“It’s not how old we are; it’s how we are old”: A salutogenic approach to how older Australian women experience ageing and respond to life stressors

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Originality

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Robyn Kennaugh
Statement of contribution

This is to certify that Research Higher Degree candidate has contributed to the following paper by her contribution in developing research questions, methodology and analysis of data, interpretation of findings and writing of manuscript

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List of Publications

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Kennaugh, R “As time passes by: how older Australian women cope with ageing” A longitudinal thematic analysis of the coping strategies of women in the oldest cohort of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health, born 1921-26. 10th Annual Regional Congress; International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, Asia/Oceania; October 2015; Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Kennaugh, R “Ageing, stress and ageing well: Stories from older Australian women” 49th AAG Conference: November 2016; Canberra, Australia.
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Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(From: The Road Not Taken
Robert Frost)

The opportunity to acknowledge and thank significant people, who have impacted my life, and particularly this PhD journey, has been most satisfying to me. The names of many people come to mind although necessity forces me to put limits on the page. Suffice to say my life has been rich with valuable voices, not all of who can be mentioned here.

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formed the memorable #ChiangMaiSuper6. What happened at conference was supposed to
stay at conference, but, never mind, some minor details may have accidentally slipped out to
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# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAT</td>
<td>Active Ageing Taskforce</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADL</td>
<td>Activities of Daily Living</td>
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<td>ALSA</td>
<td>Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALSWH</td>
<td>Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACLS</td>
<td>America’s Changing Lives Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>Body Mass Index</td>
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<td>CLOC</td>
<td>Changing Lives of Older Couples</td>
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<td>DVA</td>
<td>Department of Veterans’ Affairs</td>
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<td>EPC</td>
<td>Enhanced Primary Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>EQ-5D</td>
<td>EuroQol five dimensions questionnaire</td>
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<td>GRR</td>
<td>Generalised Resistance Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRD</td>
<td>Generalised Resistance Deficits</td>
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<td>HAIL</td>
<td>Health and Independent Living</td>
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<td>HRQOL</td>
<td>Health related quality of life</td>
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<td>HRS</td>
<td>Health and Retirement Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICAA</td>
<td>International Council on Active Ageing</td>
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<td>MCS</td>
<td>Mental health component score</td>
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<tr>
<td>MELSHA</td>
<td>Melbourne Longitudinal Studies on Healthy Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEPS</td>
<td>Medical Expenditure Panel Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDUS</td>
<td>Mid-life in the United States Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSDE</td>
<td>National Study of Daily Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCS</td>
<td>Physical health component score</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>Randomised Control Trials</td>
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<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Messages</td>
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<td>SOC</td>
<td>Sense of Coherence</td>
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<td>SRR</td>
<td>Specific Resistance Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>U3A</td>
<td>University of the Third Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>Women’s Health Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War 1</td>
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Abstract

The number of older people within the world’s population is rapidly increasing. Within that group, the number of women outnumber men, and as time passes, the number of widowed women has become greater than the number of married women. The impact of this change requires adequate preparation, and understanding the experiences of ageing is an essential step to develop policies regarding appropriate physical and social environments. In addition, adequate services and programmes, aligned with the expressed needs of older adults, can be prepared and implemented.

This thesis focuses on the experience of older Australian women, and how they manage the challenges of ageing. The intent of the research was to understand the main issues that are reported by older women to be important, how they cope as they age and how they adjust following changes to their marital status. In addition, the research aims to identify evidence of a Sense of Coherence (SOC), as described in the theory of salutogenesis, particularly as it is identified in the experience of women who describe that they are ageing well.

Studies in this thesis applied qualitative longitudinal analyses of data. The method of Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to identify the main themes described by older women during the period in which they were participants in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health (ALSWH). A conceptual model was developed, and was applied to the data, which were free-text comments.

The main findings were first, that women reported a wide range of stressors throughout their ageing process. Second, women described resources which they could access and use appropriately to counter the negative forces of stressors, and to minimise the reaction of stress that could follow. The third main finding was that many women reported that despite the challenges of ageing, they found ways to manage the circumstances of life, and reported that they were indeed ageing well.

The main implications of the findings are that a SOC is an orientation to view life in a way that supports a flexible approach in managing life’s events and associated stressors. As such, the development of a SOC should be seen as a useful strategy, which can be developed during
early life experiences, and can continue to be implemented and strengthened across the life course.