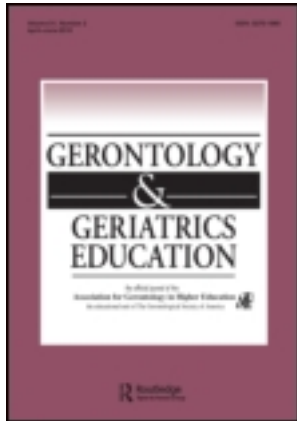


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### Two Thumbs Up: Using Popular Films in Introductory Aging Courses

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## **Two Thumbs Up: Using Popular Films in Introductory Aging Courses**

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*Good teaching requires thoughtful planning and creative thinking, especially when trying to engage students in material that is unfamiliar to them or encumbered by stereotypes, like aging. Classic and contemporary media can provide unique teaching opportunities in gerontology classrooms. Popular films can have a powerful influence over viewers' attitudes and perceptions, and spur in-depth discussions of aging-related topics common to introductory aging courses (e.g., ageism, abuse, inequality, caregiving, healthy aging, and intimate relationships). Additionally, films appeal to multiple learning styles, engaging a variety of learners. This article examines the value of using films in introductory aging courses, offers strategies for incorporating films in the gerontology classroom, suggests sample activities and assignments that pair popular films with aging course topics, identifies challenges of using film in various classrooms settings, and provides a detailed typology of films on each of the following aging topics: ageism and stereotypes, cognitive impairment, death and dying, diversity, family*

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*relationships, health and wellness, sexuality and intimacy, and work and retirement.*

*KEYWORDS* ageism, aging in film, gerontology course assignment, movies, stereotypes, teaching tool

Good teaching demands that faculty constantly evaluate the strategies and techniques they employ in achieving the educational learning objectives outlined for their classes (Karasik, 2012). We have discovered that films are particularly useful within the gerontology classroom. In this article, we examine the value of films, identify strategies for incorporating films in aging classes, offer sample activities and exercises, outline challenges posed when using films, and provide a detailed typology of films on each of the following aging topics commonly taught in introductory aging courses: ageism and stereotypes, cognitive impairment, death and dying, diversity, family relationships, health and wellness, sexuality and intimacy, and work and retirement.

#### WHY USE FILMS?

As educators who are deeply invested in student learning, it is imperative to incorporate multiple pedagogical strategies in achieving student learning objectives. Good practice requires implementing verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual spatial, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, and naturalistic (Gardner, 1983) strategies in trying to reach all students. Using feature films allows faculty to integrate several multiple intelligences into their classrooms, appealing to a number of learning styles (Myers, Sykes & Myers, 2008; Pickard, Berg-Weger, & Birkenmaier, 2008). As students watch, listen, and make notes on the films, they are utilizing visual, auditory, and writing as means to engage and retain the content (Pickard et al., 2008).

When used effectively, films can be valuable learning devices and attitude enhancers in the classroom. Hoover (2006) discovered that her history students are increasingly visual learners as opposed to verbal learners. Many of her students reported being better able to pay attention when movie clips were used. She found that movie clips supplement auditory presentations with visual evidence and help students to relate to pertinent information. The use of popular media like movies facilitates learning and retention (Fain, 2004).

Goldenberg, Lee, and O'Bannon (2010) note that today's students are also part of a digital generation that is accustomed to multimedia formats

and that movies are an effective way of connecting contemporary culture with course content. Thus, film affords a format that is less routine than lectures, one to which many current students are familiar. Fain (2004) asserts that merging traditional education with popular culture, as evident in films, helps students to make sense of and see the relevance of what they are learning to the world in which they live.

DeGenova and Buchanan (1997) identify eight advantages for using literature and film in teaching family science. These advantages are applicable to the discipline of gerontology and include:

- 1) provide dramatic and clear illustrations of concepts and theories,
- 2) place human behavior in socio-historical context,
- 3) afford insights into aspects of family life not emphasized in other methods of studying [older adults],
- 4) help the learner to identify and empathize with [older adults] in ways that quantitative data do not,
- 5) permit the learner to enter vicariously into situations and settings otherwise unavailable,
- 6) focus on the unique, not just the modal or generalizable, aspects of [aging],
- 7) offer a safe method of examining oneself and one's [own aging experience] through projection, and
- 8) invite students to learn in an enjoyable manner. (p. 222)

As part of society's social fabric, movies offer a commanding means of engaging subjects. Rogers (2002) notes that films speak volumes about race, class and gender issues within society. They serve as "powerful socializing agents" (p. 3) as viewers identify with characters and their situations. Movies offer opportunity for reflection as viewers solve problems, discuss, and ask questions about whom they are and who they want to be.

Logistically, it is also quite feasible for most instructors to incorporate film into their classrooms. Movies are widely available and relatively inexpensive resources. They do not require huge investments of money and can often be located in university and public libraries, via local and electronic rental agencies, and from retail outlets including discount book and thrift stores. Films can also be integrated into a range of classes, at a variety of class levels, and cover a multitude of possible disciplinary topics (Goldenberg et al., 2010). Additionally, films may be shown in their entirety, in shorter segments, or in brief clips. They may be grouped with like topics or paired for contrasting viewpoints. Finally, they may be shown in class, streamed online, used as supplemental teaching events (e.g., movie nights), or assigned as required or optional viewing in the same fashion as course readings.

In recent years, it appears that some of the invisibility of aging in films is giving way to more and more films which include older characters and touch upon aging themes. *The Gerontologist*, in fact, began an audiovisual column

in 1976 that continues to regularly review movies and other media with an eye to their aging content (Yahnke, 1989). Although Chivers (2011) suggests that more movies about aging does not necessarily equal better movies about aging, there currently is a reasonably large body of film portrayals from which gerontological educators may choose. The following typology identifies films that may be used to illustrate and spark discussions about the following themes common to many introductory aging courses: ageism and stereotypes, cognitive impairment, death and dying, diversity, family relationships, health and wellness, sexuality and intimacy, and work and retirement.

### TYPOLOGY OF FILMS ABOUT AGING

In an effort to make it easier for faculty to locate appropriate films for their classroom use, we compiled a typology of feature-length films and documentaries with aging-related content (Table 1). We identified these films using a number of strategies, including movies currently being used in the authors' aging courses, content searches of internet movie websites (e.g., <http://www.amazon.com/Films-with-Aging-Themes/lm/17UUMDXZMLICE>; <https://signup.netflix.com/>), aging-related movie web listings (e.g., APA Division 20; <http://apadiv20.phhp.ufl.edu/cinema.htm>), and an examination of prior literature on aging-related films (Bazzini, McIntosh, Smith, Cook, & Harris, 1997; Markson & Taylor, 1993; Vickers, 2007). Although a substantive collection of movies addressing various aspects of aging was gathered to create this typology, it is by no means a comprehensive listing of all possible films.

We viewed each film looking for material illustrating key aging-related subject areas covered in introductory aging courses, including: ageism and stereotypes, cognitive impairment, death and dying, diversity, family relationships, health and wellness, sexuality and intimacy, work and retirement, caregiving, economics and financial issues, housing, and policy and programs. Based on this content analysis, we created a typology of movies by topic for each of these areas, which were then grouped into the larger domain headings of social relationships (ageism and stereotypes, diversity, family relationships, and sexuality and intimacy); health (cognitive impairment, health and wellness, caregiving, and death and dying); and engagement with environment (work and retirement, economics and financial issues, housing, and policy and programs) (Tables 2, 3, and 4). We constructed these summative tables to serve as resources for educators who wish to incorporate films containing specific topics into their gerontology classes. Films specifically referenced in this article are identified by the superscripted letter in Table 1.

