

## CHAPTER 4

# Neither Crone nor Cougar: Navigating Intimacy and Ageism on Dating Apps

*Treena Orchard*

Wow beautiful Queen. I admire  
The beauty you captivate in your  
Picture!!! If your personality is  
As beautiful as you are I would  
Definitely like to get to know you.  
I'm interested in being a cub to  
A loving and caring cougar mama.  
(Anonymous)

## INTRODUCTION

The opening quote is a direct message (DM) sent to anthropologist and *New York Times* best-selling author Dr. Wednesday Martin by an adoring male fan. Dr. Martin writes about parenting (2016) and sexuality (2018) and is a prominent social media influencer, but cougar–cub intimate relationships are not in her scholarly wheelhouse. Aware of my dating app research (Orchard, 2019), including age-hypogamous heterosexual relationships, where the woman is older and the man is younger (Orchard, 2020), she thought the DM might be useful in my research. Dr. Martin also invited me to discuss the topic of older women dating younger men on the IGTV (Instagram TV) show she hosts. Building on our shared background in anthropology and mutual desire to destabilize heterosexist stereotypes of older women as asexual crones (Syme et al., 2019) or predatory cougars (Montemurro & Siefken, 2014), we had a lively exchange that included thoughtful questions from viewers. After the show, several people shared similarly

rewarding and empowering experiences in these relationships and thanked us for our smart, inclusive discussion.

Often depicted in contemporary media as exceptional or very rare, age-hypogamous relationships have existed for centuries. Notable older women who have enjoyed these unions include Catherine the Great of Russia, British author George Eliot (the pen name for Mary Ann Evans), and Winston Churchill's mother (Silver, 2019). The most enduring example is that of Mrs. Robinson and Benjamin Braddock from the 1967 film *The Graduate*. Set against iconic Simon and Garfunkel songs like "Mrs. Robinson" and "The Sound of Silence," this story of intergenerational lust and the emptiness of postwar consumer society is one of a handful of films preserved in the US National Film Registry due to its cultural, historical, and aesthetic significance (Stern, 1996). The sultry image of Mrs. Robinson pulling on her nylons during a tryst with Benjamin, a recent college graduate several decades younger than herself, is etched in the minds of Boomers, Gen X-ers, and younger generations who have not seen the film but know famous lines such as "There is a great future in plastics" and "Would you like me to seduce you?" (Grover, 2020; Whitehead, 2014). Although Mrs. Robinson is depicted as a leopard-clad siren for most of the film, she ends up losing Benjamin to her own daughter, a dramatic turn of events immortalized in long, silent frames focused on her weary, almost pathetic appearance. To date, no contemporary film or television series rivals *The Graduate* for its unique rendering of these issues, and its enduring impact reflects our unabated fascination with not only alternate forms of intimacy but also the impossibility of older women as powerful figures socially and sexually.

Despite her fall from sexual grace, Mrs. Robinson is regularly cited in discussions of age-hypogamous relationships and is nearly always depicted as a cougar par excellence—a term that became popular in North America following the publication of *Cougar: A Guide for Older Women Dating Younger Men* (Gibson, 2001). Her name was featured in DateMrsRobinson.com, a dating site for older women and younger men launched in 2012 that now goes by CougarLife.com. The website features beautiful women in vintage outfits that are reminiscent of the late 1960s (i.e., pussycat glasses, hair scarves) and is marketed as a place to connect "modern, confident women with energetic younger men" (Cougar Life, 2022). In this digital space, cougars and their lovers, called cubs, are positioned as sensual members of a community that supports their unique dating lifestyle. Lauded as an opportunity for older women to flip the dominant script that marks them as sexless (Burema, 2018; Gewirtz-Meydan & Ayalon, 2020), cougars are also scorned for their transgressive desires (Alaire, 2019) and for having sexual desires at all (Vares, 2009).

Learning more about these categories and relationships is important given their increasing popularity. A recent American Association of Retired Persons survey of 3,500 heterosexual singles found that 34 percent of women between the ages of 40 and 69 years date younger men and 14 percent of women ages 50 to 59 prefer dating men in their 40s or younger (Witrogen, 2020). This preference is linked with several factors, particularly changing marriage patterns. Fewer people are getting married, and those who do are often older than in the past, which impacts women and men differently (Bialik & Fry, 2019). Women typically have fewer same-aged prospects because men often marry younger women (Alaire, 2019). This so-called “marriage squeeze” compels many women to turn their interests to younger men for sex and companionship (Kershaw, 2009). Another reason these relationships are on the rise is the shift in what men desire in terms of lifestyle and partners. Many younger men do not want to set up families or be the primary breadwinners, and they often prefer older female partners because these women may already have children, they know who they are sexually, and they have a firm sense of what they want in life (Morrison et al., 2015; Orchard, 2020).

