

Women at Warp Episode 117: Mature Women of Star Trek

GRACE:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Grace, and thanks for tuning in. With us this week we have Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Hello.

GRACE:

And we have special guest Karen Chuplis.

KAREN:

Hello.

GRACE:

correcting herself *CHuplis*. *laughing* I asked you how to say it and I screwed it up anyway!

KAREN:

No no no. You didn't believe me. You did not screw it up like it *can* be. *laughs*

GRACE:

OK that's good to know, that I rank low on the screw up scale there. So before we get to our main topic we've a little bit of housekeeping to do first. First off, our show is supported entirely by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to high quality bespoke episode commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcast. Just put out there that you're listening to us. That way we know that *you* know about *us*, and that makes such a difference. By the time this is airing we'll be getting ready for Star Trek Las Vegas. So keep an eye on our social media. We'll be so busy- active all up in that social media to make it feel like you are there with us. Because we wish you could be there with us. We have a book club book coming up, *Dwellers In The Crucible* by Margaret Wander Bonnano. And is there a time when we're- do we know exactly when we're all-

JARRAH:

We don't know 100 percent, but it'll be around like September October. So you still have some time to read it.

GRACE:

It's your summer reading assignment from us, your buddies The Women at Warp.

JARRAH:

This book came very highly recommended by members of our Goodreads book club. So if you want to read along and join the discussion go to Goodreads and search Women at Warp in the groups, and that's how you can find us.

GRACE:

Jarraah gave it an awesome review already, based on its cover alone. So we can only keep going in terms of excellence from here.

JARRAH:

Yeah. They say don't judge a book by its cover but I think in this case you definitely should.

GRACE:

We're not going to *judge* so much as *get excited* by.

JARRAH:

Yeah exactly. I'm very excited.

GRACE:

So for our topic today we have The Mature women of Star Trek. Women characters who are over a certain age and how they're depicted throughout the franchise.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So I mean, obviously it's hard to kind of draw a line because I mean Star Trek has its own aging system in terms of like, apparently humans live longer. But in terms- and then like *our* world has ages. But then in terms of the actual show, like Karen and I were talking a bit and it seems like the cutoff sort of in Star Trek which mirrors about Hollywood is around like 42 where you start to be like a *mature* woman of Trek or like somebody's mom. You know, somebody's grandma, the wife of an aging scientist.

GRACE:

That one comes around a couple times doesn't it?

JARRAH:

Or a cranky admiral. *laughs* So we're going to talk a little bit about some of these characters as well as just how Star Trek generally portrays aging and specifically for women. So I'm excited! And excited to have Karen with us. Karen, do you want to tell folks a little bit more about yourself and how you first got interested in Star Trek?

KAREN:

Well it's just kind of been in my life, my whole life. I was born in 1963 so I was probably, you know, pretty young when it was first airing. But I certainly watched it because I have a quite older brother, he's like 6-7 years older than me. And then for sure when the first syndication

came around. It was just, you know, when it was on I was watching and I was playing Star Trek in the backyard and I was just totally involved in the whole idea of Star Trek. And as soon as like- oh! They used to have these little anthologies with short stories of the original series episodes, you know, and I had that of course we didn't you couldn't re-watch them. If they weren't on *they weren't on*. So that was, you know, it's just always been a part of my whole growing up formation. I mean, it was so bad that- I didn't know that you pluck to your eyebrows to thin them out and in like fourth grade I was trying to shave them and I missed-

GRACE:
Oh no!

KAREN:
Yes. And my mom goes "Oh were you trying to look like Mr. Spock?" I was so embarrassed. *all laugh*

GRACE:
I feel like that gives you total OG fan credibility though.

KAREN
That kind of showed- I didn't even realize she knew how much I was into Star Trek. But she when she said that I'm like "Oh my gosh." *laughs*

GRACE:
So she was paying attention all along.

KAREN:
She was! *laughs* So that is kind of just, you know, it's just a part of my whole makeup. And I do really like all of the series so I mean- I'm- it's not that I'm easy but I just, you know, find something in every single one of them to enjoy.

JARRAJ:
That's awesome!

GRACE:
That's great!

JARRAH:
So we have, you know, we've sort of brainstormed a list of possible characters we could talk about but I was just thinking because before the show you were saying you sort of identified some of the archetypes that we tend to see in mature or older women in Trek. And I thought maybe we could sort of group them together like that, and then to see who the outliers are. Does that sort of make sense?

KAREN:

Yeah, it's kind of the groups that you find in theater and television. It's not just Trek. Trek adds the category of finicky Admiral. *all laugh* That probably falls under the Harridan role, you know, the witchy complaining older woman.

GRACE:

witchy voice The crone. The crone figure.

KAREN:

Yeah I think there's like Harridan, and then there's the wise grandmother, and then there's the cougar.

JARRAH:

Nice.

GRACE:

The cougar is a recent addition though, within the past 30 years or so right?

KAREN:

Not *really*. No I mean you gotta really think of Mrs. Robinson.

JARRAH:

Oh yeah.

GRACE:

OK.

KAREN:

It's been around a long time, and the saloon gal. Takin' the young guy coming into town, you know?

JARRAH:

Oh! Like would we count like Feezal Phlox as a cougar?

KAREN:

Yeah! Somewhat.

GRACE:

We totally could.

KAREN:

At least with Feezal it seemed like that was just a Denobulan trait, possibly.

JARRAH:

Yeah. But like, certainly the way Tripp sees her-

GRACE:

Denobulan cougars. My God. *all laugh*

JARRAH:

But Tripp certainly reacts like "Oh my gosh! I mean she's an attractive woman, but she's older, and she's married, and she's hitting on me and I just-

GRACE:

"Mrs. Phlox you're trying to seduce me." *Jarrah laughs*

JARRAH:

What other cougars do we have in Star Trek?

