself, because no one will pay any attention to you.

Although Katerina initially insisted that her boyfriend, who was seven years her junior, did not influence her beauty work in any way, she later admitted: "He probably does motivate me a little ... if I go somewhere with him, of course I don't want to look much older [than him]." Both Daria and Anna considered it a woman's calling to seek out male attention, with Anna asserting: "I think that it's a self-evident truth that...it's about the continuation of the species, so a woman needs to attract the attention of the other sex. For me, it's just obvious that a woman wants to attract attention." Anna was disappointed and distressed over her decreasing attractiveness in the eyes of her husband, saying: "When you're starting to get old, you lose that ability to be admired and even when you observe the reaction of your husband...you see the expression on his face...and the disappointment that others feel is very unpleasant." As a result, Anna, like the majority of the women, worked hard to retain a youthful and attractive appearance.

### **4.3 Experiences of Immigration and Their Effect on Beauty Work**

This section examines the ways in which the women’s beauty work practices were influenced by their immigration experiences and assimilation into Canadian culture. In particular, I explore the impact, or lack thereof, of Canadian ideals of beauty and femininity on the women’s beauty work practices. Additionally, I look at how the women’s integration into the Canadian labour force and their experiences of ageism and sexism in the workplace affected their beauty work decisions.

#### **4.3.1 The Negotiation of Canadian Beauty Ideals: Assimilation**

Most of the women adapted and assimilated their beauty practices to better correspond to their understandings of Canadian beauty ideals. For instance, the women’s use of makeup was among the beauty work practices that were most affected by the women’s assimilation into Canadian culture. Nine of the women regarded Canadian standards of beauty to be more inclusive of a “natural” appearance, and perceived Canadian women to be less interested than Soviet women in the use of makeup products. The prevailing attitude among the women was a willingness to assimilate to Canadian norms by minimizing or giving up makeup use altogether. For example, Maria, who had worn brightly-coloured lipstick in Russia, now preferred to wear more subdued tones. She stated: “Here, women don’t use such bright [makeup] colours...And if you start using them, you’ll look different from the crowd...I just don’t want to look different than other people.” In addition to not wanting to appear dissimilar from Canadian women, some of the women simply preferred Canadian attitudes towards makeup use to those they espoused in the former Soviet Union. Valeria noted: “Everyone around me walks around without makeup. That makes life a lot easier for me. Sometimes I need to run to the store, and I think, ‘Oh, why do I need to put on makeup?’ It just makes life simpler.”

In addition, some of the women relished their liberation from the obligations of fashionable appearance that they had been required to undertake while living in the Soviet Union, particularly in relation to clothing. The four women who perceived themselves to have assimilated to Canadian styles of dressing stated that their motivations included the desire to fit into their Canadian surroundings as well as the seeking of practicality and comfort after spending years immersed in a culture that privileged fashionable femininity. For instance, Oksana asserted: "I don't dress up here...because I want to feel more comfortable and also, I want to be the same as the other people....I want to be like everybody else in my environment." Polina explained why she had altered her dressing style since moving to Canada: "I like spending money on clothing, but now my clothing is more useful or comfortable. Not pretty or fancy...I'm spending more money on things that I need." Sofia expressed a similar view:

Here they try to make clothing and everything suit their lifestyle. If it suits you to wear a low heel, wear it. If it suits you to wear a T-shirt, wear it, and don't suffer. Back there, you'd board a bus, and you wouldn't be able to sit down in your skirt. You couldn't walk through the mud in your high heels...and here you wear whatever suits your life.

Indeed, the majority of the women commented on how they perceived Canadian clothing to be more relaxed and athletic. The women's observations regarding Canadian style reflected those of Maria, who remarked: "In Canada, people dress more simply, more casual...they dress to feel comfortable." The women additionally noted feeling less societal pressure to dress well and buy expensive clothing to denote their middle-class status. Sofia, who preferred to dress more casually now that she lived in Canada, stated: "The clothing here, you couldn't tell by someone's clothing how wealthy or poor they are, you just can't. A wealthy woman could be walking around in ordinary looking shorts and running shoes." Likewise, Polina asserted: "[Here], you can buy what you like and what you feel good in. And you don't need to spend money or pretend that you like a certain style to fit in."

Although none of the women had placed much importance on sport and exercise while they resided in the Soviet Union, their immigration to Canada made the majority of the women reconsider the merits of physical activity for maintaining their health and appearance. Upon their relocation to Canada, eight of the ten women began to explore various forms of physical activity. These women felt compelled to engage in physical activity by the aging of their bodies and by the appearance dividends they hoped to receive from exercising, and not in order to better adapt to the Canadian lifestyle. For instance, when I asked Oksana why she exercised, she opined: "My weight, it's actually going up, and if I'm not going to diet, I should try something else...With age, you start to look...less shapely." However, many of the women spoke of being influenced to begin exercising by their Canadian friends, co-workers, and general surroundings.

Anna remarked:

I think [living here] has had a positive effect on me. I saw that really, it's very smart to start thinking about your health when you're younger...here, everyone actively looks after themselves, exercises, looks after their diet...maybe that's why I started thinking more about it and maybe that's why I started practicing yoga...the Canadian lifestyle, it influenced me very much in the way I look at my health and how I try to maintain it.

