

The Influence of Anti-aging Culture on Body Image and Self-perception of Menopausal Women in Israel

Dr. Idit Klein

Abstract

The present study examines the subject of body image and self-perception of menopausal women in Israel as well as the relationships between menopause, body image, self-perception, and anti-aging culture. The study was conducted using the qualitative methodology, in the phenomenology and narrative paradigms, thereby providing a platform through which the participants could describe their subjective experiences.

The participants were 25 Israeli women aged 48-60. The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews enabled participants to share their life stories, emotions, and perceptions about their body, their "self", and anti-aging culture during menopause. Each interview lasted about two hours, and was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

The study addressed themes such as self-fulfillment, beauty ideals, grooming, menses, fertility, sexuality, social roles and expectations, styling, healthy lifestyle, and women's body image in different stages of life, such as childhood, adolescence, and menopause.

Israel is a multicultural nation consisting of immigrants from different countries and cultures. Each culture is different and influences women's perceptions about body image, menopause, aging, and anti-aging.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study reveal similar environmental factors that influence Israeli women's life experiences. These factors include Jewish and Israeli history, tradition, and religion, which impact the narrative of menopause and body image and create perceptions of aging and anti-aging. An additional important aspect revealed in the study is that of the individual's personality and her life story, which also affect her subjective body image and self-perception during menopause.

Key words: Menopause, body image, self-perception, qualitative research

Introduction

Menopause and Body Image

The world health organization in conjunction with the Council of Affiliated Menopause Societies (CAMS) provided the following definition of menopause: "The of cessation menses for all full 12 months, which translate into near completion in decrease of ovarian hormones secretion estradiol the more biologically

active from estrogen. The period before menopause is called perimenopause and after menopause -post menopause. Each period can last a few years".

Menopause is considered a natural and normal stage in life that happens to all women in midlife, usually between the ages of 45-55. Some women experience early menopause due to genetics, medical conditions such as cancer, chemotherapy treatment or gynecological surgeries, such as a mastectomy or ovary removal to prevent breast or ovarian cancer for carriers of the BRCA gene.

Even though menopause is an important stage in women's life span, menopausal women are almost absent from the socio-cultural discourse and from the academic research of body image in general and in Israel in particular. In Israel, menopause culturally symbolized and stigmatized as aging.

Cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2017) shows the strong connection between language and culture. Language creates reality. People interact and transmit messages through language. Words symbolize culture and represent the essential channel to information, socio-cultural norms, and values. Language also represents the social ethos and cultural perceptions. Hence, language creates cultural narratives and forges an individual's reality.

According to Wolf (2021) Cultural linguistics can provide an understanding of that nature and relationships amongst cultural cognition, cultural conceptualization and language, cultural schemas capture beliefs, norms, values, expectations and behaviors.

In Hebrew, the term of menopause is *gil hablut*, which means the age of wilting. The term represents a negative representation of menopause and can create negative body image and negative self-perception. Another term widely used in Israel to refer to menopause is *gil hamavar*, which literally means 'the age of transition' that also has negative association, because it's the age of transition from fertility to old age and death.

Although men also go through a transitional stage due to a reduction in testosterone, in Israel, this stage is associated with women only.

Women's role as mothers is especially significant in Israel. (Berkovitch, 1997) There is generally a strong emphasis on fertility and motherhood because of Jewish and Israeli history, the religious commandment to procreate, the need to build a new state and nation in Israel after the loss of six million people in the holocaust, and the loss of many young men during Israeli wars since the establishment of the state until the present day.

In Israeli culture, menopause therefore symbolizes the end of a significant stage of life for women. For some women, menopause symbolizes mourning, loss, and deficiency.

In addition to the typical physical and emotional symptoms of menopause, for some Israeli women, the inability to reproduce during menopause symbolizes the dysfunction of the body and therefore leads to a negative body image.

Changet al. (2019) shows that there is a reciprocal relationship between negative body image, self-perception, and physical symptoms of menopause. Negative body image affects menopausal women's self-esteem /self-perception and can reduce menopausal women's quality of life. On the other hand, a positive body image enhances quality of life and can reduce menopause symptoms.

Body image is defined as a multidimensional concept that includes the individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about her own body (Cash & Pruzinsky ,2021). Body image consists of body acceptance and body appearance. It is the individual's perception of her physical self, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Lee & Dam Horst (2021) emphasize that body image consists of physical shape, size, weight, and functioning. Body image is also constructed by body satisfaction evaluation and an investment in appearance. (Herzig et al.,2021).

Since menopausal women experience many changes in their body, visually and functionally, some of them report changes in self-perception and body image.

Hockey et al. (2021) and Wolf (2004) suggest that body image is influenced by social and cultural construction of beauty ideal. The western ideal of beauty consists of youthful, thinness, fitted, and a glowing look. According to Walf (2004) Most women in menopause do not meet the standard imposed by this ideal of beauty and are therefore often frustrated due to the changes they witness in their body and face.

