

# The Childless Menopause Season 3, episode 10

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menopause, childless, women, conversation, talk, grief, community, men, thought, experience, life

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## SPEAKERS

Berenice Smith, Anastasia MacDonald, Sarah Lawrence, Michael Hughes

### **Sarah Lawrence** 00:00

But I've still feel like we are not at the table when we're talking about menopause. Do you know what I mean? And I think that's probably it's perhaps it's less to Davina. And it's more to do with conversation and we're still being ignored. And that's the thing that really fucks me off, to be honest, putting it bluntly.

### **Michael Hughes** 00:24

Welcome to the full stop podcast, a childless community podcast with Berenice Smith, Sarah Lawrence and me, Michael Hughes. And if this is your first time here, our podcast delves into the many facets that make up the childless identity, as well as what is going on in the wider, childless community. And our hope is that with all our special guests, we can help you craft your own narrative, and what it means to be part of our community. And we also aim to educate those not in our community, who can begin to understand and support those in their lives, who may be facing a life without children. Now this episode, with our dear friend, Anastasia MacDonald, we delve into menopause from a child's perspective. Now, so why don't spoil this much needed and enlightening conversation? Let's just dive straight in.

### **Berenice Smith** 01:18

Would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners, because we tried to ask him to introduce themselves in their own words, in case we kind of get it wrong, but I've known you for a number of years now, haven't I?

### **Anastasia MacDonald** 01:32

Yeah. Right. Because you did my logo, little business. And then we met up in business bindis meditation class, too.

### **Berenice Smith** 01:42

Yes. Yes, magnificent meditation. I was speaking to her on Friday, actually.

**Anastasia MacDonald 01:53**

So I'm Anastasia, I live in Columbia, Maryland and the East Coast of the US. I am childless by circumstance, I realised I would be childless early in 2014. And grieved some then. Although it wasn't really until 2018 That I dove in and sort of got into the grief and started excavating it and looking at it and starting to more deliberately heal. And that's the end of 2017 is when I found gateway women, I did the online be with Jodi, it was game changing life changing wonderful. Yeah, and I've sort of I feel like in those in these last four plus years, I've sort of been part of the child, this community in different ways, keeps evolving, as we all do. And now these days, I feel sort of like a member at large. Plugging into different aspects and speaking up here and there and staying quiet and other realms.

**Sarah Lawrence 03:13**

It's interesting, isn't it, how it changes how we connect with the community as we sort of go through our own. Only it wouldn't say journey, but it kind of is, isn't it? So in terms of how you're connecting with the community, how are you connecting at the moment because I know you have sort of changed the sort of way that you turn up Haven't you?

**Anastasia MacDonald 03:37**

Yes, I'm um, I'm online a lot. I'm the host for our local group host and a semi official co host for our local gatherings here. And it does seem like that that's in a new phase of growth, perhaps the Local Group, which is funny energy builds on energy, it's now feeling easier to host that because we're getting new interest so some somewhat in Lighthouse women on the whole of the platform. And then on Instagram, I've been very deliberate that Facebook is for all realms of life and Instagram is 95% only for childless community. And I listened to a few special podcasts and and try to be brave and have small conversations that feel doable and which is not necessarily community building, but practice. building my voice and small sort of real life ways.

**Berenice Smith 05:00**

sense of liberation about that, do you think?

**Anastasia MacDonald 05:05**

Yeah. Even even when it's a conversation, that's easy, even when it's just slipping in the tiniest thing, and it's well received. I'm always very proud of myself. And I always report back to at least one of my online be friends that I spoke up for me, I spoke up for us. Yeah, every time makes all the future times easier. For sure.

**Berenice Smith 05:35**

Amazing. So I can I can see it in your face. Obviously, we don't share the video. So the listeners won't know that. But having known you for a number of years now I can see it in your face. And it's just a lovely, a lovely thing to witness. Yeah. Good on you. It's just that little, small, small word here and there. And it does. It's the energy as you said, it's feeding off the energy of others. And I think those meetups as well, so powerful, we've shared our stories together, and it creates strength, even if we don't realise that we're saying things and doing things. Just small little words, and just dropping things in here, there can be very small little nuggets of change.

**Anastasia MacDonald 06:18**

And I think there's something I feel like I learned this at some point in the online be that there's something about really doing those little nuggets with no expectations, you know, you hope you're gonna get a thoughtful response, or at least, you know, seed falling on good ground kind of response. And sometimes you don't sometimes people just say, What do you say? Because they're not expecting the phrase job is not by choice. But yeah, I figure it's, it's planting seeds and speaking up. Speaking up tiny counts.

**Sarah Lawrence 07:04**

I think it all counts doesn't even even just showing up. Really, you know, even as a childless woman showing up in life is a big deal, isn't it? I think even if we're not sort of saying, I just happen to be, you know, child is not by choice or childless by circumstance. It's just showing up, isn't it? I think it's kind of, as you rightly say, just the little things means that we actually make space for us. And I think that's really starting to become increasingly important.

**Berenice Smith 07:37**

I love that expectation as well, no expectations. One of the things I'd sort of think about is that often the responses that we get says more about the other person than that's, I think, keeping that in mind and thinking, well, I've got nothing to lose, because we do have something to lose, we often give pieces of ourselves away when we don't necessarily want to net really want to talk about it. I was reminded, actually, this morning, there was a conversation on Twitter about with Alli Hall, who's child free by choice. So it's slightly different narrative to us, of course. But actually, there's quite a lot in common. And she was saying about how we're all entitled to flexi time and part time work, we are allowed. We are allowed to ask, we don't have to just have children to do that. We can go off and do a side hustle, we can do something else. And I happened to mention a conversation that - Sarah - you and I have done that over the past. And I said it just reminds me of a conversation I had with somebody who who said to me, Well, how are your children? And I said to again, it's giving away part of yourself. But I said sadly, I don't have any children. I'm part time. And she said to me, she said she do

**Sarah Lawrence 09:09**

To you?!

