

Lucy, Angela, Maureen, Jane, and Katharine: Perceptions of Actresses as They Age

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Abstract

We showed students at a university movie clips from early, middle, and late in the careers of Katharine Hepburn, Jane Fonda, Lucille Ball, Maureen O'Hara, and Angela Lansbury. The study participants assigned feminine and masculine traits to the characters and rated their likeability and attractiveness. The data showed that the participants liked the actresses better and saw them as more feminine later in their careers than in the early years of their careers. These results contradict Hollywood stereotypes about the appropriate movie roles for women.

Key words: film studies, women's studies, Hollywood stereotypes, women and aging

Introduction

"They don't write scripts for old ladies like me."
 --Maureen O'Hara (Thomas, 2004)

The media often notes that male actors seem to have much longer careers than female actors. Relatively few quality roles in movies or television are available for women in later stages of their careers, while men continue to be offered leading roles in both media throughout their careers, even into their seventies, as in the case of Sean Connery. General discussions of women in film and television suggest that young women tend to play marginalized roles, typically roles related to their sexual attractiveness or relationship to a male character. Thus, to the extent that women are perceived as declining in sexual attractiveness with age, they may be excluded from these roles in television and film at later stages of their careers.

Some studies have examined women in nontraditional roles in the media, particularly in television. For example, Oppenheimer, Adams-Price, Goodman, Codling, and Coker (2003) found that college-aged audiences were neither enthusiastic about nor hostile towards women in powerful roles on television. However, college-aged audiences did not perceive actresses in powerful roles as particularly attractive or particularly likable. It is possible that the media avoid depicting women in nontraditional roles because media producers believe that audiences will not be interested in viewing women in such roles.

Research on aging and gender shows that a broader range of images exists in the real world than in the "reel world." In reality, older women may be stereotyped as kind or cruel, maternal or unaffectionate, or wise or foolish (Sherman, 1997). However, in children's films and television shows, older women are particularly likely to play negative roles. Theories on women and aging may be used to explain the image or archetype of the "cruel" older woman. One common theory has long suggested that women become more androgynous as they get older; that is, in addition to their feminine "communal" characteristics, they take on traditionally

masculine "agentic" characteristics such as decisiveness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness, i.e., "bitchiness" (e.g. Gutmann, 1994, 1985).

It is often said that women are perceived in our culture as old at an earlier age than men. Montepare and Lachman (1989) contend that women become concerned about aging at a much earlier age than men do. Giesen (1989) notes that married women believed attractiveness ended by the time a woman entered her middle 30s. Rodeheaver (1991) discusses "work force progeria," which is related to the belief of men that women should look good and not try to take charge. Gutmann (1994, 1985) asserts that women may be perceived as less attractive, more masculine, and less likable as they age.

The purpose of this study was to examine how audience perceptions of actresses changed at different stages of their careers. Specifically, we were interested in the perceived attractiveness, likability, femininity, and masculinity of the actresses. As stated below, there are theoretical reasons to believe these characteristics may change as an actress's career progresses.

Most research on women, aging, and the media focuses on two elements: a characterization of the roles assigned to older women or an inventory of the number of roles for older women. The typical roles for older women are stereotypically either nurturing grandmothers comfortable with their role or the sadistic bitch (Meehan, 1983; Lindsey, 2003; Kaplan, 2000; M. Haskell, 1987; Doane, 1987). Regardless of the role, the older woman is asexual (Douglas, 1994, p. 28). In the words of Kjaersgaard (2005), "In essence, it is apparent that older women's roles on television still tend to be negatively stereotyped and do not provide diverse and positive images of aging" (p. 204).

A few studies examined the lack of roles in television for older women. Northcott (1975) found that older female roles composed only 1.5% of all female characters in the 1970s. Signorielli and Bacue's (1999) longitudinal look at television discovered that women over 65 received only 3% of all roles. Most women (60%) played settled adults (p. 557). In looking at data through Fall 2001, Signorelli (2002) indicated no changes in the presentation of women and aging. McCormick (2001) contended that Hollywood has a "wrinkled ceiling" for women but not for men (p. 46), a concept that is similar to Rodeheaver's concept of work force progeria (See also Bazzinni, McIntosh, Smith, Cook & Harris, 1997). Sean Connery, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, Warren Beatty, Robert Redford, Harrison Ford, and Michael Douglas moved into their 50s and retained the romantic lead, often with women half their age, reported McCormick. Markson and Taylor (1993) reported only 27% of the actresses winning Academy Awards were over 39 compared to 67% of the male winners (p. 161).

D. Haskell (1979) concluded that the women's movement changed the jobs held by television women, but not the script focus on romance. Markson (1997) concurs: She suggests that few older female characters are presented as professional women, and those who are, are seen as harming themselves or their families with their focus on their careers. Signorielli (1982) claims most scripts emphasize home, family, marriage, or romance for women, meaning most of the roles are for women young enough to be romantically attractive to the male leads and the audience (p. 594). McNeil (1975) reported that 74% of female roles on television fit into the family-romantic categories (p. 266). Thus, the emphasis on relationship roles keeps women confined to the "inner world" of the family, while men deal with the more important concerns of business and politics, argued Van Zoonen (1994, pp. 93-94).

