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Still Waiting to Be Seen

Fifty-Plus Characters in Film, Broadcast and Streaming, 2010–2025

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GEENA DAVIS INSTITUTE

In partnership with NEXT 50

Ranking data provided by Nielsen

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Foreword from Next50

Next50 is a private, national foundation based in Denver, Colorado. Since 2016, Next50 has been working toward creating a world that values aging. One way we pursue that vision is by transforming the way we think about aging by creating more realistic portrayals of older adults across the arts. The Geena Davis Institute has been an outstanding partner because their work identifies and addresses age bias in film and television. We both know that media is a driving force in the ways that we see and understand the world around us, and if we intentionally create well-rounded and dynamic older characters, the world will begin to see older adults as valued contributors, leaders, and members of society.

This study looked at how characters aged 50 and older appear in the most popular U.S. films and TV series from 2010 to 2025 — and the results speak for themselves. Over the last 16 years, only 1 in 4 characters on screen is older. There has been a moderate rise in this number, with a 6-point growth of older characters seen in film; however, the closer we look, the more issues rise to the surface. When older adults do make an appearance, about 4 in 5 are white and they are often cast as villains. Among film leads and major supporting characters, 30% of those who are 50-plus play villains, compared with less than 10% of under 50 characters. If American media shows older characters as villainous that often, what will Americans think of their congresspeople? Their neighbors? Their parents?

This problem of representation is especially pernicious for older women, who make up only 6.5% of characters on broadcast television. When looking at the 10 top-grossing films each year over 16 years, only one lead was a woman aged 50 or older. Only one! That doesn't do justice to the nearly 60 million older women in this country. They deserve better. And the Geena Davis Institute is helping the entertainment industry do better not just through this study but also with their Spellcheck for Bias™ tool. This tool helps writers address tropes and biases in their scripts before they even make it to production, encouraging artists to reimagine the ways they are representing older adults.

Nearly 30% of American older adults report feeling socially isolated. They are disconnected from their communities, and they are underestimated by the world writ large. We know that what we see on screen shapes what we expect in real life. If older characters can be portrayed as the multifaceted people that they are — that we all are — then we can usher in a new mindset around aging on screen and in our own lives. We can find new ways to connect to one another, to build bridges and social ties across generations. This shift brings us closer to a world that values aging. The Geena Davis Institute is proving this change is possible, and Next50 is proud to stand with them to make it happen.

PETER KALDES

President & CEO, Next50

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Key findings

This study examines the representation of adults aged 50 and older across popular U.S. film and television from 2010–2025. In total, the study analyzes 440 titles and 10,504 speaking characters.

1 in 4
characters is 50 or older, 2010–2025

4 to 1
men to women among 50-plus film characters

1 of 176
film leads in 16 years was a 50-plus woman

3 in 10
broadcast leads are 50-plus, the best showing of any medium

1. **Fifty-plus characters remain about one in four on screen.**
   From 2010 to 2025, 23.9% of film characters, 24.0% of broadcast characters and 21.4% of streaming characters were 50-plus. Over the time frame, broadcast and streaming held flat; film saw at most a slight rise.
2. **More 50-plus women on screen in film and broadcast.**
   Although 50-plus representation is mostly flat from 2010–2025, 50-plus women made some gains. In film, men under 50 fell from an estimated 56.3% of characters to 43.0%, while 50-plus women more than doubled (3.0% to 7.3%). On broadcast series, 50-plus women were the only group whose share grew (5.3% to 8.9%). Streaming showed no change for 50-plus women (8.3% to 8.4%).
3. **Fifty-plus women are the most overlooked group.**
   While 50-plus women main gains, 50-plus men still outnumber 50-plus women 4 to 1 in film, nearly 3 to 1 on broadcast and 3 to 2 on streaming.
4. **Broadcast gave 50-plus actors the most leads.**
   Nearly a third of broadcast leads (29.5%) are 50-plus, compared with about 1 in 7 in film and streaming. But most of them are men. Fifty-plus men are 23.6% of broadcast leads, and 50-plus women are just 5.8%.
5. **Fifty-plus characters are less racially diverse.**
   Fifty-plus characters are less racially diverse than under 50 characters in every medium, and the gap is widest on streaming in 2021–2025 (20.7% of 50-plus characters were people of color compared with 41.4% of under 50 characters).
6. **Villainy skews older.**
   Older characters were disproportionately written as the threat, the obstacle, or the one to defeat.
7. **Fifty-plus characters are shown as bosses.**
   Among characters shown working, 50-plus characters are about twice as likely as under 50 characters to hold authority, in film (62.7% compared with 33.7%) and on broadcast and streaming (64.3% compared with 28.4%).
8. **Fifty-plus characters are rarely shown as being physically affectionate.**
   Fifty-plus characters are less than half as likely as under 50 characters to be shown being physically affectionate with a romantic partner, in film (9.3% compared with 19.9%) and on broadcast and streaming (4.9% compared with 12.7%).



Halfpoint Images / Moment via Getty Images

Introduction

Few audiences are as valuable to film and television, or as routinely sidelined, as Americans in the second half of life. People 50 and older log more screen time than any other age group. According to Nielsen's 2025 report, adults aged 50–64 spent an average of 5 hours and 24 minutes watching television, including streaming, on days they watched TV in September 2024. Adults aged 65–99 watched even more, averaging 6 hours and 33 minutes per viewing day.[1] Streaming adoption among people 50 and over climbed from 64% in 2019 to 86% in 2023,[2] and a 2025 AARP study found that "the 50-plus age group spends over $10 billion a year on Hollywood entertainment."[3]

Despite the size and spending power of this audience, the media industry continues to see younger viewers as more valuable. As the New York Times reported, "induastry wisdom insists that younger viewers demand younger heroes."[4] Our analysis suggests that these self-fulfilling industry axioms, as well as implicit bias, have led to significant underrepresentation and misrepresentation of 50-plus viewers.

Erasure is not the only problem. Many productions promote ageism by relying on negative, inaccurate, and sometimes harmful stereotypes, and they tend to pigeonhole the few older characters who do appear into a narrow set of storylines. Because entertainment media help shape how a society perceives individuals and groups, these misrepresentations carry real social consequences. They influence our collective understanding of what it means to grow older and of whether aging is something to anticipate or to dread, both for ourselves and for others.

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How uncommon are 50-plus characters on screen, and are 50-plus women more uncommon than 50-plus men? How often are 50-plus characters reduced to stereotypes? A 2021 study by the Geena Davis Institute, sponsored by Next50, found that characters 50 and older, especially women 50-plus, lack equitable inclusion and accurate representation in the most popular American films and television shows from 2010 to 2020.[5] For example, characters 50 and older made up less than a quarter of all characters in top-grossing films and top-rated TV shows from the past decade, and just 2.9% of leads or co-leads were 50-plus in 2010–2015, improving only to 15.1% by 2016–2020. Among characters 50 and older, men significantly outnumbered women — 80% of film roles, 75% of broadcast TV roles, and 66% of streaming roles.

This new study extends that work through 2025, covering 160 top-grossing films, 160 episodes of top-rated broadcast series and 120 episodes of popular streaming series. It asks four questions, and the findings answer each one for film, broadcast and streaming side by side:

1. Who's on screen? How often do 50-plus characters appear, and has that changed?
2. Who gets the lead? How often do 50-plus characters, and 50-plus women in particular, carry the story?
3. How are they portrayed? As bosses, villains, heroes or romantic partners?
4. Who's missing? How diverse are 50-plus characters by race, disability and LGBTQIA+ identity?



MoMo Productions / DigitalVision via Getty Images

Ageism on screen and off

Ageism pervades entertainment media, and it becomes more acute when age intersects with gender. In Hollywood, a woman's age is stigmatized far earlier than a man's, a divide that surfaces in paychecks as plainly as on casting sheets. Studying 265 performers who appeared on screen between 1968 and 2008, researchers found that women's average earnings per film rise until roughly age 34 and then drop off steeply, while men's earnings keep climbing until about 51 before leveling off.[6]

Performers themselves have grown increasingly outspoken about what this erasure costs, not only to careers, but the wider culture. Accepting a 2026 AARP Movies for Grownups award for her leading turn in the *Matlock* reboot, Kathy Bates noted that the industry keeps narrowing the kinds of characters older actors are permitted to play, cautioning that "when we aren't reflected in those stories, we all start feeling unseen and invisible."[7] Bates' remark reframes underrepresentation as far more than a professional grievance: It is a message about who is presumed to still count in later life.

There is some indication that the industry is taking note. In 2026, acclaimed television shows like *The Boroughs, Hacks, Matlock*, and *Only Murders in the Building* signal a wave of multidimensional and richer roles for older actors. These roles are also being recognized, with the 50-plus stars of *Hacks, Matlock,* and *Only Murders in the Building* receiving several Emmy and Golden Globe nominations and wins.

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Despite an increasing number of high-profile shows featuring older actors, the existing evidence describes a twofold failure: Older adults are still largely missing, and where present, frequently stereotyped. An older woman on screen shoulders a compounded disadvantage, pushed to the margins first by age and then again by gender. This report is an effort to assess how the industry has moved since our previous report, which covered 2010–2020.[8]

The trouble is not merely tone but range. The storylines most particular to later life are routinely trivialized or skipped altogether. A 2025 Geena Davis Institute report, which analyzed 225 films released in 2009–2024 that featured a prominent woman of 40 or older, found that a mere 6% so much as mentioned menopause, and usually as a throwaway joke rather than a real narrative thread.[9] Gains may also be spreading unevenly. It is an open question whether the recently expanded slate of roles for women 50-plus is going disproportionately to women who are white and heterosexual, while older characters who are LGBTQIA+ or people of color remain scarce. Authentic inclusion means broadening representation across race, sexuality, ability, and body type, not simply aging up an otherwise uniform cast.

The social consequences of ageism: how age bias affects us all

Ageism, or the stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination we direct at ourselves and others on the basis of age, is not a niche. It reaches everyone, and its roots run deep: The World Health Organization observes that "children as young as four become aware of their culture's age stereotypes."[10] As such, most people carry these beliefs for decades before they themselves grow old. Those internalized assumptions turn out to rank among the strongest predictors of how we fare later on. In a landmark longitudinal study of 660 adults aged 50 and above, participants with more positive self-perceptions of aging lived, on average, 7.5 years longer than those with more negative ones.[11] This gap persisted after accounting for age, gender, socioeconomic status, loneliness, and functional health.

Media sits squarely at the center of how these stereotypes can be propagated and normalized. The 2020 University of Michigan's National Poll on Healthy Aging reports that 82% of adults aged 50 to 80 regularly encounter at least one form of everyday ageism, including exposure to ageist messages.[12] Tellingly, respondents who spent more time with television, the internet, and print reported exposure to more forms of ageism than lighter media users, underscoring entertainment's part in spreading these messages.

Older adults themselves largely reject the stereotypes. About two-thirds say life after 50 has turned out better than they expected, and most report growing more at ease being themselves while holding onto a firm sense of purpose.[13] The distance between that lived reality and its on-screen shadow is exactly where entertainment media can intervene. Because beliefs about age are learned early and reinforced across a lifetime, accurate and dynamic representation of older adults, and older women above all, is not simply a question of fairness on screen. It is a lever on the health, dignity, and intergenerational understanding of an entire aging society.