**Berenice Smith 09:09**

I replied that I would probably know if I had children. But I think it was so ingrained in her somehow this way of working was because she was a parent. And she was part time. That actually that was the only way she could be part time. And again, it's a conversation where it shows Yes, you can give something of yourself or you can say no. I'm not part time for that reason. And I don't know that says everything I need to know about you. I actually feel quite quite sad for you. Really I do because you're not going to get far in life with that kind of attitude. The bias was just incredible.

**Anastasia MacDonald 10:00**

As much as I'm increasingly aware that when each of us speaks up even in those small ways, it's, we're speaking up for ourselves. But increasingly, I'm aware that I am speaking up for all of us, that it's, it's gonna be good for the hall in ways that I may never know. That's one of the podcasts I listen to his new

legacy Institute. And she is just inspiring me over and over and over that it's yes, there's these personal healings and personal evolutions that we're each making our way through. And it does seem like there's this social political, wave of us that's, that's coming. That makes me brave too!

**Berenice Smith** 11:07

What Michael is doing by building up the male voice as well, it's incredibly important to have some really exciting conversations in the last couple of weeks about that. And there's, yeah, there's a couple of really cool things going on around that, too. And they all actually come off an awful lot of the work that you're doing, Michael and giving people voices. And getting men voices, was one of those things where you The weird thing about, you know, ranting about International Women's Day. But actually, one of the things that's never covered on International Men's Day, is childless men. And that needs to change to

**Sarah Lawrence** 11:45

that, that sense of there's this growing political, social voice that we were gathering, I really, I really feel the same. You I look back to when I found out I couldn't have children is roughly the same time as you Anastasia. And it's kind of there was nothing I remember doing this this desperate Google search. And there is nothing but I reckon you know, your Google Now, clearly, we've got we've got a bit of a terminology thing going on as well. We know, we know who we are. We have a dataset, a label. But we now know we have an identity, don't we? We have this identity, and we know who we are Anastasia. Sorry. But it's, it's really, I think you're right. It's this growing voice. And I think we are starting to turn up in more and more varied conversations. You know, we're talking about menopause today. And I said earlier, before we started recording, I kind of feel like we haven't really got a place at the table yet. But it is a yet, isn't it?

**Anastasia MacDonald** 12:52

What do you mean, when you say that? What makes you say we don't have a place at that table?

**Sarah Lawrence** 12:57

Well, I see a lot of conversations going on. And it kind of feels so there's lots of conversations in terms of women that have had children. And so it's, it's part of that evolution of a woman going from being able to have children to not, but for those of us that have not been able to have children, were not part doesn't strike me with that part of the narrative yet, because I feel, personally, I've had a very different experience of my menopause, as opposed to friends who have had children, it feels, you know, I look at the way that they're reacting to them in a pause, and it's kind of almost like a sudden, oh, my god, I can't have children. Whereas I've known for a while, I've not been able to have children. And so there is this difference. And there isn't really much acknowledgement that my experience is different to this.

**Berenice Smith** 13:47

But came up actually, I think on the Instagram, as well. One of the comments that we had, and I'm just gonna go and find if you bear with me for a moment, because I should have had this all to hand where we started. One of them that we had was from somebody who said that they feel angry sometimes that my body let me down in not being able to have a child and now it's going to the menopause, hitting me with all these shitty symptoms that are deliberating at times. But I get upset, so upset when people

who've had kids say I'm glad to be going through this now because I've hardly noticed any change I'm sure it's Jody has said that it's the menopause, not the mother pause Hmm. and it feels like one of those, again, International Women's Day, it feels like it's been something that's been taken over by the majority. And in a way that happens that's society at large on lots of different themes. But universally, it affects women at different times of their lives, but it affects all women. Medically, I believe that to be the case. Again, not kind of saying that, you know, I know the answer to those things. But yes, it's, it feels like it. But the shift needs to come. And one of the interesting things I've noticed is that there is this talk now, I've found in over here, I don't know if you've seen it, Sarah. Companies are talking a little bit more on LinkedIn, for example, about menstrual leave about how periods are affecting the workplace. And I don't know if that's global, but it appears to be tentative thing. It's not you shaking. Okay. Yeah. And that's, that's, that's, that's a real kind of like, it's odd that it's happening in this country, but I suppose maybe perhaps, there is a push with that. Coming from the pandemic, I think a lot of women have been away from the workplace. I can speak for myself personally. And that, that actually I since IVF, and that failure is that my periods worse. Absolutely wasn't, I'm more in touch with my hormones. And I think during lock downs, I became increasingly more in touch with my hormones. And I was aware that at least and I hadn't thought about it, because I used to share a flat with somebody, and I love it a bit. But for four days of every month, she would not talk to me. And I had no idea why I thought I'd done something wrong. Because I was sailing through if he got his some bias for you my own bias. I sailed through them all my, you know, I was fine. I was right, you know, it was like an inconvenience that takes them, you know, painkillers and carry on. I didn't have that hormonal roller coaster until after I've been through the through IVF. And then I realised possibly because I think the term that's used is medical menopause. Again, someone might want to correct me on that. But that's the term I heard uses. Because the way that the drugs work, you go into a false menopausal state. And since that point, I've been terrified at the menopause. Because if it's like that, and God knows, but again, it's medicine, medical isn't necessarily seems natural. But yeah, I am kind of aware that this conversation is now happening around menstrual leave, and women saying actually, I, I want to work from home, I don't want to come in because actually I cannot manage. I've realised that me standing around doing a shift or whatever I'm doing, when I am going through. This is painful. And that maybe is off the back of the conversations that we're having more awareness about menopause. Which I'm, I'm kind of hopeful. Slightly hopeful that maybe that maybe encourages perhaps childlessness as a conversation to maybe there's a thin liminal space where we can get in and say, hi, us, too. Because an awful lot of our community have already been through the menopause early on, been much, much earlier than they should have done had we have all fitted into what society believes is a normal woman. And what we're probably finding out now is that actually we are we're not real much more than that, aren't we? There are way more seats at the table. Sorry I rattled on, I was on a mini rant there. Now, but you know, it is this kind of thing, isn't it? Where you have this sort of thing that happens to all women. And yet somehow, does it happen? That it all starts to be divided into little bits and my piece of the pie is bigger than your piece of the pie? Actually, if we all just sit together and have a conversation about it, we'd all realise that actually happens to all of us. Anyway, I'm gonna stop ranting now I get really cross about that.