GRACE:

Should we give a hard and fast definition of the term "Cougar" just before we proceed? Just in the incredibly rare off-chance that listeners don't know this term?

JARRAH:

Also known as a mountain lion. *All laugh* It's an older woman who is like, trying to pick up younger men. And generally like, I think given the stereotype like dresses like or behaves in a way that is not considered age appropriate. So it's obviously like all of these archetypes are kind of gendered and imply like ways that women should behave based on age or based on gender. And in this case it's like "Oh act your age lady! Like you shouldn't be so openly sexual."

KAREN:

"Go dress in a sack" and yeah-

GRACE:

"Go hide in your corner! Go back to your hobbit hole old woman!"

KAREN:

Like Deanna in Man Of The People is like a cougar gone bad. You know?

JARRAH:

Ooooh! This is a good example. This is the one, if anyone doesn't remember, where she's being overtaken by negative energy from this negotiator guy and she starts like rapidly aging and becoming more overtly sexual at the same time. And this is like the most terrifying thing that could happen to a woman. *all snicker*

GRACE:

scared fragile man voice "Aaaah! You're supposed to stop being sexual when I stop finding you attractive!" *swooning sounds*

JARRAH:

It's like, definitely portrayed with like scary music and stuff. It is kind of- I mean, I love the like vamp-y outfit with like the skunk swirl in the hair.

GRACE:

I'm pretty sure that outfit gets reused as one of the dabo girl outfits later on in Deep space Nine.

JARRAH:

Oh I think you're right!

GRACE:

Yeah. Anyway, let's let's go over some more cougar characters.

KAREN:

Well Lwuxana definitely has that vibe. Particularly just, you know, when it's useful for the writers.

GRACE:

When it's *funny*. *laughs* When it's *funny* she's a sexual being.

JARRAH:

Yes she definitely has- she's not as reducible to that trait as some of the other characters, or to like any type of archetype because she shows up so often. But you can see those *moments*. Like she's definitely, you know, sort of like embarrassing Deanna by flirting with Picard, by flirting with Riker, or by flirting with everybody. By flirting with Ferengi. She, you know, occasionally drops her clothes. *all snicker*

GRACE:

Shows up naked to her own wedding yada yada.

JARRAH:

I think in her case like, it is- it's kind of cool and empowering because she has those other elements. So it's not so much just like "Oh look at her being embarrassing" but it's like "Damn! She's still got it." And she's, you know, she's going out there and going after what she wants. Which is Lwuxana.

KAREN:

And you get that impression, at least from Deanna, that that's older Betazoids too. But I always think of that scene in the elevator with Odo, which I particularly like, where she tells him- you know she takes her wig off and she goes "Nobody's ever seen you like this before." and he says

“Why? It's fine.” And she says “It's ordinary. And I have never cared to be ordinary.” And *that* is kind of a base for Lwuxana's character I think. She just doesn't care to be ordinary no matter *which* of those buckets she's falling into. *laughs*

GRACE:

Funny you mention buckets when you're talking about Odo.

KAREN:

laughing Yes!

JARRAH:

Would you think of Mirror Georgiou as sometimes falling into this category?

KAREN:

Yeah definitely. There is that vibe in a couple of scenes that they definitely portray her that way. And she, you know, Michelle Yeoh eats that character up and that aspect of the character.

GRACE:

More power to her on it.

KAREN:

Amen. I would- she just is very self-assured. I mean-

GRACE:

Which is the sexiest thing of all.

KAREN:

Yeah. I mean that's just totally her- the reason she can *do it*.

GRACE:

That's one of the things I absolutely have appreciated about our mature women that we've gotten in Discovery. We've got them being characters with active sexual lives that are not treated as being outliers and I think that's really cool. And a pretty good signifier of- while we haven't gone all the way to the mountain top in terms of portrayals of women especially older women, step in the right direction there.

KAREN:

Well, and I love that Jane Brooke's character Admiral Cornwall is not the cranky crazy bitchy Admiral. You know?

GRACE:

No! She's a woman in her prime.

KAREN:

She's just, you know again, competent. Confident. She has just a real assertive personality that is like somebody you would meet! You know I always wonder- I always think how these older women should be, is just like you could replace her with any age. You know? If you write the character to be the *character* it would kind of be that you could put anybody in a 30 year range in there. And I think they did real well especially with now that we're coming into Discovery. Of course sadly we've lost her. But now we have Georgiou. Maybe we'll pick up another mature woman.

JARRAH:

I mean Cornwell's- she's also a counsellor and she's very perceptive. So she's- like she's very tough but she also is very in touch with emotions which is very cool to see.

KAREN:

Yeah. I really- I mean it thrilled me to see these women in their late 50s in these strong very important roles in the Star Trek show. Not just a guest star. A one-off guest star.

GRACE:

Especially ones that fall into buckets.

KAREN:

Yeah! I mean they don't last. I mean usually there's something, you know, that *happens*. I did think of- now these are not characters that you would- they were a one-time thing. But they were a feature of the episode and it kind of shows that still in the 90s you still had this image of older women. But the conwoman in rivals on D.S.9. You had two older women in that show that were feature characters and one was the con woman who was playing the lonely but at a loss woman, semi-cougar-y. And then you had the shopkeeper who was the lonely and sad shopkeeper. You know, "Older women are supposed to be lonely." They're just sad people.

GRACE:

"They're supposed to be widows and that should be their defining characteristic." *all laugh* Very Victorian in terms of sensibility.

KAREN:

Because if they're not widows then they're, you know, they're still portrayed almost as a 50s housewife *who has a scientific degree*. *laughs*

GRACE:

Also if you're not acting like a widow you're essentially a cougar.

KAREN:

Yeah! Right!

