RESEARCH ONLINE

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health

2006

Older women's "ways of doing": Strategies for successful ageing

Alison Wicks
University of Wollongong, wicks@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

This article was originally published as: Wicks, A, "Older women's ways of doing": Strategies for successful ageing, Ageing International, 31(4), 263-275. Copyright Springer New York 2006. Original article is available here

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

Older women's "ways of doing": Strategies for successful ageing

Abstract
This paper discusses older women's "ways of doing" which are occupational strategies that facilitate successful ageing by maintaining participation in meaningful occupations. The paper adopts an occupational perspective of health. This particular view of people as occupational beings who need to participate in personally meaningful occupations for their health and well being is central to occupational science, which provides the paper's theoretical framework. The occupational strategies were identified in a life history study exploring the occupational life course six rural Australian women. The study data were the women's life stories, which were narratively analysed from occupational and feminist perspectives. Analysis revealed the women developed strategies, at each life stage, in response to the explicit and implicit exclusions they experienced in relation to occupational participation, within familial and social contexts. This paper focuses on strategies they developed in late adulthood as a means of facilitating successful ageing. Although the study revealed that each woman developed unique strategies to meet her personal needs for participation, there are some common features of their strategies. This paper describes five significant features of the strategies which were highlighted when they were considered collectively. To enhance understanding of older women's "ways of doing", two case studies from the life history study are presented and illustrated with examples of occupational strategies. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of occupational strategies and an occupational perspective of health for policies and programs that promote successful ageing.

Keywords
successful ageing, health policy, practice guidelines, occupations

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Life Sciences | Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details
This article was originally published as: Wicks, A, "Older women's ways of doing": Strategies for successful ageing, Ageing International, 31(4), 263-275. Copyright Springer New York 2006. Original article is available here

This journal article is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/hbspapers/93

Title: "Older women's ways of doing": Strategies for successful ageing

Author: Alison Wicks

Affiliation: Australasian Occupational Science Centre, University of Wollongong

PO Box 5080

Nowra DC

NSW 2541

Email: wicks@uow.edu.au

Contact: Ph: 02 44480841

Fax: 02 44480889

.

Abstract:

This paper discusses older women's "ways of doing" which are occupational strategies that facilitate successful ageing by maintaining participation in meaningful occupations. The paper adopts an occupational perspective of health. This particular view of people as occupational beings who need to participate in personally meaningful occupations for their health and well being is central to occupational science, which provides the paper's theoretical framework. The occupational strategies were identified in a life history study exploring the occupational life course six rural Australian women. The study data were the women's life stories, which were narratively analysed from occupational and feminist perspectives. Analysis revealed the women developed strategies, at each life stage, in response to the explicit and implicit exclusions they experienced in relation to occupational participation, within familial and social contexts. This paper focuses on strategies they developed in late adulthood as a means of facilitating successful ageing. Although the study revealed that each woman developed unique strategies to meet her personal needs for participation, there are some common features of their strategies. This paper describes five significant features of the strategies which were highlighted when they were considered collectively. To enhance understanding of older women's "ways of doing", two case studies from the life history study are presented and illustrated with examples of occupational strategies. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of occupational strategies and an occupational perspective of health for policies and programs that promote successful ageing.

Key words: successful ageing, health policy, practice guidelines, occupations

.

Older women's "ways of doing":

Strategies for successful ageing

Introduction

This article discusses older women's "ways of doing" [1], which are strategies that facilitate successful ageing by maintaining participation in meaningful occupations. These occupational strategies employed by older women were revealed in a recent life history study exploring the occupational life course of six Australian rural women. Common features of the strategies are described and examples of the strategies used by two of the women who were participants in the study are presented. The implications of these study findings in respect of policy and programs that promote successful ageing are also discussed.

Occupational science provided the theoretical framework for this article and the research study that informs it. Occupational science is an emergent discipline that endeavours to generate knowledge and understanding about human occupation and humans as occupational beings (Wilcock, 1998; Zemke & Clark, 1996). An occupational perspective of health is central to occupational science. This particular view of health is based on the premise that people need to participate in purposeful and

---

1. The term 'women's ways of doing' used in this article to describe the occupational strategies developed by the women draws on a key concept previously explored by Belenky et al, ' women's ways of knowing'. In some ways, women's ways of doing demonstrates women's survival strategies.

meaningful occupation for their health and well being. In occupational science, occupation refers to all the things that people do in their everyday life, not just paid employment.