Lydia likewise observed: "When you come here, your worldview changes...sooner or later, everyone comes to the conclusion that they need to move...and in our [yoga] class, there are a lot of Russian women who have also come to that conclusion."

Finally, half of the women additionally noted that it was not only the cultural atmosphere, but also their changing life circumstances in Canada that altered their beauty work routines. Both Daria and Sofia observed that since they had retired and now devoted much of their time to their families and grandchildren, they felt less compelled to engage in beauty work. Sofia, who wore little makeup when she lived in Russia, remarked that she did not feel required to begin using beauty products now that she lived in Canada: "It feels unnecessary...You don't really

want to start putting things on your body or your face...I just don't feel like I need it [anymore].”

At the same time, three of the women, who were currently unemployed, said that they had scaled down their beauty work when they had gotten laid off. Maria felt that it was no longer essential for her to maintain her makeup use now that she was not working and interacting with the public, noting: “I don’t use real makeup each day. When I was working [I wore] more, but when I stay at home, I think that it’s good to give my face a chance to rest a little bit.” Likewise, Lydia noted: “My lifestyle has changed, and I don’t go to work every day, like I used to...I don’t have to put on makeup everyday if I’m just sitting at home or going to the grocery store, right?”

However, as will be discussed further in the following sections, these three women continued to perform long-term beauty interventions such as dieting and hair colouring as they attempted to regain employment in the Canadian labour market.

#### **4.3.2 The Negotiation of Canadian Beauty Ideals: Othering**

At the same time, some of the women used makeup and clothing as a way of othering or distinguishing themselves from Canadian women and Canadian beauty culture and maintaining their “Russianness.” To begin, many of the women’s narratives emphasized the significance and distinctiveness of their identities as Russian women. For instance, when speaking of Canadian culture, Oksana commented: “I will never be inside this culture...so we stay and communicate more with [Russian] people. We do not really mix with Canadian people. I believe it’s much easier for us to have our [Russian] friends, our family.” Likewise, Maria noted that most of her friends were Soviet émigrés: “We know maybe only a couple of Canadian families...We’re in good relations with our neighbours, sometimes they visit us, but...I could not say that we’re friends.” Polina explained the reason behind this: “We’re looking for Russian-speaking friends, because they can understand our background, our traditions...you want to find people that speak your language and understand you better.”

Paralleling their efforts to preserve their former homeland's traditions, culture, and language through their social networks, some of the women used beauty work to construct and maintain their individuality as Russian women. For instance, half of the women maintained a conscientious and fashionable dressing style following their immigration to Canada, and were motivated both by their desire for an attractive appearance and their wish to maintain their unique identities as Russian women. These women stressed the superiority of European styles of dressing, and attempted to construct a fashionable look that echoed the European fashions they had grown up emulating and imitating. For instance, Katerina had this to say: "It's a habit. It's my nature that I'm used to being dressed mostly like European women. So I have beautiful coats, I still like high heels...and I hate wearing sweatpants." Having come from a very populous Soviet capital, Katerina was shocked by the contrast between Canadian and Russian styles of dressing: "Canadian women...they're often dressing tastelessly, very often in things that don't match. They could be wearing a silk dress with sneakers...I wouldn't do that. My feel will hurt, I'll hobble, but I'd wear proper shoes, you know?" Valeria also had a negative view of Canadian style and stated that, compared to Russian women, "the women here, they don't dress as nicely. Maybe when they're going out, they'll dress a little nicer, but as a rule, I don't see well-dressed women." Thus, Valeria continued to emulate European fashions: "I grew up in a different culture, and I try to pick out clothing that looks elegant. For me, European style is still preferable, and I like it when women dress in a European manner."

Similarly, some of the women utilized makeup to set themselves apart from Canadian women. Even though Katerina was aware that her makeup use differed from that of most Canadian women, she observed that she felt compelled to wear makeup in the same way that she did in the former Soviet Union, because, "your character is formed from childhood...and this [way of life] just becomes a part of you...it becomes *you*." Lydia similarly commented on her

reasons for wearing makeup and attempting to maintain an attractive outward appearance: “It’s a part of [the Russian] mentality...We grew up with this belief from a very young age, to try to beautify ourselves...it was a part of our lives.” Despite her belief that Canadian women were less focused on beauty, Lydia continued to wear feminine makeup, saying:

I try not to lose my own habits and my self. And because of that, I look after myself the way I’ve gotten used to taking care of myself. So I don’t lower myself to another level – because if you let yourself go, then that’s it, consider yourself a lost cause...Never mind that around me, people have a different mentality. I am the way I am and I’m going to stay the way I am.

At the same time, the women struggled to reconcile their notions of attractiveness and femininity with what they perceived to be Canadian beauty ideals. While Lydia spoke of not wanting to appear Canadian, she was also conscious that she looked out of place by virtue of the way she dressed:

I think that a woman is more confident if she looks better. But Canada is not very accommodating in that respect, because when you go outside, you feel like a white crow because next to someone else you’re dressed very brightly...but if I would dress like the locals here, I think that I would get very depressed, very quickly.

