



Photo Lukasz Wlierzowski

a most memorable line

GEORGIA CASEY FINDS COMFORT IN WATCHING OLDER FILMS.

I watched *When Harry Met Sally* for the 137th time a few weeks ago and noticed something that had eluded me on previous viewings – Meg Ryan's forehead moves.

It had probably been two or three years since I last watched the movie and, in that time, I've landed firmly in my late 20s. I've reached the phase of life when I have an inexplicable urge to google how old every actress is in the film I'm watching as a barometer for what someone 'should' look like at that age. Meg was 28 in *When Harry Met Sally*, by the way.

A 28-year-old with an expressive forehead has become a rarity in Hollywood, thanks to cosmetic interventions like Botox and filler, which have become as commonplace as Meryl Streep at the Oscars. But it wasn't always like this; there was a period somewhere between Grace Kelly and Anya Taylor-Joy when the sight of crow's feet or an absence of veneers on screen weren't think-piece-worthy phenomena.

Impossible beauty standards and plastic surgery have always been a feature of movie stardom. During the Golden Age of Hollywood, studios moulded starlets to fit their extremely narrow view of marketability. Rita Hayworth was subjected to painful electrolysis treatments to alter her hairline and mask her Hispanic heritage, and Marlene Dietrich famously removed her molars to achieve her trademark cheekbones.

Things began to shift when the old studio system fell. The growing popularity of gritty, realistic films in the 1960s and '70s saw actresses shedding the hyper-femininity of the 1950s in favour of androgynous naturalism. Things changed again in the '80s when hyper-consumerism was in vogue, and jazzercised babes became an emblem of the ambition and fad diets that defined the era. Cut to the 2010s and the dawn of high-definition cameras, and suddenly, the lines and pores on celebrity faces were prominently displayed in living rooms and theatres around the world. It's not surprising that it is around this time that we begin to see the flawless homogeneity that defines our current era.

Ageism is rife in Hollywood, particularly for women, and a vial of Botox or a facelift could be the difference between booking a job and fading into obscurity. Unfortunately, this means that the rest of us are exposed to increasingly unrealistic depictions of women of all ages. Women in film and television have always been idealised, but as cosmetic technology advances, it's becoming more difficult to relate to people who look like AI versions of themselves. A static face can create a disconnect between what an actor is saying and what their face is expressing, preventing the audience from fully immersing themselves in the story. I mean, it's tough to get lost in a plot set in the 1600s when our protagonist has a mouth full of pearly veneers.

I think of some of my favourite actresses and performances from older movies – Shirley MacLaine in *The Apartment*, Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall* or Barbra Streisand in *What's Up, Doc?* – and realise that each of these roles was made memorable by the actors' ability to say so much with a quick upward flick of the eyebrows or subtle tightening of the mouth. I was obsessed with these women growing up; not just because they're incredibly gorgeous and charismatic, but because I felt like I understood them. They didn't always look perfect, had unique features that sat outside of conventional beauty standards and looked utterly like themselves – and they were appreciated because of it.

Women in the public eye face more scrutiny than most of us could ever imagine, and when your face is your livelihood, the pressure to be ageless must seem insurmountable. It would be unfair to blame them for our current beauty standards because even though they do normalise it, to some extent, they are also victims of it. Whenever I find myself wondering if I'm performing my role as '28-year-old woman with face' correctly, it's extremely comforting to go back and watch some of my favourite old movies. And if that doesn't work, I remember the wise words of Nora Ephron: "Anything you think is wrong with your body at the age of 35 you will be nostalgic for by the age of 45." ❀