

“Me.No.Pause.”: Anxieties and fantasies of aging and femininity in contemporary menopause advertising

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Abstract

Amidst heightened cultural visibility of menopause and a burgeoning market of menopause-related products in the United Kingdom and the United States, this article examines how menopause is constructed in contemporary advertising. Informed by a psychosocial understanding of advertisements as fantasy texts which operate through mobilizing psychic desires, identifications, and anxieties, we ask: How are women exhorted to relate to menopause? What fantasies and larger social tensions do the advertisements invoke and how do they resolve them? A reflexive thematic and multi-modal analysis of 20 outdoor, print, television, and online advertisements reveals three central exhortations: defy, disavow, and embrace. These exhortations tap into wider contemporary anxieties around aging, women's loss of power, and control over women's bodies. The advertisements help to break the taboo around menopause, contributing to its growing visibility and framing in more positive terms. At the same time, the advertisements incite a fantasy of controlling and denying menopause, reinforcing the imperative to deny aging, resecuring patriarchal heteronormative notions of youthful femininity, desirability, and economic productivity, and placing responsibility of “managing” menopause solely on women.

Keywords

advertisements, control, loss of power, menopause, UK, US, women's bodies

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Menopause has been shrouded in silence and taboo for decades in the West. Within its historical limited visibility, menopause was predominantly framed as an illness of hormonal deficiency requiring medical intervention, mainly with hormone therapies (Baber, 2023; Krajewski, 2019; Roberts, 2007; Throsby & Roberts, 2023; Whittaker, 1998). Feminist scholars have consistently critiqued these constructions, the medicalization of menopause, and the role they have played in tightening the patriarchal control of women (Coupland & Williams, 2002; Greer, 2019; Gullette, 1994; Houck, 2006; Lock, 1993; MacPherson, 1981; Shoebridge & Steed, 1998).

Advertising has been a central cultural site where these constructions flourished. During the 1950s and 1960s, advertisements for estrogen brands notoriously pathologized and medicalized aging women's bodies, casting them as undesirable, distasteful, and in decay, while reinscribing narrow heteronormative notions of desirable femininity. For example, one 1966 advertisement for *Premarin*, the most popular estrogen medication on the United States (US) market at the time, promised the pill would make a woman "pleasant to live with once again, [because] it is no easy thing for a man to take the stings and barbs of business life, then to come home to the turmoil of a woman 'going through the change of life'" (<https://tuesdayshorse.wordpress.com/2010/02/10/premarin-regrets>). Another advertisement showed a joyful smiling woman engaged in a conversation with two men in a party, with the caption: "help keep her this way" (<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AFPA6ZXP2ANJ148O>).¹

Attitudes to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) have fluctuated dramatically since the 1960s. A first rise in its use in the US and the United Kingdom (UK) took place in the 1960s, and a second, with even higher increase, in the years 1999 to 2000 (Cagnacci & Venier, 2019). However, linking HRT with a risk of breast cancer, the 2002 Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study showed that HRT had more detrimental than beneficial effects. While this study was later debunked, it led to a dramatic decline in popularity and use of HRT (Cagnacci & Venier, 2019; Hickey et al., 2022). Notwithstanding these shifts, the tabooing and framing of menopause as an illness associated with loss and decay have persisted in Western cultures (Houck, 2006; Lock, 1993; Rowson et al., 2023; Throsby & Roberts, 2023). Although later advertisements have contributed to the "de-tabooization" of menopause, even during the 2010s they continued to stigmatize older women as dysfunctional and "construct menopause as an illness that must be medicated" (Krajewski, 2019, p. 146).

More recently, however, especially since 2021, menopause has received growing cultural visibility and seen shifts in its framing in the US and the UK (Jermyn, 2023; Orgad et al., 2024; Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023a, 2023b; Takhar et al., 2025). Against this rise in visibility, and the growing market for menopause products, in this article, drawing on a psychosocial approach, we explore the construction of menopause in contemporary advertising. McCartan's (2025) is the only other study of menopause advertisements since 2021; however, it includes only women's lifestyle magazines and focuses on analyzing postfeminist discourses. In our study, by examining a range of contemporary advertisements produced and circulated in the UK and US, we interrogate the fantasies they incite, regulate, and modulate about the body, femininity, aging, and gendered relations. We argue that menopause advertising constitutes an important cultural site which

serves as part of the “cultural canvas” (Houck, 2006, p. 3) for delineating some of the larger psychic and social tensions pertinent to feminism today.

In what follows, we start by discussing our theoretical approach, which draws on feminist theorization of advertisements as fantasy texts that evoke larger tensions and anxieties about gendered relations and women’s bodies. We then situate our study empirically within the current heightened visibility of menopause in the Anglo-American sphere. Next, we introduce the research design and present the analysis of advertisements in two parts. First, we discuss three exhortations identified in the sample that call on women to defy, disavow, and embrace menopause. Second, we show how these exhortations play on and respond to psychic and social tensions around loss of social, economic, and sexual power and control over women’s bodies. We argue that current menopause advertisements represent a shift in the construction of menopause and aging women since the late 2010s. At the same time, they perpetuate often highly conventional, neoliberal norms of heterosexual femininity, thus remaining limited in their capacity to offer more transgressive imaginings of menopause, femininity, and aging. Building on extant studies of cultural constructions of menopause, our study is the first to focus on current advertising as a central site where tensions and fantasies pertinent to women and feminism are evoked, fought over, and negotiated.

