

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA DEPICTION AND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF MENOPAUSE

MSC dissertation, May 1998

ABSTRACT

The adverse consequences of some medical interventions in women's health have caused the promotion of exogenous sex hormone use by women from mid-life to receive critical attention. As with some past interventions, the long-term effects of using these hormones (commonly known as hormone replacement therapy - HRT) are not well understood, yet their use by women is increasing. It has been suggested that women's experience of menopause and its management is related to the culture in which they live. To understand mainstream Australia's discourse about menopause as evidenced through one of society's major mediating forces, this study undertook a print media survey of items from two newspapers available daily in Western Australia and four selected women's magazines over the ten-year period 1985 - 1994.

Following the survey, three groups each of 30 - 40 year old and 50 - 60 year old women discussed their sources of information about and, where relevant, their experiences of menopause. Methodological triangulation enabled the survey items and group discussions to be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, the latter using the NUD.IST computer program, to better identify and understand any relationship between the social and private discourses about menopause. While not able to be demonstrated conclusively, there did appear to be links between the relative paucity of items in the selected media and women's lack of knowledge about menopause, between the negative discourse about menopause in the survey items and the women's discussion, and between the adoption of HRT use by some women who felt that they should and whose information about menopause had come mainly from the mass media.

Future research directions are discussed in terms of (i) the effects on women of mainstream social discourse about menopause and (ii) the role of the mass media in shaping other aspects of women's lives.