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# Social class in female star personas and the cross-class romance formula in Depression-era America

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**Abstract**

Female stars of the 1930s differed in the number of cross-class romance films in which they appeared, the frequency in which they played the poor or the wealthy side of the romantic couple, and the relationship of the cross-class formula and the stars' roles within them to their star personas. Social class was one component in stars' personas and its importance varied among stars, as did the particular class, upper or lower, with which they were associated. The stars are placed in four categories ranging from those stars who appeared in ten or more cross-class romances (Crawford, Stanwyck, Lombard) to those who appeared in two or less. Fan magazines emphasized the working-class background of the stars who frequently played the poor female roles in cross-class romances and presented upper-class personas of those stars who more frequently played the wealthy female roles. Reports on the marriages of the stars corresponded to motifs in their cross-class romance films, including the extent of the star's gentrification and glamorization and the star's willingness to sacrifice her career or lifestyle for her husband. Tensions between formula and persona were resolved by an emphasis on the stars' domesticity and adaptation to their husband when they married and the stars' independence and importance of their career when they were single or divorced.

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