Advertising, fantasy, and gender relations

Feminist scholarship has underscored advertisements as ubiquitous sites where gendered relations, identities, and norms are conceptualized and reinforced, negotiated, reworked, and transformed (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2008; Ibroscheva, 2013; Sobande & Klein, 2023; Winship, 2000). As Gill (2007, p. 63) notes, advertisements “form part of the ‘public habitat of images’ that works to discipline and regulate women’s relationship to their own bodies.” They exercise a disciplinary power (Bartky, 1990; Gill, 2007), inducing a constant self-measurement against prescribed definitions of normative femininity: dominant forms and expressions of femininity that are produced and regulated by a patriarchal order, and through which expectations and norms about how women should behave, feel, think, and, crucially, look, are being reproduced (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; McCann, 2022).

Advertisements’ disciplinary power is intimately connected to the way they produce and incite fantasies of lives out of reach (Ibroscheva, 2013). Advertisements, Winship (2000) argues, constitute fantasy texts which operate through the mobilization of psychic desires, identifications, and conflicts (see also Fuss, 1995). They attract audiences by presenting ambiguities and tensions that relate to their audiences’ psychic conflicts, and successfully resolving those tensions (Winship, 2000, drawing on MacRury, 1997). In particular, advertisements conjure up fantasies that play on the tension arc of pressures to concede to and rebuff patriarchal structures (Winship, 2000).

Building on this literature, we adopt a psychosocial perspective and draw on a social constructionist approach to critically examine how feminine subjectivities in contemporary menopause advertisements are interpellated and discursively organized through desires, fears, and anxieties at both the psychic and the social level (Butler, 1997). Informed by this approach, we treat advertisements as a cultural site that is constitutive

of and produced by understandings of femininity. We thus explore how contemporary advertisements reaffirm and concurrently disrupt forms of normative femininity, which foreground, champion, legitimize, and naturalize cisgender, White, youthful, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, sexually desirable, and economically productive female subjects (Douglas, 2020; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McCartan, 2025; Segal, 2012).

The menopause moment and its market

In recent years, particularly in the UK and US, there has been “an unprecedented period of pronounced public cultural conversation around a newly inflected era of menopause consciousness and comprehension” (Jermyn, 2023, p. 2; see also Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023b; Pickard, in press; Takhar et al., 2025). This “menopausal turn” (Jermyn, 2023), or “menopause moment” (Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023b), has materialized in and across a range of domains: high-profile women speaking publicly about their menopause-related experiences (Jermyn, 2023); a significant rise in news coverage of the topic, particularly since 2021 (Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023b); a flurry of fiction and nonfiction books (Mulvey-Roberts, 2024; Throsby, in press); increasing portrayals of menopause in popular television shows and artistic performances (Šimić & Underwood-Lee, 2024); a reinvigorated medical discussion and campaigns to increase awareness of menopause; introduction of menopause-related workplace initiatives (Dennis & Hobson, 2023); and a rapidly expanding market for menopause products (Anderson, 2024; Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023a).

The latter is of particular significance for our study, which focuses on advertising of consumer goods and services. While the menopause market is not new (Coney, 1994), recently, it has expanded exponentially, with a growing range of economic players contributing to and profiting from it (Anderson, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2024). This market encompasses an expanding range of products, including medications for an array of symptoms, alternative remedies, specialized cosmetics products, menopause-related wellness programs and services, specialized retreats, apps, and “femtech” products (Larocca, 2022; Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023a).

The “menopausal turn” (Jermyn, 2023) has been facilitated and shaped by wider processes and factors. They include what Susan Douglas (2020, p. 1) describes as an “upheaval” in the landscape of aging women: the increasing challenging of gendered ageism—the intertwining of ageism and sexism and its coupling with normative femininity. Significantly, women over 50 are now the fastest growing demographic in the workforce and “the wealthiest and most active generation of women in history” (Douglas, 2020, p. 81). There has been a notable increase in older women in positions of power and a rise in their positive portrayal (Douglas, 2020; Shimoni, 2021), as well as more positive portrayals of menopause as a natural transition that involves multiple phases which can be experienced in multifarious ways. Research also notes a shift towards depicting menopause as an experience of (largely cis-gender) female self-transformation, empowerment, self-confidence, and liberation (Jermyn, 2023; McCartan, 2025; Mulvey-Roberts, 2024; Orgad et al., 2024; Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023a, 2023b; Rodgers, 2024).

Methodology: Studying menopause advertisements

Drawing on feminist scholarship that underscores advertisements as fantasy texts, and situating our inquiry in the current menopausal turn, we ask: What fantasies do contemporary menopause-related advertisements incite, and how do they play on and reveal larger psychic and social tensions pertinent to women and feminism today?

Data collection

To address this question, and since there are no comprehensive databases of UK and US advertisements, we purposively selected advertisements based on their relevance and suitability for answering our research questions (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). Our data corpus did not seek to be exhaustive or representative of the entirety of UK and US menopause advertising. Rather, we included advertisements whose central focus was menopause and that were circulated between 2019 and 2024, the time when there was a rise in public attention on menopause (as above).² We gathered the data from (a) London public transport advertisements, aiming to capture a range of neighborhoods with different socioeconomic characteristics; (b) social media feeds, menopause-related newsletters, and direct marketing; (c) websites identified via online searches using the terms “menopause products,” “menopause ads/adverts/advertisements/advertising,” “menopause remedies,” “menopause support,” and “midlife support”; (d) a random selection of four popular UK women’s magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, and *Vogue*) from 2023 to 2024.

