Journal of Women & Aging

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/wjwa20

# Unveiling the creative self in midlife: A qualitative study of Italian women's psychosocial transformation journeys

Anna Cappellini & Venusia Covelli

**To cite this article:** Anna Cappellini & Venusia Covelli (29 Mar 2025): Unveiling the creative self in midlife: A qualitative study of Italian women's psychosocial transformation journeys, Journal of Women & Aging, DOI: 10.1080/08952841.2025.2483482

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2025.2483482

JOURNAL OF WOMEN & AGING
https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2025.2483482

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group



# Unveiling the creative self in midlife: A qualitative study of Italian women's psychosocial transformation journeys

Anna Cappellini and Venusia Covelli

Department of Theoretical and Applied Sciences, e-Campus University, Novedrate, Italy

**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explores the psychosocial experiences of midlife Italian women, focusing on the evolution of their creative self. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, we examined narratives from eight women aged 51–62, capturing their spontaneous perception of the changes characterizing this phase of their life, with a particular focus on the subject of creativity. Three major themes emerged from the interviews: (1) Personal Growth, highlighting increased self-awareness, resilience in the face of adverse events and a deeper connection with their bodies; (2) Relationships with Others, underscoring shifts in friendships, family dynamics, and how relationships foster creativity; and (3) The Creative Self, which explores the redefinition of creativity in midlife as part of a broader transformative process. The study offers new insights into how midlife can serve as a fertile period for personal and creative development, challenging the dominant focus on loss often associated with ageing. This work contributes to the literature by highlighting the underexplored positive transformations occurring during this phase, particularly in the Italian socio-cultural context.

**KEYWORDS**

Creativity; Dixit cards; generativity; menopause; midlife woman

## Introduction

Midlife for women is a transitional period marked by challenges and opportunities, characterized by the reorganization of roles, relationships, and priorities, and by significant changes encompassing biological, personal, familial, and professional domains (Lachman, 2001). This phase is shaped by critical life events, such as menopause, and involves reflection on both past experiences and future aspirations, making it a pivotal time for personal growth, generativity, and the pursuit of a new psychological and social balance (Barrett, 2022; Lachman et al., 2015). These transformations are profoundly influenced by social factors such as health, status, class and gender (Infurna et al., 2020), and individual factors related to subjective aging shaping the diversity of experiences (Barrett & Barbee, 2022). During this phase, creativity can be regarded as a vital resource for personal adaptation and growth. It can serve as a vehicle for expressing generativity, extending beyond biological procreation to encompass the generation of ideas, the development of projects, and the creation of meaningful contributions to society (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). Moreover, creativity is a dimension closely linked to identity and the way individuals relate to the world and themselves. In an age marked by profound biopsychosocial transformations, one's creative self

**CONTACT** Anna Cappellini anna_cappellini@yahoo.com Department of Theoretical and Applied Sciences, e-Campus University, Italy.

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2025.2483482.

(Karwowski & Lebuda, 2017) inevitably changes. Therefore, this study aims to explore how women's subjective experiences of midlife transformations influence the role of creativity in their lives.

## The transformative processes of women in midlife

The experiences of women in midlife have been increasingly explored by international research, and, as with any life transition, they are characterized by both gains and losses (Baltes et al., 1980; Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Midlife women often navigate significant complexities in both their personal and professional lives, necessitating the management of multiple responsibilities. In addition to handling physical and psychological changes, they often must balance job positions of responsibility, young or teenage children, aging parents, and a frequently uneven distribution of childcare tasks (Hughes & Lewinson, 2015; Lichtenstein et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2015; Steffan & Loretto, 2025; Thomas et al., 2018). Amid these complexities, it is often necessary to address family dynamics that require consolidation, re-establishment, or dealing with irreparably broken bonds, which Crowley refers to as *Grey Divorce* (Crowley, 2019).

Among the most investigated themes in the literature are menopause, body image, motherhood, and the professional context. The experience of menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 (WHO, 1996, 2022) and is heavily shaped by the cultural environment. In fact, although triggered by a universal biological process, menopause is far from being a uniform experience: it's influenced by individual traits, social values, as well as economic and environmental conditions (Hickey et al., 2022). For example, women's experience can be shaped by the language and communication around the subject and culturally defined narratives (Milgrom et al., 2016; Navvabi-Rigi et al., 2022; Strezova et al., 2017). Cultural contexts of minorities, such as queer communities, offer inspiring perspectives of positive transformation (Jones et al., 2023). To foster a positive discourse on menopause, the role of healthcare providers proves to be central (Alspaugh et al., 2021; Hofmeier et al., 2017). Menopause is also related to body image, which plays a crucial role in the narratives of midlife women, is related to social expectations and self-perception (Bailey et al., 2021; Hofmeier et al., 2017; Wallbank et al., 2022), and can influence couple satisfaction (Crowley, 2019). Regarding motherhood, research has explored narratives related to being a mother, (Błachnio & Kuryś-Szyncel, 2022), becoming a mother for the first time (Morgan et al., 2015), the choice to be *childfree* (Ruegemer & Dziengel, 2022) and the experience of being unable to have children (Fieldsend & Smith, 2020). Finally, in the professional realm, significant attention has been given to the issue of ageism, along with its consequences on the opportunities available to women (Vickerstaff & Van Der Horst, 2022). This is particularly significant considering that women over the age of 50 can be highly motivated to learn, innovate and access their generative drive, by coaching and promoting new generations' wellbeing (Hurd, 2016; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015).

## Creativity in midlife

Creativity, along with procreation and productivity, is described by Erikson as a dimension of the construct of generativity that enables the transfer of cultural resources from one generation to the next (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). Erikson suggested that midlife is marked by the chance to harness creative and productive resources beyond the realm of competition, driven solely by an intrinsic motivation to create, nurture, and extend care outward. As people age and gain wisdom from life experiences, new forms of creativity emerge, manifesting in the sharing of knowledge and ideas within a generative environment (Datta Roy & Panda, 2022). Generative resources available to midlife women in professional and personal contexts have been previously investigated. The construct of self-transcendence positively influences individuals' narratives through, for example, a sense of interconnectedness, acceptance, and a positive outlook on the future

(Reischer et al., 2021). Long-term friendships are psychological significant and might serve as a protective factor against negative states (Piotrowski, 2018). Harnessing progress, the ability to construct personal narratives that describe one's aging as a story of progress (Barbee, 2022), can be associated with an increased sense of worth, confidence, standing up for oneself and generative mentoring.

Several studies have investigated creativity from a life span perspective (Russ et al., 2021). It has been suggested that there is a peak of creativity between the ages of 30 and 40, followed by stabilization or decline in later stages of the life cycle. This trend is often attributed to factors such as decreased energy and cognitive decline (Runco, 2018; Trnka et al., 2020). Nonetheless, a growing body of literature highlights the creative potential of adults over the age of 50 (Meléndez et al., 2016) and the influence of creativity on life satisfaction later in life (Adams-Price et al., 2018). Creative outputs can emerge across a variety of domains, including everyday life, academic research, performance arts, scientific innovation, and artistic expression (Kapoor et al., 2021).

Although everyday creativity has been highlighted as an important resource for individual well-being throughout the life course (Conner et al., 2018; Pauly et al., 2022; Platt, 2019), studies focusing on women have primarily concentrated on creativity in professional settings. Leadership styles (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020), roles in socially recognized creative fields, such as design, art and advertising (Inglada-Pérez et al., 2021; Porto & Romo, 2022), and the representativeness of women at the top of organizations (Roca et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2020; Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021) are among the main investigated subjects. However, regarding women' creativity in midlife, there is only limited research (Lear, 2017; McInnis & Medvedev, 2021). For example, creativity across the phases of the menstrual cycle has been previously studied (Chrisler, 2019; Galasinska & Szymkow, 2021) but, to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies examining whether and how creative potential changes in conjunction with the end of the reproductive age.

### *Study goals*

As previously highlighted, there is a growing interest within the scientific community in aspects related to the resources and positive transformation of midlife women, although not specifically focused on creativity. Regarding Italy, however, the research is often focused on aspects of loss mainly related to the negative psychological and health impact of menopause (Bendinelli et al., 2022; Laudisio et al., 2021; Saraulli et al., 2023) and issues in the sphere of sexual life (Faccio et al., 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2021). There's a paucity of studies investigating a positive narrative of aging and aspects of generativity and creativity. The present research aims to increase insight into Italian midlife women's narrative of self-development with a focus on creativity. Here, we used a qualitative approach to explore the experience of transformations undergone during this stage of life, with particular attention to the evolution of women's creative self.

