



Rewriting the script: The power of age diversity on screen

A new AARP survey of 2,013 adults 18-plus finds that interest in age diversity on screen extends across all age groups, and that on-screen depictions impact how society views getting older. American TV and movie audiences say it is important to see storylines reflecting the complexity of real-life relationships and family dynamics.

KEY FINDINGS

Americans believe on-screen stories shape societal views of getting older.

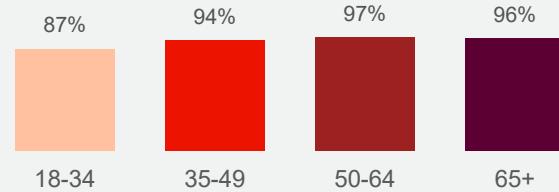
Across age groups, respondents believe that on-screen depictions matter. More than **eight in ten Americans** (81%) agree that what people see on screen influences how society views getting older. Half of adults across all age groups say it helps break down stereotypes by age. Further, a strong majority of adults 18-plus (93%) are likely to watch movies or TV with actors 50-plus in leading roles. The message is simple: age-diverse storytelling has broad appeal, and its impact extends beyond the screen.

Eight in ten Americans say what people see on screen influences how society views getting older.



Likelihood of watching movie or show with 50-plus lead

Percent indicating somewhat or very likely by age



Interest in 50-plus leads may be linked to a **desire to see intergenerational diversity on screen** more broadly. Adults 18-plus say it is important to show actors of different generations together in movies and TV, more so among younger respondents.

Those ages 18-34 who indicate they are open to watching a movie or show with 50-plus leads are even more likely than their older counterparts (adults 35-plus) to say showing actors of different generations together is very important.

Respondents applaud movies and TV shows featuring age diversity that:

“... portray pretty real depictions of not only older adults but younger ones too.”

— Woman, 22

“... show how a multigenerational family functions. There are times where the older members are wiser and where the younger members helped the older ones.”

— Male, 68

Current storyline gaps point to opportunities for richer storytelling around love and romance.

Across all age groups, romantic relationships are pinpointed as the largest gap where characters their age are underrepresented in movies and TV. Fifty-seven percent of adults 18-plus identify storyline gaps for characters their age related to dating, intimacy, love, and relationships. Only 29% of adults age 50-64 and 16% of adults age 65 and older see characters their age in romantic roles. Yet close to half of adults overall (46%) say they would like to see more love and romance themes featuring characters their age.

“... focus on real-life issues like health, friendship, love, and finding purpose later in life, without reducing the characters to stereotypes.”

— Woman, 24

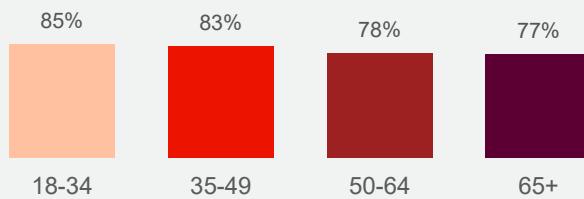
Positive and realistic portrayals can inspire viewers of all ages.

Well over half of 18-plus adults believe that accurate representation of people 50-plus matters — making stories more relatable to a wider audience and showing that people of all ages can be active, interesting and complex.

However, younger adults are much more likely to feel inspired by how people their age are portrayed in movies and TV — 51% of those ages 18-34 versus only 16% of adults 65 and older. This highlights a significant gap in how current age representation resonates with viewers as they get older.

Agreement movies/TV influence how society views getting older

Percent indicating somewhat or strongly agree by age



One in three respondents (33%) indicate that a movie or show has made them feel more positive about getting older, giving the industry an opportunity to reshape how society views aging, especially for younger audiences.

Survey findings suggest that movie and TV depictions of aging can inspire greater optimism about the future. However, while some current portrayals are getting it right, gaps and opportunities remain. A media landscape embracing age diversity and rich storytelling, including love and romance, can resonate with audiences of all ages—and matters for how Americans view getting older.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted October 30 – November 6, 2025 among 2,013 adults age 18-plus through Dynata's online panel. All data were weighted by age, race/ethnicity, region, marital status, education, and gender.



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