Our final data corpus (Table 1) consists of 20 advertisements for menopause-related products and brands, including outdoor, print, television, and online (internet, social media, and email marketing). Most of the advertisements are from the UK—reflecting the attention the topic has received in this national context (Jermyn, 2024; Orgad, 2025; Orgad & Rottenberg, 2023b)—and the others are from the US, where there has also been significant increase in the visibility of aging women (Douglas, 2020). In addition, Anglo-American popular culture has a “high degree of discursive harmony and cross-cultural traffic” (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 13), and many of the brands operate across both the UK and US.

Several advertisements have been recognized and/or framed as feminist interventions, taboo-breaking, and championing women’s empowerment, female solidarity, diversity, and inclusivity. For example, in the UK, the *Tena* commercial (see Table 1, Advert 1; note advertisements’ numbers as listed in the table will be given in text for reference), part of the “The Last Lonely Menopause” campaign, won the UK Channel 4’s Diversity in Advertising Award 2021 under the age category and was applauded for its “groundbreaking” de-stigmatization of menopause (Houston, 2022). *Holland and Barrett*’s (health and wellbeing chain) commercial (Advert 3) from the advertising campaign “Me.No.Pause” won the Transport for London’s diversity competition, for increasing diversity and challenging gender stereotypes, and was praised for “break[ing] the silence surrounding the menopause” (Kemp, 2019). In the US, the *Imvexxy* commercial (Advert 5) was hailed for how it “recontextualizes what a menopausal woman looks, acts, and feels like,” by depicting her as glamorous and pleasure-seeking (McCann NY, 2021).

Table 1. Advertisements sample.

	Advert	Product	Year	Type and URL (where available)
1	Tena (UK)	Sanitary pads	2023	Television and online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMsPc4VyYnQ
2	Veozah (US)	Hormone-free drug for hot flashes and night sweats	2023	Television and online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTO4s-mdkd0
3	Holland and Barrett (UK)	Brand	2019	Outdoor, television and online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tB0ZnVh0bNo
4	Astellas (US)	General awareness campaign	2023	Television and online https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IVAi/astellas-pharma-super-bowl-2023-whats-vms
5	Imvexxy (US)	Estrogen vaginal insert	2021	Television and online https://www.shootonline.com/video/mccann-ny-bucks-pharmaceutical-ad-norm-combats-menopausal-stigma-long-may-she-reign-campaign
6	Goop (US)	Madam Ovary wellness kit	2019	Online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyVT_OXt53k
7	Pantene (UK)	Hair care	2022–2024	Print and online https://www.facebook.com/share/v/aHi3JscejvB552lp/?mibextid=UaIRPS
8	Clarins (UK)	Facial cream	2022	Print
9	Boots No. 7 (UK)	Cosmetics	2024	Print
10	Stella (UK)	App	2023	Outdoor
11	Menopace (UK)	Herbal supplement	2023	Outdoor and print
12	Always Discreet (UK)	Sanitary pads	2023	Outdoor
13	Percy & Reed (UK)	Hair and skincare	2023	Email marketing
14	Yoga-go (UK)	App	2024	Social media
15	Gen M (UK)	General awareness	2022	Print https://www.prolificnorth.co.uk/news/brand-giants-team-genm-raise-menopause-awareness/
16	Wild Nutrition (UK)	Vitamin supplements	2024	Email marketing
17	NayDaya Skin (UK)	Vaginal dryness supplement	2024	Social media
18	Bupa (UK)	Bupa Menopause Plan	2024	Social media
19	The Better Menopause (UK)	Better Gut probiotic	2024	Social media

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

	Advert	Product	Year	Type and URL (where available)
20	Viva NMN (US and UK)	Supplement to increase energy and improve sleep	2024	Social media

The *Astellas* advertisement, (Advert 4) shown during the 2023 Super Bowl to 115 million people, was presented as breaking the “silence, stigma, and misunderstanding” around menopause (Astellas, 2023).

Data analysis

As noted earlier, we understand menopause advertising as a discursive site where meanings, tensions, and anxieties about menopause, gendered relations, and women’s bodies are negotiated and contested. Thus, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2021), which is commonly used to qualitatively analyze textual data, was deemed as highly appropriate and fitting our social constructionist approach and its conceptualization of media texts as both reflecting and shaping cultural meanings. We adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2021) process of coding and theme development, which is flexible and organic, and often evolves throughout the analytical process. We sought to ensure our analysis was both theory-driven and grounded in a close reading of the data (Pownall et al., 2022).

Following Braun and Clarke’s (2021) six phases, we started by familiarizing ourselves with the data in order to begin mapping the terrain. This involved individually viewing/reading the advertisements multiple times and noting analytic observations in relation to the research question, both for each data item and the entire dataset. In the second phase, we viewed and read the advertisements together to generate explicit and latent codes that captured important features of the data that might be relevant to addressing the research question. This involved three rounds of coding of the entire dataset, following which, we collated the codes and relevant extracts from the advertisements for later stages of analysis. The third phase saw us develop initial themes by identifying broader patterns across the advertisements in relation to our analytical questions. We then collated data from each of the advertisements relevant to each provisional theme. In the fourth stage, we checked the themes against the coded data and the entire dataset to determine that they addressed the research question and cohered into a clear narrative. In this phase, some themes were developed and modified, while others were discarded. Next, we developed a detailed analysis of each theme and labelled them. In the final phase, we integrated the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualized the analysis within the literature. These phases were often overlapping and nonlinear, involving us returning to the advertisements, refining our codes, and continually evaluating the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It is worth noting that while we use examples of specific advertisements to illustrate particular themes, some advertisements contain elements from more than one theme.