## Materials and methods

### *Study design*

An exploratory study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology based on semi-structured autobiographical narrative interviews, where key themes were used as guidelines (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). Reference was made to the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Attention was given to how participants assigned meaning to their experiences within both their personal and social spheres. After the spontaneous observations on the changes that have occurred over the past few years, the theme of creativity was further explored through questions (reported in the following section "Procedures"). Finally, the interviewer investigated the meanings attributed by the interviewees to the terms generativity and

motherhood in order to explore the semantic contexts surrounding these two terms directly through the words of the participants. The goal was to identify commonalities or differences between the definitions provided, uncover new nuances in comparison to those found in the literature, and examine how they connect to creativity. The researcher took an active role in the interview process and in the co-construction of the narrative allowing, in the here and now, to shed light on the essence of experiences often previously unconscious (Bradshaw et al., 2017). The flexibility of the conversational approach has made it possible to capture personal insights with greater accuracy (Schober & Conrad, 1997).

## Participants

Given the lack of consensus regarding the onset and conclusion of the midlife phase (Lachman, 2001), the study is focused on the 50–65 age group, to also capture the experience of biological transition aspects related to menopause, which for many women occurs between 45 and 55 years of age (WHO, 2022). It was decided to interview women with an active professional life to avoid the influence that the transition to retirement might have on their psychological experience of this stage of life. Eight women between the ages of 51 and 62 years old were recruited using the principal investigator's (AC) personal network by using a snowball sampling methodology (DeVaney, 2016). Women with ages outside the expected range or who did not provide research consent were excluded. An email detailing the research project was sent to 35 contacts, asking them to share it within their personal networks. From this, the first three spontaneous applications, which met the criteria and had signed the informed consent, were recruited. Each of the three participants were then asked to share the project information within their personal network, leading to the recruitment of three more women, following the same procedure as before, one from each network (candidates were asked to specify who referred them). This process was repeated to identify the final three participants, bringing the total to nine. One participant withdrew from the study. The number of participants was considered sufficient, as saturation of themes was reached and no new themes emerged in the last three interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Demographic characteristics of participants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participant characteristics.

| Pseudonym | Age at interview | Children | Civil status | Qualification | Job |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beatrice | 54 | No | Married | Secondary School Diploma | Theatre teacher |
| Francesca | 62 | Yes | Married | PhD | University researcher |
| Luisa | 55 | Yes | Married | Secondary School Diploma | Yoga teacher |
| Maria | 55 | Yes | Cohabitant | Master's Degree | Laboratory analyst |
| Giulia | 60 | Yes | Widow | PhD | Company Director |
| Marina | 51 | No | Single | Master's Degree | Company Director |
| Adriana | 52 | Yes | Widow | Master's Degree | Highschool teacher |
| Lucia | 57 | Yes | Married | Master's Degree | Event planner |

## Procedures

Face-to-face interviews were conducted online between December 2023 and February 2024. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted from 50 to 70 min. Before starting the interview, a trained interviewer (AC) explained the study's aim, gave information about the study confidentiality and obtained a written consent. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of e-Campus University (n.09/2023). AC conducted the interviews in Italian using a semi-structured interview guide.

The interview was composed of three main areas. The first aimed at investigating the participants' spontaneous observations regarding the changes they experienced in the last five years.

Some of the questions asked were the following: *I ask you to tell me about the most significant changes or events in your life over the past 5 years. You can talk about physical changes or changes in your way of thinking or living your relationships; they can be changes that come from within or influenced by external events, in any area that is important to you. You can start wherever you like and share whatever you prefer. Every thought of yours will be important.* The second main area focused on the meaning of creativity as perceived by the interviewees and how this perception has evolved over time. Some of the questions asked were the following: *Each of us has our own way of seeing and expressing creativity. The word creativity or the expression of being creative is very subjective. What does it mean to you? Think about the creative part of yourself throughout your life—as a child, as a teenager, when you started working. What activities or moments come to mind? And today, how do you express your creativity? Has anything changed in the way you express yourself or even just in how you feel creative?* The last main area focused on the theme of generativity and motherhood: *Reflecting on the questions asked and the content you shared with me, if I say the word "generativity," what comes to mind? Spontaneously, even if the term is not familiar to you, what does it evoke? And if I say "motherhood"?*

In the second part of the interview, the interviewer used Dixit cards to explore the theme of creativity. The advantage of Dixit cards is that they can enrich the narration of one's psychological experience by amplifying meanings and stimulating the emergence of new imageries (Berger & Pain, 2017; López-Íñiguez & Burnard, 2022). The interviewer introduced participants to an activity adapted from the official Dixit board game, using a selection of 21 cards, available in the supplementary material, from the set Dixit 1 and Dixit 2 (Roubira & Cardouat, 2008), to explore further the concept of creativity related to the self, as it had emerged from participants' narratives, through a visual stimulus. Dixit cards allowed participants to engage in a different reflective modality, focusing on elements characterizing creativity concerning the self as previously narrated, which could also be further expressed through visual inputs. This approach enabled a deeper exploration and integration of participants' narrated content, revealing new connections among the themes that had emerged. To this end, participants were provided with the following instructions: *Now I will show you a series of cards, which you may already know—they are Dixit cards. Among the ones you will see, choose three of them that resonate with your creative self and best express what you have talked about so far regarding creativity, or that might add something new or different. There are no right or wrong answers, so I ask you to freely choose the cards that you feel best represent creativity about yourself. Don't give it too much thoughts, just pick spontaneously those cards which inspire you the most.* After the choice, the interviewer asked the participants to describe the card and the reason why they found it meaningful.

The use of Dixit cards as an investigative tool, alongside the participants' narratives prompted by the interview guide, represents an attempt at data triangulation. Triangulation is defined as *an approach for assessing the validity and reliability of data collection methods in the social and behavioral sciences* (Pelto, 2017, p. 242). According to Denzin (2017), researchers should employ multiple methods or various forms of triangulation in a study to test or develop a theory based on different sources or methodologies.

## Data analysis

After transcribing the interviews verbatim, a thematic analysis of the content was conducted, following the methodology described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis aimed to identify and describe the implicit and explicit themes emerging from the open-ended responses provided by the participants. The first author carried out the inductive analysis by repeatedly reading the transcript and creating an initial set of associations through memo writing, which allowed to record thoughts and reflections on the data. A manual analysis and coding of recurring patterns subsequently enabled the transformation of codes into themes. The structure of the

themes was discussed and refined with the co-author. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

## Results

### Themes and sub-themes

The analysis of the results permitted the content to be categorized into 3 main themes and 11 sub-themes. The first theme is *Personal Growth*, which contains the sub-themes: 1.1 *Space for creativity*; 1.2 *Self-awareness*; 1.3 *Relationship with one's own body*; 1.4. *Resilience; 1.5 Transcendence*. The second theme is *Relationship with Others*, which contains the sub-themes: 2.1 *Quality over quantity*; 2.2 *Creativity through relationships*; 2.3 *The judgment of others;* 2.4. *The perspective on parenthood.* The third theme is *The creative-self*, which contains the sub-themes: 3.1 *The meanings of creativity;* 3.2 *Generativity and motherhood.*

The interconnection of the themes provides insight into how women's experience of midlife changes contributed to shaping their creative-self (Figure 1).

A new *Perspective on parenthood*, particularly regarding older and more independent children, together with the choice to prioritize *Quality over quantity* in relationships, contributed to the liberation of *Space for creativity*. Greater *Space for creativity* translated into a desire to create for others, to offer something new and personal to the world, as described in the theme *Generativity and Motherhood.*

Increased *Self-awareness* fostered greater attention to relational needs, as captured in the theme *Quality over Quantity*, and improved the *Relationship with one's own body*. The need to look beyond individual existence, encapsulated in the concept of *Transcendence*, further supported the generative drive. The expression of *Creativity through relationships* enriched creativity with new meanings, as discussed in the theme *The Meanings of Creativity*.

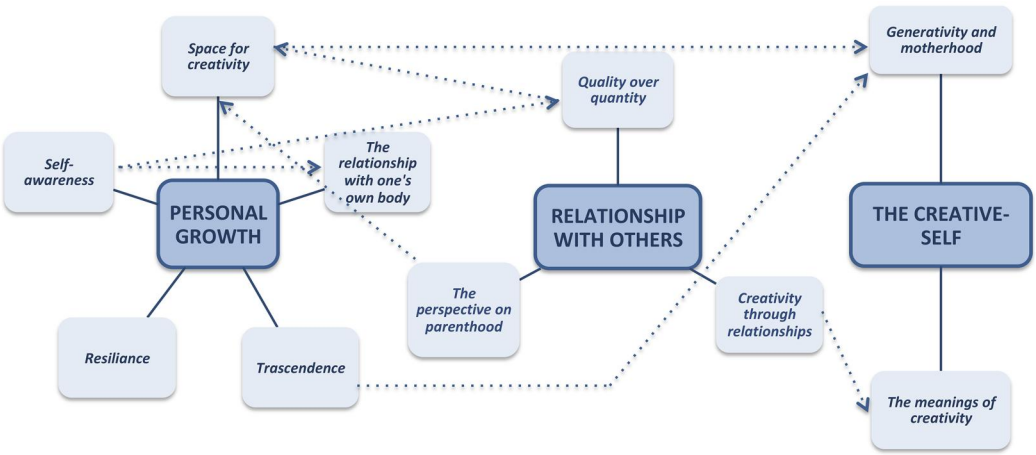


**Figure 1.** Representation of the emerging themes.

### Personal growth

During the interviews, aspects of personal growth and positive transformation emerged, which the women interviewed attributed to the last 5 years of their lives. In particular, the individual narratives highlighted: the ability to make time to develop talents or cultivate passions that had not previously found space in their daily life; a perceived increase of self-esteem and self-affirmation; a more mature and aware relationship with one's body and the changes related to it;

a greater sensitivity to aspects of transcendence, for instance towards nature, the universe or spirituality; a self-narrative about resilience and recognition of the potential for growth in moments of great difficulty in their past life.

