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**TELEVISION'S MATURE WOMEN:
A CHANGING MEDIA ARCHETYPE:
FROM BEWITCHED TO THE SOPRANOS**

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Despite almost a half century of change and growth for women spurred by the Second Wave of the Women's Movement, older women continue to be depicted on television as caricatures informed by ageist ideologies. A feminist textual analysis of mature women on television reveals a surprisingly consistent media archetype and helps to elucidate the politics of representation of older women. It is only very recently that counter hegemonic portrayals are acting as "filtering devices" (Cohen, 2002, p. 615) for the examinations of the stereotypes of ageism in the media.

"Media pedagogy...helps develop the ability...to give individuals power over their cultural environment". (Kellner, 1995, p. 10) Part of media pedagogy is deconstructing the paradigm of ageism on television. In this paradigm an older woman (and, of course, some older men) frequently is seen first of all as "the other". Secondly, she is categorized as "invisible" except for her role as either mother or grandmother. And thirdly, she is used as a "metaphor", all too often linked with disease, isolation, worthlessness, vulnerability, dissatisfaction and decrepitude. More recently a few counter hegemonic television portrayals of older women (in *Judging Amy*, *Queer as Folk* and *Six Feet Under*) have been harbingers of change in showing multi-dimensional aspects of mature womanhood.

Ageism, a term defined by Robert Butler in 1975, is a "process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against older people because they are old, just as

racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender. Older people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old fashioned in morality and skills...Ageism allows the younger generation to see old people as different from themselves, thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings.” (Butler, 1975, p. 12) It’s so pervasive in society that we hardly notice any more the ridiculous way that older men and specifically older women are portrayed in advertisements, greeting cards and so often in the media. Television is a particularly ubiquitous and influential means by which people of all ages subconsciously formulate their views about older people.

The tainting of the image of older people had already begun to appear in the United States in popular literature at the end of the 19th Century (Featherstone, 1995, p. 131) creating and reinforcing the views that an older individual should be portrayed as declining, feeble and certainly not mentally alert. Adding further to the denigration of older people was the loosening of beliefs that the elderly were somehow more closely connected to the eternal. “In a society which had lost its fear of the afterlife, and in which awareness and contact with death was not integrated into everyday life (for death no longer held a mythical power over the living) there was no reason to fear any potential revenge from old people.” (Featherstone, 1995, p. 123) The tarnished imaging of older people, particularly women, has relentlessly continued into the 21st. Century.

THE OTHER

What does it mean to call someone “the other”. The term is credited to Simone de

Beauvoir from her 1949 book, *The Second Sex*. In it she explains that man makes himself the essential being and woman is “the other”. That is, the definition of personhood is male so that woman defines herself in terms of the male. Similarly, the essential being or standard of womanhood in American culture is youthfulness. Therefore, if a woman is old she is not essential woman but rather “the other” and consequently different. Women of all ages know that the standard is youth and to be “not young” is to be devalued by society. The older woman is perceived as menopausal and no longer a recipient of the “male gaze”. And older women adopt this view of themselves and try desperately to be young or at least to “pass” as young and thus, young and old are accomplices in creating a social construct that defines being old as a negative. Simone de Beauvoir laments the “otherness” that forces older people to “stand outside of humanity”, a prisoner of society’s misconceptions. “If old people show the same desires, the same feelings and the same requirements as the young, the world looks upon them with disgust: in them love and jealousy seem revolting or absurd, sexuality repulsive and violence ludicrous. Above all they are called upon to display serenity: the world asserts that they possess it, and this assertion allows the world to ignore their unhappiness. The purified image of themselves that society offers the aged is that of the white-haired and venerable Sage, rich in experience, planing high above the common state of mankind; if they vary from this, then they fall below it. The counterpart of the first image is that of the old fool in his dotage, a laughingstock for children.” (de Beauvoir, 1977, p. 10)

Betty Friedan also laments the distortions of society’s images of mature adults. In *The Fountain of Age*, Friedan discusses Vern Bengston’s concerns that older people are so often seen only as a societal problem rather than as creators of solutions to problems.