Likewise, Anna lamented having to tone down her elegant style of dressing so as to not stand out among Canadian women: “I think that I could dress better. I mean, I’d like to dress better, but taking into account the Canadian attitude towards fashion, I try to adapt myself to this environment, even if I don’t subscribe to this attitude.” While Anna attempted to maintain her individual sense of style, she simultaneously stressed the importance of blending into her surroundings: “I don’t like being overdressed because I don’t want to look different from everyone else. So I can’t dress like I dressed in the Ukraine, or it wouldn’t look right....no one wants to look like a white crow.”

In particular, the women felt conflicted by their desire to uphold a feminine appearance.

Katerina had this to say:

Sometimes I see Russian women, and I can spot them from a distance. And I don't like that sometimes they wear too much makeup, too much jewellery. Sometimes they're dressed up and the look out of place, you know? On the other hand, Canadian women look very, very plain. You can't even see them, they're like grey mice. And sometimes I think, maybe it's better to look brighter, but look like a woman and not like an undefined mass.

However, Katerina continued to wear makeup and bright clothing, noting: "It makes me feel like a woman...I want to look at me in the mirror and I want to like myself, then I feel more confident, my mood is going up, I go out and I feel like a woman." Similarly, Lydia thought it imperative to preserve a well-groomed appearance in order to maintain one's sense of self-assurance. She remarked: "I have some lipstick on right now. I would just never go out without makeup...[because when I wear makeup] I feel more confident when I enter a room. And people tell me that I look good." Indeed, Lydia was proud of the way her makeup use differentiated her from Canadian women and attracted the attentions of Canadian men: "Sometimes I even see that Canadian men, who are not used to women who are made up, pay a lot of attention to me. Even young men, they look [at me] with interest and with a sort of respect."

Finally, the participants distinguished Canadian and Russian clothing trends in relation to attitudes towards overweight and argued that Canadian women were more accepting of fatness. For example, Sofia stated:

Here, [being overweight] is perfectly normal. These women, they're walking around, putting on whatever they like - even if it shows their flaws, they're perfectly content. They're taught that they're just not like other girls, and that's perfectly normal. But in Russia, they'd say, "Oh here comes a fat cow."

Similarly, Valeria remarked: “In Canada...I don’t like it when women who are chubby walk around in shorts, there’s bulges sticking out here, out there...But I think that in Canada there’s a different understanding of [appropriate body weight].” While they perceived Canadian women as more accepting of their figure flaws, the women remarked that Russian women would choose to conceal their body weight with what were considered to be appropriate clothing choices rather than flaunt their bodily imperfections. Katerina asserted: “Very often, Canadian women will wear things without understanding that maybe they shouldn’t wear them. A big woman shouldn’t be wearing shorts...it’s just unpleasant to look at. A Russian woman just wouldn’t allow herself to do that.”

#### **4.3.3 Facing Difficulties in the Canadian Labour Market**

The women’s negotiation of Canadian beauty ideals was particularly apparent when their integration into the labour market necessitated them to adopt Canadian views of beauty and femininity. Despite their advanced education and possession of often extensive work experience, many of the women were met with challenges when they attempted to gain work in Canada. As previously mentioned, prior to immigrating to Canada, six of the women worked as engineers, while the other four held various white collar jobs, including those of an administrator, shipping agent, journalist, and customs agent. However, six of the eight women who sought work upon arriving in Canada experienced an occupational downshift. While her husband, who worked in the trades, found a job relatively easily, Lydia, who was a journalist in the Soviet Union, found it difficult to attain a position in her field of specialization. She spoke of the time when she realized she would have to take on an unskilled labourer position: “It was very serious and very stressful for me...because I had never worked a different job in my life. I’d never held anything in my hand other than a pencil, and...I was very depressed, it’s true.” Katerina was forced to find work quickly after her divorce left her with no monetary support

from her husband and no transferable skills for work in Canada. She recalled: “I’m a chemical engineer, so I didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t young when I came here, I was 49, and it seemed to me that it was too late to go to university to confirm my diploma.” Like Katerina, four of the other women were also forced to take on lower status jobs in the hospitality industry or as elder-care workers, customer service representatives, and aestheticians. Vera, who immigrated to Canada during a recession, had a particularly difficult time adjusting to her vocational downgrading: “I had to make a funeral for my previous background and accept my new life. Sometimes it was tough, people would say, “You’re an engineer, why are you stooping so low?”...but I didn’t have any other way to live.”

Only four of the women were able to find work in their previous professions. These women were younger and/or immigrated later than the women who felt compelled to change professions in order to gain employment in Canada. Even so, these women had difficulty obtaining employment, spending an average of two to three years looking for work following their immigration. Furthermore, likely due to their limited work experience in the Canadian labour market, four of the eight women who had sought work in Canada had recently been laid off due to the worsening Canadian economy. Thus, even when the women were able to regain their former occupational status, they still faced marginalization in the workplace.