**Anastasia MacDonald 19:49**

Yeah, I don't believe my experience is different from what you and Sarah are describing i i Don't take in a lot of mainstream media. And the places the resources I've gone to for menopause information I'm

realising are actually sort of parenthood status neutral or deliberately inclusive. And I haven't felt that mother not mother distinction among my friends. Mostly everyone seems glad simply to have a, an empathetic person who's gone through some is going through some version of it. I don't know it. That's sort of splitting, splitting into groups version of it might be in the the mainstream magazines. But honestly, I feel like I haven't encountered it. It hasn't smacked me in the face like that.

**Berenice Smith 21:15**

That's a really positive thing. Because perhaps it's pockets where perhaps people small pockets, so maybe not larger pockets where perhaps there needs to be just a small conversation to say this. And actually there are examples out there were it is more inclusive than perhaps some of the areas that we've encountered, which is a good thing. I think that's positive, it doesn't feel perhaps like the enormous perhaps biased that perhaps maybe the areas that we've encountered and some of our listeners have encountered feel it'd be interesting to see what the responses to that. I think when we've put the episode out as to whether there is perhaps bias in different countries, different industries, even I mean, I'm thinking from the workplace, as much as anything as some of the conversations with Katy at MIST and about that type of whether you're what it's like in this country working with childless infertility, miscarriage and all those areas, and some of the workshops that she's done in the one that we carried out together, way back in November. And whether there are just pockets, certain industries, even that have a more bias perhaps than others, as well. But yeah, the interesting to see what listeners responses or if anyone has any thoughts on that, then please let us know in the comments on the website, or online as well, or drop us an email. I'll be really curious to see how that is. But it feels like there's something a bit more hopeful, which is a good thing. Isn't that Michael? You've got your hand up?

**Michael Hughes 22:53**

Yeah, I'm, I'm obviously very aware that I'm a bit of a fish out of water on this episode. So I'm taking it as a as a education for me. So on behalf of all those curious men that want to understand this, I want to take us back a little bit. And I'm gonna say this wrong, Anastasia. Thank you. Because I've gotten troubled by a couple other people for saying their names wrong. So when you said your your finding the I'll use my words, you're finding the vocabulary to use to express to explain how you out our situation, your the way that you're living. For free childlessness, I really resonate with that, because one of the things I found through all the things that I do is that I'm now I'm doing the same, I never realised it, but I'm actually doing the same. So with that in mind by half a point. So I'm going to I'm going to take that with this episode, as I said, it's an education. So I'm going to take you back basically. And I'd really love to hear either your experience if you wish to share your experiences or your thoughts or what does menopause mean for you? Obviously, I've had this conversation with Vicki, but I need I need more and I'm sure there's other curious people out there would want to understand this more. So you're sort of drag it back a bit but I'd really love to hear what you three lovely ladies have to say.

**Sarah Lawrence 24:59**

Okay, First if you like, I mean, so for me, I've I've had a taste of really extreme menopause after my hysterectomy because your your ovaries basically go to sleep and go into shock. And you know, then they have to it's it's basically luck of the draw whether they decide to switch back on or not. So my experience after my hysterectomy was waking up, absolutely smothered in sweat, so much so that I

thought I'd wet myself. And I thought I'd lost control of my bladder, and the roller coaster of the emotions. So I remember I was quite emotional anyway because my hysterectomy bought up all of my childlessness again. And there was a nurse there. And I don't usually use names, but she was the biggest bitch I've ever come across who's in a caring risk role. And I had to have injections in my stomach for blood clots, because obviously you can't move. And she came in one night, and it was about the fourth, third that night, and my stomach was very swollen, I was sweating, I was all over the place. And I was getting triggered all over the place. And she came in and jabbed me with this needle, and I got really upset. And she basically walked out as though I shouldn't have been upset, and I thought I can now pull my language, but if this is what it's going to be like, I really don't want anything to do with it. And my experience so far of the menopause is it's a lot more gentle than that. It's like a slow, slow switch run like that. But what I have found is that actually, you kind of have to accept that your body's just going to do some weird and wonderful things. I can I can be talking mid sentence, I can suddenly forget what the hell I was talking about, or why I walked into a room, or you know, all of those things I sat there yesterday, is gonna is gonna sound like random. And I sat and watched the Lost Boys and watched it for years, all of it. And I, I was looking, I was searching for it. And I couldn't remember the film that I was searching for. That's kind of it just does it. And you just have to kind of I think for me, it's a growing acceptance of not being the woman that I was before. But it's also the grown realisation that actually my childlessness is mixed up in that, and I no longer want to have a biological child from this body. But I still mourn the loss of the opportunity. And I think that's kind of putting it in a more articulate way. That's kind of, for me the difference between those that have had children and those that haven't. It's that the grief is different, if that makes sense. But for me that my body is changing, and I have to admit I don't like it. I'm really struggling with it. I don't know how you you to feel.