***Space for creativity.*** All women described a growing attention to aspects of themselves, always been present in a more or less conscious way, but to which they never dedicated enough time and cultivate. The need to express themselves creatively and to pursue their passions required the interviewees to reassess their work-life balance. Creating space for everyday creativity fostered a sense of personal growth and development, along with a perception of improved harmony across the different aspects of their lives.

Some women rediscovered passions that had accompanied them since childhood and noted how dedicating time to these activities positively impacted other aspects of their daily lives as well. Some examples include archery and creative writing for Beatrice (54 years old, theatre teacher and screenwriter) or gardening for Francesca (62 years old, university researcher), who obtained an allotment thanks to a public tender for the allocation of urban gardens. Here is how they explained the revival of these interests:

> [Referring to archery] It's a passion I had as a girl, I signed up in August last year and this year I also started some tournaments, with terrible results that I don't care about, it's a competition with myself on concentration and the repetitiveness of the act, which I also find a lot in writing (…) I am nurturing myself: the discipline of writing is fuelling archery and vice versa and I like this very much (…) I'm letting it grow, that's it. (Beatrice)

> The first courgette we ate [with her children] was coming from grandparents' garden (…) now, with my first real vegetable garden I told myself I'm taking some time off work and I'm in the middle of green. (Francesca)

Some interviewees described their 50s as the moment when they became their authentic selves, shaping a life more aligned with their needs and desires. Some narratives described the midlife transition as a baptism, a validation to fully occupy their place in the world, with competence and pride. Luisa (55 years old, yoga teacher) fully invested in her passion for yoga, building skills and turning it into her main profession, while Maria (55 years old, laboratory analyst) started feeling more confident and aware of her value, especially at work. Both described this process with the enthusiasm of reaching a new stage in their personal development:

> I made the big leap, around the age of 48 I enrolled in an important international school and 4-5 years ago I started teaching yoga, putting what I learned to good use. And I love it. (Luisa)

> Having completed various things, I started feeling everything more like mine. Before it was more like "who knows if I'll succeed, who knows if I can do it", while now I feel more centred. (Maria)

Even with a well-established and stable career, the needs to express oneself more freely and to do things on one's own terms emerged. Giulia (60 years old) and Marina (51 years old) shared the common experience of holding managerial positions in large international companies, roles they described as demanding strong organizational and time management skills. Both of them recognized an important development achievement in the ability to carve out a space tailored to one's individual needs. Pride shines through in the way they told their stories:

> I managed to carve out a space for myself for creative, spontaneous development. Let's say that mine is not a life of impositions and this is a great achievement. (Giulia)

> I don't like constraints, I have always needed to self-manage my time. (…) If remote working hadn't been legitimized by the Covid situation, I would have asked for it anyway. (Marina)

***Self-awareness.*** This stage of life is characterized by a multitude of commitments and responsibilities. Nonetheless, prioritizing self-reflection, self-understanding, and self-appreciation has proven

to be essential, as reflected in the narratives of all the interviewees. Marina, after her workload has increased over the past two years, has recently found ways to devise small escapes to "breathe". As if she were taking a journey with her imagination, she said:

> I love going to places that rejuvenate the soul, like the mountains. I am faithful to my professional obligations, but I am proud of having built a career that allows me to manage time my own way. (Marina)

It seems that when a person is in tune with their desires even the busiest schedules can offer moments of lightness and enjoyment. Giulia has turned her work trips to four different cities in Italy into an opportunity to enjoy what she loves, such as audiobooks and meeting friends spread across various cities:

> I listen to 5-6 audiobooks a month, it's my time for me; it's me and my car. ( … ) I remember a time when, after arriving at my destination, I stayed in the car outside the house, just listening to the end of the audiobook, that's just what I wanted. (Giulia)

Self-awareness has also been linked to an improvement in professional, friendly, and romantic relationships.

> Detachment and wisdom, I offer an additional bird's-eye view, whereas often when you're young you have your head stuck inside your own perspective. (Giulia)

> I have started to listen to myself more, to be more aware of my feelings; the body speaks to us and forces us to listen, and this helps me a lot in my yoga classes. (Luisa)

> I get involved with them [children and adolescents she teaches theatre to], I push them to come into contact with their imagination. I have also acquired a more political vision of what I do. (Beatrice)

> I've started to pay more attention to what bothers me and found the strength to express it. I assert myself more now compared to before, when I might have been somewhat put in the background in relationships. (Beatrice)

Some narratives on the theme of self-listening originated from feelings of misunderstanding and devaluation, which led to a process of personal and professional growth, as happened to Francesca and Lucia (57 years old, event organiser):

> I often deceived myself, about people or relationships, by telling myself "everything is ok, everyone is a friend". Then I looked for other contacts and for the last 15 years [from 47 to 62], my work got published with [other organizations and universities] who look for me, treat me like a human and indeed, they say "that's good! Come and let's work together!" ( … ) I got my job back. (Francesca)

> It [divorce] led me to start from scratch on a path of individuation, where I tried to understand myself, through studying and psychotherapy. (Lucia)

The awareness of life's finiteness, linked to the death of parents or the illness of a friend or partner, can led to questioning what one truly desired in the limited time that remains, as Maria did (55 years old, laboratory analyst):

> There is a kind of urgency in saying let's see carefully what I want to do in the time I have left ( … ) a starting point to put on track what is important to me. (Maria)

***Relationship with one's own body.*** All the women spontaneously raised the topic of their relationship with their bodies and mentioned menopause. Various experiences emerged, such as an improved understanding of their bodies, the need to adapt to changes, and finding new rhythms, both individually and as a couple.

Regarding menopause, several women highlighted aspects of both gain and loss; all women even those identifying only negative aspects in the physical transition of menopause, adopted a predominantly optimistic narrative. For example, menopause has represented an opportunity to

learn and take better care of their body, or it has meant liberation from certain issues related to their period:

> The heat, the aches and pains, feeling that something is missing, these are also an opportunity to listen to yourself and take better care of yourself. (Luisa)

> I am one of those people who was reborn because I had big problems with medical things [talking about gynaecological problems] and when everything was put to rest, I had more energy to invest in other things. (Francesca)

Moreover, it is interesting to note how discussing menopause has brought to light relational aspects concerning the couple's relationship and friendships. When a woman's body changes, the couple's relationship may require adjustments in the sexual sphere, which have an impact on the emotional sphere. In this sense, menopause is perceived as a transition that goes beyond the individual aspect related to the woman's life stage to encompass the couple's dimension:

> It's a couple's transition, a change that you have to accept and that involves the couple finding new ways [talking about intimacy]. (Maria)

In the case of friendships between women, however, the topic of menopause seems to be a taboo, something that tends not to be discussed openly, which can limit opportunities for peer support as well as the development of relationships. Maria noticed that among friends, while intimate topics like pregnancy or childbirth were discussed openly, menopause was rarely mentioned, except in a joking manner. As she said:

> It's about inhibition, [menopause] it is somewhat a cultural taboo. (Maria)

An exception to the narrative of gain and loss was Adriana (52 years old, teacher), who described her long premenopausal process as an endless suffering characterized by cycle irregularities, pain, unpredictability, and the full constellation of symptoms outlined in medical manuals. What stands out clearly in her narrative is her self-irony and ability to adapt to something that, although seemingly endless, she knows to be temporary. Her story is marked by a calm account, filled with jokes and humour.

> I've been in menopause for 5 years, very heavy to bear ( … ) I have hot flashes, either a painful or non-existent cycle and I'm about to commit suicide [she laughs] why not conclude this interview with a memorable quote?

The perception of the physical symptoms of menopause and the importance attached to them is also linked to one's lifestyle rhythms and daily priorities. In fact, menopause can take a backseat due to more serious events in a woman's life, as happened with a significant loss in Giulia's case, or a serious illness in Beatrice's case. In their case, although mentioned, menopause did not take up any space in their narrative, and they themselves explained this through the description of events that commanded all their attention during that phase of life.

Only one woman, Marina, at 51, had not yet entered menopause and said she started sensing the first signs. Her reaction was to give maximum priority to her physical and mental well-being through exercise and diet. She described being trained to listen to her body when she had to deal with endometriosis. Also, thanks to the experience of illness, every signal from her body is described as an opportunity to take action and care for it:

> I feel in great shape, and if I happen to put on 2-3 kilos, I immediately download an app to get back on track. *Mens sana in corpore sano* is my philosophy. (Marina)

Several interviewees described the relationship with food and nutrition as a way to maintain good health, by respecting the changes in their metabolism, but also as a lifestyle choice with a higher value. Beatrice, for example, describes her becoming vegan as the most significant change of her 50s, as an ethical choice and a way of being in the world.