**TABLE 1** Films With Aging Content

Title/content (key, below)	Rating	Year	Time	Summary
<i>A Family Thing</i> : DD, D, FR	PG-13	1996	1hr, 49 mins	After discovering that the mother who raised him is not his biological mother, Earl goes on a journey to find his half-brother and to rethink his new bi-racial identity.
<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i> : DD, D	PG-13	1987	1hr, 37mins	A group of old, black men takes a courageous step by coming forward en masse to take responsibility for the killing of a white racist.
<i>About Schmidt</i> <sup>1</sup> : CI, DD, D, FR, HW, SI, WR, C	R	2002	2hr, 5 mins	Newly retired Schmidt evaluates his relationships as he embarks on an RV journey to his daughter's wedding.
<i>Age Old Friends</i> : AS, CI, DD, FR, SI, C, H	NR	1989	1hr, 35 mins	John Cooper who must decide whether to move with his daughter or remain in a retirement home to help his progressively senile best friend.
<i>Another Year</i> : DD, FR, C	PG-13	2010	2hr, 10 mins	Over the course of a year, contented medical counselor Gerri and her geologist husband Tom see their friends and relations through a series of happy events and heartbreaks.
<i>As Young as You Feel</i> : AS, FR, HW, SI, WR, C	NR	1951	1hr, 17 mins	Forced to retire, John Hodges decides to impersonate the president of his old employer's parent company.
<i>Aurora Borealis</i> : CI, DD, FR, C, H	R	2005	1hr, 31 mins	Haunted by his father's unsettling death, Duncan tries to create a more stable life when he takes on a handyman job at the senior residence where his grandparents live.
<i>Away From Her</i> : CI, FR, HW, SI, C, EF, H, PP	PG-13	2006	1hr, 50 mins	Married 44 years, Grant and Fiona face Fiona's Alzheimer's diagnosis, institutionalization and the impact on their relationship.
<i>Boynton Beach Club</i> : DD, FR, SI, H	R	2005	1hr, 35 mins	Upon joining a bereavement support group, the lives of six older individuals cross paths, opening the doors to dating again.
<i>Buena Vista Social Club</i> : D	PG-13	1999	1hr, 45 mins	A group of legendary Cuban musicians, some as old as their nineties, were brought together to record a CD.
<i>Calendar Girls</i> <sup>2</sup> : FR, SI	PG-13	2003	1hr, 48 mins	Based on the true story of a group of working-class British housewives who raise money by posing for a nude calendar.
<i>Cocoon</i> <sup>3</sup> : AS, DD, D, HW, SI, WR, H	PG-13	1985	1hr, 57 mins	Three senior citizens accidentally discover cocoons left behind by aliens—along with a surprising impact on their lives.

<i>Driving Lessons</i> : AS, CI, FR, SI, WR, EF	PG-13	2006	1hr, 38 mins	A “coming of age” story of intergenerational friendship between a 17 year old boy and an aging actress.
<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i> <sup>a</sup> : CI, D, FR, C, H	PG-13	1989	1hr, 39 mins	An old Jewish woman and her African-American chauffeur in the American South have a relationship that grows over the years.
<i>Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood</i> : FR, SI	PG-13	2002	1hr, 56 mins	Lifelong friends stage an unorthodox “intervention” to bring daughter and mother together.
<i>For Better, for Worse</i> : AS, D, SI, WR, C, EF	NR	1993	57 mins	Documentary follows the story of couples who have been together for 50 or more years.
<i>Foxfire</i> : DD, FR, HW, H	PG	1987	1hr, 39 mins	A widow must decide if she’ll remain in their cherished homestead or look to a future with her son at his home in Florida.
<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i> <sup>a</sup> : DD, D, FR, C	PG-13	1991	2hr, 10 mins	Intersecting stories (one depression-era, one 1980s) of friendships between women—the latter middle-aged Evelyn and the elder Ninny.
<i>Grumpy Old Men</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, DD, FR, SI, WR, EF, H	PG-13	1993	1hr, 43 mins	Two longtime friends-rivals-neighbors vie for the same woman’s affection.
<i>Grumpier Old Men</i> : AS, DD, SI, WR	PG-13	1995	1hr, 41 mins	Max and John are still fighting after 35 years, Grandpa still drinks, smokes, and chases women, and there is a new woman in town.
<i>Harold &amp; Maude</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, DD, FR, SI, HW	PG	1971	1hr, 31 mins	Soon to be 80-year-old Maude meets death-obsessed eighteen-year-old Harold at a funeral and teaches her young protégé about life.
<i>Hope Springs</i> : SI, C	PG-13	2012	2hr, 1 min	An aging couple goes for marriage therapy to address some issues in their sex life.
<i>How to Live Forever</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, DD, PP, SI	NR (content advisory)	2011	1hr, 32 mins	Mark Wexler’s documentary interviewing long-lived elders and scientists around the world to look at what it means to grow old, how we can live longer, and what that might mean.
<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i> : D, FR, SI	PG-13	1995	1hr, 49 mins	Centers on the stories of several women in a quilting bee as they construct a wedding quilt as a gift for a member’s granddaughter.
<i>I’m Not Rappaport</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, D, FR, HW, WR, C, EF, H	PG-13	1996	1hr, 16 mins	An 81-year-old Jewish man and a visually impaired Black apartment house superintendent become unlikely friends as they meet regularly in New York’s Central Park.
<i>Iris</i> : CI, DD, D, FR, SI, C	R	2001	1hr, 31 mins	A true-life portrayal of Iris Murdloch—a notorious English author—and her descent into Alzheimer’s disease.

(Continued)