JARRAH:

Well and if it's if they're not widows then we often see them at least like being very connected to or motivated by almost solely motivated by a male relative or a loved one. Like last night I re-watched *Silicone Avatar*, which is the one with Kila Marr where she kills the crystalline entity because it killed her son.

GRACE:

Like you do like you do.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I mean she starts off- I mean to the credit of this episode and, as well as another one that we have in our list which is an Admiral Satie. Both those actresses do such an amazing job with those roles and they're obviously meatier than a lot of roles for women of their age on TV at the time. But yeah like, Kila Marr is very motivated it's all like "I did it for you Renny. I did it for you." and then like "I'm devastated when I learn from Data that like maybe that wasn't a good idea." And same with satire. I mean- I think that the actress who plays Admiral Satie and Patrick Stewart obviously do such an incredible job. And that episode is so well written. But like, I guess the niggling thing is that so much of it is about how much she respects her father and almost every conversation she has about her personal life is about her father. And then when her father is brought up it like emotionally devastates her. And it's really really powerful. Just when you start to like take a step back and look at this kind of pattern there's a lot of instances, even when the characters are not like, they're to be the mom of the main character, where they're still being motivated by their relationship with usually a man.

GRACE:

Now do we think that's a reflection of- how am I trying to say this? Of some cultures idea that an older woman, once you've aged out of a certain age, like say once you've reached that widow's age, you are kind of the responsibility slash property of another man in your life and that's your defining characteristic. Do you think that ties into this?

KAREN:

I don't even know if it's property as much as there's a lot of hubris, that women especially women who have had children and who've been married whoever- those people become their life. That they aren't a separate individual. And so the hubris of the era in particular, I think tends to make them a male figure. It could have been a daughter. There was no reason that they couldn't have had Renny meet a girl, you know, and it still would have fit that whole character that once a woman is married and has children *that's what she is*. She doesn't have any other life. I think that is kind of a pattern of, it doesn't have to be the ownership thing- it just- it's that easy. It's like once you have kids, and have a family, and have a husband nobody just wants to talk to you about your interests. I mean that is the first thing people ask you when you go

anywhere. It's like "Are you married? Do you have children?" And then the silence when you aren't married and don't have children, like me. *laughs*

GRACE:

Have you ever seen a 20 something guy go back to visit his mom and then instantly start being like *whiney voice* "Moom make me something to eat!" and then do the whole "Oh no! She loves this! She loves doing the mom thing for me." And you're like *high pitched voice* "Biiiiiiiiitch what???" *skeptical noises*

KAREN:

Yeah.

JARRAH:

I mean if you don't have kids or a husband, you better hope you have a Scottish ghost candle.

GRACE:

Because that's all that you've got! *all laugh* Those are your defining characteristics. So what's one of these other buckets we were talking about of the women figures, that these characters fall into?

KAREN:

Well grandmotherly wisdom kind of fits, again, Lwuxana has all of those moments of wisdom, which are *great*. But like for instance you have a whole episode with her having her best stuff with Alexander because she's an older woman and must dispense her wisdom to a little child.

GRACE:

She's got to do that Mame schtick.

KAREN:

Yeah. She can't just have that conversation with say, another woman in her in her life. You know?

GRACE:

We see the same thing with Guinan a lot don't we?

KAREN:

Yeah that's true.

JARRAH:

I mean yeah, Guinans just a wisdom *machine*.

GRACE:

Yeah. She is the Zoltar The Magician of the Enterprise. Just buy a drink and she'll dispense some wisdom. *Karen laughs*

KAREN:

And I think Amanda is a little bit that way.

JARRAH:

Definitely in the movies, where especially- I mean sorry, the original movies. Where Jane Wyatt is like finding out how Spock's doing after having his katra restored to him, and that kind of thing.

GRACE:

Her literal role in the movie is just going *empathetic voice* "Heeey. How you doing buddy? how you doing? You ready to set the tone for your character arc in the movie?"

JARRAH:

But even in Journey To Babel she's sort of decoding Spock and Sarek for everyone else. Although, that's not necessarily like *grandmotherly*. But certainly this kind of thing like "Oh the men are hopeless with this kind of thing and they need the women to fill in the gaps and tell us how the feelings work."

KAREN:

Oh and in and In The Voyage Home, you know, she's the one to put in the question "How do you feel?" Like "This is important for you" that she's dispensing this whole person recovery aspect.

GRACE:

And at no point does he say "Mom I'm a grown ass man!"

JARRAH:

Tiny segue here, while we talk about Amanda. Because I think it's worth noting when we're talking about like "At what age do Hollywood start to like put you in these buckets?"

GRACE:

Oh yeah! Let's go here definitely!

JARRAH:

Let's talk about Star Trek 2009 and when they cast Winona Ryder as Amanda, who was six years older than Zachary Quinto. And I mean the argument I think was sort of like "Well, you know, but in the flashbacks Zachary Quinto is like a little kid."

GRACE:

Flashbacks that were cut from the movie.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Or you know- but it just- there's like awesome articles you can find that compare the ages of mothers and children in Hollywood films as well as romantic couples and how like it's acceptable for men like George Clooney and Tom Hanks to get older and older but their love interests stay the same age or even get younger in some cases.

GRACE:

And once Maggie Gyllenhaal turned 38 she was too old to be the love interest for a 50 something guy.

JARRAH:

Yeah there's another movie. It's a Melissa McCarthy movie and has Melissa McCarthy and Allison Janney.

GRACE:

Tammy.

JARRAH:

So Allison Janney plays the mom, and then Susan Sarandon plays the grandma. And the kind of hilarious part of this whole thing is that Allison Janney is eleven years older than Melissa McCarthy, and Susan Sarandon if she was really Melissa McCarthy grandma would have been a grandma at age 24. Sooo.