Our thematic analysis was supplemented by a social semiotic multimodal analysis, which aligns with our social constructionist orientation and our interest in both how meanings around femininity and menopause are constructed within each text and how these relate to broader social tensions and anxieties about gendered relations, aging, and women's bodies. Including this method in our analytical approach allowed us to analyze audiovisual texts, of which we had six, and allowed for flexibility across different modalities. We were therefore able to consider how meanings around menopause are communicated through semiotic resources or "modes" and their interplay within multimodal texts (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016), including visual (e.g., lighting, color, graphics, framing, gesture) and audio modes (e.g., speech, music, voiceover).

Findings

The findings are presented in two parts, responding respectively to the analytical questions derived from the main research question, namely:

1. How do the advertisements exhort women to relate to menopause? What do the advertisements ask or promise the reader/viewer to "do" with menopause?
2. What fantasies and tensions do the advertisements invoke through their injunction to relate to menopause in certain ways?

Part 1. Exhortations: How to relate to and what to do with menopause

Addressing the first analytical question, we found that the advertisements exhort women to relate to menopause in three central ways: defy, disavow, and embrace. Some advertisements articulate one of the three exhortations, while others may include more than one.

Exhortation 1. Defy: Eliminate aging and remain productive. Firmly situated in the antiaging industrial complex and its commandment to defy aging (Douglas, 2020), and echoing medicalized framings of menopause (Coupland & Williams, 2002; Houck, 2006), various contemporary menopause advertisements call on women to resist, eliminate, and defy menopause symptoms. Menopause in these advertisements is reduced to one or more negative physical and/or mental and psychological symptoms (e.g., hot flashes, thinning and dryness of hair, brain fog, insomnia, and skin weakening and dryness) that threaten conventional youthful femininity, and which women are urged to eliminate, remove, or dispel.

The advertisement for the hot flash drug *Veozah* (Advert 2), vividly exemplifies this exhortation. Predicated on the before–after makeover format, it opens with scenes of menopausal women suffering hot flashes against the backdrop of upbeat energizing music: a sweating woman standing in a crowded lift, shot from above as if through prison bars, and a woman awoken by sweat at night, sat in front of a fan. The voiceover and caption state, "This is a HOT FLASH," then "but this is a NOT FLASH," as the

advertisement moves to a series of scenes showing the transformative effect of the drug: two cheerful women taking a selfie at a sunny marina, a conventionally attractive woman putting on a scarf and leaving home, another sleeping peacefully, a confident teacher in the classroom, a smiling woman in an office, a waitress happily serving customers, and a woman joyfully trying on a coat in a clothing store. The women appear unaffected by menopause after taking the drug. Becoming hot flash-free is cast as allowing them to return to their premenopausal “real” selves, reverberating the gendered ageist idea that women’s aging bodies mask and misrepresent their essential authentic identity and thus “we have to declare war against our own faces and bodies” (Douglas, 2020, p. 88).

Similar injunctions to defiance are made in 13 other advertisements in the sample, reinforcing the notion of normative femininity as dependent on maintaining a youthful, conventionally attractive appearance (Douglas, 2020; McCartan, 2025; Segal, 2012). For example, an advertisement (Advert 8) for *Clarins*’s facial “restorative” cream for “menopausal skin” draws on discourses of defense, resistance, and restoration, promising the correction of a “skin weakened by hormonal changes,” while the advertisement for *Better Gut* probiotic (Advert 19) reads “feel like you again,” with the word “you” highlighted in orange font.

Similarly, the advertisement for *Imvexxy* (Advert 5), depicts an older, slim, grey-haired queen figure whose “vaginal kingdom” is “threatened” by vaginal dryness. *Imvexxy*, “the queen’s ally,” allows her to “renew her kingdom” and “rule the ball” by eliminating the unpleasant symptoms and allowing her to remain youthful and sexually active (Ussher et al., 2015). After using *Imvexxy*, the queen is shown running in the palace’s gardens, dancing at a royal ball, indulging in a bath with the king, and grooming herself in front of the mirror. “Long May She Reign,” the voiceover announces (the campaign’s title), echoing the “defiance mantra” of the antiaging industrial complex (Douglas, 2020, p. 87) and post-feminist discourses of control, empowerment, and confidence (McCartan, 2025).

In her analysis of women’s magazine menopause advertisements, McCartan (2025, p. 364) found a similar pattern which presented “women with ways to deny—not just to themselves, but outwardly too—that menopause is anything but a project to be embraced that leaves a woman feeling just as she always was.” However, our analysis underscores a further significant aspect of the injunction to defy aging. The goal of defying menopause and aging is not merely to enable women to feel like they did before menopause hit and reinstate their youthful femininity; crucially, it also serves the goal of “reintegrating” them into the public sphere as workers (illustrated by depictions of women in the workplace, as in the *Veozah* advertisement) and consumers (who buy the products), a construction consistent with the neoliberal project of keeping women economically productive for as long as possible (Fegitz, 2022; Orgad, 2025; Rottenberg & Gilchrist, 2025).

