

MARCH 2025

Fifty-Plus Female Actors Are Recognized Less Than Their Male Counterparts

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Executive Summary

Since 1930, 968 actors have been nominated in the acting categories of the Academy Awards®. This report analyzes whether there have been gender gaps in nominees and winners ages 50 and older since 1930, and if there has been a change over the past 96 years in the following categories:

- ◆ Best Actor
- ◆ Best Actress
- ◆ Best Supporting Actor
- ◆ Best Supporting Actress

The analysis uncovers gender gaps among 50-plus nominees and winners. However, the gaps likely reflect that 50-plus women have fewer film roles in the first place. This aligns with broader industry trends where older women have fewer leading roles than older men, limiting their chances of being nominated.

Key Findings

- ◆ Among 50-plus *nominees* in all acting categories, there is a 14-percentage-point gender gap:
 - Since 1930, 33% of all male nominees have been 50-plus, compared with just 19% of all female nominees, a gender gap of 14 points.
- ◆ Among 50-plus *winners* in all acting categories, there is a 15-point gender gap:
 - Since 1930, 34% of winners in the male categories have been 50-plus, compared with 19% of winners in the female categories, a gender gap of 15 points. Therefore, 50-plus women and men are a similar share of the winners as they are the nominees.
- ◆ The gender gaps differ when comparing Best Actor/Best Actress with Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress categories:
 - Among Best Actor/Best Actress *nominees*, 27% of male nominees and 13% of female nominees have been 50-plus, a 14-point gender gap.
 - Among Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress *nominees*, 40% of male nominees and 26% of female nominees have been 50-plus, a 14-point gender gap.
 - Among Best Actor/Best Actress *winners*, 25% of male winners and 15% of female winners have been 50-plus, a 10-point gender gap.
 - Among Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress *winners*, 43% of male winners and 24% of female winners have been 50-plus, a 19-point gender gap.

- ◆ The gender gap among 50-plus male and female actors has ebbed and flowed over the decades, but the gap is steadily widening:
 - In the 1930s, the gender gap in 50-plus *nominees* was just 3 points (12% of female nominees, 15% of male nominees); in the 2020s, the gender gap in 50-plus nominees was 17 points (50% of male nominees, 33% of female nominees).
 - The 50-plus gender gap among *nominees* was largest in the 1980s, when 44% of male nominees were 50-plus but just 16% of female nominees were. But that decade, 40% of male winners were 50-plus, while 30% of female winners were 50-plus.

Introduction

To better understand the history of 50-plus women in film, this report is an analysis of gender gaps in acting Academy Awards® nominees and winners since 1930 among women and men ages 50-plus. This topic is important because in general, 50-plus representation in films is low, but it is especially low for women. A study by the Geena Davis Institute looking at the top-grossing films from 2010 to 2020 found that when the lead actor was 50-plus, shockingly just 6.7% were women.¹

At this year's Oscars®, several 50-plus women were nominated for acting Academy Awards® —Demi Moore for *The Substance*, Kala Sofia Gascón for *Emilia Pérez*, Fernanda Torres for *I'm Still Here*, and Isabella Rossellini for *Conclave*. While none of them ultimately won, some of these films reflect a growing trend of stories that center on the lives of older women. For example, several acclaimed films in recent years showcase 50-plus women in relationships with much younger men, subverting the traditional “age gap” trope.² Could this shift lead to an increase in 50-plus women as nominees and winners for acting awards?

The on-screen representation of 50-plus women in leading and prominent roles is important because it can challenge ageist stereotypes and showcase the diversity of experiences women have throughout their lives. Expanding the roles and narratives available to this demographic enables entertainment media to reflect reality more authentically, in ways that audiences demand. According to a survey by the Geena Davis Institute, just 25% of respondents ages 50 and older agreed that their age group is represented accurately on screen, compared with 42% of respondents ages 18 to 49 who said the same about their age group.³ That's a big gap, and a signal that audiences demand more, and more authentic, stories about 50-plus women.