10'000 Hours / DigitalVision via Getty Images

Data and methodology

To analyze on-screen inclusion and representation of 50-plus characters, this report includes a content analysis of the most popular film and television in 2010–2025. We identified the 10 most popular films each year using Box Office Mojo by IMDb (in-year releases). We identified the 10 most popular broadcast and streaming shows using Nielsen rankings, for all audiences (for 2013–2020, when Nielsen rankings were not available for streaming we relied on Rotten Tomatoes aggregated critic reviews to identify the top 10 original streaming series annually, sampled proportionally across Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime). These sampling parameters and the total number of films and television shows analyzed are presented in Table 1. Titles with casts made up almost entirely of nonhuman characters — anthropomorphic animals, sentient toys, or monsters — with no meaningful human population were excluded and replaced with the next most popular title for that year (so long as that title is a mostly-human cast).[14]

Characters in the same film, or in the same series across seasons, share casting and writing decisions, so they are not independent observations. To account for this, we use logistic regression with generalized estimating equations (GEE), clustered by film for movies and by series for broadcast and streaming, with an exchangeable working correlation (independence for lead roles). Clustering TV characters by series is a conservative choice: The same series and characters often appear across several seasons, even though writers and storylines can change. To measure change over time, we model each group's share of characters (for example, 50-plus women) as a function of year. The trend lines and "estimated" shares for 2010 and 2025 reported in the findings come from these models; the dots in the trend figures show the observed share in each year. To compare groups, such as 50-plus characters with under 50

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characters, we model each outcome (such as being a lead or a villain) with the group as the predictor. Portrayal measures are analyzed for lead and supporting characters only, and broadcast and streaming are combined for portrayals because each alone has too few 50-plus lead and supporting characters. Work and work authority were analyzed for adults only. Differences described in the text are statistically significant ($p < .05$) unless noted otherwise. Odds ratios and p-values are in Table A25 in the Appendix. We did not adjust for multiple comparisons, so individual results near the .05 threshold should be read with caution.[15]

Analyses include characters whose age and gender could be determined: 5,055 film characters (1,210 50-plus), 3,039 broadcast characters (730 50-plus) and 2,410 streaming characters (515 50-plus). Each character was categorized as a lead, supporting or minor role based on the title's narrative. To look at change over time, we often group analysis into these three periods: 2010–2015 (six years), 2016–2020 and 2021–2025. Differences between individual time periods are marked in the tables.

TABLE 1

Film and television sampling, 2010–2025

	Sample description	Total titles	Total characters
Film	Analysis is of the 10 top-grossing scripted films in the U.S. market for each year, 2010–2025 according to Box Office Mojo by IMDb (in-year releases).	160	5,055
Broadcast	Analysis is of the 10 most popular broadcast television shows in 2010–2025 according to Nielsen rankings, for all audiences. For each show, the second episode of each season is used for analysis, which allows for consistency between shows in terms of storytelling (i.e. avoiding including one series' season finale or sweeps episodes).	160	3,039
Streaming	Streaming series were sampled for 2013–2025, reflecting the emergence of major streaming platforms. For 2013–2020, we used Rotten Tomatoes' aggregated critic reviews to identify the top 10 original streaming series annually, sampled proportionally across Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime. For 2021–2025, we used Nielsen viewership metrics to identify the most popular streaming series. Unscripted titles were dropped.	120	2,410

Note. For the year to year breakdown of the number of characters and titles, see Appendix A1. Includes characters whose age and gender could be determined.



kate_sept2004 / E+ via Getty Images

Findings

1 – Who's on screen?

FIFTY-PLUS CHARACTERS ARE STILL ABOUT ONE IN FOUR ON SCREEN, MUCH AS IN 2010

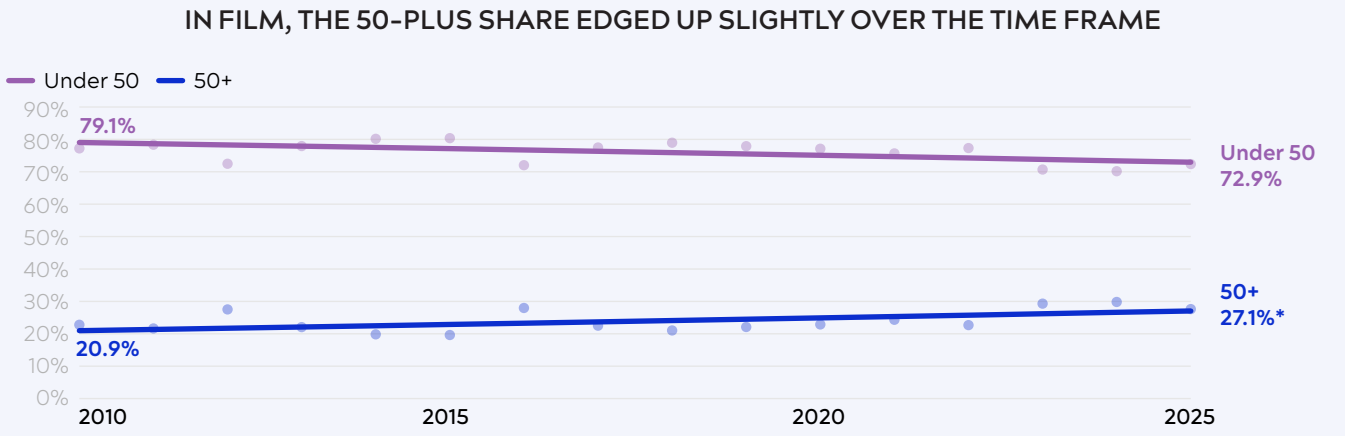
By age. Fifty-plus characters remain underrepresented in all three media. Across all years, they made up 23.9% of film characters, 24.0% of broadcast characters and 21.4% of streaming characters, and that share has barely moved.

Film. The share of 50-plus film characters edged up slightly over 16 years, from an estimated 20.9% in 2010 to 27.1% in 2025, though this small rise depends heavily on 2023 and 2024 (see Figure 1). By period, 50-plus characters were 22.3% of film characters in 2010–2015, 23.4% in 2016–2020 and 26.7% in 2021–2025. Yearly figures ranged from a low of 19.6% (2015) to a high of 29.8% (2024) (see Table A2 in the Appendix).

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FIGURE 1

Estimated trend in share of film characters aged 50-plus and under 50, 2010–2025



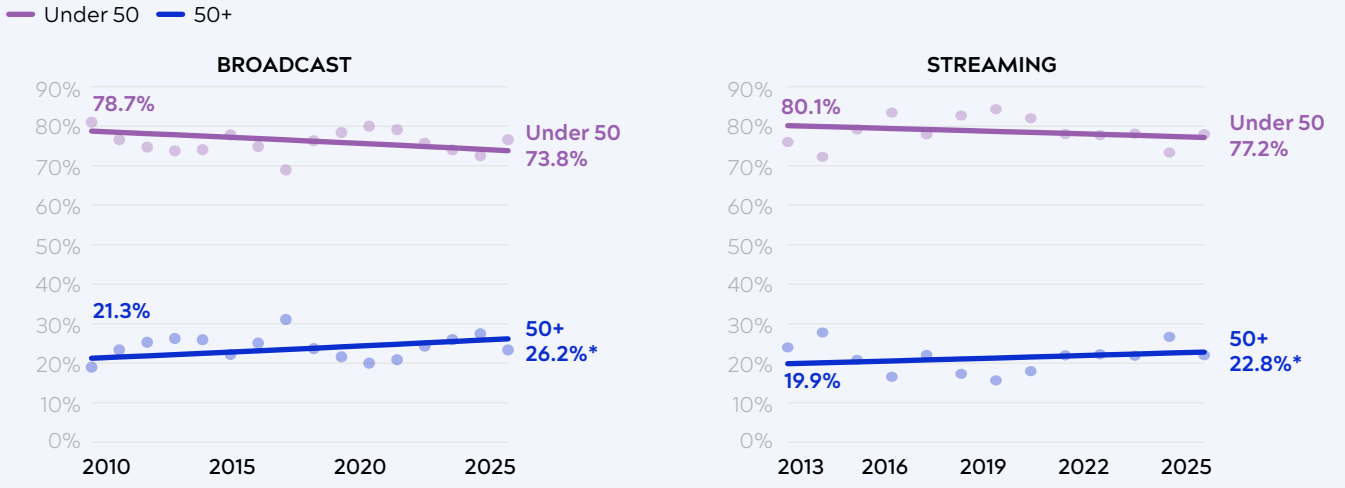
Note. Dots show each year's observed share; lines show the estimated trend from the statistical model. Labels at the left and right are estimates for the first and last years, not the observed percentages. *Statistically significant trend ($p < .05$).

Broadcast. The share changed little: 23.7% in 2010–2015, 24.0% in 2016–2020 and 24.3% in 2021–2025, with no statistically significant trend (see Figure 2 and Table A13 in the Appendix).

Streaming. Streaming has the smallest share of 50-plus characters of the three media. The share dipped from 24.4% in 2013–2015 to 17.9% in 2016–2020, then recovered to 23.0% in 2021–2025; neither the dip nor any steady trend was statistically significant. Data collection began in 2013, so the first period is smaller (25 episodes, 491 characters) and should be read with caution (see Figure 2 and Table A13 in the Appendix).

FIGURE 2

Estimated trend in share of broadcast (2010–2025) and streaming (2013–2025) characters aged 50-plus and under 50



Note. Dots show each year's observed share; lines show the estimated trend from the statistical model. Labels at the left and right are estimates for the first and last years, not the observed percentages. Broadcast covers 2010–2025 and streaming 2013–2025. Neither trend is statistically significant.

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THE SHARE OF 50-PLUS WOMEN IMPROVED, BUT THEY ARE STILL LEAST VISIBLE GROUP ON SCREEN

By age and gender. Splitting characters into four groups (men and women, under 50 and 50-plus) reveals who is least represented. Fifty-plus women are the smallest share of characters: 4.8% of film characters, 6.5% of broadcast characters and 8.4% of streaming characters (see Figure 3). Men under 50 are the largest group in every medium: 50.2% of film characters, 44.4% of broadcast characters and 44.1% of streaming characters.

Film. Three of the four groups changed significantly over time (see Figure 4). The share of men under 50 declined, from an estimated 56.3% of characters in 2010 to 43.0% in 2025. Women under 50 rose from 22.8% to 30.3%, and 50-plus women more than doubled, from 3.0% to 7.3%. The share of 50-plus men did not change.