Exhortation 2. Disavow: Deny aging, secure conventional femininity. Whereas the defy exhortation attempts to resolve the disruption menopause is said to cause to a woman’s life by eliminating its symptoms, a different exhortation, in ten of the advertisements, urges women to disavow menopause. Here, advertisements acknowledge menopause is a natural transition while simultaneously exhorting consumers to deny its consequences and not allow it to change (or ruin) their authentic selves and bodies.

Menopause is constructed as something that is at once desired and denied, indulged and tabooed (Hall, 1997). What is denied is the Freudian “unwelcome idea” (Trunnerl & Holt, 1974 as cited in Cohen, 2002, p. 28) or the “injury” (Butler, 2011, p. 64) associated with the perceived reality of aging femininity, rather than the objective existence of menopause itself. Like the defy exhortation, these advertisements rely on a notion of women’s bodies and psyches as undesirably attacked or ambushed by menopause. However, the disavow exhortation is not a call to eliminate the symptoms of menopause; it is implied that eliminating them is not possible, at least not fully. Rather, it is a call to refuse its implications.

This is potentially illustrated by the slogan of the UK herbal supplement *Menopace*, (Advert 11) “not pausing, keep going,” or the *Viva NMN* supplement advertisement (Advert 20) whose slogan is “power through the menopause.” Both recognize the existence of menopause but urge readers to refuse its injury, namely fatigue and the need to slow down. Another typical example is the advertisement for *Pantene*’s “designed for menopause” hair products (Advert 7), showing a White, conventionally beautiful older woman with long, shiny, red hair, staring confidently at the camera. The advertisement simultaneously identifies menopause as the problem—the text explains the product “targets thinning, dry hair, and itchy scalp”—and denies its implications; the caption adding: “there’s no appropriate hair for menopause, only appropriate haircare.” In so doing, consistent with dominant representations of aging femininity (Dolan & Tincknell, 2012; Douglas, 2020), menopausal femininity is securely tightened to appearance and conventionally narrow beauty standards. Aging women are reminded that what ultimately matters is how they look.

This disavowal is perhaps most conspicuously expressed in *Holland and Barrett*’s (3) slogan “Me. No. Pause.” Employing the before–after format again, first, women are shown being disrupted by menopause symptoms in everyday scenes (e.g., yoga, cooking, work meeting). The voiceover describes debilitating symptoms as an “unravelling [of womanhood] from the inside out,” and they are visualized through pixelations disrupting the image, accompanied by discordant sounds. A female voiceover then declares defiantly: “But I won’t let it define me! I may be changing but I won’t let it change ME! Still a woman. Still a lover. Still a fighter. Still me. I won’t let menopause change that” (laughing).

This frames the second part of the commercial, where women are shown in typical poses conveying female autonomy, confidence, power, and capacity: facing forward, standing tall, and staring at the camera (Kohrs & Gill, 2021; Orgad & Gill, 2022). Notably, in this part, more diverse bodies are shown, characteristic of confidence culture’s visual “glossy diversity” (Orgad & Gill, 2022), with the final image showing a woman of color, a queer woman, and a woman in a wheelchair. This variety endows the brand with a feminist rebellious slant—refusing the heteronormative, capitalist pressure on aging women to remain slim, young, abled-bodied, and sexually attractive—as well as alluding to its nonhormonal alternative that the slogan emphasizes: “supporting you through menopause *naturally*.”

Indeed, the subtle subtext of these advertisements is also refusal of HRT and its patriarchal legacy (Houck, 2006; Lock, 1993)—a central tension that has historically animated debates about menopause and its treatment. However, the acknowledgement that bodily

changes during menopause are inevitable and cannot be eliminated is diffused by the exhortation to refuse to let menopause change women's "authentic" selves. While the latter is often cast as resisting patriarchy's oppressive antiaging appearance pressures, the "authentic" self that women are enjoined to maintain still largely conforms to hegemonic norms of femininity: as cultivating the body, as caregiver, and as balancing work and family duties.

Exhortation 3. Embrace: Love your body but discipline it (and your mind) too. Aging women's bodies have historically been cast as decaying and distasteful (Gannon & Stevens, 1998; Throsby & Roberts, 2023), with women called on to reject "the tragedy of menopause" (Wilson, 1966) by controlling and taming their hormonal bodies. Against this misogynistic history, a third exhortation in nine advertisements in our dataset is for women to do the opposite: embrace menopause. Embracing menopause suggests not simply accepting menopause as a natural change without resistance, but welcoming it with enthusiasm, celebrating it as a source of power and an opportunity for positive self-transformation.

This exhortation draws on popular and neoliberal feminism's emphasis on individual empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018), and builds on Love Your Body (LYB) and confidence discourses encouraging women to accept their bodies and selves (Orgad & Gill, 2022). Shifting from earlier emphases on what is wrong with menopausal women's bodies and psyches and how these should be improved, LYB advertisements are positive, affirmative, inflected with seemingly feminist messages (Gill & Elias, 2014). They ask women to accept themselves, believe in themselves, and throw off self-doubt and insecurity, (paradoxically) through self-work, self-policing, and the consumption of products, services, or programs (Orgad & Gill, 2022).

