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Seventy Years of 50-Plus Actors at the Emmys:

Gender Gaps in Nominees and Winners

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Executive Summary

Since 1954, there have been about 4,000 nominations for the lead and supporting acting categories of the Primetime Emmy Awards across three genres: comedy, drama, and limited series. This report analyzes whether there are gender gaps among nominees and winners ages 50 and older in lead and supporting categories (excluding guest roles), and whether those gaps have changed over the past 72 years.

Overall, the analysis finds a persistent gender gap: Fifty-plus men are a larger share of male nominees and winners than 50-plus women are of female nominees and winners. But the size and trajectory of that gap differs sharply by category.

Key Findings

Fifty-plus gender gaps among all categories and genres:

- ◆ Nearly 2 in 5 male nominees (42%) have been 50-plus since the 1950s, compared with about 1 in 3 female nominees (33%) — a 9-percentage-point 50-plus gender gap. Men are nearly 30% more likely than women to land a nomination after they hit age 50.
- ◆ Exactly 2 in 5 male winners (40%) have been 50-plus since the 1950s, compared with about 1 in 3 female winners (34%) — a 6-point 50-plus gender gap. Men are nearly 20% more likely than women to win after they hit age 50.

Fifty-plus gender gaps by category (lead, supporting):

- ◆ Among nominees in all three genres, the 50-plus gender gap for leading roles is more than double the gap for supporting roles: 13 points for leads (41% of men compared with 28% of women) versus just 5 points for supporting roles (44% of men compared with 39% of women).
- ◆ Among winners in all three genres, the 50-plus gender gap for leading roles is 14 points — 41% of male lead winners have been ages 50 and older, compared with just 27% of female lead winners. Among supporting winners, 50-plus women actually have a 4-point edge: Forty-three percent of female supporting winners have been 50-plus, compared with 39% of male supporting winners.

INTRODUCTION

To better understand the history of 50-plus representation on acclaimed television, this report analyzes gender gaps in Primetime Emmy Award acting nominees and winners since 1954. This topic matters because on-screen representation of women ages 50 and older is generally low — and awards recognition is one signal of how much the industry values their performers, particularly 50-plus women.

Among the 2026 Emmy acting nominees, many 50-plus women have been recognized across genres and categories, including Jean Smart (lead, *Hacks*), Lisa Kudrow (lead, *The Comeback*), Michelle Pfeiffer (supporting, *Margo's Got Money Troubles*), and Dale Dickey (supporting, *Widow's Bay*) in comedy; Rhea Seahorn (lead, *Pluribus*), Allison Janney (supporting, *The Diplomat*), Julianne Nicholson (supporting, *Paradise*), and Kathrine LaNasa (supporting, *The Pitt*) in drama; and Sally Field (lead, *Remarkably Bright Creatures*), Laurie Metcalf (supporting, *Monster: The Ed Gein Story*), Youn Yuh-jung (supporting, *Beef*), Linda Cardellini (supporting, *DTF St. Louis*), and Constance Zimmer (supporting, *Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette*) in limited series. Their nominations reflect ongoing opportunities for 50-plus women on television. Still, 50-plus men are more common in those three genres: This year, 60% of male acting nominees are 50-plus, compared with 41% of female acting nominees, representing a 19-point gap. So, while the share of 50-plus female nominees is higher than the sample average for women (33%), it's still well below the share for men this year.

The section below details how this data was collected and analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

This report analyzes the gender and age of nominees in the lead and supporting acting categories of the Primetime Emmy Awards across three genres: comedy, drama, and limited series. Guest actor and actress categories are excluded. For each nominee, we recorded the year of nomination, whether the performer won, and their birth year, drawn from the Emmy nomination record and verified through additional research on each performer. To calculate whether a nominee was ages 50 or older, their birth year was subtracted from the year of the nomination.

The analysis looks at nominations from 1954 through 2026. In total, the dataset includes 4,017 acting nominations. This report displays both the raw percentage of nominees and winners in each decade who were 50-plus, as well as smoothed trend lines from a logistic regression predicting the probability that a nominee was 50-plus based on nomination year, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines represent a modeled long-run trend, not a year-by-year tally.