**TABLE 1** Films With Aging Content (*Continued*)

Title/content (key, below)	Rating	Year	Time	Summary
<i>Mother</i> : AS, FR, HW, SI, WR, C, H,	PG-13	1996	1hr, 44 mins	After two failed marriages, a science fiction writer decides coming to terms with his mom will improve his chances for a successful relationship, so he moves in with his mom.
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i> : AS, DD, FR, HW, SI, C	PG-13	1990	2hrs, 6 mins	A story of family relationships and the relationship between husband and wife are the main themes in this movie.
<i>Nothing in Common</i> : FR, HW, WR, C, H	PG-13	1986	1hr, 58 mins	An advertising executive's world falls apart when his mother leaves his father and he must cope with the downfall.
<i>On a Clear Day</i> : FR, HW, WR	PG-13	2006	1hr, 29 mins	A recently laid-off grandfather decides to swim the English Channel in hopes of making peace with his past.
<i>On Golden Pond</i> : AS, FR, HW, SI, WR, C, H	PG-13	1981	1hr, 49 mins	A retired professor and his wife spend time at their summer cottage with their estranged daughter and her fiancé's son.
<i>Out to Sea</i> : DD, FR, HW, SI, WR	PG-13	1997	1hr, 46 mins	An old con man talks his straight-laced friend into joining him for a luxury cruise on an ocean liner.
<i>Passed Away</i> : FR, SI	PG-13	1992	1hr, 36 mins	A middle-aged son wonders about the meaning of his life as relatives gather for his father's funeral.
<i>Play the Game</i> : AS, FR, SI, EF	PG-13	2008	1hr, 45 mins	A young ladies' man teaches his dating tricks to his lonely, widowed grandfather.
<i>Robot &amp; Frank</i> : AS, CI, C, H	PG-13	2012	1hr, 30 mins	Set in the near future, an aging widower and retired cat-burglar is given a caregiver robot by his adult children.
<i>Roommates</i> : AS, DD, FR, WR, H, PP	PG	1995	1hr, 48 mins	A 107 year old baker shares living space with his 35 year old surgeon grandson, whom he continues to teach about life.
<i>Secondhand Lions</i> <sup>a</sup> : DD, FR, HW, SI, WR, EF, H	PG	2004	1hr, 50 mins	A young boy is deposited with his "crazy" great uncles for a summer.
<i>Something's Gotta Give</i> <sup>b</sup> : FR, HW, SI, WR, C, H	PG-13	2003	1hr, 54 mins	A 63-year-old playboy who chases younger women has a heart attack and finds himself vying with his much younger physician for the attention of a woman his own age.
<i>Soul Food</i> <sup>c</sup> : DD, D, FR, SI, C, H	R	1997	2 hr, 8 mins	A widowed matriarch holds her family together via her 40-year tradition of Sunday dinner. When she is hospitalized and eventually dies, her grandson tries to fill her role.



<i>Strangers in Good Company:</i> DD, D, FR, HW	PG	2000	1hr, 5 mins	When a bus filled with eight elderly women breaks down in the wilderness, the strangers are stranded with only their wits, their memories to sustain them.
<i>Tell Me a Riddle:</i> CI, DD, FR, SI, C, H	PG	1980	1hr, 34 mins	An elderly husband and wife rediscover each other as they embark on a cross-country road trip after learning the wife has a terminal illness.
<i>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel:</i> DD, D, FR, SI, WR, EF, H	PG-13	2012	2hr, 3 mins	Seven British retirees move to The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel for the Elderly and Beautiful in India to “outsourced” their retirement for various financial, health, and personal reasons.
<i>The Bucket List:</i> DD, FR, HW, SI, C, EF	PG-13	2007	1hr, 37 mins	A billionaire and a mechanic, both terminally ill, decide to do all the things they have ever wanted before they die.
<i>The Cemetery Club:</i> DD, D, FR, SI	PG-13	1993	1hr, 47 mins	Three Jewish widows cope differently with their husbands' deaths and their future lives.
<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button:</i> AS, CI, DD, D, FR, HW, SI, C, EF	PG-13	2009	2hr, 46 mins	Benjamin Button is aging backwards as his life is unraveled through the journal readings of his first love's daughter as she reads to her dying elderly mother.
<i>The First Wives Club:</i> FR, HW, SI	PG	1996	1hr, 42 mins	Three ex-wives, each dumped for a “newer model” come up with a plan for revenge against their exes.
<i>The Help:</i> DD, D, FR, WR	PG-13	2011	2hr, 26 mins	Set in Mississippi during the early 1960s, the film depicts a white female journalist who writes a book about the experience of black maids working for white families.
<i>The Hours:</i> CI, DD, D, FR, C	PG-13	2002	1hr, 54 mins	Follows the parallel lives of three 20th-century women: the incomparable Virginia Woolf, an unsatisfied 1950s housewife, and a modern-day book editor who is losing her former lover to AIDS.
<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells:</i> AS, DD, D, FR, SI, WR	PG-13	2000	1hr, 24 mins	A widow finds comfort in some old friends - her saxophone and her all-girl band mates.
<i>The Notebook:</i> CI, DD, SI, C	PG-13	2004	2hr, 4 mins	An older gentleman reads a timeless love story of star-crossed lovers to his aging companion.
<i>The Queen:</i> DD, FR, PP	PG-13	2006	1hr, 43 mins	Portrays Queen Elizabeth's struggle with knowing how to respond to Princess Diana's death
<i>The Savages:</i> AS, CI, DD, FR, C, H	R	2007	1hr, 54 mins	After an abusive childhood, siblings now face the challenge of caring for their ailing father.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 Films With Aging Content (Continued)

Title/content (key, below)	Rating	Year	Time	Summary
<i>The Shell Seekers</i> : AS, FR, EF, H	PG	1989	1hr, 34 mins	Penelope embarks on an incredible journey—50 years into her past—to discover the secret to happiness.
<i>The Thing About My Folks</i> : DD, FR, SI, WR	PG-13	2005	1hr, 36 mins	A father and son take an impromptu road trip to avert a family crisis and along the way, they let their differences go and end up having the time of their lives.
<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, DD, D, FR, HW, EF, H	PG-13	1985	1hr, 48 mins	A woman living the twilight of her life trapped in an apartment in 1940's with a controlling daughter-in-law and a hen-pecked son longs to visit her hometown before she dies.
<i>To Dance With the White Dog</i> : D, CI, DD, FR, C	NR	1993	1hr, 40 mins	An elderly widower trying to work through his grief when his wife dies finds a white dog as his new companion and he takes the dog on a nostalgic journey.
<i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i> : AS, DD, FR, HW, WR, C	PG	1999	1hr, 29 mins	A journalist spends time with his mentor who is dying of Lou Gehrig disease (ALS).
<i>Up</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, DD, FR, HW, WR, H	PG	2009	96 mins	By tying thousands of balloons to his home, 78-year-old Carl sets out to fulfill his lifelong dream to see the wilds of South America.
<i>Used People</i> : DD, D, FR, SI, H	PG-13	1993	1hr, 56 mins	Despite a dysfunctional family, religious differences, and social mores which dictate how soon new relationships can develop after a spouse's death, Joe and Pearl get a second chance at love.
<i>Waking Ned Divine</i> : AS, DD, FR, HW, SI, EF	PG	1998	1 hr, 31 mins	When a lottery winner dies of shock, his fellow townsfolk attempt to claim the money.
<i>Whale Rider</i> <sup>a</sup> : AS, D, FR	PG-13	2002	1hr, 41 mins	A 12 year old Maori girl and her grandfather struggle with gender roles, expectations, and traditions.
<i>Whales of August</i> : DD, FR, HW, SI, WR, C, H	PG	1987	1hr, 31 mins	Two elderly, widowed sisters spend the summer in a seaside house recalling earlier events in their lives.
<i>When Harry Met Sally</i> : FR, SI	R	1989	1hr, 36 mins	Harry & Sally's relationship evolves over time. Interspersed with interview clips from long-married couples.
<i>Young at Heart</i> : DD, HW, SI	G	2008	1hr, 48 mins	Documentary follows a senior chorus through a series of hilariously chaotic rehearsals and life events.

AS = ageism/stereotypes; CI = cognitive impairment; DD = death and dying; D = diversity; FR = family relationships; HR = health and wellness; SI = sexuality and intimacy; WR = work and retirement; C = caregiving; EF = economics/financial; H = housing; PP = policy and programs.<sup>a</sup> These films are specifically referenced in this article.