The majority of the eight women who entered the Canadian labour market upon immigrating to Canada commented on how their age affected their ability to find work. For instance, Lydia who was already in her 50’s at the time of her immigration to Canada, remarked: “The fact was that we were already older, and this proved to be another difficulty. It was harder for us to learn the language...You need to put much more resources into [looking for work].” In addition to discussing the language-related challenges they experienced, most of the women spoke of their perceptions of the importance of having a youthful appearance in the labour

market. As previously noted, the women who were able to regain their pre-immigration vocational status were younger than the remainder of the sample. Even so, Oksana, one of the youngest participants, said she felt pressured to dye her hair so as to not appear older than her younger co-workers: “I’m thinking about [dyeing my hair]...I think that probably later on I will dye it...because I would like to look a little younger than I am. I’m not sure how much they like older people at my workplace.” Similarly, Maria, who was presently looking for work, explained why she dyed her hair:

I don’t want to look older...I have to find a job...and you have to look good enough to get a job, right?...I think that it’s a problem when you come in and look older... because if you look old then maybe [an employer] will think that you will work a couple of years and will leave the company...and it’s about sickness too, because when you’re older, they understand that maybe you will not work all the time, how they expect you to work.

Anna noted that when women look older, “they cross over to a different group of people, and it’s bad because if you’re working or even worse, looking for a job, you need to look younger, because if you look old, no one will hire you.” Anna also commented on how she thought looking more youthful allowed a woman to network within a greater range of social groups, and thus expand her professional opportunities. While most of the women talked of unspoken standards of appearance in the workplace, Vera experienced overt ageism when she attempted to apply for a job in engineering. She told me: “I tried to get a job in my old field, but no one would take me because they said, “You can’t teach old dogs new tricks”, because I was over 40...and I was a woman in a male field.” Thus, while the women attempted to retain their Russian identities through their use of various beauty work such as makeup and fashion, some of the women chose to assimilate their makeup and clothing use in an effort to adapt to Canadian views of attractive feminine appearance. Additionally, the women who sought work in Canada

aimed to comply with what they perceived to be the standards of appropriate appearance within the Canadian workplace by engaging in such beauty work as colouring their hair.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This study has examined the beauty practices of ten Russian immigrant women over the age of 50 and their reasons for engaging in these practices. In this final chapter, I review and summarize my findings in light of the extant research and theorizing concerning beauty work and aging, discuss the broader implications of my research, highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the study, and offer suggestions for future lines of inquiry.

### **5.1 Russian Immigrant Women's Beauty Work**

To begin, all of the women engaged in some form of beauty work with ten women using skin care products, eight using make-up, eight opting to dye their hair, seven engaging in dieting, eight engaging in physical activity, and five displaying an interest in fashion. For the most part, the study's findings reflected the extant research on beauty work among North American and Russian immigrant women. Similar to the research that has been conducted with older white North American women (Calasanti, 2001; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Wolf, 1991), the women in my study viewed the various physical signs of aging as undesirable and unattractive and indicated that one of their main motivations for doing beauty work was to delay or conceal such visible signs of aging as wrinkles and grey hair (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008, Wolf, 1991). Likewise, the women's clothing choices were often driven by their desire to camouflage age-related changes in their figures, and maintain a conventionally attractive aesthetic appearance (Fairhurst, 1998; Hurd Clarke, Griffin, & Maliha, 2008; Twigg, 2007). Indeed, the women deemed figure-flattering clothing that concealed weight gain and other signs of aging, such as wrinkled or sagging skin, to be the most appropriate for older women. Like white North American women (Fairhurst, 1998; Hurd Clarke,

Griffin, & Maliha, 2008) the women considered clothes that were brightly-coloured, attention-provoking, and revealing to be inappropriate for older women.

Corroborating existing studies of North American and Russian immigrant women (Hesse-Biber, 1996; Hurd, 2000; Kishinevsky, 2004), the majority of the women interviewed also displayed negative attitudes towards their body weights, and attempted to maintain a slim figure through the control of food intake and exercise. Despite their similar dieting practices and views of body weight, the women in my study considered Canadian women to be more accepting of a variety of body types (albeit more interested in health and exercise). However, unlike North American women, who tended to identify exercise as a more socially acceptable method of weight loss (Reel, et al., 2008), the majority of the women in my study viewed both exercise and dieting as equally viable means of maintaining their weight.

In addition to being shaped by their lifestyles, the women's beauty work was underscored by their ages and financial means. Those women who worked with the public and stated that they socialized frequently with others tended to engage more in beauty work such as makeup, fashion, and hair colouring. At the same time, those women who were unemployed stated that they had lessened their utilization of makeup and fashionable clothing. These women were similar in their reduction of beauty work to the older Canadian women interviewed by Hurd Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha (2008), who altered their clothing choices to better reflect their casual lifestyles as they transitioned into later life. Echoing Ashwin's (2000) observation of the cultural acceptance of traditional gender roles in Russia, the two oldest women in the study felt that their beauty work was less important than their commitments to their children and grandchildren. This finding reflected the work of Kishinevsky (2004), whose interviews with older Russian immigrant women in the United States revealed that they likewise felt compelled to devote their attentions to their families rather than themselves. Several of the women were

deterred from using expensive anti-aging skin treatments and professional hair colouring by their limited finances. Indeed, the two women who underwent non-cosmetic surgical procedures were among the most affluent women in the study. Finally, the women's beauty practices were shaped not only by their advancing ages, but also by their unique chronological ages and corresponding socialization. For instance, the oldest participant in the study engaged in little beauty work due to the negative associations with makeup, hair dye, and dieting she had formed during her childhood in post-war Russia. On the other hand, the two youngest participants in the study, who had not yet undergone menopause, did not diet, likely due to the limited age-related changes that had occurred in their bodies compared to the other women in the study.