Body image dimensions are associated with psychosocial functioning. It is related to the individual's self-esteem, interpersonal confidence, eating and exercise behaviors, grooming activities, sexual behavior, and any other individual experiences. These components can predict emotional stability and can lead to positive body image during menopause (Tylka, 2015).

The research findings show that women who invested on grooming activities, styling, sports, healthy nutrition, and healthy lifestyle, reported on positive body image and self-perceptions during menopause.

On the other hand, negative body image during menopause increases physiological symptoms of menopause which in turn could lead to a negative mental state of mind and thus increase the possibility of anxiety and depression (Chen Ho-Chen, 2019; and Delamater al., 2010), which are some of the symptoms associated with menopause.

During menopause, women can experience physiological and psychological changes. Some women experience such symptoms as hot flashes, night sweating, insomnia, dizziness, irritability, nervousness, palpitation, muscle and joint pain due to menopausal arthrosis, and migraines. During menopause, most women experience body changes of shape and weight such as: fat gain, especially in the midsection of the body, hair loss ,change in hair color, and texture and changes in skin-wrinkles. Many menopausal women experience changes in the genitourinary system (such as genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM), vaginal dryness and atrophy, and Lichen sclerosis) that often leads to a decrease in libido, recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), and vaginal infection. Some of my informants shared that

changes in the genitourinary system, dryness, and infections prevents enjoyment of sexual intercourse and thus can create problems and difficulties in the marital relationship, which can also influence body image.

Physical changes as well as the decrease of the body function, may bring a general decrease in body strength and self-perception. Negative body image can lead to physical neglect and an unhealthy lifestyle. According to the research findings, I suggest that there is a circular connection between positive/negative body image and health.

Some menopausal women suffer from osteopenia/osteoporosis and sarcopenia- muscle and bones wasting, and a decrease in body balance as a result.

Some of my interviewees reported emotional changes, such as depression, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, and mood changes.

As a dance therapist and a fitness, Pilates, and health coach more than 30 years, I have found that there is a strong connection between the body experience and the emotional condition and state of mind.

I find that there is a strong connection between physical and mental stability and strength. Physical stability and strengthened body enhance emotional stability and creates a positive body image during menopause. Stability and strength, as well as flexibility, can be created through fitness and movement, and can influence and enhance emotional stability.

The embodiment theory posits a relationship between the body and the mind/soul. Through the bodily experience, women understand and process their emotional experience. This theory emphasizes the impact of the body on emotional experience and explains the connection between the body and the mind. (Merleau Ponty in Marshall,2008; Shapiro, 2019). According to this approach, experiences represent the connection between the body and the mind. The body and the senses are the source and a basis for existential experience. Through the body, people perceive and create their reality.

The biopsychosocial approach strengthens this concept. This approach systematically considers biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors and their complex interaction in understanding the individual health experience in a holistic approach. (Cohen Brown et Clark, S. ,2010). Accordingly, most menopausal women experience physiological changes, which may be influenced by a range of biological, psychological, and cultural factors. (Hunter & Smith, 2017; Simon, 2020) (Shapiro & Shwartz, 2019).

The research findings show the verity of experiences and perceptions about menopause and anti-aging culture and the reciprocal and bidirectional connection between body image and self-perception. They also show the bidirectional connection between physiological and psychological aspects, the connection between healthy lifestyle and visibility and the connection between anti-aging culture and wellness.

Methods

In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the research subject.

Twenty-five Jewish Israeli women were recruited after posting a call to action on Facebook. The participants were from different sociocultural and educational backgrounds, occupations, and marital statuses. Most women were from the Sharon and Israel center area.

Most of the women I interviewed were secular, some defined themselves as traditional, and one participant was from an Ultra-Orthodox family but had left the religious framework and become secular at the age of 16.

Some of the interviewees were second-generation holocaust survivors, and some of their families were the frontiers who build the state.

The interviewees had a variety of occupations and included vice presidents of companies, nutritionists, academics, journalist and writers, psychotherapists, cosmeticians, and housewives, mostly from the middle class . Each one of them came from a different family, environment, and educational background, thus creating a heterogenous research population that made the research so interesting and teaching.

As one of the principles of qualitative research, I did not look for homogeneity or for one objective truth. I found the heterogeneity of the research population interesting and enriching the knowledge about the research subject.

In-depth Semi-structured Interview: A Narrative Research Approach

In-depth interviews are an essential, qualitative, and narrative research instrument. (Josselson, 2013; Shkedi,2012; Seidman, 2006). A narrative interview is circular, which means that as research participants start to tell their story, new subjects and questions arise. The format of semi-structured interviews provided flexibility and allowed spontaneity, creativity, and authenticity for both the interviewees and the researcher conducting the interviews.