My experiences on the Bumble dating app echo these findings, but was I just an item on young men’s sexual wish list? When I posed this question to my dates, they said that they wanted to learn about my career successes, my global travel experiences, and how I achieve balance in my life. They were also eager to learn more about female sexuality and pleasure, which their younger partners rarely shed light on given their lack of confidence and experience. Being appreciated for who I am as well as my erotic capital contrasts with dominant social constructions of older women as sexually undesirable, which was exciting to experience and ponder the significance of. To me, as an anthropologist trained in the histories of sexuality, gender, and culture, the men’s perspectives seemed to align with the divine feminine and goddess worship, ancient belief systems that predate patriarchy and honour the intuitive, sexual energies of women across the lifespan (Eisler, 1987; Savage, 2014). For a visual, think of those “Venus” stone carvings of the female form with exaggerated breasts, hips, and genitals. Although I was not worshipped by these men, which was not my goal, I felt valued for my age and my interests in sexual pursuits that honoured female energies. My dates were eager to connect in these ways; however, they were not always sure how to do so without sacrificing their pre-established notions of masculinity and what sex normally looks like for them—that is, driven largely by male pleasure. Sometimes they expressed competing anxieties about how their desires fit in relation to the shifting social landscape, whereby women are acquiring more power and influence. Many young men are

trying to navigate these cultural and gendered tensions through their intimate relationships, aspects of which are captured in my fieldnotes below.

## REFLEXIVE POSITIONING

This chapter situates my Bumble journey within the relevant research literature about heterosexual age-hypogamous relationships, sexuality, and digital dating (Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Burema, 2018; Fuentes & Sörum, 2019; Tweten, 2018). I also employ autoethnography, which involves individuals making connections between their lived experiences and the broader cultural context that give those experiences meaning. Such accounts highlight the unique contours of the authors' lives and shed interpretive light on the social implications of their personal experiences (Ellis, 1995; Frank, 1995). Unlike traditional research studies with human participants, autoethnographies are typically undertaken without funding and do not require ethics approval given their focus on the lived experiences of the author/creator.

Autoethnography is a useful way to understand the five months I spent on Bumble, from August 2017 to January 2018, because it illuminates the complex phenomenon of digital dating through the nuanced insights of one woman's life: mine. My fieldnotes contain rich observations about how Bumble works alongside humorous, vulnerable self-reflections as a sex-positive woman seeking intimacy and a more nuanced understanding of how men think about gender, sexuality, and older women. Descriptions of my interactions and conversations with some of the men I met are included, which is not uncommon in autoethnographies provided that this information is mainly descriptive and no identifying details are included.

This is the first scholarly analysis of the ways that gender, sexuality, and age intersect on dating platforms to create intimate opportunities for older women and younger men that mirror aspects of the divine feminine. From the moment I entered the digital Bumble hive, compelling and confusing patterns, symbols, and clues about modern sexuality, dating, men, and myself began to emerge. How could I not write about these experiences? My online dating journey began after I secured tenure, which affords me significant occupational security and privilege. However, it does not protect me from being whispered about among colleagues and students or from being harassed by online misogynist trolls who pour hate onto feminists, sex-positive folk, and others beyond the powerful, yet clearly crumbling, patriarchal artifice. I take these risks to share the excitement and the anomie of digital dating and to try and make some sense out of this bizarre, often difficult setting many of us inhabit while searching for sex, love, and who we are as intimate beings (Orchard, 2019, 2020).

## DIVINING THE DIGITAL: RESURRECTING THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL IN AGE-HYPOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIPS

It is an interesting time to be an older woman, and I am reminded at every turn that I am an older woman. When I hit 45, new pop-ups appeared on my media feeds for products to contain my ostensibly unruly, embarrassing ageing body. I have been flooded with ads for incontinence underwear, pharmaceutical options to eradicate the marsupial-sounding menopause “pouch,” and listicles with hot fashion tips for women over 50 featuring scarves, hats, and dark denim. Yet, stories also abound about female celebrities who only get hotter with age (Springer, 2020), women having the best sex of their lives post-menopause (Martin, 2019), and young men who love older women (Patrick, 2019). The lead characters on HBO series such as *Mare of Easttown* (Kate Winslet) and *Olive Kitteridge* (Francis McDormand), whose non-perfect bodies and complex personalities do not preclude them from having interesting sex lives, are other examples of the increasingly diverse representations of intimacy among older women. These competing accounts do not exist in isolation; they overlap with one another and inform the romantic fortunes of older women, including those seeking intimacy with younger men.

