



# AT THE TOP AND AGING OUT

Instead of a milestone to be celebrated, midlife has become a minefield to be navigated, especially if you're a working woman with plans to keep on working. These women are over it – and they're fighting back.

MARCH 8, 2023 BY SYDNEY LONEY, SPECIAL TO THE STAR, PHOTOS BY RICHARD LAUTENS



## OPINION

## New way of life

The '15-minute city' idea could be life-changing for Toronto **Olive B2**

## REAL ESTATE

## Doing her part

Developer has plans to fight city's affordability crisis **B10**



# BUSINESS

MARKETPLACE, B15



## AT THE TOP and aging out

Women at the height of their careers are suddenly finding themselves judged — and found wanting — for having the audacity to age. Studies show that women over 50 are increasingly being passed over for promotions, face shrinking salaries and have a harder time getting hired for new jobs. The pressure to appear younger is exhausting, expensive and unavoidable. **Sydney Loney** talked to five Toronto women about what needs to change. **Photography by Richard Lautens**

"It's not over till you're dead!" declared 61-year-old Jennifer Coolidge, star of "The White Lotus," as she brandished her best supporting actress trophy overhead at the 2023 Critics Choice Awards. Her words, and career resurgence, feel like a triumph for women of a certain age — in no small part because the stats show otherwise.

For every career win for a woman over 50, there are countless humiliating losses. Some play out publicly, like when CNN morning show host Don Lemon proclaimed U.S. presidential candidate Nikki Haley past her prime at 51. When co-host Poppy Harlow protested, he said, "I'm just saying what the facts are. Google it, everybody at home. When is a woman in her prime? It says 20s, 30s and 40s."

Last June, news anchor Lisa LaFlamme's sudden dismissal from CTV caused a national furor, not only because she was so well-respected but because, shortly afterwards, we learned that the head of CTV News was irked that she'd let her hair go grey — and wanted to know who'd approved the decision.

"It was a rude awakening for women, and it hit me hard personally," says Joanna Kervin, vice-president of

external approvals and implementation at Crosslinx Transit Solutions in Toronto. Kervin, who is 60, had let her own hair go grey years earlier and found it liberating — until the Lisa LaFlamme incident. "It changed my thinking around having made the decision to go grey, and I started wondering whether people see me in the same way because I'm not presenting as a younger person. It suddenly made me question how I'm valued by others."

Kervin, who as a civil engineer has often been the only woman in the room in an industry dominated by men, is determined to chart a path for younger women, so that they might encounter fewer career barriers than she did. "I don't lack confidence and I still want to be comfortable in my skin, even though it's challenging at the moment," she says. "I've had some unsettling conversations recently, like people asking me when I'm going to retire. I worry I'm being categorized as an older woman there's no longer a place for."

This is a subtle shift that many women experience; they go from being seen as respected to irrelevant. In her late 40s, communications professional Pamela

Ageism is pushing women out of work, but some are fighting back and speaking out, including these five Toronto women at the top of their game. **From left: Tania Lindo, Zabeen Hirji, Lisa Murphy, Joanna Kervin and Pamela Kennedy.**

**IN FIRST PERSON**  
**CHRISTOPHER**  
**ALEXANDER**

### All options are on the table for housing

Re/Max head says prices may have to drop to fix crisis

**BRENNAN DOHERTY**  
 SPECIAL TO THE STAR

If there's anything Re/Max Canada president Christopher Alexander finds encouraging about Canada's tumultuous housing situation, it's that plenty of would-be homeowners are still stepping up to the plate.

"No matter what, in any market — whether it's great or terrible — people buy and sell homes," he says. "It's not a traditional commodity. It's shelter."

In Toronto, however, residents are finding it increasingly difficult to stay optimistic. The gulf between Toronto's have and have-nots is as wide as a mortgage contract. With the median sale price for a single-detached home sitting at \$1.2 million, many Torontonians will simply never be able to afford the post-Second World War suburban dream.

They know it, too. Léger research in a recent Re/Max Canada report found 70 per cent of Toronto residents were worried about inflation and the high cost of housing. Across the rest of Canada, that figure is 57 per cent.

A lack of housing stock, high interest rates and a roaring economy are worrying business leaders — **SEE IN FIRST PERSON, B9**

**TODAY'S NEWS**

■ The **Bank of Canada's** next rate decision is Wednesday, and experts believe the central bank will hold steady. **B3**

■ How can businesses protect themselves against **LockBit**, the ransomware cyberattack group? **B3**

■ **SNC-Lavalin** reported a fourth-quarter loss of \$54.4 million. **B3**

**MARKETS**

▲ **S&P/TSX**  
20,581.58 + 244.37

▲ **S&P 500**  
4,045.64 + 64.29

▲ **DJIA**  
33,390.97 + 387.40

▲ **NASDAQ**  
11,689.00 + 226.02

▲ **DOLLAR**  
73.48¢ + 0.03¢

▲ **GOLD**  
US \$1,854.60 + US \$14.10

▲ **OIL**  
US \$79.68 + US \$1.52

▲ **NATURAL GAS**  
US \$3.009 + US \$0.244

**SEE AGEISM, B6**



# An inconvenient age

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Ageism doesn't just affect me at an executive level, it affects every woman in the workforce. If I can use my influence and the privilege that I have to lead conversations that might help other women, no matter where they are in their careers, then that's important for me to do.