The occupational perspective of health has links with the concept of successful ageing. The concept of growing old with health, strength and vitality, fostered by participation in the community, was introduced several decades ago (Havighurst, 1961) and then became a strong theme in gerontological research in the 1980s. Successful ageing as a concept has re-emerged recently. Currently, the notions of continued participation in meaningful occupations and ongoing contribution to community life underpin the National Research Goal: Ageing well, ageing productively (Australian Research Council, 2005), and recently established organisations such as the Research Network in Ageing Well (ARC/NHMRC, 2005) and the Productive Ageing Centre (University of the Sunshine Coast, 2005).

The occupational perspective of health resonates with other theories in social gerontology. For example, the model of selective and compensatory optimisation emphasises the significance of mastery of everyday life activities and personally meaningful goals in successful ageing (Baltes & Baltes, 1993), both key aspects of the theory of the human as an occupational being which is the foundation of an occupational perspective of health (Wilcock, 1993). Activity theory (Lemon, Bengston & Petersen, 1972), which contends that people who age optimally are those who maintain usual activities as long as possible, also has synergy with an occupational perspective of health.

.

The role of participation in meaningful occupation for fostering healthy ageing has been highlighted by occupational science research. For example, the Well Elderly Study, a randomised control trial, has affirmed the connection between occupation and wellbeing for older people living in community housing in Los Angeles. In this study a culturally diverse group of men and women aged 60 years or over participated in a program that enabled them to experience the importance of participating in meaningful occupation and to employ occupationally-based principles of healthy living. Benefits were evident across health, function and quality of life domains (Clark et al., 1997). A follow-up of the Well Elderly Study revealed that not only was the occupation-based program cost effective, but the costs of post-intervention health care for the participants were significantly lower to that of the control group (Hay et al., 2002). Another study theoretically framed by occupational science involved participants ranging in age from 60 to 90 years. This study found that the participants, 28 women and 2 men with varying degrees of physical, mental and cognitive disabilities, adopted ingenious strategies to overcome obstacles and to enhance their lives by creating opportunities for meaningful occupations (Jackson, 1996).

A recent life history study conducted in Australia by an occupational scientist revealed the significance of older women's occupational strategies for maintaining meaningful participation and fostering successful ageing (Wicks, 2003). It is this particular study that informs the article.

.

Methodology

The aim of the life history study was to explore influences that facilitated or constrained participation in meaningful occupation over the life course from the perspective of older women. A narrative and a hermeneutic phenomenological approach were adopted. A narrative approach to research uses narratives, the stories people tell about the things they do. As such, it is particularly suitable for understanding people's occupational experiences (Clark, Carlson, & Polkinghorne, 1997). The specific narrative approach used was life history to obtain a comprehensive, over time view of people (Frank, 1996). Life stories of the older women were the data. A hermeneutic approach to phenomenology borrows other people's experiences to learn from them and to develop a richer, deeper understanding of a human phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). In the study, the women's stories of their occupational experiences over time were gathered and then analysed and interpreted to understand how they maintained participation in meaningful occupation.

The participants of the study were six women aged between sixty-six and seventy-six years and living in the Shoalhaven, a rural community on the south coast of New South Wales, Australia. These six women were purposively selected from 22 focus group volunteers on the basis of their ability to reminisce and reflect and on the diversity of their life stories. Three focus groups were conducted to identify significant themes embedded in the occupational experiences that the women shared with each other. These themes were later explored in-depth in individual life story interviews with the six selected women. The interviews were conducted face to face in a comfortable setting of

the participant's choosing. In total there were twenty one interviews: sixteen for data collection and discussion, which were audio-taped so that they could be transcribed; and five for data clarification. Only the transcribed interviews were analysed. The interviews for data clarification provided essential background for interpretation.