Methodology

This report analyzes the gender and age of nominees for the following Academy Awards®:

- ◆ Best Actress
- ◆ Best Supporting Actress
- ◆ Best Actor
- ◆ Best Supporting Actor

For each nominee, we noted the year of their films' release, whether they won, and their birth year. To calculate whether the actor was 50-plus, their birth year was subtracted from the year their movie was released. The analysis displays the percentage of nominees and winners in each decade who were 50-plus. Since the Academy Awards® started at the end of the 1920s, the analysis begins with 1930 to start at the first full decade. In the charts below, we also display smoothed line charts to represent patterns over time.⁴ Overall, since 1930, there have been 1,815 Academy Awards® nominations across 968 actors for best lead and best supporting acting roles;⁵ 33% of male nominees and 19% of female nominees have been 50-plus.

TABLE 1

Total number of nominees for Best Actor/Best Supporting Actor and Best Actress/Best Supporting Actress since the 1930s

	Number of Nominees	Percent Who Are 50-Plus
Best Actor/Best Supporting Actor	907	33%
Best Actress/Best Supporting Actress	908	19%

Findings

Gender Gaps in 50-Plus Nominees

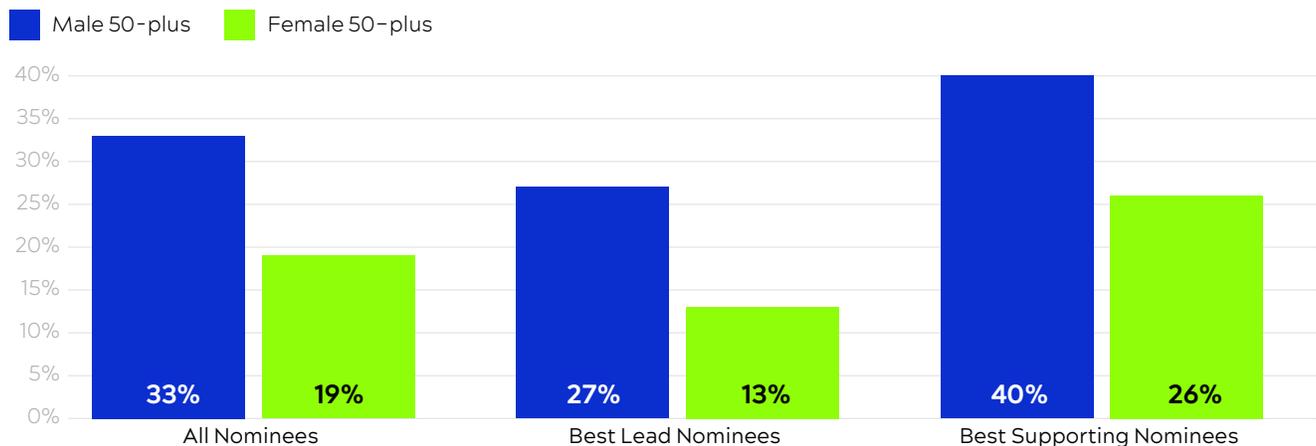
First, this report presents the analysis of *nominees* in the Academy Awards® acting categories.

GENDER GAPS IN 50-PLUS NOMINEES FOR BEST ACTOR/ACTRESS AND BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR/ACTRESS SINCE 1930

As shown in Chart 1, 50-plus men are a larger overall share of male nominees than 50-plus women's share of all female nominees: 33% of all male nominees have been 50-plus, while 19% of all female nominees have been 50-plus—a gender gap of 14 percentage points.

CHART 1

Share of male and female nominees for Best Actor/Actress and Best Supporting Actor/Actress who are 50-plus since 1930



The 50-plus gender gaps for Best Actor/Best Actress and Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress nominees are the same (14 percentage points). However, as an overall share of nominees, 50-plus actors/actresses are more common among nominees for best supporting roles (40% of male nominees compared with 26% of female nominees) than best leading roles (27% of male nominees compared with 13% of female nominees).

HOW HAVE GENDER GAPS IN 50-PLUS NOMINEES CHANGED?

How have gender gaps in nominees shifted over the 95 years of the Academy Awards®? Our logistic regression analysis finds that the gender gap between 50-plus male and female nominees since the 1930s has grown over this time frame, as shown in Chart 2.