There is some indication that television scripts are including more women over 40 in prominent roles (Lindsey, 2003). Kim Cattrall exploded over-40 stereotypes on *Sex and The City*. Although in the role of grandmother, Tyne Daly remained an active, professional woman on *Judging Amy*. Vanessa Redgrave was a regular on *Nip/Tuck* until 2005. Joely Richardson (Vanessa's daughter on the show and in real life) remained through the 2006 season and the age of 41. The 2005 season included new reoccurring roles for Sally Struthers on *Gilmore Girls* and

Lauren Holly on *NCIS*. The 2006 and 2007 seasons had several roles for women over 40, including Glenn Close (*The Shield* and *Damages*), Ellen Barkin (*Ocean's Thirteen*), Marg Helgenberger (*CSI*). Demi Moore appeared in five major films or television shows.

"Fed up with stories of AARP eligibles walking off in the sunset with 25-year-old hapless cuties," screenwriter Nancy Myers set out to prove that there was an audience for romantic comedies starring older actresses (Valby, 2004, p. 48). *Something's Gotta Give* was released in late 2003, and grossed over \$119 million by February 2004 ("Box Office," 2004, p. 77). It also earned Diane Keaton, 58, her fourth Oscar nomination. However, the Lifetime Channel accepted a series (*Any Day Now*) about two women in their 40s and revised the story so that the women were in their 30s to better fit the advertising demographics of the channel (Lotz, 2004, p. 33). At age 38, Debra Messing began a series on USA network called *The Starter Wife*. Teri Hatcher, Felicity Huffman, Marcia Cross, Nicollette Sheridan are all over 40 and star in *Desperate Housewives*.

The purpose of this study was to test audience perceptions of actresses as they age. Does the audience perceive women as being less attractive, more masculine, and less likable at different stages in their careers? In preparing our hypotheses, we operated from basic Hollywood assumptions: We predicted that the audience would find the actresses most attractive, most feminine, and most likable when they portrayed a young person. We expected the respondents to find the actresses more masculine, less attractive, and less likable in the later stages of their careers. These stereotypes are so prevalent that we expected males and females to respond to the actresses in similar ways. Further, we expected no interaction for race.

H1: Males and females would find the actresses most attractive, most feminine, and most likable in their earliest films.

H2: Males and females would find the actresses least attractive, most masculine, and least likable in their latest films.

H3: Race would play no role in how the actresses were perceived.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were undergraduates at a land-grant university in the South. The school had an enrollment of approximately 16,000 with about 18% of the students being African-American. Of the 76 participants in this study, 22 were Caucasian males, 4 were African-American males, 19 were African-American females, and 31 were Caucasian females.

Questionnaires

This questionnaire employed measures of masculinity and femininity that are related to measures used in previous studies, but that were altered for this study. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) has separate scales for masculinity and femininity. The BSRI is commonly used as a self-assessment tool of an individual's masculine or feminine traits. The BSRI provides adjectives already established in the literature as valid cultural descriptors of masculinity and femininity. Usually subjects rate themselves (1 to 7) on trait adjectives associated with positive aspects of masculinity and femininity. However, we altered the BSRI for this study because filling it out 15 times would be too time consuming. We used the adjectives from the inventory to create a checklist format, and asked our subjects to mark the adjectives that described each character in the film clip the participants viewed. Our contention is a person's self-concept of sex roles are the basis on which how that person evaluates the appropriateness of the sex roles of other people, a position supported by the research of Oswald and Lindstedt (2006).

In addition to use of the BRSI, this questionnaire asked participants to rate the actresses for both likability and attractiveness on a 4-point scale, with 4 representing the greatest likability

or attractiveness, and 1 representing the least likability or attractiveness. Our measure of masculinity was the number of masculine adjectives marked; our measure of femininity was the number of feminine adjectives marked.

Procedure

Fifteen clips were included in the study, so that each of the five actresses appeared three times. The clips were randomly edited onto a single videotape; all participants saw the clips in the same sequence. The participants signed a consent form, which was collected and stored separately from the answer sheets. Next, they filled out demographic information and were read written instructions before they began the questionnaire. The respondents were told they were evaluating how college students reacted to film actresses.

As the questionnaire portion began, each movie clip was identified by title and actress. We assumed many of the participants would recognize the actress and/or the film, and we did not want them to focus on those factors. After viewing each clip, the students filled out two sections on the questionnaire. On the first portion, students marked the listed trait adjectives from the BSRI which they believed described the character. On the second portion, the participants were asked to rate the character for likability and attractiveness. When each student had completed the questionnaire, the next clip was introduced and the procedure repeated. Viewing 15 clips and filling out the questionnaire for each clip took about 45 minutes.

Our study selected clips from five well-known actresses at three different points in their careers: when they played the romantic lead (the actress's youngest role), when they played the caregiver, and when they played an older woman (the actress's oldest role). College students viewed all 15 clips in random order, rating the characters shown for likability and attractiveness.

To examine how audiences perceived the characters played by the actresses in different stages of their careers, we needed to find clips of the actresses that spanned their 30-year careers. For the clip to be considered, each actress needed to be the dominant person in the scene so the audience's attention would be focused on her. However, we excluded scenes of the actresses with overt sexuality or violence.