**Anastasia MacDonald 27:57**

I think I without hating on my body as I sort of got into my late 40s having my period was such an annoyance and sort of lowercase o offence, you know that that part of my body hadn't done what it was meant to do. So why did I have to keep having this month late, not fun. And I sort of just be done with it. So there was a certain not exactly looking forward to it. But looking forward to menopause and sort of finishing up that chapter. And I have wondered, I still wonder if there will be another big wave of grief because there hasn't been with it I sort of I think because I have known for so long that the fertility window was closed. And because it's now been these four plus years that I've really been chewing on all the issues and working to heal the grief. The idea of my own fertility is so historical now so far in the past that this ending hasn't felt hasn't felt like an end of that. It has sort of felt more like a thing of its own. A next phase in next chapter all these weird new things And it's not been easy in the not even so much in the childless related things, but it it got me with some real psycho emotional weird not fun stuff it last summer felt like one long seasonal affective disorder episode, which does not happen in the summer in the Northern Hemisphere and as you said, I kind of well in part, I realise you have to roll with it and find humour in it and like people that you can make jokes about night sweats with. And eventually I I did talk to my doctor and I now am on this marvellous oestrogen bypass, which is bringing me back to myself. And in the mix of all that, I think I had hope I had this thread of hope throughout because I know women personally, I know, women in the childless community and other communities in things I've read, who are through to the other side and say, it's really fabulous over here. It's imperfect, it can be rough getting here. But get here. It's it's not a return to who you were. But it's more than just an ease of all those maddening symptoms. There's there's some new version of you that's over here. And I feel

like I've been getting glimmers of her for a while. And you know, I have long said, since since my online beer I have said that I can imagine that older, sassy, childless crone that I'm aiming for. And I could not imagine the smack in the middle midlife childless woman, I didn't know what she looked like, I didn't quite know who she was. And so there's I was gonna say there's sweetness, but there's even excitement about getting getting closer to that one that I can envision

**Berenice Smith 33:01**

actually brought tears to my eyes, actually, that imagine the childless woman in between? Yeah, but I resonate with that. And essentially, I feel that some way too. I my feelings about the menopause, actually, that for the past since the podcast began. And I think we knew that at some point, we would have to talk about the menopause was fear. For me, absolute fear. And still is to the point of I'm much reassured by the conversations that I have had, and slowly, slowly, sort of tentatively looking. And I bought a book about two years ago, a year ago, two years ago, and it's the men's guide to the menopause. And I handed it to my other half. And I hope this isn't feel exclusionary to anyone who is not partnered. But it's part of my story, because it sort of shows the level of denial that I have. There you go, you read it, and then you tell me the highlights. And then, you know, I can sort of let myself off with bad behaviour. So it's menopause. At least you would know, because I didn't really feel like I wanted to do engage with it. My experiences of it are that I, as I've said already about medically induced menopause. So during IVF, I had different types of drug treatment. And the first few cycles were they had to do egg collection. I reacted very badly to the medication. I had ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome. I was an emotional wreck where If I remember being in Cornwall once, and there is a pub in Cornwall that I will never ever return to, because I just sat there for the entire duration in bits and absolute tears because they came in that some people came in, and they were doing singing. If you see teh film Fisherman's Friends, you know what I'm talking about. I just cried and I cried, and I cried all the way through the whole thing. And I remember sleeping in the spare room of the house that we were in because I felt so ill. So hot, so miserable everything and it's all induced by by medication. And that's a very different experience. So that gave me a fear of the and since I've come to terms with the fact that I'm not going to be a mother, and again, the grieving process, and that wave of grief, again, I can identify with what you're talking about there. It's kind of in my expecting something else to happen because I grieve the fact I'm not going to be a mother. I know that. And when I look at the world around us and the planet, I think maybe I'd have twice as many more worries as I do now, but it doesn't mean I don't mourn that loss. And the opportunity, as you said, Sarah, is the opportunity to be a mother. But I sometimes think I've got the state of things. But I think there is going to be a mourning period for that. For who I've become now, not who I was before my childless and my, my trying to be a mother as long past. Even though occasionally I've had things where I've thought, oh, maybe there's nothing Oh, hang on. Nope, nope, no, no, no, we've done that. But it's occasionally just pops up. I mean, there's a way that hang on, stop it. Don't try and fix yourself live with and breathe through that and come to terms with that. And bindi mentioned, bindi briefly before we've been discharged, meditation has been a huge part of that healing process for me, and knowing Ben's you too, and the people, the women within that group. It's absolutely incredible to share those stories. But I think there's more grief to come. And I'm trying to do as prep work as Michael and Sarah will tell you, I do prep work, if I can, like, here's the thing coming over the hill, I'm going to be prepared for it. And you aren't, that I think is the worst thing, you know, I'm lifting kettlebells. Like, I just looked at my kettlebells It's like some kind of weird kind of thing where I hate them, but love them. I seem to be regressing to sort of



wearing very much my sort of go roots to my teenager, I feel like I'm going through some kind of like identity thing at the moment. And then and again, with my diet and things like that, you know, I posted on Instagram last night about you know, being vegan isn't boring. I'm not vegan, but I'm predominantly plant based now. And trying probably actually, you know, I think about it, I'm trying to prepare for something I cannot really prepare for, because I have no idea how it's gonna hit me. I don't know, if it'll be like that time in Cornwall. And I don't know whether it's going to be something more gentle. And I suspect having spoken to Sarah about this before. And in this conversation, I think it is going to be more gentle. It's a case of just having to accept it. But I'm quite prepared for grief. And I find it difficult to talk about. Really do I can feel it in my voice at the microphone. I'm reacting to it, you know, I feel like Yeah, I think adding on the childlessness makes it a very different experience, because there is that extra level. I think perhaps for some of our listeners, and I can identify with that, too, that there is still a mourning period for the fact that actually that is it. And again, that's come up on our feedback, too. Is that actually you have this thing of it's perhaps not recognised by others is? Well, actually, no, it is. I think, I think for women who have had children, I want to bring them into the conversation too much because that's not what it's about. And there's enough conversation about that, but there is but okay, that's that it's that for now it that is over you know, it's it's it's hard. I, I I'm all over the place with it some days, I think yeah, looking forward to the fact that I don't have to go through this monthly reminder. But at the same time, I think I'll thank God. You know, I have a month to remind her, it's fine. It's great. I haven't yet got to perimenopause. Which is kind of also weird at my age because actually I was told 10 years ago Are you know, scrambled now that's it, you know, you're going to the menopause is going to hit you very soon by the clinic by the IVF clinic, and actually it hasn't. And then I can't to think what remote would I have had another opportunity would have been another cycle in there. I could have had them. So yeah, it's a little bit of a bit of a fuckup in my head. And I'm sure that's true of many. I hope that anything I've mentioned has been too triggering for people. But that's my kind of honest account of where I am right now. And it's hard,

