



Organizações & Sociedade Journal  
2022, 29(101), 323-350

© Authors 2022

DOI 10.1590/1984-92302022v29n0014EN

ISSN 1984-9230

www.revistaoes.ufba.br

NPGA, School of Management

Federal University of Bahia

Associate Editor:

Josiane Silva de Oliveira

Received: 05/06/2021

Accepted: 01/18/2022

# The Aging Process for Women in Leadership Positions: The Imminence of Symbolic Death and Rebirth

Vanessa Martines Cepellos<sup>a</sup>

Maria José Tonelli<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Getulio Vargas Foundation, São Paulo, Brazil

## Abstract

This article explores how women in leadership positions experience and develop ways to deal with their aging process in organizations in Brazil. As women have reached these top positions relatively recently, studies on the careers of younger women still dominate the literature. For this reason, the literature on aging women who hold corporate leadership positions is still scarce. Based on empirical data obtained from 58 in-depth interviews based on grounded theory, this research showed that women experience their aging process as symbolic physical, social, and professional deaths and face an age glass ceiling due to their age. However, they also create new life stories based on a redefinition of work and/or a search for a new career, a phenomenon we call 'symbolic rebirth.' This paper proposes concepts related to how women see their aging process, uncovering the dynamics and implications of aging for women. There seems to be no room to aging in corporations, even for women in leadership positions. Despite the innumerable changes that have taken place in recent decades, this organizational space is still associated with the male gender, and ageism persists even for women who are in top-ranking executive positions in corporations.

**Keywords:** women; aging; leadership position; symbolic deaths; symbolic rebirth.

## Introduction

This article explores how women in corporate leadership positions experience and develop ways to deal with their aging process in Brazil. Based on empirical data obtained from 58 in-depth interviews, in which the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to collect and analyze data, this study shows multiple dimensions of the aging process for women in such hierarchical levels.

Aging women in corporate leadership positions do matter because, although they still are a minority in leadership positions (Jyrkinen, 2014), they perform a leading role in guiding young women in corporations (McKie & Jyrkinen, 2017). As women have reached these top positions relatively recently, studies on the careers of younger women still dominate the literature (Atkinson, Ford, Harding, & Jones, 2015). For this reason, the literature on women growing old in corporate leadership positions is still scarce (Ford, Atkinson, Harding, & Collinson, 2020; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012), supporting the relevance of this research.

As these women grow older, they have to cope with issues related to their appearance since beauty and sexuality are critical aspects in corporations (Atkinson et al., 2015; Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Granleese & Sayer, 2006; Handy & Davy, 2007). Thus, older women end up becoming invisible and are deemed as less worthy of admiration (Calasanti, 2005; Pritchard & Whiting, 2015) and failing to keep up with the competition (Jyrkinen, Niemistö, & Hearn, 2017; Krekula, Nikander, & Wilińska, 2018). Moreover, prejudice against older women may also help explain why the rise of women to top-ranking positions has happened slowly over the years (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012). Additionally, Sabelis and Schilling (2013) showed that women who are 50 and 60 years old must deal with contradictory expectations: though they are at the top of their careers, they are also in decline. However, visible signs of aging can also have a positive connotation: they have more self-confidence and enjoy the benefits of experience (Jyrkinen, 2014; Sabelis & Shilling, 2013). Although these studies focus on the aging process of women in top positions, they tend to neglect the very aging experience and how women deal with that process. This study contributes to fill this gap by asking the following question: How women in corporate leadership positions experience and develop ways to deal with their aging process? In doing so, the next section shows studies on aging and on the discrimination faced by aging women in leadership positions. The third section describes data collection procedures. Next, our data analysis is shown, followed by a discussion of our findings. Finally, we propose some remarks and suggestions for future research.

## Aging studies

As the world population ages, there have been more studies on older workers (Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001; Nelson, 2005; Riach & Kelly, 2013; Wood, Wilkinson, & Harcourt, 2008). This population loses status in organizations (Fineman, 2011; Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2006), despite research indicating that they are more committed and loyal to their work (Dennis & Kathryn, 2007). Researchers suggest that older professionals have reduced employability as a result of the requirements demanded during recruitment, such as technological, physical, and social skills, leading to age bias (Turek & Henkens, 2019). However, beyond the possible obsolescence of older workers' professional skills, age discrimination in employment is also an important factor explaining these candidates' unemployment and underemployment rates (Bowman, McGann, Kimberley, &

Biggs, 2016). Several studies reinforce the discrimination and prejudice experienced by older workers (Rosigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007; Rupp et al., 2006) but studies on aging have generally been gender-neutral (Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015; Riach, Loretto, & Krekula, 2015). Some researchers address the intersectionality marking gender inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991) but few studies consider the issue of gendered ageism, which only became part of the research agenda at the beginning of the millennium (Harding, Ford, & Fotaki, 2013).

## Aging in Brazil

Although aging is a global phenomenon, in developed countries, this process took place slowly and under economic development. However, in developing countries, the process has happened quickly, especially in Latin America (Giatti & Barreto, 2003). In Brazil, projections point out that, in 2060, those aged 65 or older will constitute 22.5% of the population (58.2 million), whereas, in 2018, they made up only 9.2% (19.2 million) (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2018). However, the country still sees itself as a young country (Camarano, 2014).

Researchers in Administration (Amorim, Fischer, & Fevorini, 2019) found, based on workers employed in private and mixed-economy companies, that the group of workers aged 50 or over has a growing participation in the labor market. This worker profile is predominantly male, with educational attainment above the market average, and employment relations with formal contracts longer than that of workers in general. However, the best human resource management policies and practices of private companies in Brazil show evidence of ageism due to the low hiring of older workers and the difficulty of dealing with these employees (Amorim et al., 2019). Recent research (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Tonelli, Pereira, Cepellos, & Lins, 2020) has found biases of age discrimination and stereotyping in these organizations. Despite the positive perceptions of HR professionals about older workers and their performance, adopting age management practices is still insufficient. These practices are related to recruitment and selection; integration, retention and continuity; and adaptation to needs. In addition to the inadequacy of age management practices, ageism is also reflected in the firing of older workers (Hanashiro, 2020). According to the author, firing these workers is linked to a strategy of “age sanitation” since, so goes the claim, it is inevitable for the organization’s economic sustainability. The dismissal of older professionals may be guided by age norms, that is, by the implicit rule that there is an ideal age for occupying positions. The need for organizational restructuring and the high cost of older professionals is also alleged (Hanashiro, 2020). Therefore, authors such as Silva and Helal (2019) defend the need to combat and modify the way older workers are seen in the organizational environment.

Ageism is even more present for women in our country, as they are more vulnerable than men to aging and face difficulties in relation to career insertion, maintenance, and progression due to gender and age prejudice in addition to other professional challenges (Cepellos, 2021). According to Mori and Coelho (2004), aging women become more vulnerable due to the appreciation of youth in our society. They end up conceptualizing their own image as something negative, depreciating themselves even before old age sets in. This vision is an aesthetic condemnation, correlating the functionality of the body and the social meaning each culture attributes to this stage of life (Mori & Coelho, 2004). According to Goldenberg (2012), in a culture like the Brazilian one, in which the body is an important capital, aging can be experienced as a moment of great capital loss. The author

points out that the capital-body model is a young, thin, fit, and sexy body, distinguished as superior to a body conquered through a lot of financial investment, work, and sacrifice. Thus, for women, the body is perceived as a fundamental way for social ascension and as an important form of capital in the labor market (Goldenberg, 2012). The body and the use of artifices are part of a form of expression during aging or even a cover-up of the possible stigma attached to it (Barros, 2006).