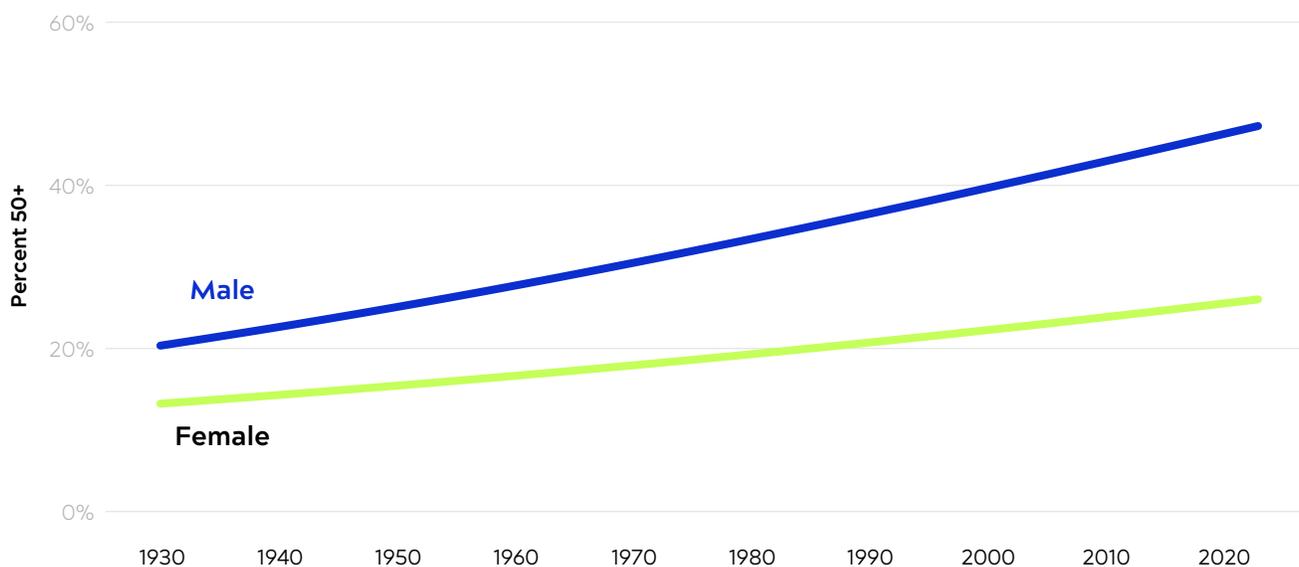
Decade to decade, there have been fluctuations, but overall, there is a growing gap in the share of 50-plus male and female nominees, with more 50-plus men than 50-plus women receiving nominations from the 1930s to the 2020s.

The smallest gaps were in the decades of the 1930s and 1960s, when 50-plus women were a slightly larger share of female nominees than 50-plus men. In the 1930s, both 50-plus men and women were a small share of all male and female nominees—just 12% of male nominees and 15% of female nominees, which is a 3-point gender gap. In the 1960s, 22% of male nominees and 25% of female nominees were 50-plus, which is also a 3-point gender gap.

In the 1940s, the gap jumped to 19 points, with 50-plus actors representing 35% of male nominees but just 16% of female nominees. The largest gap across all decades, however, was in the 1980s, when 44% of male nominees but just 16% of female nominees were 50-plus—a 28-point gender gap.