I inhabited this overlap while using Bumble, which is marketed as a feminist dating app (Featherstone, 2017) because women using the hetero version contact their male matches first. This fem-forwards approach appealed to me but was unsettling for some men, as reflected in their hostile language and behaviours. Using Bumble during the #MeToo movement undoubtedly shaped my experiences and the misogyny that circulated widely on the platform (Tweten, 2018). The disdain men expressed about women taking the lead in dating seemed to be linked with their fears associated with the “rise of women” (Rosin, 2012) and shifts in the gendered landscape whereby women are assuming greater control in various aspects of society while traditional forms of masculinity are crumbling. Yet many of these men pursued me and sought connections that belied the patriarchal ideologies they inherited. They often wanted me to take control of our encounters and enlighten them in two ways: first, by reducing the pressure for them to conform to prescribed dating rules that position men as the active players; and second, by being brought into my experiential realm, which they described as “hot,” “interesting,” “cool,” “smart,” “travelled,” “cultured,” “wise,” “confident,” and “successful.” Our interactions allowed these men to engage with a self-assured older woman who was interested in sharing intimate experiences that honoured female pleasure and circumvented traditional socio-sexual expressions of masculinity.

When making sense of these experiences, the divine or sacred feminine emerges as a useful framework. These terms refer to ideological systems centred on nurturing, generative female power and living in relational equanimity with nature and one another (Ruether, 2005). Historical regions in the Middle East, North Africa, China, and India are among the places where this matriarchal orientation flourished. Riane Eisler discusses the divine feminine in her ground-breaking book *The Chalice and The Blade* (1987), using archeological evidence to explore partnership/chalice and dominator/blade models of human organization. The former is based on principles of linking, sustaining life, and diversity, while the latter is hierarchically structured and equates masculinity with violence and control (Eisler, 1987, pp. xvii–xx). Around 5000 BCE, the partnership model was overshadowed by the dominator system, which has clearly reached its limits, as evidenced by the rejection of long-standing patriarchal norms like sexual stereotypes, binary gender roles, and traditional relationship structures centred on monogamy and marriage.

Eisler’s model resonates with the young men I met, who were interested in exploring different expressions of sexuality and masculinity through their intimate relationships with me. However, it is important to view the divine feminine, especially its binary nature and potentially essentialist ideologies regarding gender, race, and class (Debold, 2011), through a critical lens. Many sacred feminine practitioners, especially those on social media platforms, promote sexual healing sessions to ignite the goddess within that seem driven more by commercial pursuits than a genuine engagement with traditional knowledge about nature, sacred sexuality, and energies. This is reflected in the array of yoni stones being peddled and generic empowerment workshops offered by young, thin, white women with considerable social capital (Stein, 2020a, 2020b). This culturally narrow, wildly expensive “goop” version of the divine feminine is not what I am referring to when discussing the feelings and ideas I channelled and shared with many of the young men I encountered on Bumble.

## STICKY, SEXY, SAD: ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS ON SEX, GENDER, AND AGE INSIDE THE BUMBLE HIVE

My fieldnotes are organized chronologically and verbatim from the original record, minus the odd edit for clarity and narrative flow. They reveal compelling information about the contemporary terrain of sexuality, gender, and the ways digital technologies like Bumble facilitated and sometimes thwarted my attempts to cultivate a love life. I had some incredible experiences on the app, but it was a steep learning curve technically and socially to interact with so many people in a

realm that often felt unreal and fell short of what I desired. The excerpts are structured thematically to align with the aims of this chapter, beginning with learning to Bumble and finding my digital dating groove. Next, I discuss gender and power in flux, followed by divine connections and a sexual interlude. The final theme features my reflections on the overall Bumble experience as I made my way out of the hive three Januarys ago.

