

BOOK CLUB KIT

HOW THE
FEMALE BRAIN
GETS STRONGER
AND BETTER
IN MIDLIFE
AND BEYOND

Upgrade

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE UPGRADE*

1. What were your thoughts on menopause before reading *The Upgrade*? Have they changed? How do you now view it?
2. The book asks: Who do you want to be today? Who do you want to be in your transition and beyond? Who do you want to be as you enter the fullness of your age? How would you answer those questions?
3. What are some of the benefits to the Upgrade? What are you most looking forward to? What have you experienced?
4. The author notes that talking about the Transition and the Upgrade is important. Changing the conversation from how it's been previously discussed is even more necessary. Why? With whom have you talked about it? Did your mother—or grandmother—ever share their own experiences with you?
5. *The Upgrade* offers suggestions for self-care such as rest, proper nutrition, sleep, exercise, and listening to your body. How do you practice self-care in your life currently? What suggestions would you like to adopt?
6. Our relationships—whether it's a friend, a romantic partner, or adult children—can have a dramatic effect on our nervous systems. Why is it important for women to establish nervous system independence as we age? What are some simple steps the book suggests to help with that?
7. The author writes “biology is destiny if you don't know what it's doing to you.” What do you now know about your biology after reading *The Upgrade*?
8. Discuss the body-mind connection. What hacks can you do with your body to help boost your brain and mood?
9. After reading *The Upgrade*, what kind of conversations do you now plan to have with your doctor? Your loved ones?
10. Brizendine writes that much of her observation has shown that women have left our gifts at the door of the second half of life. What gifts are you prepared to hold onto? What gifts are you hoping to share?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. LOUANN BRIZENDINE

Author of *The Upgrade: How the Female Brain Gets Stronger and Better in Midlife and Beyond*

What is the Upgrade and how does it differ from what you call the Transition?

First of all, the Transition is the time period we call perimenopause and the Upgrade is the life stage we call menopause and postmenopause. The Upgrade is the time of life where things get better. As your hormones change and the fluctuations that made things feel stressful float away and a new clarity takes hold. As the hormone swings that helped you through childbearing and rearing are no longer needed your body chemistry adjusts to bring you calm, directness, and focus. You have time to focus on yourself again. The Transition is the sometimes wild roller coaster ride as hormones fluctuate in the process of shutting down. It's a time of inexplicable highs and lows, whereas the Upgrade, if you know how to set up for it, can be smooth sailing.

Did your personal experience of midlife inspire you to write this book? How?

Yes, absolutely. As I was struggling through the hormonal transition myself (and with my patients at the clinic), I kept reaching for solutions to what the erratic waves of hormones were doing to my brain, body, and mood. So I kept figuring out what was going on and how to buffer it for myself and my patients. In the process, I saw that we are not doomed to brain fog, exhaustion, and lack of vitality as we age. In fact, just the opposite! And as I figured it out, I wanted to share it with other women. And that's why I wrote this book.

In your book, you suggest that the Upgrade can redefine what it means to be female. What do you mean by this?

In the Upgrade women become free of the fertility dance; free from hormones pushing and pulling your brain and body into behaving in certain ways. Freedom from that kind of attention that can keep others from really hearing us! This freedom gives women the chance to redefine for themselves what it means to be female.

Why do you think women need to reconsider their view of menopause and the second half of life?

The negative view of the second half of life is just wrong. Sadly, women are taught to have so many fears about the second phase of life. I know, I had those fears too! The truth is, it is the beginning of a new developmental stage for women where they can make a choice to become the happy and ferociously joyous person they really are.

You write that the Upgrade can be a "gateway to the best years of your life". Please explain.

When the hormonal roller coaster levels out and stops jerking your brain circuits and body around, you can see clearly what is important to you. The core of who you are has a chance to emerge. It's a time of acting on old promises to ourselves of what we want to do and who we want to be.

Why do you think it's important for women to understand the changes happening neurochemically in the brain during the Upgrade?

It's important to understand what's happening to you neurochemically so you don't blame yourself or others for the way you feel and behave.

How do women need to be supported in order to reap its benefits?

We need to see other women who are upgrading and get guidance and support from each other. And especially, our partners, workplace, and doctors need to be a reliable support team. (We may need to bash them over the head a few times to get their attention.) Changes in the workplace and medical culture are slow in getting the message and will need our pushing.

In what ways has the Upgrade appeared in the generations before us?

Some women have been able to seize the power of the Upgrade even without a framework of support from society or a neurochemical understanding of their brain changes. Women like Maya Angelou, Betty White, Angela Merkel, Nancy Pelosi, Toni Morrison, Barbara Jordan, and more are role models we can look to. But the truth is, in prior generations most women didn't have enough support or opportunity to seize the possibilities offered by the Upgrade. Even as they may have sensed their clarity strengthen, they were ignored or deemed unworthy of being listened to for their wisdom. They were taken for granted in many ways, including their unpaid work as caregivers. My goal is for ALL women to have the opportunity for a bigger, better life afforded by the Upgrade.

Is our culture ready to embrace this new perspective on how women age?

I think that whether or not the culture is ready is irrelevant. And in fact, as a woman in the Upgrade, I think the question is a bit offensive. I don't care anymore what the culture thinks or what it's ready for. I know what I'm ready for and how I want to live. I know what others in the Upgrade are ready for and how they are living. The beauty of the Upgrade is that we stop needing validation from the culture or anyone else. We stop worrying about "oh poor little society, is it really ready for strong women?" Forget it. It's up to women to step into the Upgrade, and once that happens, cultural acceptance is a fait accompli. So ready or not, here we come. Stronger women make a stronger society not the other way around. I have no idea why a culture would have to brace itself against the fear of stronger older women when we have so much to offer to make everything better for everyone.