TABLE 1

Number of leading- and supporting-role nominees, by gender and decade

Decade	Male nominees	Female nominees
All decades	2,054	1,963
1950s (1954–1959)	104	69
1960s	146	135
1970s	262	217
1980s	300	300
1990s	306	309
2000s	311	307
2010s	361	364
2020s (2020–2026)	264	262

FINDINGS

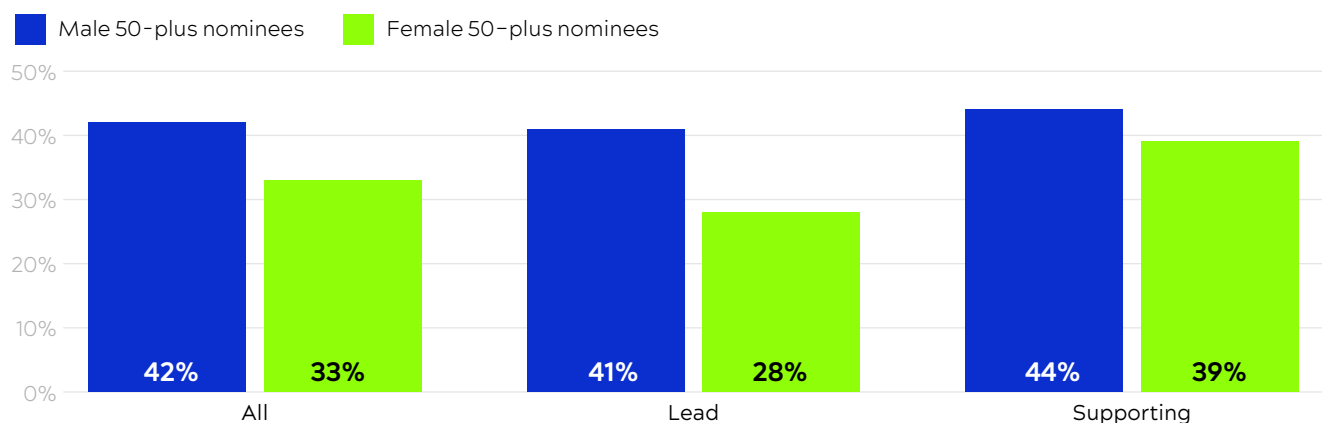
GENDER GAPS IN 50-PLUS NOMINEES

Since 1954, 42% of male nominees and 33% of female nominees in leading and supporting categories across comedy, drama, and limited series genres have been 50-plus, making for a 9-point gender gap favoring men. (See Figure 1.)

The gap looks different for lead and supporting nominees. Among lead nominees and across all years and genres, 41% of men and 28% of women have been 50-plus (a 13-point gender gap favoring men). Among supporting nominees, the gap is smaller — 44% of men and 39% of women have been 50-plus (a 5-point gender gap favoring men).

FIGURE 1

Share of acting nominees ages 50 or older, by gender and role (lead and supporting), 1954–2026

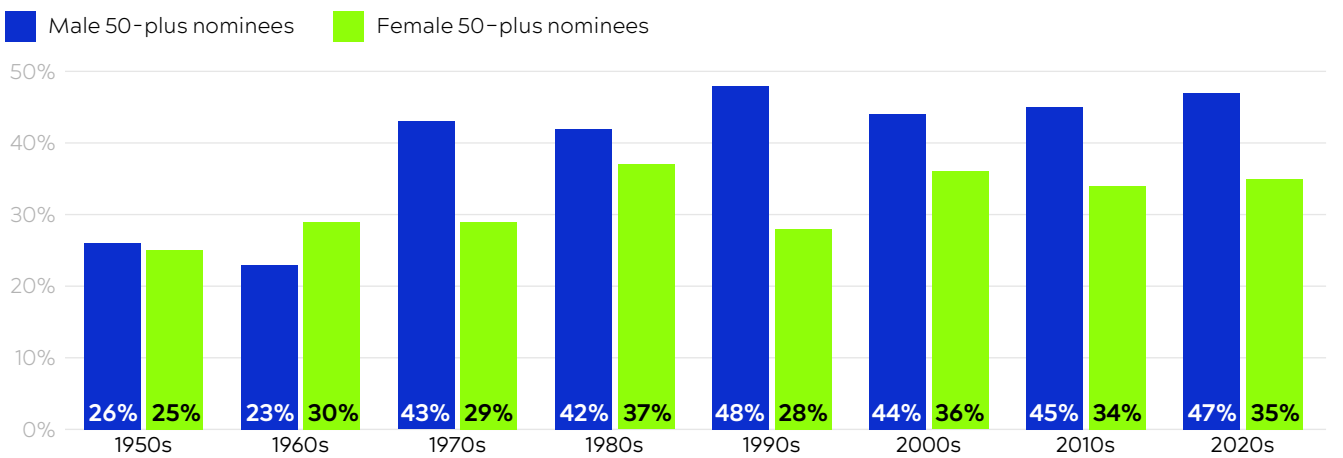


Note. Excludes guest roles.

