

# Age Performance and Performativity: Exploring Jane Fonda's New Femininity in *Grace and Frankie*

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**Abstract**— *The youthful structure of the look pressures mature women to pass for youthful versions of their former selves and continues to influence the unconscious process of age and sexuality. Through an analysis of Jane Fonda's performance of Grace in the Netflix series Grace and Frankie, I examine the performance of aging and sexuality from an interdisciplinary perspective. In so doing, I demonstrate how the characters subvert old paradigms of aging, refuse desexualization, refuse the divestment of their sexual desires, and refuse elderly women's conventional role trajectory from mother to grandmother. More importantly, I demonstrate how Grace and Frankie merge Second Wave feminism into a "new femininity," which embraces aspects of postfeminist sexuality, neoliberal consumer desires and neoliberal tropes of freedom and choice.*

**Keywords**— *Jane Fonda, Lilly Tomlin, Grace and Frankie, ageism, discrimination, Second Wave Feminism, New Femininities, Postfeminism, emancipated femininity, gender, anophobia, Hollywood, performance and performativity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Jane Fonda recently said, "We're still living with the old paradigm of age as an arch. That's the old metaphor. You're born, you peak at midlife and decline into decrepitude. A more appropriate metaphor is a staircase. The upward ascension of the human spirit, bringing us into wisdom, wholeness, and authenticity." Series creators Marta Kauffman and Howard J. Morris (2015) attempt to implement this vision by subverting and rewriting the old paradigm in their Netflix series *Grace and Frankie*. The series stars Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin play two mismatched friends who come together after their husbands, played by Sam Waterson and Martin Sheen, announce that they are a gay couple and plan to marry each other. *Grace and Frankie* offers a counter-narrative on the complexities of the gendered effects of aging. Similar to Fonda's "ascending staircase" *Grace and Frankie* resist, disrupt, and rewrite prior conceptions. In this essay, I explore this gap between generativity and stagnation by examining the performativity and interconnection between gender, age, and identity in Jane Fonda's performance in *Grace and Frankie*.

As we see in *Grace and Frankie*, "Aging is both a performance and performative" (Lipscomb & Marshall, 2010,

p.1). Through Fonda's performance of Grace, a vain and vulnerable retired cosmetics executive whose husband left her for Frankie's husband Sol, we witness the interconnection between being and performance. Fonda performs the "actions associated with a chronological age" thereby constructing a "reality of age both for the subject and for those who interact with the subject" (Lipscomb & Marshall, 2010, p. 2). I begin the essay by first briefly mapping out a short history of ageism in America, followed by a closer inquiry as to how Grace specifically challenges notions of invisibility through her staged performance of refusal and resistance to her disposability. I further explore how the show itself attempts to integrate Second Wave Feminist sensibilities with postfeminist rhetoric into the narrative thereby creating what appears to be an "emancipated femininity" enacted through financial independence, consumer choices, and individual self-improvement projects—a site where the political merges into the personal (Lazar, 2013; Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000; Zeisler, 2008).

### Historical Trajectory

Robert Butler (1969) first defined ageism as the “systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old,” revealing an historical “contempt” for old people (p. 243). In Neolithic societies elder generations were discarded when they could no longer contribute to communal sustainability. Similarly, we see the discarding of the aging body in the film and television industry. Hollywood’s reinforcement of ageist attitudes was particularly noted at the 2018 Academy Awards, when Sandra Bullock internalized the sentiments on the glorification of youth and asked to turn the lights down so she could “pass” for forty. Her comment on passing for a younger version of her self speaks to a growing internalized psychological aversion to growing old in America. Certainly, ageism is the hidden, under discussed “anxiety provoking other” of discrimination in American institutions and according to Butler (1969) “the great sleeper in American life”(p. 245). Harmful stereotypes and negative attitudes of the elderly have been internalized in our institutions and are perpetrated and repeated through social media (Thornton 2002, Overall 2006). It is fair to say that Margaret Gullete (2004) is correct in her declaration that “about age as a performance, we need to start the arguments” (p.159). Gullete begins with her premise that “whatever happens in the body, human beings are aged by culture first of all” (p. 3).