The changes in one's physical appearance were addressed by several interviewees, mostly from a constructive perspective, within stories of personal growth. The body can be an expression of where one is in their life journey. Beatrice and Lucia explained this through two different stories. Beatrice turned down a theatre role she had already played 25 years ago because it seemed to her that her body was telling her she was no longer the same, urging her to seek a different role, more suited to this phase of life.

> A body tells the story of a life and I have the body I should have at 54. I feel that my body now needs to tell something else. (Beatrice)

According to Lucia, the narrative of the great change in her body weight told the story of a great loss and a great rebirth. In this case, the physical transformation is viewed through the lens of divorce:

> Before the change, my body felt a little devastated, now it expresses my emotional liberation. (Lucia)

***Resilience.*** Four out of the eight women interviewed mentioned events of extraordinary severity that occurred in their lives, such as the premature death of a partner, suffering from a serious illness, or taking on particularly burdensome caregiving responsibilities within their families. Despite the adversity of the events, all women could incorporate them into a narrative perspective of positive transformation. The way they narrated these moments of profound crisis was imbued with a sense of resilience. Furthermore, a teleological perspective emerges, in which these events are interpreted as contributing to personal growth.

At the age of 40 Beatrice had cancer, which significantly impacted her relationship with her body:

> I look at the photos from before and I have changed, as if [the surgery and treatment] had somehow deformed me. Then little by little I regained a form, which however was not mine (…) a change that brought other changes, like a kind of avalanche. (Beatrice)

Despite the difficulty of the illness, which is now overcome, her narrative revealed a newfound awareness and acceptance of her body, which she described with joy and sense of humour:

> I would like to be thin but I would have liked to be thin even at 20! So in that respect my relationship with my body has not changed… but actually I have a better relationship with it now than I did then: I am very self-ironic and philosophical and I don't need to show off or to prove something to myself.

Two interviewees experienced the premature loss of their partners: Giulia, before the age of 50 and Adriana, at 37. Both described the change following the loss in terms of personal development, which also translated in an increased attention to their own well-being and that of others. Giulia described the transition from a phase where a lot of energy was dedicated to caring for family members to a reinvestment on her own well-being and future, by conceiving new projects included supporting medical research to find cures for the disease her husband suffered from. Adriana acknowledged that her loss has impacted her feelings toward others, such as greater empathy and attention, influenced by her awareness of the finiteness of life.

It is interesting to note how some women spontaneously connected their journey of positive transformation to creativity. They recounted how pain and hardship were transformed into motivation to think and act creatively. In this sense, creativity emerged as a need to channel energy and restructure the self, following challenging situations that deeply tested them.

> I'm not strong; in fact, I'm extraordinarily fragile. (…) I've simply learned to endure the pain and transform it somewhat. To me, this is what creativity means. (Adriana)

> Poetry is a vital creative necessity for me, born directly from the crisis of separation. It represents a crucial source of energy; if I don't engage in writing poetry, I feel unwell. (Lucia)

***Transcendence.*** Several women highlighted how, at this stage of life, their sensitivity to themes related to transcendence has increased. A need emerged to look beyond their individual lives toward nature, spirituality, or the universe. For some of them, the need for transcendence arised from experiences that bring an awareness of life's finiteness, such as those mentioned earlier. For others, it was instead a growing interest in other dimensions, whether physical, such as the universe, or spiritual, such as reincarnation:

> I believe that we live many lives. Unfortunately, my rational nature prevents me from fully embracing these reflections as I would like to, but I feel that this is the case and it benefits me to think this way. (Giulia)

> I recently developed an interest in astronomy, seeking to better understand the universe finding a meaning through comprehending it. For me, this theme is also connected to the concept of death. (Marina)

### *Relationships with others*

When discussing interpersonal relationships, both on a personal and professional level, increased selectivity in social interactions was often mentioned, with a preference for the quality of the relationship with others. In several narratives, human connection was described as an expression of creativity, which manifested in new and unexpected bonds, finding new ways to value others and discover their talents, and forming new workgroups. Moreover, an important factor influencing how women related to others during this phase of life is an increased sense of self-awareness, which led to a reduced sensitivity to external judgment.

***Quality over quantity.*** Personal connections and affection appeared to play a crucial role in this stage of life. There was a sense that bonds had become more significant, that the quality of their attention during conversations with friends had improved, and that the limited time available prompted them to be more selective in their social interactions. A sense of pride and satisfaction emerged regarding their friendships, along with a pleasure in their social interactions, in contrast to the sense of duty and adherence to norms that characterized earlier stages of life.

> My empathy has grown; I put myself in others' shoes much more and I am deeply concerned about their feelings. (Adriana)

> I'm happier with my social outings now; I'm with people I genuinely enjoy and want to see. In this regard, I feel more satisfied now than I did when I was younger. It's important to be with those you truly want to be with. (Maria)

> I see my people, my family, my friends and maintain a truly active social life, which brings me great happiness. (Giulia)

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the awareness of life's finiteness might lead to greater care for the people we cherish.

> People my age are affected by sometimes-tragic events. For example, when I was twenty, it was rare for my friends to face something like cancer. (Adriana)

> I was with my mother as long as she was there [she recently died], so as not to miss anything of her being alive. (Giulia)

***Creativity through relationships.*** The topic of creativity frequently emerged when discussing interpersonal relationships. It appeared that for some interviewees, relationships and creativity mutually influenced and enriched each other.

A creative component has been identified in sensing and understanding the needs of others:

> Maybe I sense that you're excited [here she seems to be referring to the interviewer as if she was one of her students], you need to be calmed down. So I have to adapt my yoga practice to help you find a slightly calmer place through breathing. (Luisa)

The term "creativity" was also associated with intuition, which empowers and inspires others, resulting in more fluid and well-coordinated work, particularly in the corporate environment:

> I inspire the people around me, giving them directions, which are perhaps unexpected ( … ) People may accept my suggestions also because my position legitimizes it, and therefore they may more willingly work in that direction. (Giulia)

> In my opinion, creativity is also what you can put into relationships, into solving a problem, I find it above all in the intuition of some human affinities and therefore in the organization of the work of those close to me. Understanding that a person is not exactly in the right place or how to motivate them to make better use of their talents, for their good and that of the company … stimulates me a lot. (Marina)

The aspect of people empowerment has been associated with a coaching role attributed to the age difference compared to colleagues. A greater life experience was believed to contribute to an enhanced ability to clearly see goals and guide others toward achieving them:

> I try to bring out the best in them as if you had plasticine or clay in front of you. They recognize my experience, my know-how, so in short, I'm not just the old one doing a job that a younger person could do. (Giulia)

While for Marina and Giulia relational intuition is one of the forms of creativity, Beatrice described relationships as the fundamental channel through which creativity can express and manifest itself:

> Creativity is an act of love; it requires relationships to be expressed, a way to offer yourself to others. (Beatrice)

***The judgment of others.*** When the interviewees discussed interpersonal relationships, they all described a past in which the gaze of others influenced them in various ways, by making them feeling insecure, socially shy, excessively focused on others' needs while neglecting their own, or resigned to following rules and norms rather than challenging them. At this stage of their life, they described themselves as being more in touch with who they are, with what they think and feel, and as a result, less susceptible to the judgment of others:

> Now I care less about what others think about me. Meaning that I do something because I feel like doing it, not because it would look right for me to do it. (Maria)

> I always felt I had to prove I was at the top, to work 450 million hours a day because otherwise I felt guilty. Now I have an awareness of my worth, which just 10 years ago I didn't have. (Marina)

Feeling free from the influence of others' opinions, represented a turning point for some, like Luisa, as well as an achievement she celebrated with great pride:

> You decide for yourself, that's it. I find it ravishing, sometimes I even argue with my friends because they tell me you should do this or that. Instead, I no longer let anyone impose anything on me, I decide what's best for me and that's it. I'm a grown-up, for God's sake, come on! (Luisa)

For other women it was a gradual on-going process. Despite the feeling of being less and less easily influenced, they said that the fear of judgment was frequently lurking in the background reflecting on their opinion about themselves:

> It's the same old belief: I don't feel good enough. In some moments I let myself go and it's beautiful. In other moments, instead of feeling unique, I want to feel perfect. ( … ) today I no longer get scared if I have to do something. Or rather … I do get scared but I persevere. (Lucia)

> Inside I let myself go a little more, opened up, I began to dare a little more, without caring too much about judgement, or about not getting a result. In the end, it's all a journey … ( … ) In those days [30-35 years old] I put myself into it [talking about her work] but then, unfortunately, I tended to judge myself, then a whole part of me had to say "stop judging yourself so you can go on". (Beatrice)

A significant role appeared to be played by an upbringing centred on the ideals of performance and perfection, against which many interviewees often found themselves struggling, as Adriana explained:

> We, people of my generation, still carry inside some of this sense of dependence on other people's judgment. We were taught to be high-performing and polite. Today I am much more capable of giving myself the validation, to come up with an idea and know what to do. (…) But the fear is always present, sometimes it stops you, sometimes it makes you take a step back. (Adriana)

***The perspective on parenthood.*** All the women interviewed discussed recent changes within their home, whether related to the physical space or the dynamics among family members, with particular emphasis on their relationship with their children. Living spaces evolved, either due to increased financial means or because some space became available. Places that once served as the nest for a growing family became suddenly empty as children moved out, requiring a reinvention of both the physical spaces and the parent-child dynamics.