Toval et al. (2010) suggests that an in-depth interview employing the narrative approach can empower women's world because it focuses on knowledge, emotions, identity, self-fulfillment, and reflection of the informant's world.

Kvale & Brinkman (2008) note that an interview is an inter - view. for me and for the interviewee it was an inter -view/window to the personal and subjective experiences.

The interviews I conducted helped me to understand the participants' psychological and socio-cultural world through intimate conversations.

In -depth interview is an instrument to understand culture and identity. It is also the key to constructing identity and culture and revealing the "self". Through the interview, participants symbolize their emotional world by their verbal and non-verbal presence. The dialogue created between the informant and me during the interview created a new meaningful story and narrative.

The interviews were guided by an ethical approach. Each interviewee signed an informed consent before the interview. Most of the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' natural environment, that is, their homes. Some of the interviews were conducted at my studio/clinic, and one interview in the hotel lobby.

All interviews were analyzed and categorized according to narrative analysis (Lieblich, 2013; Josselson, 2013; Spector-Marzel, 2010) and inductive thematic analysis (Gilligan et al., 2006). The research analysis process is based on hermeneutic research (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Gadamer, 1976, 1990), initiating with repeated reading of all women's interviews. Gadamer viewed the hermeneutic cycle as a process that occurs between the text and the interpretation of the text. To Gadamer as to the Heidegger approach, "being" is meaning and meaning is the interpretation of both the researcher and the informant. According to that approach hermeneutic circle describes the construction of meaning within language (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). By reading the transcriptions of the interviews several times, new themes and categories raised and have been inquired.

The research was conducted from the perspective of grounded theory which is a social science qualitative methodology based on the data that have been collected and analyzed from the real world. (Shkedi, 2012)

Findings

Body image and self-perception during menopause are influenced by many factors such as physical and functional activities, visibility and sensory factors, the socio-cultural environment, and life history. These factors influence the physical and psychological /personality aspect and create women's body image during menopause. They also influence perceptions about aging and anti-aging.

Body image and self-perception during menopause

Women's body image is influenced by visibility, health, shape and weight, body function, the ability to enjoy the body, grooming, styling, beauty ideal, sensations of the body, socio- cultural norms and social construction, personal and cultural aesthetic norms, emotions, and the individual's life story. It is also influenced by the immediate environment perceptions about the body and self-efficacy during life span as well as perceptions about nutrition and food, fitness, and healthy lifestyle.

In the following sections I will present themes that came up during the interviews.

Visibility and Femininity

During the interviews, many issues pertaining to femininity and visibility came up.

Since I believe that there is a connection between body image during menopause and during women's earlier stages in life, I asked my interviewees about their perceptions of visibility and femininity both before and during menopause.

During the interviews, a few themes and symbols of femininity came up: The ideals of beauty related to body shape, breast and waist size and shape, hair and skin look and color, as well as posture and feminine presence, styling, and grooming.

The beauty ideal – body shape and size, skin, hair color and texture

The Western ideal of beauty defines beauty as a thin and youthful look (Hammer, 2019; Walf, 2004).

Some of my interviewees felt beautiful when they were young while others felt more beautiful and feminine during menopause.

G: "I always felt beautiful, I love my femininity. But as an adolescent my close environment always criticized my femininity and sexuality. At the age of 17, I even shaved my red curly head hair, which had quite a presence, because I felt the masculine environment arresting me. My family was afraid of my beauty and my sexy feminine look. I felt in a way that the environment felt threatened by my beauty. Nowadays, As an actress I must keep my weight and body shape stable. I need to look and feel good. I am doing everything to feel good about myself".

R: "I feel more beautiful today than I was when I was younger. When I got into menopause, I had bariatric surgery and now, a few years later, I feel so good with the changes in my body I feel more beautiful today than ever".

N: "Listen, as a teenager, I was so ugly and hairy, I had a mustache, braces on my teeth and I had a small limp that I learned to hide. So now, even though my body changed during menopause, I gained weight, my hair is turning gray but it's still thick, so now I feel the most beautiful and young that I could ever be."
"

A: "I was always thin because I danced, but I had wide pelvis and legs, I always had an issue with my small tits. For a while, I even thought about having plastic surgery. But now during menopause, I have gained weight, so suddenly I have tits and I love it".

I: "I always felt beautiful. Now, during menopause, I feel less beautiful. I gained weight, my face fell. Even though I still have beautiful breasts, I don't like my chin when I look in the mirror. I love my body even though I was never too thin or too beautiful. I think that being too beautiful is dangerous. My mother was very beautiful, and she betrayed my father and left him. Not everybody loves my curvy body, but I accept my body as it is".

D:" I always had an issue with my small tits. My sister had very big tits and next to her, I felt "titles". I felt like a boy. After my breast cancer, the issue came up again. I thought of having plastic surgery, but my husband says he loves me like that, and we are afraid to have the surgery".