The five actresses included in the study were Lucille Ball, Jane Fonda, Katharine Hepburn, Angela Lansbury, and Maureen O'Hara. Each actress selected met two criteria: 1. She had a long movie career, providing several clips to choose from; 2. She portrayed a young woman, a middle-aged woman, and a late middle-aged or older woman in her career. The movie clips ran between 1:15 and 1:45 minutes--long enough to allow the audience time to assess the character.

The following is a list of the actresses and the films in career order from which their clips were chosen. Lucille Ball appeared in *The Long, Long Trailer* (1954), *Yours, Mine and Ours* (1968), and *Mame* (1974). Jane Fonda appeared in *Cat Ballou* (1966), *On Golden Pond* (1981), and *The Morning After* (1986). For Katharine Hepburn, we selected clips from *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *African Queen* (1951), and *On Golden Pond* (1981). Angela Lansbury performed in *The Court Jester* (1956), *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971), and *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris* (1992). Maureen O'Hara starred in *Redhead From Wyoming* (1953), *The Parent Trap* (1961), and *The Christmas Box* (1995).

There was some correspondence between the real age of the actresses and the roles they played, although the actresses were a little older than the characters they played in their earliest clips. In the first clips, the actresses portrayed characters in their early 20s. The second clips, they played women ranging from late 30s to 40s. Finally, we found clips of the actresses playing characters over 50.

Each set of three clips presents the actresses at different stages in their careers. Jane Fonda, for example, plays a naïve girl in *Cat Ballou*, an attractive woman with a new husband in *On Golden Pond*, and a washed up, former beauty dealing with the realities of aging in *The*

Morning After. Such clips allowed us to measure how the participants perceived Jane Fonda, and the other actresses, in a variety of roles reflecting different ages and age-based archetypes.

Measures

The data were analyzed using repeated measures analyses of variance with two between-subject factors (sex and race), and two within-subject factors (actress and career stage). The dependent measures examined were number of masculine adjectives marked, number of feminine adjectives marked, likability ratings, and attractiveness ratings. The level of significance chosen for this study was $\alpha = .01$.

Results

For femininity, there was a main effect for age of actress, $F(2,71) = 157.35, p < .001$. Overall, the participants marked a mean of 2.35 Bem feminine characteristics when the actresses were playing young women in their early 20s. The mean number of feminine items marked was 5.60 when the actresses were playing middle-aged roles. The participants marked a mean of 5.23 feminine characteristics when the actresses portrayed older women.

There was also a main effect on masculinity for age of actress $F(2,70) = 18.51, p < .001$. In comparison, the mean score for masculine characteristics was at a high of 5.91 when the actresses played young characters and dropped to 4.69 and 4.54 as their careers progressed. The participants marked many more masculine characteristics than feminine characteristics when the actresses' roles were as young women; however, more feminine than masculine characteristics were selected when the actresses played older characters. There were no effects for race and there were no significant interactions. The overall mean number of Bem characteristics marked remained consistent for all of the clips.

Table I

Means of feminine traits assigned to characters

	Early career	Middle Career	Late Career
Males n=26	2.63 std. .35	6.12 std. .61	5.55 std. .48
Females n=50	2.08 std. .19	5.09 std. .33	4.92 std. .26
Af Am n=23	2.42 std. .35	5.62 std. .62	5.18 std. .49
Caucasians n=53	2.29 std. .18	5.59 std. .31	5.29 std. .25
Totals n=76	2.35 std. .20	5.60 std. .35	5.23 std. .28

Table II

Number of masculine traits assigned to characters

	Early career	Middle Career	Late Career
Males n=26	6.21 std. .57	4.9 std. .58	4.64 std. .70
Females	5.62	4.40	4.45

n=49	std. .31	std. .32	.38
Af Am n=22	5.81 .58	4.82 .59	4.30 .71
Caucasians n=53	6.02 .29	4.55 .30	4.79 .36
Totals n=75	5.91 std. .32	4.69 std. .33	4.54 std. .40

A similar mean effect appeared for likability, $F(2,69) = 29.44, p < .001$. On a 4-point scale, the mean for actresses playing young women was 3.13, climbing to 3.55 when the actresses played older roles. In their oldest roles, the actresses received a mean rating of 3.24.

Table III

Perceived likability of characters

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Males n=24	3.21 std. .11	3.48 std. .08	3.24 std. .08
Females n=50	3.04 std. .06	3.62 std. .05	3.25 std. .04
Af Am n=23	3.20 std. .11	3.48 std. .08	3.25 std. .08
Caucasians n=51	3.06 std. .06	3.61 std. .04	3.24 std. .04
Totals n=74	3.13 std. .06	3.55 std. .05	3.24 std. .05

These results contradict the Hollywood assumptions we have discussed. The participants liked the actresses and found them more feminine as they played older roles than when they were cast as younger characters. Consistent with our hypothesis and Hollywood stereotypes, participants perceived the actresses most attractive when playing young roles, $F(2,69) = 22.60, p < .001$. The means were 3.39 on a 4-point scale when the actresses played young characters, 3.30 when they moved into middle-aged roles, and 2.98 when they portrayed older women.

