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Encyclopaedia of Gerontology and Population Aging

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Title

Aging, stardom and “the economy of celebrity”

Definition

The conjunction of aging and stardom refers to a new field of research emerging in response to the growing number of older actors who are highly visible within broader circuits of celebrity culture and who populate a burgeoning number of fictional films depicting the pleasures and problems of aging characters.

Theoretical Overview

This research brings together theories of cultural aging and theories of stardom. As suggested by the title of Gullette’s book, *Aged by Culture* (2004), theories of cultural aging are concerned with aging as a discursive and ideological construction. Uniformly, theories of cultural aging argue that “age”, “aging”, “older” and so forth are not essential properties of the body and are not inevitable consequences of the passage of time. Instead, they point to the operation of power and discourse in the production of aging; in the articulation of life-stages; in the pathologisation of aging bodies; and in an associated narrative of aging as decline. Woodward (1999) sums up that age, “Like other markers of social difference ... is socially constructed”, so too the assignment of “different norms of behaviour to different ages” along with the invention of particular names for specific stages (1999 x). Katz (1996) argues that ideas of aging have histories and that contemporary understandings of “old age” as a distinctive and inevitable life-stage of decline emerged from the Victorian workhouse when some bodies were identified as young, functioning and valuable; and others were marked as senescent, that is as aged, degenerate and worthless. Similarly, with a focus on contemporary social practices ranging from museum exhibitions, the geography of public spaces, print media, films, TV productions and the celebration of birthdays, Gullette (2004) observes that such occasions reiterate aging as a distinctive category (i.e. not childhood, not youth, not middle-age and so forth), and also shore up the narrative of aging as decline that both produces and underpins endemic ageist assumptions.

Woodward (1999), Dolan & Tincknell (2012), Whelehan & Gwynne (2014), Jermyn & Holmes (2015) highlight intersections between gender, masculine privilege and the cultural construction of aging. Similarly, Lipscomb and Marshall (2010) bring feminist thinking to understandings of cultural aging as they appropriate and re-work Judith Butler’s account of gender performativity. Rehearsing Butler’s argument that gender is a culturally produced identity that is constituted, embodied and naturalised through reiterated performances of so-called “masculine” or “feminine” gestures and actions, Lipscomb and Marshall contend that, “each of us performs the actions associated with chronological age minute by minute, and that the repetition of these performances creates a so-called reality of age both for the subject and those who interact with the subject” (2010, p2).

With “old age” now perceived to occur at a later chronological point than previous generations, Gilleard and Higgs (2005) observe the emergence of two “imaginaries” of ageing, a “third age” that can be crudely equated to an extended middle age of active leisure and consumption, and an

abjected “fourth age” that is “systematically emptied of all meaning beyond that of social and personal waste” (2005 162). The relationship between the two imaginaries is crucial with the “third age” defined by a rejection of “‘old age’ and “‘agedness’” that “helps drive the desire to consume” (Gilleard and Higgs 2015: 12). Inextricably connected to consumer culture, the “third age imaginary” is regulated by a regime of health and fitness maintenance now known as “successful ageing” that promises to prevent, or at least forestall, the onset of fourth age decline and abjection (Dillaway and Byrnes 2009).

Such formulations of aging have provided rich sites for intersections to be forged with star theory because of shared concerns with the embodiment of discourses and the reiteration of material practices that (re)produce cultural identities. Although star theory is applicable to any arena of performance, it first emerged in relation to film actors when scholars shifted attention from star biographies to the function of stars within cinema’s economic and representational systems that include, but cannot be reduced to, the films in which they appear. Dyer (1979) suggests that stars should be seen as images extending from a flesh and blood actor/actress, alive or dead. Such images are produced through media circuits (print, analogue, digital) that can be loosely grouped into four categories, the promotion of films by studios and agents, any publicity about the star, the type of character or film genre associated with a specific star, and any criticism or commentary written about a star’s film performances and the overall quality of their films. Basically, anything that is ever said or written about a star, even post-mortem, shores up his or her image. Now, the inter-net with its infinite, non-linear and non-sequential dissemination of publicity, promotions, criticism and gossip is accelerating the production and reproduction of star images.