## **Aging women in leadership positions**

Work is at the core of the life of older women holding leadership positions (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012) and, although they hold relevant positions, their trajectory is often marked by insecurities and non-linear careers (Schilling, 2015). Although they contribute with their intellectual capital, their knowledge seem less valued than older men's (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012). Their experiences are tied to a context in which the rules of masculine careers prevail and the aging process is co-constructed with other practices in the professional organization (Lotherington, Obstfelder, & Halford, 2017). Even if visible signs of aging may have a positive connotation (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2017), the women's aging process is related to loss, isolation, and decrease in income (Aaltio, Salminen, & Koponen, 2014; Tretheway, 2001).

In addition to chronological age, older women are victims of discrimination related to their appearance and sexuality (Duncan & Loretto, 2004; McGann, Ong, Bowman, Duncan, Kimberley, & Biggs, 2016), suffering from "lookism", which can be defined as appearance-based discrimination (Warhurst, Van den Broek, Hall, & Nickson, 2009), i.e., discrimination against people considered physically unattractive according to widespread psychobiological and/or social normative standards (Minerva, 2017). In the case of older women in leadership positions, there is concern about health and body, late motherhood, menopause, sexual disposition, and all sorts of discrimination which intersect age and gender (Atkinson et al., 2015; Moore, 2009). However, appearance-based discrimination is harder to prove than sexism and racism (Adomaitis, Raskin, & Saiki, 2017). In fact, little attention has been paid to body, gender, and age issues (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015) and few studies bring empirical data to discuss how women in top-ranking positions deal with this process, in which - supposedly due to their profession status - this prejudice would be minimized (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012).

In sum, although older women remain motivated to continue to work during their aging process (McKie & Jyrneken, 2017) by maintaining interpersonal relations, autonomy, flexibility, and interest beyond their work (Halford, Kukarenko, Lotherington, & Obstfelder, 2015; Shacklock, Brunetto, & Nelson, 2009), research on the aging process hardly ever deals with the joint effect of age and gender at the workplace (Cleveland, Huebner, & Hanscom, 2017; Spedale, Coupland, & Tempest, 2014), especially regarding the aging process of women in corporate leadership positions (Gersick & Kram, 2002; Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012; Still & Timms, 1998). This research proposes to fill that gap by bringing empirical data and theoretical insights on these phenomena, showing how women in corporate leadership positions experience and develop ways to deal with their aging process.

## Methodological procedures

### *The research context*

Older women's experiences and interpretations are inserted into broader historical, cultural, and social contexts in which these women grow old (Spedale et al., 2014; Walker, Grant, Meadows, & Cook, 2007). So, we briefly show the influence of the Brazilian context on aging women. Since Brazilian culture values youth, an aging woman becomes invisible — as compared to aging men to whom positive characteristics, such as charm, maturity, power, and financial success are attributed. As women are expected to be young, beautiful, and attractive, one can understand why Brazilian women, right behind North American ones, are the biggest consumers of cosmetic and plastic surgery worldwide (Goldenberg, 2011). It is in this context that our research data were collected.

### *Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory emerged during the sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss' (Charmaz, 2009) studies on the process of dying in hospitals. As Glaser and Strauss built their analysis of the dying process, they developed systematic strategies social scientists can adopt to study other topics (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A grounded theory is configured as a theory that emerges from data, based on how well the data fit into conceptual categories identified by an observer, how well categories explain pre-interpretations, and how categories are relevant to the observation of central issues (Suddaby, 2006). According to Suddaby, the method described by Glaser and Strauss is built on two key concepts: constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Constant comparison means that data are simultaneously collected and determined, whereas theoretical sampling means that the theory being built decides which data are to be collected. According to Charmaz (2009), in addition to constant comparison and theoretical sampling, other components determine the practice of grounded theory: the construction of codes and analytical categories from the data, advances in theory development at each step of data collection and analysis, the writing of memos to elaborate categories, the determination of their properties, relations between categories and identified gaps, and a literature review after analysis development.

### *Data collection<sup>1</sup>*

Grounded theory was used to collect and analyze data, including theoretical samples and simultaneously conducted data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In total, 58 interviews were conducted with women that had (or have had) leadership positions in different companies. The whole process included four rounds of interviews. In the interview set, respondents' age ranged from 41 to 63 years. Interviews were conducted largely at interviewees' workplace, in the municipality of São Paulo, a significant economic center in Brazil. Interviews lasted 60 minutes on average and were recorded and transcribed, resulting in 570 pages of text and multiples codes that were organized in three main categories, as proposed below. In showing the data, interviewees' names were changed to protect their anonymity. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 show interviewees' profiles and the industrial sectors in which their companies participate for each interview phase.

**Table 1**  
**Interviewees' profiles in the first phase**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Industrial Sectors</b>
Rachel	46	Controller	Medical technology
Marion	53	Owner	Decoration
Jane	48	Director of Strategy and Operations	Consulting and Auditing
Lina	53	Director of Strategy and Operations	Transportation
Cora	60	Consultant	Consulting and training
Virginia	52	Owner	Footwear
Clarice	48	Senior Global Vice President	Consumer goods
Teresa	53	Financial Services Manager	Footwear and sporting goods
Alice	41	Owner	Fast food
Cecilia	49	Owner	Business events
Leila	50	Ex-executive/in transition	Cosmetics
Gabrielle	53	Independent Consultant	Consultancy and Education
Aretha	45	SP Regional Sales Manager	Hospitality
Carmen	54	Executive Director of the Control Area	Finance
Tina	53	CEO	Finance

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

**Table 2**  
**Interviewees' profiles in the second phase**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Industrial Sectors</b>
Nina	49	Director of Human Resources	Filtration, separation, and purification
Angela	51	Owner	Private Equity
Dilma	54	Independent Consultant	Consultancy
Fernanda	59	SP Regional Director of Human Resources	Chemicals
Mayana	60	MBA and Graduate Program Manager	Education
Francisca	62	Independent Consultant	Consultancy
Valentina	58	Project manager	Consultancy
Rita	54	In transition	(Not working)
Aida	62	External Consultant	Consultancy
Linda	54	Administrative Manager	Education
Azalea	51	Independent Consultant	Consultancy
Diane	55	Independent Consultant	Consultancy
Cacilda	63	Independent Consultant	Consultancy and Education
Amelia	46	Independent Consultant	Executive Consultancy
Joana	54	Independent Consultant	Human Resources Consultancy

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

**Table 3**  
**Interviewees' profiles in the third phase**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Industrial Sectors</b>
Agnes	49	Vice President	Finance
Ellen	50	Owner	Executive Consultancy
Patricia	52	Director of Coaching and Mentoring	Executive Consultancy
Rosa	56	Owner	Software quality
Adriana	50	Consultant	Human Resources Consultancy
Anita	45	Consultant	Educational management
Hilda	44	Editor-in-chief	Journalism
Marisa	49	Head of Account Management	Advertising, marketing, and branding
Nara	59	In transition	(Not working)
Elis	55	Ex-executive/in transition	Education
Komako	45	Executive Director	Journalism
Nise	58	Owner	Advertising, marketing, and branding
Yara	58	Consultant	Consultancy
Sofia	44	Head of Marketing	Media and communication
Camille	56	Director	Education