## Preliminary Insights

Treena—08/30/2017, 7:28 a.m.: Since lowering the age on this Bumble thing to 30, shit has become even more real. Mama is busy!!! There's no way I can keep this up and keep my job—ha ha! I'm writing away about it though and want to make a book about this a reality xoox.

Friend—08/30/2017, 8:53 a.m.: Lol! Can't wait to read about your Bumble escapades!

(Text exchange between myself and a friend two weeks after I joined Bumble)

Like any game, and that's what Bumble is in many ways, there are implicit rules and features designed to move players through the interface en route to a successful outcome: a "match." But so much else comes into play, especially for those of us who have a wealth of dating knowledge that has nothing to do with swipe culture. Fourscore and 20 years ago, I quite easily picked up many a man from many a bar, workplace, and other social venues with little more than ... well, myself. No phone, no prior messages, just stone-cold pickups. These experiences and my usually short-lived relationships are all I have to guide me. Bumble provides very little insights about how to actually play beyond selecting age, gender, and distance, and sending periodic messages to users about being active and getting our Buzzz on.

But where to look for help? We're showered with social media information about men, women, sex, living our best lives, and not sacrificing ourselves for guys who don't love the goddess within. Is any of that realistic? I'm just curious because while it sounds awesome, in truth, finding a god of my own seems mighty challenging. I'm not looking for one anyway ... I'm just looking for a hot, semi-interesting guy to sleep with and maybe something more. Is that going to be as difficult as my spidey-senses are telling me? In "how-to" articles about how to start opening conversations, it's often recommended that we ask questions of our potential suitors to generate interest. But what questions, especially when they

give us so little to go on? Also, in their profiles, many men note their profound dislike of being asked “boring” questions, like “What do you do?” or “How’s your night?” So, what to say?!

## Gender and Power in Flux

After an in-person meeting, one guy talked about being hurt and feeling vulnerable as well as intimidated by the fact that women have a lot of power. He said, “Women don’t need men to have babies, to pay their bills, or to do that much.... What are men for, anyways?” I found this more than a little sad and told him that we need men for many things that matter, like love, emotional support, sex, a partner in this journey of life. The death or end of men idea lingers in the mind of this guy and that of many I’ve met, which surprised me because I thought that Millennials had these things figured out. He used the word *independence* frequently, which didn’t carry an overtly positive or negative vibe but was certainly charged. Another guy said that women typically have the last word when couples make decisions about important stuff—is that true?

These shifts in power relations are wreaking havoc on men and my dating life. Men seem to feel useless and then behave in ways that sort of confirm that. And women must exchange their independence for utterly disappointing love lives among men who don’t understand them or fear/resent them. This salmon swimming upstream situation sees us fighting or feigning to put ourselves together (to quote the film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*)—literally through sex and socially through dating practices on apps we use but don’t fully understand. This is occurring amid deep changes in the field of gendered relations, where things are diverse but where we’re also far less evolved than I realized. Misogyny, for instance, runs strong in this confusing river.

Another date repeatedly mentioned the impact of social media and celebrities on how people act and think about themselves and others. As he said, women adjust all aspects of their bodies to look like the Kardashians and then ask for “real” men when they themselves are unreal or not “fully real.” I listened to him but felt like saying, “Come on, it’s gotta be about something deeper than social media.” But the way he spoke made it apparent how omnipotent the media is as a cultural force. It also made it clear how threatened and confused this guy was about the seemingly unfair or contradictory sexual narratives about gender and culturally constructed notions of beauty and/or bodies.

To successfully fold Bumble or any feminist/equity-oriented reality into our existing cultural matrices, a series of rather seismic shifts must occur. Obviously,

these don't happen overnight, nor do they happen evenly, but this experience has revealed how uncomfortable men are with these shifts, which are nowhere complete and began decades before the men I'm meeting were born. It's quite compelling to learn about the social inheritance of these gendered fears. It's not as simple as the idea that men are douches and seem afraid to connect, which is a common refrain in media discourse. It's a whole slew of things that involves our relations to each other as well as structural-level socio-sexual and cultural change.

The women's movement has been addressing these issues for some 40 years, but the continuation of gender gaps, violence against women and others, and endless forms of male aggression reveal that equity is far away. Something important to remember is that it's not just that women don't have equality in all facets of life, but new ways of being a man have been slow to surface as solid, safe, and acceptable across generations and cultural groups. When women's movements and other big political change occurs, it takes forever for society to truly adjust, despite the surface view of seemingly quick acceptance of these new ideas. "Let's develop an app to get women ahead, what a great idea."