Gledhill (1991) further proposes that stardom has four key functions: as capital value that secures investments and profits for films; as a promotional mechanism for spin-off consumer goods; as a representation of the ‘real’ behind the ‘reel’; as embodiments of variable cultural norms and values including acceptable and/or ‘forgivable’ deviant behaviour. On deviancy, King (2008) observes that images can no longer be sanitized as in previous generations due to the impact of paparazzi gossip circulated by social media and the inter-net. In response, known transgressions by stars are now managed through public and publicised repentance that, like the Catholic confessional, promises forgiveness and redemption. Thus the money making function of stars is (re)secured. Dyer (1986) and Gledhill (1991) both stress that stars cannot be reduced to a market value since their images also function as signifying systems through which social meanings are made via both film narratives and wider social processes. As such, stars are seen to embody social values and identities such as masculinity and femininity, thereby serving to normalise dominant social values and to render the cultural as biological. Turner (2007 193) coined the term “economy of celebrity” to describe the mutual support that flows between stardom’s economic and representational systems.

Key Findings

Recent studies have been quick to argue that aging is a social value embodied and naturalised by stars (Dolan and Tincknell 2012; Harrington, Bielby and Bardo 2014; Whelehan and Gwynne 2014; Jermyn and Holmes 2015). This research consistently points to the sexualisation of aging in both film storylines and star publicity and gossip, and to intersections with heteronormative imperatives and regimes of successful aging (Chivers 2011; Gravagne 2013; Dolan 2017). However, Richardson’s (2018) queer approach to “ageing femininity” within film storylines and star images foregrounds the instability of dominant heteronormativity and the gender binary as he playfully teases out the fluidities of the age, femininity, camp, drag and effeminacy constellation variously embodied by both

female and male stars. Highlighting a cycle of 'dementia' films such as *Iris* (Eyre 2001) and *The Iron Lady* (Lloyd 2011), Chivers (2011) and Dolan (2017) observe that a critical mass of female figures representing cognitive decline effectively feminizes the condition, while Dolan notes distancing strategies that protect star images from the characters they play, thus preserving their use value within the economy of celebrity. Chivers suggests that the gap between aging characters and successfully aged stars enables the elision of aging and disability, and that despite appearances of greater inclusivity of aging and a greater social concern with older people, films about aging actually, "reflect an ongoing pathologization of changes associated with age" (2011, p148). Gravagne (2013) explores stars and films outside the Hollywood paradigm that are resistant to its predictable homogeneity, thereby offering understandings of aging as a process of becoming, rather than arriving at the end. Chivers (2011) and Dolan (2017) stress the racial iniquities through which aging non-white stars are marginalised both off and on-screen, highlighting how persistent racist tropes are embedded in established film conventions and operate to stereotype, demean and trivialise non-white characters in the ongoing (re)constitution of a white hegemony.

To date, Dolan (2017) is the only scholar to offer a sustained analysis of aging stardom within the economy of celebrity that takes account of both male and female stars, though Wearing (2007), Tincknell (2012), Jermyn (2014), Fairclough-Isaacs (2014), Van den Bulcke (2014) and Williams (2015) variously engaged with the embodiment of the third age imaginary by female stars at an intersection with the consumer regimes of 'age appropriate' style, topical beauty products and invasive rejuvenatory practices. Dolan highlights a distancing between male star images and the grooming and rejuvenatory practices that are a pre-requisite of movie star 'looks'. While female stars' embodiments of aging femininity are positioned as vulnerable to declining looks and failing cognitive capacities, aging male stars are positioned along a continuum of veteran or vintage masculine improvement. Dolan concludes that the insertion of aging into the economy of celebrity is a mechanism whereby the potential fluidity and instability of gender identities is glossed, with masculinity and femininity reiterated as fixed biological properties of essentialized bodies, while simultaneously, the gender binary and its assertions of masculine privilege are effectively (re)secured.

Examples of applications

Aging and stardom: from box-office to market place

Across the spectrum of genres, the dynamic between aging and stardom has become box-office gold, even in a market that consistently privileges the tastes of young men aged 18-25 (Schaap 2011). A niche market of older women's 'chick-flicks' highlights the profitability of aging female stars. In 2003, Diane Keaton attracted \$266 million box-office from a \$80 million budget for *Something's Gotta Give* (Meyers 2003), while the pull of Dame Judi Dench and Dame Maggie Smith in *The Best (and Second Best) Exotic Marigold Hotel* (Madden 2011 and 2015) earned \$137 million and \$86 million (and rising) from each film's \$10 million budget. Given that women pay to see male designated films when the reverse is not the case, it is no surprise that action movies like *The Expendables 1, 2 and 3* (Stallone 2010; West 2012; West 2014) with their roll-call of aging macho males, Sylvester Stallone, Jason Statham, Jet Li, Dolph Lundgren, Randy Couture, Austin, Terry Crews, Mickey Rourke, Bruce Willis, Claude Van Damme and Harrison Ford, had comparatively huge budgets of \$82 million, \$100million and \$90million, with the films yielding box office returns of \$275 million, \$315million and \$214million. As with all films, box-office provides a fraction of profits, with

most coming from DVDs and streaming platforms, spin-off sales and merchandising, even extending to broader consumer culture via fashion, cosmetics and tourism.