CHART 2

Estimated Percent of 50-Plus Acting Nominees by Gender, Since 1930

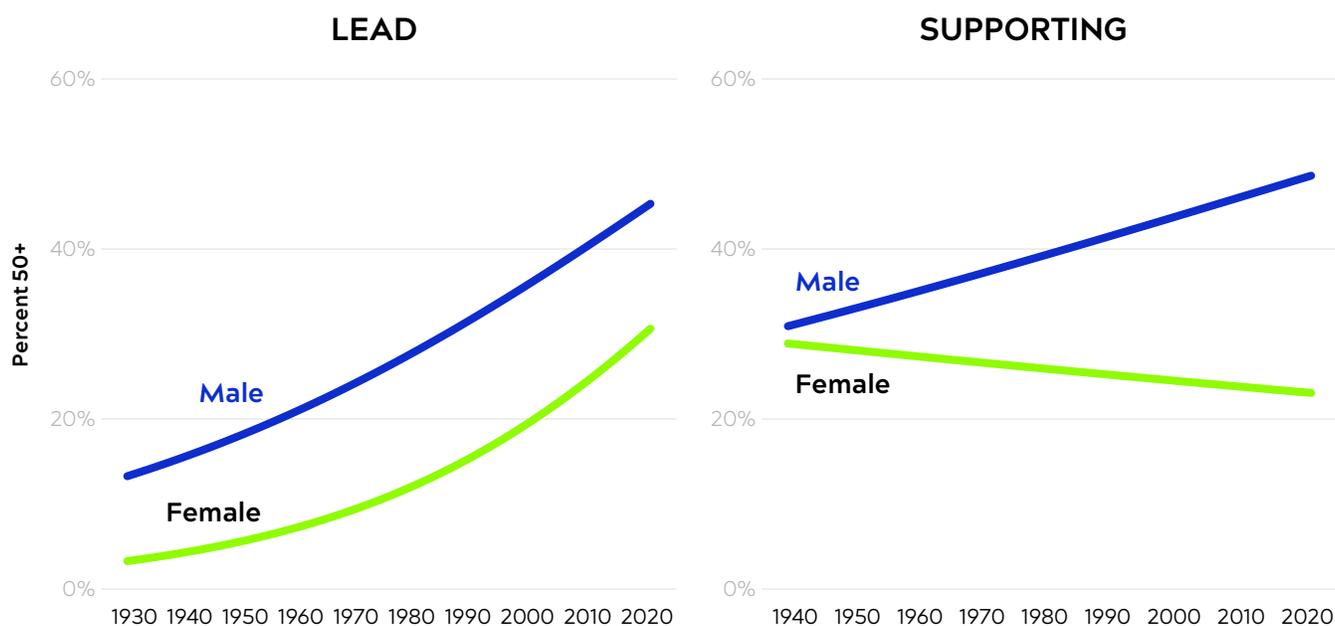


As shown in Chart 3, gender gaps in 50-plus nominees look different for Best Actor/Best Actress compared with Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress. Among Best Actor/Best Actress, 50-plus men outnumber 50-plus women, but the trajectory of each group is increasing at a similar rate.

But for Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress, the share of all male nominees who are 50-plus has increased over the last 95 years, but the share of all female nominees who are 50-plus has declined, leading to a large gender gap in more recent decades.

CHART 3

Percent of 50-Plus Acting Nominees by Gender and Role, Since 1930



Gender Gaps in 50-Plus Winners

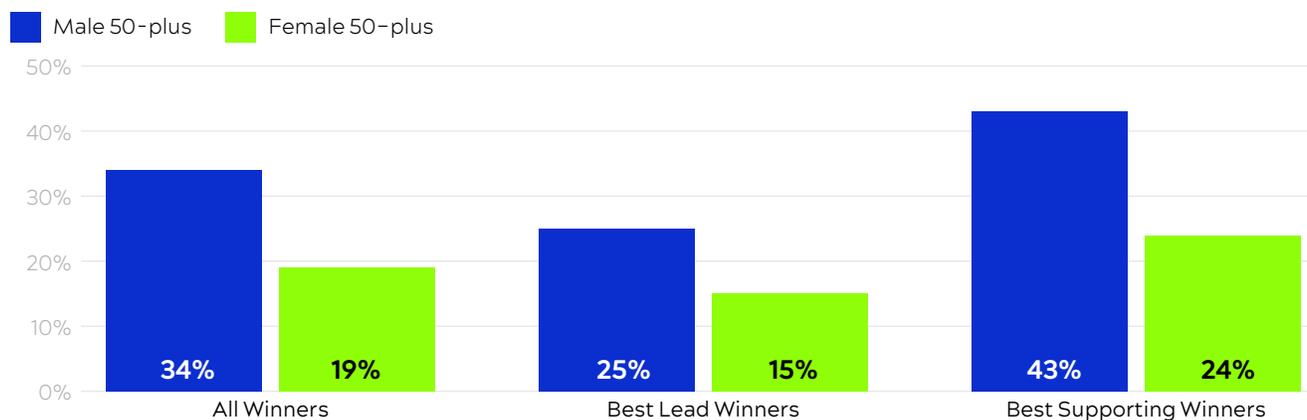
Next, we present the analysis of winners in these acting categories.

GENDER GAPS IN 50-PLUS WINNERS FOR BEST ACTOR/ACTRESS AND BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR/ACTRESS SINCE 1930

As shown in Chart 4, 50-plus men have been a larger overall share of male winners than 50-plus women have been of female winners: 34% of all male nominees have been 50-plus, while 19% of all female nominees have been 50-plus, a gender gap of 13 points.

