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## Glossy covers reflect new definition of youth

By GREG MORAGO Copyright 2010 Houston Chronicle

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Julia Roberts on the cover of Elle.

First 40 was the new 30, then 50 was. Now even 60 is ridiculously being touted as the new 30. In its desire to appear ever younger, America keeps pushing back the clock and obsessing about youth. Crow's feet and age spots? Not on my AARP face!

But age is a huge factor in pop culture, especially in the cutthroat realms of entertainment, fashion and beauty. So it raised a few eyebrows when three well-known glossy magazines — Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and Elle - all chose to put women older than 40 on their covers in September, traditionally the issue with the most ads of the year. Sure, the cover girls happen to be Halle Berry, Jennifer Aniston and Julia Roberts (none slouches in the beauty department), but it was enough for the Hollywood Reporter to suggest a seismic shift in the youthquake.

"Putting these actresses on the cover of arguably the most important issue of the year sends a message that though we live in a youth-obsessed culture, there's still something to be said for the enduring appeal of women who have been in the public eye for nearly 20 years," the Hollywood Reporter wrote.

A publishing trend? No. Shocking? Hardly.

"What's really happening is that those women are not considered old. Forty isn't old," said Elayne Rapping, professor of American studies and pop-culture expert at the University of Buffalo. "What's happening is that it's more a cultural move toward aging. When you say 'over 40' I'm not sure that is considered old anymore. It used to be."

That may be music to the ears of Berry, 44, Aniston, 41, and Roberts, 42.

That these actresses still have box-office clout and cover-girl cachet after 40 is a reflection of their aging fans, said Gerald Celente, a trend forecaster and founder/director of Trends Research Institute.

"What it suggests is that the readership is older, just as the viewership of TV is getting older," he said. "The reality also is that these are lovely ladies in great shape. Women at that age are very sensuous. They're more sure of themselves, they know who they are, and it shows in the way they carry themselves."

It doesn't hurt that Berry, Aniston and Roberts don't look like women in their 40s, Rapping said. "Look at Michelle Obama. She's over 40, and she's a symbol now of youthfulness and style," she said.

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But don't kid yourself, Rapping added: Even as America is graying, it is still very much a youth-obsessed culture. "Women are trying to stay as young as they can for as long as they can," she said. "It's about being as young as possible and as thin as possible."

Celente rejects the idea of America as a youth-focused culture. "We should be a quality-obsessed culture. America is becoming Snooki stupid," he said, referring to the breakout star of MTV's *The Jersey Shore*. "It's one of the biggest mistakes that America is making."

Is Celente's rail against youth culture at a time when Snooki is arguably the country's hottest celebrity a pop paradox? Perhaps. But let's take a look at the covers of other fashion glossies for September. Marie Claire has the 24-year-old Mary-Kate Olsen; Cosmopolitan has 29-year-old Jessica Alba; Lucky has 30-year-old Jessica Simpson. And W? It has a triple gatefold of eight up-and-coming Hollywood starlets - average age 24.

Ah, youth!

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