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## Reflection of Self: Ageism and the Body

We negotiate our identities through our bodies.

Posted Jun 17, 2013

I am looking forward to attending my nephew's wedding this weekend. Weddings are occasions which reunite family members and friends. I look forward to seeing everyone. Reunions can also be [stressful](#). I find myself worried about how I will look and what I will wear. Having achieved the status of "a woman of a certain age," I am concerned about my aging body.

The body is a paramount symbol of a person's [identity](#). Thinness and youthfulness are associated with [attractiveness](#), success, self-discipline, and [self-control](#). The ideal body is elusive at any age; aging distances us even further from it. Images in film, television, magazines, and even books rarely

portray older women in a positive way. Penelope Cruz is expected to play James Bond's love interest in the new Bond film. Cruz will be 40 when filming begins, an age when female actors are often no longer considered appropriate for similar aged male counterparts. With a few notable exceptions, women of a certain age are limited to roles of mentor, mother, or sister. There has been little discussion about Craig's age as a romantic lead; he is 45. There was no discussion when Roger Moore was 28 years older than Tanya Roberts in *A View To Kill*. This age-graded scenario is typical of Hollywood films and popular television programs, most notably *Modern Family*, in which Sofia Vergara, age 40, plays the much younger wife of Ed O'Neil, age 67.

Given this cultural context, the results of a recent poll published in the March 20 edition of *The NY Daily News* are not surprising. That survey, which was based on a national poll of 2,000 U.S. adults, found that nearly 90 percent of people think women are under more pressure than are men to look younger. Respondents suggested that men reach the status of "old" about five years later than do women. It is not surprising that women tend to internalize negative views of aging; a psychological process that reinforces the [fear](#) of aging and strengthens [conformity](#) to negative ageist stereotypes. Contemporary understanding of age refers to a person's chronological age. Subjective age, by contrast, is a more comprehensive assessment based on how "old" you perceive yourself to be.

My father was born in the Middle East, where birth records were sometimes imprecise. Neither he nor his sisters knew their exact age. They were unburdened by landmark birthdays such as 40, 50, 60, 80, 100, turning points which often frighten us. Times when we are forced to note the passing of time; to wonder how we can have lived so long; which lead us to ponder how well we have lived; times when we make our way to our reflections in the mirror. Regardless of our position on the path of life, we must negotiate our identities through our bodies. Nature and biology have set the boundaries of the body. Social norms and values will continue to set the boundaries of our self-evaluation. Our bodies, after all, connect us to the world. The well-being and dignity of the self is experienced first through the body. I will ponder these thoughts at my nephew's wedding this weekend as I squeeze into the new expensive dress I purchased at Nordstrom's for the occasion.