The *Tena* commercial (Advert 1) is illustrative of the call to celebrate menopause as a welcome transition and cherish it as a source of empowerment, self-determination, and self-acceptance while simultaneously engaging in working on the self and the body. In the first part, a middle-class, professional wife and mother is shown experiencing hormonally-based menopause symptoms: sleeplessness, hot flashes, bladder leaks, facial hair, and fluctuating emotions. She is shown in parallel with her teenage daughter who is also experiencing hormonally induced changes; as the daughter applies pimple cream in the mirror, next to her, the mother plucks her facial hair.

However, in the second part, rather than eliminating these physical and psychological changes (as in the defy advertisements), the woman embraces these changes with positivity, self-confidence, and determination—the paradigmatic affective dispositions of confidence culture and neoliberal feminism (Orgad & Gill, 2022; Rottenberg, 2018). She is shown maintaining her body through healthy diet and pelvic floor exercises, which, the voiceover states, constitute "an act of devotion."

Crucially, casting the mother's menopause experience as mirroring her teenage daughter's hormonal changes frames menopause as a coming-of-age transition embodying positive self-growth, a framing propped up by the lyrics of the background song: "you better grab the best of your life/I know you're ready/To get older/Anyhow" (Ford, 2014). The tone is celebratory and uplifting, underscoring a sense that by embracing menopause, it becomes liberatory.

In the remainder of the advertisement, we see the woman in an intimate scene with her male partner, followed by a glimpse of her attractive body, then a scene of happy family

life in the kitchen, where she is joyfully serving food. In the final scene, the mother is seen swimming peacefully, with the voiceover framing menopause as a period of self-renewal: “like shedding a skin ... and you are more yourself than you ever were.” As the mother and daughter sit by the pool, the daughter asks, “Mom, what’s the menopause like?” Thus, embracing menopause is also about breaking the silence around it, especially with the younger generation.

On the face of it, the advertisements’ exhortation to embrace menopause echoes and reinforces earlier feminist accounts of menopause, such as Gail Sheehy’s (1976) and Germaine Greer’s (2019), as a liberating period of freedom, renewal, personal growth, and self-discovery. However, according to these advertisements, “embracing” menopause relies on a disciplinary regime in which women must work on their bodies (as in the *Tena* example) and make over their mindset into positive, menopause-welcoming, and empowered. The *Bupa* advertisement (Advert 18) captures this, commanding its readers to “embrace the changes of menopause” by “tak[ing] control of menopause” with an annual £299 health plan.

Crucially, this disposition is geared towards benefiting not only women but also their family members. In the *Tena* advertisement (Advert 1), for example, making it “The Last Lonely Menopause” (the campaign’s title) is implied to be mothers’ responsibility, and theirs alone. In the *Madam Ovary* advertisement (Advert 6), the speaker confesses that thanks to the supplement, she has energy to balance her work with her family and husband. Thus, these advertisements ultimately resecure aging femininity by suturing it to neoliberal norms of managing the body, self-disciplining, and balancing work with familial responsibilities (Fegitz, 2022; Rottenberg, 2018).

Part 2. *Psychic anxieties, social tensions, and the fantasy of controlling menopause*

Having discussed three central ways contemporary advertisements exhort women to relate to menopause (Analytic Question 1), we now move to address Analytic Question 2 by examining tensions and fantasies that the advertisements evoke through these exhortations, and how they resolve these tensions through a fantasy of controlling and denying menopause. We argue that this fantasy plays on and speaks to two larger contemporary psychic and social tensions pertinent to women and feminism today: (a) midlife women’s loss of social, economic, and sexual power, and (b) control over women’s bodies.

Midlife women’s loss of social, economic, and sexual power. As noted earlier, the advertisements are situated in and respond to a moment when women over 50 constitute the fastest growing demographic in the workforce and the landscape of aging femininities is characterized by “visibility revolts” and increased positive portrayal (Douglas, 2020; Jermyn, 2024). Indeed, many of the advertisements foreground the relatively new visibility and social and economic power of older women, depicting menopausal women as confident senior businesswomen (e.g., Adverts 1, 2, 3, 6) and active consumers (e.g.,

Advert 2). Simultaneously reinforcing normative constructions of femininity, women in the advertisements are frequently shown in the sphere of the home, as happy mothers and wives (Adverts 1, 3, 6) and active (hetero)sexual partners (Adverts 1, 5, 17). Thus, the advertisements show women enjoying the “new sexual contract” (McRobbie, 2009)—today’s menopausal women being the first generation to bear the fruits of realizing themselves and achieving success in all spheres of their lives.

However, the advertisements concurrently evoke a deep anxiety about the fragility of this personal and social achievement. Menopause is depicted as disrupting and threatening the success and progress women have been allegedly allowed by the new sexual contract. It is seen to undermine women’s economic productivity and success at work, where they are often shown suffering from symptoms such as brain fog and hot flashes (e.g., Adverts 1, 3, 6). It echoes the wider dominant narrative of menopause as a key disruptor of women’s full and meaningful participation in the workforce (Rottenberg & Gilchrist, 2025; Steffan & Potočnik, 2022).

