

Caitlyn Jenner needs to grow up

Ellen Goodman 8:43 a.m. EDT June 16, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy of the Conversation Project)

BOSTON — Have you noticed that the first 65-year-old cover girl on *Vanity Fair* was actually born a boy? Is that transsexual progress or just trans-sexism?

Yes, I am happy that Caitlyn Jenner has finally come out as a female, thereby risking her net worth. As one cartoonist suggested, she is now likely to be paid exactly 77 cents on the dollar.

More to the point, as Jon Stewart noted, the silicon-cleaved and made-over Olympian is now the sweetheart of the

Twittersphere and cable chatteratti where people are talking about nothing but her glam girl status.

In Stewart's words: "It's really heartening to see that everyone is willing to not only accept Caitlyn Jenner as a woman but to waste no time in treating her like a woman. You see, Caitlyn, when you were a man, we could talk about your athleticism, your business acumen. But now you're a woman and your looks are really the only thing we care about." Bingo.

In that vein, let's remember the remarks of the woman who chose the clothes for the photo shoot. The *Vanity Fair* dresser said: "The one thing that makes it easier to dress someone is proportion.

Caitlyn's proportions are fashion proportions, really." She's tall, slim, narrow-hipped, kind of ideal to dress.

Yes! A fashion designer's dream come true! A boy's hips and a girl's boobs.

But as an (even) older woman, may I add a little something to the sexism? A little ageism perhaps? May I ask why Caitlyn couldn't come out as a 65-year-old woman rather than a 25-year-old starlet?

A factoid: Americans are turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 a day. If the female half of that demographic is looking for a role model, it's not a Medicare Babe but a woman facing down the truly Olympic challenge of aging gracefully.

The fashion industry basically stops at Forever 21. The shoe designers loved and left us like heels.

If we need to go Hollywood to cast an iconic older woman, couldn't we have Helen Mirren at 69 or Meryl Streep at 65?

Or better yet, Candice Bergen at 69, who admits to being 30 pounds over her Murphy Brown weight? "I live to eat," she announces. "No carb is safe — no fat either." Being overweight is probably more of a challenge in this culture than bending gender. You go girl.

Instead Caitlyn looks more like Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Boulevard" playing an over-the-hill actress when she was only 50!

The editors of Vanity Fair were not the only ones who transformed Bruce into their fantasy Caitlyn. Where, oh, where was photographer Annie Leibowitz in all this? What was she thinking? At 65 herself, the long-term companion of the late uber-intellectual Susan Sontag, Leibowitz surely has more to say and show about aging than her ingénue subject.

Well, here's the thing. I am sorry that Caitlyn missed out on being a 20- or 30- year-old woman. But I wish she could catch up.

While she was winning gold medals, many in her generation were raised on the idea that "when I am an old woman I shall wear purple." For many, 65 is not the new 30 but the new freedom from the extreme sport of femininity.

At 65, most women are thinking less about breast implants and more about hip transplants. The makeover that produces the most debate in that circle is not about sexuality but about whether to let our roots grow out. It's about being ourselves, not what society expects. It's not about squeezing yourself into some required image and outfit. It's about letting yourself go. At long last.

Dear Caitlyn, welcome to our gender. Now that you're one of the girls, don't you want to become one of the women?

Ellen Goodman, a former columnist with The Washington Post Writers Group, is a founder of The Conversation Project. www.theconversationproject.org. Contact her at ellengoodman1@me.com.