

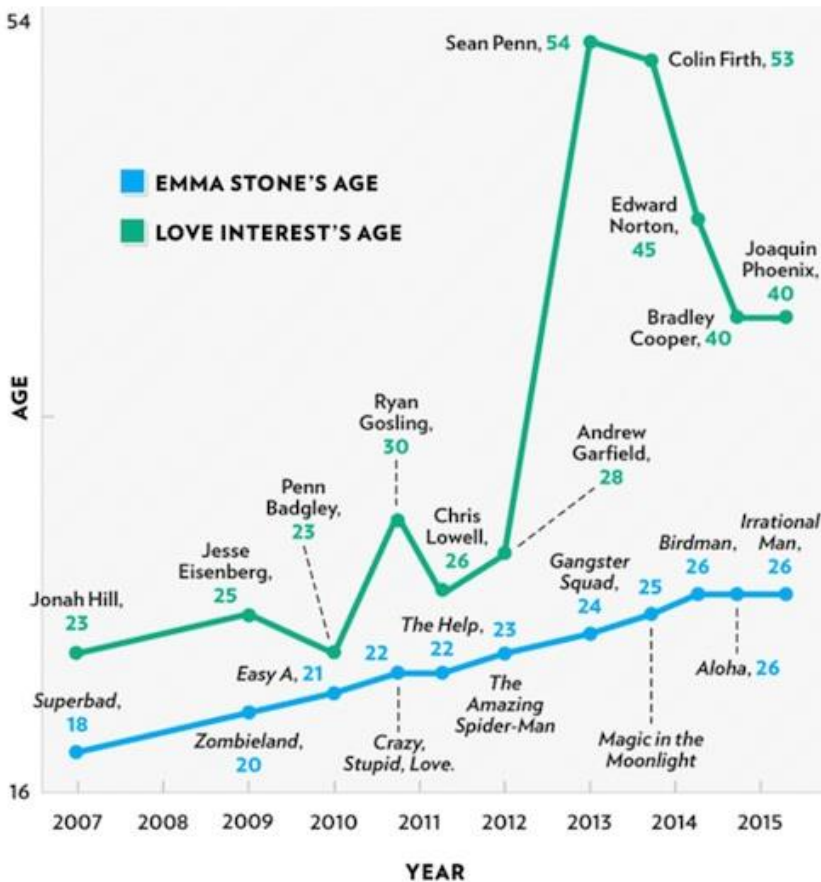
Case 15: Act Your Age²

In her 2018 acceptance speech for the SAG Award for best actress in *Big Little Lies*, Nicole Kidman addressed the lack of roles for women over 40 in Hollywood. After thanking some actresses over 40, including Susan Sarandon, Jessica Lange, Meryl Streep, and Judi Dench, Kidman continued:

“I want to thank you all for your trailblazing performances you have given over your career and how wonderful it is that our careers today can go beyond 40 years old. Twenty years ago, we were pretty washed up by this stage in our lives, so that’s not the case now.”

Hollywood’s problem with casting actresses over 40 is well documented. Research shows that female characters are consistently younger than their male counterparts, and film history provides a lengthy list of examples, from 44-year-old Woody Allen paired with a teenage Mariel Hemingway in *Manhattan* to just about any modern-day Scarlett Johansson or Jennifer Lawrence movie. For example, the chart below shows the age gaps, ranging from two to 31 years, between Emma Stone and her leading male counterparts.

EMMA STONE



According to a San Diego State University Study of the top 100 grossing films in 2014, just 30 percent of female roles were written for characters age 40 and older, whereas the rate of male roles for characters over the age of 40 was nearly double. Similarly, the percentage of male characters in movies increased between the ages of 30 and 40, while it had the opposite effect for female characters within that same age range. Meryl Streep has called out Hollywood's attitude toward older women, telling *Vogue* that the industry sees them as "grotesque on some level," while Helen Mirren called the aging double standard for actresses "outrageous."

There is a saying that art imitates life, but when it comes to Hollywood is it the other way around with life imitating art? Every time we see older man paired with younger women are our stereotypes and prejudices about aging reinforced? Some would argue that people can vote with their pocketbook. That is, if audiences wanted to see older actors, they would demand it. Others suggest that that lack of representation of older actors shapes our perceptions and how our society views older people and that actors should "act their age." To remedy this should Hollywood be mandated to include those over 40 in equal representation to the population?

Case from the 2019 National Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl

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