As there are no rules or formulas for analysing data in qualitative research (Denzin, 1994), the manner in which the life story data in this study were analysed evolved over a lengthy period into a 'custom-made' process, guided by the form and nature of the data itself. The process was developed in response to interaction with the life stories and was informed by hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative theory. Essentially there were four stages in the analysis.

The initial analytical stage was saturation, in which the researcher became intentionally steeped in the world of the research participants (Bowers, 1988 cited in Higgs, 1997, p. 7) in order to become familiar with their world (Holloway, 1997). The saturation stage actually began during recruitment of participants, and continued opportunistically throughout the life of the study. Sequencing the events described in each life story into chronological order was another part of the analysis. Basically, the aim of this stage, which involved reorganising the stories temporally, was to bring about order and meaningfulness that were not always apparent in the life stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). The third stage involved illuminating the themes and sub texts that were woven throughout the stories. Rather than mechanically counting or coding selected terms,

.

illuminating the themes in this study was more a matter of 'seeing' the themes within the text as a whole, within discrete episodes of the stories or even within particular sentences, as described in hermeneutic phenomenology. This stage followed the principles of the hermeneutic circle in that there was a recurring movement between the whole story and the individual episodes to ensure that the major events or actions described did not contradict or conflict with the idea behind the plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). Essentially, this stage ensured coherence, enabled critical reflection and facilitated the interpretation, the final stage of analysis.

The interpretation was a reflective and transformative process that brought out and refined the meanings that could be sifted from the women's stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research such as this life history study, interpretations are influenced by the researcher's *lebenswelt*, or life-world (Heidegger, 1962), and by the theoretical constructs and approaches which shape a study from the outset. For this study both an occupational perspective and a feminist perspective (Connell, 2002) were adopted when interpreting the data. It is important to note, that, as van Manen (2000, Inquiry: Writing section, para. 5) reminds us:

> … no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge. It behoves us to remain as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the world and to the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach adopted in the study recognises that the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self evident, yet are the truths

of experience (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Therefore, unlike quantitative studies which seek facts and representativeness, this study used participant checking to add to its contextual richness and to ensure the participants were satisfied the transcripts adequately reflected their personal experiences. Any requests to modify or delete sections of the transcripts were addressed, prior to analysis.

The authenticity and trustworthiness of the processes involved in this life history study were maintained by systematic approaches to the research design, data collection and interpretation (Mays & Pope, 2000) and a self conscious adherence to those criteria considered essential for quality qualitative research (Higgs & Adams, 1997). An extensive 'audit trail' (Holloway, 1997, p. 26) was developed, the principal component being the researcher's 'reflexive journal' (Holloway, 1997, p. 135). All the material that was retained in this journal was dated and catalogued. The journal also included a record of personal *a priori* constructions (Dickie, 1997), emerging thoughts and ideas. Triangulation of data sources, methods and theory was used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994).

The Charles Sturt University Ethics Committee approved the study in 2000 and the women gave their informed consent to participate. At no time have any details capable of identifying the women been made public and every endeavour has been made to ensure their anonymity. All names in the study and in this article are pseudonyms.

.

Findings

Analysis of the life story data revealed that across the life course various personal and environmental factors influenced the women's opportunities for participation in meaningful occupations and, subsequently, their health and well being, as Wilcock (1993) contends. Personal influences included personal goals, personal capacities and occupational persona, that dimension of self that is predisposed to and driven toward engagement in certain types of occupations (Whiteford & Wicks, 2000). The environmental influences were more diverse, ranging from social policy on women's rights to tertiary education and historical events such as the Depression or World War II, to family values and role models. Gender emerged from the analysis of the women's life stories as a significant environmental influence that was both implicit and explicit. Gender is socially constructed and refers to the social division and cultural distinction between men and women (Jackson & Scott, 2002). As gender influences social arrangements and relationships between men and women (Connell, 2002), it significantly influences the way we live our lives. In particular, gender influences what we do and our choices of participation (Connell, 1987). For a long time, feminists have recognised the constraining influence of gender on women's participation (de Beauvoir, 1988; Friedan, 1963; Lake, 1999). The findings of this study support such a view.