What are the consequences? It is a tautological bind; the younger members of society don't expect to see active and productive behavior on the part of seniors and in turn older people accept this deleterious stereotype of themselves. (Friedan, 1993, p. 63)

Susan Sontag refers to a "double standard of aging". (Sontag, 1997, p. 19) Unlike men, "women are required to match up to the adolescent ideal throughout their lives...It is therefore not surprising that many of our representations of women are constructed in terms of physical appearance and that images and self-images of the bodies of older women cause such problems." (Featherstone, 1995, p. 8) Frueh concurs that the "older woman is doubly different, doubly degraded, and doubly injured by exterior identity: she is visibly female, different from men and visibly aging, even when cosmetically altered, different from young." (Frueh, 1997, p. 202)

The other side of ageism is the energy and effort put into denying aging, by older people themselves, but particularly by older women. Older women often internalize the self-loathing so frequently promoted in the ageist stereotype and make valiant efforts to separate themselves from the hated "old".

Apparently millions of women are convinced that if they just try hard enough and buy enough they will not be "junked". Billions of dollars are spent in an effort to become visible, in other words, to become young again. "Age passing becomes a state of mind, a measure of self-worth, a guide to choice. When we reflect 'young' tastes in our clothing, cosmetics, activities, friends and lovers, we are passing." (Copper, 1997, p. 124) "Passing" enables older women to pretend that the key roles that they have grown accustomed to as "object" and "childbearer" are still somehow a possibility even though they are no longer able to have children. And there is even a moral dimension to remaining

young, a requirement that a woman's well-being is dependent on her ability (or inability) to stay youthful. And thus this reinforces the notion "that happiness and self-fulfillment in later life are dependent on the moral responsibility of individuals to reconstruct a youthful body, identity and social life." (Wray, 2003, p. 515)

Letty Pogrebin is not too critical of women who want to remain as young as possible. "In a society that reduces every woman to her appearance – a society where, according to Rutgers University psychologist Jeannette Haviland, being attractive turns up at the top of the average female's concerns from age ten on, a society where psychologists at the Oregon Research Institute in Portland found girls as young as twelve to be in a serious state of depression because of their negative body image, it's a brave woman who bucks the system and insists she couldn't care less when age takes the bloom off the rose." (Pogrebin, 1996, p. 131)

Because patriarchal values are so prevalent throughout the culture, both young and older women have adopted the "young as worthwhile" mythos. And this, inevitably, pits younger women against older women. Faced with a barrage of media indoctrination, "older women have to be made to disappear. Making our aging appear unseemly, unsightly, unacceptable assures that we will...The caricature of the Ugly Feminist appears with every backlash – to scare young women away from identifying with older women and prevent the transmission of authority. The Beauty Myth not only sets women in competition with one another on a daily basis but sets younger women against older." (Pogrebin, 1996, p. 145) It is not by chance that young women feel they have so little to learn from older women and the connection between female generations is systematically and deliberately denigrated. In a more insidious fashion, women

young and old are programmed to distrust each other. “Older women fear younger ones, young women fear old, the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span.” (Wolf, 1991, p. 14)

Examples of older woman as “other” are common in popular TV shows. One prominent example is Endora in the 1960’s *Bewitched*. Endora is portrayed as “grotesque by comparison” to her younger counterpart Samantha and represents the “age-old archetype of the witch as a wrinkled and disorderly crone”. (Douglas, 1994, p. 132) Samantha dresses attractively and with her blond hair perfectly in place she exemplifies a youthful exuberance. But Endora, “with her overly bouffant, bright red hairdos, two-inch-long false eyelashes and thick eyeliner that shoots up at a forty-five-degree angle” (Douglas, 1994, p.132), is not exactly appealing to men, nor is her appearance appealing to women either.

In “Samantha’s Good News”, Endora’s ex-husband, Maurice, becomes involved with his very young secretary. Endora decides to turn the woman into an old lady because she’s angry at him. The episode is amusing and Endora does display “the most powerful one/two punch in the cosmos” but at the same time she cannot escape the ravages of getting older and being denied her position as a powerful young woman. Her solution to the problem is to make the beautiful secretary the most awful thing imaginable, an old woman.

Thus, despite the impressions that Samantha and Endora are powerful manipulators of men, it is really Samantha who is the admired role model, not Endora. Samantha conforms to the prerequisites of approbation: youth and beauty. And yet, Endora cannot be dismissed as a prototypical older woman; she is not frail, weak and helpless. She is

an independent woman who says and does what she wants to without regard for the consequences from men. For the 1960's this was a clarion call to liberation. But, did her female audience want to emulate her? That is doubtful because she's basically pictured as such a ridiculous caricature in most of the episodes.