By decade, the widest gap among all nominees was in the 1990s (a 20-point gap; 48% of male nominees but just 28% of female nominees were 50-plus). In the 1960s, there was a 7-point gap favoring 50-plus women (23% of men and 30% of women were 50-plus). (See Figure 2.) In the 2020s so far, the gap is 12 points, favoring 50-plus men.

FIGURE 2

Share of acting nominees ages 50 or older, by gender and decade

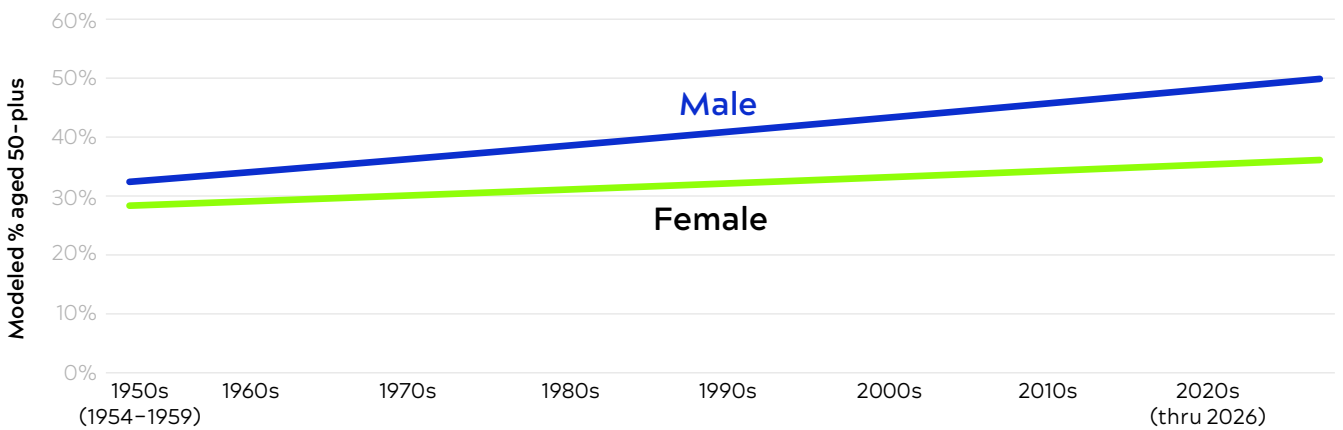


Note. The 1950s cover 1954 to 1959. The 2020s cover 2020 to 2026. This analysis excludes guest roles.

Figure 3 presents the modeled gender gap for all nominees over the study’s time frame. It shows the gap widening by an estimated 10 points between 1954 and 2026 (from 4 points to 14 points).

FIGURE 3

Figure 3. Estimated share of acting nominees ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