GRACE:

Yikes.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So it's just a thing that like, Hollywood like can't understand how women age.

GRACE:

skeptical voice Can't or won't?

JARRAH:

A little bit of both. *laughs* So I think that the Winona Ryder example is one of the times we see that most clearly in Star Trek. But certainly if you go and look back at like primarily like, love interest characters in most of the original series and TNG they're by and large very young.

GRACE:

Looking at the range of Picard's love interests and that come becomes very clear also.

KAREN:

Yeah. They're all in their 40s. So always they got him til their forties.

JARRAH:

Yeah. But then you also get like a whole bunch of these crotchety old dudes scientists with younger wives *Karen laughs*

KAREN:

That it's just constant.

GRACE:

How do these guys just keep scoring hot wives? Because that seems a little "wish fulfill"y.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Like there's the woman in the horrible episode A Matter Of Perspective with her older husband and there's of course We'll Always Have Paris. So yeah, that's just a general comment on Hollywood, and Star Trek, and aging.

KAREN:

Well they're just like they're the rock stars of the future, because you know how people are always wondering *Grace laughs* about how these rock stars get these model girlfriends or wives.

JARRAH:

But then like, why don't we don't like Toby Russell from Ethics and Kila Marr have like super hot young guys-

GRACE:

Yeah! Why not?

JARRAH:

Well, of course I say guy because we didn't have gay characters in Trek by that point. Why did they not have like an entourage?

GRACE:

Why do not the older women scientists characters have hot boyfriends?

KAREN:

Because "they just work too hard. They dedicate their life- *all laugh* to science."

GRACE:

"Because if you're a working woman at that age you're a *spooky voice* croooone!"

KAREN:

Right. "You just don't have time for men."

GRACE:

sinister voice Croooooooooone.

JARRAH:

Well is that a good segue into the Harradin type?

GRACE:

I'd say that's definitely a segue. Let's go for it.

JARRAH:

Because also when I think of Harradin and I think like someone who nags. I don't know if that is in the meaning of the word there, but like I think that even though I have a lot of love for some of these characters I think that you can definitely put like, Necheyev at times.

GRACE:

Oh absolutely.

JARRAH:

Because she's like the person who comes on the ship and like, harshes on everyone's buzz

KAREN:

She's the straight-up military Admiral. I mean, she just has no civilian side to her. And it definitely falls into that. It's just another side of that bucket. You know? That you can't be a compassionate person and be an admiral and be a woman. I mean even Jellicoe comes up with a few moments of compassion, at times. But not Necheyev.

JARRAH:

And then Admiral Satie as well. Definitely there's this sort of like, you know, very like upright, like looking down your nose at other people, lecturing, or thinking you know better than other people, or bossing them around and none of these things are necessarily like terrible but it's this idea that like a woman should have warmth.

GRACE:

I feel like Pulaski gets lumped into that too.

KAREN:

Yeah I was just going to say, you know, she's always cutting people off.

GRACE:

She's a *pushy* older woman which you're not supposed to be.

KAREN:

Right! And then the Picard has that line. He's like "Oh please let me finish my sentence once in a while." *laughs*

GRACE:

snotty voice "No!"

KAREN:

Well it worked to her detriment, because her character actually was very compassionate. But she had all of *that* worked in there too for whatever reason they were doing that. You know?

GRACE:

We've definitely covered this before, yeah. There's a lot to be said about Pulaski both being done a disservice to and just not getting a fair shake as a character.

JARRAH:

Mm hmm. Well I think like one thing that you can say that's positive about a lot of these characters is that they're almost uniformly competent. Like a lot of the old dude scientists we talked about are like corrupt or insane and we don't often see that. I think we tend to see more like hubris with some of these more like Harridan women characters, like Toby Russell or Admiral Satie. But they're definitely like knowledgeable, until they kind of cross that line. They're like, they command your respect. They have a lot of qualifications. It's just kind of this unfortunate dynamic they get set up especially in TNG where they're like the ones confronting our heroes who are often, like as Picard, is like a guy. And so it just ends up sort of like reinforcing the stereotype or the stereotypes that are there. But still like they have a lot of power which is kind of cool.

KAREN:

Yeah. If they just didn't go crazy. *Grace laughs* You know, that's the other thing. It's like you have these characters that are strong and competent and then they're always in the end, you know, just have the crazy eyes with the camera zooming in. Like Satie was so wonderful. But she just super lost it.

JARRAH:

And yeah. Kila Marr even more.

KAREN:

Even Data's mom did that a little bit.

GRACE:

Can't trust these old broads. *Karen laughs*

KAREN:

They've gotten better. You know, they have improved over- you have- you know, I would say they are improving at all times. You know? And at least we're just not completely afraid and leaving them out like in that original series.

JARRAH:

Well let's maybe talk about some of the ones like later than TNG. You mentioned the characters from Rivals. I know we have like, Endgame Admiral Janeway on the list. Yeah. Bit of a unique case.

KAREN:

And she- that is one character that, and probably because she was established, that they kept her *her*. And they also didn't make her look like she was on the cusp of dying with her older age makeup. She just looked like they-

GRACE:

Definitely appreciate it.

KAREN:

Yeah! You know, a stately graceful aging person. And so that was a- I thought they did a really good job with her.

JARRAH:

Yeah, I was having trouble thinking of a lot of other ones in Voyager. I guess because they're stuck in the middle of the Delta Quadrant so they don't have their parents come visit a lot. Although we've done an episode on Klingon women and certainly I could think of several examples that were like B'Elannas mom, Sirella, Grilka. Maybe not Grilka- well yeah I think Grilka qualifies. But B'Elannas mom is there in like the Klingon-

GRACE:

She's not a *loving* mother.