### **Sarah Lawrence 40:34**

I love that. I mean, you've made me feel a little bit normal, because I find, I don't know that you tell me. That bit as Anastasia were, you sort of said, there's this other woman that is beyond this, let's call it a shit show. And I'm looking forward to being her and I go through phases of I think I see her as well. But then I also got a very teenage side. So you know, some days, I'll be like, No, fuck you, oh, I don't, I don't abide by your rules, I'm gonna wear something that's really aged and appropriate. And, you know, just, it's almost like there's this internal battle going on, in terms of, I'm going to be this woman, I'm now wrestling with the fact that I've got to leave behind this younger version of me. And there's all sorts of shift comes up, you know, some days I'm wearing clothes that I just think, well, that's a bit odd, why'd Why do I fancy wearing, I'd know, you know, a very tight, I've got this really tight band t shirt that I like to wear on a slim day. Because this is the other thing as well, this is really fucks me off is sometimes my body will be the size that I think it should be. And then other days, it'll just go, oh, by the way, it's just gonna be two sizes bigger today, just for shits and giggles. And you're like, there's no accounting for it, you know, the belly does what the belly does. But it's, it's that that's the bit I think I'm really struggling with is the kind of who I turn up on as on the day, whether I'm in a good mood, bad mood, or hormonal mood, because I still get them. Or whether I'm going to be the size I think I should be or the size that my belly thinks I should be on any given day. And the effects as well. You know, when they sort of when people do talk about menopause, they sort of thought, Oh, well, you know, you might have

you know, your periods might turn out differently, or you might have a bit of a bad mood. But nobody tells you that your stomach your you know, IBS, I don't know if either of you get that I get really bad IBS symptoms, for no, no apparent reason. And there's no accounting for it, I can eat the same thing every day. And then all of a sudden out of nowhere. Hello, IBS. So it's that sort of thing. I think that that really winds me up, you just don't know whether you're coming or going. Is that just me?

**Anastasia MacDonald 43:01**

No, it's real. It's real. Thank you. I have the insight recently, that I have I've been living from the story that I still have this longing to hermit because sort of a post pandemic thing not quite ready to go out in the world. And recently, thanks to one of the menopause podcasts I was doing I had the insight that well that might be a little bit pandemic ripple effect. But maybe it's largely just this menopause longing to be quiet and to avoid and but that also, like you're saying, it comes and goes, there are days when I'm ready and happy to be out in the world. And other days where I want to wear the clothing that makes me happy that day, which maybe I wouldn't wear out in the world and I just want to be home and and that was a new idea really in the last week. And I'm trying to give it space to say yeah, this is a time of shitshow and joy and excitement and what the heck is going on and just find ways to slow it all down. Or even just slow down when I can slow down in terms of you know what's on the calendar what's expected of me One of the podcasts I love for menopause stuff is the menstrual quality podcast which is put out by Red School. And so two women who are the primary sort of teachers on there about menopause has written a book recently, which I haven't written haven't read yet. But they and when episode they talked about the word, smudge, which they said, is a real word, but it's an old word and it's fallen out of use, but we should definitely bring it back. It means to, to get by doing the very least possible. And they just say, this is how to survive your menopause transition. It's about self care to write. It's about learning our own. truest, deepest self care. And so I thought that that whole concept of snatch is just brilliant. Because, right, whatever your experiences where you're doing this thing that feels like WISEWOMAN, teenager flipping or whether grief is smashing you down that day, that week. How can we each find ways to just snudge our way out of life? Through life a little bit of snudge!

**Berenice Smith 46:24**

Love Snudge! It reminds me of the thing on Twitter that occasionally you see on Instagram also. Calling cards from like, past years, I think. Nancy Mitford, we had one that just says, No, I declined to see you! And, you know, the right to say no, I think that's come you know, that, that has been kind of on these things. I think it's come from the pandemic is that actually, you know, our levels of tolerance, I think have changed I, I tend to go on the line of if it's not useful or beautiful, badly, paraphrasing William Morris. But yeah, it's not useful or beautiful. A few more questions from our social media post. Are there support groups available for childbirth and menopause, I've searched and could only find support groups for those going through IVF which is not an option for me, and that they entered the menopause at age 35. And so many questions around options to help with brain fog, low libido, etc. I'm on HRT now still confused as to what that might mean, for my future health, increased risk of breast cancer, osteoporosis, dementia, depression. That really, but actually, if people do have any support groups, around childless and menopause, I haven't found any attic pacifically for chumps, menopause, I would think that there are probably some good conversations to be had in groups like you'd like us women. And of course, there are within your network as well, Sarah, I think counsellors and coaches who properly around that, and Sarah Roberts has The empty cradle. As replied to say, living it now intense,

incredibly powerful experience, harnessing it to go deeper, not easy, but worth it with you. If it's hard. I think trying if you can you feel comfortable having a conversation with people within our community, if you don't want to talk about it at large with others, it's probably good way to start to get some form of support in place. I think with lots of these things, we have to create it ourselves. Yeah. And that's tough to do. Because we know, all of us sitting here today, it's tough to start a conversation. It's tough to start something that's a support network. But I think that's where to go, if that would be my advice on it. And hopefully, that's hopefully this episode might lead to something to, perhaps is something we can do and support people within our community. If somebody's willing to say, okay, I can start with something up, then we'll give you all the help we can from our network, to make that happen for you too, as I'm sure others will, too. One thing that I have learned about our community is that we are very loyal and supportive of each other's endeavours.