**TABLE 2** Movies by Topic: Social Relationships

Ageism/stereotypes	Diversity	Family relationships	Sexuality and intimacy
<i>Age Old Friends</i>	<i>A Family Thing</i>	<i>A Family Thing</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>
<i>As Young as You Feel</i>	<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>Age Old Friends</i>
<i>Cocoon</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>Age Old Friends</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>
<i>Driving Lessons</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>Another Year</i>	<i>Boynton Beach Club</i>
<i>For Better, for Worse</i>	<i>Buena Vista Social Club</i>	<i>As Young as You Feel</i>	<i>Calendar Girls</i>
<i>Grumpier Old Men</i>	<i>Cocoon</i>	<i>Aurora Borealis</i>	<i>Cocoon</i>
<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>	<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood</i>
<i>Harold &amp; Maude</i>	<i>For Better, for Worse</i>	<i>Boynton Beach Club</i>	<i>Driving Lessons</i>
<i>How to Live Forever</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	<i>Calendar Girls</i>	<i>For Better, for Worse</i>
<i>I'm Not Rappaport Mother</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	<i>Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood</i>	<i>Grumpier Old Men</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>	<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i>	<i>Driving Lessons</i>	<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>
<i>Play the Game</i>	<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i>	<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>	<i>Harold &amp; Maude</i>
<i>Robot &amp; Frank</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Foxfire</i>	<i>Hope Springs</i>
<i>Roommates</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	<i>How to Live Forever</i>
<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Iris</i>	<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>	<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i>
<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells</i>	<i>Soul Food</i>	<i>Harold &amp; Maude</i>	<i>Iris</i>
<i>The Savages</i>	<i>Strangers in Good Company</i>	<i>How to Make an American Quilt</i>	<i>Mother</i>
<i>The Shell Seekers</i>	<i>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>
<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i>	<i>The Cemetery Club</i>	<i>Iris</i>	<i>On Golden Pond</i>
<i>To Dance With the White Dog</i>	<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>	<i>Out to Sea</i>
<i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i>	<i>The Help</i>	<i>Nothing in Common</i>	<i>Passed Away</i>
<i>Waking Ned Divine</i>	<i>The Hours</i>	<i>On a Clear Day</i>	<i>Play the Game</i>
<i>Whale Rider</i>	<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells</i>	<i>On Golden Pond</i>	<i>Secondhand Lions</i>
	<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i>	<i>Out to Sea</i>	<i>Soul Food</i>
		<i>Passed Away</i>	<i>Tell Me a Riddle</i>
		<i>Play the Game</i>	<i>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</i>
		<i>Roommates</i>	<i>The Bucket List</i>
		<i>Secondhand Lions</i>	<i>The Cemetery Club</i>
		<i>Soul Food</i>	<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>
		<i>Strangers in Good Company</i>	<i>The First Wives Club</i>
		<i>Tell Me a Riddle</i>	<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells</i>
		<i>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</i>	<i>The Notebook</i>
		<i>The Bucket List</i>	<i>The Thing About My Folks</i>
		<i>The Cemetery Club</i>	<i>Used People</i>
		<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Waking Ned Divine</i>
		<i>The First Wives Club</i>	<i>Whales of August</i>
		<i>The Help</i>	<i>When Harry Met Sally</i>
		<i>The Hours</i>	<i>Young at Heart</i>
		<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells</i>	
		<i>The Queen</i>	
		<i>The Savages</i>	
		<i>The Shell Seekers</i>	
		<i>The Thing About My Folks</i>	
		<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i>	

(Continued)

**TABLE 2** Movies by Topic: Social Relationships (*Continued*)

Ageism/stereotypes	Diversity	Family relationships	Sexuality and intimacy
		<i>To Dance With the White Dog</i> <i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i> <i>Used People</i> <i>Waking Ned Divine</i> <i>Whale Rider</i> <i>Whales of August</i> <i>When Harry Met Sally</i>	

### STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING FILMS IN GERONTOLOGY CLASSES

Educators from a variety of disciplines have delineated ways in which they use films as teaching tools. In this section, we offer their thoughts and proposed strategies, as well as our own. Seery, Cobb, Harpel and Hertzog (2002) outline three ways to integrate film into the introduction to family studies classroom: entire films, particular scenes or clips (lasting 10–30 minutes), and brief snip-its (lasting between 2–10 minutes). A variety of learning outcomes are possible when using entire films. One example of this is an assignment where students watch *The Cemetery Club* in its entirety in an attempt to increase student awareness of grief, sexuality, cultural nuances, and social networks in later life. (See Appendix A for complete activity plan.) A second example (Appendix B) incorporates all of the film *Secondhand Lions* to examine sibling relationships, intergenerational familial relationships, and friendships in later life during the unit on social relationships. Many of the films identified within the current typology would be appropriate to use in full to examine a variety of aging issues. It should be noted that using full-length films does require a fair amount of time commitment, either in or outside of the classroom.

Shorter clips from films can be used to reinforce concept acquisition (Bluestone, 2000). For example, an instructor might define a concept (e.g., living arrangements in later life) prior to showing a clip and then ask students to look for the concept and then discuss it as a class. Another option is to first show the clip, generate class discussion around the clip and then identify the concept illustrated by the clip. Either approach can be accommodated by using a clip from the film *Up*, in this case a clip from when the demolition crew awaits Carl's departure from his home so that they can bulldoze it to build a new complex. To everyone's dismay, balloons pop out of the house's chimney and Carl floats away in his house, to remain in the home that he meaningfully shared with his wife their entire married life. After students

**TABLE 3** Movies by Topic: Health

Cognitive impairment	Health and wellness	Caregiving	Death and dying
<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>A Family Thing</i>
<i>Age Old Friends</i>	<i>As Young as You</i>	<i>Age Old Friends</i>	<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i>
<i>Aurora Borealis</i>	<i>Feel</i>	<i>Another Year</i>	<i>About Schmidt</i>
<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Aurora Borealis</i>	<i>Age Old Friends</i>
<i>Driving Lessons</i>	<i>Cocoon</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Another Year</i>
<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>	<i>Foxfire</i>	<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>	<i>Aurora Borealis</i>
<i>Iris</i>	<i>Harold &amp; Maude</i>	<i>For Better, for Worse</i>	<i>Boynton Beach Club</i>
<i>Robot &amp; Frank</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>	<i>Cocoon</i>
<i>Tell Me A Riddle</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Hope Springs</i>	<i>Foxfire</i>
<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>
	<i>Nothing in Common</i>	<i>Iris</i>	<i>Grumpier Old Men</i>
	<i>Common</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>
<i>The Hours</i>	<i>On a Clear Day</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>	<i>How to Live Forever</i>
<i>The Notebook</i>	<i>Out to Sea</i>	<i>Nothing in Common</i>	<i>Iris</i>
<i>The Savages</i>	<i>Secondhand Lions</i>	<i>Robot &amp; Frank</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Bridge</i>
<i>To Dance With the White Dog</i>	<i>Strangers in Good Company</i>	<i>Soul Food</i>	<i>On Golden Pond</i>
	<i>The Bucket List</i>	<i>The Bucket List</i>	<i>Out To Sea</i>
	<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Roommates</i>
	<i>The Hours</i>	<i>The Hours</i>	<i>Secondhand Lions</i>
	<i>The Notebook</i>	<i>The Notebook</i>	<i>Soul Food</i>
	<i>The Savages</i>	<i>The Savages</i>	<i>Strangers in Good Company</i>
	<i>To Dance with the White Dog</i>	<i>To Dance with the White Dog</i>	<i>Tell Me A Riddle</i>
	<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>	<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>	<i>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</i>
	<i>Whales of August</i>	<i>Whales of August</i>	<i>The Bucket List</i>
	<i>Waking Ned Divine</i>		<i>The Cemetery Club</i>
	<i>Whales of August</i>		<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>
	<i>Young at Heart</i>		<i>The Help</i>
			<i>The Hours</i>
			<i>The Last of the Blonde Bombshells</i>
			<i>The Notebook</i>
			<i>The Queen</i>
			<i>The Savages</i>
			<i>The Thing About My Folks</i>
			<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i>
			<i>To Dance With the White Dog</i>
			<i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i>
			<i>Used People</i>
			<i>Waking Ned Divine</i>
			<i>Whales of August</i>
			<i>Young at Heart</i>