JARRAH:

-visions. Yeah. No, I mean she's interesting. Yeah it's like this. It's kind of, you know, it's a powerful story about the need to reconcile with one's mom, who you feel has really let you down. And she ends up kind of having to forgive her mom for how she feels she was wronged but she also realizes like that she needs to put herself in her mom's shoes and understand.

KAREN:

Yeah. I think they do good with- see come along Voyager and Enterprise the mothers have improved because we have T'les who is you know, I think a good mom. But she is also competent and has her own life.

JARRAH:

T'Les is actually really cool. I like how she, you know, she starts out and you are not inclined to like her because she's like putting- she's- her plans and what she wants go against what we want for it T'Pol and maybe what some people want for Trip. But I like how she's revealed to be much more than just like someone who's trying to control her daughter, that she clearly loves her and she's trying to make change in a very restrictive society.

GRACE:

She is a character who has her own jazz going on outside of her kid.

KAREN:

Definitely yeah.

JARRAH:

Another one we see is our Rihanna Mayweather who is interesting because you know she's got this whole life on their ship. I think it's just a little bit unfortunate that her son's really kind of take control and it's not kind of portrayed that she could just step up and be the captain that her deceased husband was. But she she definitely is like capable, she's very like practical, she loves her family. Also other than her and a few other like relatives of main characters of color not a lot of people on this list are women of color. Like we've got Georgiou and Guinan. And other than that I couldn't really think of anyone who wasn't like Geordi's mom, Travis's Mom. So that's another thing too, is like can we not figure out how to talk about older women of color? I mean even the fact that Guinan is like- falls into this sort of like "the wise grandmother" a wise sort of mystical figure goes hand-in-hand with sort of like earthy stereotypes about black women of like the magical mystical black woman.

GRACE:

She definitely falls into the magical black person trope.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So, need more diversity. But I think Georgiou is like a massive step in a good direction on both age, gender, and race fronts. And she's just like, so cool and hard to kind of pigeonhole into different categories.

GRACE:

She does bad things, but you still want to see more of her. What's she going to do next? We don't know! She's a wildcard!

KAREN:

And of course T'Pol had her hero, V'Lar the ambassador, who you know, and this is kind of outside of universe but Fionnula Flanagan played her and she also played Julianna, Data's mom and she played Enina Tandro in Dax in fact.

JARRAH:
Oh yeah!

KAREN:
So it's like there are-

GRACE:
She's almost Jeffrey Combs. *all laugh*

KAREN:
“There are not enough older women in Hollywood to fill these roles. That's why we don't write them.”

JARRAH:
Another one who's in Enterprise but was originally in their general series is T'Pol. And I think she is so cool. I mean in the original series she makes such an impression as this like wise matriarch. And then in Enterprise it's like her young revolutionary side. Yeah, so it's pretty awesome.

KAREN:
There's a nice history I think.

GRACE:
Where's her spinoff?

KAREN:
Yeah!

JARRAH:
Yeah, I'd watch it. I mean obviously in Enterprise like the actress playing her is not like reading as someone who is like middle age. Like she's reading as a very young woman. But I think it's cool to give backstory to this like just powerful moment we have in the original series.

KAREN:
We just can kind of- I can see her getting to the 70 year old stately Celia Lovsky character because she was very immersed in the history of Surak and that worked really- I thought that was cool too.

JARRAH:
Do we have any other examples that we want to shout out at the moment? Or should we talk about some of the- sort of like when Star Trek uses combined science fiction and aging as an interesting device.

GRACE:
Yeeeah.

KAREN:
Yeah, it's a very *terrifying* prospect, which it is. I mean, I'm not going to sit here and tell you "Oh yay! I'm in my 50s and everything's going peachy!" It's not going to happen. It's not.

GRACE:
But aging isn't for suckers.

KAREN:
But it's just not like the horrendous- especially in the original series it is. It's *crazy*.

JARRAH:
Let's talk The Deadly Years because you know, what you were saying Karen about how like Admiral Janeway she looks older but she's like acting the same, in The Deadly Years this really struck me as like, the people start acting like they think old people act, even though they've aged in like a day.

GRACE:
cartoonish old person voice "I'm 60 years old now. I need to stand in line for 20 minutes to buy a piece of fruit with a coupon and then return it."

KAREN:
Now I will say, I've been re-watching that. I guess Dr. McCoy does say. "Depending on your metabolism." This seemed to be a feature of the *condition* too. *Grace snorts* But yes-

GRACE:
The *condition* of being over 40.

KAREN:
Well I'm telling you, I filled out a survey for the Office for Health stuff and, you know, I had the *condition* of menopause. And I'm like- I got mad and I wrote them and I said "Menopause is a stage of life. It is not a condition." And they were like "Well we understand this. Yada yada yada yada." It's still on there, I have a *condition*.

GRACE:
So then you of course wrote back and told them to eat your farts, *all laugh* as one does.

KAREN:
But yeah. They really overdo it. I don't know if that- *sighs* you know it carries into the Bashir being old on DS9 and that one and a crazy weird- It's like he is one hundred and forty years old.

GRACE:

Guys there are points of age where you're *over* a certain age, but you are not the Crypt Keeper.

KAREN:

laughing Exactly.

JARRAH:

Kim also has a moment where he sees himself as an old man in Thaw. But what's kind of struck me watching *The Deadly Years* and, because this is one where a whole bunch of people rapidly age but not everyone, like not Kirk's bizarrely former girlfriend who shows up to try to persuade him to be into her again.

GRACE:

Why does that keep happening to him?

KAREN:

And then there's that strange little scene where he kind of accuses her of wanting to get back with him because he's older now.

JARRAH:

Yeah. That was really funny. But what was interesting is there's this like lieutenant who was on the away mission and she's the, I think, the only person we see die from the mission other than the scientists they bring back with them. And for her and the woman scientist there is like mention of their looks, like she sees herself in a mirror and gets really upset that they put a mirror there in sickbay. And with the woman scientist her husband keeps going like **plaintive voice** "Elaine was so beautiful."