FIGURE 3

Share of all film, broadcast and streaming characters by gender and age, 2010–2025

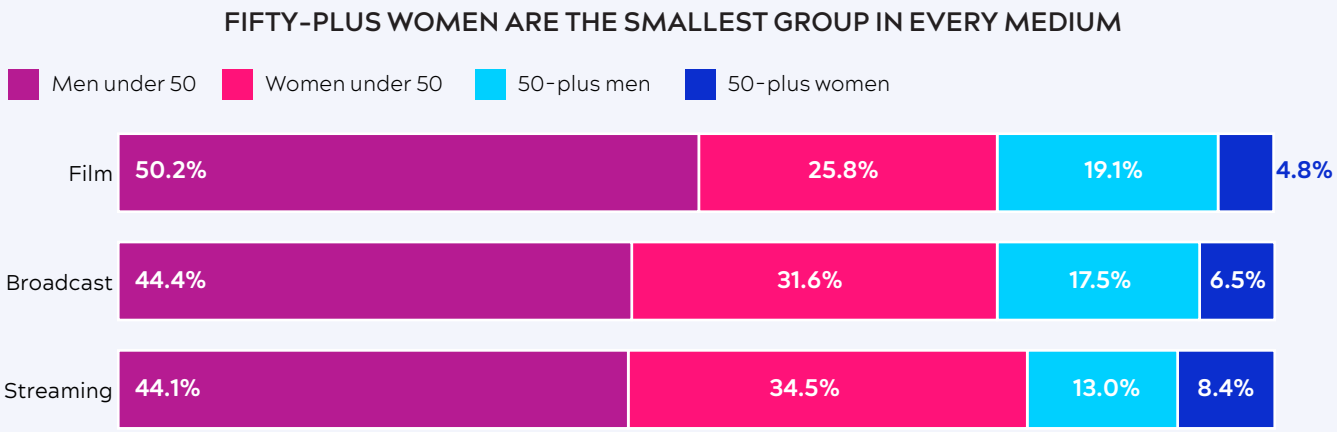
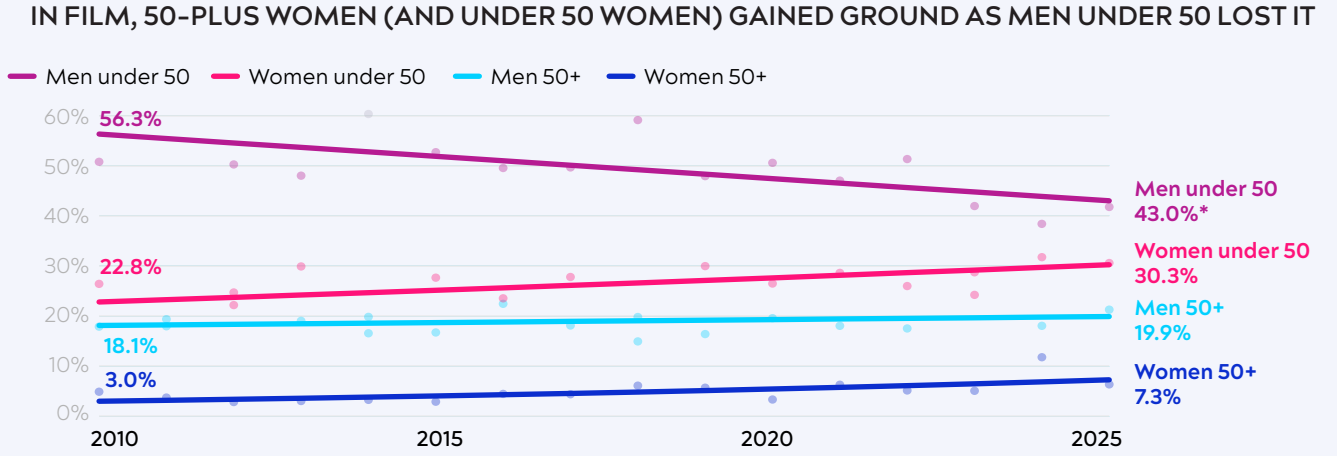


FIGURE 4

Estimated trend in share of film characters by gender and age, 2010–2025



Note. Dots show each year's observed share; lines show the estimated trend from the statistical model (see Table A4 in the Appendix). Labels at the left and right are estimates for the first and last years, not the observed percentages. *Statistically significant trend ($p < .05$).

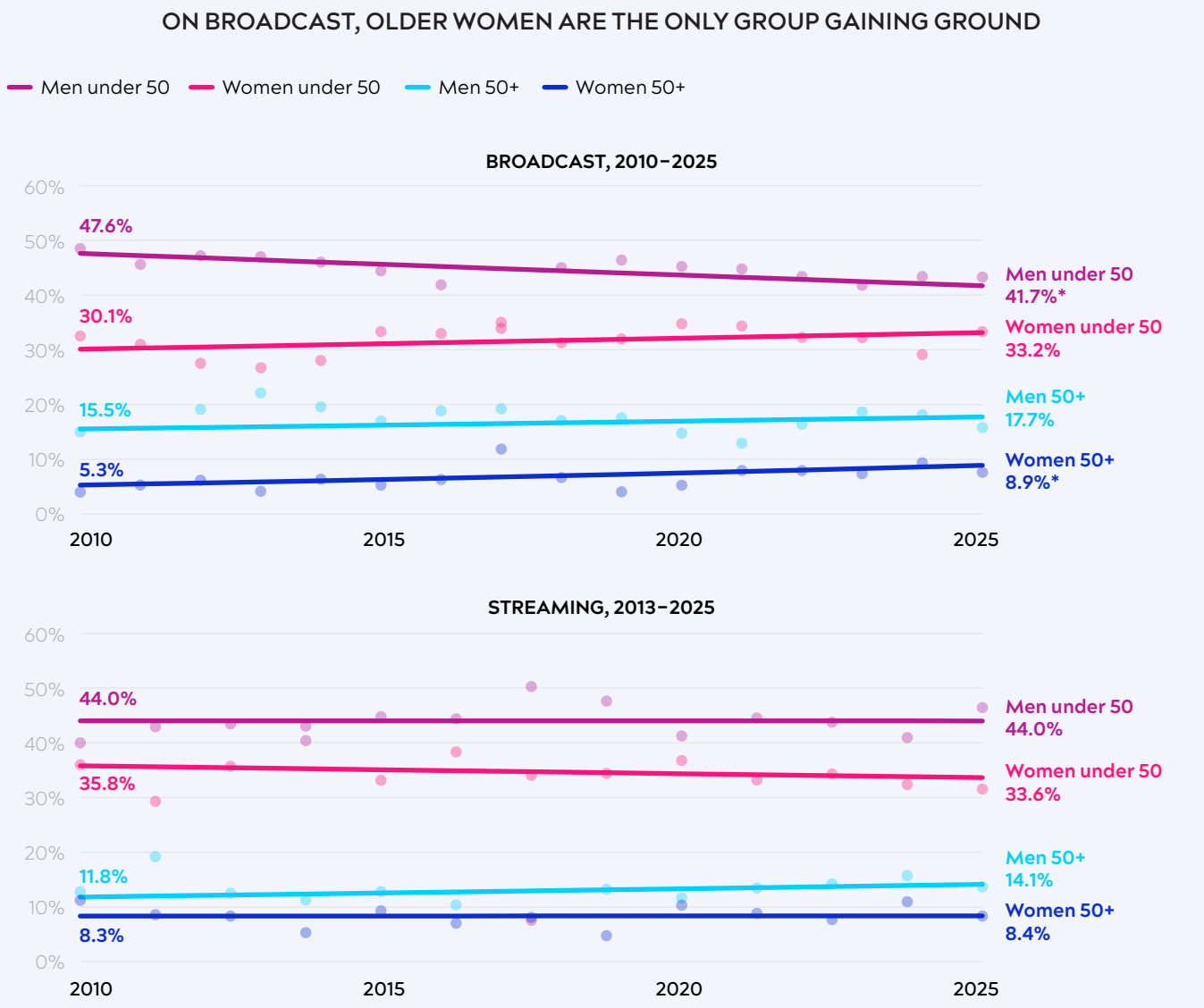
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Broadcast. Fifty-plus women are the only group gaining ground, rising from an estimated 5.3% of broadcast characters in 2010 to 8.9% in 2025. Men under 50 declined, from an estimated 47.6% to 41.7%, while women under 50 and 50-plus men showed no significant change (see Figure 5 and Table A16 in the Appendix).

Streaming. None of the four groups changed significantly in 2013–2025.

FIGURE 5

Estimated trend in share of broadcast (2010–2025) and streaming (2013–2025) characters by gender and age



Note. Dots show each year's observed share; lines show the estimated trend from the statistical model. Labels at the left and right are estimates for the first and last years, not the observed percentages. See Table A16 in the Appendix. *Statistically significant trend ($p < .05$).

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Within the 50-plus group. Looking only at 50-plus characters, most are men: 80.0% in film, 72.9% on broadcast and 60.8% on streaming, or about 4 to 1, 2.7 to 1 and 1.5 to 1 (see Figure 6).

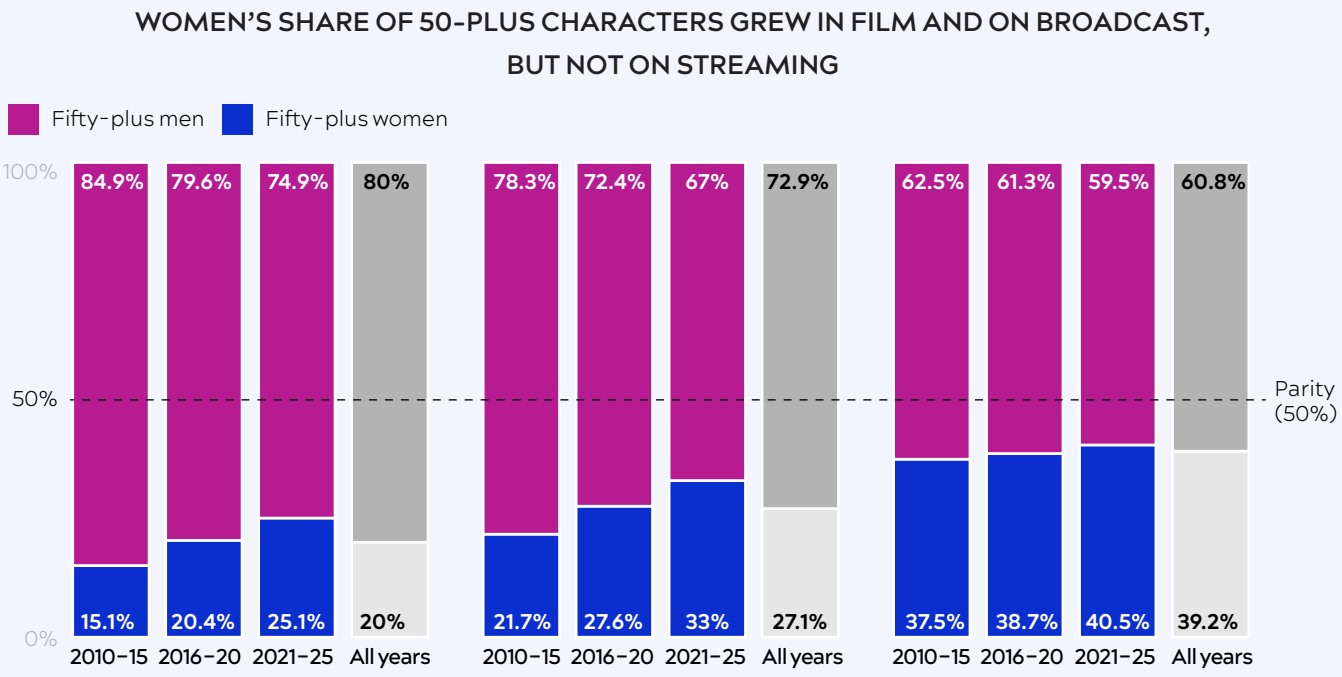
Film. Women's share of 50-plus characters rose from 15.1% in 2010–2015 to 20.4% in 2016–2020 and 25.1% in 2021–2025, a statistically significant rise. Even so, a 50-plus film character is still a man four times out of five.