The advertisements also evoke menopausal women’s anxiety of losing their sexuality (Schaller et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2019; Winterich, 2003, 2007) by depicting menopause as threatening women’s ability to function as (hetero)sexual partners (e.g., Adverts 1, 5, 17) due to vaginal dryness and bodily changes. The advertisements also tap onto fears around women’s ability to carry on their roles as mothers and housewives (Dillaway, 2006). In the *Tena* advert (Advert 1), for instance, the mother nearly burns food in the oven, and the daughter is worried about her mother’s sleepless nights and emotional state.

While the advertisements depict the threat of biological symptoms to women’s bodies, psyches, and roles, we argue that they evoke larger social anxieties: the threat of aging women’s loss of social, economic, and sexual power. Menopause coincides with a time when many women experience significant pressure in their professional lives while carrying a heavy and unequal burden of family caregiving (Dillaway, 2006; Rowllings et al., 2025; Steffan & Loretto, 2025; Steffan & Potočnik, 2022). The advertisements resonate because they summon the challenging experiences that many midlife women experience in daily life and larger society, which still often casts them as suffering from reduced capacity, past their “expiry date,” and irrelevant (Orgad, 2025).

Yet, the advertisements simultaneously avoid representing or even hinting at many of the structural conditions underpinning the challenges midlife women experience. As research shows, these include unpaid and undervalued caring responsibilities for children, elderly or disabled family members, and friends, as well as sexist and ageist work cultures that fail to provide flexibility and support (Beck & Brewis, 2024; Laker & Rowson, 2025; Orgad, 2025; Steffan, 2021). Instead, menopause acts as placeholder for these wider tensions and anxieties that are unspoken and diffuse.

By focusing exclusively on the threat of menopause as a biological condition to women’s bodies, minds, and roles, and on its treatment, larger societal and structural tensions are modulated. By treating menopausal symptoms with products, the ideal menopausal woman can carry on performing her role as a successful worker while seamlessly maintaining her unpaid social reproductive activities (Orgad, 2025). The products ensure she can restore her heteronormative feminine roles as a happy and good worker, mother, wife, and sexual partner without disruption, and without challenging the status quo.

Controlling women's bodies. A second tension evoked by the advertisements relates to women's control over their bodies, tapping into anxieties about loss of control during this time of life (Christoforou, 2018; Fahs, 2016; Rubinstein & Foster, 2012). Some advertisements conjure this fear by representing menopause as a violent force threatening to take over the body. The *Holland and Barrett* advert (Advert 3), for example, shows a woman in a "before" state enjoying their body (e.g., sunbathing, doing exercise), then being attacked by an alien-like force—depicted by pixelation and shrieking sounds—invading their body, turning her brain "mushy," or dissolving her face. Other advertisements depict the threat of losing control more subtly. The *Always Discrete* advertisement (Advert 12), displayed on London's underground trains, references incontinence where passengers do not have access to toilets. Here, too, the advertisements' efficacy rests on invoking larger anxieties of women's loss of control over their bodies.

This threat has animated feminist movements' long fight for women to reclaim their bodies against interference from patriarchy, the state, and the market—from reproductive justice (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1973; Ross & Solinger, 2017), through resistance of the beauty industry's policing of women's bodies (Wolf, 1991), to fighting rape as a systemic tool of oppression (Brownmiller, 1975). However, the advertisements speak to anxieties around women's bodily control that are also particularly pertinent to women and feminism in the second and third decades of the 21st century: regressive developments such as the state rolling over women's reproductive rights in various places, including the US; increased maternal and infant mortality (Singh & Gallo, 2024); and burgeoning antiabortion campaigns in the US and the UK (Lowe & Hayes, 2018; Lowe & Page, 2024). The threat of loss of control over the menopausal body and the fantasy of regaining it through interventions are also connected, if implicitly, to the fears and promises associated with the development of medical and hormonal interventions to enable radical bodily changes, including hormonal therapy for transgender people as well as *Ozempic*, which has been hailed as a treatment for obesity, fertility, and an antiaging technology (Carr, 2023).

Thus—amid an extremely complicated and contested terrain where different forces and actors struggle over controlling women's bodies, and in the context of debates over a binary biological understanding of gender and trans embodiment—menopause advertisements promise women can "take control" over their menopausal bodies, as the *Bupa* advertisement (Advert 18) reads.

Crucially, this fantasy of regaining bodily control is articulated as inseparable from the promise of restoring a youthful heteronormative feminine body (see also McCartan, 2025). The menopausal woman depicted in all the advertisements we analyzed conforms largely to normative female beauty standards, with only minor modification. She is only slightly visibly older, signified by grey hair and wrinkles. Yet her hair is often still long, full, and shiny, and her wrinkles are minimal. She is mostly slim, heteronormatively attractive, and able-bodied. Ultimately, the aspirational menopausal woman is someone who actively engages with menopause, but only to grasp control over her body and return it to narrow notions of heteronormative youthful femininity.

This fantasy of women's individual control also hides the huge power that companies, particularly Big Pharma and the beauty and wellness industry, hold over women's bodies.

Indeed, while the message is that control over the menopausal body is desirable and almost, if not fully, in the hands of women, it hides the crucial fact that the realization of this fantasy relies on products manufactured by these companies.

Thus, while current advertisements play a significant role in breaking the taboo and silence around menopause, they incite a fantasy of controlling and denying menopause through eliminating its symptoms (defy), refusing its consequences and the inevitable changes it entails (disavow), or transforming the menopausal body and self into positive, confident, active, and attractive (embrace).