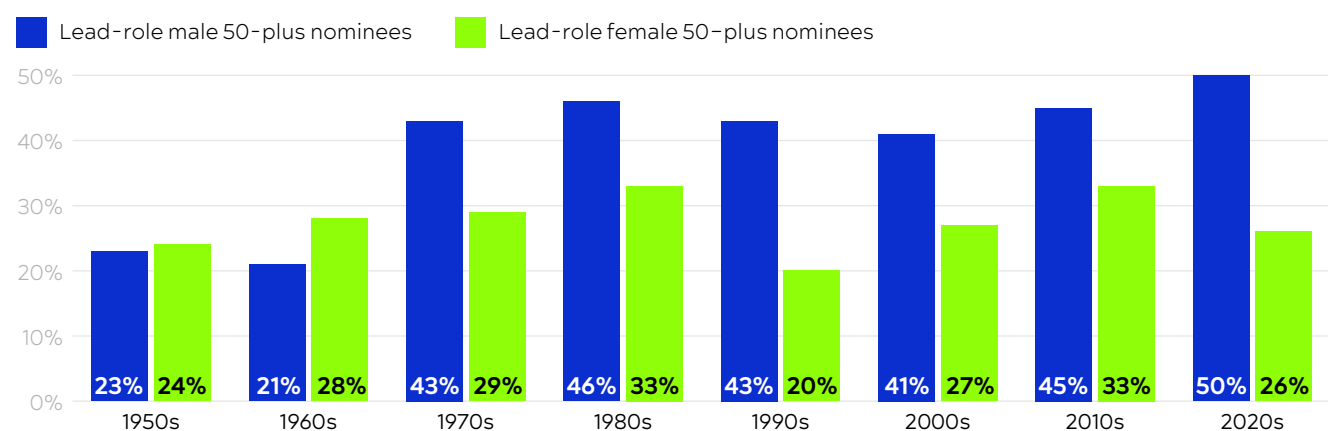
Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a nominee was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual nominees. Excludes guest actor categories.

GENDER GAPS IN NOMINEES AMONG LEADS AND SUPPORTING CATEGORIES

Among lead nominees across all years and genres, the 50-plus gender gap is 13 points — 41% of male lead nominees have been 50-plus, compared with 28% of female lead nominees. By decade, the widest gap among leads is in the 2020s (24-point gap; 50% of male lead nominees and 26% of female lead nominees were 50-plus). In the 1960s, the gap favored 50-plus women by 7 points (21% of men and 28% of women were 50-plus).

FIGURE 4

Share of leading-role nominees ages 50 or older, by gender and decade

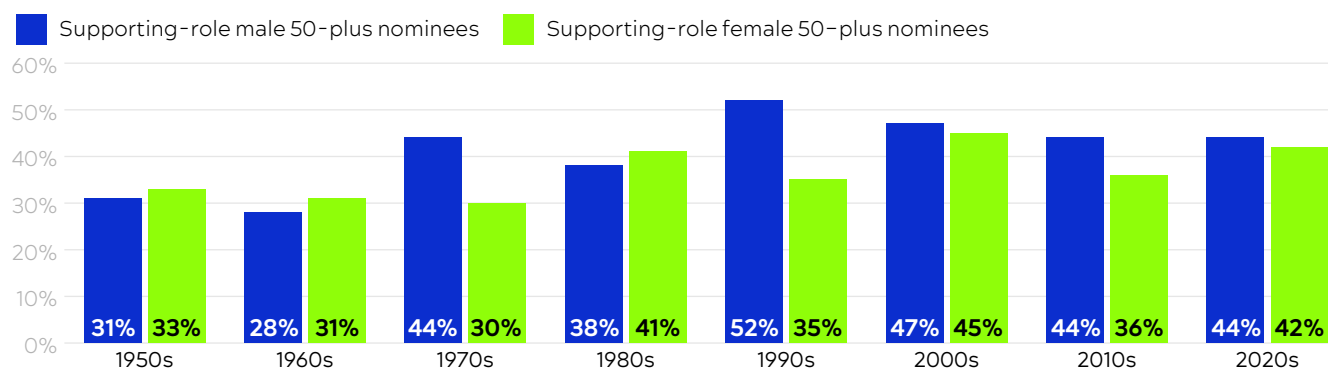


Note. The 1950s cover 1954 to 1959. The 2020s cover 2020 to 2026. This analysis excludes guest roles.

Among supporting-role nominees across all years and genres, the 50-plus gender gap is just 5 points — 44% of male supporting nominees have been 50-plus, compared with 39% of female supporting nominees. By decade, the widest gap was in the 1990s (a 17-point gap; 52% of male supporting nominees and 35% of female supporting nominees were 50-plus). In the 1960s, the gap favored 50-plus women (27% of men and 32% of women were 50-plus). In the 2020s so far, the gap is just 2 points favoring men (44% of men and 42% of women were 50-plus).