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

**Table 4**  
**Interviewees' profiles in the fourth phase**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Industrial Sectors</b>
Marilia	50	Senior Manager	Clothing
Tarsila	46	Editor	Publishing
Lilia	47	CEO	Events
Carolina	49	In transition	Hospitality
Elizbeth	44	Director of Global Corporate Communications	Contact Center
Ada	51	Senior Consultant	Consultancy
Fabiola	46	Commercial Director	Petrochemical and supply chain
Agatha	51	Owner	Equipment Loading and Maintenance
Carlota	46	In transition	(Not working)
Marta	41	Owner	Events
Marlene	56	Director	Market Research and Intelligence
Edith	42	MBA and Graduate Program Manager	Executive transportation
Leda	61	Owner	Business automation software

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

### *Why four rounds?*

The decision to collect and analyze data in four rounds was based on the possibility of adopting flexible and creative ways of operating grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009). On the first round, 15 interviews were conducted with quite open questions. By using the snowball strategy, women working in leadership positions were selected. We aimed to collect data to answer the first research question: How does aging affect the personal and professional lives of women in corporate leadership positions? After this first round, this research question was redefined once data showed that these women failed to distinguish their professional from their personal lives. Interviewees also stated that the aging process had started when they were 40. Then, for the second round, the research question was: How does the aging process affect the life of 40-year-old women or older who hold leadership positions?

On this second round, other 15 executive women were interviewed.

The main codes that emerged during the first collection phase guided the second phase of data collection. For this, a second semi-structured classification guide was structured. The script for the second phase contemplated the following questions: (a) Does your age mean anything to you? (b) What is aging for you? (c) Do you consider that you are living a new phase in life? What stage is this? Why?

Data interpretation showed that the perception of their aging process was extremely relevant since women stated the importance of physical, social, and professional aspects. Moreover, our data showed the importance of how they experience their aging. So, in the third round, the

research question proposed was: How women in corporate leadership positions experience and develop ways to deal with the aging process?

This question was used in the third and fourth rounds of data collection. In the third round, another 15 interviews were conducted with executive women above 40 years of age who work or worked in leadership positions.

The main codes that emerged during the second phase of collection guided the third phase of data collection. For this, a third semi-structured interview script was structured. The script for the third phase contemplated the following questions: (a) How do you deal with your older appearance and what is your relationship with your organizational context? What does this older look mean to you? (b) How do you deal with your aging body and what is your relationship with your organizational context? What does your aging body mean to you? (c) How do you deal with menopause and what is its relationship to your organizational context? What does this process mean to you? (d) How do you assess the possibility of entering the labor market today considering your age? (e) Have you faced any difficulties in recent years because of your age? How did you handle them?

Since the flip-flop technique is important, questions about what stopping working meant were added to the interview script.

Finally, in the fourth round, 13 interviews were conducted. The criteria for selecting interviewees remained the same but included women who had started their own business.

The main codes that emerged during the third phase of collection guided the fourth phase of data collection. For this, a fourth semi-structured interview script was structured. The fourth phase script included the following questions: (a) What do you expect from your future? Why? (b) Do you intend to work up until what age? Why? (c) What is the role of work in the aging process? (d) Does aging change the way you relate to work? Has the meaning of work changed over the years? (e) How do you adapt the reality of work to your moment of life? Do you have any other parallel activities?

The large number of codes led us to propose three main categories to describe this phenomenon: how participants experience their aging process, ways to delay aging, and ways in which they reconstructed their lives, summarized in Table 5.

Table 5  
**Categories and subcategories**

Category	Subcategory	Explanation
<b>Experiencing the aging process</b>	Symbolic physical death	Shows the meaning attributed to growing old based on the concept of a prognostic of physical, social, and professional death and the meaning of decline and finitude attributed to growing old.
	Symbolic social death	
	Symbolic professional death	
<b>Ways of delaying aging</b>	Body care	Shows ways to delay aging and female executives' reaction to physical, social, and professional death. It occurs through body care and development of skills for dealing with their symbolic deaths.
	Developing personal and professional skills	
<b>Ways of rebirth</b>	Redefining work	Shows the possibility of a future based on redefining work or ending an executive career and the possibility of starting a new life story based on their understanding of their physical, social, and professional death.
	Searching for a new career	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

## Data analysis

This section explains the three proposed categories and offers quotes that represent interviewees' experiences:

### *Experiencing the aging process*

The word 'death' came up several times in the interviews not only in reference to actual death but also as a metaphor for experienced situations. Aging is associated to different forms of finitude, experienced as symbolic physical, professional, and social deaths, as described below.

### **Symbolic physical death**

The physical dimension is evidenced by signs in the body, such as wrinkles, weight gain, locomotion difficulties, gray hair, physical and intellectual tiredness, and appearance, which could suggest, in their perspectives, an image of a careless and sloppy professional failing to deliver the expected results.

*Well, aging mostly refers to the physical body, right? From a physical point of view, your body is no longer the same, you don't lose weight as easily, you have to start taking better care of your health, the check-up you used to have every two years becomes annual, so you have to be careful. It can't be helped. (Patricia, 52)*

Another topic included in this category was the difference between aging for men and women, concerning appearance and aesthetic issues:

*For us, women, I think it is a double burden, right? Men aren't as worried about the aesthetic issue . . . And the price of aging for women is much higher. For men, it isn't. Gray hair is charming, while we go to the hairdresser every 15 days. (Patricia, 52)*

In sum, this category includes aspects such as: physical energy (specifically physical and mental fatigue), body signs (such as gray hair), and difficulty losing weight. Appearance and aesthetics seem to limit their professional performance. Moreover, women experienced the difference regarding their aging process and that faced by men.

### **Symbolic professional death**

Another aspect is the awareness of their symbolic professional death, understood as the perception women have of the end of their professional cycle. As interviewees see it, aging may be a factor able to justify being fired for age, being devalued, or even resigning from an executive position. Fear is a recurring thought.

*When I was 35, I never thought about being fired . . . I thought I was going to live the rest of my days as a success story. So that's the downside I must deal with. It's a shadow I recognize, and I always need to say: OK, if I get fired, what's going to happen? How are my savings? What do I do? What's my plan B? But there is this downside that is a certain fear. It's the fear of losing power, of being humiliated if you get fired. It's a downside that I never considered when I was younger. It doesn't cross one's mind; youngsters will live forever. Now I think about mortality. And mortality comes in different ways; work is over, it's death. No more hormones, another death. (Carmen, 54)*

Interviewees realize that re-entering the corporate world may be difficult because of their age, particularly when they see people who concretely face professional challenges due to their age, as pointed out by Leila:

*It is difficult to find a job when you are 45. Even if you are very experienced, it is different when you are working. I am fully aware of it . . . I have a friend who is 55 who has been unemployed for about 3 years. She cannot find a job because of her age. There is a position*

*open, but when people learn of her age, they don't call her, not even for an interview, and they say that the position is for a 35-year-old profile. It happens a lot. (Leila, 50)*

Additionally, women must deal with the end of a certain lifestyle associated to their work identity. It is a challenge not seeing this prestigious status, mainly because the opportunities in the corporate world decrease as one grows old:

