

ECED7006. The Social (Re) Production of inequality. Assessment 3. Sally Gordon (1100769).

Within this assignment a critical discussion will be explored including three images which are seen to perpetuate stereotypical attitudes surrounding the menopause transition within society. The main sociological perspectives linked to equality and diversity will be explored including what defines equality and diversity. Consideration will be explored regarding how social inequality is reproduced as well as how power and control impact upon a fair society. The three chosen images are representative of how women of menopausal age can and have historically often been viewed within society (Goodman, 2020; Whiley *et al*, 2022 and Mullins, 2022). This topic and these images have been chosen due to a feminist constructivist paradigm and approach and infuriation towards these stereotypical types of images still being portrayed by the media plus a personal interest surrounding the subject of the menopausal transition overall regarding and supporting inclusivity and equity and diversity surrounding the topic. The menopausal transition is a time when women of varying ages dependant upon individual health concerns, but naturally occurring between the ages of 45 and 55 cease to be fertile and stop having periods. This is a time when women stop having monthly menses and many but not all women may go through significant physiological and psychological changes due to lower hormone levels sometimes spanning over a decade (Nhs.Uk, 2023). The symptoms can be severe, affecting and sometimes damaging relationships, work life and social lives and include over 34 symptoms (Womenshealth.Gov.2021). According to Menopausematters.co.Uk (2023) about 70 % of women may experience menopausal symptoms. The most common symptoms include hot flushes, mood swings, brain fog, anxiety, depression, sleep problems, urinary tract problems, vaginal dryness and pain, weight gain, loss of identity, tearfulness, headaches, hair loss, Palpitations, osteoporosis, joint stiffness and aches and pains, night sweats, incontinence, sexual problems including lack of libido, lack of confidence, cardiac disease and anger (Healthline.com, 2020). Women can go through a huge psychological shift when they cannot produce children anymore and experience excessive symptoms. Due to the physical and psychological experiences that women can suffer throughout this period of life it is often viewed in a negative light by society and causes negative attitudes towards women (Sood *et al* , 2016). The objectification of this group means when they are old and no longer fertile they may be seen as less valuable and passed their use by date, often to the demeaning and patronizing jokes and attitudes of colleagues

and partners (Mullins, 2022). According to the Office of national statistics (ONS.Gov, 2021) suicide rates within this age specific group of women between the ages of 45 to 54 have risen by 6% in the last 20 years and are known to have the highest suicide rate among females. With women between the ages of 50 to 54 having the highest suicide rate in the UK (Committees.Parliament.UK, 2021).

Image one.