JOANNA KERVIN  
VICE-PRESIDENT, EXTERNAL APPROVALS AND IMPLEMENTATION,  
CROSSLINX TRANSIT SOLUTIONS



## AGEISM FROM B1

Kennedy started having difficulty pitching new clients, and existing clients began hiring younger women in-house. “I’ve had discussions with other women in PR about this and it’s a collective worry,” says Kennedy, now 55, director of PK Communications in Toronto. “They, too, often feel not seen or heard, or not seen as up-to-date on the latest technology and social trends.”

Ever since she turned 50, Jenny Godley’s social media feeds have been awash in ads for wrinkle creams and tips for “How to Lose Weight After 45.” “In my research, I’ve found women are 50 per cent more likely than men to experience age discrimination,” says Godley, associate professor of sociology at the University of Calgary. “And they’re not just facing ageism, they’re facing sexism as well, particularly in the workplace.”

This one-two punch of discrimination is described as “gendered ageism” by gerontologist and Nipissing University sociology professor Ellie Berger. Her book, “Ageism At Work,” cites studies indicating employers view older workers as less flexible, in poorer health, less creative and less trainable than younger workers, and she points out that many of these stereotypes have been disproven.

As part of her own research, Berger interviewed Canadian women 45 and older about the realities of aging on the job, as well as employers. Many of the women told Berger that people only want to hire “young, pretty women” — and the employers, particularly male ones, many of whom were older themselves, agreed. Berger was shocked. “They talked about how they felt women are trying to look younger in job interviews by ‘dressing like cougars’ or ‘showing up in their daughters’ clothes.’ Employers from the service industry, such as restaurants and hotels, said things like, ‘Well, society wants to be served by young, pretty staff. So it’s not my fault. It’s society’s fault.’”

This derogatory view of older women is so deeply ingrained that we often think nothing of it. “We’re socialized at a young age to see older women in a negative way, like when we read children’s literature where they’re portrayed as ugly or scary,” Berger says. “They’re the wicked old witches or the evil stepmothers.”

Naturally, this has a negative impact. Berger cites identity degradation — the realization you’re being judged on your appearance, not on your qualifications and experience — as one of the hardest obstacles women struggle with as they get older. “Women internalize it and feel degraded, and useless,” she says. “It can have a significant effect on their mental health.” In fact, when people internalize ageist stereotypes, it leads to negative health outcomes such as depression and a shorter life expectancy, according to a review of 422 studies on aging from around the world by the Yale School of Public Health.

The reason ageism affects women more than men is because so much of it is based on appearance. “We’re judged by how we look at an early age and it continues as we get older,” says Berger. At 49, she finds herself thinking about this more. “Some friends have already had cosmetic treatments, like injections, and even those who once said they never would are now saying things like, ‘Well, maybe...’”

Fear of visible aging is kicking in earlier and earlier. “Preventative Botox” and “prejuvenation” are cosmetic trends on the rise: a report from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons found 811,000 Botox procedures were performed on 30-year-olds in 2020 alone. Meanwhile, the global hair colour market — already valued at \$19 billion — is expected to grow to \$29 billion by 2026.

But many women are fighting back. Tania Lindo, 51, began letting her hair go grey a couple of years ago in an act of defiance. “When you give the finger to that fear and insecurity, it’s so liberating,” she says. Lindo launched herself into a modelling career at age 46 after a man whose advances she’d rejected told her she wasn’t getting any younger and wouldn’t be beautiful forever.

“It was like a declaration of war,” Lindo says. “He used my age as a weapon of fear.” Lindo, also a senior account executive in Toronto, signed on with Elite Models the next day. “I thought, ‘Hey, maybe I can be part of the solution. I want to inspire younger women and show them it’s not so scary up here. And I want to help men reframe their thinking around aging, beauty and desirability.’”

Lindo is beginning to see more older women featured in fashion and beauty campaigns, as opposed to just commercials for dish soap. “I just hope more brands will start to recognize that there’s more power in our voices than ever and age diversity is so necessary.”

Indeed, in Canada, 19 per cent of the population is 65 or older (up from 14 per cent in 2010) and one in five Canadians aged 65 are working. In February, the Wall Street Journal hailed the end of the 40-year career, and the rise of the 60-year career. Given the western world’s aging workforce, employees of today — and their employers



Someone said to me the other day, ‘Oh, you look great for 51!’ I said, ‘You could have ended the sentence at, ‘You look great.’’ We’ve been conditioned to think a certain way, but I think now we can own what is beautiful.