*You get used to living in a certain way. This lifestyle involves a lot of vanities, attachments, images . . . So, you create a self-image with which you identify. You look in the mirror and you think you're that image, and then there comes a time when you says "This isn't you anymore. Who am I?" I think it's this disconnection, this change, which is difficult and causes many people to postpone it and remain suffering, because it isn't easy. (Carolina, 49)*

Despite their high-management positions, women's competences are not guaranteed, and they worry about maintaining that position. Age seems to be a relevant aspect because they are afraid of being replaced by a younger generation. The corporate world values a convivial posture and a young body. They experience a process we call a new ceiling; the age glass ceiling, embedded on the practices of organizations which will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

*Sometimes I tell the office staff "Soon, people will find out that I'm old, I'm over 50, and they'll let me go." I always think the guys will get tired of me, but to this day, there's no reason why they should. (Tina, 53)*

Fear of dismissal or downgrading as a result of age stigmas seems to explain the concealment of aging as a rule shared by aging women in executive positions. This seems to happen due to the association of aging with physical decline, loss of energy, and failure to deliver results. Aging, therefore, seems to be tied to an articulated sequence of losses:

*Menopause itself is a loss, the end of your career is a loss. I think it's a phase with a concentration of losses; you can lose your parents, you can lose relationships, you can lose your own work. (Patricia, 52)*

Allied to the symbolic physical death, the symbolic professional death comes up as a second instance, which helps us understand interviewee's experience of growing old.

## Symbolic social death

Aging is also experienced based on the social dimension. It is tied to losses related to events such as menopause, biological clocks, an empty nest, retirement, and difficulty in finding a partner during the aging process.

*. . . It has to deal with your own mind being aware of the fact that you are at the end of a cycle. Menopause. I am at menopause, so I've ended a cycle of my hormonal life . . . (Carmen, 54)*

Menopause is a hormonal death that means the end of an important cycle for women. During menopause, women experience changes in their bodies, such as heat flashes, lower physical disposition, feelings of melancholy, and impacts on appearance. For this reason, menopause requires special care, such as medical treatments for hormone replacement to alleviate symptoms and promote a better quality of life and allow the maintenance of social activities.

*The hormone, this hormonal issue has a huge impact on people's lives. We don't realize that much until we go through this process. So physically, energy drops, mood . . . you have a feeling of melancholy, physical disposition . . . it has a huge impact. Skin, hair, image due to lack of hormone, and I'm talking to other colleagues, other women who are in the same phase, they notice the same. I realize that a woman needs to be a warrior. She needs a lot of energy to actually handle the different roles in life. (Amelia, 46)*

Menopause can be a “trigger” because it signals other social losses, as we will see below. When it comes to the biological clock, interviewees are concerned about being alive but not fertile, not mothers. The centrality of their work was often the great villain of motherhood. Those aspects, apparently tied to the physical dimension, were considered in this analysis as social since they imply the way those women position themselves (given by these markers) in the social context: either women are mothers, or they will lose the opportunity of placing themselves as productive.

*When I reached 40, I went to my gynecologist's office and was tested . . . and he said to me: "I'll do some tests to check your fertility." . . . When I learned the result of those tests, I fell on the floor crying. He said ". . . you are not able to get pregnant, it is too late, you can even contact assisted-reproduction clinics, but I think you won't succeed". (Elizabeth, 44)*

Another event that stands as an indication of the aging process is retirement. In this study, retirement also means illness and death for executive women. Retirement seems to be even more difficult for women who consider work a core aspect of their lives. That is why slowing down the pace is important to adapt to this reality.

*This is a big challenge. If you don't prepare yourself to slow down . . . it has to be done little by little and thinking in the end 'what I'm going to do?' because I need to fill up [that gap] . . . It's very common to see people who retire and then get sick and die. (Marilia, 50)*

Other element that creates discomfort is finding a partner. Women show that their chances of finding a partner are smaller when they grow older, especially when compared to men the same age:

*We live a huge existential void. I, at least, fill myself up with my work . . . And not being married, not being in a super-steady relationship should be a problem. Then, you feel like you're empty. It must be all that also. (Tarsila, 46)*

Therefore, awareness of social decline is marked with several impossibilities of continuing to perform certain social functions during the aging process: the mother role (due to menopause, biological clock, and an empty nest), the professional role (due to retirement), and the affective role (due to difficulties of having a steady relationship).

In sum, physical, professional, and social deaths seem to mark this period. However, interviewees also try to delay and react to the aging experience, as discussed next.

### *Ways of delaying aging*

The second theme that emerged from the data is related to multiple ways of reacting to aging. The first reaction to aging is an attempt to delay the aging process through mechanisms such as body care and the development of new skills.

### **Body care**

Body care refers to physical and mental health and aesthetic issues. Exercising and medical and aesthetic treatments are included in these women's daily routine. They aim at alleviating aging signs and improving their appearance, in addition to making their bodies more functional. ". . . So, there is a constant concern about appearance; you end up by spending more time to change clothes, more time to put on makeup, to hide this, hide that. So, it's a big preoccupation" (Patricia, 52). "Now, I take long two-hour walks on weekends, about 25 kilometers, and, during the week, I do Pilates. I need to take care of my body in order to be successful and extend my 'shelf life'" (Marion, 53).

Body care and aesthetic procedures enable women to extend their physical, social, and professional lifespan. Based on this strategy, one can face the menopause hassle, play the mother role for longer, and keep oneself professionally active. Since older women rarely accept their gray hairs, all end up by dyeing their hair and looking for ways to disguise aging signs. On one hand, they are accepting the prejudice against aging signs but, on the other, it may be considered a way to delay the aging process.

### Development of new skills

In addition to taking care of their bodies, developing personal and professional skills is also a way to offset the effects of aging, whether physical, professional or social. This mechanism includes continuing their professional activities. Work seems to not only minimize aging awareness but also to slow down the aging process since work makes women feel younger and able to face constant challenges. *"In my opinion, the fact that you have a job, an occupation, you feel productive, it slows down your aging process"* (Rosa, 56).

Developing skills is also associated to postponing symbolic social death. Some women recognize, for example, the importance of maintaining their activities to prevent the negative effects of aging. This strategy also contributes to the continuity of a social life. *"The secret is to not stop, to do what you like, to know yourself; people don't even have time to know themselves. What would I be doing now if I were retired?"* (Nara, 59).

As consequence of the process of delaying aging, women expect to build a new life story, a process called symbolic rebirth, which is explored next.

### Ways of rebirth

What are the future expectations of women experiencing their aging process as symbolic physical, social, and professional deaths? Growing old triggers new purposes and behaviors, such as the greater willingness to look after oneself and enjoying their remaining years in a pleasant way, leading women to converge their angsts about the future in one single objective: a search for a more balanced life. However, the way these women have conducted their professional activities seems incompatible with this new objective. *"We're tired of playing tag, of working 12, 13 hours a day; it's exhausting . . . We understand that our body has had enough"* (Tina, 53).

In this sense, it seems more appropriate to redefine work, or yet, to end their executive careers. Both possibilities are associated to a transition that determines the beginning of a new life story, alluding to the idealization of a symbolic rebirth.

### Redefining work

Interviewees understand that a new job should enable conciliation with their families and be a source of personal satisfaction, i.e., it should enable a more balanced life and be strongly associated with a purpose. Thus, changing work routines, rejecting demands, delegating tasks, and reducing working time become important measures to reach these objectives.