Another parody is Sophia Petrillo in *Golden Girls* (1985-1992), the wise-cracking, smart-mouthed senior member of the quadrangle of "golden" women. She comes to live with Dorothy, Rose and Blanche after her retirement home, Shady Pines, burns down. In her demeanor and dialogue she epitomizes how surveyed audiences consistently describe older women on television: frail, confused, laughable, superficial and degraded. Never seen without her trademark purse, she clasps it whether she is sleeping, running or going to visit someone. Consistently she is presented as a distracted and somewhat insubstantial elder who often isn't quite sure what is going on. While "relishing" the freedom of older people, she carries the twin burdens of being uninhibited enough to say exactly what she feels (calling the gay cook at Shady Pines, "the fancy man") but also being excoriated as "the other". She sits on a stool in the kitchen when the three other women are discussing, almost always over cheesecake, their lives. Thus, she is a part of the scene but really on the periphery. She takes many opportunities to malign older people, explaining, "Look, you didn't ask me for my opinion, but I'm old, so I'm giving it anyway".

When she is not sniping at her three roommates, she is talking about illness (her cataract and laser surgery) and loss or how life isn't as good as it was. She laments, "People think you should just be glad to be alive. You need a reason to get up in the morning. Life can turn around and spit in your face."

INVISIBILITY
(EXCEPT FOR ROLE AS MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER)

What does it mean to be invisible as a person? The definition of invisible is “incapable of being seen”. To be invisible is to be either the recipient of a totally stereotypical view or to actually not be seen at all. People, particularly men, often ignore older women, because they are not young, not a sex object and not a reproducer. The older woman can be visible and socially acceptable, however, in her roles of motherhood and grandmotherhood. Thus, on the television shows that have a mature woman character, she typically exists only as a mother or a grandmother. And so often the portrayals are the “Jewish Mother schtick” of the whining, devouring and complaining older woman, whether the character is specifically Jewish or not. To depict an older woman as an intellectually vital, sexually active, productive member of society in her own right is very rare.

“In a youth-oriented patriarchy, especially, to become an older woman is to become invisible, a nonentity.” (Bolen, 2001, p. ix) According to Naomi Wolf, women’s magazines largely ignore older women and if they do feature an older woman she is air-brushed to look 10 to 15 years younger than she actually is. “The effect of this censorship of a third of the female life span is clear. By now readers have no idea what a real woman’s 60 year-old face looks like in print because it’s made to look 45. Worse, 60 year-old readers look in the mirror and think they look too old, because they’re comparing themselves to some retouched face smiling back at them from a magazine.” (Wolf, 1991, p. 82)

This invisibility is piercing for a mature woman not only because she is not worthwhile enough to be visible, but she enters society's radar screen as a symbol of frailty, weakness and ugliness. Her major roles are gone and she becomes merely a manifestation of what a young woman wants to avoid. Germaine Greer explains that "the middle-aged woman no longer has the option of fulfilling the demands of a patriarchal society. She can no longer play the obedient daughter, the pneumatic sex object or the madonna. Unless she consents to enter the expensive, time-consuming and utterly futile business of denying that she has passed her sell-by date, she has sooner or later to register the fact that she has been junked by consumer culture." (Greer, 1997, p.261)

Emblematic of visible motherhood, but invisible womanhood, are characters such as Edith bunker (*All in the Family*), Estelle Costanza (*Seinfeld*) and Marie Barone (*Everybody Loves Raymond*). While laughing at the ridiculous antics of Edith Bunker, we are also imbued with messages that reiterate her place within an ageist society. She can't compete as a physically attractive, sexual being. She's invisible in that realm and does not represent any emerging new images for mature women.

Estelle Costanza (*Seinfeld* 1992-1998) and Marie Barone (*Everybody Loves Raymond* 1996-present), both Italian matriarchs, could be any of the stereotypical Jewish mothers so prevalent on television for the last 50 years. They are women, much like the pantheon of Jewish mothers, Ida Morgenstern (*Rhoda*), Sylvia (*The Nanny*), Sheila (*South Park*) and Susie (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*) who "push, weedle, demand, constrain and are insatiable in their expectations and wants." (Prell, 1999, p. 143) Joyce Antler

characterizes this mother type as “manipulative, self-indulgent, demanding, and overly protective...” (Antler, 1998, p. 249) They are invisible as women in their own right, but painfully invasive as Mother.