Star influence on consumer culture as it plays out in the third age imaginary can be divided between indirect appeal and direct endorsements. Indirectly, stars influence fashion or style, sometimes through the transfer of on-screen costuming to the high street (Eckert 1991; Herzog and Gaines 1991). Such transfers now position older stars like Diane Keaton, Dame Judi Dench and Clint Eastwood as exemplars of age and gender appropriate late-style. Consistently, Diane Keaton and Dame Judi Dench are cited as embodiments of a stylish, 'graceful ageing' that dodges the twin perils of 'too much shine' or 'too much flesh', and successfully balances the condemnatory oppositions of 'frumpy' and 'mutton dressed as lamb' (Dolan and Tincknell 2012). Keaton has carried the attribution of style-icon for forty years plus thanks to the influence of Ruth Morley's *Annie Hall* (Allen 1977) costume design which became the star's trademark 'look'. Dench was already chronologically aged when she was enrolled into the pantheon of older style icons. As with Keaton, this followed the wake of on-screen costume design, in this instance Louise Stjernsward's for the *Marigold Hotel* films. In various ways, both Keaton and Dench's styles gesture to masculinized feminist inspired functional dress, though the former's 'look' draws on both 1940s female glamour and eighteenth century dandy fashions, and the latter to the hippie counter-cultural fashions associated with the baby boomer generation that is now imbricated in the emergence of the third age imaginary. While concealing denigrated marks of experience, these styles promise egalitarian access from budget outlets. However, cheap fabrics and mass produced cuts rarely hang or fit well and emulation rapidly transforms into poor approximations (Williams 2015). Nonetheless, the approximations are highly revealing of star influence in the market-place and speak volumes about the pressures of 'graceful ageing' placed on older women while also gesturing to the impact of the third age imaginary on gendered consumption practices and self-presentation

The gendering of third age consumption is also evident in the praise heaped on Clint Eastwood as an icon of masculine late-style and is highly telling of the dynamic between costume design and star images (Dolan 2017) as much as the pressures placed on older men to avoid youthful styles and the exposure of flesh (Twigg 2013). For men, the avoidance of youthful style happens at an earlier chronological age than it does for women and involves the adoption of unadorned and neutrally coloured clothing that is very different from the display of cult and counter-cultural styles such as rock n' roll, punk, surfer, goth and so on through which youthful masculinity performs generational differences. The suit is emblematic of unadornment, not only signalling the assimilation of youth into hegemonic mature masculinity, but also that of non-white identities, with the wearing of colourful, flamboyant, ethnic or tribal garments signalling an outsider position of some kind (Polhemus 2000, p46). Like Keaton, Eastwood's style credentials are long-standing and can be traced back to Glenn Wright's costume design for *Dirty Harry* (Siegel 1971) where a Neapolitan cut suit both conformed to masculine unadornment and connoted edgy, macho masculinity. Equally, Eastwood's late-style is informed by denim clothing that signifies labour, pioneers, cowboys and countercultural rebels. The suit/denim dynamic of Eastwood's late-style establishes a non-corporate version of masculinity that negotiates the terrain between formality and leisure; between bland conformity and alienated rebellion. Across the blogosphere, discourses of 'vintage' are attached to Eastwood's image and as with fine wine, mature cheese and antique furniture, this establishes aging as a process of improvement, rather than decline. Eastwood's image thus articulates masculine late-style as simultaneously macho and vintage, while the star's embodiment of the third age imaginary that conforms to the slim and toned body of successful aging also establishes aging masculinity as a continuum of improvement. By comparison, the dynamics of the economy of celebrity position aging

femininity as constantly vulnerable to decline, requiring constant surveillance to avoid the signs of aging and the slide into abjection.