Hollywood has certainly influenced culture on the gendered affects of aging because film and television actors construct important socio-cultural paradigms through their performances (Stacey, 1991; Dyer, 1998; Signorielli, 1989; Bielby and Bielby (1996; Stukator, 1996). If we briefly reflect on Hollywood’s historical trajectory, we see that age hierarchies got their footing in the 1910s and 1920s, when early film makers began to market to “youthful audiences” by privileging youthful stars in “romantic roles” and presenting the elderly as a “problem” in social interactions. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the elderly are portrayed as “dehumanized,” and socially irrelevant, or aged “two-dimensional objects of kitsch to be laughed at,” and “repurposed for the amusement of the young” (Shary & McVittie, 2016, p. 91).

Television, in particular, is one of the institutions that fashions societal views of its elderly. Unfortunately, for the most part, with the exception of the *Golden Girls*, the majority of depictions of the elderly are distorted, debilitating, grotesque and *othered*. Mainstream television culture has generally ignored any positive depictions of the natural processes of aging by steering away from it as a

viable market of audience reception (Arber & Ginn, 1991). Here and elsewhere, ageism is alive and well.

The subject of aging becomes even more complicated when we add gender into the social equation (McMullin, 1995; Riley, 1987). For women, especially in Western societies, the *dialectical* effects of age and gender collude to disadvantage women in all spheres of their livelihoods in a precarious state of double jeopardy (Chappell & Havens, 1980; Sontag 1979:). This double bind is even more systematically severe for older women in nearly every aspect of their productive and reproductive lives. Germaine Greer (1991) refers to the dilemma of ageism and sexism as anophobia, the irrational fear of the old woman. Yet, gender and age are part biological. “A person does not get to choose a different age or gender from the wardrobe each morning” (Butler, 1993, p. x). The socio-cultural meanings and associations connected with the biological elements of age and gender are constructed. “The matter of bodies will be in dissociable from regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the significance of those material effects” (Butler, 1993, p. 2) Aging Hollywood female actors understand too well the “material effects of aging” and the loss of social value and power. The senior woman is doubly marginalized, doubly dishonored, and doubly diminished because of her aging physical female appearance, which is much different than the experiences of her aging male counterpart (Frueh, 1994, p. 277).

### Invisibility and Loss

In Season One, Episode Three, “The Dinner,”(2015) Grace and Frankie confront the fact that they have become invisible social beings. Without their male counterparts, both women seem to have disappeared from their social order. Rendered socially “invisible,” their former domestic acquaintances have left their sides and the world at large has dematerialized them. In addition to the loss of husbands, loss of married friends, loss of physical stamina, there is the constant fear of loss itself to remind the characters of their mortality.

In the episode of “The Dinner” we are invited into Grace and Frankie’s disrupted lives. After an awkward dinner with their family, Grace and Frankie go to the check out line of a grocery store to purchase some cigarettes, but are ignored by the cashier/clerk who is busy pricing grapes. Upset by their invisibility, Frankie screams, “Excuse me, can we get some cigarettes cry’n out loud” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H et. al., 2015,26:34). The grocery clerk heads towards them, but instead of stopping at their check stand, he stops at the one in front of them where a young voluptuous blond in a strapless

green dress asks to purchase lottery tickets. Try as they might, Grace and Frankie cannot get his attention away from the blossoming beauty as they have been upstaged by the radiance of sexual youth. Outraged by her consumer “seconding, Grace screams, “Hello” three times, the third time exploding into a rage and banging her hands frantically on the counter (Kaufman, M., Morris, H et. al., 2015, 27:12).

What kind of animal treats people like this? You don’t see me!?!?

Do I not exist? Do you think it’s right to ignore us?

Just because... she’s got gray hair and I don’t look at her?

This poor women needs a pack of cigarette and she doesn’t have a lot of left. Get us a pack of cigarettes!