Broadcast. Women's share of 50-plus characters rose from 21.7% to 27.6% and 33.0%, a statistically significant rise.

Streaming. Streaming has had the most gender-balanced older cast throughout (37.5%, 38.7% and 40.5% of 50-plus characters were women), with no significant change.

FIGURE 6

Share of 50-plus characters who are men and women, by medium and period



Note. Streaming begins in 2013. All years: film 20.0%, broadcast 27.1%, streaming 39.2% (n of 50-plus characters: film 1,210, broadcast 730, streaming 515). The film and broadcast rises is statistically significant.

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2 – Who gets the lead?

BROADCAST GIVES 50-PLUS ACTORS THE MOST LEAD ROLES; 50-PLUS WOMEN RARELY LEAD IN ANY MEDIUM

By age. Fifty-plus characters are well represented in supporting roles, but lead roles are a different story. We look first at how often 50-plus characters lead compared with under 50 characters, and then at how those lead roles divide between men and women.

Film. Fifty-plus characters were about half as likely as under 50 characters to be the lead: 2.1% of 50-plus characters compared with 3.9% of characters under 50. Of 176 film leads, 26 (14.8%) were 50-plus.

Broadcast. Broadcast is the one medium where 50-plus characters hold more than their share of lead roles. They make up 24.0% of broadcast characters but 29.5% of leads (76 of 258). Put another way, 10.4% of 50-plus broadcast characters are leads, compared with 7.9% of under 50 characters, though this difference is not statistically significant.

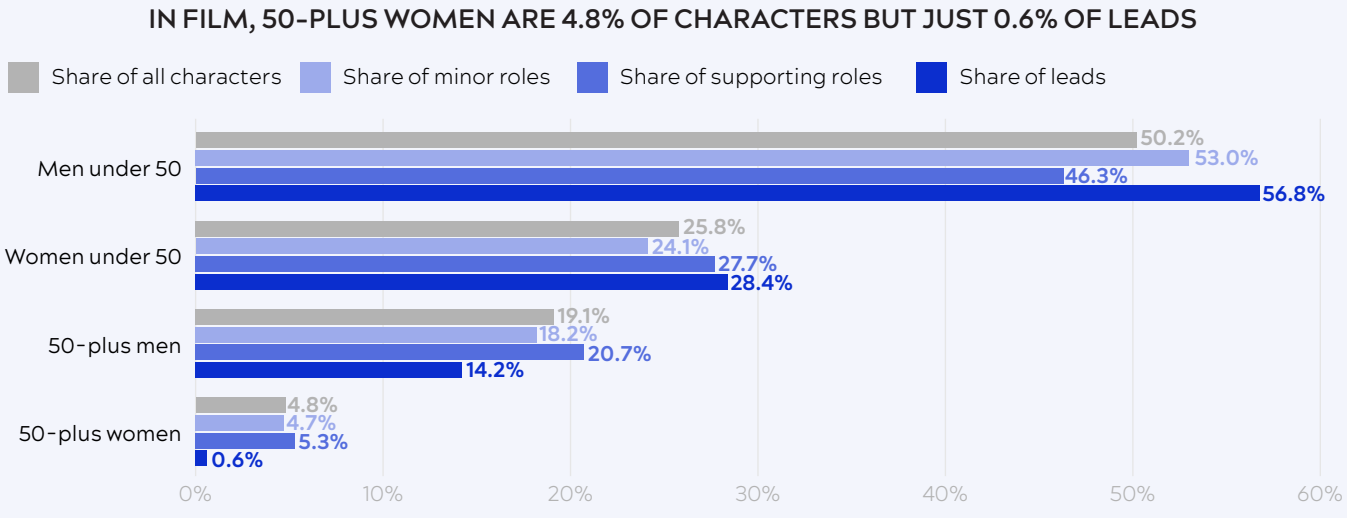
Streaming. On streaming, 5.4% of 50-plus characters lead, compared with 8.1% of under 50 characters, a difference that is not statistically significant. Fifty-plus characters are 21.4% of streaming characters but 15.4% of leads (28 of 182).

By age and gender. In every medium, most 50-plus leads are men: 25 of 26 in film (96.2%), 61 of 76 on broadcast (80.3%) and 22 of 28 on streaming (78.6%). Fifty-plus women are the smallest group of leads everywhere (see Figures 7 and 8). Because so few 50-plus women lead, differences in lead rates between 50-plus women and men are not statistically significant in any one medium.

Film. Fifty-plus women are 4.8% of film characters but just 0.6% of leads; 50-plus men are 19.1% of characters and 14.2% of leads. In 16 years, one 50-plus woman led a top-grossing film: 0.4% of 50-plus women, compared with 2.6% of 50-plus men.

FIGURE 7

Share of all film roles, by gender and age, 2010–2025



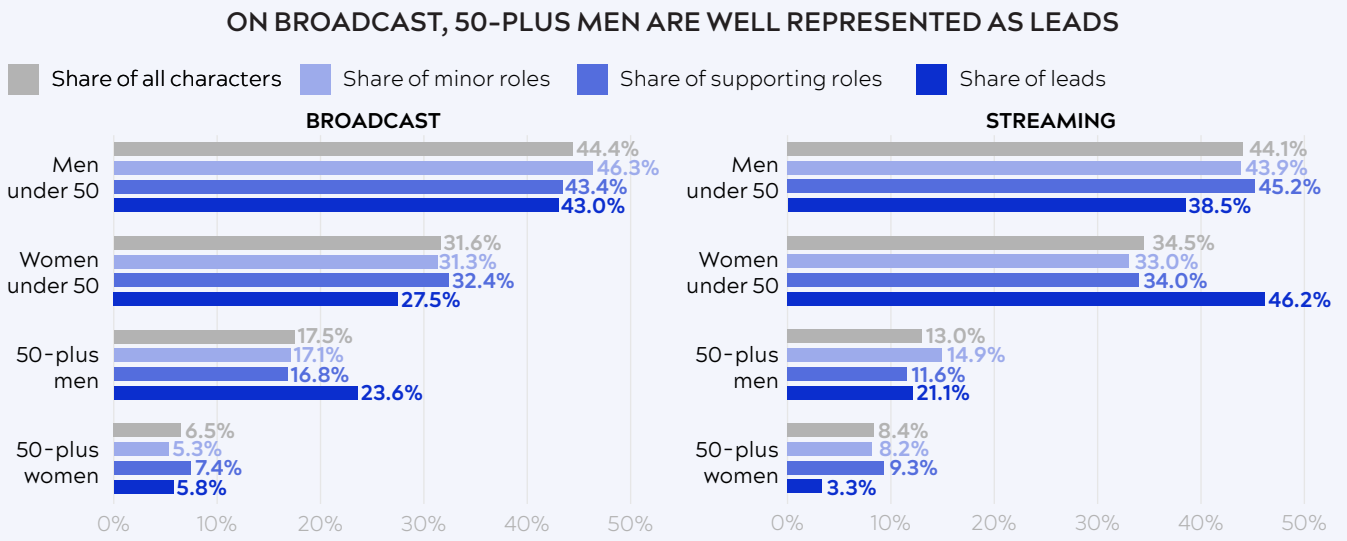
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Broadcast. The broadcast advantage goes mostly to men. Fifty-plus men are 17.5% of broadcast characters but 23.6% of leads, while 50-plus women are 6.5% of characters and 5.8% of leads.

Streaming. Fifty-plus men hold about their share of streaming leads (13.0% of characters, 12.1% of leads), while 50-plus women fall well short (8.4% of characters, 3.3% of leads).

FIGURE 8

Share of all roles on broadcast and streaming, by gender and age, 2010–2025



Note. Broadcast: 258 leads; streaming: 182 leads.

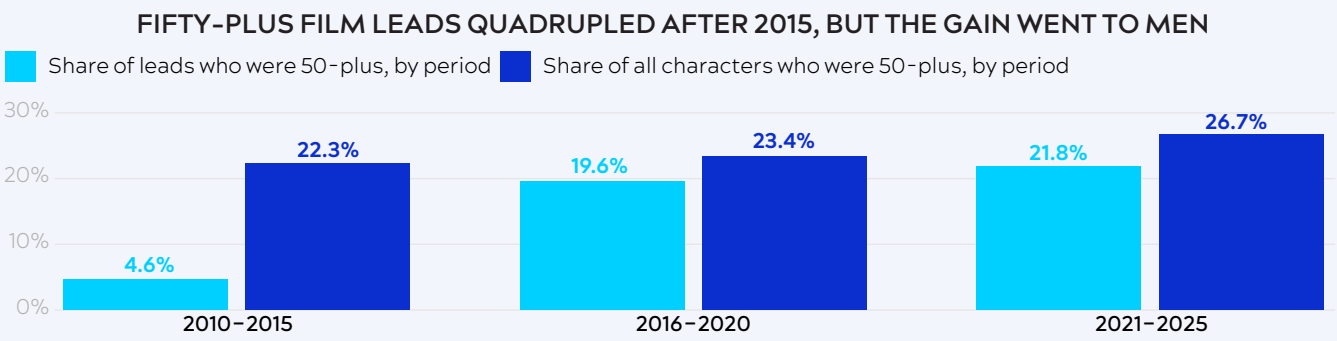
CHANGE OVER TIME

By age. The share of leads going to 50-plus characters rose significantly only in film; on broadcast and streaming, it moved up and down without a clear trend.

Film. The share of film leads going to 50-plus characters more than quadrupled after 2015, from 4.6% in 2010–2015 to about 20% in later years, a statistically significant rise (see Figure 9). Over the same years, 50-plus characters grew only modestly as a share of all characters, from 22.3% to 26.7%.

FIGURE 9

Share of leads and of all characters who are 50-plus in film, by period



Note. The first period covers six years.

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Broadcast. The share of leads who are 50-plus was 29.8% in 2010–2015, 24.3% in 2016–2020 and 38.1% in 2021–2025, but these differences were not statistically significant (see Table 2).

Streaming. The 50-plus share of leads fell from 22.0% in 2013–2015 to 10.1% in 2016–2020 and rose to 17.0% in 2021–2025, also not a significant change (see Table 2).

By age and gender. Who gained those lead roles differed by medium: in film, nearly all of the new 50-plus leads were men, while on broadcast, 50-plus women gained lead roles as 50-plus men's declined.

Film. The gain in 50-plus film leads went almost entirely to men: 50-plus male leads went from 3 to 11 to 11 across the three periods, while 50-plus female leads went from none, to none, to one. Much of that rise comes from established stars who aged into the 50-plus group while still headlining their franchises. About two in three 50-plus men who led a top film in 2016–2025 were reprising a role in a sequel or franchise installment. This pattern partly reflects the sample: The 10 top-grossing films each year are dominated by franchise blockbusters and sequels, and they leave out the independent, awards-season and streaming films where 50-plus actors more often lead. In short, the biggest films made room for 50-plus leads, but mostly for the men who were already starring in these roles.