**Sarah Lawrence 49:43**

It will be good starts and I think there's so much healing but today's conversation has been a bit like is this is this right is this is everybody else experienced this? You know, it's, you just don't know what is within the realms of I hate the word but what's in the realms of What is normal, you know what's supposed to be happening or how people are experiencing it? We don't really talk about it. And it would be good to have start a conversation so that we can kind of normalise it a little bit for our for our, our experience, not just across womanhood popped into my head and actually one person who does talk a lot about this, in terms of childlessness is Stella Duffy I couldn't remember her name.

**Berenice Smith 50:27**

Yeah. So yeah, look up Stella. She's follows the podcast, and, of course, was on a previous episode, too. And there's an awful lot of conversations that she's having around that, too. And I think drawing on perhaps some of the people who are in that space, Jody, of course, has her projects as well around crones around ageing, again, another area perhaps to look at, too. I think, if you think about, say, 10 years ago, when the people that we knew then who were starting to do things, and of course, we're all ageing. So I think as we all age, from when we first began, when we were like, Oh, my God, you know, this childlessness is upon us. We're all ageing and starting to talk a little more about it. And from that, I think there will be more coming. It's a case of just sort of us all getting to the point where we've got to the point where we've had the menopause to go through and say, It's like this, and she said, understands us people saying to you, it's okay over this side. And it's getting to that side and finding those people in that community to which is a really hopeful thing to hear from you. Thank you, I feel so much more hopeful having having listened to you, thank you.

**Michael Hughes 51:48**

I was gonna be absolutely silent in this episode, to be quite honest. But so listening to the three of you, I just want I was probably just, it's just something an observation, I have the two things want to say the first one is that this observation where I've sort of come to a, in my own experience, rather than say, journey, in my own experience, it's around transitions. So I'm listening to you through you ladies. And, and part of this is obviously a transition transition from from one self to another. And I sometimes think that for myself, you know, I've got 250 and onward. Whatever, what happened there, so Well, bang, 50. And it was like, for the first time, I had to do a transition. No, of course, I'm not saying that it's x, I'm just realising that other members of our community might, might get upset with the word transition, but

there's the best I can do. And so I sort of had this, this thought that, that because my, my path wasn't the same as most men. I've never had to have that transition. So let's say I was a teenager, then then I met someone, I became a partner. That's where it ended. Whereas everyone else has a number of transitions through their life. And so are they more resilient to transition? I don't know. It's just what's the thought in your head? And for us, is a BAM, here it is. transition time, as a way Whoa, what I got to do hang on. And of course, depending on how you made up it, yeah, the sky could be falling in and others handle it really well. But it's, we haven't, maybe we haven't built up that resilience that others have. You don't know where I'm going with that. But it's just a thought. The second thing is that what is what is it that you would like me to know about this? Is it so think of me of just other men? What would you want other men to know or understand? So give me something to take away.

**Berenice Smith 54:36**

I would like to just say notice, because actually, when you think about for me, one of the fears I have is that I feel like right now I'm in the best shape I've been for years, years and years and years mentally, physically, I'm doing okay. I become invisible at that point to society when actually I have a lot to offer and that ageism comes in. I'm already grieving the fact that actually I can't be a mother, which is a loss of fertility, which is the thing that society and men go, Oh, Mother kind of thing. And you know, that sort of that whole kind of sexuality of being a mother? Then you go to the bit where you're kind of like, oh, yeah, you old. And it kind of, and actually, for me, it's like, I always envisage myself as having this house where people come in and go, when I'd be kind of some kind of, like, font of wisdom, and maybe the podcast is a bit like that. But it's not really it's the physicality of having a role in society of being some kind of Matriarch or some description like my grandmother was, and my grandmother was, and I am not, because they have not noticed in that way. So it's the fact that acknowledging that actually, I think that that women who are older, have so much still to give so much life experience and much mentoring. Just universally we have a lot to offer. Beyond I think, perhaps what media society, we have lost somewhere along the line, you know, okay, you're no longer fertilised? Well, I haven't been that for ages. So, you know, but it's again, it's that thing, but I think that's what I kind of want to say there was something else in my head about what you said before, but I'm gonna have to come. Oh, resilience, I'll come back to that. I have a set a thought of it about resilience, but I'm not sure that I've shaped it.

**Anastasia MacDonald 56:49**

Yeah. Michael, I would say that it's okay. To talk about menopause. Or to ask about it, if I'm your friend, or maybe even your colleague. I think maybe you wait for me to make some comment about it. Some little share. But it's okay. And even welcome for you to acknowledge it. And ask him to my experience of it a little bit. You know, as Gen X are the ones that are going to talk about it, right, we're finding our voice around it and our way the generation before us didn't. And the men of Gen X or Gen X also. So please be with us. You know, please. Right? It's funny, you are a fish out of water. You went out of three here, you're the one who's not living in a body doing this. But it's still your experience somehow right? Indirectly. Your your cohort is going through this. So let's make it a team effort to make it speakable and talk about audible Yeah, so yeah, I guess your question makes me say I would not only invite you to join in the conversation about menopause but I would ask you to join us whatever that you know and I think that mostly is curiosity when it overt curiosity

**Michael Hughes 58:49**

Yep. That some Yeah. Yeah, I'm not sure where I'm gonna go with this. But I agree what you said really resonates with me so thank you for giving me the opportunity. And next time I'm travelling down south down the 95 We might have that conversation one day because I did start as you as the other girls are probably not what weren't what you said Where You Live dogs straight onto the map go Yeah. Oh, yeah, I know where that is. I've been passed there in about 2002 1005

**Anastasia MacDonald** 59:22

Okay. Stop by anytime!