GRACE:

same voice "Oh the best years are behind her now."

JARRAH:

And Elaines like "Thanks, jerk."

GRACE:

angry voice "Thank you for all of your support sweetheart. I appreciate it **enraged voice** SO Much in this time of hardship."

JARRAH:

But no one is like, other than mentioning that Bones has gray in his hair, there's never a mention of their looks.

GRACE:

Because he's a guy and it's very different for them.

KAREN:

The men fear losing their intellect and women fear losing their beauty.

JARRAH:

Exactly. Like, the men are like forgetting their orders and McCoy talks about "We're all gonna be mental vegetables."

KAREN:

McCoy suddenly develops a very heavy southern drawl.

GRACE:

He becomes even older and more Southern.

JARRAH:

And it's like similarly Uhura in *And The Children Will Lead or Shall Lead*, she's shown her darkest fear and it's basically her looking super old in a mirror and she like gets terrified and starts crying.

KAREN:

And that's what they offer her in *I Mud* is to continually be to be beautiful.

JARRAH:

Yeah I mean, of course and she turns it down. Because she's awesome. But then it's like- I mean *And The Children Shall Lead* it is just a horrible episode anyway. But then it's like, let's give her a little more credit that maybe-

GRACE:

Maybe that's not the thing that's her most important and defining quality.

JARRAH:

Yeah she should just be like "Yeah. So this *is* a fear. And that's fine, but it's not happening right now. And, you know, people live through this like this is just something that happens."

KAREN:

They're finally over that as we go into the more modern era. it's just a more realistic presentation of women in their 50s and 60s, you know?

JARRAH:

What really struck me re-watching *The Deadly Years*, is when they have the computer tell Kirk how old he is and by this point he has memory it's like totally shot. And it says something like he's between 65 and 70. *karen laughs*

GRACE:

He is frickin Methuselah over here!

JARRAH:

laughing And my dad was a planner and a gerontologist and one of his biggest pet peeves was how on surveys you always see surveys asking about your age demographics, and it's like why have to 34-35 to 44-45 to 54-54 to 65 and then it's like 65 plus or 55 plus or 60.

KAREN:

It's 55 plus now. I'm telling you. Last time I saw they'd shrunk the group and I'm like "Hey! Wait a second."

GRACE:

Which is ridiculous, especially considering how much longer the average life expectancy keeps becoming. It's like *that* could be your *midpoint*. You could still have half your life ahead of you.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And what it does is show that like basically our policies and society and programs are designed for people that are at the middle of this like curve that these surveys try to represent. And that everyone who is above that age is conflated even though there's enormous differences between someone who is 50 or 55 and someone who's ninety five or a hundred. And, you know, you can't always draw clear lines there but it prevents us from actually seeing what's happening with populations who are like in that 55 plus category because there's no further breaking down.

GRACE:

whining voice Well that would be haaaard. *Jarrah laughs* That would require extra work on their part.

KAREN:

It's like they just don't care.

GRACE:

if I can bring it back to the difference between how aging is perceived differently between men and women. I keep thinking back to this one Deon Cole stand-up bit all about how you never see women with gray hair reading the news. You see *guys* with gray hair reading the news all the time because if it's a guy then they're older and wiser and trustworthy and they have experience whereas if you see that with a woman she's letting herself go or becoming feeble. And I think about that a lot now when it comes to older women in the media.

KAREN:

What's strange about that too- I mean it's pervasive when you grew up. I mean you have this fear and I let my hair grow naturally grey a couple years ago and I was tired of dyeing my hair every three to four weeks. It's like just couldn't keep up and I'm like "This is crazy." And honestly

I've gotten more comments on my hair from younger people, ever since I let my hair go natural, then when I was any time the previous rest of my life. And so it is I think it's kind of put onto us as a image or a belief because I don't think it completely translates in real life that way so much. It's perpetuated through the media I think.

JARRAH:

Oh totally. I mean it obviously serves a lot of interests, if women are insecure at every age. But yeah I mean there's like whole industries that benefit off people feeling like you need to preserve your youthful appearances.

GRACE:

Those companies are owned by men just for the record.

JARRAH:

Or just women who don't care. *laughs*

GRACE:

Either way!

JARRAH:

I think that Unnatural Selection which is the TNG episode where Pulaski rapidly ages is moderately better. Actually it's significantly better. I re-watched this and I was like "I don't know that you can say anything about gender and aging from this one." They don't to the same extent sort of start to like act like caricatures of old people. So that was nice. And you have both her and the scientist on the space station that are women that are rapidly aging and I guess the only critique is that she's not actually the one that solves the problem, like Picard is the one that solves the problem. But I-OK. A *couple* critiques. So that's a critique about the like age related part of it but *laughs* the other really funny part about this episode is that like, it starts off with Picard talking to Troi and being like "What's the deal with Dr. Pulaski?"

GRACE:

laughing Could you please say that again in a Jerry Seinfeld voice?

JARRAH:

Seinfeld impression "I mean, what's the deal with Dr. Pulaski?"

GRACE:

cartoonish seinfeld impression "What's the deal with Dr. Pulaski?" *jarrah laughs*

KAREN:

That was a really strange little scene. Yeah.

JARRAH:

"I mean have you ever thought about when Dr. Pulaski" and Troi goes like "Oh basically she's just very caring and dedicated" and Picard goes "Maybe *too* caring and dedicated."

GRACE:

For a doctor? *laughs*

JARRAH:

And we got to like the opening credits, I watched this last night, I said to my friend I'm like "Did I miss something? Did she do something?" And it was like "No that was just a random interaction." And it's like he's kind of set like even six or seven episodes into that season. It's still like "I don't know that I like this lady. Maybe I can get other people to like justify that I don't like her?"