CHART 4

Share of Male and Female Winners for Best Actor/Actress and Best Supporting Actor/Actress Who Are 50-Plus Since 1930



The 50-plus gender gap for Best Actor/Best Actress winners is just 10 points (25% of all male winners are 50-plus, compared with 15% of all female winners). The gender gap for Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress, however, is 19%—43% of male winners are 50-plus, compared with 24% of female winners.

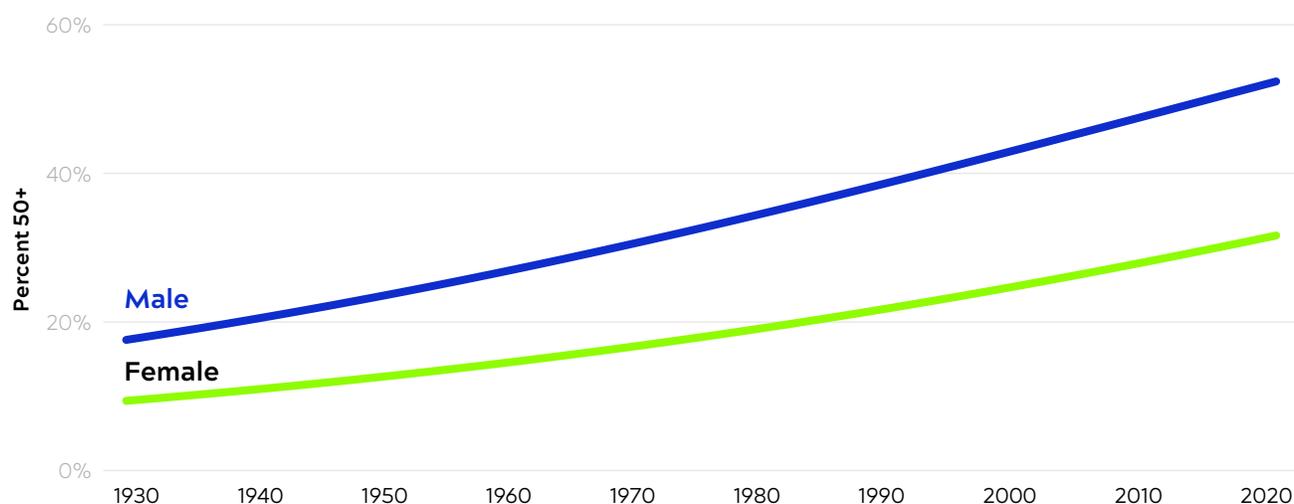
Have Gender Gaps in 50-Plus Winners Changed Over Time?

As with nominees, the share of 50-plus winners has ebbed and flowed, but the overall trend is a widening gender gap, as shown in Chart 5.

Three decades—the 1990s, 2000s, and 2020s—have seen the gender gap in winners eclipse 20 points. For example, in the 1990s, only 5% of leading and supporting winners were 50-plus women, compared with 40% of leading and supporting male winners who were 50-plus, a gender gap of 35 points.