Table IV

Perceived attractiveness of characters

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Males n=24	3.32 std. .12	3.19 std. .10	2.89 std. .12
Females n=50	3.46 std. .06	3.41 std. .05	3.07 std. .06

Af Am n=23	3.28 std. .12	3.25 std. .10	3.05 std. .12
Caucasians n=51	3.49 std. .06	3.35 std. .05	2.91 std. .06
Totals n=74	3.39 std. .07	3.30 std. .06	2.98 std. .07

No significant effects for gender occurred in assigning masculine or feminine traits to the actresses, $F(1,171) = .49$, n.s., for masculinity and $F(1,72) = 2.08$, n.s., for femininity. There also was no interaction between gender of the viewer and character age, $F(2,70) = .58$, n.s. for masculinity and $F(2,71) = .70$, n.s., for femininity. For femininity when the actresses were young, females marked a mean of 2.08 items; the male mean was 2.63. When the actresses played middle-aged roles, the mean number of feminine traits checked by females was 5.09; males checked 6.12. The mean number of feminine traits marked by females was 4.92 when the actresses played older roles; the male means was 5.55. The trend was clear; both males and females marked the fewest feminine traits when the actresses were playing young roles and the most feminine traits when the actresses played middle-aged roles. As their characters aged, both sexes marked more feminine traits.

Males marked a mean of 6.21 masculine traits for young characters, with that number declining to 4.98 for middle-aged roles, and 4.64 for older roles. The mean number of masculine traits marked by females was highest for young characters (5.62), dropping to 4.40 (middle-aged) and 4.45 (older). Both males and females assigned more masculine characteristics to the actresses in their youngest roles than in their older characters.

Young characters were rated lower than older characters on likability $F(2,69) = 29.44$, $p < .001$. No significant effects for sex occurred for likability. Males liked the actresses the least when they played the youngest characters (3.21). Males liked them more as they aged (3.48 middle-aged and 3.24 oldest roles). Female responses followed the same pattern: 3.04 (young roles), 3.62 (middle-aged roles), 3.25 (older roles). No significant effects for sex occurred for attractiveness, $F(1,70) = 3.37$, $p = .07$. Both men and women found the actresses most attractive in young roles (males 3.32, females 3.46) and least attractive in their oldest roles (males 2.89, females 3.07).

When the results were factored by race, the overall trends remained the same. On attractiveness, the mean score for Caucasian was 3.49 (young roles), 3.35 (middle-aged roles), 2.91 (older roles); the mean score for African-American was 3.28, 3.25, and 3.05, respectively. Regardless of race, the participants liked the actresses in their youngest roles the least (African-Americans 3.20, Caucasians 3.06). For the actresses in the middle of their careers, the mean was 3.48 for African-Americans, and 3.61 for Caucasians. The means for actresses in their oldest roles were 3.25 for African-Americans and 3.24 for Caucasians. Caucasians selected a mean of 6.02 masculine traits when the actresses played young roles compared to 5.81 for African-Americans. African-Americans marked a mean of 4.82 masculine traits when the actresses were middle-aged compared to 4.55 for Caucasians. When the actresses played older women, African-Americans assigned a mean of 4.30 masculine traits to the actresses, and Caucasians assigned a mean of 4.79. For African-Americans, the means for feminine traits were 2.42 (young roles), 5.62 (middle-aged roles), and 5.18 (older roles). Caucasian means were 2.29 (young roles), 5.59 (middle-aged), and 5.29 (older roles).

Hypotheses/Results

These results indicate that H1 was only partially correct; actresses were considered most attractive in their youngest roles. However, they were least likable and demonstrated the fewest feminine traits in these roles. H2 was also only partially correct. The participants did find the actresses the least attractive in their oldest roles. However, both men and women perceived the

actresses the most masculine in their earliest films. The participants also liked the actresses more as their careers progressed. H3 was accepted as stated; race played no role in these results.

Results by actresses

There were many interactions when we looked at the actresses individually by age of the actress and by race and gender of the audience. Below, our report includes the means, with post hoc analyses of interesting findings.

Katharine Hepburn

Table V

Means for Katharine Hepburn

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Likability n=74	2.95 std. .12	3.32 std. .12	3.61 std. .07
Attractiveness n=74	3.37 std. .11	2.92 std. .13	2.69 std. .14
Masculinity n=74	7.36 std. .53	7.45 std. .52	3.38 std. .46
Femininity n=74	.94 std. .21	1.43 std. .27	8.80 std. .42

The film career of Katharine Hepburn spanned 62 years beginning with her first film in 1932 and ending with her last film in 1994. The scenes that were selected for this study showed Hepburn in a variety of roles. The scenes were taken from *The Philadelphia Story (1940)*, *African Queen (1951)*, and *On Golden Pond (1981)*.

In *The Philadelphia Story*, Hepburn, 33, plays Tracy Lord alongside Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart in a romantic comedy. In this scene, ex-husband Dexter (Grant) suggests that Tracy, a spoiled heiress, allow the media full coverage of her forthcoming wedding as an option to prevent her father's fling with a dancer from becoming front page news in the society section.

Hepburn is seen in a very different light in *African Queen*, which is set in Africa during World War I. Hepburn plays a Christian missionary, Rose Sayer, who is given the right of passage along a dangerous African river by a drunken riverboat captain, Charlie Allnut (Humphrey Bogart). In the scene viewed by the participants Rose expresses admiration for Charlie's navigation skills. Charlie, however, fails to be flattered in such a perilous situation.