At the same time, the women's beauty practices differed from those of North American women in some important ways. To begin, the women's socialization in the former Soviet Union strongly influenced their attitudes towards their bodies and their beauty work choices. Only a few of the study participants alluded to the influence of communist ideology on beauty work that was noted by Azhgikhina and Goscilo (1996), as the majority of the women, who were born after or close to Stalin's death in 1953, grew up at a time of lessening societal controls and ideological indoctrination in Russia. However, the shortages of goods and services throughout the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's that have been well-documented by most researchers of Russian history (Mamonova, 1994; Smith, 1976) had a distinct impact on the women's abilities to engage in beauty work. The women noted that the unavailability of certain services, such as exercise facilities, lessened their interest in those forms of beauty work that were unattainable to them, while the lack of other products, such as cosmetics and clothing, only intensified their desire to partake in the discourses of fashion and beauty. Even as the comparatively high earnings of the participating women made it possible for these women to engage in beauty practices that were beyond the reach of other Soviet women, their occupational

status as middle-class workers compelled their efforts of beautification as a class preservation mechanism.

### **5.2 Beauty Work as a Means of Assimilation and Othering**

The women's translocation into Canadian culture required them to reconsider their understandings of feminine beauty and their means of achieving this ideal. The majority of the women perceived Canadian definitions of beauty and femininity to be more affirmative of "natural" aesthetics. While some of the women regarded this aesthetic to be liberating, others were disappointed by what they perceived to be Canadian women's disregard for feminine appearances. Regardless of their views, most of the women felt compelled to reduce their use of makeup and fashion in order to adapt to their new cultural environment. These findings reflected those of Remennick (2007), who observed that some of the Russian-American immigrant women she interviewed felt similarly obligated to change their appearances as they assimilated into their receiving country. Both the women I interviewed and those that Remennick (2007) studied felt that their feminine appearances were overly conspicuous among North American women, and attempted to alter their beauty work to fit with their new cultural surroundings. Moreover, those women who sought work in Canada felt that it was particularly necessary for them to accommodate the appearance preferences of the Canadian labour market, which will be discussed more fully in the next section.

At the same time, some of the women utilized their beauty work as a means of differentiating themselves from Canadian women and preserving their identities as Russian women. These women employed makeup and fashionable dressing as a way of maintaining their distinct cultural views of beauty and femininity. Given their socialization within a culture that exoticized unattainable Western European goods, it is unsurprising that the women privileged

European fashions over those of North America. The women reflected on how their beauty work comprised an important part of their self-identities, and an outward reflection of their internalized value systems. For instance, the women struggled to reconcile their ideas of feminine beauty and their desires to maintain attractive appearances with what they perceived to be Canadian attitudes towards beauty. Many of the women considered the process of beautification and their abilities to attract male attention to be an intrinsic part of their personalities, and lamented what they perceived to be the rejection of feminine beauty among Canadian women. Although the women modified their beauty work to some extent in an effort to assimilate to Canadian ideals of attractiveness, they continued to engage in beauty practices that reflected their preconceived notions of attractive feminine appearance.

### **5.3 Beauty Work, Health, Illness, and Death**

In addition to their relocation into a new cultural environment, the women were also contending with their transition into later life. The women's ages and their perceptions of their aging bodies exerted a considerable influence on their current beauty work practices. The women's concerns regarding the social devaluation of their aged appearances were coupled with their apprehension about old age and the ill-health and dependence they feared it would bring. Much like older North American women, the women in the study expressed negative views of their aging appearances and aging bodies (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008), and attempted to negotiate their efforts to present a youthful, attractive look with their need to convey an age-appropriate appearance (Fairhurst, 1998; Hurd Clarke, Griffin, and Maliha, 2008). Accordingly, the women asserted their preference for subtle makeup and figure-concealing clothing that flattered what they perceived to be their best features.

In addition to articulating their discontent with various appearance-related changes in their bodies, like skin wrinkling, drooping, grey hair, weight gain, and muscle loss, the women expressed dissatisfaction with the energy loss, mobility limitations, and changes to their bodies that had coincided with menopause. While studies of white North American women showed that they frequently articulated fears regarding the social devaluation and invisibility of the aged body (Fairhurst, 1998; Furman, 1997; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008), the women in my study more commonly expressed their apprehensions regarding the physical decline of their bodies. Indeed, many of the women engaged in beauty work such as exercise and dieting with the intent of decelerating the physical aging of their bodies and their loss of physical abilities.

