

Oscars sure to spark debate about categories

By JEFF STRICKLER Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

Have the Academy Awards for supporting actor and actress lost their focus?

The controversy has grown in recent years, and now is sure to be cranked up another notch in light of the Oscars won by Geena Davis for "The Accidental Tourist" and Kevin Kline for "A Fish Called Wanda."

The argument is not about their performances; both were strong. The question is whether they were competing in the proper categories. If not, is that fair to the other competitors?

Critics of the nominating system have complained that Davis and Kline had starring roles, not supporting ones. The implication is that because they had much higher visibility in their roles, they had an advantage over their less-prominently featured competitors.

There have been calls in the past for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to designate supporting and starring roles during the nomination process. So far the academy has resisted, instead providing an open ballot in which voters are free to write down any name in any category they feel is appropriate.

Before the nominations, the studios bombard the trade press with "for your consideration" ads that promote people for specific categories. Studio publicists freely admit that they tailor these campaigns to increase their studio's chances of winning. In other words, if they think the competition for best actress is too strong for Davis to

have a shot at winning, they will promote her for best supporting actress.

The fuzziness surrounding the supporting Oscars can be traced to the proliferation of the ensemble cast. One of the longtime standards for determining a supporting role is the amount of time the actor spends on screen. Ensemble casts split up the on-screen time so much that often everyone in the cast can be considered a supporting player. That was the common complaint when both Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe were nominated from "Platoon" two years ago and in 1984 when Sam Shepard was nominated for "The Right Stuff" and Glenn Close from "The Big Chill."

Kline falls into this ensemble-actor category. Although "A Fish Called Wanda" was labeled John Cleese's movie, Cleese wrote a script that spread around the action and the good jokes. As a result, Kline could be considered as much the star as anyone else who was in the movie.

While there's precedent for Kline's position, the inclusion of Davis in the supporting category is hard to reconcile on any grounds. She was billed in the credits below Kathleen Turner, but everyone in Hollywood knows that the order of the credits is determined as much by the bargaining power of the actor's agent as the significance of the



Geena Davis AP LaserPhoto

Davis clearly was the female lead. She was on screen much more than Turner. Her character was the one William Hurt's character played off during his metamorphosis. She even got the guy in the happy-ever-after ending; if that's not a designation of a leading lady, what is?

'Roseanne' again top-rated show in Niensens

NEW YORK (AP) — A high-rated NCAA championship basketball game helped CBS come in second in last week's Nielsen, but didn't budge NBC from No. 1, even though ABC's "Roseanne" was the top-rated show of the week.

Last year, the NCAA championship game was enough to give CBS a first for the week. This year, the game had a somewhat lower rating, but was still in the top 10.

According to the A.C. Nielsen Co., the top-rated shows of the week were: "Roseanne" ABC, "The Cosby Show" NBC, "Cheers" NBC, "A Different World" NBC, "60 Minutes" CBS, "NCAA Championship — Michigan vs. Seton Hall" CBS, "Golden Girls" NBC, "Empty Nest" NBC, "L.A. Law" NBC and "Murder, She Wrote" CBS.

"Roseanne" had the highest rating of the week, 23.3, but a lower share, 35, than "Cosby" with a 38. Each rating point represents 904,000 households with television. The share is a per-

centage of sets in use. NBC said the "Cosby" rating was lower because of the switch to daylight saving time affecting shows that are on at the beginning of prime-time when in many parts of the country it's still light outside. "Roseanne" is on an hour into prime time.

ABC's "Columbo" did well, coming in 12th for the week. But the bad news for ABC is "Moonlighting," which went on hiatus earlier this year, then moved to Sunday night where it is in the bottom 10 of the Nielsen ratings with a 6.2 and a 10 share. Only two other shows, both of them on ABC, rank lower: "HeartBeat" and "Men."

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Television tonight

Table listing TV programs for Thursday, April 13, 1989, including channels, times, and program titles.