FIGURE 5

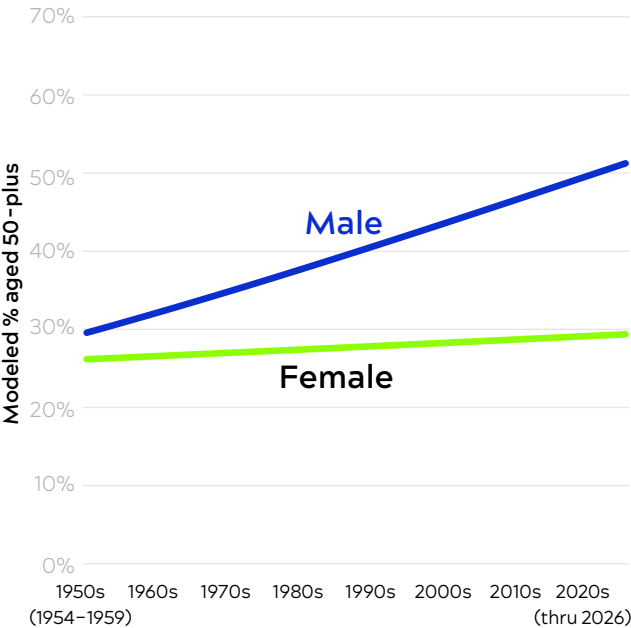
Share of supporting-role nominees ages 50 or older, by gender and decade



The modeled gender gap among lead nominees has widened by an estimated 19 points between 1954 and 2026 (from 3 points to 22 points).

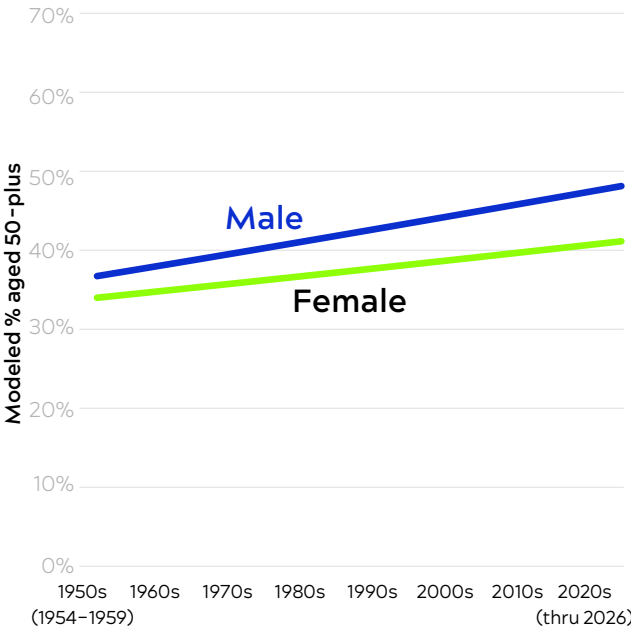
The modeled gender gap among supporting nominees has widened, too, but by much less: An estimated 4 points between 1954 and 2026 (from 3 points to 7 points), a far smaller shift than the 19-point widening among male and female lead nominees over the same period. In other words, the gender gap for 50-plus supporting roles has stayed comparatively stable, while the leading-role gap has grown roughly five times as much.

FIGURE 6
Estimated share of leading-role nominees ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a lead-role nominee was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual lead-role nominees. Excludes guest actor categories.

FIGURE 7
Estimated share of supporting nominees ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a supporting-role nominee was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual supporting-role nominees. Excludes guest actor categories.