In the famous “Outing” episode on *Seinfeld*, Seinfeld and George are mistakenly assumed to be gay by an NYU reporter. Estelle Costanza, while sitting on the toilet, reads the article about them in the paper. Estelle is so shocked she falls off the toilet and her back goes out. When George visits her in the hospital she blames him again for her condition, and decries, “Every day it’s something else with you. I don’t know anything about you any more. Maybe you’re making porno films.!” In “The Contest” Estelle, prone to falling and guilt-tripping, once again lands in the hospital when she collapses after witnessing George in the act of masturbating. From her hospital bed she laments, “You have nothing better to do at 3:00 in the afternoon. You treat your body like an amusement park. Too bad you can’t do that for a living. You’d be a big star!” Thus, not only is George infantilized but he is humiliated constantly by his mother regarding his manhood. His worst nightmare is realized when he has to move back with his parents because he can’t pay his rent. As soon as he brings his luggage back home his mother forces a bologna sandwich on him, a food he doesn’t want to eat. Although he refuses his mother’s offering, he knows that this act is interpreted as his rejection of her.

Any interaction between George and his mother is fraught with putdowns in order to emphasize George’s inadequacies. He constantly reveals to everyone that he’s a nothing and basically a bad person. It’s no surprise that his mother is the cause of his miseries because whatever he attempts to do she’s convinced it will fail. In “The Finale”, George is thrilled because NBC has finally, after 5 years, accepted the show that

he wrote entitled “Jerry”. George proudly tells his mother that he’s writing. Mom’s retort is “You know how to write? Where will you get the ideas? The whole show sounds pretty stupid.” George is unendingly demolished by his mother’s remarks but always hopeful he can escape the smothering consequences of her parenting style.

Estelle is a perfect caricature of the older mother, a woman who has no existence apart from her children and feels that the children are unendingly in need of remodeling, remaking and redoing. Similar to Marie Barone, she is uni-dimensional in her nagging demands of compliance from her children.

In *Everybody Loves Raymond*, though, there are daughters-in-law to extend the web of influence and manipulation. The tension between the older generation of women and the young is palpable in each episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, an extended battle of wills between daughter-in-law Debra and Marie. In a memorable episode of conflict, Debra is put in jail for being drunk behind the wheel and falling asleep. Debra is driven to drink too much when Marie interferes in the wedding shower for the new daughter-in-law, Amy. Debra decides she is too drunk to drive home, falls asleep and is picked up by a police officer. Marie, in her typical manner, assures Debra that “no matter how much shame you’ve brought on us”, we’ll stand behind you. Marie quickly escalates her diatribe by exclaiming, “Now it all makes sense. The messy house, kids running around filthy, the way she talks to me.” In Marie’s mind, Debra is an alcoholic and thus Marie’s involvement is more essential than ever. While complaining to Raymond that she “doesn’t have a drinking problem, I have a mother-in-law problem”, Debra learns that “mother cannot be defied, only humored. She can’t be controlled,

merely temporarily contained. She feels it her right to live her son's life as well as her own, and that's that." (Richmond, 2000, p. 178)

METAPHOR

Too frequently we see the portrayals of older women as a metaphor for disease, isolation, worthlessness, vulnerability, dissatisfaction and decrepitude. Typically, she's a mother who either lives with the family or lives alone. If she has a love interest in her life it's portrayed as a silly relationship, very childlike and laughable. Married older women are depicted as either totally dominated by a man or as a virago who has so destroyed her husband's ego that he has capitulated to her will long ago. Dressed most often in heavy, frumpy styleless clothes, she's a desexed creature who pathetically spends her time and energy on haranguing her children and/or husband, convincing them that she needs attention. If children or a husband aren't available, she will cling to anyone who is willing to help her. Research finds that people look at the old on television and label them stubborn, eccentric, foolish, dependent, frail, vulnerable, worthless, grumpy and a drain on society.