Whereas feminist researchers have also observed women's unique ways of navigating the weave of relationships and structures which constitute their worlds (Bateson, 1990;

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Personal Narratives Group, 1989), the life history study revealed that women develop occupational strategies to overcome those influences that limited their choices of and opportunities for participation in meaningful occupations. These women's "ways of doing" are the focus of this article. Although it was found that the women developed unique strategies in response to their own needs and circumstances, there were five common features when the strategies were considered collectively

First, the primary purpose of all the occupational strategies was to create opportunities for meaningful occupational participation. Second, the occupational strategies were developed by the women in the early stage of their life course and gradually refined over time. Third, there was a relationship between the quantity and quality of effective strategies and the level of participation in meaningful occupations. Fourth, the women used their most effective occupational strategies subconsciously. King's (1978) thesis that adaptive strategies become subcortical and self-reinforcing parallels this finding.

The fifth feature of the women's occupational strategies was the relationship between perceived satisfaction with their occupational life course and the effectiveness and refinement of their occupational strategies. The women's reflections revealed that those who had implemented effective and refined occupational strategies were most satisfied with their occupational life course.

.

Two case studies are now presented to highlight the influences on the women's participation and to provide context for understanding their occupational strategies that are presented as examples. Sylvia and Doris, two of the women who shared their life stories in the study, were selected for the case studies as both developed a range of interesting and effective occupational strategies during their life course which enabled them to pursue rich and fulfilling lives. In addition, both reported satisfaction when they reflected on their life course. Extracts from the study data are included so that the voices of Sylvia and Doris can be heard.

Sylvia

Sylvia was born in 1928, the only child of a middle class family. Her father was an accountant who later became a financial journalist. Her mother did not work, but regularly played tennis and bridge with her friends.

As a young girl, Sylvia led a solitary but contented life, enjoying a culturally rich environment. Provided she did not make a move or say a word, she was allowed to stay up for the intellectual discussions about current affairs and world events that were frequently held with her father's friends. Music, literature and opera were also inherent parts of her upbringing.

Sylvia left school at the age of fifteen. Though she wanted to attend university and pursue a career in journalism, her father forbade it. He believed women did not need education, and insisted she attend a business college so she could get a secure job in the bank.

However, there was no way Sylvia was ever going to work in the bank. After completing a clerical course, Sylvia worked in a series of jobs that she found interesting: as a public servant in the Department of Information during the War; a clerical assistant for a playwright and then secretary in an advertising agency.

Sylvia married Alfred when she was 20, on condition that they spend the first year of their marriage travelling and working in Europe. She had been passionate about going to Europe since she was a young girl and had been saving for such a trip since she left school. Nothing was going to stop her, not even marriage.

On their return to Australia, Sylvia secured some more interesting positions. She worked as a clerical and research assistant for several academics at a university. During this time she attended evening lectures in political science and international relations as a non-examinable student. Despite the odds, she was getting the education she craved. She continued to work in a variety of positions while her children were growing up. Sylvia believed it was important for a woman to be financially independent. She had observed the power her father had over her mother because her mother did not contribute to the family income.

Sylvia and her husband are now both retired. They pursue their personal interests independently. Sylvia still maintains a hectic schedule attending the theatre, opera, and concerts and playing bridge.

The phrase that captures Sylvia's occupational persona is 'This is **my** life'. She always was and still is, very happy with her own company. She always wanted and needed a thread of independence. From a very early stage, Sylvia knew what she wanted to do, but she was not always able to do it. She said that at times she felt torn by occupational tensions, that experience of having to choose between what she wanted and doing what was expected.

Adopting enlightened self interest

Sylvia's strategy of 'adopting enlightened self-interest' in her later years has been her attempt to satisfy her personal occupational needs as well as meet the needs of her significant others. It is not surprising that Sylvia developed this strategy, given that a constant theme woven through her story is her need to be independent. It is also interesting to note that adopting enlightened self-interest is a strategy that Sylvia says she developed over time, with much thought and consideration. The following extract explains her strategy for participating in those occupations that are most meaningful to her in the latter stages of her life course.