(Kaufman, M., Morris, H et. al., 2015, 27:06-27:35)

Their explosive behavior shatters their “cloak of invisibility,” and Grace and Frankie materialize in front of the young clerk. Finally “visible,” they leave the store. Back in the car, Grace is contrite admitting that her meltdown lacked “poised.” In a passionate call to arms, Grace refuses “to be irrelevant.” The women soon learn that there is a plus side to their invisibility. Frankie has a “superpower” and has stolen the pack of cigarettes from the store. “If you can’t see me, you can’t stop me,” Frankie says (Kaufman, M., Morris, H et. al., 2015, 27:50-28:00).

Harbingers of loss persist throughout Season Four (2018): In Episode Four, Frankie loses her legal status when she is declared legally dead; in Episode 10, one of the supporting characters experiences dementia and loss of memory; in Episode 11, we witness Grace’s loss of good judgment when she hires a contractor who steals all of their belongings. These “losses” in mental and physical acuity prompt their children to introduce them to their greatest fear of all—loss of dignity when they are persuaded into joining a retirement community (Episode 13).

The aging duo has been disappeared into a “none place.” For Grace, it is the loss of identity and the powerlessness to locate herself in the context of the divorced, disappeared aging woman that has demolished both her exteriority and interiority (Brooks, 1999, pg. 232). Grace performs the experience of loss by assuming the burden of its representation and “interiorizing” society’s perceptions and prejudices of aging (Mellencamp, 1999, p. 312).

Grace, the forsaken object, to borrow Freud’s terms has “lost the perception of the object (which is equated with the loss of the object itself)” (1926, p. 137). She is imagined and represented as a “loss object rather than as a subject process or a passage through time” (Mellencamp, 1999, p. 314). Her self-representation, until now, has been intricately

intertwined with marriage and youth. While Grace certainly feels invisible, her dynamic personality is anything but unseen. The manner in which she performs and negotiates her position as cultural refuse, demonstrates that it is, she, Grace who is in charge. Grace directs her own desertion of her former married younger self and performs a visible transformation from loss to emancipated new femininity and self-realization (Brooks, 1999; Lazar, 2013).

### Refusal of the Call to Disappear

Interestingly, the seventy-year old Grace, similar to the eighty-year old Fonda is staged at the aging moment of her cultural irrelevance; and, it is Grace the character and Fonda the actress who vehemently refuse to be turned into cultural surplus in the complicated ruins of Second Wave Aging feminists (Brooks, 1999). It is the opposition to thwart society’s efforts to disappear her that keeps viewers watching her journey on the ascending staircase towards Fonda’s “emancipated” wholeness of being.

One of the attractions to the series is the way in which Grace and Frankie decline and negate the gendered discourse on aging and their position as invisible “figures of loss” with no sexual desires. And, refuse they do, when they take on the role of “sexual entrepreneurs” by implementing “technologies of self-hood” with the unveiling of their vibrator line, which appeals to elder women in need of “lubing” (Harvey & Gill, 2013). Grace and Frankie take charge after their husbands leave and open up choices for the “female sexual sex-expression and sexual pleasure” of senior women, while at the same time refurbishing sexual stereotypes on ageism and beauty in America (Harvey & Gill, 2013, p. 52). In order for Grace and Frankie to survive their third act, they must become “sexually agentic” and embrace “the sexuality of culture” in which emancipated freedom is tied to patriarchal capitalist-consumerist demands—the purchasing of orgasmic freedom in a male-dominated capitalist world (Harvey & Gill, 2013). The series seems to embrace a contemporary sexually liberated postfeminism connected to the rhetoric of “choice” “empowerment” and “sexual determination” (Harvey and Gill, 2013; Coleman, 2008; Gil, 2006; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013). With the launching of the vibrator line, writer/producers Kauffman and Morris introduce a sequence of signifiers designed to encourage a sense of emancipatory sexual liberation. In this world, sex drives the narrative, as it is vital to a pleasure-filled life style of realized identity, creative expression and personal fulfillment (Attwood, 2005, p. 86).