. Betty Friedan discusses a survey conducted by *Retirement Living* on a cross section of people under and over 65 and the "most common adjectives used to describe the way people over sixty were depicted on television were 'ridiculous', 'decrepit' and 'childish' ". (Friedan, 1993, p. 49) In a survey conducted by H. Cohen, participants stereotyped the portrayal of older women as having the following characteristics: living in the past; old fashioned in their behavior, thinking and the way they looked; not interested in sexual activity; basically cared for by their families without giving in return

and largely invisible. (Cohen, 2002) They are often portrayed as stubborn, eccentric, foolish, dependent, frail, vulnerable, worthless, isolated, grumpy and a drain on society. (Bazzini, 1997)

Friedan asserts that “gerontologists have pointed out that the television image of people over sixty-five is distinctly reminiscent of the ‘terrible two’ toddler.” (Friedan, 1993, p. 56) And Zita argues that the older female body is a surface for the metaphors of disease, disability, and medical dependency. (Zita, 1997, p. 96)

An exemplar of the “ill” mother is Italian mama, Livia (mother of Tony, Barbara, Janice), in *The Sopranos*. Father Phil Intintola, the family’s priest, explains that “it’s her special gift to survive by exercising power through powerlessness.” (Rucker, 2000, p.10) According to Allen Rucker, “She looks frail and acts like she’s weak in the head but she’s got Tony by the cajones. Maybe it’s God’s way of punishing him for being a gangster.” (Rucker, 2000, p. 10) Or, perhaps, it’s any child’s quintessential nightmare side of his or her older mother.

Although Tony tries to be a devoted son, “Livia rails against Tony’s neglect, rejects his gift CD player and resists his encouragement to move into a well-appointed seniors home.” (Yacowar, 2002, p. 23) She makes it very clear to Tony what a terrible son he is and that “once she’s locked into a nursing home, I’ll die faster”. Tony, while talking to his psychiatrist in episode after episode, reveals that “whatever I do I feel guilty”. He is asked by his psychiatrist, Dr. Melfi, whether he can remember anything good about his mother. After pausing, the only good experience he can recall is when Tony’s father fell down the stairs and everyone laughed. But he quickly retorts, “Hey she’s a good woman, I’m the ungrateful fuck” although he admits that his mother “has an

almost mystical ability to wreak havoc.” When she dies, Tony tells Melfi that Livia was a “selfish, miserable cunt. She ruined my father’s life . So, we’re probably done here, right? She’s dead.” But, of course, Tony cannot expunge his mother so easily. She’ll be a constant presence in his life as long as he lives.

COUNTER HEGEMONIC PORTRAYALS

Gradually, depictions of older women are breaking the stereotype and instead of being always characterized as the other, the mother and the metaphor, a few portrayals are defying the archetype. As early as 1984 two dynamic older women on popular television shows convinced audiences that mature women can think and be involved in society. *Miss Marple* (periodically from 1984-1992 and returning) and Jessica Fletcher portrayed by Angela Lansbury (*Murder She Wrote*, 1984-1996) are clever agents who investigate murders. One is an amateur detective, the model of decorum, in the British village of St.Mary Mead and the other is a mystery writer who herself scrutinizes murders in Cabot Cove, Maine and later New York City. Both use their wits, rather than their physicality to solve the mysteries, applying what might be labeled a feminine approach to sleuthing. Through observation and keen insights into human behavior these women are the heroines who are not marginalized and certainly not invisible. Noteworthy is the beginning of each segment of *Murder She Wrote*. Jessica Fletcher is shown riding her bicycle and waving at many members of the community. However, both women are “spinsters” presumably so they will have the time to pursue their cases rather than obsess over mothering and grandmothering.

But it is mainly in the 21st Century that television departs from the older woman as parody to the nuanced portrayals of such characters as Tyne Daly in *Judging Amy*, Sharon Gless in *Queer as Folk* and Frances Conroy in *Six Feet Under*.

Tyne Daly in *Judging Amy* (2001-2005) introduces the audience to a rarity, Maxine Gray. Not only is she a sought after professional woman, a social worker with the Dept. of Children and Families in Hartford, Connecticut but she is a person who is respected for what she says and does. Not physically beautiful and not young, she carries herself with grace and confidence and has love interests in the show, notably the rich businessman Jared Duff to whom she becomes engaged, losing him to a heart attack 48 hours before the wedding and Ignacio Messina. The audience observes a gray haired woman who knows who she is and one who is not trying to camouflage her age or her wisdom. Capable of toughness, love, and humor she is also a multi-dimensional character who represents frailties (she hasn't spoken to her brother in 12 years).

