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# Julianne Moore on Married, Middle-Aged Anxiety

By [Steve Pond](#)

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*In all the talk over whether this is the year that Annette Bening will finally win an Oscar, Julianne Moore has sometimes gotten short shrift. Moore shares the screen (and a bed) with Bening in "The Kids Are All Right," with the two playing a longtime couple whose relationship is tested when Moore's character has an affair with the sperm donor (Mark Ruffalo) who fathered both of their children.*

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*A four-time Oscar nominee, Moore has lately been the subject of much dialogue about whether she should campaign in the Best Actress or Best Supporting Actress category – though Focus Features is clear that both are Best Actress contenders.*

*Lisa Cholodenko's movie, which Moore has been involved with for its entire five-year development process, is clearly based around a pair of lead performances, regardless of what kind of positioning might give its actresses a better shot to win.*

### **Have you been paying any attention to the discussions about whether you should campaign in the supporting or lead category?**

You can't pay attention to that stuff. You *can't*. That's out of your hands. That's a decision that everybody else in the room makes for you.

### **I think you're betraying the movie if you pretend that one of these roles is a lead and the other is supporting.**

Exactly, yeah. It's definitely an ensemble movie, and it's definitely about these two women who have this relationship.

### **You were involved from the first draft of the script, weren't you?**

The very first. Lisa and I met at one of those Women in Film lunches, and I approached her and said, "Why didn't I see the script for 'High Art'?" I loved that movie and "Laurel Canyon," and I said, "Listen, I really admire your work, and I would love to work with you one day." We hit it off and stayed in touch, and then probably about a year after that, she sent me the first draft of "The Kids Are All Right" and said, "I really want you to do this movie, and which part do you want to play?" And right away, I said, "I want to play Jules."

### **Why Jules?**

She's very warm and loving and soulful, but so lost. That was what was so appealing to me, that she was somebody in complete limbo, and you didn't know which way she was going to go. And she couldn't even ground her anxiety. She didn't know why she felt so unsettled, so disenfranchised, disconnected. That idea of somebody being in the middle of a crisis, and not being able to articulate it, it was really evident to me that I wanted to do that.

Of course, that was a very long five years ago.

### **What delayed it?**

There was a long process of getting the financing, getting it going, in the middle of it Lisa had a baby.

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And these days, it's all so precarious. You can get right up to shooting, and especially that year we were doing it, things were falling apart left, right and center. You just didn't know. You can lose \$500,000 and the whole thing falls apart.

### Did you ever think it was dead?

No, I have a history of movies like this. Most of my films have been independent films, and I'm married to somebody who makes independent films. I know how hard it is to get the money, but I also know how rare really great material is. So when I become attached to something and I care about it, I really stay with it.

And luckily this was a part that I could not age out of, which was great. (*laughs*) I could hang onto it, and when it's a filmmaker that you believe in and you care about, that doesn't come around all that often.

### Lisa told me that she didn't thinking about Annette Bening until many drafts later, when the script evolved.

Yeah. 'Cause when we finally had it back together after Lisa had her baby, we had a meeting about it. And because we had been together for so long, she very generously said, "Let's talk about who should play opposite you." The script was always funny, but it had become progressively more so, and she said, "What do you think of Annette Bening?"



I said, "I think that's a great idea. I don't know her, but let me email her." (*laughs*) Because it's so much faster. As great as our agents are, if you wait for an offer for an independent film to go through, it takes a long time to go through the channels. But if you get an email from an actor that you know even casually, I'll read something right away.

I wrote her a nice email saying how much Lisa and I wanted her to do it, and she responded right away and then she was in.

### I know the schedule was tight, but your relationship does feel very lived-in.

That's the point. That's what you want. They've been together for 20 years, and you need to be able to feel the love and the familiarity and the difficulties and the whatever. And yeah, we didn't have a lot of time to prepare for it, but we certainly had a lot to draw on with our own histories. We've both been married for a long time, we're both parents. Even the kids, I think they were both living at home at the time, so that whole thing of a teenager living with your mom and ad, that was very familiar to them too. And that's what you draw on, really. I think it felt very easy for Annette and I to be a couple.

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**They're a gay couple, but that's sort of taken for granted in the story – what happens to them could just as easily happen to ...**

Anybody. And it does! It happens to plenty of people. I think that was one of the things I loved about the movie so much, that at its heart it's an exploration of what it means to be married and middle-aged. A lot happens after you've been with somebody for 20 years. A lot of drama. Everybody hits big huge bumps, and either they get through it and they stay married, or they split up.

So here was an exploration of what happens when somebody does something that could explode the relationship and the family, and that, to me, was really moving. When Jules has that big speech about how hard marriage is, she says you hurt the ones you love the most. And she does. This family is everything to Jules, absolutely everything. And she's jeopardized it by being so lost and so fragile and grasping at things, she's actually endangered her entire world.

And people do that. We make incredible mistakes. Sometimes you're forgiven, sometimes not – and I loved the chance to explore that in a relationship, straight or gay or whatever, it doesn't really matter. That exploration is at the center of a lot of our lives.

**When you have a moment as crucial as that final speech of Jules', but you're working on only a 23-day schedule, did you have enough time? Did you feel rushed?**

You feel terrified. I had three takes, I think, two or three takes. So you just think, hope I don't blow this! But it's a situation I've been in a lot, because of the size of movies that I make. And it's part of the process.

**Did you feel as if you got it in those two or three takes?**

You never do. You hope so. But I don't think I've ever walked away from something thinking, yeah, I aced it! You just think, well, I put something out there.

And that speech was difficult tonally, because it can't be too sad. If it's maudlin, it's not funny. And that speech needed to be moving and funny. Lisa was very clear that we were making a comedic piece. That's not to say that it wasn't realistic and human, but we really wanted the humor to be a part of it. So you think, okay, I need to hit this, but I need to hit it on the side to make sure it's funny.

**So are you hopeful that when the movie's over, Jules and Nic repair their relationship and go on?**

I think they do. I definitely do. I think it's definitely Lisa's view that these two are not going anywhere. In fact, the last line in the movie came in very late, that scene where their son says, "You guys shouldn't split up," and we go, "Why?" And he says, "You're too old."

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And I remember when I read that, I called Lisa and I was like, "Oh my God, it's just perfect." She doesn't resolve it, but you realize, that's the truth. They aren't going anywhere. They've invested so much time in each other, in their family, in that life. They're gonna get through it.