GRACE:

"She's old and mysterious and I don't care for it at all."

JARRAH:

And I think like she behaves in a way that's really awesome in this episode, and it's supposed to be very admirable that she is very much putting other people first. She is not, you know, going behind Picard's back or anything. She's trying to do what he says but she just doesn't wanna let all these people die and then she just accepts the fact that this is leading to her own mortality. And it's very powerful and she won't let the other people put *themselves* in danger.

GRACE:

Especially when you think of the analogy of people in the medical field putting a lot of themselves into it and having to take a lot of emotional brunt from their work.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So it's definitely like, I would say it's heroic for her. But what I think is hilarious is that so like this is happening and Picard contacts her old commanding officer "Why did she leave?" And the guy goes "Oh I see you haven't run into her stubborn streak. Well it turns out she's a really big fan of yours." And so she always really wanted to be on the Enterprise, and she wouldn't let it go until she got that job. And like *that's* what changes Picard's mind, is knowing *all laugh* that like she's a really big fan.

KAREN:

Not only that as he sits down he goes "Huh!"

GRACE:

"That explains EVERYTHING!"

KAREN:
Everything!

JARRAH:
“I was really insecure about this before but now I know that she secretly admires me. I can afford to be generous in my opinion.”

GRACE:
I mean how many of us have dusted off that old chestnut of obnoxious guy It's like “I'm only obnoxious to you in terms of your obnoxiousness because I secretly admire you and respect you so much. And that's why I keep stealing the paper out of your copier because I respect you.
pause Really.”

JARRAH:
So we didn't talk about that episode in our Pulaski episode which is why I spent a little bit more time on it. But what we did talk about and is obviously still important to mention is that they mention that Pulaski slept with Riker's Dad which-

GRACE:
Never forget.

JARRAH:
Which we must Never forget.

GRACE:
Just never forget.

JARRAH:
And that is awesome because that is another example of an older woman with a sexuality.

KAREN:
And not only that she just puts Riker in his place. She's like “I would have had him in a New York minute” *Grace laughs* She like tamps him down.

GRACE:
It's like “Yeah. Not only am I a sexual being.... *whispering* your dad is!”.

KAREN:
Yeah. Which isn't as much a sight. But yeah, you know, there's a little of that. After a certain era anyhow.

JARRAH:

Yeah, definitely. Definitely going against the grain for depictions of older women. And so is Lwuxana. Do we think- I'm trying to think through like other alien races. Do we miss any- one I noticed in original series, we've done like multiple episodes that talk about the Romulan commander from the Enterprise Incident. But I didn't notice that that actress was 40 which was- is not at all old but was definitely above average for a love interest in TOS.

KAREN:

Big time. Or any. I mean honestly I can't think of very many roles period in TOS that had women above the age of say 30 tops. You know, really. And I think Jarrah, you wrote that Green Girl article you wrote. You know, it I think is true especially in that era. It's like there was nothing for women between college and grandmother. You know, and I think absolutely that came from that whole fear thing of aging. But it's nice to see that at least love interests moved into the 40s when- once you get to TNG and beyond, that they could be.

JARRAH:

Oh yeah. Like you mentioned Phillipa Louvois.

KAREN:

I love her so much. And she's just a fantastic character and she's so self-confident and assured and competent and curious about the world and open minded and yet playful and, you know, I mean I just have always loved that when she looks at Picard and says "Ain't love grand?" I love the way she says it. It is so killer perfect, you know? And she's 42, you know. And so it's like *that* was a huge improvement. That was pretty good even for the 80s actually. And then also Erica Hernandez in Enterprise, Columbia's captain that was Archer's kind of love-ish interest. I mean she's 40 some too. She's a great character too. Too bad that we couldn't get more of her. Yeah. Because she was a good character.

JARRAH:

I love her so much.

KAREN:

So much.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And also again, another woman of color so that, you know, we had a couple of them. Another one is the Romulan commander in Face Of The Enemy, Carolyn Seymour. She's the same age as the actress who played Phillipa Louvois, so that season was a couple seasons later so she would've been like mid 40s. But she's awesome, and I guess like the other Romulan commander, I'm not talking about the other one she played but the one in Enterprise Incident, that in this case, when you're talking about mature woman it goes beyond just like her age to very much like it's a commanding presence.

KAREN:

Right. Could have been played by any age. *And* there were two very strong in-command women who weren't Necheyev, bitter militaristic Harridans. You know, they were not. They were just simply themselves.

JARRAH:

Although you know who I just remembered? We haven't talked about though? Kai Wynn.

GRACE:

Yeeeah. Both of the Kais that we see offer us a very interesting take on what older lady characters can be. Don't they?

JARRAH:

Like Kai Opaca definitely falls into like the wise grandmother. Kai Wynn is **pause** I don't know. What do you think Karen?

KAREN:

Oh man. I think she has her own- but she's the evil. I mean she was-

GRACE:

But she starts out just showing up there to nag and make trouble in her first appearance. And then the character kind of snowballs from there.

KAREN:

Yeah. But she never fills out into much of a three dimensional character like say- I mean they did a better job with Gul Dukat. Facets of his personality even though he's an evil son of the gun. Kai Wynn was just, you know, she was just there to hate.

JARRAH:

I think she has moments of complexity, but it's almost uniformly around the same types of conflicts. About like, what would God really want? And so sometimes, you know, she has moments where she's forced to go to Sisko for advice and reluctantly take it. And she's not actually trying to engineer anything dastardly. And I think those episodes in between the other ones make her an interesting character. But definitely if you had to put her closer to one of those archetypes it would definitely be more of like the Harridan or I don't know. I guess. Just like a villainous woman. She's definitely like an ambitious woman. She's a woman of hubris.

