Menopause goes mainstream

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Women in their 50s, 60s and 70s are defying expectations and upending the status quo, as noted in our latest trend report “Elastic Generation: The Female Edit.” Once considered an invisible demographic, the over-50 set is now refusing to go quietly—instead embracing change, celebrating life, and flying in the face of stereotypes.

50-year-old *Baywatch* star Pamela Anderson is one of the high-profile names at the forefront of this conversation, tackling the taboo of menopause head on. “I had empty-nest syndrome, all sorts of syndromes. Hormones! Hot flushes! Moods! It was all happening,” she told the *Daily Mail*. “I felt very emotional, very poetic, very dark and dreamy.” The actress turned activist now lives in Marseille, France, with a French footballer 18 years her junior and is exploring Ayurvedic medicine as a healing alternative.
Anderson isn’t the only celebrity rebelling against the societal silencing of “women of a certain age.” British supermodel Yasmin Le Bon, 53, has recently confessed to experiencing menopause-related memory loss and body aches, and gaining a “layer of padding,” while former socialite Meg Mathews describes the phase as the worst 18 months of her life. Turning 50 in 2016 prompted her to found the fun and factual website megsmenopause.com as a resource for the millions of women navigating this change.

The menopause is the time in a woman’s life when her periods cease, and is deemed to have occurred when she not menstruated for 12 months. Despite the universality of this natural process, it still remains
deeply stigmatized and shrouded in mystery. Menopausal women are likely to undergo physical and emotional symptoms of varying severity, such as hot flashes, memory loss, sleep disruption, depression, weight gain and mood swings, and a new wave of women are pulling back the curtain and speaking candidly about their experiences.

Inspired by her own sense of isolation during the onset of this hormonal shift, Mathews has become an advocate for the menopause cause. From foggy brain and joint pain to loss of libido and vaginal dryness, she shies away from nothing, explaining to Metro, “Menopause doesn’t mean the end of being sexy or feminine, it is something every woman will experience at some point... whether you suffer from every symptom going or sail through, it doesn’t have to be something you face alone.”

While there’s still some way to go before menopause is normalized, UK advocates are campaigning for workplaces to become more menopause-friendly after a BBC survey carried out in December 2017 revealed that 70% of women don’t tell their employers they’re experiencing debilitating symptoms that can often cause them to miss work or sometimes even drop out of the workforce entirely. In the United States, the fictional septuagenarian duo in the TV show Grace and Frankie create a line of sex toys specifically to meet the needs of post-menopausal women, and wellness bible Goop’s voyage into vitamins includes High School Genes, a cleverly named metabolism booster for women who are perimenopausal and postmenopausal.
After realizing that no one—not even her own mother—had the answers to her questions about aging, including the ones about menopause, Susan Feldman, founder of lifestyle site In The Groove, which launches this spring, set out to create a place where like-minded, age-defying women could shop, connect, and be seen and heard. “I woke up one day, probably after my mother told me she didn’t remember anything about menopause, and realized there were no digital platforms that were speaking to me,” explains Feldman. “I realized that for my mother’s generation, menopause was just something that happened, no one discussed it, and you just did what you had to get to the other side. Today, it’s time that we break the silence and start a conversation.”

Feldman is on a mission to free women from rules, age limits and expectations. “For a multitude of reasons, the world—especially the advertising world—has decided that at 50 you are no longer worth addressing,” she says. “This may have been true in the past, but today women want to be in the know and feel relevant. Age-defying women are ready to engage and looking for more.”

Kejal Macdonald, VP marketing of taboo-smashing pee-proof underwear line Icon, says older women are the best-kept secret of our society. “They’re treasure troves of wisdom, style, strength and humor. They’ve seen some shit, and have this awesome freedom of self that’s incredibly aspirational,” explains Macdonald, the marketing mastermind behind Icon’s recent “Piss Off” campaign featuring a badass skateboarder and a silver fox in acrobatic yoga poses.
While most brands targeting women over 50 have a patronizing, hush-hush attitude, Icon’s refreshing approach is all about replacing shame with unabashed, unapologetic celebration. “If you don't talk to women over 50 and figure out what they’re into—roller derby! hiking! learning a new language!—you’ll assume they’re all sipping a mug of tea on their porch while wearing a beige sweater set,” explains Macdonald. “Our secret to successfully connecting with boomer women is taking the time to get to know them. And not only to know them, but also to celebrate them and find the things we all have in common. Also, talking to them like they’re humans and sprinkling in a healthy dose of humor helps.”
Icon Undies' Piss Off campaign. Photography by Molly Matalon
When you tell the truth, you build trust, Macdonald points out. “When you say the thing no one wants to say, or tackle the subject that feels embarrassing, people pay attention because it wakes them up,” she says, noting that it’s no longer enough just to address a void in the market. “Make it look beautiful. Make it funny. Elevate your brand to meet the tastes of your customers.” In this case, the customers are the millions of women who are a lot more discerning and digitally savvy than brands previously believed.

For more on how to market for the 50+ female generation, download our Elastic Generation: The Female Edit trend report.

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