R:" I have always had big boobs, and I was ashamed of my body. When I was teenager and during the army service, I tried to hide my feminine body, silly me. Now my body has changed, but I feel more reconciled with it, except for my too white skin, which has always been an issue for me "

S:"As a child and a teenager I didn't feel beautiful, I had brown skin compared to my family and friends, as if I was the child who was "burned in the oven " to my parents. I also had a big nose. After I had plastic surgery, I felt much better about myself. Nowadays I feel ok and am reconciled with my looks".

Menopause Experiences

The experience of menopause is subjective.

For some women, menopause is accompanied by a sense of a loss of femininity, attractiveness, and functionality. For them, menopause symbolizes grief-and loss of femininity, while for others it was a kind of newly found freedom. Yet some of my interviewees were ambivalent about the cessation of menses.

Perceptions About Menses

A:"There is a movie that a mother tells her daughter when she gets her first menses: welcome to femininity, so I was thinking to myself, if I don't have a menses any more than I lost my femininity? For me menses symbolizes femininity and the end of a very important evolutionary role of production "

B:"When my menses stopped, I felt it was heaven. No bleeding anymore. I jumped up to the moon. But I had to pay for it (smiling} with other symptoms".

Y:" I loved my menses, it was natural. It symbolized for me the cycle of nature and health. It symbolized for me women's power and now I have lost it".

L:" The cessation of menstruation wasn't an issue to me. I felt a kind of relief. I don't feel less feminine because of it. Anyway, I did not reproduce any children... The problem was the shocking side effects of menopause, all the symptoms and the fat gain".

D:" I feel ambivalent about the cessation of menses. In a way I summoned myself during menopause because it released me from going to the "mikveh" and the habit of "niddah". It feels as if I got back control over my body. The body is mine. I can do with it what fits me and not what the religion ritual binding fertile women, or to please my husband " (a Jewish religious ritual of going to a special pool after menses to clean the impurity of menses)

Menopause Symptoms: Body and Mind

As noted, menopause is a subjective experience. While some women experience some of the symptoms, others do not experience any symptoms at all. Most of the women I interviewed had learned how to handle symptoms they experienced. Some of them used HRT while others used natural supplements. For some menopausal women, the changes associated with menopause led to adoption of a healthier lifestyle.

My interviewees mentioned that they suffered from hot flashes and night sweat, insomnia, gaining weight, migraines, sensitivity to food, emotional changes, anxiety, depression, memory problems palpitations, vaginal dryness, irritability, uncontrollable hunger, wrinkles, urine and vaginal infections, and joint and muscle pain.

Body symptoms can influence women's body image and self-perception, since they influence body visibility and functionality that could influence emotional state of mind and vice versa. Women who experienced depression and anxiety neglected their body, their visibility, and their health, while women who felt satisfied with their lives and invested in their body and self, experienced emotional stability.

Some of my interviewees did not experience the typical symptoms of menopause and noted that menopause was a positive experience for them while for others it was a negative experience.

E: " When I got into menopause, I felt like I was going mad, as if I was losing myself, I didn't recognize myself. I suddenly had brain fog, I lost my organization abilities, and felt that I had lost my core."

O: " When I entered menopause, I felt palpitations as if I was involved in a car accident, hot flashes, and night sweats. It was terrible."

N: " I have lost my libido from 100 to 0, I felt so sorry for my husband"

B: " I feel dry down there like a prune, each sexual intercourse hurts, so I stopped having sex with my hubby. "

R: " I feel that I have gained weight especially in the midsection, and if I don't eat healthy, I gain more fat It also influences my body posture."

O: " I feel so irritated and depressed, I cry for no reason, eat emotionally and don't invest in my look "

E: " I suddenly have new wrinkles and facial hair, so I find myself with tweezers in front of the mirror all day; it's depressing".

I: " I find that I have sensitivity to many kinds of food, as if something has changed in my stomach, so I must be minded to what I eat, If I don't, I get fat and my stomach hurts and it's depressing "

Contrary to the above experiences, some women experienced the opposite symptoms.

D: "I can't gain weight, I am trying to eat more, and I am losing weight, I don't feel hungry. When I was young, I was considered very thin. People called me a broom stick. Now my thinness is an advantage. I know that many women my age struggle with their weight, even women who were very thin before menopause."

R: " Since I have started to use HRT, I feel sexual arousal that I have never felt before, I even bought myself an adult toy (vibrator) and I use it with lubricants hemp oil."

O: " I must say that I am more connected to myself and less attuned to the environment. Nothing irritates or makes me nervous; I chose what to do in my life. "

N: " This is the best time of my life, the symptoms I had before at the beginning of menopause have gone, and I have flourished, but I flourish in and not out. I feel connected to myself more than ever."