Frankie and Grace, the never aging, never wrinkling frozen faces in time are the new celebrity models for sexual representation and discourses on aging, “choice and empowerment” (Harvey & Gill, 2013; Coleman, 2008; Gil, 2006; McRobbie 2009; Ringrose, 2013). As they package and promote their vibrator as a form of “empowerment,” the unsettling question remains as to whether this fashionable subjectivity “wrapped in a postfeminist guise” simply reinforces old stereotypes on aging and beauty in America (Harvey & Gill, 2013, pg. 52). Certainly, Grace and Frankie’s rebellion to cultural standards of age-appropriate behavior, “categories,” “rules,” and “regulations” catapults them into visibility, if not sexual entrepreneurial wholeness (Atwood, 2006, p. 77). The series seems to suggest that, “to be noticed, older women have to defy social norms” and comply to new sexual standards of postfeminist liberation (Kaplan, 2010, p. 43.)

In Season II, Episode 13, Grace and Frankie refuse their desexualization and divesting of their sexual desires and refuse elderly women’s conventional role trajectory from mother to sexless grandmother. Instead, both Grace and Frankie refigure, re-sexualize, and reinvest themselves as a vibrant and elderly women simply living and being in another stage of life (Kaplan, 2010, p. 47). And they do so, by reclaiming their sexuality on behalf of aging women and becoming savvy entrepreneurs in the “niche” sexual toy industry by developing a vibrator line specifically geared to aging women.

In Season 2, Episode 13, “The Coup,”(2015) Grace and Frankie defend their vibrator business to their family, including their x-husbands Robert and Sal. Robert cannot stomach their business scheme saying, “Couldn’t we fight for the right to masturbate after lunch?” Full-term pregnant daughter Brianna has further internalized society’s sexual prohibition and cultural taboo for older women and questions how she is going to explain to her children that “grandma makes sex toys for other grandmas” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H et. al., 23:38). Grace, again, resists and defends her position as a sexual, entrepreneurial women stating, “We’re making things for people like us because we are sick and tired of being dismissed by people like you” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 24:35). Both Gracie and Frankie walk out, as their family watches in astonishment at their daring strength and guts. In this sense, Grace and Frankie renegotiate their positions by “*stretching time* “re-pacing the temporality of spectacle, display, and performance” (Brooks, 1999, p. 234). Through the awakening of their sexual beings and engagement in dynamic acts of resistance and refusal,

“the discarded displays itself, {and} demands attention” (Brooks, 1999, 234.)

In Season Three, Episode One “The Art Show”(2017), Grace and Frankie pitch their vibrator business to loan officer Derrick Flout claiming that their particular product is “designed for older women that specifically takes into account their arthritis and vaginal tissue” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 2:13) They request a “\$75,000 loan “and would like “3.45 percent rather than the usual 4.1” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 3:01). Derrick questions if it will be a short-term loan, but Grace immediately says they would like ten years (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 2:43). To persuade him further, Frankie offers a vibrator with batteries for his lady friend. Considering their age, Flout questions when they think they could possibly be paying it back. Grace responds, “ten years as is common in a ten year loan” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 3:04). He then retorts that he doesn’t think a “ten year loan would be prudent at this time for our bank with you,” inferring that they will not live long enough to earn a profit (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 3: 28). Grace counters with a seven-year loan, but Flout doesn't think that “seven is realistic,” either (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 3:32). Flustered, Frankie asks what is realistic? Flout says, “somewhere in the one year range” indicating his fears of ever getting paid back on his investment (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 3:39). While Frankie thinks that they aren’t getting a loan because Flout is afraid “of female sexuality” and never read “*Our Bodies Ourselves*,” Grace realizes that Flout won’t give them the loan “because he thinks we’re too old” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 4:14). Grace finally calls him out: “Do you know what this is? Ageist. Ageist bullshit!” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 4:15).

Flout defends his position claiming that there “are many factors” considered in “loan decisions” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 4:23). In this instance, it is inferred that the loan to Grace and Frankie is too risky because of the uncertainty of Grace and Frankie’s life span. Fonda and Tomlin are playing women in their early seventies, which is comedically ironic since the actors themselves are in the realm of their eighties. (Fonda is actually 81 and Tomin is 79.) The show seems to play into dangerous cultural notions that if 30 is the new 50, 70 is the new 80. Grace is sure that ageism has come into play and that it shouldn’t matter “how old you are, or how many birthdays you have left,” or as Frankie notes “how many pubic hairs you have left” (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 4:24).<sup>i</sup>

### Performing Aging Spectacle

One of the fascinating aspects of screening Fonda the actress and Grace the character is the way in which motivation and intentionality overlap. Fonda's performance offers an opportunity to examine Fonda's attitudes towards her own aging processes. Fonda the actress provides a complicated vision and model for aging within a broader cultural context. Fonda refuses to subjugate herself to the sociocultural and psychological pressures to govern old age instead she buys into the pressures to stay young and "pass" for someone in her seventies.

