S. RYAN and J. HISLOP: “No longer window dressing”; captive and captivated experiences of the menopause

Cultural understandings of menopause have become increasingly medicalised, shifting from a natural development transition to an emphasis on what are seen as biological deficits of the ageing body (Utz, 2011). A recent qualitative study (ibid) of two generations of women found younger women were less willing to accept the menopause and fought the changes associated with it.

Here we conduct a secondary analysis of 46 in-depth interviews collected for the Healthtalkonline (www.healthtalkonline.org) menopause section in 2010. The women were aged between 35-77. Our analysis identified two categories of experience; captive and captivated. The captivated women embraced the menopause, describing a sense of freedom, empowerment and greater confidence. The captive women articulated a sense of loss for their ‘former selves’. This loss was largely in relation to physical appearance and the women’s perceptions of the invisibility of ‘older’ women in British society. This group described a gap between how they felt and how they looked and struggled with this tension.

Unlike Utz (2011), our analysis found age was not a factor in whether women were captive or captivated. Further work is needed to explore what contributes towards each orientation in order to develop appropriate information for women.