Broadcast. Fifty-plus women's lead roles rose from 2 to 5 to 8 across the periods, while 50-plus men's went from 23 to 22 to 16 (see Table 2).

Streaming. Counts are small: 50-plus women held 2, 3 and 1 leads across the periods, and 50-plus men 9, 5 and 8 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Leads by gender and age on broadcast and streaming, by period

ON BROADCAST, 50-PLUS WOMEN'S LEAD ROLES ROSE FROM 2 TO 5 TO 8 ACROSS THE PERIODS

Period	Broadcast: Fifty-plus men	Broadcast: Fifty-plus women	Broadcast: share of leads 50-plus	Streaming: Fifty-plus men	Streaming: Fifty-plus women	Streaming: share of leads 50-plus
2010–2015	23	2	29.8%	9	2	22.0%
2016–2020	22	5	24.3%	5	3	10.1%
2021–2025	16	8	38.1%	8	1	17.0%
All years	**61**	**15**	**29.5%**	**22**	**6**	**15.4%**

Note. Streaming begins in 2013.

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3 – How are they portrayed?

FIFTY-PLUS CHARACTERS ARE SHOWN AS BOSSES AND VILLAINS, RARELY AS ROMANTIC PARTNERS

Portrayals were analyzed for lead and supporting characters. We compare 50-plus characters with characters under 50, and 50-plus women with 50-plus men, using rates within each group: "14.7% of 50-plus women are villains" means 14.7% of all 50-plus women in leading or supporting film roles. Broadcast and streaming are combined here, because each medium alone has too few 50-plus lead and supporting characters for reliable comparisons.

Work and authority. Among adult characters, 50-plus and under 50 characters were shown working at similar rates, in film (76.8% compared with 73.7%) and on broadcast and streaming (67.5% compared with 64.7%). But among those shown working, 50-plus characters were about twice as likely to hold authority, such as running a team, a company or a government: 62.7% compared with 33.7% in film, and 64.3% compared with 28.4% on broadcast and streaming. In film, the age gap held at roughly 30 points in every period, and on broadcast and streaming it also held in every period (see Tables A8, A9, A20 and A21 in the Appendix).

Fifty-plus women are more likely to be kept out of the workplace, but not out of the top jobs within it. Fifty-plus women are the least likely adult group to be shown working: 56.9% in film, compared with 81.6% of 50-plus men and 66.7% of women under 50, and 52.5% on broadcast and streaming, compared with 75.1% of 50-plus men. But once shown working, they held authority at least as often as 50-plus men (69.7% compared with 61.5% in film, and 65.7% compared with 63.8% on broadcast and streaming; neither difference is significant).

Villains, rescues and deaths. In film, 50-plus characters were villains more often than under 50 characters (22.2% compared with 16.8%), and the gap is concentrated in the biggest parts. Among leads and major supporting characters, 29.9% of 50-plus characters were villains, compared with 9.1% of under 50 characters. Fifty-plus characters fill about a quarter of these roles (23.8%) but half of the villain parts (35 of 69). Fifty-plus film characters were also half as likely to rescue someone (11.3% compared with 21.5%), were rescued less often (13.5% compared with 20.3%) and were more likely to die on screen (20.4% compared with 15.3%). By period, 50-plus characters were less likely to rescue others in every period, and the villain gap reached significance in 2021–2025 (see Tables A10 and A11 in the Appendix).

On broadcast and streaming combined, the villain gap is smaller (10.8% compared with 7.9%) and not statistically significant. It was largest in 2010–2015 (13.4% compared with 9.8%), smallest in 2021–2025 (7.7% compared with 6.0%), and comes mostly from streaming, where the gap is statistically significant on its own (12.4% compared with 7.5%; on broadcast, 9.9% compared with 8.3%). Unlike film, 50-plus characters rescued others as often as under 50 ones (8.0% compared with 7.6%) and died at similar rates (3.9% compared with 2.4%), though they were rescued less often (3.6% compared with 6.5%) (see Tables A22 and A23 in the Appendix).

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In film, 50-plus women were villains less often than 50-plus men (14.7% compared with 24.1%); on broadcast and streaming the pattern was similar (7.6% compared with 12.4%) but not statistically significant. This reflects a gender gap at every age rather than an age effect, since under 50 women were also villains about half as often as under 50 men. In film, 50-plus women rescued others about half as often as 50-plus men (6.9% compared with 12.3%), but this difference is not statistically significant, and 50-plus men and women died at similar rates (21.1% compared with 17.2%).

How age shapes heroism and villainy in film

Hero–villain conflict is one of the main ways mainstream film organizes meaning, and research on how audiences enjoy stories helps explain why. Affective Disposition Theory holds that our ongoing judgments of characters' virtue predict how much we enjoy a story: we enjoy a film when the characters we judge to be good succeed and the ones we judge to be bad fail.[16] Because viewers need to sort characters quickly, filmmakers rely on shorthand cues, and our analysis suggests that age is still a common cue for villainy. That is why it matters when 50-plus characters are cast as villains far more often than as heroes.

Popular franchises show the pattern clearly. In the *Jason Bourne* films, a young operative is hunted by a series of senior CIA officials, played mostly by 50-plus men. In *The Hunger Games*, young people are sent to fight to the death by an aging President Snow. In the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort's defining goal is to escape aging and death, and he fights mostly younger heroes. In the *Sonic the Hedgehog* films, an aging Dr. Robotnik (and later his grandfather) menaces a childlike hero.

A closer qualitative look at top films from 2021–2025 found the same pattern. Fifty-plus characters were about one in four characters overall, but more than one in three villains and only about one in six heroes.

There were exceptions, but they were narrow. Nearly all 50-plus heroes were men continuing a role in an established franchise, such as Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, Keanu Reeves in *John Wick: Chapter 4* and Tom Cruise in *Top Gun: Maverick*. Only two 50-plus women were heroes in the films analyzed from 2021–2025: Laura Dern as Ellie Sattler in *Jurassic World Dominion* and Salma Hayek as Ajak in *Eternals*. Neither carried the film; both were part of an ensemble of heroes. Fifty-plus women were rare in hero and villain roles, but when they did appear in one, they were about four times as likely to be the villain as the hero. For women under 50, it was the reverse: far more were heroes than villains.

This fits a long line of feminist scholarship on gender and aging. Cultural norms tend to equate youth with beauty, and for women in particular, beauty is often treated as a sign of a character's value and virtue. Men are allowed to age into authority and appeal, while women's appeal stays tied to youth, so an older woman can become an easy shorthand for menace.

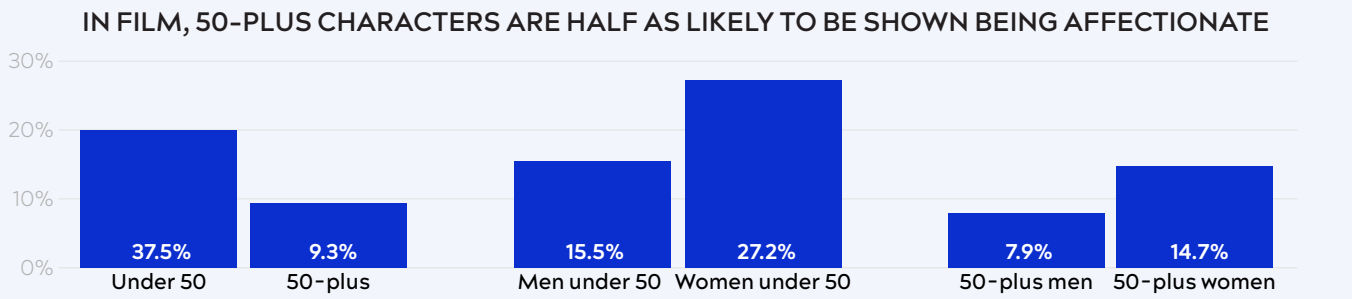
When the heroic arc keeps going to the young and older characters keep being cast as obstacles to defeat, film reinforces the belief that aging means decline.

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Romance and affection. Fifty-plus characters are less than half as likely as under 50 characters to be shown being physically affectionate, such as kissing, hugging or being intimate: 9.3% compared with 19.9% in film, and 4.9% compared with 12.7% on broadcast and streaming, where the gap is widest on streaming (5.0% compared with 17.6%).

FIGURE 10

Romance and affection among lead and supporting film characters, by age and gender, 2010–2025



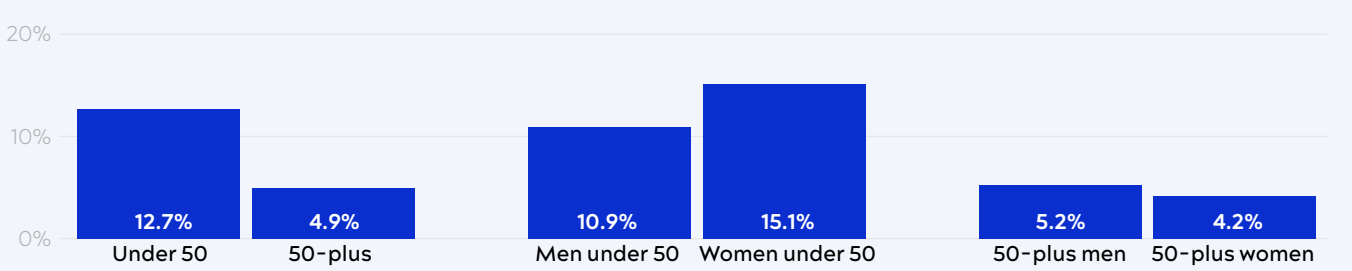
Note. Fifty-plus characters differ significantly from under 50 ($p < .05$). Women under 50 differ significantly from men under 50 ($p < .05$). Fifty-plus women differ significantly from 50-plus men ($p < .05$).

Gender shapes romance and affection depictions, too. In film, women at every age are shown being affectionate more often than men: 27.2% of women under 50 compared with 15.5% of men under 50, and 14.7% of 50-plus women compared with 7.9% of 50-plus men. Even so, 50-plus women are about half as likely as under 50 women to be shown this way. This suggests that when women of any age are on screen, their romantic life is more central to the character's arc than it is for male characters. On broadcast and streaming, under 50 women again outpace under 50 men (15.1% compared with 10.9%), but 50-plus women were not shown being affectionate more often than 50-plus men (4.2% compared with 5.2%).

By period, the film gap narrowed in 2021–2025, mainly because under 50 characters were shown being affectionate less often (although this narrowing was not statistically significant); 50-plus characters stayed at about 8–10% throughout. On broadcast and streaming, the gap held in every period (see Tables A12 and A24 in the Appendix).

FIGURE 11

Romance and affection among lead and supporting broadcast and streaming characters, by age and gender, 2010–2025



Note. Fifty-plus characters differ significantly from under 50 ($p < .05$). Women under 50 differ significantly from men under 50 ($p < .05$). Fifty-plus women and men do not differ significantly.

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4 – Who's missing on screen?

50-PLUS WOMEN OF COLOR ARE UNCOMMON. OVERALL, FIFTY-PLUS CHARACTERS ARE LESS RACIALLY DIVERSE THAN UNDER 50 CHARACTERS.