After all, Fonda has been the ultimate guru of health, exercise, and youthfulness since the 1980s. She is the "hero of aging" remaining forever fit and youthful in her physical appearance" (Butler, 1993, p. 227). Both Fonda the actress and Grace the character demonstrate a devotion to the "deliberate re-sexualization and re-commodification" of her body, which shifts from "an external male gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze" (Gill, 2003, p. 104). In her performance of Grace, seldom a hair is out of place. Indeed she symbolizes the "new woman" of old assuming the priorities of postfeminist consumer culture spending time and money in the pursuit of youth and beauty. "The "new woman" was/is one who purchased the latest products, including fashionable clothing; followed a daily schedule of personal hygiene; and maintained a slender, youthful body, even after childbirth. In a postfeminist media society, which concerns itself with the sexualization of the female body, agency and acquiescence march hand in hand.

But could Fonda be reinforcing consumer pressure to look young and be young in her highly constructed performance of youthfulness? Who looks this good at 80 without a great deal of consumer help? Could Fonda be heightening women's fears and insecurities by passing as seventy? It's as if her appearance reinforces the values that women in harmony with modern preoccupations of youth, sex, and consumerism are compensated with cultural currency. In this series, Fonda herself is the site of the "various faces" of the commodity, which are physically juxtaposed and brought into a tension.

While both Grace and Fonda have maintained their "cultural capital," they also have had the economic means and the power of cinematography to do so. Fonda as well as Tomlin "pass" as younger versions of themselves through "cosmetic surgery, make up, dental surgery, fashion, hairstyle, and, not the least, photographic illusionism" (Stukator, 1996). Director of Photography Gale Tattersall used French silk stockings as rear lens netting, and an innovative lighting concept to film the iconic actresses in order to enlist the forgiveness of age. The softening of Fonda's face, through careful lighting and the pale colors that surround her create a youthful aesthetics of the aging body. However, when actors are willing to let go of Hollywood filming techniques for the raw reality of aging and performing age, it becomes a transformative site of aging performance and performativity. This is especially observable in Season One, Episode Three, "The End,"(2015) where we witness how the director foregrounds age by allowing us to consider the chronological age of Fonda and her ability to enact Grace's age.

After a dinner in which both Grace and Frankie believe that their husbands are going to announce their retirement, they discover that their husbands are in love with each other. Grace returns home, sits in front of her mirror and takes off her Ms. Hanson façade piece by piece starting with the removal of her false eyelashes. She then proceeds to remove her hair extensions and surprisingly the elastic band that loop around her head to tighten her sagging jawline (Kaufman, M., Morris, H. et. al., 28:38). Once Fonda abandons her accouterments of youth and agelessness, we expect to see Fonda in the raw, visceral moment of her aging 80 year-old self. This is not the case: her hair still bounces with life; her skin glows; her jaw line remains sharp and defined; her eyelashes maintain their thickness. Jane Fonda's performance of age and gender is in tension with her personal on-going masquerade of her physically aging body. While Grace's reflection in the mirror suggests her loss and confusion about herself and her identity, we also witness Fonda the actress participating in the pressures of the aging female body to masquerade and pass in order to be visible.



Frankie (Fonda) unmasking herself.

### Rewriting the Narrative

*Grace and Frankie* enlists viewers to move beyond the “othering” of older women, by confronting the complex unconscious attitudes, conflicts and fears about aging women and their social behaviors. These fears arise when viewers begin to recognize their own aging female “otherness” in them (Kaplan, 2010, p. 34). In each episode, the producers place Grace and Frankie within different gendered, political and cultured contexts to challenge and work out existing ageist/gendered notions and stereotypes about age and gender related appropriateness (Kaplan, 2010, p. 35). The series establishes the oppositional struggle of the aging characters that labor daily to try and negotiate a thirty to forty year old generational divide with their family and other members of society.