GRACE:

And ambitious women are scary already as we know from all of pop culture.

JARRAH:

Yes. Why didn't you just step aside and let the lovely handsome young Vedeck Bariel take the job?

GRACE:

Why? So selfish of her really.

KAREN:

Well they did keep killing those guys off those. *all laugh*

GRACE:

Fair yeah. It was the defense against the dark arts position of Bajor.

JARRAH:

I mean she's dogmatic but she's also been through an incredible amount. And there are some moments in the show where they talk about it as well and some of the novels where, you know, she's saying like what she can't stand is being judged for this is how she thinks Bajor should go, when she also lived through the occupation. And even though she wasn't fighting the resistance she was defending a faith that was illegal essentially.

KAREN:

Yeah well she's an interesting character.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Female changeling too potentially. Age is very hard to tell, other than we know how old the actress was.

KAREN:

Yeah. I don't know.

JARRAH:

I don't know that I have anything really interesting to say about her and this topic.

KAREN:

No I don't- I mean she just was never given- she's a plot device. Really. So pretty hard to talk about her.

GRACE:

She's our fearless MacGuffin leader. So looking back over these characters we've discussed is there anything that we would really like to see done more of or done better with older women characters in the future of Star Trek and just in the future of media in general.?

KAREN:

I just hope they move forward as they have been, making them more real people. You know, and I think if they just make them right for the character and not for the age we'll be fine.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I think it's cool also to have valuing of traits like, you know, wisdom and not seeing that as like you know, instead of seeing it as like when you get older you're not thinking clearly realizing beyond like a trope of wise grandmother-lieness but just that like "Hey you were there. Let me listen to what you've been through."

KAREN:

Yeah. And talk to people.

GRACE:

I'm just gonna fall back on more active sex lives for older characters. Because if you only see the portrayals in media of them being young and good looking people who have romantic and sexual lives that's pretty messed up considering we've got a huge chunk of the population that is over let's say thirty five. I'm just saying.

JARRAH:

Yeah like not everyone needs to have an active sex life or a partner or children but we need a diversity and the fact is like by and large the representations have been no sex life at all. So.

GRACE:

Or no romantic or love lives, also by extension.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Where it is just kind of like you know a *sweet* kind of dating thing but it's usually more about the man. And usually the woman is still younger. With the exception of Anij in Star Trek Insurrection who's 300 *Karen laughs* also a wise grandmother figure.

GRACE:

But a *sexy* wise grandmother figure.

JARRAH:

Yeah I don't know. I don't see Picard like ripping her clothes off. *Grace laughs* I just see like staring at flowers and holding hands a lot.

KAREN:

Yeah they have that- What? The seven types of love? They're like in the six range or something.

GRACE:

Again we're not allowed to see any kind of sexual relationships between characters that we as the audience don't find sexy. I've got opinions here Ok?

JARRAH:

Well and I mean we know that in Star Trek The audience has traditionally been viewed and explicitly in many cases as adolescent boys. So it's like "Who we think adolescent boys find sexy."

KAREN:

And yet when I wear my Disco shirt out into public every time, the one that's like the one they wear on the show that says disco, I get a shout out from some woman or another from ages 18 to 60.

GRACE:

Know your audience, Star Trek.

KAREN:

So it's like yeah, that is very clearly a huge population that they are catching on to that they understand are a pretty big part of the backbone. So yeah.

JARRAH:

I'm really curious to see what we see in Picard because all the members that have been announced are pretty young, with the exception of Michelle Hurd who is still much younger than Patrick Stewart. So it will be interesting to see where they go there. I'm probably down with whatever. But yeah, it would be good to see more things like challenging those archetypes we talked about or just the characters that can't be boxed into one or the other. And just more often more diverse, more people of color, more people who aren't straight. Georgiou's not, so that's cool.

GRACE:

More people with different body types than, you know, the standard we get on TV please.

KAREN:

Yeah, I think they're going that direction, they're doing a better job.

GRACE:

So, let's wind down on this topic. Are there any final thoughts you want to share with our listeners on this topic?

KAREN:

I think we did a good job covering it.

GRACE:

celebratory All right!

KAREN:

You know, it's just it's still kind of amazing out of seven hundred plus episodes we still have maybe 30 characters, most are one-shot characters, that are above the age of 35 so there's plenty of room for improvement. Because the vast majority of the population of course is aging. So, gotta go somewhere.

JARRAH:

And the more we can like talk to each other and see each other as people and not stereotypes then the better.

KAREN:

Right. Like I said, they just need to write for the character and hire the best people to play them. Yeah. You know, what makes the most logical sense of characters interacting. So I think that- I mean there's just more than one type of diversity that we need to see a better inclusion of.

GRACE:

Right. And ageism in the media is very very real.

KAREN:

I mean it's- you just can see it in movies and television and I really hope that continues to improve.

GRACE:

That about wraps us up for this episode I think. Karen are there any projects or any where people can find your work online if they want to hear more from you?

KAREN:

Oh I'm just a loud mouth online.

GRACE:

That's a good way to do it.

KAREN:

I am on Twitter I'm @K R I N C H U, Karen Chu and on Instagram I post a lot of Star Trek stuff. I am @thewavynation_

GRACE:

Nice! And Jarrah, where can people find you online?

JARRAH:

You can find me @Jarrahpenguin on Twitter. That's J A R R A H -penguin or at Trekkiefeminist .com.

GRACE:

And again I'm Grace and you can find me on Twitter @BoneCrusherjenk or looking into the mirror bemoaning the best years being behind me already.

JARRAH:

If you'd like to contact our show you can contact crew@womenatwarp.com or you can find us at Women At Warp on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. For more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com.

KAREN:

Oh thanks for having me guys.

GRACE:

Thanks for being here!

KAREN:

It's fun.

outro music