E: " I don't suffer any menopausal symptoms, I guess it's because I started to live a healthy lifestyle even before menopause. I eat healthy and do sports to maintain my body and my emotional stability and it works.

Healthy Lifestyle: Fitness, Nutrition, and Nutrition Supplements

Healthy lifestyle has an impact on body image and symptoms of menopause. For some women, menopause was an opportunity to take care of their body and health.

O: " At the beginning of menopause, I gained 8 kg. So, I started a keto diet. Since then, I have lost weight and I feel much better about my looks. Also, I feel much lighter, and I don't feel swelling in my stomach as I was at the beginning of menopause. "

Y: " I invest 3000 shekels every month in my vitamins. It keeps me healthy. I prefer to invest in my nutrition and nutrition supplements than to go shopping or to restaurants."

M: " I started to eat healthy, and I started doing sports because my medical tests were not very good. I understood that I must take care of myself. I look better and feel better than before. "

L: "During menopause I have started to jog, it's a present I give to my body. It affects my body and my mood. It makes me feel good and when I changed my nutrition, it also influenced my mental state."

Styling during menopause

I suggest that there is an inherent sloppy look in Israeli fashion. Even designers create clothes and fashion that is not considered "too much". I claim that it is connected to a few ethos that represent the Israeli socio-cultural construction and norms: The ethos of the frontiers who had to build the state and did not have time or money to invest in their look, the ethos of motherhood : If you are a mother , you should invest your time and money in your children and husband , and not in your looks. If you are a mom, you should not feel or look sexy. The ethos that "you are beautiful when you are comfortable" or

"Do not look at the can but into it", the ethos of equality and modesty (of frontiers, as soldiers during service in the army, as members in the kibbutz, and in the religious and traditional environment).

According to the above ethos, since you are no longer fertile after menopause, you are supposed to disappear from the social arena, or at least not to be noticed. You are expected to be looked at in certain colors and you are not supposed to "show" your body or have a shiny /attractive/sexy look. As one of my informants said, " I don't want to stick out, I prefer to look like everybody in the street."

Yet, some women experienced menopause as a stage of life when they could be connected to their desires and be even bolder than they have ever been.

The respondents talked about styling and aesthetics and emphasized convenience above any other aspect of styling during menopause.

The research findings show that styling and grooming may affect menopausal women's body image and self-perception.

A:"People in Israel are always looking strangely at my elegant style. They think that it is because I am French, but it is because I am an image consultant, and I must "walk the talk". Besides, styling is in my DNA. But I sometimes feel unconnected to the Israeli pioneer's style ".

H:" I love fashion and styling. I find that it is a way of expressing my individuality. But I will never dress "too much" or wear high heels. High heels to me look "too much" and are also not comfortable.

L:" Since menopause I have stopped wearing dresses because I feel it makes me look old. I prefer jeans and comfortable sneakers; I look and feel young and cool."

N:"Since I entered menopause, I changed the colors I wear. Before menopause I used to wear red and black and now, I wear down to earth colors like green, beige that looked old to me before."

H:" I never wear high heels, because it looks "too much" and it's not comfortable or practical when I go with my kids to the playground or when I am teaching in class."

O:" I always invested in clothes, not for others but for myself. I love aesthetics and the elegant look. I love high heels and I find them very comfortable. It also makes me feel assertive. I love to see myself in nice clothes, but women around me always ask me how come I haven't given up those unhealthy and uncomfortable heels and shoes. All women around me wear flat shoes or sneakers. Leave me alone! it's my choice."

I:" For me, high heels symbolize my femininity and freedom. At my religious environment, when I was a kid, it was not allowed to wear high heels, women should not show or emphasize their femininity, so when I left my environment, the first thing that I have changed in my look was my shoes. "

M:" I have always loved fashion. I think I have a unique style. But I love wide clothes, I always buy comfortable clothes and I always take one size up, so the clothes won't be tight and show things I don't want to show, especially now that my body has changed ".

E:" I love to wear makeup and to feel groomed, I feel beautiful. I wake up in the morning beautiful, but I prefer permanent makeup and eyelashes and I have my hair straightened, so I occasionally go to my hairdresser and to the cosmetician and I am ready to go out without investing so much time daily and have time for other things. It is very comfortable. I don't have the patience and time to go to my hairdresser every week in order to look good, but I love to look beautiful, So I do the permanent grooming and I don't have to worry or deal with everyday grooming."

O:" I love to buy beautiful clothes and to take care of myself. It is a kind of therapy. I go to my cosmetician once in a month, and I love it. She takes care of my skin and I love the sensation of the massage she gives to my face and to my soul, I deserve it. I don't do that for others, but for myself" (smiling)

Social and cultural norms/ Israeli women's social roles and the environment expectations

As noted, one of the essential women's social roles in Israel is being a mother.

