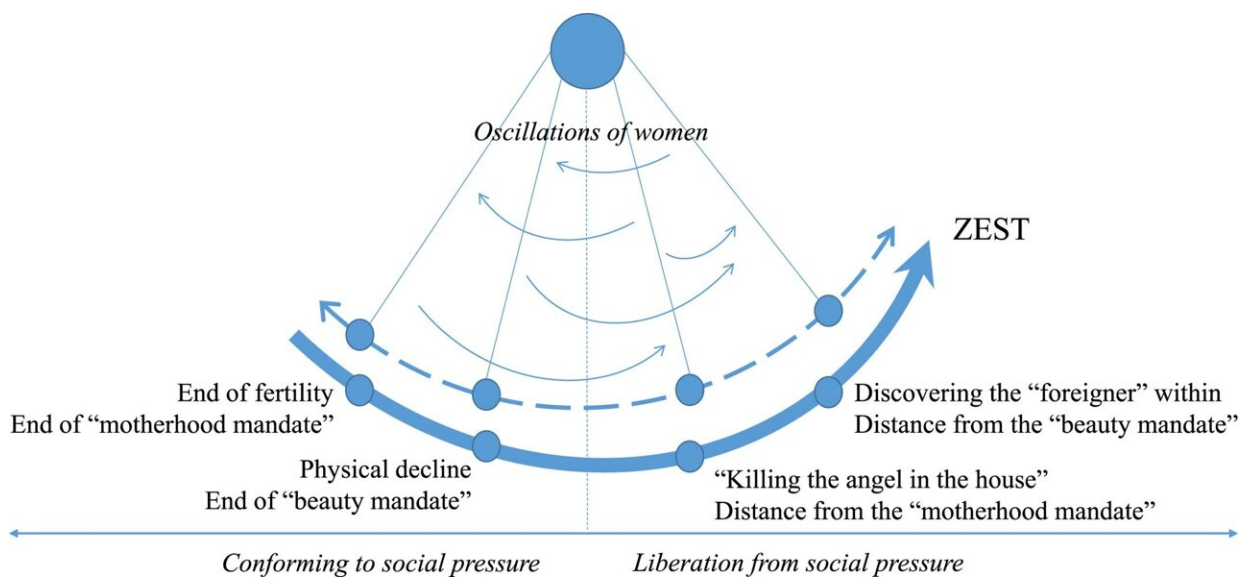


Organizations must go beyond medical views on menopause to support women's professional aspirations, says study

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The dialectic of zest. Credit: *Gender, Work & Organization* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13017

Organizations must enable midlife women to thrive in the workplace by taking inspiration from societies such as China and Japan to encourage positive conversations around the impact of menopause, a new study reveals.

But as they support older [women](#) in pursuing their ambitions and

accessing [career opportunities](#), organizations must ensure they do not hinder career progression through overlooked promotions, undervalued work, and lost opportunities.

In Western countries, menopause is traditionally viewed as a managed medical condition that creates physiological challenges that women must overcome if they are to function as effectively in the workplace as men of a similar age.

Publishing their findings today in *Gender, Work & Organization*, an international team of researchers led by the University of Birmingham, calls on organizations to use a new tool they have developed to address the largely unexplored and underutilized positive, creative, and energizing aspects of menopause.

The experts drew from feminist writers, such as Margaret Mead, Virginia Woolf, and Julia Kristeva, as well as 15 years' worth of articles on menopause published by British newspaper The Guardian beginning in 2005, to create their "dialectic of zest" tool to destigmatize menopause—long seen as a disease or a disability in Western societies.

Co-author Pilar Rojas-Gaviria, from the University of Birmingham, commented, "Organizations must move towards a positive, creative vision of menopause in the workplace—creating the kind of environment that encourages women to make use of all their talents and creativity as part of the menopause experience. We offer 'the dialectic of zest' as a useful tool for organizations to pursue a better understanding of women in the workplace, addressing not only their needs but also their individual ambitions.

"Western organizations can learn a lot from other cultures. For example, menopause tends to be a more welcome experience in China and Japan. Women in these countries have fewer hot flushes than their US and

Canadian counterparts—rarely associating this condition with embarrassment. The terms 'second spring' or 'rebirth' are often associated with menopause in traditional Chinese medicine—suggesting a positive transition into middle age."

The researchers used feminist writings and articles from The Guardian to describe menopause as a transformational phase that should not be viewed as deterioration and decline. They note that medical interpretations of menopause, while essential for treating health conditions in [older women](#), have overshadowed the lived experiences of aging women.

The "dialectic of zest" tool describes women's lived experience as an oscillating pendulum swinging between spaces of social conformity and personal liberation. This helps us better understand the multiple experiences of menopause in the workplace.

The researchers believe that in the workplace, organizational policies and practices either nourish or obstruct women's experiences and expressions of zest.

Two key steps that women experience in the process of liberation are based on Woolf's "killing the angel in the house" (stepping away from being devoted to others) and Kristeva's "discovering the foreigner within" (focusing on their projects, dreams, and authenticity).

If women are freed from the "angel in the house" and discover the "foreigner" within, then those experiencing menopause in the workplace will be well-placed to thrive.

"The 'dialectic of zest' tool creates a [holistic approach](#) to organizational care, where the full range of concerns, objective and ambitious of women experiencing menopause are considered," explained Dr. Rojas-

Gaviria. "This is a powerful perspective that can inspire care not only for women but also for all individuals who may struggle with challenges in the workplace.

"Organizations wishing to benefit from these insightful women must also create opportunities for 'education for all'—a compelling avenue to create the kinds of context where women experiencing [menopause](#) can contribute, advance, and thrive."

More information: Camilla Quental et al, The dialectic of (menopause) zest: Breaking the mold of organizational irrelevance, *Gender, Work & Organization* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13017](https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13017)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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