**TABLE 4** Movies by Topic: Engagement With Environment

Work and retirement	Economics/financial	Housing	Policy and programs
<i>About Schmidt</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Age Old Friends</i>	<i>As Young as</i>
<i>As Young as You Feel</i>	<i>Driving Lessons</i>	<i>Aurora Borealis</i>	<i>You Feel</i>
<i>Cocoon</i>	<i>For Better, for Worse</i>	<i>Away From Her</i>	<i>Away From</i>
<i>Driving Lessons</i>	<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>	<i>Boynton Beach</i>	<i>Her</i>
<i>For Better, for Worse</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Club</i>	<i>How to Live</i>
<i>Grumpier Old Men</i>	<i>Play the Game</i>	<i>Cocoon</i>	<i>Forever</i>
<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>	<i>Secondhand Lions</i>	<i>Driving Miss Daisy</i>	<i>Roommates</i>
<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	<i>Tell Me a Riddle</i>	<i>Foxfire</i>	<i>The Queen</i>
<i>Mother</i>	<i>The Best Exotic</i>	<i>Grumpy Old Men</i>	
<i>Nothing in Common</i>	<i>Marigold Hotel</i>	<i>I'm Not Rappaport</i>	
<i>On a Clear Day</i>	<i>The Bucket List</i>	<i>Mother</i>	
<i>On Golden Pond</i>	<i>The Curious Case of</i>	<i>Nothing in</i>	
<i>Out to Sea</i>	<i>Benjamin Button</i>	<i>Common</i>	
<i>Roommates</i>	<i>The Shell Seekers</i>	<i>Robot &amp; Frank</i>	
<i>Secondhand Lions</i>	<i>The Trip to Bountiful</i>	<i>Roommates</i>	
<i>The Best Exotic</i>	<i>Waking Ned Divine</i>	<i>Secondhand Lions</i>	
<i>Marigold Hotel</i>		<i>Soul Food</i>	
<i>The Help</i>		<i>Tell Me a Riddle</i>	
<i>The Last of the</i>		<i>The Best Exotic</i>	
<i>Blonde Bombshells</i>		<i>Marigold Hotel</i>	
<i>The Thing About My</i>		<i>The Savages</i>	
<i>Folks</i>		<i>The Shell Seekers</i>	
<i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i>		<i>The Trip to</i>	
<i>Whales of August</i>		<i>Bountiful</i>	
		<i>Used People</i>	
		<i>Whales of August</i>	

reflect on the scene and share their own insights as related to their text and other class materials, the professor might introduce the concept of “aging in place” and the significance of one’s living environment. (See Appendix C for a more complete lesson plan.) In either case, movies offer visualizations of concepts, helping to reinforce them for the students.

Guiding questions prior to showing a clip encourage students to direct their attention and focus so that they are prepared to make connections with concepts in the discussion to follow (Adams & Hall, 2009). For instance, we suggest that prior to showing a film clip selected from the current typology to illustrate family relationships, a professor might ask students to define a concept such as filial responsibility, either individually, in groups or as an entire class. What are appropriate expectations for adult children relative to the well-being and care of aging parents? What attitudes and behaviors represent filial responsibility? What does filial responsibility look like? Then, the instructor might show scene 12 (“Personal KGB”) from the movie *I'm Not Rappaport* and ask students to look for signs or evidence of filial responsibility.

Yet another way to teach with clips is by promoting perspective taking (Adams & Hall, 2009). Again using the example of *I'm Not Rappaport* faculty might assign a portion of the class to imagine itself as the aging father (Nat Moyer) and another portion of the class to imagine itself as the adult daughter (Claire) in the clip to further explore the concept of filial responsibility. Students could be asked to describe their feelings, concerns, and revelations in each of the roles. What concerns might Claire have due to the fact that her father spends a great deal of time in Central Park amid the potential urban threats, especially because he was recently injured by a thug there? How does Nat respond to his daughter's greater sense of the need to intervene and take greater control in her father's life to ensure his safety? Students could be asked to imagine themselves in a similar situation with their own parent and how they would respond.

A third way to encourage student reflection is through reevaluating a situation (Adams & Hall, 2009). Taking the example of *I'm Not Rappaport* one step further, gerontology educators might ask "How might the character have acted differently?"; "How might the outcome have been different if the character had acted differently?"; and "What circumstances might have been necessary for the character to make a different or better choice?" Using our filial responsibility example, faculty might ask students, "How could Claire have acted differently?"; "If Claire had given her father a variety of options, how might the outcome had been different?"; and "What circumstances would have been necessary for Claire to offer Nat a broader range of options?" These questions might help students to consider the possibility of different outcomes or different circumstances for these characters.

DeGenova and Buchanan (1997) outline how snip-its (even shorter clips) can offer illustrative examples within a class presentation. Such brief clips can make casual reference to a topic while adding interest or demonstrating key ideas. One example from the current analysis that illustrates how such brief clips may be used is the short scene in the movie *Up* that very quickly reviews Carl and Ellie's married life up until he becomes a widow ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2bk\\_9T482g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2bk_9T482g)). This 4-minute scene can be used to introduce the concept of life course perspective and the ways in which earlier events affect one's outcomes, goals, attitudes, and values in later life.

In addition to examining how various lengths of films may be used in introductory aging courses, it is essential to consider the various pedagogical functions that using these films can have as well. Champoux (1999) identifies eight functions of films for teaching organizational behavior and management concepts and theories. They include fostering case analysis, providing experiential exercises around particular scenes which require decision making or problem solving, creating powerful metaphors and images that leave lasting impressions, utilizing satire or an emphasis of peoples' faults and shortcomings to present a fresh perspective on the familiar,



offering symbolic representations of course concepts or theories, giving meaning and conveying a message more effectively than words or lectures, constructing cross-cultural experiences not otherwise readily available to students, and portraying other time periods and historically situated events and activities. In the following paragraphs, we provide illustrations of each.

Champoux's (1999) functions of films are equally suited to the gerontology classroom. For instance, an instructor could use *Iris* in fostering case analysis when teaching about the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. The movie is a real-life portrayal of Iris Murdoch, a British novelist, and her relationship with John Bayley, along with their experience of her descent into Alzheimer's disease. The movie affords an excellent case study of the deteriorating effects of Alzheimer's disease on individual functioning and relationship dynamics, as viewers watch John struggle with despair and frustration as Iris' caretaker.