So many of these men have the idea that women's empowerment takes away from their value as men. It's such a shame that this simplistic model was continuing to circulate in 2017. Our equity and growth are hard-fought outcomes of being oppressed and denied access to what many men have easy access to: power. We're not taking anything away from them; in fact, women's experiences in the shifting terrain of gendered power don't have much to do with them at all. I only learned this in person, the only real way for people to open up. These things could never come through in a few lines of text, those abbreviated lines, those condensed back-and-forths. They don't permit a full exploration of anything. I was sitting a few centimetres away from this beautiful man, who was struggling with not just a breakup but also a life in major transition. Only in that shared space, where he felt safe and welcomed to share, could I hear him and how he told his story to me.

This is so central in making the connection, which is ultimately what all of this is about, for me anyway: connecting. He opened up to me, and I wasn't surprised to get a message from him later saying he felt comfortable with me. That's because of what I do for a living, because we were in my place—calm and well designed—and because I'm also confident in myself. He was safe and I let him know I care, which are essential ingredients in communication and intimacy.

## **Sexual Interlude**

And then came a man very unlike the others, in both demeanour and spirit: quiet, cultured, a true cat person. He was also the youngest at 29 years of age. He stepped

across the threshold of the back door of my apartment building carrying a bottle of wine, and he was exceedingly polite. When I said I do not drink but he was welcome to, he declined, and the bottle sat on the kitchen countertop amid the dishes that accumulated as the day turned into night. It was a time of Nepalese dumplings, an interrupted viewing of the Marvel movie *Logan*, pleasant repartee about different chunks of our lives, and several intense coming-togethers. I found myself drawn to his face, touching it often and reaching for it in the dark as we cuddled under the sheets and talked about our favourite films, basketball teams and players, cuisines, our middle names, and desert island albums.

This exchange of things we like, things we do, and bits of who we are felt almost juvenile. But it wasn't about behaving below an age grade or in a way that belies the complex, diverse lives we both lead in the adult world to which we belong. It was just refreshingly simple—two people connecting through one another's life after intimate sex. It is a soft, inviting atmosphere into which many of us have stepped. It's a special place where my body and mind are invited to just be together, alongside those of the person beside me. He was my only overnight guest, a prolonged swansong as I drift out of the hive. Not once did this man check his phone, and he said "thank you" after everything I gave him. I fed him, caressed him, and plied him with strong coffee in the morning.

## End-Game Reflections

There is a strange aversion to talking about Bumble among my partners. If I raise the issue of going off the app, it seems or feels like I'm shining a light on the fact that we used an app to meet, which still feels a bit shady or embarrassing. Why does admitting what is obvious make me feel more vulnerable? So many questions abound: Do I mean anything? Do you mean anything? Is this meeting or conversation only the product of a game? Because it originated as a game, does it have to remain so?

I have finally exited the hive, and although it feels great, it doesn't just "end" there. I sat on my living room rug and wept following a phone call and then a text message from the two men I really liked. The feelings that swirled inside me included disbelief, a little bit of fear, happiness, wonder, and pride. They grew out of the place in me where finally, after so many months and years even, I was able to accept and receive true kindness and connection.

I was crying because these men were showing me that I mattered and that they cared about me, which is very much tied to my own complex feelings about myself as someone who is good and who deserves love. I've thought these things for a very long time, but to feel it reflected through the behaviours and good intentions of

people I want to be with in one capacity or another is truly magical. It's no small thing, and I agree with my counsellor, who said that this journey has been like a pilgrimage. Actually, she began by saying how touching my reflections were and then asked me what the definition of a pilgrimage is. "A perilous journey to a sacred place," I replied, realizing that with each syllable, I had just described my own Bumble quest.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter offers insights on approaches to intimacy and identity among older women that are more meaningful than the ageist, sexist constructs of the cougar or the crone. Although the cougar category offers a way for ageing women to (re)claim aspects of their sexual subjectivity that are absent in the crone narrative, it does not necessarily advance affirmative ideas about sexuality. This is because cougars are framed as transgressive figures who contravene sexual, gendered, and age-related practices within the context of heteronormative dating practices that assign active roles to men (Montemurro & Siefken, 2014). Their transgression makes them titillatingly taboo, but it is also why their sexual appetite is rendered dangerous or ridiculed instead of being recognized as evidence of agential power. These disparaging attributes are further reinforced by the fact that this version of female sexual desire is reduced to animal form, a powerful symbol of dehumanization (Tipler & Ruscher, 2019). A final reason why cougars are scorned has to do with ageism, which is an under-problematized issue within intersectional feminist analysis.

