

CODES

# COMING OF AGE

*Melissa Doyle writes about turning 50, and why she has launched Elli, a digital space for women ageing with purpose and meaning.*

It wasn't until I was constantly asked how I felt about turning 50 that I really stopped to think about it. Other than the hope for a fancy present, it didn't feel much different than any other birthday. And that realisation was a bit of a light-bulb moment: 50 today isn't what we've been taught it's supposed to be. I am not my mother's 50, certainly not my grandmother's 50, and most certainly not what my 20-year-old self imagined that 50 would be.

My friend and colleague Naima Brown and I have just completed *Age Against the Machine*, an Audible Original podcast series. It's a global exploration of women and ageing and it taught us both a lot about why women today are feeling less focused on our age as a number. For starters, we now have more (but not nearly enough) political power, we have more (but not nearly enough) financial power, we have more education, access to health care, knowledge about our bodies, visibility but – you guessed it – not nearly enough.

As women in our 50s, it seems we are at a real inflection point. So many women over 50 are vulnerable in so many ways. Housing insecurity, financial insecurity and employment insecurity are just a few of the 'insecurities' that make ageing as a woman in Australia feel so daunting for so many of us. Add on the social pressure to remain looking as young as we can for as long as we can, the hormonal changes happening in our bodies, and the changes taking place in our personal lives, such as ageing parents and kids leaving home, and it's easy to see why it's such a fraught time. All of this adds up to women constantly telling us that they feel invisible.

But there are reasons to be hopeful. The very fact that Audible commissioned us to make *Age Against the Machine* signals an awareness that this is a conversation we need to have. Covid has brought women's leadership to the fore the world over, and the film that took home the Oscar this year – *Nomadland* – saw a 63-year-old actress, Frances McDormand, awarded for portraying the life of an older homeless woman. Instagram is full of accounts of women over 50 who are challenging the norms and refusing to be invisible (if you're not following Paulina Porizkova, you're missing out).

Women over 50 are more engaged with every aspect of life than corporations, the media, governments and sometimes even our own communities recognise. It seems the only time corporations target us is with anti-ageing products. But we are out here pounding the pavement protesting with our daughters, we're in boardrooms, we're at home getting our kids through school while we help our parents' transition to the next phase of their lives. We are working our butts off, we are creating art, music, books, films, television and podcasts.

I am very aware that my ageing experience is made considerably easier by my health, education, relationship, race and financial status. I am one of the lucky ones and I never take it for granted.



Melissa Doyle

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Those of us who are thriving in our 50s and beyond want to raise the alarm for those of us who aren't.

Naima and I both felt strongly that the podcast was just the beginning of a wider conversation, and when we looked around for somewhere to have that conversation, we couldn't find anywhere, so we launched Elli ([elliwomen.com.au](http://elliwomen.com.au)), a digital space for women who are ageing with purpose and meaning.

Elli is the name of the Norse goddess of ageing. One version of her story has her beating Thor in a wrestling match. Elli isn't the kind of goddess to knit in the corner and bake cookies (although we do we love knitting and baking cookies) – her ageing is present, commanding, fierce, relevant and kind of in your face.

The primary question of *Age Against the Machine* is: what is the difference between becoming an elder, and becoming elderly? Every woman will answer this differently – but for me, becoming an elder means owning my age, position and status and deliberately using it to cultivate and champion the next generation. I'm not competing with younger women, I'm not concerned that they have less wrinkles or less grey hair. I'm concerned about their wage gap and their access to affordable childcare so they can stay in the workforce. When women stop competing and start mentoring each other, watch out!

These are the kinds of things I want us to talk about, but also fun stuff – fashion, skincare, travel, pop culture, health and wellness. And that is what we're doing over at Elli, so come join us.

*Audi ambassador Mel Doyle is part of Vogue Codes 2021. Go to [vogue.com.au/vogue-codes](http://vogue.com.au/vogue-codes) to book tickets.*