Yet, while Grace and Frankie make age related gendered adjustments, they also breach and rupture existing paradigms on women, sex, and growing old in America. Grace and Frankie refuse to spend their winter years in a state of passive complacency. They refuse to let their curiosity wither on a dying vine; they refuse to be non-sexual celibate beings; they refuse to sit down and never get up.

In Season Four, Grace challenges normative age dating patterns and sexual desirability of women when she dates a younger man named Nick played by Peter Gallagher who doesn't seem to mind her aging body. There are many scenes that indeed challenge normative behaviors. One that stands out is the crisis narrative of Season Four, Episode 13, “The Home,” (2018) when both Grace and Frankie's children persuade them that they can no longer care for themselves and should consider living in an assisted living community. In what the children refer to as “a safe, safe emotional space,” Brianna, Mallory, Coyote, and Bud confront Grace and

Frankie with their concerns about their inability to continue living on their own (Kaufman & Morris, 2:51). They have discovered an online checklist to determine if a loved one is ready for assisted living. Grace calls her children insane, but Mallory reads off the printout of the signs that they may be ready for assisted living, which include “neglect around the house,” “recent physical set back,” “unexplained bruises” (Kaufman & Morris, 3:33-3:47). Grace questions how they could even think about putting them in assisted living and rebuff any of these “signs.” Frankie asserts that “a different check list would say that I'm doing just, just fine, “growing as an artist, check” and “finding new things to fondue, check” (Kaufman & Morris, 4:58). Grace asserts that she “found two successful businesses, check! Didn't run one of them into the ground, check!” (Kaufman & Morris, 5:08).

The children end up convincing the aging pair by telling them individually that it is the other that is in need of help. Grace ends up going into the home for Frankie and Frankie goes into the home for Grace. Two months later, they reside in Walden Villas and wonder, “How the hell did we get here?” (Kaufman & Morris, 9:32). In fact, Walden Villas looks quite pretty with its lovely lake and ducks; it is also, however, quite stifling and mundane as Grace appears to have to breathe deeply or the surroundings will suffocate her. Age becomes a performance for them as they stage and enact the presentation of aging women who sit, watch, and wait.

At one point in the home, the women are all wearing the same pastel gulf outfits with matching sun visors at a “Look Great, Feel Good,” seminar (Kaufman & Morris, 15:31) Grace, particularly, seems to be apprehensive of the aging clones around her—who are portrayed as having accepted their loss of cultural value and power. Grace manifests this internalized psychological aversion to the other aging women

by staying in her room at lunch and opting out of many of the group activities, unless of course she feels as if she is doing it for Frankie.

After a series of experiencing a restriction of liberties and freedom in the assisted living facility, both Grace and Frankie wonder about their decision. First, Frankie is told she can no longer paint outside of the art room and Grace is told that she cannot run a business out of her room. “Running a business is antithetical to a retirement community” (Kaufman & Morris, 14:51). The last straw occurs when Frankie’s fondue pot is confiscated because it’s deemed “too dangerous for residents”; however, it will be “kept in safe keeping,” until she dies (Kaufman & Morris, 21:16). When Frankie realizes her bong has also been confiscated, she says, “Take a way a man’s bong, you take a way his dignity” (Kaufman & Morris, 22:01). At this point, the women have grown tired of the rules and regulations and want to return home, refusing their delegation to disregarded assisted living residents existing in the margins of life and death:

You know where they don’t have dumb rules, our house.

Well yeah, but you can’t go there?

What do you mean, I can’t go there?

Well because you know why?

Oh right I’m sorry.

Because of you.

No, because of you.

No, I came here for you, because you are a porcelain figurine.

I came here for you because you’re Mrs. Magoo.

I’ve always been Mrs. Magoo.

And I haven’t shattered yet, I mean if a part falls off just glue it back on.

Oh my God, We have been parent trapped!  
(Kaufman & Morris, 2018, 22:51-23:24).