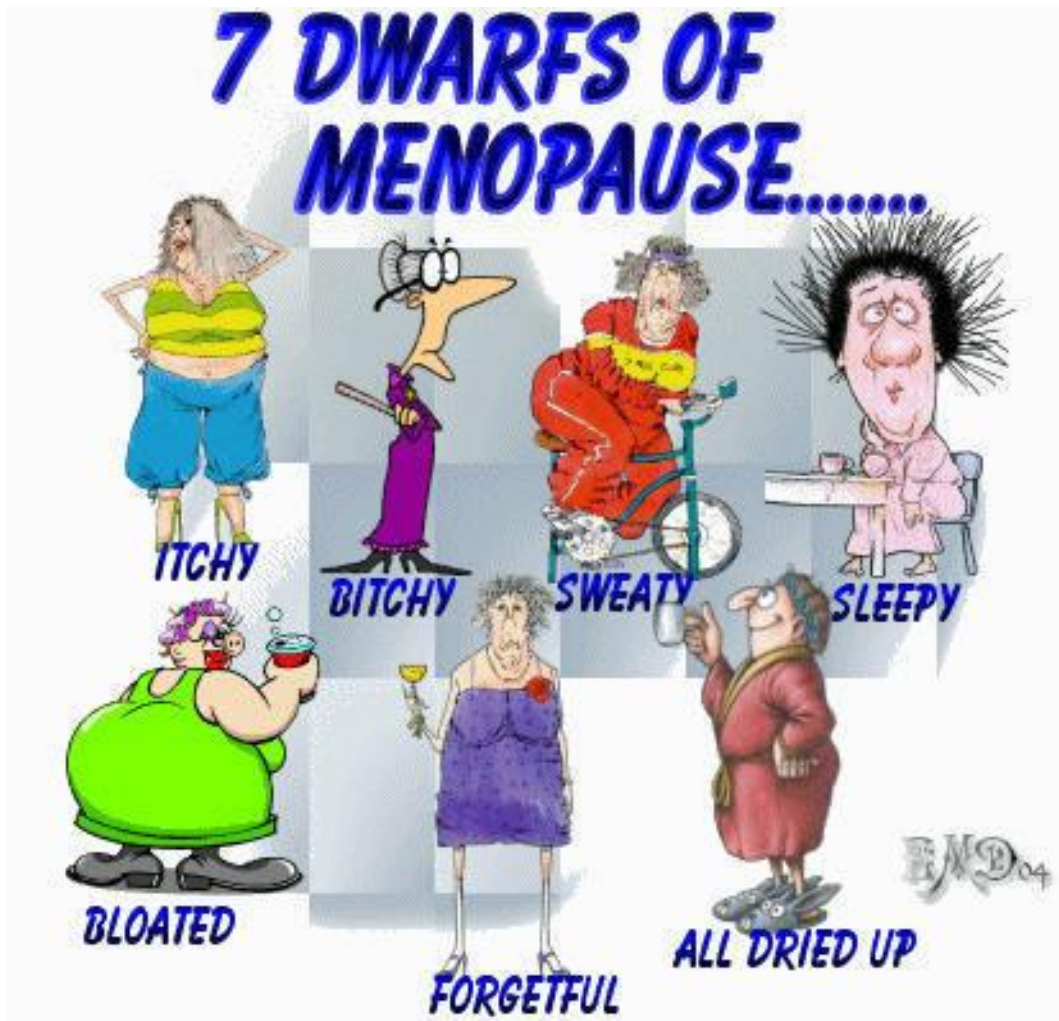


[Chicagomedicine.org/-/media/images/ucmc/forefront/channel-pages/womens-health/universal/woman-fanning-hot-flash-menopause-universal-832x469.jpg](https://chicagomedicine.org/-/media/images/ucmc/forefront/channel-pages/womens-health/universal/woman-fanning-hot-flash-menopause-universal-832x469.jpg).(2023).

This representation has been fuelled by media, ignorance, lack of education surrounding the topic, gender politics and bias, unconscious bias, ageist stigma and misogynistic attitudes within the public sphere as acknowledged by Liao *et al* (1994); Levitt (2019) and Blount (2022). Image one shows an older grey haired lady fanning herself with a look of exhaustion with her eyes closed (Chicagomedicine.org, 2023). Looking at this image it is perceived by the author of this assignment to almost immediately to be an aged menopausal woman having hot flushes as opposed to a beautiful woman perhaps sitting in a hot position, fanning herself from the sunshine

for instance. This is possibly due to the authors own perception and unconscious bias. However, the language and negative images used towards aged women especially on media platforms has been reported to reinforce negative discourse surrounding age and agism which contributes to women of this age feeling underconfident, vulnerable and disempowered as noted by Makita *et al* (2021) and Appel and Webber (2021). This is how unconscious bias is created and indoctrinated through the media to see women of this age in a way which makes a suggestion that the reality of a woman at the menopausal age must be of the individual being very tired and having hot flushes. Research has shown that older women are negatively stereotyped by the media which results in women in this demographic group being portrayed in a negative way (marcommnews.com, 2018). This is an example of society re producing inequality within the population which is detrimental and reaffirming the stereotypical image of women in this group. Recently, 194 of the World Health Organisation (WHO) member states called for the development of campaigns to combat agism and the reinforced negative attitudes within the media by promoting healthy attitudes to aging within our aging society given that as it has been proven to negatively effect health and wellbeing within this group which includes menopausal women (WHO. Int, 2022). Findings show that negative production of ageist content within the media which includes magazines, newspapers, social media platforms and news outlets is six times more prevalent than positive content with physical negative attributes being the dominant feature within the analysis as noted by Ng, (2021). Image 2 represents various stereotypical cartoon images of old, fat , grey haired, itchy, bitchy, sweaty, sleepy, bloated , forgetful and all dried up older females (Marywojo1.7dwarvesofmenopause.flickr.com/photos, 2009). This is how menopausal women may be perceived and the production of these perceptions reproduced by negative media coverage within society which encourages the social reproduction of inequality and bias including unconscious bias (Harper *et al*, 2022). It may be argued that the medicalisation of menopausal symptoms may attribute to the anxiety surrounding the menopause and that the media exacerbate this. However, there is no universal experience with most women preferring to not take hormone replacement therapy and preferring to go down the natural route unless their symptoms are severe. Many factors contribute to menopausal symptoms and reporting including cultural attitudes, economic status, education level, body mass index, smoking , diet and exercise. These all contribute to a woman's unique experience of this stage in life (Hickey *et al*, 2022).

Image two.



Marywojo1.7 dwarves of menopause. flickr.com/photos/37268215@N04/3430403178/in/04 April.2009.(Accessed 10/01/2023).