Endorsing rejuvenation: body and mind

Nowhere is such surveillance more visible than in endorsement advertising by stars like Jane Fonda, Dame Helen Mirren and Nicole Kidman of so-called anti-aging products, and the extension of what Wolf (1990) termed “the beauty myth” into the third age imaginary. Predicated on the eradication of the signs of aging inscribed on hair, faces and bodies, this ‘silvered’ beauty myth signals the conflation of rejuvenation and feminine successful aging. Meanwhile, stars like Jane Fonda, Cher and Madonna proudly display rejuvenated bodies acquired through the pricks, punctures, insertions, excavations and sutures of cosmetic surgery, even as the curiously unfurrowed brows of many others renders them the objects of endless ‘has she/hasn’t she?’ scrutiny across the gossip bloggersphere. Such scrutiny is double edged in that it may well persuade some consumers of the efficacy of rejuvenatory products, while also triggering well-founded suspicions of airbrushed and Photoshopped enhancements to photographs (moving and still), especially following high profile complaints from consumer groups on both sides of the Atlantic. The suspicion of the photographic image’s unreliability makes the ‘live’ appearances of older female stars on chat shows and at red carpet events all the more powerful since it ostensibly bypasses the opportunity for image enhancement and allows for the successfully aged female face and body to be effectively displayed to the benefit of star image, and as an idealised version of aging femininity (Dolan 2014). Equally, such events provide openings for adjudications of ‘failure’ in the stakes of graceful aging and/or rejuvenatory procedures. Susan Sarandon and Meryl Streep have variously fallen foul of either ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ or ‘frumpy’ adjudications, while Melanie Griffiths and Madonna are consistently vilified as examples of either excessive or failed plastic surgery. The vilification of Madonna is focused on ‘stringy’ arms and ‘veiny’ hands that are denounced as rejuvenatory failures. Effectively, Madonna’s hands reveal the vulnerability of cosmeceutical techniques, their propensity to break down, to collapse and to fail, thus exposing the dreaded declining body of fourth age abjection, and the mortality, that lies beyond. (Railton and Watson 2012). Thus, despite the efforts of rejuvenation, Madonna embodies the narrative of aging as inevitable decline.

Male consumers are also targets of the anti-ageing industries, but older male stars are yet to appear in endorsement advertising. Indeed, male movie stars of any age rarely promote those grooming products and services that parallel the feminine beauty industry. Here, the overwhelming presence of securely masculine sporting stars speaks of residual anxieties that male concerns with appearance all too readily align with effeminacy and possibly homosexuality. The economic costs to individual stars (and their agents) speaks volumes about the persistence of these anxieties. For instance, Sylvester Stallone reputedly earned \$1million for one year’s work promoting Russian Ice vodka and George Clooney is reported to have earned \$40million for facing up the Nespresso launches in Europe and North America. The veracity of these claims notwithstanding, they nonetheless indicate that the economy of celebrity rewards its brand ambassadors very well. If this earning potential is neglected in relation to male grooming products, then for now, the consumer capitalist imperative is completely outweighed by the demand to secure hegemonic masculinity for male movie stars. Thus, where feminine beauty endorsements make visible the artifice of allure, the labour of grooming that is a requirement of male stardom is concealed in order to protect stardoms’ embodiment of hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity along the vintage continuum.

Male stars are notably silent on the topic of rejuvenation, though the case of Mickey Rourke, stardom's aging bad-boy, illuminates strategies of image management when facial enhancement is undeniably evident. To say the least, following recurring cycles of drug abuse and rehabilitation, multiple bar room brawls and a short-lived but successful career as a professional boxer, Rourke's macho image was assured, even as a history of violence was written on his damaged face. Following a typical trajectory of disgrace, confession and redemption, stories of Rourke's ultimate rehabilitation from both addiction and disfigurement paid most attention to the reconstruction of his face, reporting two bouts of surgery (the first 'botched'), as well as the macho endurance of extreme pain. Simultaneously, graphic postings on social media represented Rourke's plastic surgery as a narrative of trauma and reconstruction, rather than feminised self-indulgent vanity. Additional nuances emerged when paparazzi photographs revealed a slimmed-down figure emerging from a gym. With headlines proclaiming the star to be rejuvenated, sub-headings and accompanying copy told of a new exercise and diet regime. Here, Rourke's rejuvenation is attributed to the grind of the gym and a healthy lifestyle rather than the skill of the surgeon. In this way, Rourke's image has it both ways in that it forges the intersection of rejuvenation procedures in line with the consumer imperative, while also securing those procedures within the frame of macho masculinity. Equally, Rourke is uniquely positioned to embody a macho version of masculine successful aging and to implicitly endorse the repeated socio-medical advice that it is never too late to redeem the body from previous excesses (Dolan 2017).