The final Hepburn scene that the participants viewed was from *On Golden Pond*, which is the story of a dysfunctional family who spends a summer at their lake-side cottage. Ethel Thayer (Hepburn) is the wife of Norman Thayer (Henry Fonda), a retired English professor. Their estranged daughter, Chelsea Thayer (Jane Fonda) shows up at the cabin. The film also stars Doug McKeon who plays Billy Ray, the son of Chelsea's boyfriend. In this scene, Ethel is outside talking to Billy who is upset because Norman yelled at him. Ethel, in a mothering role, is consoling him.

The overall perception of Hepburn does not particularly coincide with the basic Hollywood assumptions of women being less attractive, more masculine, and less likeable as they age. The participants of this study held a more favorable view of Hepburn later in her career (a mean of 3.61) than they did during the beginning (a mean of 2.95) and middle (a mean of 3.32). These findings do not validate the assumption that audiences view actresses as less likable later in their

careers. In terms of attractiveness, the study showed that the audience considered Hepburn to be more attractive early in her career (a mean of 3.37) and less attractive in the middle (a mean of 2.92) and later in her career (a mean of 2.69). In this case, there is no commonality between likability and attractiveness. The number of adjectives that the audience used to indicate their perceptions of Hepburn's masculinity or femininity does not correspond with the assumption that aging female actresses are viewed as more masculine. Hepburn was viewed to be relatively masculine early in her career (a mean of 7.36) and in the middle of her career (7.45). Adjectives decreased to 3.38 for the scene that showed her latest in her career. This may be due to the audience reacting to the role portrayed by Hepburn in the selected scene rather than to her age. In terms of femininity, there was a consistent progression, with the participants marking Hepburn to be less feminine in her early career (0.94) and during the middle of her career (1.43) than later in her career (8.80).

Angela Lansbury

Table VI

Means for Angela Lansbury

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Likability n=74	2.48 std. .14	3.44 std. .10	3.46 std. .11
Attractiveness n=74	2.64 std. .15	2.81 std. .13	2.60 std. .14
Masculinity n=74	6.44 std. .43	4.65 std. .46	2.16 std. .45
Femininity n=74	1.32 std. .22	7.03 std. .48	7.53 std. .54

Angela Lansbury was 31 and already an Oscar nominee when she appeared in *The Court Jester*. Fifteen years later she made *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*; at the age of 67 she starred in *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*. Due to their cohort, most participants in the study would have known Lansbury best from her long-playing television role in *Murder, She Wrote*.

In *The Court Jester*, Lansbury plays Princess Gwendolyn, the love interest. In the scene used, the Princess stands in her bedroom window to observe Hubert Hawkins, the Court Jester (Danny Kaye), coming towards the castle. Her maid promises Lansbury that Hubert soon will be in love with the princess. Dressed in a green gown, the Princess dominates the dialogue and the visuals. She appears to be in her early 20s.

In *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, Eglantine Price (Lansbury) uses her magical powers to help fight World War II. Her magic entertains the three children left in her care during the war. In the rather maternal scene viewed, Eglantine is preparing the bed to fly her and the children to London.

In *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*, Ada Harris (Lansbury) is a working class woman in her 60s who goes to Paris to buy a designer gown, much to the chagrin of the elites of French society. In the scene shown, Ada is having a friendly, but not romantic, lunch with Marquis Hippolite (Omar Shariff). Ada provides wise counsel to help the aristocratic Hippolite repair his relationship with his daughter.

The participants liked Lansbury much more in the scenes from the middle of her career (*Bedknobs and Broomsticks* 3.44) and later in her career (*Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*, 3.46) than in her earliest role (*The Court Jester*, 2.48). The participants did not find her particularly more

attractive at 31 (2.64) than at 67 (2.60). In fact, they found her most attractive in *Bedknobs* (2.81). The number of masculine and feminine traits marked reflects the over all trend of the study. As the love interest in *The Court Jester*, Lansbury received a mean of 1.32 feminine marks from the participants (her lowest) and a 6.44 masculine mean (her highest). As Lansbury aged, the participants perceived her considerably more feminine in the scenes selected (7.03 in *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* and 7.53 in *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*) and less masculine (4.65 and 2.16 respectfully) than when she was 31.

In this study, the audience's perception of Lansbury changed slightly, regardless of where she was in her career, except for the exceptionally low feminine marks from *The Court Jester*. As Roisman-Cooper (1998) points out in a biographical article, Lansbury received most of her acclaim as a character actress. She received three Oscar nominations, garnered four Tony awards, and had twelve Emmy nominations. In *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* and *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*, Lansbury played character roles, meaning the personality that she presented to the audience was more important than appearance or sexuality. In contrast, Lansbury rarely played the love interest in her career as she did in *The Court Jester*. The scene included in the study emphasized Lansbury's appearance over character. Lansbury's means in this study may reflect the participants' preference for Lansbury as a character actress instead of as a romantic lead.