Conclusion

This article has focused on how contemporary advertising exhorts women to relate to menopause, and how through these exhortations it evokes fantasies and modulates fears about women's bodies, femininity, aging, and gendered relations. We demonstrated how current advertisements adroitly tap into anxieties and tensions that are central to women's lives today—in particular, the threat of losing economic and social power, the threat to traditional notions of femininity and conventional understandings of biological sex, and the rolling back of women's reproductive rights. We showed how these tensions are modulated and muted by promising consumers they can deny menopause and restore their “true” feminine selves. By subscribing to a neoliberal logic of self-management and honing attitudes and consumption, advertisements promise women they can regain control over their lives and bodies at work and home. In so doing, they elide the larger structural factors underpinning women's feelings of loss of control.

On the one hand, contemporary menopause advertising signals significant shifts in how menopause, women's bodies, and aging are constructed. Rather than an illness associated with decay, loss, and deficiency, menopause is largely depicted as a transition that should be welcomed and celebrated, and made into a positive, liberating experience of renewal and self-growth. Reverberating neoliberal and popular feminism's emphasis on empowerment, confidence, and positive affect (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Orgad & Gill, 2022; Rottenberg, 2018), women's bodies in contemporary menopause advertising are no longer denigrated, invisibilized, and shamed, but rather are sites to be self-confidently claimed and celebrated.

Current advertising also reflects and reinforces a shift from the heavy control of the masculine medical profession over women's treatment of menopause via HRT (Houck, 2006; Lock, 1993). It is now (supposedly) in the hands of women experiencing menopause to manage their bodies through consuming products; following exercise, diet, and wellness regimes; and adopting a positive mindset. Unlike previous eras, aging women are now depicted as active, confident, resilient, and, crucially, in control of their bodies and their private and public lives.

At the same time, notwithstanding their progressive appeal and embrace of feminist-inflected language, the commercial constraints of the genre mean advertisements must not go beyond a surface-level engagement with feminist critique (Macdonald, 1995; Winship, 2000). First, despite the exhortation to accept menopause as a natural transition, menopause remains largely depicted as negative and often debilitating symptoms,

reinforcing the historical trope of “an experience fraught with peril and difficulty” (Houck, 2006, p. 14). To the extent that women are encouraged to accept menopause and aging, this relies on their active and constant self-management, intervention, and self-policing through consumption of drugs and beauty products and the adoption of wellness, diet, and exercise regimes aimed at maintaining or restoring a conventional youthful femininity (see McCartan, 2025).

Even as women are exhorted to embrace menopause, they are still asked to defy and deny it, and drink from the “fountain of youth” (Baber, 2023)—be it HRT, herbal supplements, or a wellness app. In this sense, while menopause advertising to an extent responds to critiques of the antiaging industry and its defiant mantras, it concurrently buttresses them. The message is that although menopause and aging are a natural process, its symptoms are largely undesirable and need to be managed, controlled, and eliminated. There is no room for accepting that one cannot and perhaps should not control the changes one’s body is undergoing due to the natural process of aging.

Second, while the advertisements may partly challenge narrow definitions of normative femininity and sexual attractiveness by depicting a more diverse range of bodies—including disabled, plus-sized, queer, and women of color—this is largely a “glossy diversity” (Orgad & Gill, 2022). That is, differences are foregrounded and flattened through a combination of aesthetic and affective means that homogenize everyone as needing medical and/or beauty and wellness interventions, rather than material, political, cultural, or economic changes. Furthermore, the “diversification” of bodies shown represents only a small shift from the normative ideal of female attractiveness (Orgad & Gill, 2022), and, crucially, from heteronormative roles associated with normative femininity.

The menopausal woman in contemporary advertising remains tethered to traditional patriarchal heteronormative notions of femininity, desirability, and economic productivity. An aging subject free of familial or sexual ties who does not participate in the labour market and does not seek to control menopause remains off limits for advertising’s idealized menopausal woman. The “freedom” and “liberation” menopausal women enjoy rarely involve breaking away from their roles as mothers and wives, and require the seamless balancing of these roles with being productive workers—modelling the postfeminist “new sexual contract” (McRobbie, 2009). Indeed, women’s return to their “normal” desirable self, following consumption of the product, is often depicted as returning to performing these roles.

Third, according to the advertisements, managing menopause involves the ability to continue performing a postfeminist “pleasurable femininity” (Winship, 2000, p. 29) for men as lovers and partners—a construction pertinent also in other contemporary media discourses where women’s empowerment is enacted through pleasing men (Tappin et al., 2023). While the advertisements exhort women not to allow menopause to interrupt or “pause” their sexual pleasure, the heteronormative framing infers that neither men’s pleasure should be interrupted by menopause, echoing discourses in 1950s and 1960s advertisements where men were spared the “turmoil” of their wives’ menopausal symptoms (see also Orgad et al., 2024).

Ultimately, advertising’s ideal menopausal woman must stay sutured to conventional pleasurable femininity, in a never-ending, impossible quest to outpace oldness and deny aging: Me. No. Pause.

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Notes

1. We located both *Premarin* advertisements through background archival research.
2. The only advert in our sample from before 2021 is *Holland and Barrett's*, which is part of the brand's "Me.No.Pause" campaign. It was launched in 2019 but continued into 2023, and was highly cited in the UK; hence, we included it.

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