Yet all is not lost for the Mrs. Robinsons among us, given the many opportunities that exist for older women to experience sex and intimacy in ways that contest oppressive patriarchal constructs and feel pleasurable on their own terms. As discussed above, these opportunities are shaped by factors that include changing marital trends (Kershaw, 2009), the "Millennial shift" in sexual scripts among younger generations that feature less domineering masculinities (Anderson et al., 2021; Morrison et al., 2015), and the upsurge of social as well as scientific interest in older women's sexuality (Martin, 2019; Rosin, 2012; Vares, 2009). Another contributing factor is dating platforms themselves, which are reconfiguring how people experience age-hypogamous relationships, gender, and the broader socio-cultural changes that inform who we are in these digital times.

The autoethnographic fieldnotes featured in this chapter illuminate the challenges of using dating apps like Bumble, the empowering opportunities they can offer older women, and the ways young men are struggling to consolidate their sexual desires and selfhood in relation to the increasingly powerful status of women.

The structural fissures regarding gender and power that I observed, namely, that many men have inherited deep-seated fears about and resentment towards women, were disturbing and instructive. It was only as a member of the Bumble hive that I learned of these complexities in such an embodied, intimate way, which reveals how these apps both mirror and mediate our increasingly digitized lives. These virtual landscapes are also productive spaces through which users can usurp harmful elements of the patriarchy, including outmoded sexual, ageist, and gendered scripts. On this platform, millions of people have their fingers, literally, on the technical and emotive pulses that direct the ways in which we create, circumvent, or happily crush outdated patterns regarding intimacy, social connection, gendered identity, and the ways we experience ourselves in the world.

Using Bumble enabled me to connect with hundreds of young men, who shared their insights about emergent relationship structures, sexual pleasures, and the subjectivities discussed above. Among the most exciting, unexpected aspects of my time inside the Bumble hive was learning what I represented to many of my paramours: a source of respected knowledge and experience, occupational success, a sexy woman with good energy, and a safe place where they could talk about and enjoy being themselves as men whose identities are in flux at micro and macro levels. These encounters resemble aspects of the divine feminine and the partnership model (Eisler, 1987), which is a pleasurable, equitable, and meaningful alternative to the worn-out crone/cougar dichotomy. They also align with recent research into sexuality among older people more broadly, which is far more exciting, satisfying, and varied than the dominant discourse would have us believe (Martin, 2019; Meier & Barry, 2017; Syme et al., 2019; Vares, 2009).

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are age-hypogamous relationships a “thing” among your age group? Can you think of any famous examples of these generation-jumping relationships? If so, how were they portrayed in the media?
2. Did this discussion enrich your understanding of how older women and/or Millennial guys use dating apps? Did it align with the dating experiences of any older women you know?
3. What were your previous thoughts about sexuality among older women? Did this chapter challenge those previous assumptions? If so, how?
4. Who are some influential role models for young cisgender men to learn about alternate forms of masculinity? How about other gendered groups of men?

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## INVITATIONS TO GO DEEPER

1. Have you used a dating app? In what ways, if any, was your experience similar to the author's? In what ways, if any, was your experience different? What do you think might account for the similarities or differences?
2. Do you think it's important to resist certain sexual and gendered stereotypes that make unconventional intimate relationships socially unacceptable or silenced? If so, why, and how can we resist these restrictive social constructions?
3. Discuss the tensions between the cougar label, which some women find empowering and others find oppressive, and the idea of the sexually vacant crone. Are similar constructs applied to older men? If so, how are they similar or different to the ones associated with women?
4. What impact has the #MeToo movement had on women's feelings of safety related to disclosing abusive experiences? Do you think elements of the divine feminine could be used to increase women's sense of sexual freedom and expression in this regard?

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## READ MORE

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## LISTEN MORE, WATCH MORE

- Cougar and the Milf* podcast, hosted by the Cougar (Astrid) & the Milf (Blythe), 2017–present, 21 episodes.
- The Graduate*, directed by Mike Nichols, 1967.
- Harold and Maude*, directed by Hal Ashby, 1971.
- “Maggie May,” performed by Rod Stewart, from the album *Every Picture Tells a Story*, 1971.

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