

Keeping My Ways of Being: Middle-aged women dealing with the passage through menopause

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ABSTRACT

In the medical literature, midlife for women is often redefined in terms of menopause, emphasis is placed on estrogen deficiency, symptoms and risks of different diseases. In contrast, social scientists and feminists have emphasised the social construction of menopause. The meanings given to menopause by women themselves are often left aside.

This grounded theory (GT) study is based on in-depth interviews of 24 women, aged 45-61 and on open-ended questions in questionnaires answered by women aged 45, 50, 55 or 60 during the years 2000-2002. GT proved to be well suited to the aim of letting that emerge, which concerned the women and their resolving behaviours in passing through menopause.

Analysis of data revealed that not being able to know what would happen and what influence menopause would have on them as individuals were sources of uncertainty. A theory of a general pattern of behaviour emerged, Keeping my ways of being, resolving the uncertainties involved. In this process, the women were perceived as actively involved subjects. The intensity of the process and the use of its three different stages, those of Preserving present ways of being, Limiting changes and Reappraising, were considered as dependent upon the central and important Personal calculation process.

Although Keeping my ways of being emerged from data concerned with the menopausal transition, the theory might well be expanded in its area of application beyond the realm of menopause, contributing to an understanding of how people, men and women alike, deal with more or less inevitable passages or changes in which they endeavour to deal with the uncertainties present.