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TANIA LINDO  
MODEL FOR ELITE MODELS AND SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE





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With more longevity, we will live longer, and we will live healthier. And there's so much left for us to give. It's really about redefining age as a time of potential to be unlocked, as opposed to something of declining value.

ZABEEN HIRJI  
EXECUTIVE ADVISER, FUTURE OF WORK FOR DELOITTE

— will have no choice but to figure out how to navigate longer career paths.

“There needs to be a reset across society,” says 62-year-old Zabeen Hirji, former chief human resources officer at RBC, who created a “purposeful third act” for her post full-time career phase. She’s now a strategic adviser for firms, governments and institutions, often focusing on the topic “the future of work.” Hirji has researched the mental health and resiliency of senior leaders, something she says has been long overlooked but is important for the entire workforce. “We need to better understand the value that older workers bring and also engage them with younger workers to build reciprocal mentoring relationships.”

Showing younger women that the world doesn’t end after 40 is a role that more older women need to take on, says Toronto-based jazz vocalist Molly Johnson. “At a certain age, you mentor,” she says. “You’ve got to spread that knowledge around and let girls know that it gets better. That they’ll stop caring so much about what other people think of them and start thinking about what *they* think of themselves.”

At 63, Johnson is travelling, performing, filming — and unabashedly aging. “I let my hair grow out because I’m making authentic music and recording songs that I wrote myself, but I was still colouring my hair. Now, it’s not grey, it’s *platinum*.” When she heard about the vitriol Madonna endured when she performed at the Grammys and cameras zoomed in on her cosmetically altered, wrinkle-free face, Johnson says she just felt sad. It takes a thick skin to be an aging female performer, she says, but it does make you stronger.

After 40 years, Johnson has finally landed a solid record deal. “This is when things get good, because you’ve lived through it all,” she says. “There’s a certain confidence that comes with age and we need to champion that.”

Lisa Murphy, 53, found a renewed sense of confidence when she left a long career as a digital media director in Toronto and became a certified mindset coach last year. “Coaching helped me realize that I needed to think about my whole life, not just my career. And I needed to find something that was fulfilling.”

The shift propelled Murphy to launch the 50ForwardClub, which celebrates 50-plus women who are trying new things. “I knew that many women like me were feeling unsettled in their personal and professional lives, and a bit blindsided by menopausal symptoms and anxiety. I wanted to create an uplifting space that made them feel seen,” she says. “The blessing of it for me is discovering so many women leading rich, fulfilling and joyous lives in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond.”

Murphy says that midlife is a good time to take stock, but you don’t necessarily need to embark on a full reinvention. “It’s just about rediscovering who you are and what you want, and taking the time to think about what makes you happy. Then you can start making small goals that help you go in that direction.”

The thing is, of course, that aging happens to all of us, so we may as well face it head on. “It’s embarrassing to be called out as older until we stop being embarrassed about it,” said Ashton Applewhite, author of “This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism,” in a 2017 TED talk. “It’s not healthy to go through life dreading our futures.”

SYDNEY LONEY IS A WRITER, EDITOR AND CONTENT STRATEGIST WITH 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE. SHE WRITES ABOUT HEALTH, CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE. REACH HER AT [TWITTER.COM/SYDNEYLONEY](https://twitter.com/sydneyloney)

HAIR AND MAKEUP: ALANNA FENNELL AND OLIVE GREY/PLUTINO GROUP; STYLIST: CARLA CANDELA; TANIA LINDO WEARS A MAX MARA DRESS FROM NORDSTROM, JENNY BIRD EARRINGS AND RING. JOANNA KERVIN WEARS A LAFAYETTE 148 NEW YORK TOP AND HALOGEN EARRINGS FROM NORDSTROM, JENNY BIRD NECKLACE AND RING. PAMELA KENNEDY WEARS A SMYTHE BLAZER, NORDSTROM SIGNATURE TOP, COS TROUSERS AND JENNY BIRD NECKLACE AND RING. LISA MURPHY WEARS A VERONICA BEARD BLAZER FROM NORDSTROM.



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I’ve discussed this with other women in PR and it’s a collective worry. They, too, often feel not seen or heard, or not as up-to-date on technology and trends. I would like to see society embrace and celebrate women at every age and stage of their careers.

PAMELA KENNEDY  
DIRECTOR, PK COMMUNICATIONS



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There is a feeling that 50-plus women are in the sunset of their careers when, in fact, many women are just getting started. I love it when I hear older women talking about exciting new career pivots or entrepreneurial efforts. It’s not a ‘sunset’ at all. It’s a time to try new things.

LISA MURPHY  
MINDSET COACH AND FOUNDER OF  
THE 50FORWARDCLUB