Cognitive well-being has also fallen within the regulation of successful aging within the economy of celebrity, with Nintendo *Brain Age* mind training games promising to rejuvenate the mind. Although the efficacy of the technology was rapidly challenged by the scientific community, between its 2005 launch and 2016, sales of *Brain Age* nonetheless reached 19.01 million units with *Brain Age 2* selling a further 14.88 million, combining to equal Nintendo's globally recognised best sellers, *Super Mario* and *Pokémon*. Nintendo's suggestions that cognitive function, like physical fitness, should be guarded throughout the life course was reflected in the chronological ages of its endorsing stars, such as America Ferrera - 21, Nicole Kidman -39, Julie Walters -55 and Patrick Stewart - 65. Across the span of ages, this roster was populated by a relatively high proportion of female stars. Given that gaming is dominated by men, it is reasonable to assume that this gender balance was intended to attract women to the gaming market, but unfortunately, it also suggested that women were in greater need of brain training than men. Here, those discourses of superior masculine capabilities that have underpinned patriarchal privileges for centuries were reinstated, and however unwittingly, Nintendo forged a connection to Hollywood's feminisation of cognitive decline noted by Chivers (2011) and Dolan (2017). The point here is that *Brain Age* endorsements usefully illuminate the profit making function of stardom, while they also highlight how the articulation of successful ageing within the economy of celebrity produces and reproduces a gender binary that positions feminine intellect as innately weaker than its masculine counterpart.

Stars, characters and performances

The focus on appearance for graceful agers, rejuvenators or vintage veterans alike is key to the sexualisation of older women in action movies such as *RED* (Schwentke 2010) and romantic comedies like *Something's Gotta Give* (Meyers 2003). Older male stars, and the characters they play, have always retained their desirability through couplings with ever younger female leads, even as older female actors played sexless stereotypes like sister, friend, or mother, or were as Harrington (2017) suggests "hagsploited" in films like *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Aldrich 1962). The introduction to film and the third age imaginary of the sexually active older woman is intertwined

with the elision of sexual health and successful aging within socio-medical paradigms (Marshall 2011). But, despite this radical shift, representations of sexuality into aging remain gendered. While there has been some lessening of the older man/younger woman coupling that for decades had supported the youthful images of chronologically aged male stars, it is striking that aging action heroes are still partnered with younger women – for instance in *RED* (Schwentke 2010) an 11 year gap separates male and female stars, Bruce Willis and Mary Louise Parker, and in *Third Person* (Haggis 2013) Liam Neeson is paired with Olivia Wilde, his junior by thirty two years. Here, the ‘hard bodied’ pun that secures the aging male star within the rubric of virile vigour needs no explication. Yet, when this gender dynamic is reversed, either within on-screen storylines as in *The Mother* (Michell 2003), or in the everyday world of celebrity partnerships where Madonna, Demi Moore and Sharon Stone are frequently cited on ‘cougar alert’ websites, the predatory stereotype rapidly dominates surrounding discourses. Moreover, as with the older woman/younger man liaison, the sexual desires of older lesbian women are framed as perverse and predatory (Krainitzki 2016). In this way, representations of older women’s sexuality mobilised by aging female stars and the characters they perform, regulates third age sexuality as both ‘age appropriate’ and heteronormative.

If the economy of celebrity has found it necessary to make older female stars and characters both visible and desirable as a trope of heteronormative, sexually healthy, successful aging, it has also been necessary to raise the issue of erectile dysfunction, and its remedies. Traditionally perceived to be a shameful and shaming loss of masculinity, erectile dysfunction is now aligned with the unsuccessfully aged body of the fourth age imaginary. The cinematic de-stigmatization of erectile dysfunction is articulated through stars like Jack Nicholson whose hyper-virile image promises a satisfactory resolution to story lines, as does the generic expectations of emotion, loss and recuperation that underpin romantic comedies like *Something’s Gotta Give* and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* where these issues are rehearsed. Equally, generic expectations allow for comedic, Viagra scenarios that employ allusion to express and render safe a painful taboo. Whether or not Pfizer paid for product placements in these films is not readily accessible information, but it is reasonable to assume that the company had no objections to the publicity since it never openly demanded the removal of, or complained about, any references. There is something strangely double edged about these stories since their dénouement is a Viagra free sexual union whereby an older woman proves to be of greater efficacy than the medication. Here, age appropriate coupling is sanctioned as a beneficial regime for aging masculinity’s sexual anxieties, while older women are positioned as the sexual carers of the dynamic (Chivers 2011, p129-134). So while socio-medical discourse promotes sexual activity as a sign of third age well-being, stardom and the economy of celebrity embodies a heteronormative and age appropriate framing.