*The possibility of starting over when I'm 50, of doing other things when I'm 50. It is a new life, it is as if you had won a bonus, it is like a videogame extra bonus, and the game starts again. It's fabulous!* (Carolina, 49)

Symbolic rebirth determines a time to turn to oneself and to do tasks able to enable pleasure and satisfaction: to take up a language course, to do voluntary work, to learn new skills.

*When I'll actually stop working or reduce my working hours I will go back to school. I will take graphic design, I will study interior decoration, whatever! I'll do something different. That's what I'm talking about, to dedicate time to what I want to do. (Valentina, 58)*

Although they remain in leadership positions, these women begin to recognize themselves in other images. The achievements throughout their executive career represent, in this context, a legacy for younger women.

*I really want to leave a legacy, a legacy. Not that my personal background is a particularly beautiful story, but I want to leave a legacy for younger women, for them to have choices, that when they're offered a job, like . . . Look, he wants to promote you. Believe in it, go for it and do it. (Carmen, 54)*

A legacy would stand for something left following professional death. It is associated to a succession process where women aim to pass their knowledge through mentoring activities to contribute to other professionals and to the company.

### **A search for a new career**

The possibility of a symbolic rebirth could also come from a new career, such as consulting, coaching, council board member, running their own business, and academics. *"When I realized I was growing older and was facing that moment in the market, when being senior means being excluded. As from 40, 42 years old, I started to think of having an academic career"* (Elis, 55).

These careers offer professional longevity since they fail to exclude executive women due to old age. Instead, they value aspects related to maturity, such as experience, knowledge, and wisdom. Moreover, those are activities that allow more flexibility and freedom at work.

*There are some other choices. Consulting, thinking about consulting within the HR area . . . I've also thought about taking some coaching courses or certifications to be able to do executive coaching. There are some other personal things, like having a business of my own . . . The other option is to teach . . . (Nina, 49)*

Taking a sabbatical period or traveling are also options for women looking for ways to have leisure time. The end of an executive career stems from physical fatigue caused by aging and its incompatibility with the demands of executive work, leading women to pursue careers that are more adequate to that moment in their lives.

*Whether you like it or not, one is lying who says that the body doesn't feel, the body does feel. I didn't have the same rhythm, I would get very tired and, what's worse, I had already lost my relationships, because it is an emotional wear. I would no longer live close to the*

*people I loved and I didn't have any social life. It causes stress that is reflected in your body and lying is useless. Today, I'm 50, 45, I'm not able to produce as much as I used to produce a while back. Then, I've decided to have my own company. Actually, I've chosen quality of life. I wanted some more peace and quiet. (Adriana, 50)*

In sum, women experience aging as symbolic physical, professional, and social deaths marked by losses and the imminence of finitude but they react trying to delay the aging process, whether by caring for their bodies, developing personal and professional skills or setting forms of symbolic rebirth, enabling them to write a new life story based on a redefinition of work and/or a search for a new career.

To deal with aging, women tend to seek ways to minimize its physical, social, and professional effects. New careers and abilities are also identified as a form of symbolic rebirth, in which efforts are being made to begin a new story, either by redefining work or by even ending their executive career.

## Discussion

The previous section suggests that the aging experience for women in leadership positions might be seen as physical, professional, and social deaths. This study also showed that women develop ways to avoid such deaths by actions we called symbolic rebirth. Based on empirical data, this paper contributes to the literature showing that aesthetic procedures (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Handy & Davy, 2007) are a way to cope with prejudice against appearance and sexuality (McGann et al., 2016). It is also part of the requirements for working in the more sophisticated labor market for women who grow old in leadership positions. In this sense, appearance and lookism (Warshurst et al., 2009) go beyond sexual attractiveness (Calasanti, 2005), appearing as another professional demand since good looks seem to be part of successful women's code of conduct. Our empirical data showed that older women are victims of prejudice against their appearance even when they hold top-ranking corporate positions, in which competences and skills should prevail as recognition factors. These findings are in line with the Brazilian literature, which points out that women become more vulnerable due to the appreciation of the young in our society and depreciate themselves in the face of their image in the mirror (Mori & Coelho, 2004). Thus, they must constantly take care of their appearance once it is tied to the image a professional builds in the corporate world. They are forbidden to grow old and all visible signs of the aging process must be concealed. This seems to explain why Brazilian women are one of the biggest consumers of cosmetic and plastic surgery in the world (Goldenberg, 2011). This research rejects the idea that prejudice against women's competences decreases when they reach high positions (Jyrkenen & McKie, 2012) since a more advanced age appears as another barrier in these women's careers.

As they experience the aging process as a symbolic physical death, they need to take care of their bodies and appearance. Women are supposed to hide physical signs of aging, experienced differently than for men to whom the physical signs of aging are associated with maturity, knowledge, and experience. Taking care of their appearance is a core aspect in these women's daily lives, to whom gray hair may be perceived as laziness. This may suggest the idea of a declining professional. Symbolic physical death is associated to the experience of aging with the physical

decline of their bodies and the encroachment of physical death. It means having to deal with tiredness, wrinkles, gaining weight, and gray hair, which cause embarrassment and may impact professional performance. In this sense, the body showed significant importance since the aging experience appears based on it. One must keep it able to work (Halford et al., 2015) because their professional performance could be hindered, and a younger professional could replace them. In Brazilian society, the concern with the body seems to have an even greater relevance for women, as the body is an important capital, understood as a way for social ascension and the labor market (Goldenberg, 2012). The expected body is young, thin, fit, and sexy (Goldenberg, 2012), which makes women strive to achieve this expected standard and, at the same time, avoid the signs of aging. For this reason, getting older has such a negative connotation for the interviewees.

The second contribution of this investigation indicates that women not only face difficulties finding new jobs (Handy & Davy, 2007) and changing careers, limiting their professional decisions even more (Jyrkinen, 2014; Krekula et al., 2018; Moore, 2009). They are also afraid of losing their status and prestige achieved along their professional trajectory. In this sense, although they hold high positions, they cannot take them for granted and the effort to maintain their positions is stronger for those women. For them, aging is disassociated from wisdom and experience, but relates to decline, lack of energy, and capacity to deliver. Symbolic professional death is related to fear of being professionally passed over, of being fired or facing demotion because they are women experiencing the aging process. Their fear of not being able to exercise their professional role, which is so important in these women's lives, evinces this. Discrimination related to appearance and fear of replacement by younger executive women and of being seen as less productive seem to ruin the conquests of women in leadership positions. Here, we can observe a paradox: when women in leadership positions grow old, they feel that they are losing space as they conquer them. It could be said that, in that moment, women face a new modality of glass ceiling, an age glass ceiling. Even when they hold a top-ranking position, older women are more discriminated than men. This fear of being overlooked in organizations can be explained by the situation experienced by many older professionals in the country who are victims of ageism, even in companies with the best human resources management policies and practices (Amorim et al., 2019). This context of discrimination in many companies in Brazil can cause this feeling of lack of perspective, especially on women, who are even more vulnerable in our society (Cepellos, 2021). It is the fear of being victims of what Hanashiro and Pereira (2020) call "age sanitation," that is, the inevitable dismissal to keep the organization financially healthy.