Menses symbolize the ability to reproduce and to become a mother. Several women shared their difficulties to get pregnant and talked about their IVF treatment. They talked about their strong wish to become a mother.

Women who had problems in getting pregnant, felt "broken" "dysfunctional", and felt as if their body had betrayed them.

For many women in Israel, becoming a mother constitutes feminine self-fulfillment. Some of my interviewees shared that they loved their body during pregnancy (another transitional stage in women's lives) while others felt like "elephants" and loss of control over their body like the experience of losing control over their body during menopause.

I:" I was born a mother. When I was 12 years old, my brother was born, and I took care of him as if he was my child. So, I practiced for my life role of being a mom to four kids. I started my career only once my kids had grown up."

H:" It took me a lot of time to get pregnant, and I had to go through a procedure of artificial insemination, which took a few years. I felt that my body was broken and was not functioning. But in the end, I became a mother, and I was very happy. I loved being a mother of babies and small children. Now, during menopause, except for all the changes my body is going through, my kids don't need me anymore and the nest is getting empty, and I sometimes feel sadness. But on the other hand, I have

started my new academic career as a university lecturer, and I have started my PhD. So, I must say that I feel more worthy and valued in my own eyes and in what people around me think of me".

Besides the expectation and the social norm of being a mother, in some families, women were also expected to succeed in their studies and career.:

S:" I was always the smart one in my family. In my family, it was very important to succeed. I come from a family of doctors and scientists, so the expectations for my studies and career were very high, but not instead of being a mom."

O:" In my family you were expected to succeed as a mother and in your career. my parents supported me to do that. They gave me the opportunity to become an immunologist and become the CEO of an international pharmaceutical and research company. When the kids were young, I felt that I was juggling between my career and my role as a mother. Fortunately, my husband and family supported me. Now during menopause, I am at the top. I feel that I have fulfilled my aspirations and I intend to have another significant professional role and then retire. I want to fulfill my passion and dream to learn about wine and open a boutique winery. I feel that now I want time for myself".

perceptions about Aging and Anti-Aging Culture

feminist theories suggest that anti-aging culture is connected to the beauty culture and continues to sell the dream of perfect look through beauty consumption. (Hammer, 2019; Wolf 2004; Clarke, 2011) But Anti-aging is not just cosmetics and aesthetics. It deals with delaying the body's aging process and prevention of diseases (Hillell,2018). Anti-aging culture promoting not only youthful looks but a healthy lifestyle. It enables well-being during menopause and in later stages in life.

I interviewed women who represented anti-aging agendas and others who represented pro-aging.

I suggest that Pro aging perceptions misses the essential advantages of an anti-aging culture, which promotes a healthy lifestyle for menopausal women, creates positive body image and positive self-perception.

Pro-aging matches and reproduces the negative Israeli narrative of menopause. According to this narrative, when you are in menopause, you are old, you have finished one of your social roles as a children reproducer. You are therefore supposed to disappear from the public arena or at least not to be seen as attractive, beautiful, stylish, groomed, not look 'too much", "too beautiful, or "too feminine". If you want to look and feel young, you are considered "pathetic" or not authentic to yourself and to the environment.

For some of my interviewees, using anti-aging practices, especially to improve their appearance, makes women look unauthentic and unnatural. These women represent the perception that "dealing" with your looks, even if it makes you feel good and improves your body image and self-perception is superficial. They also feel that perhaps it is better to hide or to be ashamed of the fact that you have

invested in your appearance. For other participants, using anti-aging medical treatments represents a holistic perception about physical and mental maintenance. For example, when they use Botox, they feel authentic because they don't feel old as they did when they looked at their mirror reflection with wrinkles. Yet, some of my interviewees were ambivalent about anti-aging culture. I interpreted this as the conflict between their wish to look younger and the socio-cultural Israeli norms and ethos as well as social perceptions about menopause and aging.

Y: "Aging is unpreventable, but I can only try to take care of my body and try to age well. I don't think that if I look younger by using cosmetics or by coloring my hair or through Botox as a treatment for my wrinkles, I will be young again. I accept my aging look. Of course, I would be happy to be thinner or look like the Kardashian mother, but I guess I don't have the money for that, and it is not natural. I believe in the natural and authentic look. Trying to fight the aged look won't really make me young and I don't think it will make me feel good. On the other hand, I must say that I look in the mirror and don't like my wrinkles and my aging look".

M: "Not long ago, I thought that Botox and injections are done only by bimbos; I had the perception that dealing with your wrinkles is superficial, but I see that some of my close friends, very intelligent and successful career women, have started to do that, they look beautiful and reflect finesse and elegance, they look even better than they looked when they were young. Maybe I need to change my stereotypical thinking."

