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Like mother, (not) like daughter: The social construction of menopause and aging

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Abstract

In recent American history, the definition of menopause has shifted from a natural, developmental transition to an increasingly more medicalized perspective that emphasizes biological deficits of the aging female body. Using qualitative data from two generations of women, this essay explores how and why this redefinition has occurred and what effect it has had on women's attitudes toward health and aging. The physical experiences of menopause were remarkably similar across mother–daughter pairs; however, daughters (who represented a slice of the baby boom cohort) differed from their mothers in how they talked about menopause, how they defined and treated menopause, and how willingly they accepted or fought the changes associated with menopause. Major social institutions, including the media and pharmaceutical industry, have played a significant role in reshaping the cultural lens through which women experience issues of health, body, and aging. This essay emphasizes the baby boomers'

desire to maintain control over their bodies and considers how this cohort of women, as a result, may experience late-life issues of body and health.



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Keywords

Women's health; Attitudes toward aging; Medicalization; Menopause; Generational differences

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