Race. In every medium, 50-plus characters are less racially diverse than under 50 characters. In film, people of color are 23.0% of 50-plus characters, compared with 32.4% of under 50 characters, and the gap has held for 16 years even as films overall have become more racially diverse (see Table A5 in the Appendix). On broadcast and streaming, the gap has widened as under 50 casts diversified faster, though that change was not statistically significant. By 2021–2025, people of color made up 25.0% of 50-plus broadcast characters, compared with 44.7% of under 50 characters; on streaming, the gap (20.7% compared with 41.4%) was the widest of any medium (see Table A17 in the Appendix).

Women of color. Fifty-plus women of color face a double gap. They make up 6.2% of 50-plus film characters, 6.4% of 50-plus broadcast characters and 9.7% of 50-plus streaming characters, about half their share among under 50 characters (see Tables A6 and A18 in the Appendix). None of the 26 film leads who were 50-plus was a woman of color, and no 50-plus woman of color led a streaming series. On broadcast, just two did: Angela Bassett as Athena Grant in *9-1-1* and Queen Latifah as Robyn McCall in *The Equalizer*.

Disability. Fifty-plus film characters are about twice as likely as under 50 characters to be shown with a disability (see Table A7 in the Appendix). On broadcast, they are about three times as likely, though the gap was smaller in 2021–2025, a change that was not statistically significant; on streaming, there is no age gap (see Table A19 in the Appendix).

LGBTQIA+. Fifty-plus LGBTQIA+ characters are close to absent in film and rare on broadcast and streaming, about 1% of 50-plus characters. Streaming has the most LGBTQIA+-inclusive under 50 casts of any medium (5.5%), but none of its 50-plus LGBTQIA+ characters appeared after 2018.

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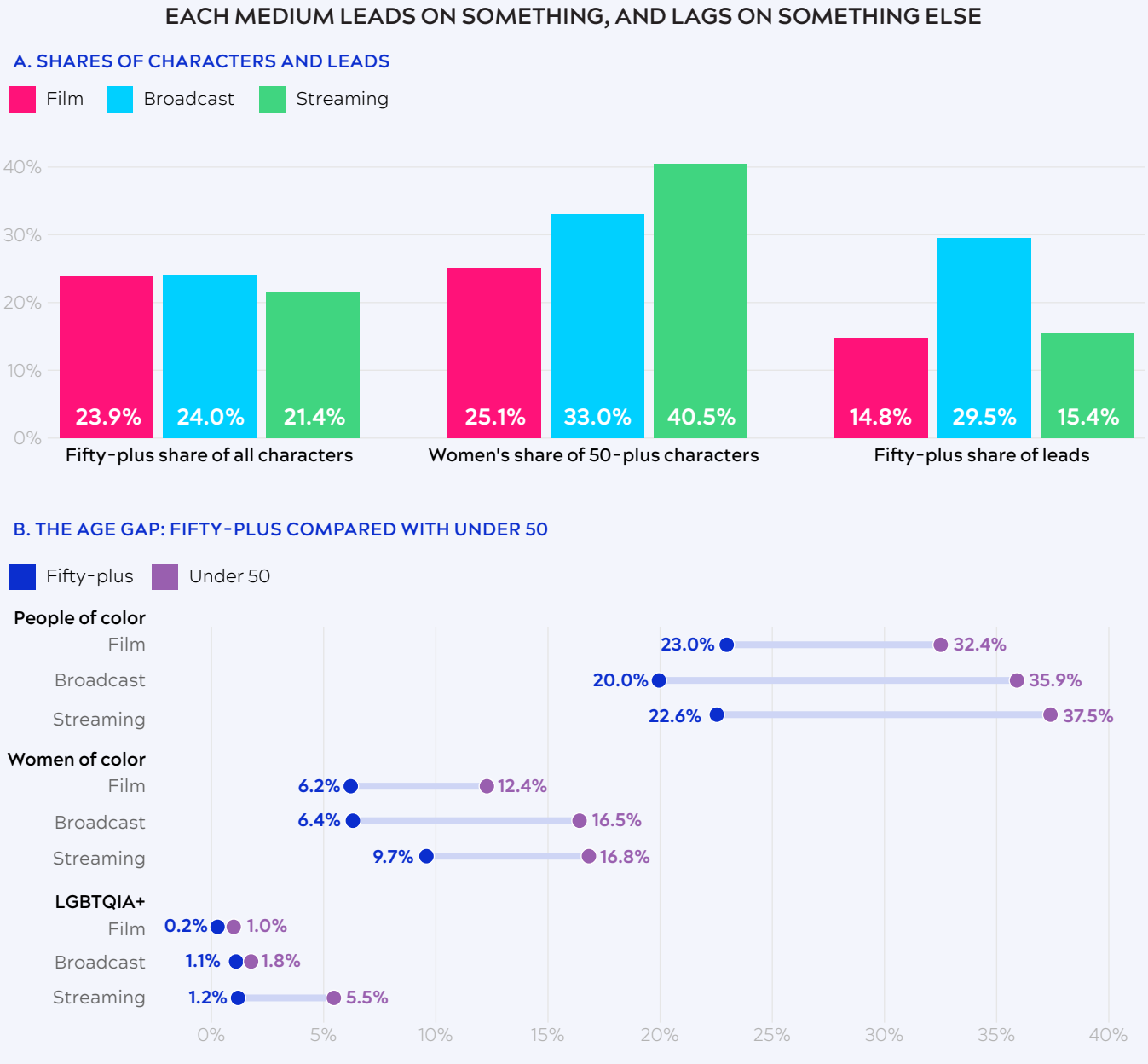
5 – Film, broadcast and streaming compared

BROADCAST IS THE MOST AGE-INCLUSIVE MEDIUM; FILM HAS THE WIDEST 50-PLUS GENDER GAP

Broadcast TV has the most 50-plus leads and a growing share of 50-plus women. Film has the widest gender gap among 50-plus characters. Streaming has the best gender balance among 50-plus characters, but by 2021–2025 it had the widest racial gap between 50-plus and under 50 characters, and the widest LGBTQIA+ gap (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12

Fifty-plus representation in film, broadcast and streaming, 2010–2025



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The Next Fifty Test

Developed with support from Next50

The Next Fifty Test asks a simple question: Does the story have a 50-plus woman who wants something, and does it show her going after it? It's a quick way to see whether 50-plus women on screen are driving the story, or just passing through it.

The Next Fifty Test was developed to encourage more prominent and dynamic roles for 50-plus women on screen.

A PIECE OF MEDIA PASSES IF:

- ☐ There is at least one named woman aged 50 or older;
- ☐ She speaks about something she wants for herself or others; and
- ☐ She takes action to pursue it.

A BASIC BAR	HER OWN GOAL	AGENCY
A 50-plus woman with a named, meaningful role is far from guaranteed.	A career change, righting an injustice, or saving the world, said out loud.	She applies for the job, fights for her cause, or leads the mission.

The Next Fifty Scorecard

The Next Fifty Scorecard is a checklist to show whether 50-plus women have the same range of storylines younger characters typically do.

How to score: A title earns 1 point for each criterion met by any named 50-plus woman in the title. For Not the Punchline, the title earns the point only if no 50-plus woman's age is played for a joke.

The gap check: Score an under 50 woman in the same title the same way. If they earn a point and the 50-plus women don't, that's the gap.

CRITERION	WHAT IT MEASURES
☐ The Paycheck	An economic life: working, looking for work or managing money
☐ The Network	Friends, work friends or a community of her own
☐ The Love Life	A romantic or intimate storyline, not played for laughs
☐ The Save	A heroic act: she rescues someone, steps in or takes charge in a crisis
☐ The Arc	She changes, learns or grows by the end
☐ Not the Punchline	Her age is not used as a joke
Total	**__ / 6**

The next fifty years can be a time of ambition, agency, and possibility rather than decline.



Mireya Acierto / Photodisc via Getty Images

Writing the next fifty

Recommendations for the industry

1 **Put 50-plus women at the center of the story.**
In 16 years of top-grossing films, just one of 176 leads was a woman 50-plus. Men 50-plus outnumber women 50-plus four to one in film, nearly three to one on broadcast and three to two on streaming. Studios should develop and greenlight projects with women 50-plus as the lead, not only as the mother, mentor or boss of a younger lead. Casting goals for women 50-plus in speaking roles should be set and tracked, starting with film, where the gap is widest.

2 **Cast more 50-plus characters, everywhere.**
About one in four characters is 50-plus, and that share has barely moved since 2010, even though 50-plus adults watch more TV than any other age group. Age should be a standard casting consideration on every project, for all genres and themes. When a role's age isn't essential to the story, consider casting someone 50-plus.

3 **Think intersectionally when casting 50-plus characters.**
Fifty-plus characters are less racially diverse than under 50 characters in every medium. In film, 23% of characters 50-plus are people of color, compared with 32% of under 50 characters. Streaming's gap was the widest of any medium by 2021–2025 (21% compared with 41%), and no 50-plus women of color led a top film or a streaming series in the sample. Casting should avoid patterns where "older woman" defaults to white and "older person of color" defaults to male, and treat gender balance and racial diversity among 50-plus characters as one goal, not separate ones.

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4 **Don't let LGBTQIA+ inclusion stop at 50.**
Streaming is the most LGBTQIA+-inclusive medium for under 50 characters (5.5%), but just 1.2% of its 50-plus characters are LGBTQIA+, and none appeared after 2018. Film had two in 16 years, both men. Create storylines for 50-plus LGBTQIA+ characters to reflect the real world.

5 **Age isn't a shorthand for villainy.**
Among film leads and major supporting characters, 30% of those 50-plus are villains, compared with 9% of under 50 characters. Villains drive the plot, so these are important roles. But writers should ask whether age is being used as a shortcut to signal villainy, and when an older character is the villain, give them motives that go beyond their age. Cast 50-plus actors as protectors, problem-solvers and heroes in action and franchise films, too.

6 **Give 50-plus characters romantic and physical lives.**
Older characters are less than half as likely to be shown being physically affectionate, in film (9% compared with 20%) and on broadcast and streaming (5% compared with 13%). Romance, intimacy and everyday affection belong in the lives of characters 50-plus, and they should be written without being framed as a joke.

7 **Build on what's working.**
Fifty-plus characters are shown as authority figures: Among characters shown working, those 50-plus are about twice as likely to be in charge. But 50-plus women are the least likely adult group to be shown working at all (57% in film, compared with 82% of 50-plus men), even though, once working, they're in charge as often as 50-plus men. More 50-plus women should be shown at work and in positions of authority, with competence paired with vitality, romance and friendship in the same character.

8 **Measure it, and hold the line.**
The industry should apply the Next Fifty Test at the script and casting stages, not after release, and track age, gender and race together in casting data, so that progress for one group isn't mistaken for progress for all. Work with the Geena Davis Institute to track that progress, or apply Spellcheck for Bias™ at the scripting stage, to catch these issues before they go to production.*Note.* Excludes characters coded as children. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from ages 18–49 ($p < .05$). ‡ Fifty-plus women differ significantly from 50-plus men ($p < .05$).