Grace and Frankie realize that they came for each other so they can leave for each other. They press the emergency button and commandeer a golf cart and bump and swerve pass the guard at the security kiosk. They drive to their La Jolla neighborhood right up on to the sand and then decide to walk the rest of the way to their home. In this scene, reminiscent of *Thelma and Louise*, we witness how Grace and Frankie have the power and guts to stand up to society’s disappearing of elderly people into retirement communities. Grace and Frankie rupture the notion that aging women have no rights, no say in where, and how they live. Unfortunately, however, when they finally arrive home, they find a *Remax*

*Real Estate Sold* sign in front of their house, leaving the audience wondering how the fiercely independent duo will get out of this one.

Here, and elsewhere the paradigms and gendered discourses on aging are interrupted as Grace and Frankie refuse disappearance and disposability and take their power back into their own hands to rewrite their own lives, (on what seems like) their own terms. However, as it is for most aging adults, growing old in a youth obsessed American society is never that easy—especially when adult children are involved.

### CONCLUSION

Since the writing of this paper, the producers have addressed feminist criticism concerning the discrepancy between the age of the characters and the age of the actors. In Season Five, both Grace and Frankie are now positioned in their early 80s capturing both Fonda and Tomlin’s true age, and perhaps creating even more anxiety about how an eighty-year old woman should look and act like. *Grace and Frankie* propose a complicated example for its subject positions as it produces both opportunities and challenges for women attempting to negotiate the socio-emotional, economic, and political ideals associated with the aging process in America. I have argued that the series embraces a contemporary sexually liberated postfeminism connected to the rhetoric of “choice” “empowerment” and “sexual determination” (Harvey & Gill, 2013; Coleman, 2008; Gil, 2006; McRobbie 2009; Ringrose, 2013). Grace and Frankie negotiate the ambiguities and contradictions of this postfeminist empowerment discourse, one in which they still attempt to write into being their evolving aging identities. The series, itself leads the way for aging women to lead “a life of one’s own,” as “full participants” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001 p. 55, Budgeon p. 284). In this world, senior women are given a crash course on the lifestyle habits and beatitudes of the idealized aging subject. Over the course of Grace and Frankie’s historical trajectory, I have identified several habits, which reflect an “emancipated femininity.” These include: independence, responsibility, individualism, resilience, self-determination, sexual agency, flexibility, and consumer power (Neilsen, 2004, p. 11; Budgeon, p. 284). These are certainly admirable traits, traits most women find noteworthy especially for women in their seventies and beyond.

I question, however, under whose terms series producers Marta Kaufman and Howard Morris really rewrite the new feminist narrative. Certainly the repackaging and resexualization of senior women who grew up in the age of Second Wave Feminism calls for further interrogation.

Indeed, it is an appealing and invigorating discourse to have 80 something women hide their age and pass for 70 something women and enjoy their female friendships, their sexuality, their new interests, their independence, and their new entrepreneurial endeavors. It is also true that this discourse introduces new contradictions and new anxieties and pressures for women to “pass” for younger versions of their senior selves, whether they are *outed* by critics for concealing their true age or not. There is no denying that Kaufman and Morris *have* introduced a discourse of new possibilities for what it means to be a senior woman living her own life in American society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001 pg. 55, Budgeon 284). At the same time, they have also created a neoliberal, postfeminist, consumer discourse of never ending self-improvement projects in order for the senior woman to enact the physical, social, personal ideals the show suggests. While senior women have indeed become vibrant consumers in late modern culture, purchasing power and self-improvement projects aimed at passing for a younger age *do not* equal feminism (Ringrose 2007, p. 483). In fact, for many it is quite expensive and exhausting to keep on the youthful charade as Fonda the actress and Grace the character demonstrate week after week. It is therefore necessary for the myriad faces of feminism to engage in critical discussions of “empowerment,” which includes socio-economic, political, racial, and gendered analysis. Such an investigation of “new femininities” must include its possibilities and well as its pressures and contradictions. (Budgeon, p. 290). Yes, Margaret Gullete, the arguments have been started, but amidst the marketing crusades of Botox, fillers, hair dies and extensions, are women even listening?

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