Maureen O'Hara

Table VII

Means for Maureen O'Hara

Maureen O'Hara	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Likability n=74	3.10 std. .11	3.86 std. .06	3.03 std. .12
Attractiveness n=74	3.63 std. .08	3.80 std. .07	2.81 std. .11
Masculinity n=74	8.58 std. .56	1.83 std. .44	5.97 std. .53
Femininity n=74	1.70 std. .15	8.47 std. .55	3.41 std. .43

Maureen O'Hara, who began acting for films in her early 20s, was 33 in *Redhead from Wyoming*, 41 in *Parent Trap*, and 75 in the *Christmas Box*. Lewis (1990) points out that O'Hara's main roles in movies were to allow the male character to dominate the scene. However, in *Redhead from Wyoming* Kate Maxwell (O'Hara) was the dominant character instead of a support for the male hero. Kate relies upon her feminine wiles to manipulate one cowboy in the scene from *Redhead from Wyoming*.

Parent Trap casts O'Hara as Maggie McKendrick, the divorced mother of teen-aged twin daughters. In the scene, Maggie has supper with ex-husband Mitch Evers (Brian Keith) as the twins try to rekindle their love. The film presents the impression that Maggie is in her 30s and Mitch approaching 40.

In the *Christmas Box*, a television movie, Mary Parkin (O'Hara) appears to be in her late 60s or 70s. She is a wealthy, bitter widow who brings a young couple and their daughter into her home as domestic employees. In the scene, a stern Mary warns the husband (Richard Thomas) to pay more attention to his family.

The bitter edge of the *Christmas Box* confrontation may have overly influenced how the participants evaluated O'Hara's masculine and feminine characteristics, marking a mean of 3.41

for feminine traits and a mean of 5.97 for masculine traits. Perhaps because of the romantic nature of the *Parent Trap* scene, participants found O'Hara particularly feminine (a mean of 8.47) and not particularly masculine (a mean of 1.83).¹ In *Redhead*, participants indicated that O'Hara was the least feminine (a mean of 1.70) and the most masculine (a mean of 8.58) of all three scenes included in the study. Like the overall trend, the participants marked more feminine traits as O'Hara aged and perceived her less masculine than her appearance at 33 as the beautiful actress in *Redhead*. Her attractiveness was highest in *Redhead from Wyoming* (a mean of 3.63) and *Parent Trap* (a mean of 3.80), dropping to a mean of 2.81 at the end of her career. However, the participants liked her only marginally better in *Redhead from Wyoming* as the scheming woman of the West (a mean of 3.10) than as the bitter widow (a mean of 3.03) in *Christmas Box*. They liked her best in *Parent Trap* (a mean of 3.86), perhaps because she is portraying the type of character she plays so well--a feminine character who supports the masculinity of the lead actor (Lewis 1990). Of all the actresses in this study, O'Hara probably was the least known by the participants. *Christmas Box* was only her second film since *Big Jake* in 1971, meaning most of the participants were not even born when O'Hara's Hollywood star had faded.

Lucille Ball

Table VIII
Means for Lucille Ball

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Likability n=74	3.55 std. .08	3.57 std. .08	3.45 std. .10
Attractiveness n=74	3.52 std. .09	3.40 std. .08	3.53 std. .12
Masculinity n=74	4.29 std. .39	7.40 std. .54	5.24 std. .58
Femininity n=74	3.04 std. .42	5.07 std. .47	4.46 std. .40

In 1953, at the height of her popularity on *I Love Lucy*, Lucille Ball, age 42, made *The Long, Long Trailer*, the story of a recently married couple in their 20s who drives a New Moon trailer across the country on their honeymoon. According to Sanders and Gilbert (1993), authors of *Desilu: The Story of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz*, the film proved to be one of the most popular and profitable of Ball's career (p. 70). In the scene selected for our study, Tracy and Nicholas Collini (played by Ball and husband Desi Arnaz, respectively), are in the middle of their journey when Nicholas asks Tracy to read the map. Ball uses slapstick, verbal puns, and her trademark booming voice to dominate the scene.

Approximately 15 years later, at the age of 57, she starred in *Yours, Mine, and Ours* with life-long friend Henry Fonda. In the film, Ball played Helen North, a middle-aged widow with eight children who marries Frank Beardsley (Fonda), a widower with ten children of his own. Together they cope with the nuances of everyday life in a household overrun with eighteen children. In the scene used for analysis, Helen comes to the aid of her son Phillip, who causes a disturbance in his class when he refuses to answer to his legal last name. Helen is assertive and strong in her reaction to her son's punishment, a perfect example of a mother defending her son.

In 1974, Ball, age 63, signed on for the lead role for a film version of *Mame*. Mame Dennis is an independently wealthy woman who has difficulty dealing with her husband's family.

¹ The clip cuts before O'Hara and Keith begin an argument.

For this role, Ball dyed her hair gray in order to appear more regal and sophisticated. In the scene selected, Mame is being escorted to her plane by her nephew Patrick (Bruce Davidson) and his family. She asks to take her young nephew, also named Patrick (Kirby Furlong), with her, but the family refuses. However, the parents relent, allowing Mame and Patrick to walk off together.

Ball received the most masculine marks from the participants as the harried mother in *Yours, Mine, and Ours* (a mean of 7.40). Ironically, she received the most feminine marks in that role as well (a mean of 5.07). The participants found her the least feminine in the scene selected from *The Long, Long, Trailer* (a mean of 3.04), and attributed slightly more feminine characteristics to her in *Mame* (a mean of 4.46). Ball received a mean of 4.29 masculine marks for her earliest role, Tracy Collini in *The Long Long, Trailer*, and a mean of 5.24 masculine marks as Mame Dennis.