**Sarah Lawrence** 59:28

it's difficult I'm what I notice is that my friends and obviously my partner it it can be a bit difficult because as I say, one day I can turn up as a teenager and another day I can be I you know, I can be feeling pretty shit and not wanting to really engage but I think what I found as I sort of as I go through this is actually I've become a lot of more and more strong a stronger woman. My opinions and My voice have become more. And I, I don't know. And I can only speak for the men that are in my, you know, in my orbit, I've had friends that I've been friends with for many, many years and I have changed. And I, I my experience is that men can find women with an opinion and with a voice, quite scary and a bit intimidating and not sure what to do with it. I'm still the same person, I just, I just don't try and hide it as much as I used to. I used to go very quiet. You know, if I didn't agree with something, I had something, say I tend to, you know, I won't say it because I don't want to offend. But now, as I've got older I speak, I speak my truth. And I think my experience has been that men don't quite know what to do with us women, when we find our voices, which we tend to do when we go through this, I think, you know, the number of Fox we have left to give kind of diminishes very quickly. And I think for guys, that can be a bit a bit difficult. But what I would say is, I'm still a woman, I'm still still the same person that my friends have known for years, but I will speak my truth. And I guess I would like them to feel confident around me that they can actually go hang on a minute. So they're actually I don't agree with you, and push back. And I kind of missed that when I was younger, there was a bit more fun. And people like, you know, there was a bit more backwards and forwards. And I wonder sometimes if men kind of want to back off women because they don't know how to deal with us when we go through this. And I'd like to say, Guys, just be you. You know, we're not expecting you to be pushovers. We don't want that I personally don't want that I want my friends, male friends in particular to have an opinion, whether that's about menopause, whether it's bad politics, whatever. But I would love for blokes to be able to feel that they can be strong around a strong woman.

**Berenice Smith** 1:01:58

I think it's that curiosity, isn't it as well, I think we'd have to sort of stop doing I think that they're molesting I mean, luminous in always, but I think men, women, different genders, we have to somehow pull ourselves together and go, these are the things that bind us because there is an effect, whether it's just being in a workplace and a colleagues going through it and they're having a rough day, or they can't come in in it that has an effect on the guy. Is that work in the office? Do you know there is an effect isn't something you can just park away and put in a cupboard and go oh, you know, so and so's are having a bad day today? That that's not fair. That's what we did before. But we don't do it now. And the past got us really nowhere. I think it got us into a bit of a kind of a mess with these things. It just wasn't talked about. And it has to be discussed because it's waves each far.

**Michael Hughes** 1:02:56

The root of that question actually comes from from moving ahead at my employment, I think was like money last year, maybe like the year before. I'm going to obviously go a long way around this. But it was a it was a think tank around how we retained fi females. So we don't have a problem with employee. We have we've caught up in inclusive environment compared to some industries in Australia. And so we don't have a problem attracting females into our workforce. But we have a problem. We're saving them. And so we would try to you know, flesh out this why. And I'm one of the one of the young, younger people in the room told a story that she was rung up by she was wrapped up by a woman who was driving concrete agitators, so she was in quite a male orientated sort of environment. And she was having he was touring the mountain. She was having she it was tough. It was hard for her. And the best the best her supervisor could do with garlic, she's on a rags bladder yell, you know, you know, you're not going home, get you know, keep keep get to work, keep going to what you're doing. And obviously absolutely unacceptable behaviour. And it's horrible to hear. But we had to hear him. Yeah, so that's where the root of my question comes from is that, you know, I would like to be it's not about me, but I'd like to be someone that is curious and can gather information and understand. So yeah, thank you. I really appreciate your answers.

**Berenice Smith** 1:04:50

I think childless men have an awful lot more to kind of a lot more awareness. I think they do. I think because of you know, whether they're So, by circumstance, whether you're partnered or not, I think just the conversations that I've had with, with childless men. Over the years I've known you and before, there is more empathy there. I think that there is a feeling in my mind that actually, that, that together, we have more power, regardless, and more empathy. Because I think when I when I when I think about the conversations you and I've had, and you will turn around and go, actually, no, that's not right. We will talk about settings and discuss them. I think that that, for me, is a it makes me feel that if I was in any situation where I felt that there was a, an issue over something as intimate really as as the menopause, because it is a very personal thing. It's more of a threat, but it affects people in different ways. But actually, they knew that there was a man or they would advocate and say, Look, actually hang on a minute. You can't say those words to somebody, even if I didn't want to say them, that someone would turn around again, there, hang on it. Advocacy matters. I think as well, that curiosity leads to advocacy, which leads to a bigger voice, which means that actually, it becomes a thing that everybody talks about. I mean, that's kind of layout of that wonderful kind of universe that I have in my, my head where we all just, you know, childless becomes more, not less. And we talk about it more. But I think advocacy is a huge part of that, along with that curiosity. So the question is really welcome. Because I think it can shape perhaps how people, people move forward.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:06:46

I think it's what Anastasia said, isn't it? Gen X, we aren't workers, we are the ones that are kind of the pioneers. Really, you know, that blessing boomers, they didn't talk about this stuff, because their parents didn't talk about this stuff. You know, that's just not how it went. Gen X cannot we're no, we're going to talk about it. But it does, as Bernie says it, guys have got to be involved in this. It can't just be the women that are talking about it, guys have got to bless them, they've got to be able to roll with the punches. You know, because you don't know we're gonna rock up. We could be any given day, we can

change rock shop and change our moods, because we're going through it. So, you know, it's a learning curve for you guys, as well. And I appreciate that question. Because I think you're right, I think childless men actually are probably more emotionally intelligent, because of the shit that, you know, they've had to go through. Some men don't, some men won't be but I do think my experience has been even actually of childfree I've got a lot of friends who are childfree they are the guys are more emotionally intelligent, they're more attuned to this sort of stuff. Because I think the gender roles and I don't like it, but I think the gender roles play out when you're a parent. They're more inclined to then if if you're not so nice, thank you for asking. It means a lot.