Although the women spoke little about the social depreciation of their aging looks with respect to societal invisibility, women discussed their experiences of ageism in their attempts of regaining employment following their immigration to Canada. As previously mentioned, all eight women who sought work in Canada experienced some difficulty in attaining work in their professional fields. While the younger women in the study were able to find employment in their respective fields, the older women often experienced overt and implied age-discrimination that made it difficult for them to recover their previous vocational status. Consequently, many of the older women were forced to assume positions in such ‘feminized’ fields as aesthetics, elder care, and customer service. These findings corroborate existing research on Russian immigrant women in the United States and in Israel, which has demonstrated that Russian immigrant women often experience difficulties in regaining their pre-immigration professional positions in their receiving countries, and that older immigrant women are further disadvantaged by their age in their search for employment (Chiswick, 1993; Remennick, 2003a). Moreover, the women were wary of the ways that their aging appearances might shape a potential employer’s

decisions, and engaged in beauty work to appeal to what they perceived to be a preference for youthfulness in the Canadian workforce. Thus, the women's perceptions of their social and economic values as indistinct from that of their aging bodies betrayed their internalization of the "double standard of aging" (Sontag, 1997, p. 20), and cultural categorization of older individuals as unproductive, weak, and inactive (Arber & Ginn, 1991, Calasanti, 2001).

#### **5.4 Beauty Work, Agency, and Determinism**

The women's beauty work practices exemplified their continuing negotiation of culturally-imposed ideals of beauty and femininity and their abilities to choose their beauty work practices and outward representation of self-identity. On the one hand, the women's beauty practices were framed by hegemonic ideals of beauty and femininity (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). The impact of the youthful, slim, and toned beauty ideal that was described by Barky (1990) and Bordo (1993) was evident in the women's many disparaging comments on the parts of their bodies that deviated from this prescribed notion of beauty, including their aged skin and post-menopausal weight gain. It was also apparent that the women dedicated much time to their efforts of approximating an attractive feminine aesthetic through their use of multiple beauty products, implements, and services. Furthermore, the feared consequences of the women's non-compliance with societal beauty standards were perceptible in their apprehensions regarding the continuation of their careers into later life, and their continued ability to appear feminine and attractive to their husbands and partners.

On the other hand, their beauty work choices afforded the women, who were doubly marginalized by their immigrant status and age, the possibility of defining and managing their outward representations. For instance, the women's use of hair dye and smart clothing to conceal perceived age-related physical flaws could be viewed as a logical cultural negotiation

(Gimlin, 2000) of the cost of beauty work against the social and economic benefits it bestowed. By engaging in beauty work that defied societal stereotypes of older women as unproductive and asexual, and identifying themselves as feminine, attractive, and sexually-viable through their appearances, the women employed beauty work for their benefit, even while they acquiesced to a limited definition of accepted feminine appearance (Gagne & McGaughey, 2002).

At the same time, some of the women's beauty work choices allowed them to redefine their identities as Russian women in Canadian society. Through engaging in beauty work that mimicked European styles, the women were able to convey their unique cultural perceptions of femininity and attractiveness through their appearance. Additionally, the women were able to preserve and express their individuality as Russian women through clothing and makeup that differentiated them from Canadian women. Even as the women comprised an invisible minority among other white Canadians (Davey, et al., 2003), they were able to express their cultural distinctness through their external manifestation of beauty.

### **5.5 Limitations of the Project**

Although the project interviews resulted in sufficient data to uncover new knowledge of Russian immigrant women's beauty work practices, the study's design and limited sample size make it difficult to generalize the data to the general population of Russian immigrant women in Canada. The women who participated in the study were not representative of the female Russian immigrant population in Canada, and thus, it is difficult to make generalizable statements regarding the beauty practices of all Russian immigrant women in Canada. Due to the preference given to highly-educated, skilled immigrants with families by Canadian immigration policies, the study's sample was additionally highly homogeneous in terms of the women's work experiences, educational attainments, marital status, and stated sexual preferences, as well as

with respect to their origins from urban areas within the former Soviet Union. It is likely that a sample including women who worked in lower-class vocations, had lesser financial means, lived in rural regions, or were not white would have resulted in different conclusions for the study. However, it is unlikely that such a sample could have been recruited from one concentrated geographical area within Canada. It is also regrettable that the study did not attract more immigrant women over the age of 65. It is probable that the opinions of immigrant women who were older and/or retired would differ appreciably from those of their younger, employed counterparts. Moreover, older women would likely have differing views of their (gendered) roles within the family, their social locations in Canada, and their utilization of beauty work in late life than those of younger immigrant women.

Additionally, the study's design limited some of the conclusions that I was able to draw from the data. The interview questions focused mainly on the women's current beauty work practices, past experiences of life in the former Soviet Union, and immigration experiences to Canada. However, half of the women had indicated that they had relocated to Israel prior to immigrating to Canada, although I did not question them about these experiences. Exploring the women's attitudes towards, and assimilation and resistance to Israeli beauty culture could have provided additional insights into the women's current views of feminine beauty work and their aging bodies. Furthermore, in their descriptions of their exercise habits, the women equated exercise with sport, rather than adopting a broader view of physical activity as a part of everyday life that can encompass such activities as housework, workplace endeavours, and walking. Troubling the notion of exercise as an exclusively sport-related pursuit may have elicited further discussion from the women regarding their daily physical activities in the former Soviet Union, how these were similar to or different from the physical activity they performed in Canada, and

whether their definitions of physical activity as a form of beauty work had changed or stayed the same over time.