Their home was at the heart of many reflections and was described as a space that has partially emptied and requires reinvention, as a workshop for pursuing hobbies, and as an economic achievement following a lifetime of work. Luisa attributed to her home a great role in her midlife transition. Only after she turned 50 did she leave the family home where she was born. Her new flat quickly became a place in which to experiment with creativity and build her yoga studio. She said she felt as if, at 50, she had finally left the nest and truly taken flight:

> It was my first and only moving in my life. I finally left home, that's it! (Luisa)

While Luisa had just purchased her first home, Maria had recently finished paying off her twenty-year mortgage. She described this event with a mix of pride and nostalgia:

> There is happiness because you have achieved a goal you set for yourself, but at the same time there is also a bit of a bitter taste in your mouth. In the sense that you say: it means that 20 years have passed! (Maria)

The home was also described as a creative workshop by Lucia, who detailed her DIY and upcycling projects; Marina on the other hand saw her flat as an untapped potential and regretted the lack of time to decorate it and, above all, to enjoy it.

Another important aspect of the midlife transition highlighted by several interviewees was the increased independence of their children, whether teenagers or young adults. They discussed how this development impacted their relationship with them and with themselves while questioning what their new role as a mother might be. Some women described their relationship with children who seemed to no longer need them with a sense of nostalgia and a desire to continue bringing value to their lives. Others, however, spoke of gaining a new relationship with their grown children, whom they were gradually learning to know as adults.

> They [two 26 years old twins] are interested in psychology and after reading some articles, they told me that I have the empty nest syndrome. Now that you have grown up, I no longer have to carry your bag, I no longer have to wash you, to wear myself out carrying you here and there. Now that you are nice, sociable and interesting and it would be lovely to do something with you, you rather do it with others?! (Francesca)

> Now I find myself looking at my parenting from the window, I see this young woman moving, moving in the world. I look at her from a distance. She moves, she makes her decisions, she travels the world and I stand there watching this young woman I created. (Luisa)

> They are part of my network now … When I go to R. I see my daughter who lives there, when I go to M. I see my other son, and on some weekends, I go to G. to visit the other son. (Giulia)

Mothers of teenagers described their relationship with their children as an experience filled with curiosity, discoveries, and often conflicting emotions: the rediscovery of their own adolescent self,

the fear of losing connection, and the anxiety that independence might expose them to risks and dangers. Regarding her daughter's wish to have an experience abroad, Adriana said:

> On the one hand, I can already picture myself there, smelling the sweater or doing those typical motherly things. On the other hand, I can't wait and am thrilled to imagine what a girl might experience; it will be such a meaningful experience. (Adriana)

Despite the difficulties in adapting to the change mentioned by most mothers, all clearly identified their children's independence as an opportunity for their own personal growth. Several women spontaneously extended the concept of motherhood to that of creativity, comparing the creative energy that brought their children into the world to the energy that enabled them to engage in new personal collaborations and pursue new passions.

> I can also experience other forms of parenting through other things that I have created because they are my work. (Luisa)

### *The creative-self*

***The meanings of creativity.*** During the interviews, the women reflected on whether and how their creativity has evolved over the course of their lives and its role in the present moment. In exploring the meanings they attributed to creativity, the interviewees spoke about imagination, intuition, improvisation, and the ability to adapt and reinvent oneself. Creativity has often been associated with the idea of fluidity and transformation, and at the same time, as an energy that needs to be directed:

> Creativity must be channelled. Not only do I want but I have to give direction to my creativity, it is necessary, and the more I narrow the field, the more creative I can be in the end. (Beatrice)

Several women described their creative self as that part of themselves ready to adapt and improvise, navigating through the most complex situations with ease.

> The more tangled things are, the more I adapt; difficult things look easier to me ( … ) and then when I find myself in a calm situation, sometimes I struggle. (Adriana)

Improvisation also emerged in relational terms, underscoring the relational component of creativity that was previously mentioned.

> I create sequences during my yoga classes based on my feeling, my ability to listen, which allows me to move forward and adapt. When you come into contact with people and realize that they need more than what you had prepared, creativity is that thing that tells you "ok mix everything up, and start again from scratch". (Luisa)

Another concept that emerged in several narratives is intuition: in its relational component, as the ability to inspire others, and as lateral thinking that allows for the connection of distant concepts and ideas. The creative self has been described as a raging river, flowing unpredictably from one project to another, generating virtuous synergies between seemingly unrelated fields.

> I feel an abundance of creativity in inventing projects, like the Patient Association ( … ) and my bistro, born as plan B and which is now becoming a third job. ( … ) Letting the mind run wild, listening to the heart more than the reason. (Giulia)

> I combined my passion for plants with the technical part of my work: cartography, satellite images, drone images, etc. ( … ) which I began to apply to crops ( … ) and I flourished again! (Francesca)

Finally, creativity has been described by some interviewees as something that does not remain within them but is put into the world and offered to others, a description that echoes the definition of the construct of generativity.

> Creativity is a vital energy that flows through us. Our creative output doesn't truly belong to us and when the conditions are right, we simply act as channels for its expression. (Lucia)

Next, the interviewees explored their creative self through Dixit cards. The were asked to choose three Dixit cards (Roubira & Cardouat, 2008), among a deck of 21 (see attachment), which could express the creative part of themselves. Then they were asked to describe them. The three most selected cards, by four out of eight interviewees, are no. 2, no. 7 and no. 19 (Figure 2). All the interviewees chose at least one of these three cards, while half of the interviewees chose at least two of them.


**Figure 2.** The three most selected Dixit cards.

Card number 2 shows a cat that attempts to use magic to remove the fish from the crystal ball. Those who chose it described it as a representation of creativity as a realm of possibilities, accessed through the world of imagination. They highlighted the freedom of thought that comes with not setting limits or boundaries.

> The curiosity about the metaphysical, questioning past and future lives, divination and reading the future … and the cat, symbol of freedom. (Giulia)

> Believing we can make the impossible possible. (Beatrice)

> The crystal ball recalls the anarchic part of me, my recent interest in science, in my creative side, in space and the infinite world, to understand it better. (Marina)

In card number 7, there's a snail approaching a long spiral staircase that winds up to the clouds. For the interviewees who chose it, this image evoked a sense of slowness and the importance of taking time in an upward journey of positive growth.

> The staircase goes up infinitely, [the little snail] will climb it without running, very slowly, step by step. Beautiful ascension movement of growing up, climbing and seeing things from above. (Giulia)

> Anyway, in the end, we go up, we can't help but go up, right? All the things you do are not lost and lead you to go up. (Lucia)

> The snail is slow but gives me the idea of infinity. I like the idea of a slow path that leads into the clouds. (Marina)

> It reminds me of patience. You could climb even Mount Fuji, right? Slowness is not something that should preclude the possibility of achieving an objective, and we always tends upwards. (Adriana)

Card number 19 illustrates a traveller, possibly a child, blowing soap bubbles shaped like planets into the sky. The interviewees saw in this card the idea of creativity being blown into the

world, like bubbles; a light and free creativity that travels outward, carrying a message that may disperse, reach someone, or even make its way to the stars. Some connected motherhood to the creative process of releasing something into the world.

> And the bubbles, even if they burst or disappear, you brought them out, right? You delivered them. And once you deliver a child into the world it is no longer yours. It passed through you, but it's not yours. (Lucia)

> I create things and then give them away, to humanity, I let them go. Where did it go? Where did it come from? Something just takes root and grows. (Luisa)

### *Generativity and motherhood*

When asked separately, "What does generativity mean to you?" and "What does motherhood mean to you?" all the interviewees naturally connected the two concepts, emphasizing shared elements as well as highlighting key distinctions.

Although none of the interviewees mentioned knowing the term "generativity" as defined in life-span developmental psychology literature, all of them attributed a meaning to it. The perception of generativity frequently emerged as something open and flexible, allowing room for freedom, in contrast to the often binding and complex concept of motherhood. Generative freedom was associated with a metaphorical sowing, in contrast to motherhood, which carried a sense of gravity that is often restrictive, also linked to the interviewees' experiences as daughters.

> Motherhood is a huge thing. ( … ) For me, it was also linked to fertility problems until the twins eventually arrived. It's a big and difficult thing. If I think that now my children will have to think whether to face this experience … it's a pretty messed up bubble. While generativity is something more outside of you, motherhood is inside. [Motherhood] is a heavy load to carry because you also take charge of it biologically. (Francesca)

> While generativity is always growth, motherhood on the other hand can be constricting, not always generative, and also a little castrating. (Giulia)

Generativity was described as being open to the world, in contrast to the visceral and physical nature of motherhood.