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Appendix

TABLE A1. OVERVIEW OF CONTENT AND CHARACTERS ANALYZED, 2010–2025

	Film		Broadcast		Streaming	
Year	# of films	# of characters	# of series/ episodes	# of characters	# of series/ episodes	# of characters
2025	10	268	10	171	8	168
2024	10	255	10	182	9	210
2023	10	355	10	177	9	169
2022	10	331	10	189	10	238
2021	10	255	10	201	9	223
2020	10	332	10	210	10	189
2019	10	317	10	222	10	185
2018	10	328	10	211	10	214
2017	10	320	10	177	10	172
2016	10	361	10	191	10	151
2015	10	311	10	153	10	168
2014	10	338	10	189	10	198
2013	10	331	10	217	5	125
2012	10	356	10	178	–	–
2011	10	351	10	171	–	–
2010	10	246	10	200	–	–
Total	160	5,055	160	3,039	120	2,410

Note. Where fewer than 10 titles are listed for streaming, it is due to non-scripted shows being dropped, and extended lists unavailable to replace those titles.

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TABLE A2. SHARE OF FILM CHARACTERS AGED 50-PLUS AND UNDER 50, 2010–2025

Year	Under 50 characters	Fifty-plus characters
2025	72.4%	27.6%
2024	70.2%	29.8%
2023	70.7%	29.3%
2022	77.3%	22.7%
2021	75.7%	24.3%
2020	77.1%	22.9%
2019	77.9%	22.1%
2018	79.0%	21.0%
2017	77.5%	22.5%
2016	72.0%	28.0%
2015	80.4%	19.6%
2014	80.2%	19.8%
2013	77.9%	22.1%
2012	72.5%	27.5%
2011	78.3%	21.7%
2010	77.2%	22.8%

TABLE A3. SHARE OF CHARACTERS BY AGE AND GENDER IN TOP FILMS, 2010–2025

Year	Men under 50	Women under 50	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
2025	41.8%	30.6%	21.3%	6.3%
2024	38.4%	31.8%	18.0%	11.8%
2023	42.0%	28.7%	24.2%	5.1%
2022	51.4%	26.0%	17.5%	5.1%
2021	47.1%	28.6%	18.0%	6.3%
2020	50.6%	26.5%	19.6%	3.3%
2019	47.9%	30.0%	16.4%	5.7%
2018	59.1%	19.8%	14.9%	6.1%
2017	49.7%	27.8%	18.1%	4.4%
2016	49.6%	22.4%	23.5%	4.4%
2015	52.7%	27.7%	16.7%	2.9%
2014	60.4%	19.8%	16.6%	3.3%
2013	48.0%	29.9%	19.0%	3.0%
2012	50.3%	22.2%	24.7%	2.8%
2011	59.0%	19.4%	17.9%	3.7%
2010	50.8%	26.4%	17.9%	4.9%

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TABLE A4. FITTED SHARE OF FILM CHARACTERS BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP, WITH YEARLY TREND

Group	2010 (estimated share)	2025 (estimated share)	Change (estimated)	Trend
Men under 50	56.3%	43.0%	−13.3 points	Declining
Women under 50	22.8%	30.3%	+7.5 points	Rising
Fifty-plus men	18.1%	19.9%	+1.8 points	No clear change
Fifty-plus women	3.0%	7.3%	+4.3 points	Rising†

Note. Estimates are from a statistical model that accounts for characters appearing in the same film. "Rising" and "Declining" mark statistically significant trends ($p < .05$). †Includes a high of 11.8% in 2024; the trend remains significant when 2024 is excluded.

TABLE A5. SHARE OF FILM CHARACTERS WHO ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Share of 50-plus characters who are people of color	Share of under 50 characters who are people of color	Gap (points)
2010–2015	14.4%	24.1%	−9.7
2016–2020	23.6%	33.6%	−10.0
2021–2025	32.0%	43.2%	−11.2
All years	**23.0%**	**32.4%**	**−9.4**

Note. Excludes 174 characters whose race could not be determined.

TABLE A6. SHARE OF FILM CHARACTERS WHO ARE WOMEN OF COLOR, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Share of 50-plus characters who are women of color	Share of under 50 characters who are women of color	Gap (points)
2010–2015	1.9%	7.0%	−5.1
2016–2020	7.7%	13.2%	−5.5
2021–2025	9.6%	19.6%	−10.0
All years	**6.2%**	**12.4%**	**−6.2**

TABLE A7. SHARE OF FILM CHARACTERS SHOWN WITH A DISABILITY, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Fifty-plus	Under 50	Gap (points)
2010–2015	4.9%	3.1%	1.8
2016–2020	5.9%	2.8%	3.1
2021–2025	3.6%	1.0%	2.6
All years	**4.8%**	**2.4%**	**2.4**

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TABLE A8. WORK AND AUTHORITY AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING FILM CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2025

Measure	18–49	Fifty-plus	Men 18–49	Women 18–49	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
Shown working	73.7%	76.8%	77.5%	66.7%	81.6%	56.9%‡
Authority at work (of those working)	33.7%	62.7%†	35.4%	30.2%	61.5%	69.7%
n (all / working)	1,459 / 1,076	594 / 456	952 / 738	507 / 338	478 / 390	116 / 66

Note. Excludes characters coded as children. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from ages 18–49 ($p < .05$). ‡ Fifty-plus women differ significantly from 50-plus men ($p < .05$).

TABLE A9. WORK AND AUTHORITY AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING FILM CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Working: 18–49	Working: Fifty-plus	Authority: 18–49	Authority: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	74.1%	79.9%	39.8%	68.5%†
2016–2020	81.1%	80.6%	35.3%	69.3%†
2021–2025	65.4%	71.8%	22.7%	52.8%†
All years	**73.7%**	**76.8%**	**33.7%**	**62.7%†**

Note. Excludes characters coded as children. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from ages 18–49 within that period ($p < .05$). n (18–49 / 50-plus): 567 / 179, 461 / 170, 431 / 245. Authority is among characters shown working: 420 / 143, 374 / 137, 282 / 176.

TABLE A10. VILLAINS, HEROIC RESCUES AND DEATHS AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING FILM CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2025

Measure	Under 50	Fifty-plus	Men under 50	Women under 50	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
Villain	16.8%	22.2%†	20.4%	10.8%	24.1%	14.7%‡
Rescues another	21.5%	11.3%†	20.5%	23.3%	12.3%	6.9%
Rescued	20.3%	13.5%†	18.1%	24.0%	14.4%	9.5%
Dies	15.3%	20.4%†	17.1%	12.2%	21.1%	17.2%
n	1,771	594	1,114	657	478	116

Note. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 ($p < .05$). ‡ Fifty-plus women differ significantly from 50-plus men ($p < .05$).

TABLE A11. VILLAINS, HEROIC RESCUES AND DEATHS AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING FILM CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Villain: Under 50	Villain: Fifty-plus	Rescues another: Under 50	Rescues another: Fifty-plus	Rescued: Under 50	Rescued: Fifty-plus	Dies: Under 50	Dies: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	17.8%	21.8%	20.4%	11.7%†	19.0%	14.0%†	16.1%	17.3%
2016–2020	18.3%	23.5%	27.5%	15.3%†	27.8%	22.4%	16.5%	26.5%†
2021–2025	13.9%	21.6%†	16.4%	8.2%†	13.9%	6.9%†	12.9%	18.4%†
All years	**16.8%**	**22.2%†**	**21.5%**	**11.3%†**	**20.3%**	**13.5%†**	**15.3%**	**20.4%†**

Note. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 within that period ($p < .05$). n (under 50 / 50-plus): 685 / 179, 568 / 170, 518 / 245.

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TABLE A12. ROMANCE AND AFFECTION AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING FILM CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Affectionate: Under 50	Affectionate: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	23.6%	7.8%
2016–2020	21.3%	10.0%
2021–2025	13.3%	9.8%
All years	**19.9%**	**9.3%**

Note. Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 for all years, 2010–2015, and 2016–2020 ($p < .05$). n (under 50 / 50-plus): 685 / 179, 568 / 170, 518 / 245.

TABLE A13. SHARE OF BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS AGED 50-PLUS, 2010–2025

Year	Broadcast	Streaming
2025	23.4%	22.0%
2024	27.5%	26.7%
2023	26.0%	21.9%
2022	24.3%	22.3%
2021	20.9%	22.0%
2020	20.0%	18.0%
2019	21.6%	15.7%
2018	23.7%	17.3%
2017	31.1%	22.1%
2016	25.1%	16.6%
2015	22.2%	20.8%
2014	25.9%	27.8%
2013	26.3%	24.0%
2012	25.3%	–
2011	23.4%	–
2010	19.0%	–
All years	**24.0%**	**21.4%**

Note. Streaming data collection begins in 2013. Each year includes about 125–240 characters per medium, so single-year figures swing widely.

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TABLE A14. SHARE OF BROADCAST CHARACTERS BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2025

Year	Men under 50	Women under 50	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
2025	43.3%	33.3%	15.8%	7.6%
2024	43.4%	29.1%	18.1%	9.3%
2023	41.8%	32.2%	18.6%	7.3%
2022	43.4%	32.3%	16.4%	7.9%
2021	44.8%	34.3%	12.9%	8.0%
2020	45.2%	34.8%	14.8%	5.2%
2019	46.4%	32.0%	17.6%	4.1%
2018	45.0%	31.3%	17.1%	6.6%
2017	33.9%	35.0%	19.2%	11.9%
2016	41.9%	33.0%	18.8%	6.3%
2015	44.4%	33.3%	17.0%	5.2%
2014	46.0%	28.0%	19.6%	6.3%
2013	47.0%	26.7%	22.1%	4.1%
2012	47.2%	27.5%	19.1%	6.2%
2011	45.6%	31.0%	18.1%	5.3%
2010	48.5%	32.5%	15.0%	4.0%

TABLE A15. SHARE OF STREAMING CHARACTERS BY AGE AND GENDER, 2013–2025

Year	Men under 50	Women under 50	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
2025	46.4%	31.5%	13.7%	8.3%
2024	41.0%	32.4%	15.7%	11.0%
2023	43.8%	34.3%	14.2%	7.7%
2022	44.5%	33.2%	13.4%	8.8%
2021	41.3%	36.8%	11.7%	10.3%
2020	47.6%	34.4%	13.2%	4.8%
2019	50.3%	34.1%	7.6%	8.1%
2018	44.4%	38.3%	10.3%	7.0%
2017	44.8%	33.1%	12.8%	9.3%
2016	43.0%	40.4%	11.3%	5.3%
2015	43.5%	35.7%	12.5%	8.3%
2014	42.9%	29.3%	19.2%	8.6%
2013	40.0%	36.0%	12.8%	11.2%

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TABLE A16. FITTED SHARE OF BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP, WITH YEARLY TREND

Group	Broadcast 2010 (est.)	Broadcast 2025 (est.)	Trend	Streaming 2013 (est.)	Streaming 2025 (est.)	Trend
Men under 50	47.6%	41.7%	Declining	44.0%	44.0%	No clear change
Women under 50	30.1%	33.2%	No clear change	35.8%	33.6%	No clear change
Fifty-plus men	15.5%	17.7%	No clear change	11.8%	14.1%	No clear change
Fifty-plus women	5.3%	8.9%	Rising	8.3%	8.4%	No clear change

Note. Estimates are from a statistical model that accounts for characters appearing in the same series. "Rising" and "Declining" mark statistically significant trends ($p < .05$); both remain significant when 2024 is excluded.