In all of this, it needs to be remembered that the economy of celebrity in which stars promote themselves, their films and all manner of consumer goods and services is a workplace. Whenever we see a star appearing in a film, at a red carpet event, in a promotional commercial, on a TV chat show or in interview, they are at work. For many aging stars, this typically means working beyond the retirement ages of most western countries. Given that stars function to naturalise and normalise social values and practices, this suggests that deferred retirement is now enmeshed in this process. This process is supported by storylines where aging characters continue to work, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm – as a burden of necessity as in *Last Orders* (Schepisi 2001), as a constitutional responsibility in *The Queen* (Frears 2006), or as an ongoing pleasure akin to a hobby as in *Quartet* (Hoffman 2012), *RED* and *The Marigold Hotel* films. Regardless of film genre, the dynamic that plays between aging stars and the stories they populate establishes deferred retirement as economically and socially desirable, and as an integral component of the third age imaginary. This is highly problematic for the acting profession since the high visibility of a handful of wealthy and/or

relatively prosperous stars effaces the more commonplace poverty that follows many acting careers defined by intermittent work and fewer possibilities to accrue a viable pension. Moreover, the promotion of deferred retirement within the economy of celebrity conveniently coincides with the raising of retirement ages across the west, effacing some of the fiscal problems associated with the aging demographic. It also glosses the very real responsibilities, aversions and difficulties that render an extended working life either undesirable or impossible for many older people struggling with caring responsibilities for younger and older family members and/or work related physical damage and insufficient resources to retrain. Crucially, aging stars do not merely embody deferred retirement, but this embodiment supports changing patterns of retirement imposed across the west, while at the same time, its ideological glosses obfuscate the problem of poverty amongst older actors while rendering extended working an easy and welcome option for all.

Directions of Future Research

Future research will need to take three directions. First, the striking absence of research with fans of aging stars, or audiences of films with older characters and storylines, needs to be addressed. Regardless of methodologies employed, any empirical research would offer vital insights into the ways in which fans and audiences use and make sense of aging stars; the insertion of aging into the economy of celebrity, and films populated by aging characters. Such research may add to weight to the kind of discourse analysis offered here, or may suggest blind spots in textual approaches. Second, future research, both textual and empirical, should make race, racial dynamics and/or ethnicity the primary object of investigation into aging stars, exploring how race is articulated and embodied in the economy of celebrity and cinematic systems of representation; how and where non-white aging stars are used within the economy of celebrity, and interrogating the casting practices that marginalise aging non-white stars in films about old age. Third, there is an urgent need for research adopting comparative methodologies pioneered by Gravagne (2013) and Medina (2018) that juxtapose film and stars from different national cinema's as a means to develop a body of cross-cultural understandings about aging, stardom, the economy of celebrity and cinematic systems of representation. Any of these future directions would undoubtedly offer vital knowledge to film-makers and the film industry more broadly, as well as enriching the knowledge base of consumer industries, and of the academy as it goes forward with its research agendas and teaching programmes.

Summary

This entry explicates aging stardom mobilised at an intersection of the economy of celebrity and formations of gender, while highlighting an interface with a white hegemony. It traces the implicit promotions and explicit endorsements of aging stars for late style, for beauty and grooming products, for rejuvenatory practices and for mind training games, even as they regulate gender differences and the privileges of masculinity within the third age imaginary. In their embodiments of successful aging, stars expose the conflation of health and heteronormative sexuality, and the implications triggered by emerging representations of sexually desirable and desiring older women who are all too frequently reduced to an age appropriate caring service for erectile dysfunctional partners. And by exploring the obvious fact that aging stars are working actors, this entry suggests that the economy of celebrity works to normalise and glamorise deferred retirement in line with the policies of western governments in ways that obfuscate the resistances and hindrances to extended

working lives experienced by many older people, while masking the economic limitations of their acting peer group who did not achieve the relative prosperity, or wealth, that follows stardom. Overall, while it is important to celebrate the insertion of aging into stardom, and the new visibility of older female stars, any celebration needs to be tempered by a recognition of the complex dynamics of the economy of celebrity at its intersection with the third age imaginary.

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