> Generativity is a creation process, conceived with the mind. Motherhood is conceived with the body and therefore even more visceral. (Marina)

A perspective has also emerged that intertwines the two concepts, in some cases even merging them. From this viewpoint, both generativity and motherhood were seen as processes of creating something that, once brought into existence, no longer entirely belongs to you. Several interviewees have evoked the image of putting something into the world, which grows beyond oneself, a concept that was previously mentioned in the exploration of the meanings of creativity.

> Maybe it's her [daughter's name] that I launched into the world, in the same way as ideas are generated and created, putting them out there. (Luisa)

> Generativity is motherhood. Motherhood is life: it's not just about the woman's body, but a much broader concept, it's putting something into the world that passes through you; once you deliver a child into the world it is no longer yours. (Lucia)

> I saw her and it was neither her dad nor me, it was just another new and unique person, a new experience. For me, motherhood is this: freeing something that goes outside and must remain outside. [ … ]. So generativity and motherhood are synonymous except that in motherhood there is a living being. (Adriana)

## Discussion

This study explored how midlife women perceived, experienced and expressed their creativity, and how their creative self has evolved over the course of their lives. In the subjective experience that surfaced from the narrative of the interviewed women, a renewed creative energy came to

light. Many of them recently invested in new activities and took on new personal, artistic, and professional challenges. These results contribute to the literature regarding the self-perception of midlife women and expands the understanding of their creative and generative potential. Furthermore, the insights provided can help to value and empower midlife women's personal growth potential in professional, educational, artistic, and social contexts. From the content analysis of the interviews, three overarching themes were identified, *Personal Growth*, *Relationship with Others*, and *Creative Self* and divided into 11 sub-themes.

The study revealed that, at this stage of life, there is an increased focus on inner experience and psychological and physical needs, supporting various paths of personal and professional growth. Actions have been undertaken by the participants to balance their work-life equilibrium, resulting in dedicating time to newly born or old passions that they had not been able to express earlier in their life.

The professional dimension held particular significance in the narratives, as all the women reported recently creating personalized opportunities that enabled them to more effectively showcase their talents in the workplace. For some interviewees, this entailed a complete career shift, either significantly altering their professional trajectories or embarking on entirely new ones. For others, it involved advocating for their needs within their organizations, such as securing greater flexibility in work hours or locations. Among women working in highly competitive environments, some have felt undervalued in recent years, which have led them to seek new professional opportunities and reinvent themselves in different contexts. It has also emerged the awareness of the age difference with younger colleagues and the importance of asserting their seniority and expertise. These findings resonated with the various studies that have highlighted how midlife women's growth potential and openness to change are often not recognized by the leadership, resulting in the underutilization of their expertise, and leading to limited access to professional training opportunities (Ryan & Gatrell, 2024; Vickerstaff & Van Der Horst, 2022).

The relationship with the body is one of the factors that has undergone a process of positive transformation. In fact, the results highlighted greater acceptance of the body and increased sensitivity to its needs and the signals it conveys. There is an increased focus on well-being through specific dietary regimes, physical activity, and connection with nature. These aspects resonated with evidence that attributed to midlife women a renewed focus on body care, not in terms of aesthetics or appearance, but rather for the pleasure of living their body and in favour of a healthy aging (Ben Dori & Kemp, 2020; Oude Hengel et al., 2023). Body acceptance has been identified as one of the key aspects of the psychophysical experience of aging and focusing on the functionality and health of the body can promote greater self-acceptance and gratitude for life (Hofmeier et al., 2017).

The role of others' judgment and the need to reassess its influence during middle adulthood have been highlighted by several studies (Ben Dori & Kemp, 2020; Dolberg & Ayalon, 2018; Hofmeier et al., 2017; Ruegemer & Dziengel, 2022) and this held true for all the interviewees. Indeed, all participants reported having experienced the influence of others' gaze and judgment in the past and having suffered because of it. While some interviewees claimed to have become immune to the fear of judgment in recent years, others explained that it remains an ongoing process of emancipation. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the role played by the parenting style with which they were raised and the important to better listening to their own emotions to break free from it.

Self-transcendence represented another recent development in their life and was described as an interest in realms beyond the self, whether it be the universe, spirituality, the language of symbols, or the idea of living multiple lives. Reischer et al. (2021), suggested self-transcendence to be an important asset that, at this stage of life, makes individuals more inclined to accept past experiences, feel interconnected with others, and realize their full potential. Indeed, the interviewees who recounted dramatic events in their life journey demonstrated an interest in self-

transcendence and a remarkable capacity for acceptance, incorporating these events into a narrative of positive transformation and maintaining a sense of trust in the future. The literature has identified optimism and spirituality among the key factors of resilience that can positively influence the experience of midlife transition (Süss & Ehlert, 2020). It is interesting to note how, after significant events such as divorce, illness, the pandemic, or a major relocation, women's stories revealed a theme of renaissance. This was expressed through images such as: an emergence into the real adulthood, rediscovering one's inner child as an inspiring muse, or relearning to live in a changed body, proud of every scar.

The importance of relationships emerged at various points of the narratives, as an overarching theme and an essential element of women's lives. At different times, the interviewees described their current life phase through the evolution of their relationships with friends, children, and colleagues.

Friendship, especially with other women, have gained increasing importance over the course of life, and a growing need to prioritize the quality of time spent with them was expressed. The awareness of the limitedness of life span, gained through experiences of illness and loss, led some interviewees to greater assertiveness and selectivity in their relationships, focusing on their authentic presence alongside those they truly care about. In particular, long-term friendships fulfil important developmental needs in midlife women's life by supporting the consolidation and realization of the self (Piotrowski, 2018).

A renewed relationship with growing children and a new perspective on parenthood also emerged as part of a process of self-redefinition. Children were perceived as individuals they had brought into the world and now observe from a distance, as if through a window, as new participants in their network of adult relationships, and as a means to revisit the intense emotions of adolescence. This is a particularly relevant aspect of self-narrative because the way motherhood is experienced influences one's self-identification and self-esteem, and could serve as a valuable resource for successful aging (Błachnio & Kuryś-Szyncel, 2022).

Workplace relationships have often been described as a means of expressing creativity through the formation of strategic connections, as well as empowering and nurturing talents. In fact, the link between relationships and creativity emerges very clearly in the section of the interview dedicated to the creative self.

The creative self was linked by all women to a form of relational creativity, along with other types of creativity such as lateral thinking, imagination or improvisation. This was described as listening, valuing others, and facilitating connections. It was also described as the ability to improvise, to recognize positive relational dynamics, for example in a work group, and to encourage them. This supports the evidence suggesting that midlife women compared to men tend to have stronger dyadic relationship capacities, which could enhance their coaching abilities, particularly in professional settings (Muschalla, 2025). It is interesting to note that those who described themselves only having relational creativity hesitated to respond when asked about their creative self, and some of them initially doubted whether they had one. This might be because relational creativity, that serves others, is less evident and socially acknowledged than artistic creativity (Cattani et al., 2015).

Several women described creativity as a form of generosity, that is, creating something and letting it go, as well as engaging in free and selfless productivity. This perspective connects to the concept of generativity, understood as care for others and the new generations (Erikson & Erikson, 1981). Several respondents, both with and without children, described creativity using the recurring image of bringing forth something that comes from within; new ventures, like a poem, a project, or a plant, were described as creatures that they gifted to the world. Several of the interviewees described their creative selves offered remarkably similar interpretations inspired by one of the Dixit cards (no. 19): creativity as something released into the sky, traveling freely

and potentially taking root; a part of oneself shared with the world; and something that doesn't belong to us but instead lives in others and in relationships.

When describing their creative self, many women showed a great sense of playfulness and self-irony, as if they were connected to a freer and more childlike part of themselves. It has been suggested that playfulness may have a significant part in cognitive functioning and emotional development, both of which are essential elements of healthy aging (Dillon et al., 2022; Waldman Levi et al., 2015). It is interesting to observe how this light-heartedness seemed more pronounced in the four women who had radically changed their professional paths, reinventing themselves.

The creative self was spontaneously linked throughout the interviews, to the idea of motherhood and to what Erikson described as generativity. The terms "generativity" and "motherhood" were then semantically explored allowing for the identification of new nuances in relation to the definitions found in the literature, of how they are interconnected, and of how they connect to creativity. All the interviewees spontaneously associated generativity with motherhood, but in describing the relationship between the two concepts, they could be divided into two groups: those who saw generativity and motherhood as distinctly separate and often in opposition, and those who view them as closely connected, if not overlapping. In the first group, generativity is interpreted as openness and creative freedom, in contrast to motherhood, which is perceived as more visceral and binding, coloured by fears and the inseparability of the bond. This more constrictive idea of motherhood is often linked to both one's experience as a mother and the experience with one's own mother. In the second group a generative imagery of motherhood has emerged, echoing with the construct of parental generativity (Bakiera, 2018). Motherhood was described as bringing forth into the world, accepting what is and what will be, and allowing things to happen, a definition that nearly overlaps with the one previously provided by several interviewees regarding creativity. This analysis suggests the presence of a generative process among midlife women, where the concepts of creativity and motherhood are profoundly intertwined. It would be interesting to explore the autobiographical, socio-demographic, and cultural factors that influence the perception of creativity, generativity, and motherhood. Finally, further research into how the three concepts interweave with each other could provide a deeper understanding of the transformation processes behind women's midlife development.