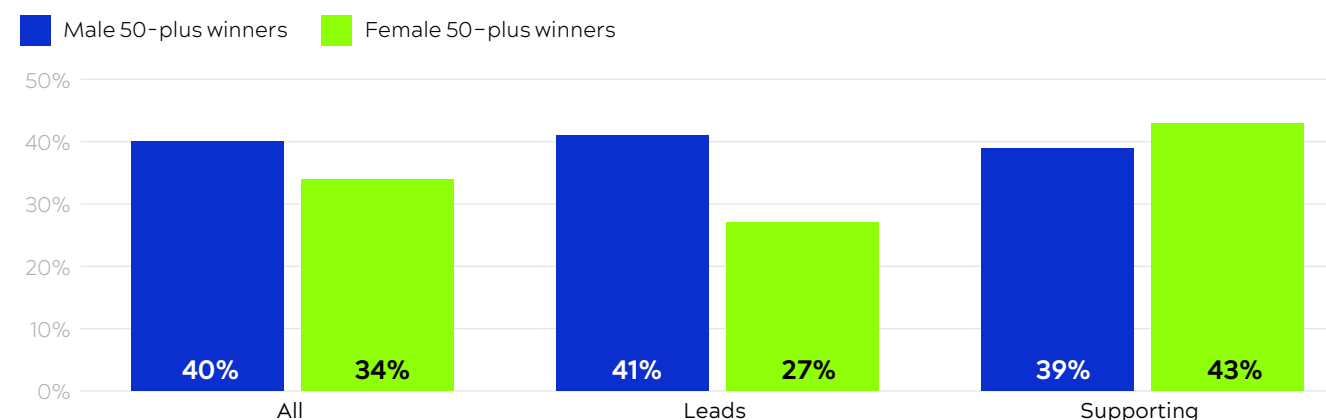
GENDER GAPS IN 50-PLUS WINNERS

Among winners for a leading or supporting role across all three genres, 40% of men and 34% of women have been 50-plus, a 6-point gender gap favoring men.

The modeled gender gap among winners has stayed roughly stable between 1954 and 2026 (from 7 points to 5 points). By decade, the widest gap among winners was in the 1990s (37-point gap; 60% of male winners and 24% of female winners were 50-plus). In the 1960s the gap was 23 points in the opposite direction: 17% of men and 41% of women were 50-plus.

FIGURE 8

Share of leading-role winners ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026

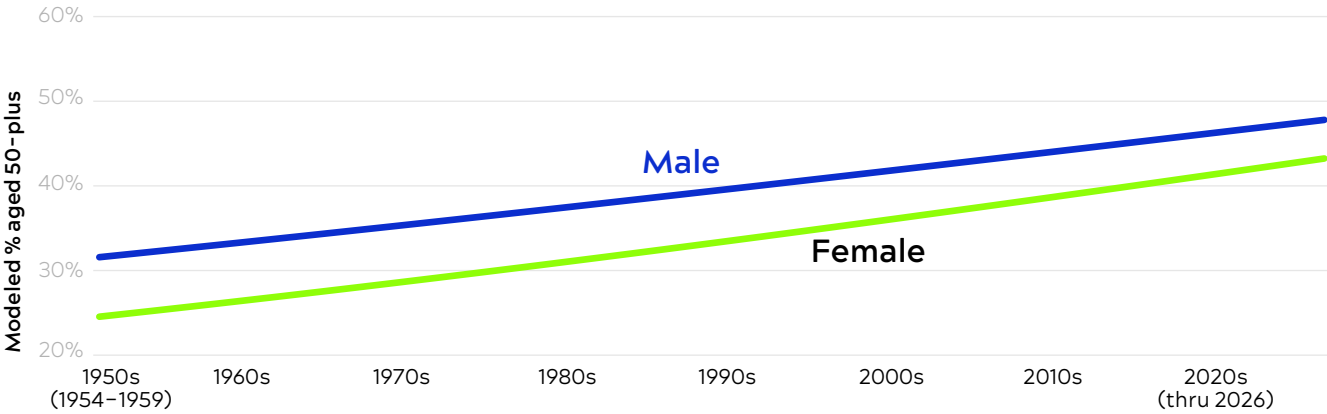


Note. Excludes guest roles.

GENDER GAPS IN WINNERS AMONG LEADS AND SUPPORTING ROLES

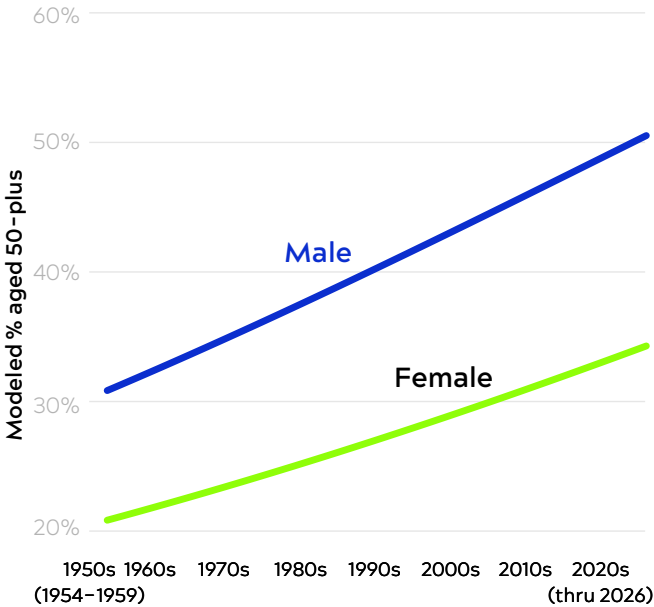
As shown in Figure 8, among leading-role winners in all genres, 41% of men and 27% of women have been 50-plus (a 13-point gender gap favoring men). Among supporting-role winners in all genres, 39% of men and 43% of women have been 50-plus (a 4-point gap in the opposite direction, with female winners more likely than male winners to be 50-plus).