Her relationship with Ignacio Messina, her landscape designer, is not a demeaning one, a coupling of two old folks that are laughable caricatures (like Sophia Petrillo's relationships). Rather they are presented as mature individuals who learn from each other and communicate their feelings and needs. Mr. Messina takes Maxine salsa dancing and remarks that she lacks passion on the dance floor. The implication is that Maxine needs to accept her femininity and enjoy the connection with him as a partner. He is smitten with this gray haired overweight grandmother and the attraction is believable and poignant, not ridiculous. He formally asks Maxine if he can "court her" and she is pleased and willing to continue the relationship. Maxine is seen throughout the series

advising not only her granddaughter and daughter, but advocating, as a professional, for youngsters who are in trouble.

Sharon Gless in *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) manages as Debbie Novotny to present a working class woman who accepts her son and others the way they are. With her lashing tongue and her impatience with intolerance she is the admirable advocate of justice and humanity. She is frequently contrasted with those who cannot change and must profess their ideologies no matter what the price. It is telling that Brian's mother, a lonely widow whose phone never rings and the antithesis of Debbie, is adamant about excoriating her gay son, telling him how sinful his lifestyle is and that he will surely go to Hell.

Despite Debbie's floozy looks (a throwback to Endora) and her ubiquitous t-shirt ("It's All About Me") she is not degraded as an older woman and does not pattern her life only after her own demands. In one episode, a gay dead boy is found in the trash bin behind Debbie's restaurant. Detective Horvath labels the corpse, "Jane Doe". Debbie is indignant that the detective is cavalier about the death and yells at him, "This kid has a name. You're a homophobic prick." She is incensed that no one in the community, including the detective, takes this death seriously enough to investigate fully and she proceeds to find out the identity of the boy. Detective Horvath is so impressed with her perseverance, and perhaps also her humanness, that he wishes to date Debbie. Again, Debbie is hardly an invisible presence on the show but a pivotal character who embodies street-smart wisdom.

Frances Conroy's Ruth Fisher in *Six Feet Under* reveals an exceedingly complex woman, layered with inadequacies, uncertainties and struggles. She's an imperfect wife

who resorts to an affair with Hiram (Ed Begley, Jr.) while still married to Nathaniel. As a widow she has an active sex life, dating her boss at the florist shop and ultimately marrying George Sibley (James Cromwell), a geologist and professor. Although she mainly dresses in a plain, matronly style and is a self-accepting prude, she is a desirable woman who attracts many men.

In “Ecotone”, an episode in the woods in which she tries to rekindle her romantic relationship with Hiram, she comes to the conclusion that she is desperately disgusted with all the men in her life who have constantly made demands on her. In an epiphany of self awareness, she dramatically “shoots” each of the love interests in her life and comes to the conclusion that she no longer needs or is interested in Hiram. Despite George’s constant entreaties to travel together “to close the distance between them” and even after George recovers from his mental breakdown, Frances concludes that she wants her freedom. There is nothing “other” about this character who struggles, as do all the characters, regardless of age, to make sense of a world which includes the incomprehensible, such as the death of Nate. Her mother-daughter battles with Claire are representative of the difficulties of familial interaction. She is not static, nor is she purely defined as mother and grandmother. Her multi-age support group, her knitting circle, accepts and discusses her problems with men in the light of all women’s problems with men, not classifying her as “old” and different. She continues to explore who she is, employee in the florist shop and ultimately an owner along with her friend Bettina of the Four Paws Pet Retreat. There is nothing ageist about her choices and problems.

The decoding of media stereotypes of older women and the awareness of counter hegemonic representations serve to promote the empowerment for this cohort. Too often

older women are puzzled by the bombardment of negative images so prevalent in American media. “Women doing well are aware of a troubling discrepancy between the positive way they see themselves and social devaluation they perceive and they feel challenged to live lives that contradict the ‘over the hill’ stereotype. Their sense of ‘personhood’ is stronger than ever, yet society and the media are fading them into invisibility that does not sit well with the baby boomer generation. They are aware of dissonance between the increased freedom and power they feel and negative cultural stereotypes and media portrayals.” (McQuaide, 1998, p. 30) But with the politics of representation slowly changing on television, the debilitating stereotype of helplessness, fragility and aimlessness can be replaced. It is not only older women who will benefit from a new paradigm but all of society as well. The young can look forward to a stage in life that affords new opportunities and possibilities, a time of increased agency and renewed activism.

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