**Michael Hughes** 1:08:11

Oh, thanks. Thanks for trusting me with those answers. So really appreciate it.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:08:14

I genuinely thought you were going to be very silent.

**Berenice Smith** 1:08:17

I was worrying about men being excluded. Actually, there's an awful lot of questions to ask. I know my husband read this book and I put it in the show notes. It's not only about childlessness, it is menopause at large there is stuff in it I think there could be a bit prenatal, but it was he just put it down. 'Oh my holy God'. Okay. But he just did. What he said was it was just like, you know, what women goes through. I can remember, you know, obviously, this was there for all the infertility stuff. But there was a moment during the start of lockdowns when I was having a really tough day and I think I'd probably sort of generally hidden there or I just got on with things you know, I would go and carry on with things because it was locked down because I could go and get the you know, the big hot water bottle out and neck down the painkillers and just sit here feeling like you know, this is this period rather than menopause but it was just sat there, visibly, clearly not myself. And you said you've been going through all of that since you were when and I said I think 14 or 15 years old, I think something that I forget when and he said that's really shit! And I said yeah, yeah. I think that generations have changed, how we speak more openly now. And I think that with childlessness, or with infertility, we're more inclined to talk about the rubbish and we're more inclined to share the really, really grim stuff. But actually, I think perhaps maybe others don't generations, other parts of society don't. And that makes us a bit more powerful because we're prepared to talk about the nitty gritty stuff, you know, very, very openly today about your hysterectomy and how that impacted you. And that matters that we hear that too, so. Thank you also, for that. I think this has been such a powerful a powerful learning podcast, I've learned so much, if nothing else, that we're stronger together.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:10:54

Yeah, thank you, Anastasia. I mean, goodness me funny, that deep end with a topic like this would be like white knuckling it. Oh my god. really gonna talk about this? But yes, thank you, thank you for coming on.

1:11:18

The best book I've come across so far is a fairly new one called What Fresh Hell Is This? by Heather Karina And I, I feel like she does occasionally even sort of reference you know, if you're sharing this

book with the men in your life which is just one more way that it's wonderfully inclusive. That that's why I one of the reasons why I think of it as the best I've found that she is so wonderfully careful to you know, always say if about parenthood, she's very inclusive of of non parents of just any any minority you can think of she's she's very inclusive, and her language, wickedly funny, little salty, and her language. And as far as I can tell, very current and her science. So that's, that's and my library system to buy multiple copies of it. That's another stuff thing I do for the childless community and get my library to buy the books.

**Berenice Smith** 1:12:45

Brilliant. That is fantastic. The agenda balance network that I'm part of, they have a library area. And I've made sure that there are all the books that we know, that be recommended, and quite a few from the Nomo book club as well. Book recommendations are really good. And to know you've read it as well makes it much safer, I think to and becomes further endorsed for our listeners as well. Thank you so much.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:13:25

Yeah. Nice. Thank you. I think this is invaluable. We need these resources, don't we mean? Yeah, you know, the one I read was the natural. Sorry, that's what I was turned around. Forgive me. Like, he probably thought I was ignoring you. I wasn't. I was looking at my bookshelf, the natural menopause plan, because I'm very practical. And I can't take HRT because of my Endo. And I was told not to, because it could trigger it off again. So I look at natural alternatives. Some of them work, some of them don't. But actually, that was where I started. So I take quite a few supplements and do a lot of exercise trying to manage it that way because not all of us can take HRT, right.

**Anastasia MacDonald** 1:14:07

That you say exercise that other resource that is so my three are the Menstruality podcast. what fresh hell is this and a podcast slash platform called hit play not pause, which is intended for women who were sort of endurance athletes, super sporty girl, also, which is not me. But they do try to welcome anyone who's looking to do some exercise and movement and she also has very current science mixed in and has a real mindset of this is a very subjective experience. Here's all the information that might help you. You and maybe your doctor need to figure out what's the best course for you. And oh, by the way, eating well, and exercising as much as you can, can only help you. So she she is a wonderful source of information to tell it definitely feels like this is the start of something, doesn't it?

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:15:28

We need some sort of thing. Some sort of resource in this community don't mean to help us out with this.

**Anastasia MacDonald** 1:15:36

Yeah. Yeah. And that one, I will say in terms of inclusivity. So the she is Selene Yeager is her name. And I I wouldn't say there's the same kind of overt inclusivity. But the women there are so focused on their sport on that whole realm that I find there's very little mother talk. There's some you know, it is a mainstream podcast, and she has a group on Facebook. So there's, there's mentions here and there,



but it's so much focused on sort of the individual woman be the best athlete she can be. There's not a lot of space for parenthood chatter.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:16:35

Let's let you get back to bed! Though you might be awake for the day. The cat will be like what the heck was going on there!

**Anastasia MacDonald** 1:16:52

When I was getting up, though, the I lived by a lake. And it's it's a hazy not cloudy enough to cover the moon, but just hazy. And so it's the full moon setting awake through these hazy clouds. And I wouldn't have seen it otherwise. So thank you.

**Sarah Lawrence** 1:17:08

Thank you. Thanks so much for coming on. Really appreciate it.

**Berenice Smith** 1:17:15

Lovely, to catch up with you again, as well. It really has been an absolute pleasure to catch up with you after quite a long time.

**Michael Hughes** 1:17:30

Thanks for listening. And if you want to find out more about our podcasts, we'll have a burning topic we've not covered, please reach out to us as we'd like to be as inclusive and diverse as possible. Now you can find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and messaging. And we have a channel on YouTube. And of course at [www.thefullstoppod.com](http://www.thefullstoppod.com) And here you can sign up for our listeners list where you can keep up to date with what's going on in our world. And if you'd like to support our podcast, you can find the link to donate there too. Now, we would love it if you could rate the podcast on the platform you're using and this will help the algorithm get in front of more of our community. Now a special thanks to Anastasia MacDonald, and as always, it's important for us to let you know you're not alone.