The term age glass ceiling, developed throughout this study, alludes to the term glass ceiling which was coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978 to indicate a subtle and transparent barrier but strong enough to prevent the passage of women to higher hierarchical levels in the organizations in which they work (Carvalho Neto, Tanure, & Andrade, 2010). According to Lima, Carvalho Neto, Lima, Tanure and Versiani (2013), the glass ceiling is associated with a significant discriminatory process that takes the form of prejudice, in which women are forced to invest more, make more efforts, and have greater commitment than men at work, in addition to dealing with an imbalance between the public and private spheres. The authors found that executive women still undergo the process of subordinate insertion validated by masculine values, which create barriers to women's rise in senior management positions. But what about female executives who reached top-ranking positions? Can we claim they have surpassed the glass ceiling and no longer face difficulties? Based on the findings of this research, we identified that the female executives interviewed, despite having faced the

barriers associated with glass ceiling throughout their career, are not exempt from challenges. Evidence shows that the barriers faced from the moment they go beyond the glass ceiling are related to old age. For this reason, we call this phenomenon the age glass ceiling. The age glass ceiling refers, therefore, to the invisible barriers arising from aging, such as physical, social, and professional issues that can affect women's executive permanence in the held position.

The third contribution of this research is to show that, although the literature indicates benefits from experience and seniority, and women facing aging with more control, empowerment, freedom, and courage in their professional lives (Jyrkinen, 2014; Sabelis & Shilling, 2013), women face barriers to enjoy those possibilities due to what is called, in this study, symbolic social death. In this sense, aging is experienced negatively not only as a time of change in responsibilities of intense care, with adolescent children and elderly parents (Jyrkenen et al., 2017) and a decrease in income (Aaltio et al., 2014; Tretheway, 2001) but also as a phase of non-material losses, i.e., the interruption of a core aspect of their lives (work) which virtually cannot be separated from their personal lives. In other words, these women are not only worried about their health and body, menopause, and sexual disposition (Atkinson et al., 2015; Moore, 2009) but also afraid, above all, of the impossibility of performing certain social roles and having, as their only option, their professional role, which they also see threatened during the aging process. Moreover, this research showed that this moment is experienced as social losses: menopause and fertility loss — or empty nest syndrome if children had already left the home — the possibility of losing their jobs, and retirement. Aging is experienced through the expectation of those events which stand for the finitude of possibilities: being fertile, productive, a mother, and desired. When they check the balance of their decisions and choices, interviewees realize that they have abdicated from important aspects and that their chances will be reduced with aging. Even if these women have achieved their professional objectives by reaching high managerial positions and financial stability, they find themselves prevented from enjoying the experiences related to those events. Additionally, another paradox is clear: expecting to experience other aspects of being a woman, and finding it difficult to do so, they turn again to their professional life, where they already have a place. In this movement, professional aspects are even stronger. It is a deadlock almost without a way out because the professional aspect, which is also endangered, is the sole source of social recognition for these women. In this sense, professional death is even more frightening.

Our fourth contribution is showing that, although older women remain motivated and continue to work while facing the aging process (McKie & Jyrneken, 2017), for many reasons, such as maintaining interpersonal relationships, autonomy, flexibility, and interests outside work (Shacklock et al., 2009), they also do it to delay aging. For interviewees, to deal with symbolic physical, professional, and social deaths they build up ways of delaying the aging process. Taking care of their bodies, physical and mental health, aesthetic issues, and attempts to reduce aging signs are actions which can also be understood as a way of maintaining their work, of continuing to be seen as worthy women. Even if contradictory, since those actions collaborate with the stereotypes of women aging, maintaining physical and mental health also enable them to live longer. Moreover, developing new professional and social skills are efforts that allow them to keep their jobs and their high positions. Since work is essential for them (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012), keeping their jobs is a way of delaying aging. Their symbolic rebirth can be seen in the same way: by looking for a more balanced life, other sources of satisfaction, a new career, a sabbatical year, traveling, and leisure,

these women can set more ties and have more time for themselves. Moreover, those movements may also be legacies for generations of younger women on the same career.

## **Final remarks**

As women grow old in corporations, they fight against discrimination and prejudice regarding their physical appearance, and they still must confront the devaluation of their skills and knowledge as they did in the beginning of their careers. Moreover, it is only the marker of chronological age that seems to define these executives. The effects associated with aging appear to point at a loss of professional usefulness. For this reason, concealing one's age seems to be a reasonable way to fight against aging-related stigmas, one of the many strategies employed to silence these difficulties. In addition to physical signs, there is the idea of finitude, of time ending, of disease and death. It is a time of losses: fertility, children, menopause, parents' illness and death, dismissal, and demotion.

Delaying the aging process is a way of reacting to physical, social, and professional deaths. Women may simultaneously show the possibility for rebirth. Along the impossibility of professional advancement, aging awakens new intentions and behaviors, such as the desire to look after themselves more and enjoy their remaining years in a pleasurable way, leading women to concentrate their anxieties about their future plans into a single goal: the pursuit of a more balanced life.

This search for a more balanced life often comes from redefining their executive jobs or even ending their executive careers. From the data, it is evident that this desire is based on dissatisfaction with the pace of work, intense professional demands, and the high load of activities of a high-level position. There seems to be no compatibility between these women's needs, such as having more time for their families and for leisure, and the working conditions to which they are subjected. We can consider, then, that there is a "forced exit" of these women who have worked so hard to reach these positions. We claim, therefore, that there is a need to revisit the ways of working and organizational practices to allow older women to be able to work in organizations with better working conditions and quality of life. Gordon and Whelan (1998) have already warned that these women have significantly different needs than younger women and middle-aged men. Organizations which wish to retain these women should focus on changing human resource policies and practices, in addition to creating a supportive culture and effectively utilizing their talents and motivating the pursuit of achievements.

This study proposes concepts related to how women see their aging process and uncovers the dynamics and implications of aging for women. There seems to be no room to aging in corporations, even for women in leadership positions. Issues related to physical appearance or even age-related stigmas lead women to conceal their aging and to seek alternatives to prevent visible signs of aging at the workplace. For this reason, we identified the existence of an age glass ceiling, that is, an invisible barrier related to old age that creates losses and difficulties for female executives to maintain their positions as they get older. Thus, it can be said that, even if female executives have surpassed the glass ceiling in their professional trajectory, they still face challenges when they reach top management positions.

Despite the innumerable changes that have taken place in recent decades, the organizational space is still associated with the male gender, and ageism persists even for women who are in top-ranking executive positions. The situation is problematic if we consider the Brazilian context of rapid aging (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2018) and the scarcity of age management practices that could promote better working conditions for older professionals (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Tonelli et al., 2020). Another point is the pressure experienced by women in our country to keep their bodies attractive and young (Goldenberg, 2012), which also reflects on the way women present themselves in the organizational context. Skills and professional performance seem insufficient for these women to remain in their positions. Interviewees understand that it is also necessary for them to control their youthful appearance to prevent them being overlooked in the organization. Therefore, we can notice how prejudice regarding age and gender can have implications for the professional life of aging women.