### *Limitations*

Our study has some limitations that need to be mentioned. First, these pertain to the sample size and selection. The small number of participants does not allow for the generalizability of the findings, making them specific to the studied group and less applicable to other populations or contexts. In addition, most participants had medium to high levels of education and stable employment, which may have influenced their perceptions of potentially complex life transitions. The use of a convenience sample consisting solely of women from Northern Italy may introduce cultural or geographic bias, excluding perspectives from women in other regions or sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the absence of comparisons with other age groups, men, or women from the different areas limits the understanding of the specific dynamics related to the studied context. Another limitation concerns the potential influence of the interviewer, who may have impacted the data collection during the interviews through language, tone, or implicit expectations, potentially introducing bias into the data. Finally, the focus on specific themes, such as creativity and generativity, has inevitably excluded other relevant aspects of midlife. Depending on the length and depth of the interviews, certain dimensions of the participants' experiences may not have been explored comprehensively. However, as this is an exploratory study, the preliminary findings presented here raise further questions and research hypotheses to be investigated in future projects.

## Conclusions

Midlife women might benefit of a newfound, more liberated, and conscious creative energy. This energy manifested across various aspects of personal and professional life, such as openness to change, a willingness to pursue personal projects regardless of external judgment, and relational talent. Future research could delve deeper into the psychosocial factors that either facilitate or hinder the flourishing of midlife women's creative self. Finally, Dixit cards proved to be a valuable tool to reflect on their emotions and thoughts, even on complex personal topics, and uncover deeper and more creative connections within their narrative. Further studies could assess the effectiveness of this tool in better understanding life transformations while serving as a basis for life-coaching and psychotherapy interventions. Overall, the investigation of midlife women's creative potential could provide insights for their better support within the health system.

## Acknowledgments

We thank all the participants for their valuable narratives and Ede Rancz for critical and proofreading.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Data availability statement

All data available from corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

## References

Adams-Price, C. E., Nadorff, D. K., Morse, L. W., Davis, K. T., & Stearns, M. A. (2018). The Creative Benefits Scale: Connecting generativity to life satisfaction. *International Journal of Aging & Human Development*, *86*(3), 242–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091415017699939

Alspaugh, A., Im, E.-O., D., Reibel, M., & Barroso, J. (2021). The Reproductive health priorities, concerns, and needs of women in midlife: A feminist poststructuralist qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *31*(4), 643–653. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732320970491

Anderson, C., & Kirkpatrick, S. (2015). Narrative interviewing. *International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy*, *38*, 631–634. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11096-015-0222-0

Bailey, K. A., Dagenais, M., & Gammage, K. L. (2021). Is a picture worth a thousand words? Using photo-elicitation to study body image in middle-to-older age women with and without multiple sclerosis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *31*(8), 1542–1554. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323211014830

Bakiera, L. T. (2018). Parental generativity. The concept and measurement. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, *49*(3), 344–354. https://doi.org/10.24425/119501

Baltes, P. B., & Baltes, M. M. (1990). Psychological perspectives on successful aging: The model of selective optimization with compensation. In P. B. Baltes & M. M. Baltes (Eds.), *Successful aging* (1st ed., pp. 1–34). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511665684.003

Baltes, P. B., Reese, H. W., & Lipsitt, L. P. (1980). Life-span developmental psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *31*(1), 65–110. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.31.020180.000433

Barbee, H. (2022). Harnessing progress: Gender, sexuality, and positive self-perceptions of aging in midlife. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *61*, 101008. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2022.101008

Barrett, A. E. (2022). Centering age inequality: Developing a sociology-of-age framework. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *48*(1), 213–232. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-083121-043741

Barrett, A. E., & Barbee, H. (2022). The subjective life course framework: Integrating life course sociology with gerontological perspectives on subjective aging. *Advances in Life Course Research*, *51*, 100448. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2021.100448

Ben Dori, S., & Kemp, A. (2020). Undoing age, redefining gender, and negotiating time: Embodied experiences of midlife women in endurance sports. *Time & Society*, *29*(4), 1104–1127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X20948987

Bendinelli, B., Pastore, E., Fontana, M., Ermini, I., Assedi, M., Facchini, L., Querci, A., Caini, S., & Masala, G. (2022). A priori dietary patterns, physical activity level, and body composition in postmenopausal women: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(11), 6747. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116747

Berger, E., & Pain, F. (2017). Model and mobilise imaginary for innovative experience design. *The Design Journal*, *20*(sup1), S4690–S4696. https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352967

Błachnio, A., & Kuryś-Szyncel, K. (2022). I am a mother because i wanted to—I am a grandmother because others see me that way—Motherhood as a critical life event for ageing women. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(24), 16381. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416381

Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S., & Doody, O. (2017). Employing a qualitative description approach in health care research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, *4*, 2333393617742282. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393617742282

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Colucci, M. (2015). Creativity in social networks. A core-periphery perspective. In C. Jones, M. Lorenzen, and J. Sapsed (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of creative industries* (pp. 75–95). Oxford University Press.

Chrisler, J. C. (2019). The effect of premenstrual symptoms on creative thinking. In D. L. Taylor & N. F. Woods (Eds.), *Menstruation, health, and illness* (1st ed., pp. 73–88). Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315793078-9

Conner, T. S., DeYoung, C. G., & Silvia, P. J. (2018). Everyday creative activity as a path to flourishing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *13*(2), 181–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1257049

Crowley, J. E. (2019). Gray divorce: Explaining midlife marital splits. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *31*(1), 49–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2017.1409918

Datta Roy, M., & Panda, M. (2022). Is generativity Erikson's answer to human ageing in the neoliberal world? *Journal of Aging Studies*, *62*, 101057. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2022.101057

Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The Research Act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134543

DeVaney, S. A. (2016). Yin, R.K. (2016). Qualitative Research from Start to Finish, Second Edition. New York: The Guilford Press. ISBN: 978-1-4625-1797-8. 386 pp. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, *44*(3), 324–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcsr.12144

Dillon, P., Gan, D. R. Y., Trivic, Z., Siang Ng, T. K., Rhodus, E., Best, J., & Jorde, S. (2022). Playfulness for brain health in mid- and late-life: Scoping review to support preventive non-pharmacological interventions in community settings. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, *103*(3), e5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2022.01.012

Dolberg, P., & Ayalon, L. (2018). Subjective meanings and identification with middle age. *International Journal of Aging & Human Development*, *87*(1), 52–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091415017721932

Erikson, E., & Erikson, J. (1981). On generativity and identity: From a conversation with Erik and Joan Erikson. *Harvard Educational Review*, *51*(2), 249–269. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.51.2.g211757u27732p67

Faccio, E., Solarino, M., Vitelli, R., & Cipolletta, S. (2018). Normalisation versus medicalisation of sexual disturbances during menopause: A qualitative research in the Italian context. *Sexuality & Culture*, *22*(2), 445–461. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-017-9477-z

Fieldsend, M., & Smith, J. A. (2020). 'Either stay grieving, or deal with it': The psychological impact of involuntary childlessness for women living in midlife. *Human Reproduction*, *35*(4), 876–885. https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/deaa033

Galasinska, K., & Szymkow, A. (2021). The more fertile, the more creative: Changes in women's creative potential across the ovulatory cycle. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(10), 5390. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105390

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hickey, M., Hunter, M. S., Santoro, N., & Ussher, J. (2022). Normalising menopause. *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, *377*, e069369. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2021-069369

Hofmeier, S. M., Runfola, C. D., Sala, M., Gagne, D. A., Brownley, K. A., & Bulik, C. M. (2017). Body image, aging, and identity in women over 50: The Gender and Body Image (GABI) study. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *29*(1), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2015.1065140

Hughes, A. K., & Lewinson, T. D. W. (2015). Facilitating communication about sexual health between aging women and their health care providers. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*(4), 540–550. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732314551062

Hurd, T. L. (2016). Claiming subjectivity: Re-storying clinical psychology and myself. *Women & Therapy*, *39*(1-2), 56–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2016.1116313

Infurna, F. J., Gerstorf, D., & Lachman, M. E. (2020). Midlife in the 2020s: Opportunities and challenges. *The American Psychologist*, *75*(4), 470–485. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000591

Inglada-Pérez, L., Coto-Millán, P., Casares, P., & Inglada, V. (2021). Profile of creative women: A comprehensive quantitative approach for Spain. *European Planning Studies*, *29*(10), 1798–1818. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1881045

Isopahkala-Bouret, U. (2015). Graduation at age 50 +: Contested efforts to construct "third age" identities and negotiate cultural age stereotypes. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *35*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2015.07.001

Jones, R. L., Jen, S., & Reiter, B. (2023). "Courage to cobble something new": Women's queer and creative narratives of bisexuality and ageing. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *65*, 101133. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2023.101133

Kapoor, H., Reiter-Palmon, R., & Kaufman, J. C. (2021). Norming the muses: Establishing the psychometric properties of the Kaufman Domains of Creativity Scale. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *39*(6), 680–693. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211008334

Karwowski, M., & Lebuda, I. (2017). Creative self-concept: A surface characteristic of creative personality. In G. J. Feist, R. Reiter-Palmon, & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity and personality research* (1st ed., pp. 84–101). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316228036.006

Lachman, M. E. (Ed.). (2001). *Handbook of midlife development*. Wiley.