How could Ball simultaneously receive a high number of masculine and feminine marks for her role in *Yours, Mine, and Ours*? The nature of the scene offers one possible explanation. In that scene, Ball displays a mixture of overtly feminine and masculine characteristics. She is soft-spoken with her son; in her gestures and words she is the nurturing mother who comes to the aid of a hurt, loved one. She is, at first, just as soft-spoken with the teacher, but when the teacher refuses to call her son by the name he wishes, Ball is aggressive, dominating the end of the scene with shouts of her husband's last name.

For Lucy, no statistical significant differences existed among the three means for likability (3.55, 3.57, 3.45 respectively) or among the three means for attractiveness (3.52, 3.40, 3.53 respectively). These findings do not reflect the study's overall trends, and there are at least two possible explanations for the discrepancies. First, Ball went to great lengths during her long career to look as attractive and youthful as possible. Ball required a provision in her contract that negatives would be retouched to remove facial lines (Brady, 1994, p. 276). According to Brady, Ball never considered a face lift as she got older, but Hal King, her longtime make-up artist, "came to the rescue by pulling her facial skin taut with elastic bands and developing a rubbery foundation to erase decades from her increasingly lined countenance." Thus, the rich matron in *Mame* is made to look as attractive and as relatively youthful as the newlywed in *The Long, Long, Trailer* and the struggling mother in *Yours, Mine, and Ours*.

As stated previously, participants found Ball to be just as likable in the scene taken from *Mame* as they did in the scenes from *The Long, Long, Trailer* and *Yours, Mine, and Ours*. Kanfer (2003) offers a possible explanation for this consistency: "Almost all personalities suffer a decline in reputation after death. Not Ball. Each year she has grown in significance and popularity" (p. ix). For example, when *TV Guide* selected the "50 Greatest TV Stars of All Time" in 1996, Ball was rated number one (p. 303); more than 80,000 tourists from 36 countries have paid homage to The Lucy-Desi Museum in Jamestown, New York (p. 305); the Internet offers hundreds of web sites dedicated to Ball (p. 311); and *I Love Lucy*, along with Ball's other television sitcoms, films, and specials continue to find new generations of viewers on cable. As Thomas Wagner, producer of the documentary *Finding Lucy*, stated, "Lucille Ball's lunacy will outlast almost everything that's on television today" (p. 304).

Jane Fonda

Table IX
Means for Jane Fonda

	Early career	Middle career	Late career
Likability n=74	3.54 std. .12	3.55 std. .10	2.67 std. .11
Attractiveness n=74	3.79 std. .10	3.58 std. .10	3.27 std. .12

Masculinity n=74	2.90 std. .40	2.10 std. .33	5.98 std. .58
Femininity n=74	4.77 std. .50	6.02 std. .57	1.97 std. .24

Jane Fonda was an actress for more than twenty years. Born in 1937, Fonda was 29 when she starred in *Cat Ballou*. In *On Golden Pond*, Fonda was in her early 40s, although she was cast as a character in her 30s. At 49, Fonda played a mature role in *Morning After*.

Cat Ballou was Fonda's first starring role. In the movie Cat tries to save her father's farm from the bad guys. She turns to a couple young ne'er-do-wells for help. In the scene chosen, Cat confesses her love to one of her rescuers.

An established actress in 1981, Fonda plays Chelsea, the angry daughter in *On Golden Pond*. In the scene shown, Chelsea and her mother (Katharine Hepburn) discuss Fonda's stepson. Based upon her attire, the age of her stepson, and how the role was written, we assume the producers wanted the audience to believe Chelsea was in her mid-30s.

In *The Morning After*, Fonda plays Alex Sternbergen, an older character who is a grouchy drunk and murder suspect. In the scene shown, Alex is bickering with Turner Kendall (Jeff Bridges), who has given Alex a ride from the airport. Wearing sunglasses and wrapped in a sweater and scarf, Alex portrays a woman her actual age, which was 49.

Of the selected actresses, Jane Fonda's casting best fits the Hollywood stereotype: young attractive women play the romantic leads, middle-aged women play nurturing roles, and older women are grumpy. The stereotypical roles may also have influenced the audience perceptions as they viewed her in the chosen clips. The argumentative woman with a hangover sitting in a convertible on a dusty highway does not come across as feminine nor as likable as the loving mother visiting with her own mother.

The statistics indicated that the audience reacted differently to Fonda in *The Morning After* than in her earlier films. In *Cat Ballou* she was rated a mean of 3.54 for likability; in *On Golden Pond* the mean was 3.55; and in *The Morning After* the mean was 2.67. For attractiveness her means were similar: 3.79, 3.58, and 3.27. The means for masculinity in each film was: 2.90, 2.10, and 5.98. For femininity the mean number of adjectives marked totaled 4.77, 6.02, and 1.97. The mean number of adjectives marked for Fonda was 10.97, 11.93, and 9.84 respectively, which demonstrated a consistency on the part of respondents throughout the survey.