Finally, my lack of Russian language skills proved to be a detriment in reviewing the extant literature regarding Russian women and their conceptions of beauty and femininity. Although I attempted to draw from a wide range of translated academic sources, the study would have benefited from the inclusion of Russian language research in my review of the literature.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Future Research**

One surprising observation that was made during this study was the willingness and desire of many of the women's partners and male children to take part in the research. Given the importance of the nuclear family in Russian culture, an examination of immigrant Russian males' attitudes towards their bodies and body work practices may reveal interesting insights into the socialization and acculturation experiences of Russian men and boys, as well as their formations of gender roles, gender attitudes, and gender-appropriate body work.

Additionally, further research regarding the beauty work practices of older Russian women over the age of 65 would likely add to current understandings of immigrant women's beauty work choices in and experiences of later life. Although this type of research might be difficult to actualize, interviews with Russian immigrant women over the age of 65, particularly those who have resided in Canada over 10 years, would be helpful in uncovering how these women acculturate to Canadian norms. Would these women adopt middle-class Canadian attitudes towards later life, viewing retirement as a time of increased freedom? Would their financial capabilities allow them to assume these ideas of later life? How would their acceptance or rejection of Canadian views of later life alter their beauty practices and their perceptions of beauty and femininity?

Finally, it would also be interesting to examine the beauty work practices of older Russian immigrant women in a longitudinal manner. A longitudinal examination of Russian immigrant women's beauty work might help illuminate how their attitudes towards aging, the body, and feminine beauty work change or stay the same over time, and how they might vary with the length of the women's stays in Canada. Longitudinal studies would also be helpful in uncovering how Russian immigrant women struggle with and continue to negotiate conflicting Russian and Canadian cultural ideals of beauty, femininity, and old age.

In conclusion, this project has helped to extend existing research on immigrant women's beauty work practices through qualitative interviews with ten Russian immigrant women. Additionally, this study has contributed to the feminist research of older women's attitudes towards their bodies, later life, and beauty work by including the perspectives of older Russian immigrant women. The women were similar to Canadian women in their beauty work choices and motivations, which included their desire to approximate a normatively attractive appearance in order to increase their social and material success. However, the women were also able to redefine their Russian-Canadian identities through their use of various forms of beauty work. Thus, the women's beauty work practices, while shaped by hegemonic ideals of beauty and femininity, were also performed as a negotiation of their social location as immigrants, Canadian residents, and older women. My research highlights the importance of beauty work in women's every day experiences. Far from being a trivial notion, the pursuit of beauty was central to the women's negotiation of their identities as immigrant women, social and economic relevance, and cultural locations.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Interview Schedule**

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - a. What was your life like in Russia?
    - i. Prompts: Where were you born? Where did you live in Russia? What did you study in school? What did you work as in Russia? Tell me a little about your family.
  - b. What was your experience of immigration?
    - i. Prompts: When did you immigrate to Canada? Why did you decide to immigrate to Canada? What was the most/least difficult thing about your immigration experience? What was it like for you to learn the English language? What was your experience of finding work in Canada? What was your experience of finding friends and establishing social contacts?
  - c. Tell me a little about your life in Canada.
2. Tell me about your beauty practices.
  - a. Walk me through a typical daily routine.
    - i. Prompts: How do you care for your hair? Do you use hair dye, makeup, skin/body lotions, perfume, tanning/skin bleaching creams? How do you care for your nails? What do you do with respect to clothing? What are your dieting practices? What kinds of exercise do you engage in?
  3. Why do you do the kinds of beauty practices that you do?
  4. What are the most important/least important aspects of your beauty routine?
  5. What practices do you spend the most/least time on and care about the most/least?
    - a. How much time/money do you invest in these practices?
    - b. Why are these particular practices important to you?
  6. How have your beauty practices changed throughout your life, if at all?
  7. How are/were your beauty practices influenced by your female (mom, aunt, grandmother, daughter) and male (husband, father, son) family members?
  8. How are/were your beauty practices influenced by your friends?

9. How are/were your beauty practices influenced by the media?
  - a. What type of media influences you the most currently/when you lived in Russia?  
What types of media were available to you when you lived in Russia?
10. How are/were your beauty practices influenced by the cost of beauty products and services? How are they influenced by the availability of beauty products and services?
11. Who or what most influences your beauty practices?
  - a. Why is that the case?
12. How do you feel about your body?
  - a. Why do you feel this way about your body?
  - b. How have your feelings towards your body changed as you have aged?
13. How has your age influenced your beauty practices?
  - a. Which beauty practices have you had to change as you've aged?
  - b. How have your beauty practices changed?
  - c. How has age made it more difficult/easier for you to take care of your body?
14. How do Eastern European beauty practices differ from Canadian beauty practices?
15. How do you think your beauty practices would differ if you had not immigrated to Canada?
  - a. How have your beauty practices changed since you have immigrated to Canada?
  - b. How have they stayed the same?
  - c. Why have your beauty practices changed/stayed the same?
  - d. To what degree do you think Canadian ideals of beauty have influenced your beauty practices?
16. Are there any questions I should have asked you but didn't? Are there any important issues we haven't discussed? If you were doing this kind of research, what kinds of questions would you ask?

## **Appendix B: Information Sheet and Consent Form**

### **INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title: The Beauty Practices of Older Russian Immigrant Women Living in Canada**

#### **Brief Description of the Project:**

This project aims to find out more about:

- The experiences of older women of Russian descent living in Canada with various beauty practices, such as makeup, clothing, diet, hair, and skin care.
- The cultural factors that influence the beauty practices of Russian-Canadian women.