Lachman, M. E., Teshale, S., & Agrigoroaei, S. (2015). Midlife as a pivotal period in the life course: Balancing growth and decline at the crossroads of youth and old age. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *39*(1), 20–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025414533223

Laudisio, D., Barrea, L., Pugliese, G., Aprano, S., Castellucci, B., Savastano, S., Colao, A., & Muscogiuri, G. (2021). A practical nutritional guide for the management of sleep disturbances in menopause. *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition*, *72*(4), 432–446. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637486.2020.1851658

Lear, G. (2017). Midlife awakening: An emergent transformation of the self. *Journal of Transformative Education*, *15*(4), 277–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344616670264

Lichtenstein, B., Lucke, J., & Loxton, D. (2022). Women and divorce: Financial coping from midlife to older age. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *34*(3), 323–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.1935552

López-Íñiguez, G., & Burnard, P. (2022). Toward a nuanced understanding of musicians' professional learning pathways: What does critical reflection contribute? *Research Studies in Music Education*, *44*(1), 127–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X211025850

Mayer, C.-H., & Oosthuizen, R. M. (2020). Concepts of creative leadership of women leaders in 21st century. *Creativity Studies*, *13*(1), 21–40. https://doi.org/10.3846/cs.2020.10267

McInnis, A., & Medvedev, K. (2021). Sartorial appearance management strategies of creative professional women over age 50 in the Fashion industry. *Fashion Practice*, *13*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2021.1872891

Meléndez, J. C., Alfonso-Benlliure, V., Mayordomo, T., & Sales, A. (2016). Is age just a number? Cognitive reserve as a predictor of divergent thinking in late adulthood. *Creativity Research Journal*, *28*(4), 435–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2016.1229983

Milgrom, H., Hait, T., & Vogel, T. (2016). Intricate interplays in women's groups: Vulnerability and strength meet in the second half of life. *Women & Therapy*, *39*(3–4), 260–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2016.1116860

Morgan, P. A., Merrell, J. A., & Rentschler, D. (2015). Midlife mothers favor 'being with' children over work and careers. *Work*, *50*(3), 477–489. https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-141958

Muschalla, B. (2025). Psychological capacity profiles of different age groups and gender in a national representative sample. *PsyCh Journal*, *14*(1), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.795

Navvabi-Rigi, S.-D., Mohammadi-Shahboulaghi, F., Foroughan, M., & Momtaz, Y. A. (2022). Weaving a cocoon on the way to aging transcendence: Grounded theory study on aging perception during menopause transition. *PloS One*, *17*(11), e0276797. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0276797

Oude Hengel, K. M., Soeter, M., In Der Maur, M., Van Oostrom, S. H., Loef, B., & Hooftman, W. E. (2023). Perimenopause: Symptoms, work ability and health among 4010 Dutch workers. *Maturitas*, *176*, 107793. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2023.107793

Pauly, T., Chu, L., Zambrano, E., Gerstorf, D., & Hoppmann, C. A. (2022). COVID-19, Time to Oneself, and Loneliness: Creativity as a Resource. *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *77*(4), e30–e35. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbab070

Pelto, P. J. (2017). *Mixed methods in ethnographic research: Historical perspectives* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228822

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne Psychological Journal*, *20*(1), 361–369. https://doi.org/10.14691/CPPJ.20.1.7

Piotrowski, M. (2018). Selfobject experience in long-term friendships of midlife women. *Psychoanalytic Social Work*, *25*(1), 17–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228878.2018.1437757

Platt, L. C. (2019). Crafting place: Women's everyday creativity in placemaking processes. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *22*(3), 362–377. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417722090
Porto, M., & Romo, M. (2022). The generative force of the domain and the field: Contributions of highly creative women. *Creativity. Theories – Research - Applications*, *9*(2), 119–137. https://doi.org/10.2478/ctra-2022-0014
Reischer, H. N., Roth, L. J., Villarreal, J. A., & McAdams, D. P. (2021). Self-transcendence and life stories of humanistic growth among late-midlife adults. *Journal of Personality*, *89*(2), 305–324. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12583
Roca, D., Suárez, A., & Meléndez-Rodríguez, S. (2024). Female creative managers as drivers for gender diversity in advertising creative departments: A critical mass approach. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *39*(4), 465–479. https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-09-2022-0291
Roubira, J.-L., & Cardouat, M. (2008). *Dixit* [Board game].
Ruegemer, A. M., & Dziengel, L. (2022). Why DID they have children? Rural midlife women who are childfree. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *34*(5), 551–566. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.1944002
Runco, M. A. (2018). Authentic creativity: Mechanisms, definitions, and empirical efforts. In R. J. Sternberg & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *The nature of human creativity* (1st ed., pp. 246–263). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108185936.018
Russ, S. W., Hoffmann, J. D., & Kaufman, J. C. (Eds.). (2021). *The Cambridge handbook of lifespan development of creativity* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108755726
Ryan, L., & Gatrell, C. (2024). How are middle- and older-age women employees perceived and treated at work? A review and analysis. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *26*(4), 536–555. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12365
Saraulli, D., Matroberardino, S., & Spataro, P. (2023). Emotional and health correlates of body dissatisfaction during the menopausal transition. *BPA Applied Psychology Bulletin*, *81*(296), 53–64. https://doi.org/10.26387/bpa.2022.00011
Schober, M. F., & Conrad, F. G. (1997). Does conversational interviewing reduce survey measurement error? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *61*(4), 576. https://doi.org/10.1086/297818
Steffan, B., & Loretto, W. (2025). Menopause, work and mid-life: Challenging the ideal worker stereotype. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *32*(1), 116–131. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13136
Strezova, A., O'Neill, S., O'Callaghan, C., Perry, A., Liu, J., & Eden, J. (2017). Cultural issues in menopause: An exploratory qualitative study of Macedonian women in Australia. *Menopause*, *24*(3), 308–315. https://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000000750
Süss, H., & Ehlert, U. (2020). Psychological resilience during the perimenopause. *Maturitas*, *131*, 48–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2019.10.015
Taylor, C., Ivcevic, Z., Moeller, J., & Brackett, M. (2020). Gender and support for creativity at work. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *29*(3), 453–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12397
Thomas, A. J., Mitchell, E. S., & Woods, N. F. (2018). The challenges of midlife women: Themes from the Seattle midlife Women's health study. *Women's Midlife Health*, *4*(1), 8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40695-018-0039-9
Thompson-Whiteside, H., Turnbull, S., & Howe-Walsh, L. (2021). Advertising: Should creative women be expected to 'fake it? *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(3-4), 294–319. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1707704
Trnka, R., Kuška, M., & Čábelková, I. (2020). Emotional creativity across adulthood: Age is negatively associated with emotional creativity. *Studia Psychologica*, *62*(2), 164–177. https://doi.org/10.31577/sp.2020.02.798
Vaccaro, C. M., Capozzi, A., Ettore, G., Bernorio, R., Cagnacci, A., Gambacciani, M., Coletta, V., Maffei, S., Nappi, R. E., Scambia, G., Viora, E., & Lello, S. (2021). What women think about menopause: An Italian survey. *Maturitas*, *147*, 47–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2021.03.007
Vickerstaff, S., & Van Der Horst, M. (2022). Embodied ageism: "I don't know if you do get to an age where you're too old to learn". *Journal of Aging Studies*, *62*, 101054. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2022.101054
Waldman Levi, A., Erez, A., & Katz, N. (2015). Healthy aging is reflected in well-being, participation, playfulness, and cognitive-emotional functioning. *Healthy Aging Research*, *4*(8), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.12715/har.2015.4.8
Wallbank, G., Haynes, A., Tiedemann, A., Sherrington, C., & Grunseit, A. C. (2022). Designing physical activity interventions for women aged 50+: A qualitative study of participant perspectives. *BMC Public Health*, *22*(1), 1855. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14237-y
World Health Organization (WHO). (1996). *Report of a WHO Scientific Group: Research on the menopause in the 1990's. WHO Technical Report Series 866*. Geneva: World Health Organization. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/trs/WHO_TRS_866.pdf
World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/menopause