Moreover, it is important to say that a limitation of this study is that interviewees were Caucasian, upper class women, an elite in both corporations and Brazil. The dimensions of race, ethnicity, and social class were absent from this study, and this remains a gap to be explored in the future. The centrality of work in these women's lives needs to be more deeply examined, especially because this issue is controversial in the literature. In the data analysis, women aged 40, 50, and 60 were treated equally, and specific cutoffs would be necessary for these different age groups. For future studies, comparative studies should be conducted with aging executive men to identify similarities and differences related to women's aging process.

Finally, racial, age, and gender equality is far from being a reality in Brazilian corporations. To address a broader discussion on gendered ageism is critical to expose the prejudices that pervade power structures in corporations. Although this research describes the experiences of women from the Global South, our findings could be useful for other cultures and countries.

## References

- Aaltio, I., Salminen, H., & Koponen, S. (2014). Ageing employees and human resource management – evidence of gender-sensitivity? *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 33*(2), 160-176. doi:10.1108/EDI-10-2011-0076
- Adomaitis, A. D. D., Raskin, R., & Saiki, D. (2017). Appearance discrimination: lookism and the cost to the American woman. *The Seneca Falls Dialogues Journal, 2*, 73-91.
- Amorim, W., Fischer, A. L., & Fevorini, F. B. (2019). Workers age 50 and over in the Brazilian labor market: is there ageism? *Revista de Gestão, 26*(2), 161-179. doi:10.1108/REG-09-2018-0092
- Atkinson, C., Ford, J., Harding, N., & Jones, F. (2015). The expectations and aspirations of a later-career professional woman. *Work, Employment and Society, 29*(6), 1019-1028. doi:10.1177/0950017015581987
- Barros, M. M. L. (2006). Testemunho de vida: um estudo antropológico de mulheres na velhice. In M. M. L. Barros (Org.), *Velhice ou terceira idade?* (4th ed.) (pp. 113-168). Rio de Janeiro, RJ: FGV.

- Bowman, D., McGann, M., Kimberley, H., & Biggs, S. (2016). Rusty, invisible and threatening: ageing, capital and employability. *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(3), 465-482. doi:10.1177/0950017016645732
- Calasanti, T. (2005). Ageism, gravity, and gender: experiences of aging bodies. *Generations*, 29(3), 8-12.
- Camarano, A. A. (Org.). (2014). *Novo regime demográfico: uma nova relação entre população e desenvolvimento?* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Ipea.
- Carvalho Neto, A. M., Tanure, B., & Andrade, J. (2010). Executivas: carreira, maternidade, amores e preconceito. *RAE Eletrônica*, 9(1), 1-23. doi:10.1590/S1676-56482010000100004
- Cepellos, V. M. (2021). Feminização do envelhecimento: um fenômeno multifacetado muito além dos números. *RAE Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 61(2), 1-7. doi:10.1590/s0034-759020210208
- Cepellos, V. M., & Tonelli, M. J. (2017). Envelhecimento profissional: percepções e práticas de gestão da idade profissional da idade. *Alcance*, 24(1), 4-21. doi:alcance.v24n1.p4-21
- Charmaz, K. (2009). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Chiu, W. C. K, Chan, A. W., Snape, E., & Redman, T. (2001). Age stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older workers: an east-west comparison. *Human Relations*, 54(5), 629-661. doi:10.1177/0018726701545004
- Clarke, L. H., & Griffin, M. (2008). Visible and invisible ageing: beauty work as a response to ageism. *Ageing and Society*, 28(5), 653-674. doi:10.1017/S0144686X07007003
- Cleveland, J. N., Huebner, L., & Hanscom, M. E. (2017). The intersection of age and gender issues in the workplace. In S. Profili, A. Sammarra, & L. Innocenti (Eds.), *Age diversity in the workplace: an organizational perspective* (pp. 119-137). Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. doi:10.2307/1229039
- Dennis, H., & Kathryn, T. (2007). Ageism in the workplace. *Generations*, 31(1), 84-89.
- Duncan, C., & Loretto, W. (2004). Never the right age? gender and age-based discrimination in employment. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(1), 95-115. doi:10.1111/J.1468-0432.2004.00222
- Fineman, S. (2011). *Organizing age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ford, J., Atkinson, C., Harding, N., & Collinson, D. (2020). 'You just had to get on with it': exploring the persistence of gender inequality through women's career histories. *Work, Employment and Society*, 35(1), 78-96. doi:10.1177/0950017020910354
- Gersick, C. J., & Kram, K. (2002). High-achieving women at midlife: an exploratory study. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(2), 104-127. doi:10.1177/10592602011002005