#### **Who is Doing the Research:**

The research is being conducted by Alexandra Korotchenko, a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia, as a part of her graduate curriculum coursework. Her supervisor, Dr. Laura Hurd Clarke, an Assistant Professor in the School of Human Kinetics at UBC, is overseeing the project.

#### **The Interview and Your Participation:**

Your participation would entail one interview approximately one to two hours in length that would be conducted in your home, at the university, or at another location of your choice. With your permission, the interview will be digitally taped and transcribed. After the interview, the interviewer will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

#### **Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

All information resulting from the interview will be kept confidential and your name will not be referred to in any of the documents emerging from the study. The taped interview and transcript will be secured by password on a computer and stored in a locked cabinet. All documents associated with your interview will be identified only by a code number. The key to this number will not be publicly released under any circumstances. The consent form (see below) will be kept separately from the interview materials in a locked filing cabinet. According to University of British Columbia regulations, the transcript and consent form will be stored for five years and then destroyed. The computer data files will be stored for five years and then erased.

**Your Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to not answer any question, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, feel free to telephone the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at (604) 822-8598.

**Further Contact Information or Concerns:**

If you have questions or want further information about the project, please contact Alexandra Korotchenko, the graduate student who is conducting the research at (778) 881-5411 or her supervisor Dr. Laura Hurd Clarke at (604) 822-4281.

## **CONSENT**

I have read the above information and understand the nature of the study. I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that if I do not wish to answer any question or discuss any topic that is raised, I may refuse to answer. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I am willing to take part in a one to two hour interview and am agreeable that the interview be taped.

I understand that any identifying characteristics will be removed from the information I supply so that my anonymity is assured.

I hereby agree to the above stated conditions and consent to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature also indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Biographical Data Form**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FORM**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Number of grandchildren: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Number of great grandchildren: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Please indicate the highest level of education you have obtained:
  - Public school
  - Some high school
  - High school diploma
  - College or university (undergraduate)
  - Technical school
  - Graduate school
  - Other - Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Did/do you work outside the home? If so, for how long and what did/do you do?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What did/does your husband(s) do?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What is your religious affiliation?

---

12. Into which of the following income brackets do you fall?

- Under \$10,000
- \$10-20,000
- \$20-30,000
- \$30-40,000
- \$40-50,000
- \$50-60,000
- \$60,000+

13. Please list the all places you've lived in and how long you've resided in each place:

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14. When did you immigrate to Canada?

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## **Appendix D: Letter of Introduction**

### **LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

#### **WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?**

Alexandra Korotchenko, a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia (UBC), under the supervision of Dr. Laura Hurd Clarke, Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia. My telephone number is **(778) 881-5411**.

#### **WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?**

I am conducting interviews with Russian women aged 50 and older about their experiences of various beauty work practices such as makeup, hair and nail care, diet, exercise, and fashion. I would also like to talk to you about your experiences of immigration and life in Canada.

#### **WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY INVOLVE?**

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one to two hour interviews. The interviews will be conducted by myself and will take place at the University of British Columbia or at another location of your choice. You will be asked about your perceptions and experiences of a variety of beauty work practices. With your permission, I would like to digitally record the interviews so that I can concentrate on what you have to say rather than on taking notes. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

#### **WILL YOU MENTION MY NAME?**

No. Never. Everything that you tell me will be in confidence and the results of the research will be presented in general terms so that no individual woman will be identified. You will not be identified by name in any of the reports of the completed study. All of the digital recordings of the focus groups will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only I and my supervisor, Dr. Hurd Clarke, will have access to the digital recordings. Once the data has been analyzed, I will destroy all of the digital recordings and related information.

## **HOW WILL THE RESEARCH BE USEFUL?**

To date, little attention has been paid to the experiences of immigrant women and little is known about their perceptions of their bodies and the beauty work they engage in. The findings from this research will help to improve our understanding of women's experiences and perceptions of immigration, beauty, and aging.

## **WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. There are no penalties for not participating or for withdrawing from the study.

If you would like more information about how to become involved in the study, please call **(778) 881-5411**. Thank you!



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver,  
B.C. V6T 1Z3

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b>  Laura Hurd Clarke	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b>  UBC/Education/Human Kinetics	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b>  H08-03007
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b>		<b>Site</b>
UBC		Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Interviews will take place at the location of the participants' choosing. Possible sites will include the following: *Subjects' homes *Interview rooms on UBC campus *Community centres		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Alexandra Korotchenko		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> The Beauty Work Practices of Older Russian Immigrant Women Living in Canada		

**CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:** January 25, 2010

<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>	<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> January 25, 2009	
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Consent Forms:</b> Appendix A- Information Sheet and Consent Form	N/A	January 20, 2009
<b>Advertisements:</b> Appendix B- Study Recruitment Poster	N/A	January 20, 2009
<b>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests</b> Appendix C- Interview Schedule	N/A	December 17, 2008
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b> Appendix D- Letter of Introduction	N/A	January 20, 2009
<b>Other Documents:</b> Appendix E- Biographical Data Form	N/A	December 17, 2008
Appendix F- Peer Review Form	N/A	December 17, 2008
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<i>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</i>		
		