The social constructs of society builds a picture of what is normal and anything that deviates from that is deemed as 'other' according to Papanek (2019). Its difficult to understand how the menopause can be deemed in that way with all women experiencing the process if they reach this stage in life or due to health issues which mean the individual may go through the process earlier in life. Power imbalance and control are important factors to consider where feminist theory are concerned when looking at this topic as a whole. Lestarcic (2022) explains how references towards gender and women have increased and the portrayal of women have improved for the better where stereotypes are concerned however it is noted that gender provisions are still

fundamentally lacking within society. There are socio-historical dynamics of inequality and power between the genders privately and professionally as well as within society as a whole as acknowledged by Ernst (2022). The power dynamic is changing with the government recognising that women of menopausal age are the fastest growing working group within western society and is acknowledging that the negative images portrayed towards this group has a negative impact where capitalist growth is concerned. Therefore, new campaigns are being utilised and policies introduced to encourage better working environments, encouragement of flexible working hours, education and respect surrounding this group (Menopauseintheworkplace.co.Uk, 2020). Feminism has had an important part to play in changing the way society portrays women. Female social empowerment has become a fast moving revolution within western society. Politically, across all parties women have united to stand up for rights and equal opportunities and are still working hard to gain acknowledgement and inclusivity within society as expressed in parliament and as an ongoing force to be reckoned with amongst women within today's society (Committees.Parliament.Uk, 2021). The equalities act (2010) does not include menopause within the act however women are having to go to tribunals and fight for rights using the language of disability, ageism and sex to describe discrimination at work when being unfairly treated while fighting for fair treatment within tribunals (Acas.or.Uk, 2022). Many women do not have menopausal symptoms and are fit, slim healthy and age very well and are capable of working at the same level as men in high ranking job roles. Attitudes towards the menopause are often fuelled by social, cultural and psychological variables which has been reported to affect a woman's symptoms and menopausal experience. Non western countries perceive the menopause in a very different way with a reluctance to seek medical treatment and a lack of communication surrounding the subject and differing traditional values and outcomes including limited access to healthcare, religion, shame and embarrassment to discuss the topic. Culture can often influence how women experience menopause and each experience is unique where equity is concerned (Berger (2015). It has been documented that women with negative attitudes towards themselves and the menopause tend to suffer greater symptomatically with women with a more positive outlook managing the menopause in a more positive way as noted by Ayers et al (2010). This phenomenon towards the menopause directly affects inclusivity and diversity within society by reinforcing, perpetuating and stigmatising this particular group of women in homes and within workplaces. The Structural theory surrounding

this phenomenon is a conflict theory which has evolved historically but is becoming more fluid due to a structural functionalist feminist value consensus approach of combatting the outdated stereotypical viewpoint (Hagg,2020). Image 3 shows silhouettes of plump, fat women on scales (Mymenopausetransformation.com,2021). Fat shaming this group of women is another stereotypical view of this group. Young and Kotera (2022) acknowledge that body image and mental distress are linked and that this viewpoint is also predominant surrounding menopausal women. It is true that hormonal changes do affect a woman's body but not all women gain weight. Weight gain can often be due to lifestyle influences. In fact many women experience a very positive menopause transition which is rarely discussed in light of all of the negative media. Image three.



[Mymenopausetransformation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Women-on-Scales-Shadow-image.jpg](https://mymenopausetransformation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Women-on-Scales-Shadow-image.jpg)(accessed 10.01.2023).

Many women experience a very happy healthy menopausal transition with new sense of empowerment, freedom, more time to enjoy life without the worry of pregnancy, contraception, childbirth or periods including more time to enjoy with friends and family (Whiley et al, 2022). However there is scant research on the positive experiences of this period in life. Hickey (2022) argues that changing the negative perception by normalising the menopause and the positive aspects of this transition would switch the public narrative towards a more positive outlook

overall. In conclusion societies view towards this transitional experience is slowly changing and this is being supported by education, campaigns, new policies being introduced within the workplace and less discrimination due to government acknowledging that there is a need for a shift in the attitudes surrounding this topic. Images are changing in our new diverse society however, changes still need to be made and people still need to be educated on how this effects mental health for women and quality of life. Promoting positive images towards women's health, improving emotional and social support, improving socio-economic status and lifestyle enhancement planning would be a positive way to improve the wellbeing and promoting women's health for menopausal women. Negative outlooks can detrimentally affect women especially at a time when changes are becoming apparent psychologically and physiologically. By negatively highlighting women in the media it perpetuates an ongoing reproduction of negative public discourse. Positive images would help to reinforce public perception surrounding equality and diversity within society. It is important for an atmosphere to be created where individuals can feel safe to voice opinion and provide support without shame and stigma. The menopause is a natural unique process that should be cherished and viewed as a right of passage. Society still has a long way to go where change is concerned and is still reluctant to change the inherent stigma surrounding this topic. However, with feminist movements making momentum and becoming more common within the media spotlight and workplace policies being put into place and governments acknowledging that change needs to happen and perceptions surrounding this topic being put into the spotlight and becoming more common then there is hope that society in turn will improve and adjust to the needs of this group within society.

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