Aging films also provide experiential exercises around particular scenes that require decision making or problem solving. For instance, when covering death and dying an instructor could use the scenes from *The Bucket List* where two terminally ill men develop a list of things they want to do before they "kick the bucket." This clip could be used to encourage individual or groups of students to create their own "bucket list." What would they really like to experience or accomplish before they die? Students could note how the contents of their lists differ from or are similar to those of Carter and Edward in the film. They could also be encouraged to think about other decisions that might need to be made and what other problems might arise that would need to be resolved prior to their deaths.

Many films are helpful in creating powerful metaphors and images which leave lasting impressions. For instance, several classic scenes in *Harold and Maude* help to bring to the surface long-held stereotypes that allow for honest albeit challenging discussions. The hearse ride on which Maude takes Harold challenges us to consider our stereotypes and reverse stereotypes about older drivers. When Harold finds Maude posing nude for a sculptor who "occasionally needs his memory refreshed as to the contours of the female form" Harold is taken aback—because, of course, he has yet to think about Maude as a sexual being. Within *Soul Food*, as the family's elder matriarch, Mother Jo is deemed to be "the rock" of the Joseph family. Her role in keeping the family together is exemplified in her many actions and lessons. Mother Jo's strength and ability to work through the vicissitudes of her own life, as well as the life of the family, glean her children's deep admiration, earning her a special place as the family's matriarch.

An educator could use satire to demonstrate faults and shortcomings to present a fresh perspective on the familiar with *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. In the film, British retiree Muriel Donnelly (played by Maggie Smith) is first portrayed as a bitter and bigoted old woman who manages to offend everyone in the hospital that cannot treat her failing hip for 6 months. Muriel,

however, is eventually transformed by her experience in India to the savvy, now pain-free woman who eventually saves the day.

Several films provide the opportunity to offer symbolic representations of course concepts or theories. Almost all of the films described here provide students with the opportunity to explore key concepts of an introductory aging course (e.g., ageism, stereotypes of aging, biological aging), and many assignments such as the one described in Appendix D may be creatively built around this. Students could be asked to compare and contrast portrayals of older adults within movies. They could select films produced in different countries or films that represent different cultural backgrounds. For instance, *The Savages* could be used to examine stereotypes of nursing homes and how such views perpetuate negative images of such facilities. So, too, students might look for evidence of a double standard in the portrayal of older men and older women in films and how such images perpetuate negative perceptions of aging men and women. For example, students might be encouraged to examine Jack Nicholson's (Harry) and Diane Keaton's (Erica) characters in *Something's Gotta Give* for gender stereotypes. Despite both being older, Harry chases much younger women and is sexually exploitative (with the assistance of Viagra), whereas Erica is cast as sexually starved and more uptight, self-conscious of her aging body.

Film portrayals of older characters may also be used to illustrate more discipline-specific aging concepts. For example, de Guzman, Carungeong, Castillo, Castillo, and Castro (2009) use the film *Away From Her* to illustrate caring concepts to nurses, and Segers (2007) examines the extent to which 24 popular films (e.g., *Folks*, *Noel*, and *The Notebook*) accurately portray the clinical and treatment aspects of dementia.

Theories of aging, which often pose more of a teaching challenge with introductory students, can also be illustrated using films. For example, one might begin by asking students to look for examples of older characters mutually disengaging with society to illustrate disengagement theory, and then have them also find comparable examples that help to yet again disprove Cummings and Henry's (1961) pervasive but dismissed theory. Some films that might serve this purpose include *Cocoon* and *Grumpy Old Men*. Smith (2001) shares a couple of ways in which she uses movies to teach child and family theories. She often covers the theory, shows the movie, and then elicits group or full class discussion relative to how the content relates to the theory. On other occasions, she presents the theory and then has student groups locate and present clips or portions of movies that they believe represents the theory and related concepts. When applied to the gerontology classroom, an instructor might review aging theories (e.g., disengagement theory, activity theory, continuity theory, exchange theory, age stratification), show a film like *Secondhand Lions*, *About Schmidt*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, or *Calendar Girls* and then assign each group of students a theory

with which to analyze the lives of the film's older characters. Groups might be encouraged to share with the entire class how the use of their particular theoretical lens shapes their view of aging and perceptions of appropriate behavior in later life. This larger exercise could help students to compare and contrast theories of aging. Similarly, McKee and McLerran (1995) discuss how the actions of characters in the 1948 film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* can be used to illustrate concepts of psychological and social theories of aging to students.

The pedagogical function of constructing cross-cultural experiences not otherwise readily available to students is possible by using films such as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. This movie portrays the experience of culture shock as seven retirees move from their lives in England to India—a place all but one has never been before. Main character Evelyn Greenslade's (Judi Dench) blog is a helpful device for putting their slowly evolving adaptation to a new culture into words. Similarly, a scene from an international film might depict aging in a cultural context unfamiliar to most of the students. One might use a clip from *Whale Rider*, in which a grandfather uses a rope as a metaphor in explaining to his granddaughter how the Maori weave together threads to make subsequent generations strong in their Maori heritage. Such visual depictions of metaphors create a lasting image of the importance of common ancestors and shared heritage (Project Look Sharp, n.d.). For a different perspective, *The Queen* offers a peek into the life of an aging monarch and how her behavior is interpreted based on the cultural and social context.

Similarly, films can portray other time periods and historically situated events and activities. *Driving Miss Daisy*, for example, begins in Alabama in the late 1940s and follows the relationships of Miss Daisy (Jessica Tandy) with her son Boolie (Dan Aykroyd) and her chauffeur Hoke (Morgan Freeman) over 20+ years. In addition to the obvious later life issues of driving, dementia, and family, this film also captures the nuanced challenges of race, religion, and gender during a volatile period in the U.S. South. *Fried Green Tomatoes* is another film set in the South, dealing with sensitive issues of abuse, sexuality, marriage, friendships, and aging that begins in the 1980s with the chance meeting between middle-age Evelyn Couch (Kathy Bates) and an aging Ninny Threadgood (Jessica Tandy), and spans back to a period between World Wars I and II through story-telling flashbacks. *The Help*, set in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, could be used to help students to consider how Adeline—a Black maid who has spent her entire life cleaning, cooking, and raising children for White families—will experience retirement differently from other individuals or groups of people.

A function not noted by Champaux (1999) but one we believe is equally important is the way in which a particular scene might be used for considering aging policy or potential interventions. Doron (2006) focuses on the

role of the legal profession and the law—employing five popular films (e.g., *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Waking Ned Devine*, *On Golden Pond*, *The Straight Story*, and *Iris*) to explore how complex legal issues associated with aging are handled, and how these films illustrate that “the current level of discourse on major issues in social gerontology ignores the importance of the part played by the law” (p. 251).

Finally, films and similar media are also useful in fostering observation and critical thinking skills. Curch (2010) shows prime-time animated images of older adults (e.g., from shows such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *South Park*) in aging courses to foster media literacy. Donlon, Ashman, and Levy (2005) found that having older participants keep a television diary helped the participants become more aware of the ageism they were being exposed to and that this heightened awareness allowed them to be more critical of and less susceptible to these negative images. Keeping a diary or journal when reviewing a single or multiple films or film clips could be equally effective relative to raising awareness of ageism and stereotypes. For instance, students could be asked to journal or write responses to a series of questions on film clips relating to sexuality and intimacy in later life. (See the Appendix E for a complete exercise.)