> Sylvia:
>
> I suppose I started thinking about it twenty-odd years ago, really, at least. I had a reputation within the family of being fairly forthright. The kids would sort of laugh and always say, you always know where you stand with Mum. And I thought, does that mean that I am domineering, formidable, or bossy, or is this a good thing, that they always know where they stand with Mum?

And I decided that it was a good thing. And then, moving along from that, I felt that it had to be tempered a little bit, with one's own self interest. If everyone knows where they stand with you, and if you say, no, I am not going to have you for the weekend of the Queen's birthday, I would rather go down the coast and walk along the beach or something like that, that is the enlightened bit. It's the bit where they know where they stand with you. And the self-interest is being met at the same time. There is no devious, hidden agenda in me saying that I don't want you to come to me for that weekend. It is not that I don't love you, or I am cranky with you for any reason. I am not sulking. It is just that I would rather do something else. I think it appeals to me, because I like to be upfront, but I also don't like to always do what somebody else thinks I should do. So, it is a nice little two bob each way, I suppose you could say. And it works. It works for me. I hope it works most of the time for the people I care about. Does that make sense to you?

All I know is that, over time, I have thought it through. I have applied it to various things that have cropped up and wondered whether this was the right thing to do or not. And, for me, personally, I am comfortable with it. I have now reached the point where I hope it is understood by the ones I care about, and if it isn't, tough, because there is integrity and there is honesty in it. And that is a pretty good thing to give. Once again, we are talking about giving. Women always give. Well, that is not true, but I think that they always **want** to give. The fact that it might turn out to be that they are giving the thing that

.

> isn't valued is disappointing, but it is still a gift, just the same. But anyway, you might like to try it and see (2001).

An interpretation of Sylvia's words is that adopting enlightened self-interest is about recognising your own needs, accepting that at times your needs may conflict with the needs of others, and finding a way in which all parties are satisfied and no one is hurt. In some respects, it is similar to a 'win-win' strategy.

For the most part, it seems that Sylvia's occupational strategies have been effective in enabling her to do what she wants to do. However, asked to reflect on her occupational life course, she stated:

> I have been given tremendous opportunities, but they always had a cut off point, because of the value of a university education, which I didn't have. Plus, once again, we come back to the fact that I was a woman. So, I think, given all the givens, I probably haven't made such a bad shot of it (2001).

Doris

Doris was born in Sydney in 1933, to working class parents who had converted to the Jehovah's Witness faith during the Depression. Her parents separated when she was aged seven, her father evicting Doris and her mother from the family home. They struggled to survive financially on a pension.

.

Doris's mother had a chronic heart condition which restricted her activities. As her mother died quite young, Doris, by necessity, became very independent in things she needed and wanted to do. Fortunately for Doris, she received a scholarship for a selective girls' high school. The school, which advocated equal opportunity for women, and her secondary education, had a significant influence on her life.

Doris left school at the age of fifteen, to go to work so she could support herself and her mother. However, she was able to return to school a few months later when an uncle offered to finance another two years of education so she could attain her Leaving Certificate. Doris then went on to complete a two-year Diploma of Teaching. While at College she was exposed to a variety of new occupations, such as dancing and bushwalking. She still has a passion for bushwalking and native flora.

Doris worked as a primary school teacher for most of her life. Her first two marriages were unsuccessful and so for many years she was a single parent to her three children. Today, Doris is very busy as a volunteer at the local historical museum, and she has written and self-published two books on her family history. She is still an active member of the native flower association.

The phrase that best represents Doris's occupational persona is 'I am the maker of my own fortune'. It seems her occupational persona has been shaped by her childhood experiences and by her schooling. For example, as a young girl, out of necessity, Doris

had to do many things by herself, and at school, she was encouraged to pursue tertiary education to increase career options.

Doris's occupational persona has influenced her occupational strategies, enabling her to lead a full and satisfying life. When asked to reflect on her life course, Doris stated: "Well, looking back, I don't really know of the things that I really wanted to do that I didn't do" (2001).