FIGURE 9
Estimated share of acting winners ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



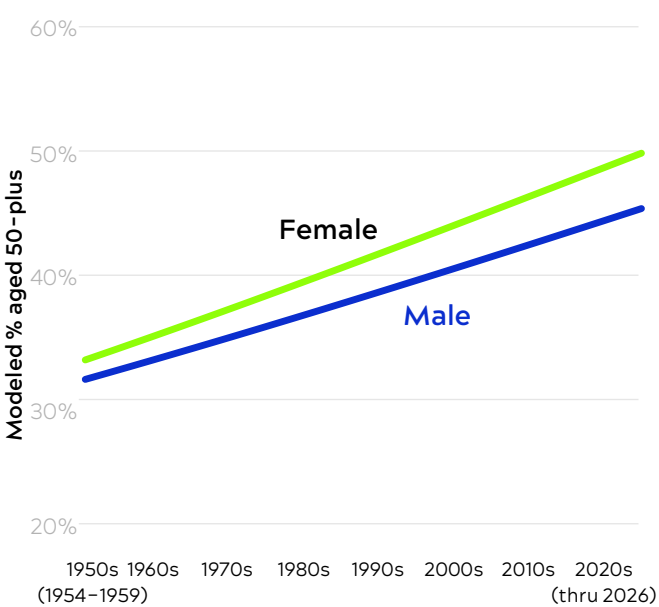
Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a winner was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual winners. Excludes guest actor categories.

FIGURE 10
Estimated share of leading-role winners ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a lead-role winner was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual lead-role winners. Excludes guest actor categories.

FIGURE 11
Estimated share of supporting-role winners ages 50 or older, by gender, 1954–2026



Note. Estimates are based on a logistic regression predicting the probability that a supporting-role winner was 50-plus, using nomination year as the predictor, fit separately by gender. The smoothed lines show the model’s predicted percentage 50-plus for each year. This is a modeled trend, not year-by-year tallies of actual supporting-role winners. Excludes guest actor categories.

The modeled gender gap among leading-role winners has widened by an estimated 6 points between 1954 and 2026 (from 10 points to 16 points).

The modeled gender gap among supporting winners has held in women's favor across the full 72-year span, widening just slightly from 2 points in the 1950s to 4 points in the 2020s. These lead/supporting splits are based on especially small yearly samples and should be interpreted cautiously.

CONCLUSION

Across 72 years of Emmy acting nominations, 50-plus men have consistently made up a larger share of male nominees and winners than 50-plus women have of female nominees and winners — a 9-point gap among nominees (42% vs. 33%) and a 6-point gap among winners (40% vs. 34%). But that gap is not evenly distributed across roles.

The divide is sharpest in leading roles. Among nominees, the gender gap for leads (13 points) is more than double the gap for supporting roles (5 points), and the modeled trend shows this widening further: The lead-nominee gap has grown from an estimated 3 points in 1954 to 22 points by 2026, while the supporting-nominee gap has grown much more modestly, from 3 points to 7. Among winners, the pattern is even more pronounced — the lead-winner gap has widened to 16 points and shows no sign of closing, while 50-plus women have held a modest advantage among supporting winners across the entire period studied, growing from an estimated 2-point edge in the 1950s to a 4-point edge by the 2020s.

Taken together, these findings suggest that age works differently for women depending on the size of the role. Once women move into leading parts, the 50-plus gap not only persists but continues to widen. But in supporting roles, women 50 and older have closed the gap entirely and, by recent estimates, edged ahead of their male counterparts. Seventy years in, the data suggests that we reward older men who are asked to carry a show more consistently than older women.

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 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 on-screen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at geenadavisinstitute.org.

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