### CHALLENGES OF USING FILMS

Like any teaching strategy, the use of film has its drawbacks. For one, popular media has had a long and varied relationship with the topic of aging, ranging from an almost nonexistent visibility of aging and older adults to stereotypically negative representations of elders as undesirable, frail, and/or ineffective (Cohen-Shalev & Marcus, 2007; J. Robinson & Skill, 1995; Vickers, 2007). This trend holds regardless of the age market of the film—and can be seen in the underrepresentation or negative portrayal of older adults in media directed toward children, teens and adults (T. Robinson, Callister & Magoffin, 2009; T. Robinson, Callister, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007). Furthermore, several studies have identified gender as a “double jeopardy” factor that particularly exacerbates the invisibility and/or negative portrayals of older women in film (Bazzini et al., 1997; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Lincoln & Allen, 2004; Markson & Taylor, 1993).

These negative portrayals of older characters in film have the potential to reinforce rather than abate students’ stereotypical expectations and attitudes toward aging. Thus, faculty must use care when selecting not only which films to use, but also which topics they plan to illustrate with them. For example, Ello (2007) describes using films to reduce social work students’ apprehension about working with older adults and to increase their interest in the population by helping the students to explore “the specific changes, events, and situations that older adults encounter that impact on their physical, psychological, economic, and social well-being” (pp. 272–273). The

topics Ello illustrates with film (e.g., ageism, physical challenges, death and dying, dementia, depression, suicide, substance abuse, difficulty adjusting to retirement, and dysfunctional family dynamics), however, have the potential to further cast aging as a time fraught with problems. In fact, Ello notes that through these films “students have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives on the process of aging and heighten their awareness of the realities of coping with myriad dilemmas” (p. 273). Although such challenges may reflect some of the reality that social workers will see when working with older adults, these experiences must be placed into the context that not all elders will need assistance with these issues. Indeed, though by definition, social workers are more likely to be called in to deal with problems rather than positive experiences, such problems are neither exclusive to nor rampant in the older population.

Although unflattering portrayals of older adults can leave viewers with a negative image of aging (Donlon et al., 2005; Fisher, 1992; Vickers, 2007; Yahnke, 1989, 2003), there is evidence that these same film portrayals may be used with careful intentionality for educational benefit as well. As discussed in the example above, making efforts to balance negative portrayals of elders with more positive ones, as well as placing each negative image into context (e.g., with supporting demographics such as the low percentage of older adults who actually develop dementia or commit suicide) can help to mitigate some of the potential negative images. Other approaches, as discussed previously (Curch, 2010; Donlon et al., 2005), seek to make use of the negative information to help viewers recognize and thus potentially neutralize the impact of these negative messages.

In addition to the problems that negative images of aging in films can pose for educators, a second, related challenge is that faculty must invest a great deal of time in identifying the best films for their particular use. This includes considering the overall impact of the material, as well as ways to balance and place into context the messages that will be conveyed. Although the typology provided here offers a wide selection of current and classic movies, new films will need to be screened for their potential. Like any other pedagogical approach, clear educational objectives also need to be delineated when using portions of or entire films and a clear plan for achieving the educational outcomes needs to be articulated. Thus, the effective use of film requires substantial time and planning.

A third challenge is the need to be sensitive to one’s audience when selecting films, as some students may be offended by foul language, sex scenes, or nudity (Marshall, 2003). Faculty should know the film’s rating (e.g., PG-13, R) and notify students in advance of any potentially offensive content. It is strongly recommended that faculty prescreen all films prior to their use and not just rely on recommendations from others. Unexpected surprises, such as the rather explicit scene where an older Japanese pornography actor is interviewed in the documentary *How to Live Forever* have taken at least one faculty member (and class) off guard. This is not to suggest that this film

should not be shown, however, because it does have considerable merit in sparking discussion regarding the concepts and controversies surrounding life expectancy, life span, life extension, and what it means to age well. Rather, faculty might want to preface this documentary's showing for some audiences by forewarning of the brief clip with frontal nudity and suggestive behavior, and perhaps consider showing only clips of the video for less mature audiences.

Fourth, professors need to be prepared for the fact that discussion of controversial or emotionally laden material may evoke a variety of interpretations from members of the class (DeGenova & Buchanan, 1997). A movie about a character suffering from Alzheimer's disease or a film in which an aging parent dies might bring about intense emotional reactions from students who have encountered similar experiences. It may be helpful to inform students of the film's topic ahead of time and to let them know if there might be potentially challenging content such as the aforementioned pornography scene.

Fifth, instructors need to be aware of copyright issues when using media. Adams and Hall (2009) and Curch (2010) offer some helpful guidance in understanding and complying with U.S. copyright law and the Copyright Act of 1976. Educators qualify for some "fair use" exemptions, but restrictions do exist for copyrighted work. Consequently, faculty members need to use a legal copy of the film or scenes and use it only for educational purposes within the context of their class. Broader uses (e.g., movie nights) may require obtaining permission from the copyright owner.

Finally, instructors need to continually be cognizant of the fact that films do not "necessarily or consistently portray reality" (Seery et al., 2002, p. 214). For instance, Chivers (2011) asserts that the film industry typically links aging with illness and mental and physical disability. She says, "On the silvering screen, old age is believed to indicate (at the very least) ill health, and ill health often visually appears in the form of a disabled body" (p. 8). Just like McCullick, Belcher, Hardin, and Hardin' (2003) concerns regarding negative images of physical education teachers in the movies and the ramifications they have for physical educators, we too, are concerned about the impact of negative images of aging in cinema. Consequently, caution must be used in employing films and assignments designed to harvest their content so that inaccurate messages are not inadvertently conveyed.

## CONCLUSION

Research and practice suggest that movies can be a particularly effective pedagogical device. As demonstrated by the typology developed for this article and the model assignments provided, there is a wide range of films from which to choose and any number of ways to incorporate them into the



introductory gerontology classroom. Although attention must be given to the pedagogical objectives for including films, the resulting impact of their content, and the legalities of copyright, with careful preparation and planning, movies are capable of enhancing learning and fostering engagement in the gerontological classroom. Now, will someone please get the lights?

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## APPENDIX A: MOVIE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

*Video illustration:* “*The Cemetery Club*” (1993, PG13, 107 Mins)

*Movie summary:* A comedy about three Jewish widows (Doris, Ester and Lucille) and how they cope with their husbands’ recent deaths.

*Main topic(s) addressed:* family caregiving; death and dying; cultural diversity

*Assignment strategy:*

- Schedule film viewing for when the last of the three main topics is to be covered in class.
- Hand out and review discussion questions (below)
- Show full feature length film.
- Facilitate discussion with students

*Learning objectives:* Upon completion of this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the demographics portrayed in the movie with a realistic picture of older adults;
2. Identify diverse factors (e.g., religion) that impact one’s experience of grieving;
3. Examine the societal stereotypes about aging and sexuality; and
4. Consider the social networks of older adults.

**Instructions to students:** Review the following questions prior to watching the video. While watching the video, make notes of examples of the key themes.

*Demographics:* (age, gender, living arrangements, etc.) How closely does the movie’s portrayal of older adults match up with the demographic profiles described in your readings/class discussions? In what ways? (Give specific examples).

*Diversity:* In what ways do the older adults in the movie differ? What are the similarities? What factors (i.e. widowhood, prior marital relationship, income,

ethnicity, living arrangements etc.) affect the characters' experiences? (Give specific examples).