- Giatti, L., & Barreto, S. M. (2003). Saúde, trabalho e envelhecimento no Brasil. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 19(3), 759-771. doi:10.1590/S0102-311X2003000300008
- Goldenberg, M. (2011). Corpo, envelhecimento e felicidade na cultura brasileira. *Contemporânea*, 9(2), 77-85. doi:10.12957/contemporanea.2011.2143
- Goldenberg, M. (2012). Mulheres e envelhecimento na cultura brasileira. *Caderno Espaço Feminino*, 25(2), 46-56.
- Gordon, J. R., & Whelan, K. S. (1998). Successful professional women in midlife: how organizations can more effectively understand and respond to the challenges. *Academy of Management Executive*, 12(1), 8-27.
- Granleese, J., & Sayer, G. (2006). Gendered ageism and “lookism”: a triple jeopardy for female academics. *Women in Management Review*, 21(6), 500-517. doi:10.1108/09649420610683480
- Halford, S., Kukarenko, N., Lotherington, A. T., & Obstfelder, A. (2015). Technical change and the un/troubling of gendered ageing in healthcare. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(5), 495-509. doi: 10.1111/Gwao.12087
- Hanashiro, D. M. M., Pereira, M. F. M. W. M. (2020). O etarismo no local de trabalho: evidências de práticas de “saneamento” de trabalhadores mais velhos. *Gestão Organizacional*, 13(2), 188-206. doi:10.22277/rgo.v13i2.5032
- Handy, J., & Davy, D. (2007). Gendered ageism: older women’s experiences of employment agency practices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 45(1), 85-99. doi:10.1177/1038411107073606
- Harding, N., Ford, J., & Fotaki, M. (2013). Is the 'F'-word still dirty? a past, present and future of/for feminist and gender studies in organization. *Organization*, 20(1), 51-65. doi:10.1177/1350508412460993
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2018, July 25<sup>th</sup>). Projeção da população 2018: número de habitantes do país deve parar de crescer em 2047. *Agência IBGE Notícias*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pKWoos>
- Isopahkala-Bouret, U. (2017). “It’s a great benefit to have gray hair!”: the intersection of gender, aging, and visibility in midlife professional women’s narratives. *Journal Of Women and Aging*, 29(3), 267-277. doi:10.1080/08952841.2016.1142773
- Jyrkinen, M. (2014). Women managers, careers and gendered ageism. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 30(2), 175-185. doi:10.1016/j.scaman.2013.07.002
- Jyrkinen, M., & McKie, L. (2012). Gender, age and ageism: experiences of women managers in Finland and Scotland. *Work, Employment and Society*, 26(1), 61-77. doi:10.1177/0950017011426313
- Jyrkinen, M., Niemistö, C., & Hearn, J. (2017). Career, care, and time: female top managers in the intersections of age, gender, and work/family. In I. Aaltio, A. J. Mills, & J. H. Mills (Eds.), *Ageing, organizations and management: constructive discourses and critical perspectives* (pp. 229-251). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Krekula, C., Nikander, P., & Wilińska, M. (2018). Multiple marginalizations based on age: gendered ageism and beyond. In L. Ayalon, & C. Tesch-Römer (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives on ageism* (pp. 33-50). Cham: Springer.
- Lima, G. S., Carvalho Neto, A., Lima, M. S., Tanure, B., & Versiani, F. (2013). *O teto de vidro das executivas brasileiras*. *Pretexto*, 14(4), 65-80. doi:10.21714/pretexto.v14i4.1922
- Loretto, W., & Vickerstaff, S. (2015). Gender, age and flexible working in later life. *Work, Employment and Society*, 29(2), 233-249. doi:10.1177/0950017014545267
- Lotherington, A., Obstfelder, A., & Halford, S. (2017). No place for old women: a critical inquiry into age in later working life. *Ageing and Society*, 37(6), 1156-1178. doi:10.1017/S0144686X16000064
- McGann, M., Ong, R., Bowman, D., Duncan, A., Kimberley, H., & Biggs, S. (2016). Gendered ageism in Australia: changing perceptions of age discrimination among older men and women. *Economic Papers*, 35(4), 375-388. doi:10.1111/1759-3441.12155
- McKie, L., & Jyrkinen, M. (2017). MyManagement: women managers in gendered and sexualised workplaces. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 32(2), 98-110. doi:10.1108/GM-04-2016-0091
- Minerva, F. (2017). Lookism. *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 1-7. doi:10.1002/9781444367072.wbiee838
- Moore, S. (2009). 'No matter what I did I would still end up in the same position': age as a factor defining older women's experience of labour market participation. *Work, Employment and Society*, 23(4), 655-671. doi:10.1177/0950017009344871
- Mori, M. E., & Coelho, V. L. D. (2004). Mulheres de corpo e alma: aspectos biopsicossociais da meia-idade feminina. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*, 17(2), 177-187. doi:10.1590/S0102-79722004000200006
- Nelson, T. D. (2005). Ageism: prejudice against our feared future self. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(2), 207-221. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00402.x
- Pritchard, K., & Whiting, R. (2015). Taking stock: a visual analysis of gendered ageing. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(5), 510-528. doi:10.1111/gwao.12090
- Riach, K., & Kelly, S. (2013). The need for fresh blood: understanding organizational age inequality through a vampiric lens. *Organization*, 22(3), 287-305. doi:10.1177/1350508413508999
- Riach, K., Loretto, W., & Krekula, C. (2015). Gendered ageing in the new economy: introduction to special issue. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(5), 437-444. doi:10.1111/gwao.12108
- Roscigno, V. J., Mong, S., Byron, R., & Tester, G. (2007). Age discrimination, social closure and employment. *Social Forces*, 86(1), 313-334. doi:10.1353/sof.2007.0109
- Rupp, D. E., Vodanovich, S. J., & Credé, M. (2006). Age bias in the workplace: the impact of ageism and causal attributions. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(6), 1337-1364. doi:10.1111/j.0021-9029.2006.00062.x
- Sabelis, I., & Schilling, E. (2013). Editorial: frayed careers: exploring rhythms of working lives.

*Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(2), 127-132. doi:10.1111/gwao.12020

- Schilling, E. (2015). 'Success is satisfaction with what you have'? biographical work-life balance of older female employees in public administration. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 22(5), 474-494. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12097
- Shacklock, K., Brunetto, Y., & Nelson, S. (2009). The different variables that affect older males' and females' intentions to continue working. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 47(1), 79-101. doi:10.1177/1038411108099291
- Silva, R. A., & Helal, D. H. (2019). Ageismo nas organizações: questões para debate. *Revista de Administração IMED*, 9(1), 187-197. doi:10.18256/2237-7956.2019.v9i1.3167
- Spedale, S., Coupland, C., & Tempest, S. (2014). Gendered ageism and organizational routines at work: the case of day-parting in television broadcasting. *Organization Studies*, 35(11), 1585-1604. doi:10.1177/0170840614550733
- Still, L., & Timms, W. (1998). Career barriers and the older woman manager. *Women in Management Review*, 13(4), 143-155. doi:10.1108/09649429810219754
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: what grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642. doi:10.5465/amj.2006.22083020
- Tonelli, M. J., Pereira, J., Cepellos, V., & Lins, J. (2020). Ageing in organizations: a view of HR professionals on the positioning of mature managers and adoption of age management practices. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 55(2), 127-142. doi:10.1108/RAUSP-08-2018-0062
- Tretheway, A. (2001). Reproducing and resisting the master narrative of decline: midlife professional women's experiences of aging. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(2), 183-226. doi:10.1177/0893318901152002
- Turek, K., & Henkens, K. (2019). How skill requirements affect the likelihood of recruitment of older workers in Poland: the indirect role of age stereotypes. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(4), 550-570. doi:10.1177/0950017019847943
- Walker, H., Grant, D., Meadows, M., & Cook, I. (2007). Women's experiences and perceptions of age discrimination in employment: implications for research and policy. *Social Policy and Society*, 6(1), 37-48. doi:10.1017/S1474746406003320
- Warhurst, C., Van den Broek, D., Hall, R., & Nickson, D. (2009). Lookism: the new frontier of employment discrimination? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 51(1), 131-136. doi:10.1177/0022185608096808
- Wood, G., Wilkinson, A., & Harcourt, M. (2008). Age discrimination and working life: perspectives and contestations – a review of the contemporary literature. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 10(4), 425-442. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2008.00236.x

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. Text in justified alignment.

## Notes

1. We cannot make our dataset available as this paper is based on interviews containing information which could easily identify our interviewees.

## Authorship

### Vanessa Martines Cepellos

Lecturer of the graduate program in Management for Competitiveness at the São Paulo School of Business Administration of Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV-EAESP). She has a PhD in Business Administration from FGV-EAESP.

E-mail: [vanessa.cepellos@fgv.br](mailto:vanessa.cepellos@fgv.br)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6707-9751>

### Maria José Tonelli

Psychologist with a PhD in Social Psychology from Pontifical Catholic University in São Paulo (PUC-SP). Full professor at the São Paulo School of Business Administration at Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV-EAESP).

Email: [maria.jose.tonelli@fgv.br](mailto:maria.jose.tonelli@fgv.br)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6585-1493>

## Conflict of interests

The authors have stated that there are no conflicts of interest.

## Authors' contributions

**First author:** conceptualization (lead), data curation (lead), formal analysis (equal), funding acquisition (equal), investigation (lead), methodology (equal), project administration (supporting), resources (equal), supervision (supporting), validation (equal), visualization (equal), writing-original draft (lead), writing-review & editing (supporting).

**Second author:** conceptualization (supporting), data curation (supporting), formal analysis (equal), funding acquisition (equal), investigation (supporting), methodology (equal), project administration (lead), resources (equal), supervision (lead), validation (equal), visualization (equal), writing-original draft (supporting), writing-review & editing (lead).

## Plagiarism check

O&S submit all documents approved for publication to the plagiarism check, using specific tools.

## Data availability

O&S encourages data sharing. However, in compliance with ethical principles, it does not demand the disclosure of any means of identifying research participants, preserving fully their privacy. The practice of open data seeks to ensure the transparency of the research results, without requiring the identity of research participants.

*The O&S is signatory to DORA (The Declaration on Research Assessment) and to COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics).*



*Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0 Internacional*