O: " I will do everything to keep my looks fresh. I won't let my face fall. Why should I? There are new solutions to keep my face fresh and I will do everything that it takes to keep my face fresh and up. I use Botox, hyaluronic acid and I go to the cosmetician once in a month for maintenance. I will do everything to keep my healthy body and looks. I also use nutrition supplements as anti-aging, to keep my body and my emotional stability, it is instead of taking Prozac or going to a psychologist. "

R: " I love my wrinkles; every wrinkle is like honey. I feel beautiful and the use of Botox doesn't look natural to me. I just want to age in a place like in the countryside and grow my vegetables myself and see my family and grandchildren growing. I don't care about the wrinkles, just about my health. And for my health I try to eat right and exercise. This is how I take care of my body; this is my anti-aging."

M: " You know, I started to inject hyaluronic acid and I feel good about myself when I look in the mirror. I feel that the mirror reflects the way I feel inside when I don't have wrinkles. That's the way I feel my authentic self. To me, wrinkles symbolize aging, and I don't feel connected to aging. I feel young and I want to look the way I feel. Having said that, I must say that none of my friends who use anti-aging medical cosmetics looks like they are 30, they just look better, fresher, and well-preserved".

O: " I will never use injections because I am afraid that it will change my face and my ability of expression. I prefer buying anti-aging cream, even though I know that it won't work on my wrinkles. (laughing) At least I have a good sensation over my skin, it is moist and looks glowing for a while after the cream. illusion of beauty that they. I know that for some women, it's a lifesaver to use those practices and technologies. I also know that in my case I have good genes and I am also married to

someone who is 10 years older than me, so I always feel young. He always says to me that I will always be young in his eyes".

O: "When I see women who have had too many injections, they look unreal to me, like a stuffed animal. They lose their natural look. I prefer laser and Rf technologies that I use in my clinic.

L: "I am more afraid of mental aging than of looking old even though, when I go to my dermatologist to inject Botox and hyaluronic acid, I love to see my reflection in the mirror, and it influences my emotional state of mind."

E: "I will do anything necessary to keep my body and my mind young and healthy, I eat well, I exercise, and I avoid junk food and sweets that make me feel good for a minute, but then I don't feel good, my stomach hurts, and my belly is swollen".

In sum, the interviewees represent the multiple perceptions about aging and anti-aging.

Most of the interviewees talked about anti-aging in terms of taking care of their body and soul and maintaining their physical and mental health during menopause to be healthy later in their life, as they get older.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study found that body image and self-perception during menopause is a subjective experience and it is influenced by biological, socio-cultural, and psychological factors.

Israel has special characteristics influenced by its unique history and multi-cultural and social structure that constructs perceptions about menopause, body image, and anti-aging culture.

In this study I presented Israeli women's experiences of body image and self-perception during menopause, as well as perceptions about anti-aging culture. These experiences are influenced by the narratives of menopause and aging as well as the participants' personal life stories and their immediate environment.

The research findings show that positive body image and self-perception during menopause can be obtained through anti-aging practices. Anti-aging practices do not only include cosmetics and the visual aspect, but also living a healthy lifestyle.

The research findings show that the physical and visibility aspects have an impact over the emotional condition. Women who took care and maintained their body on a regular basis, felt much better about their body and self. They also felt much healthier physically and mentally. There is a circular connection between positive body image, health, and menopause symptoms.

Positive body image makes women live a healthier lifestyle, which makes them accept and love their body. This often leads them to groom their body, which makes their body healthy and improves various functions, thereby reducing illness related to menopause. As a result, their self-efficacy is improved and reduces such symptoms as depression and anxiety that are sometimes due to women's personal experience of losing control over their body (Appendix A)

I suggest that menopause symptoms and aging are not an edict of fate nowadays.

Awareness of a healthy lifestyle—nutrition, nutrition supplements and sports to keep the body and mind healthy and functional, and investing in visibility through grooming, styling, cosmetics, and aesthetic medicine—can produce a positive body image during menopause and hence creates well-being.

I suggest that negative perceptions and narratives of menopause and aging will decline. Women's awareness, healthy lifestyle, anti-aging culture can change the negative stereotype that menopause and aging equals disease and decline in visibility and functionality of the body and the mind.

Anti-aging culture—including new technologies, healthy nutrition and visibility, styling, sport, , mindfulness, and healthy lifestyles—enhance women's quality of life (QOL) influence body image and self-perception. Anti-aging culture can help change perceptions about menopause and aging.

I developed the **positive menopause model -PMM**, which emphasizes understanding and enhancing all aspect in menopausal women's lives and consists of Physical emotional, cognitive and visibility aspects (henceforth abbreviated as PECV) that can be improved through investment in a mindful and healthy lifestyle and anti-aging practices.