CHART 5

Percent of 50-Plus Acting Winners by Gender, Since 1930

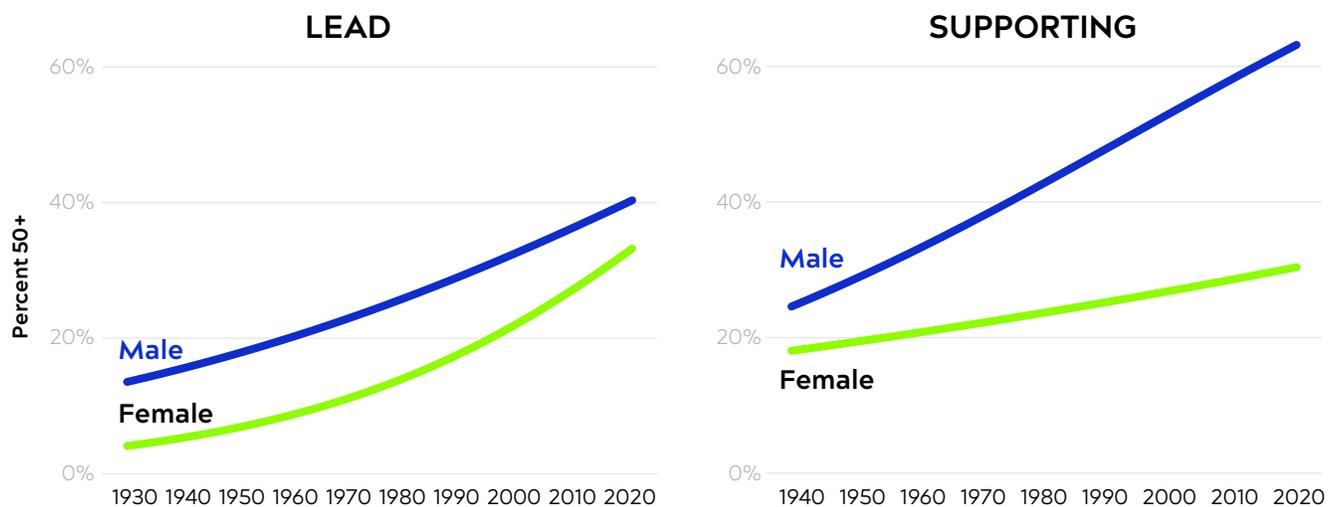


As shown in Chart 6, gender gaps in 50-plus winners look different for Best Actor/Best Actress compared to Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress. Among Best Actor/Best Actress, 50-plus men outnumber 50-plus women overall; however, the trajectory of 50-plus women is a sharper increase in more recent decades, and the gender gap is shrinking.

But for Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress, the share of all male winners who are 50-plus has increased over the last 95 years at a much sharper rate than the share of all female winners who are 50-plus.

CHART 6

Percent of 50-Plus Acting Winners by Gender and Role, Since 1930



Conclusion and Recommendations

Looking at the 95-year history of the Oscars®, we find persistent and sizable gender gaps in 50-plus actors being nominated for and winning Academy Awards®. While the 50-plus gender gap is shrinking among winners of Best Actor/Best Actress, it has grown among winners of Best Supporting Actor/Best Supporting Actress. These findings underscore the importance of developing stories that feature 50-plus men and women in equitable ways.

Prioritize Age-Inclusive Casting. Write and cast more complex roles for female actors ages 50 and older, particularly in supporting roles where the gender gap has widened.

Expand Visibility During Awards Season. In films with 50-plus characters, prominently feature 50-plus female actors in campaigns and marketing efforts to boost their recognition and increase awards consideration.

Recognize Age and Gender Equity. Spotlight age and gender equity in filmmaking, and invest in efforts to develop best practices for addressing these gaps.

Tell More Stories That Center on the Lives of Women 50-Plus. Tell stories that authentically represent the experiences of women 50-plus to challenge ageist and gendered stereotypes in film narratives.

ENDNOTES

1. Geena Davis Institute. (2021). Women Over 50: The Right To Be Seen. Available at <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/GDIGM-Next50-WomenOver50-Study.pdf>
2. Brown, Lucy. (2025, February 10). How Hollywood is Changing the Age-Gap Love Story. *The Independent*. Available at: <https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/babygirl-age-gap-kidman-oscars-b2695534.html>
3. Geena Davis Institute. (2021). Women Over 50: The Right To Be Seen. Available at <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/GDIGM-Next50-WomenOver50-Study.pdf>
4. The names of winners and nominees, as well as the work and year for which they were nominated, were extracted from the Wikipedia pages for each of the four awards. We used Perplexity AI to search for individuals' birth dates, a sample of which were hand-coded to check accuracy. The smooth lines were calculated predicting age 50-plus (1) or not (0) from year in a logistic regression. More details can be found at GitHub.
5. Many actors have been nominated multiple times, which is why there are fewer actors than nominations.

About the Geena Davis Institute

Since 2004, the Geena Davis Institute has worked to mitigate unconscious bias while creating equality, fostering inclusion and reducing negative stereotyping in entertainment and media. As one a global research-based organization, the Institute provides research, direct guidance and thought leadership aimed at increasing representation of marginalized groups within six identities: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body type. Because of its unique history and position, the Institute can help achieve true onscreen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at geenadavisinstitute.org

How to cite this report: White, M. H., II., Mangan, A., & Conroy, M. (2025). Fifty-Plus Female Actors Are Recognized Less Than Their Male Counterparts. The Geena Davis Institute.