# HOW STORIES ABOUT MIDLIFE WOMEN CHANGE THE WORLD

A Quick Guide for Creators

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## Menopause is nearly invisible in film, and invisibility shapes culture.

Our study, _Missing in Action: Writing a New Narrative for Women in Midlife on the Big Screen_, analyzes how menopause and aging appear in top-grossing films from 2009 to 2024 that prominently feature a 40-plus female character. A review of 225 films prominently feature a 40-plus female character shows that only 6 percent mention menopause in any way. These moments are usually brief or comedic. Only one film in sixteen years contains a meaningful storyline connected to menopause. When a universal life stage disappears from storytelling, the women who experience it are pushed out of view, and that silence shapes how audiences understand midlife.

## Most films erase menopause entirely.

**Real-world impact:**
Silence teaches women that this chapter of their lives should be hidden. It reinforces stigma and confusion and keeps younger audiences from learning accurate information. Many viewers, especially younger women and people of color, say film shaped their first understanding of menopause. When film has nothing to say, people fill in the gaps themselves.

**What creators can do:**
Show menopause as part of ordinary life. Allow characters to talk about symptoms without embarrassment. Let the experience be one thread in a richer arc rather than the end of a woman's story.

**What could change:**
Authentic portrayals can shift cultural expectations and open the door to conversations that reduce shame. A romantic comedy where a midlife woman dates, flirts, and names her menopause experience without apology could completely reframe how audiences see desire and confidence at this age.

## Stereotypes still dominate, especially the idea of "meno-rage."

**Real-world impact:**

These portrayals reinforce long-standing myths that women's emotions are unreliable or exaggerated. In real life, these myths influence how women are treated in the workplace, in healthcare settings, and in relationships. They feed the belief that midlife women are unpredictable or less capable.

**What creators can do:**
Tell the truth about midlife pressures. Women at this age are balancing careers, caregiving, relationships, and health. Humor can be powerful, but it should lift the character rather than diminish her. When non-menopausal women are experiencing anger, don't attribute it to menopause to get a laugh.

**What could change:**

If filmmakers replaced the stereotypical "meltdown" with a scene where a midlife woman expresses frustration for reasons grounded in the story, not her hormones, audiences would understand that women's emotions have context and credibility. This would weaken the trope that menopause explains any strong reaction and strengthen the view that women at midlife are fully dimensional humans, not punchlines.

## Aging narratives are deeply gendered.

**Real-world impact:**

Media communicates that aging is a problem women must solve while men simply age. This fuels harmful pressure around appearance and influences how women are treated in workplaces, relationships, and public life.

**What creators can do:**
Show women aging without disappearing. Portray ambition, leadership, desire, humor, and authority as continuing into midlife. Treat cosmetic procedures with nuance instead of judgment.

**What could change:**
If a film showed a midlife woman being promoted because her experience gives her an edge, audiences would see aging in women the same way they already see aging in men—as competence rather than decline. That single reversal could begin to shift expectations about who gets to lead and why.