Discussion

Reduced to a simplistic formula, most Hollywood scripts place an actress in the role of either the love interest or young mother. Operating from this premise, Hollywood holds that the audience prefers young actresses, when they are typically viewed as more feminine and more attractive than women playing caregivers or older women. However, this premise was not supported by our research. Our participants perceived the actresses attractive early in careers; however, they also assigned more masculine than feminine traits at this career stage. This may indicate that the audience viewed the actresses as assertive in the selected scenes or assigned them masculine traits because the film production elements revolved around the actress. Regardless of the reason, the significance of our results is that the audience found the actresses attractive without necessarily associating them with feminine traits.

Our results suggest that Hollywood could provide a much broader range of roles for actresses, and audiences may prefer these roles over the Hollywood stereotypes. Perhaps this should not be surprising given the appeal of androgynous celebrities (Adams-Price and Greene,

1990).

The results by actress had more variability than when we combined all five actresses together. We concluded that the audience reacted, at least in part, to how the actresses played the role and the nature of the character. The participants' tallies reflected their reaction to what was happening on the screen in only a minute and a half. Lucy was a mother protecting her young. Hepburn was a socialite or a grandmother or a slightly eccentric woman. O'Hara was romantic, Lansbury was wise, and Fonda was a daughter talking to her mother. The actresses were not interchangeable parts in stereotypical roles. To the participants, Lucy, Angela, Maureen, Jane, and Katharine were not defined solely by age, gender, role, or attractiveness.

If our interpretation of our results even partially explains the interaction between the actresses and the audience, our study undercuts Hollywood's premise for stereotyping actresses. Once the movie begins, what happens on the screen is what counts to the audience. Stereotypes are replaced by the ability of the artist to connect with the audience, regardless of who that artist is, or what stereotypical labels could be assigned to the artist before the movie begins. Regardless of whether the audience's reactions were based on the nature of the role or any preconceived notions they may have had about the actress or on the interplay between actress and role, the results from this study suggest that the audience did not respond to the actress based entirely on the stage in her career.

Our results indicate that the audience may be receptive to actresses cast in non-stereotypical roles. In fact, the audience liked the actresses more when they played roles other than the romantic lead. Our results indicate that the audience does not link feminine traits and attractiveness; ergo, the Hollywood script does not need to portray the actress as male-defined for the audience to like her or find her attractive, meaning she can be assigned masculine traits. The audience may be ready for the old stereotypes to be discarded and for more dignity and respect to be assigned to actresses. Scripts that include these new kinds of roles should be popular with the audience.

Limitations

Contrary to our expectations, the audience assigned the actresses a high number of feminine traits later in their careers. One explanation for this could be that several of the actresses were cast in maternal, caregiving roles. Five of the ten clips from the roles the actresses played later in their careers included scenes in which the actresses interacted significantly with children. It is reasonable to conclude that the audience identified femininity with the actresses portraying mothering roles. In contrast, all the actresses early in their careers played the ingénues or the love interests. If we had controlled the clip selection to exclude interactions with children, we might have had different results.

We sought to limit external factors by asking the audience to only consider the scene presented. However, the participants could have been influenced by their previous knowledge of the actresses in responding to the questionnaire, instead of just using the scene provided.

The participants also may have been more familiar with the most recent films used in the study and less familiar with the earliest roles and the film conventions used in the 1940s. However, our results were consistent for all actresses early in their careers, which spanned a period from 1940 (Hepburn) to 1966 (Fonda). The results also were consistent for films from middle to late careers (1951 to 1995).

Since we needed actresses for the study with at least 30-year careers, we knew the audience most likely had seen other films featuring these actresses. Another drawback of this study is that the actresses studied are not typical; they are among the most popular actresses of all time. Their sheer popularity is likely to be one explanation for the availability for them of late life roles. However, this does not explain why the actresses were perceived as masculine in their early roles by our sample of contemporary, young adults. To control for this limitation, a future

study could be developed using actresses who began their careers at various ages and who had no other film credits.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that the participants were all college-aged students attending a single southern university. They are likely to be conservative politically and to be traditional in their attitudes towards women. A broader sampling of participants would increase the external validity of these results. An interesting follow-up study would be to see if the appearance of femininity and masculinity change according to the age group of the participants.

Another interesting study would be to duplicate this one using male actors with 30-year careers. Such a study could test the Hollywood assumptions about male actors, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusions

The sexual attractiveness and physical beauty of actresses dominate current media images. As Fiske (1987) pointed out, television creates and reinforces cultural norms (p. 25). These stereotypes, in turn, influence how children perceive gender roles (Aubrey and Harrison, 2004, 155). In effect, that which the media make common becomes valued as normal and typical. Hollywood promotes actresses early in their careers when their sexuality and their attractiveness make them marketable. As their careers progress, actresses find themselves "aged" out of the most marketable roles and into secondary roles defined by stereotypical definitions of the place of women in society. The handful of roles available for actresses later in their careers emphasizes the negative aspects our society associates with aging.

Our research indicates that actresses are marketable throughout their careers. These actresses do not need to be confined to roles as the doddering, old fool or the evil witch. Older actresses can be cast in leading roles in which they will be accepted and appreciated by the audience. Actresses should be able to extend their careers past the age of 40 without having to take demeaning roles. Older women cast in dynamic roles would present a more balanced interpretation of women and the process of aging. The media would be aiding society in the evolution of cultural norms that recognize the worth of people regardless of age.

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