The **PMM-PECV** consists of the following:

***Positive body image**

***Positive self-perception**

***New positive menopause narrative**

PMM is based on healthy lifestyle and anti-aging culture and concludes:

Fitness, Minded and healthy nutrition, nutrition supplements, medical and alternative symptoms treatment, Anti-aging new medical and cosmetics technologies and treatments, grooming and styling, self-fulfillment based on self-efficacy and dreams -through career, second career, new profession, studies, family etc.

PMM – Positive menopause model influence and influenced by

PECV: P- Physiological aspect **E-**emotional aspect **C-**cognitive aspect and **V-**visuality aspect. (PMM -PECV, Appendix B)

The findings of the present study show that anti-aging culture can help menopausal women cope with typical menopause symptoms and stereotypes and can improve menopausal women's wellbeing.

Well-being and Well-aging can enhance quality of life.

Further research should inquire other menopausal women populations in Israel, or a comparative study between women groups based on ethnic/sectorial groups or according to geographical regions.

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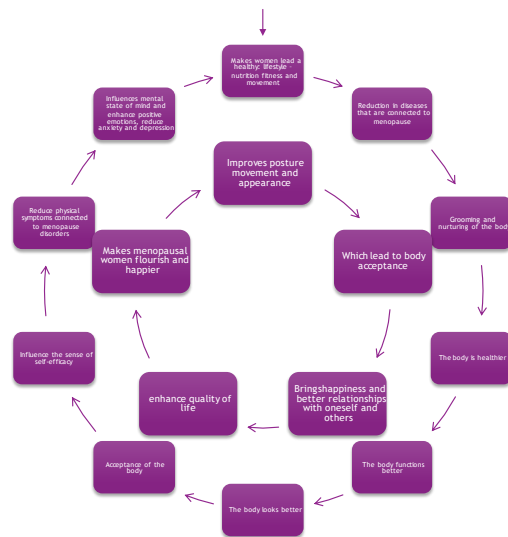
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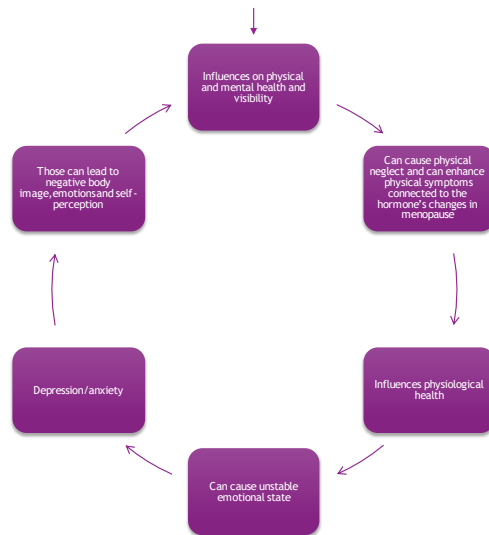
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Positive body image in menopause

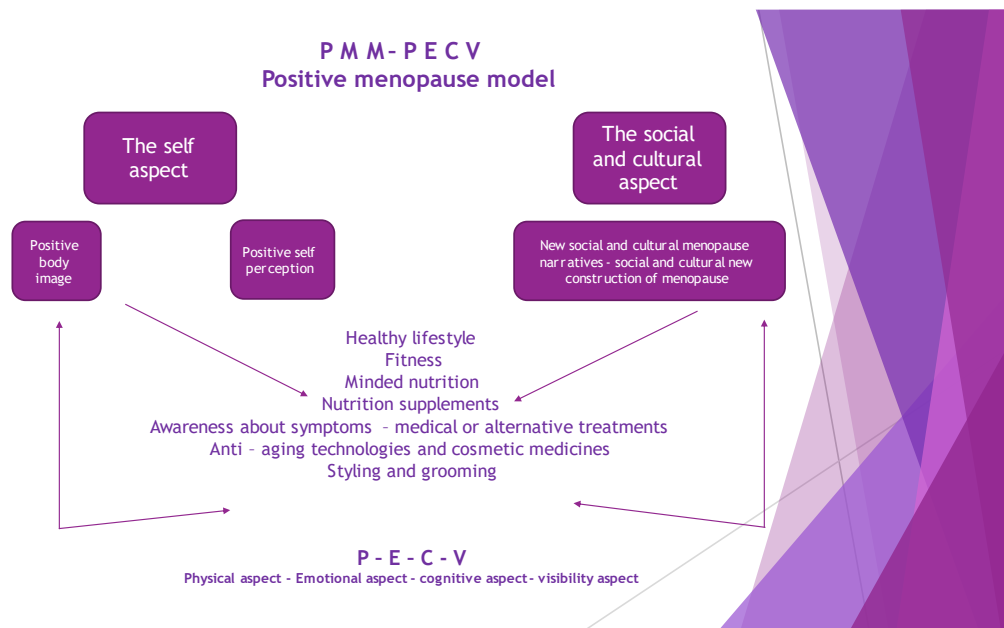


Appendix A

Negative body image in menopause



Appendix B



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