TABLE A17. SHARE OF BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS WHO ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Broadcast: Fifty-plus	Broadcast: under 50	Broadcast: gap (points)	Streaming: Fifty-plus	Streaming: under 50	Streaming: gap (points)
2010–2015	12.9%	26.0%	−13.1	23.5%	34.0%	−10.5
2016–2020	23.0%	38.7%	−15.6	24.5%	35.3%	−10.8
2021–2025	25.0%	44.7%	−19.7	20.7%	41.4%	−20.7
All years	**20.0%**	**35.9%**	**−15.9**	**22.6%**	**37.5%**	**−14.9**

Note. Streaming begins in 2013. Excludes characters whose race could not be determined (1 broadcast, 62 streaming).

TABLE A18. SHARE OF BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS WHO ARE WOMEN OF COLOR, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Broadcast: Fifty-plus	Broadcast: under 50	Broadcast: gap (points)	Streaming: Fifty-plus	Streaming: under 50	Streaming: gap (points)
2010–2015	3.0%	10.3%	−7.3	8.7%	15.5%	−6.8
2016–2020	6.2%	17.7%	−11.5	11.7%	15.7%	−4.1
2021–2025	10.7%	22.7%	−12.0	8.8%	18.6%	−9.8
All years	**6.4%**	**16.5%**	**−10.1**	**9.7%**	**16.8%**	**−7.1**

Note. Streaming begins in 2013. Fifty-plus women of color: 47 broadcast, 49 streaming.

TABLE A19. SHARE OF BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS SHOWN WITH A DISABILITY, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Broadcast: Fifty-plus	Broadcast: under 50	Streaming: Fifty-plus	Streaming: under 50
2010–2015	5.3%	1.2%	2.5%	1.1%
2016–2020	7.0%	2.1%	1.2%	3.1%
2021–2025	1.3%	1.1%	2.6%	2.3%
All years	**4.7%**	**1.5%**	**2.1%**	**2.4%**

Note. Streaming begins in 2013.

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TABLE A20. WORK AND AUTHORITY AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2025

Measure	18–49	Fifty-plus	Men 18–49	Women 18–49	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
Shown working	64.7%	67.5%	67.8%	60.6%	75.1%	52.5%‡
Authority at work (of those working)	28.4%	64.3%†	28.9%	27.7%	63.8%	65.7%
n (all / working)	2,233 / 1,445	776 / 524	1,281 / 868	952 / 577	515 / 387	261 / 137

Note. Excludes characters coded as children. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from ages 18–49 ($p < .05$). ‡ Fifty-plus women differ significantly from 50-plus men ($p < .05$).

TABLE A21. WORK AND AUTHORITY AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Working: 18–49	Working: Fifty-plus	Authority: 18–49	Authority: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	70.8%	76.2%	28.2%	71.0%†
2016–2020	66.5%	67.2%	32.6%	66.7%†
2021–2025	57.4%	61.3%	24.2%	56.2%†
All years	**64.7%**	**67.5%**	**28.4%**	**64.3%†**

Note. Excludes characters coded as children. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from ages 18–49 within that period ($p < .05$). n (18–49 / 50-plus): 720 / 231, 729 / 232, 784 / 313. Authority is among characters shown working: 510 / 176, 485 / 156, 450 / 192.

TABLE A22. VILLAINS, HEROIC RESCUES AND DEATHS AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2025

Measure	Under 50	Fifty-plus	Men under 50	Women under 50	Fifty-plus men	Fifty-plus women
Villain	7.9%	10.8%	10.8%	4.2%	12.4%	7.6%
Rescues another	7.6%	8.0%	8.1%	6.9%	9.1%	5.7%
Rescued	6.5%	3.6%†	5.8%	7.5%	3.9%	3.1%
Dies	2.4%	3.9%	3.0%	1.6%	5.0%	1.5%
n	2,617	778	1,485	1,132	516	262

Note. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 ($p < .05$).

TABLE A23. VILLAINS, HEROIC RESCUES AND DEATHS AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Villain: Under 50	Villain: Fifty-plus	Rescues another: Under 50	Rescues another: Fifty-plus	Rescued: Under 50	Rescued: Fifty-plus	Dies: Under 50	Dies: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	9.8%	13.4%	7.7%	6.5%	6.6%	5.2%	2.5%	3.0%
2016–2020	8.5%	12.4%	8.5%	11.2%	7.3%	4.3%	1.3%	1.7%
2021–2025	6.0%	7.7%	6.6%	6.7%	5.8%	1.9%†	3.3%	6.1%
All years	**7.9%**	**10.8%**	**7.6%**	**8.0%**	**6.5%**	**3.6%†**	**2.4%**	**3.9%**

Note. † Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 within that period ($p < .05$). n (under 50 / 50-plus): 755 / 231, 895 / 232, 963 / 313.

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TABLE A24. ROMANCE AND AFFECTION AMONG LEAD AND SUPPORTING BROADCAST AND STREAMING CHARACTERS, BY AGE AND PERIOD

Period	Affectionate: Under 50	Affectionate: Fifty-plus
2010–2015	12.8%	6.1%
2016–2020	16.1%	5.6%
2021–2025	9.4%	3.5%
All years	**12.7%**	**4.9%**

Note. Fifty-plus differs significantly from under 50 for all periods ($p < .05$). n (under 50 / 50-plus): 755 / 231, 895 / 232, 963 / 313.

TABLE A25. STATISTICAL TESTS FOR COMPARISONS REPORTED IN THE TEXT

Comparison	Medium	Rates	Odds ratio	p
Fifty-plus share of characters, yearly trend	Film	rising	—	.04
Men under 50's share of characters, yearly trend	Film	56.3% to 43.0% (est.)	—	< .001
Women under 50's share of characters, yearly trend	Film	22.8% to 30.3% (est.)	—	.007
Fifty-plus men's share of characters, yearly trend	Film	18.1% to 19.9% (est.)	—	.51
Fifty-plus women's share of characters, yearly trend	Film	3.0% to 7.3% (est.)	—	< .001
Authority at work, 50-plus compared with under 50 (of those working)	Film	62.7% / 33.7%	3.48	< .001
Shown working, 50-plus women compared with 50-plus men	Film	56.9% / 81.6%	0.33	< .001
Villain, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	22.2% / 16.8%	1.40	.008
Villain, leads and major supporting, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	29.9% / 9.1%	4.26	< .001
Rescues another, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	11.3% / 21.5%	0.47	< .001
Rescued, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	13.5% / 20.3%	0.55	< .001
Dies, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	20.4% / 15.3%	1.42	.007
Rescues another, 50-plus women compared with men	Film	6.9% / 12.3%	—	.10
Villain, 50-plus women compared with men	Film	14.7% / 24.1%	—	.01
Physically affectionate, women compared with men under 50	Film	27.2% / 15.5%	2.03	< .001
Physically affectionate, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	9.3% / 19.9%	0.42	< .001
Physically affectionate, 50-plus women compared with 50-plus men	Film	14.7% / 7.9%	2.00	.002
Fifty-plus share of characters, 2016–2020 dip	Streaming	17.9% (2016–2020)	—	.25
Fifty-plus women's share of characters, yearly trend	Broadcast	5.3% to 8.9% (est.)	—	.02
Men under 50's share of characters, yearly trend	Broadcast	47.6% to 41.7% (est.)	—	.02
Women's share of 50-plus characters, by period	Broadcast	rising	—	.003
Share of women characters who are 50-plus, by period	Broadcast	14.8% to 19.9%	—	.07
Lead role, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	2.1% / 3.9%	0.54	.006
Fifty-plus share of leads, 2016–2020 compared with 2010–2015	Film	19.6% / 4.6%	5.05	.02

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Comparison	Medium	Rates	Odds ratio	p
Fifty-plus share of leads, 2021–2025 compared with 2010–2015	Film	21.8% / 4.6%	5.77	.009
Lead role, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast	10.4% / 7.9%	1.36	.23
Lead role, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	5.4% / 8.1%	0.65	.17
Supporting role, 50-plus women compared with men	Broadcast	64.6% / 54.9%	1.46	.06
Authority at work, 50-plus compared with under 50 (of those working)	Broadcast and streaming	64.3% / 28.4%	4.82	< .001
Shown working, 50-plus women compared with 50-plus men	Broadcast and streaming	52.5% / 75.1%	0.52	< .001
Villain, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast and streaming	10.8% / 7.9%	1.33	.07
Villain, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	12.4% / 7.5%	1.62	.01
Villain, 50-plus women compared with men	Broadcast and streaming	7.6% / 12.4%	0.60	.06
Rescued, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast and streaming	3.6% / 6.5%	0.53	.01
Physically affectionate, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast and streaming	4.9% / 12.7%	0.45	< .001
Physically affectionate, women compared with men under 50	Broadcast and streaming	15.1% / 10.9%	1.32	.001
People of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	23.0% / 32.4%	0.66	< .001
People of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast	20.0% / 35.9%	0.47	< .001
People of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	22.6% / 37.5%	0.48	< .001
People of color, 50-plus compared with under 50, 2021–2025	Broadcast	25.0% / 44.7%	0.39	.002
People of color, 50-plus compared with under 50, 2021–2025	Streaming	20.7% / 41.4%	0.44	< .001
Women of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	6.2% / 12.4%	0.49	< .001
Women of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast	6.4% / 16.5%	0.35	< .001
Women of color, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	9.7% / 16.8%	0.58	.002
Disability, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	4.8% / 2.4%	2.03	< .001
Disability, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast	4.7% / 1.5%	3.03	< .001
Disability, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	2.1% / 2.4%	1.02	.96
LGBTQIA+, 50-plus compared with under 50	Film	0.2% / 1.0%	0.20	.006
LGBTQIA+, 50-plus compared with under 50	Broadcast	1.1% / 1.8%	0.62	.25
LGBTQIA+, 50-plus compared with under 50	Streaming	1.2% / 5.5%	0.24	.001

Note. Logistic regression with generalized estimating equations, clustered by film or by series. Rates are for the first group named, then the second. An odds ratio above 1 means the first group is more likely; — means the test reported a trend or difference without an odds ratio. Portrayal measures are for lead and supporting characters. Models for lead roles use an independence working correlation, because most films have a single lead; the exchangeable structure is undefined in that case.

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14. While anthropomorphic animals and objects can certainly communicate age, this project did not want to default to under 50 years of age unless animators made design choices that legibly communicate aging, such as graying hair, spectacles, or walking canes. Moreover, we opted against simply using the age of the voice actor to determine nonhuman characters' ages in these worlds. In short, this project analyzes titles where human age is more readily observable.
15. Film trends held up when we ran the analysis in other ways (a multilevel model with a random intercept for each film, and a film-level regression weighted by cast size). Each year includes only about 125 to 360 characters per medium, so single-year figures can swing widely. We also tested for steady change over time; a shift concentrated in particular years, such as after 2020, would need a separate test.
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