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Toolkit For Portrayals of Menopause On Screen



The Geena Davis Institute's report, [*The menopause gap in film: Writing a new narrative for women in midlife*](#), investigates the degree to which top-grossing domestic films feature menopause, and how these narratives play out on the big screen. The analysis focused on 40-plus characters in films from 2009 to 2024, to provide a series of benchmarks for understanding the media environment as it was, and as it more currently stands. Beyond menopause, the report also considers broader aging narratives related to work, love, caregiving, health, and physical appearance, to reveal how aging more broadly is framed differently by gender, and how that may shape audience expectations about relevance, desirability, and personal fulfillment later in life.

These recommendations are based on findings from the study:

- ◆ **Make Menopause Visible.** Increase characters with menopause and include storylines surrounding menopause. While menopause does not always need to be the center of the story, consider it as a fact-of-life for characters over 40.
- ◆ **Center Complexity, Not Caricature.** Menopausal characters were often portrayed as a caricature, portrayed with the “meno-rage trope” or as experiencing hot flashes. Research shows that the experience of menopause varies widely from person to person. Include stories that capture this nuance and complexity.
- ◆ **Prioritize Medical Accuracy.** Review menopause storylines for medical accuracy with an expert consultant. For this study, we found that portrayals of menopause were low on medical accuracy, sometimes even including medical misinformation.
- ◆ **Consider Who Talks About Menopause.** Include characters outside of women over 40 who talk about menopause. Whether it is a spouse, child, or parent, conversations about menopause can be social and discussed between characters who are not experiencing menopause, to show that menopause does not need to be hidden.
- ◆ **Redefine Menopause in Stories.** Menopause is often portrayed as a signal of the end of youth, rather than a normal biological process with a myriad of medical effects. Redefine menopause as a normal transition that female characters undergo.
- ◆ **Change the Tone.** Menopause was often associated with negative emotions in our film and survey analysis. While menopause may be experienced this way, research shows that there is no uniform experience associated with menopause.

Tired Menopause Tropes

Menopause as a proxy for rage

Menopause was often used to explain female characters' emotional instability.

Does this piece of media employ the “menopause as proxy for rage” trope?

- A prominent female character is portrayed as angry, volatile, or unreasonable.
- Another character links this behavior to (peri-)menopause.

Notably, it's often men who suggest a woman is in menopause, with the intent to undermine her choices.

Menopause and the death of sex appeal

Menopause was often equated with the death of a character's sex life.

Does this piece of media employ the “death of sex appeal” trope?

- A prominent female character is portrayed as losing sexual or physical desirability.
- This loss of desirability is explicitly or implicitly attributed to her age.

Menopause is the butt of the joke

Menopause typically showed up as the butt of a joke and usually at the expense of a female character.

Does this piece of media employ the “butt of the joke” trope?

- A female character's menopause is treated humorously by other characters or the narrative.
- The humor diminishes her credibility, competence, or social standing.