*Social networks/social support:* (assistance, dating, friendships, family, etc.). Who/what are the social networks of the older characters. What sources of support are available to the characters in the video? What types of support are offered? Pros/cons of this support? (Give specific examples).

## APPENDIX B: MOVIE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

*Movie analysis:* "Secondhand Lions" (2003, PG, 110 mins)

*Movie summary:* A young boy named Walter is deposited with his "crazy" great uncles for a summer while his irresponsible mother pursues other interests. Initially reluctant to stay with these strangers reputed to be bank robbers, Walter grows to appreciate his great uncles and their unconventional behavior as he learns about their mysterious past and shares in their life adventures.

*Main topic(s) addressed:* family relationships, death and dying, health and wellness, sexuality and intimacy, economics/financial, housing

*Learning objective(s):* Students will critique sibling relationships, intergenerational familial relationships, and friendships in later life as exhibited in Secondhand Lions.

*Assignment strategy:*

- Incorporate this exercise during the unit on social support/family relationships.
- Distribute discussion questions prior to viewing the movie.
- Show the film in its entirety, either in class or outside of class.
- Facilitate discussion with students.

**Instructions to students:** Review the following questions prior to watching the movie. As you watch the film, jot notes to complete the questions.

*Sibling relations:* Pay close attention to the sibling relations between Hub and Garth. How has their shared life experiences, historical events and family history impacted their sibling relationship now that they are old? How might Hub or Garth's experience of aging be different if he had a sister instead of a brother?

*Friends:* Consider Hub and Garth's friendships over their lives. How has their friendship networks changed or remained the same? What functions do

these networks provide to Hub and Garth? What needs, if any, are being met through friendships?

*Marriage:* Describe Hub's marriage as a young man. How has he managed the loss of his young wife early in their relationship? How do you think his experience of grief and loss would be the same or different if Jasmine died after 50 years of marriage rather than during childbirth early in their marriage?

*Intergenerational relationships:* How did Walter's introduction to great uncles Hub and Garth affect each as individuals and the family system as a whole? Consider the exchanges between generations. What did Walter provide to and receive from his great uncles? What did each deem to be the rewards and costs of this intergenerational relationship? How did these change over time?

*Social support system:* Examine the social support systems of Walter, Hub and Garth by drawing a convoy model of social relations for each. As each moved through life, who surrounds each and what social support is exchanged?

*Other:* List other insights gleaned about relationship for this film.

#### APPENDIX C: MOVIE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

*Movie segment:* "Up" (2009, PG, 96 mins)

*Movie summary:* By tying thousands of balloons to his home, 78-year-old Carl Fredricksen sets out to fulfill his lifelong dream to see the wilds of South America. Right after lifting off, however, he learns he isn't alone on his journey, since Russell, a wilderness explorer 70 years his junior, has inadvertently become a stowaway on the trip.

*Main topics addressed:* ageism, death and dying, family relationships, health and well-being, work and retirement, housing

*Learning objective(s):* Students will outline the significance of housing environments for older adults and articulate their own housing preferences in old age.

*Assignment strategy:* During the unit on housing and living arrangements show the first 20 mins of *Up* where Carl and Ellie move into and fix up their house. Be sure to include the clip of Carl and Ellie's marriage until Carl becomes a widower.

**Instructions to students:** Review the following questions prior to viewing the clip. Immediately after, complete your response.

- Describe the significance of “home” to Carl and Ellie. How do the murals, photographs, furnishings and other decorations reflect their values and life together?
- How might Carl and Ellie’s life have been different if they rented or could not afford to buy their own home?
- How would you characterize the overall housing quality of this particular place?
- How important is this particular house to them? Elaborate. Why does Carl respond as he does to the wreckers who intend to remove his house in order to re-develop the neighborhood?
- Carl intends to “age in place” even if his house is not in the same location. What is the significance of this home for Carl? What is the significance of location for him?
- How do you think Carl would adapt to other housing options for older adults (e.g. continuation care retirement community, independent living community, assisted living facility, apartment, board and care home, single room occupancy hotel)?

*Personal application:* In what kind of housing situation would you most like to reside in your old age? Do you think your hopes are realistic? What will you need to do over the next 40 year to make this possible?

#### APPENDIX D: MOVIE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

*Movie critique:* Portrayals of aging in the media

This assignment is designed to help you integrate the materials covered throughout this class.

1. Select a movie from the following list (See Table 1). View the movie you have selected (if you are already familiar with the movie you select (and do not wish to advance your knowledge base by choosing another) you *must* see the movie again to appropriately complete the assignment):
2. Write a 7–8 page critical review on how the portrayal of aging and the older characters in the movie relate to the topics covered in class (e.g., biological aging, stereotypes, ageism, sexuality, etc.). Use specific examples from class readings, lectures, etc. Note: It is vital to cite the specific information about aging and describe how it applies. In essence, you are being asked to demonstrate what you have learned throughout the class. The following questions may help to guide your critique:

- Who are the “older” characters? What specific cues tell you they are “older”?
- How are the older characters portrayed? (e.g., personality, power, etc.)
- How central is their advanced age to the plot?

- What messages about old age are apparent? Are these messages positive? Negative? Neutral? In what ways? Explain your assessment.
- What, if any, aging stereotypes depicted? What makes them stereotypical? If these are stereotypes, what are the realities? Why?
- How would the movie be different if the characters were not older?

## APPENDIX E: MOVIE ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

*Video illustration:* “Sexuality and Intimacy in Later Life”

*Main topic(s) addressed:* portrayals of intimacy in later life

*Assignment strategy:*

- Hand out and review discussion questions (below)
- Show clips of the following films

*Harold and Maude* (1971, PG, 91 mins) Scenes: (a) Young, rich, death-obsessed Harold finds out that his new 80 year old friend Maude is posing nude for an artist; (b) Harold and Maude make love.

*The Cemetery Club* (1993, PG13: 107 mins) Scenes: (a) Esther and Katz sneak around to have sex at a hotel; (b) The girls’ talk with a friend who is getting married (again) about the difference between companionship.

*Grumpy Old Men* (1983; PG-13, 103 mins) Scenes: (a) John and Max pursue the same woman; (b) John and Ariel talk about the last time they had sex in preparation for their intimate relationship.

*Used People* (1992, PG-13, 116 mins) Scenes: (a) Joe asks Pearl out on a date the day of her husband’s funeral; (b) Joe and Pearl kiss in a pool of water with others looking on; Joe and Pearl talk about a future together

- Facilitate discussion with students

*Learning objectives:* Upon completion of this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Examine the societal stereotypes about aging and sexuality
2. Examine their own feelings and expectations about intimacy in later life
3. Consider the factors related to developing and engaging in later life intimate relationships
4. Consider the barriers and challenges related to developing and sustaining an intimate relationship in later life.

**Instructions to students:** Review the following questions prior to watching the video clips. While watching the videos, make notes of examples of the key themes.

1. In what ways are the relationship scenes you are watching surprising to you?
2. How do you feel watching these clips? Are you happy for the characters? Concerns? Do you agree with their actions? Why/why not?
3. In what ways are the relationship issues portrayed in these clips similar to those portrayed for younger adults? In what ways are they different?
4. What are the reactions of the family and friends with regard to the characters' intimate relationships?
5. How realistic do you think these portrays are with regard to relationships in later life? Why?