Having no regrets

As an older woman Doris has adopted the strategy of 'having no regrets'. In view of her occupational persona, Doris's strategy has been shaped by her optimistic approach to life and is grounded in her philosophy that people can make the most out of the things they do. On reflection, Doris has realised she made some unfavourable decisions during her life course. In her life story interview, Doris stated; "My second marriage was even worse [than the first]. Can you imagine that? How could I have been so naïve about it?" However, rather than dwelling on those things she did that limited her opportunities and choices she always tried to find positive outcomes in everything, as shown by the following extract.

> Doris:
>
> But I never, ever thought … I didn't ever regret anything. I think that was the thing. Sometimes you hear people say, if I had only done such and such, I

.

> would have made twice as much money out of that. I never, ever think that if only I had done something differently, I would have been better off (2001).

'Having no regrets' is a strategy that has enabled Doris to progress in her life course. Instead of staying stuck in a rut, filled with regret and remorse, Doris has always been able to move forward and to take on new occupational challenges. This particular strategy has enabled Doris to participate in a range of meaningful occupations, all of which have contributed to the sense of satisfaction with her life that she now experiences as an older woman.

Being willing to try

Doris has also adopted the strategy of 'being willing to try'. This strategy has been used by Doris throughout her life course to increase her occupational interests and to enrich her occupational experiences. She continues to use this strategy as an older woman. It is notable that Doris apparently learnt this strategy from her mother, someone who was limited in terms of occupational participation due to her chronic illness. This is a strategy that, according to Doris, can open up opportunities that may not otherwise be available.

> Doris:
>
> … the thing I learnt fairly young, you mightn't think you are going to be interested in something but, at least if you keep a bit of an open mind, you never know. I hear some things from Allan's grandson, oh, that's boring. Have you ever tried it? No, I am not interested. Decision. Full stop. I have sometimes said to him, you can't say too much, but I do say, unless you try

.

> something, and find out, how do you know it is not interesting. It's like trying a new food. If you have never tried it, how can you say you don't like it?
>
> I think that is something that I learnt from my mother, very young. She didn't have that opportunity, with her health, and women at that time, when they were married they stayed at home, and she really didn't have a career at all. But I think she was interested in people and she showed it. And she let me realise that if you kept an open mind and showed some interest in things, you never knew how interesting it was going to be … she might never have said it. I can't remember her ever saying it in words, but I guess I picked that up (2001).

Implications

The study findings and the examples of older women's "ways of doing" which have been presented in this article are relevant to gerontology as they highlight the significance of participating in meaningful occupations for a sense of satisfaction and well being in old age. However, it is acknowledged that the relevance is limited. Findings of research conducted within an interpretive paradigm, such as the study reported in this article, are tentative and not intended as an attempt for developing universal theory. Also, the findings are based on a small sample of women, and directly shaped by the specific physical, social, cultural and temporal contexts of participants' lives. Nevertheless, the life story data provide rich, deep understandings of older women's experiences. Similar life history studies of women from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds will further

enhance understanding of older women's "ways of doing" and the relationships between participation in meaningful occupations and successful ageing. Such understanding is necessary for further developing an occupational perspective of health which could then be infused into social policy.

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO,1986), which serves as an essential resource when developing any polices that will impact on the lives of older people, already resonates with an occupational perspective of health. For example, the Charter recognises the relationship between people, their environments and what they do. It also encourages communities to enable individuals to actively participate within familial, social and workplace settings so they may satisfy their occupational needs and realise their aspirations. Given the ageing of our population, the changing social demographics and increasing health care costs, it is critical that social policies reflect older people's need to remain actively engaged in meaningful occupation. Policies which adopt an occupational perspective of health can then be used by practitioners working in the field of gerontology to develop occupation-based programs, for individuals and communities, to promote successful ageing.

Research has already shown the health benefits and the short and long term cost effectiveness of occupationally-based programs (Hay et al., 2002). As meaningful occupation is the critical factor in successful outcomes in occupation-based programs, there are some important guidelines for practitioners working with older people. First,

practitioners need to respect older people as occupational beings. That is, practitioners should endeavour to enable older people to engage in occupations so they can structure their lives and gain a sense of control and self-direction. Second, practitioners need to appreciate and try to understand the symbolic meaning that older people attach to various occupations. Listening to the stories that older people tell provides insight to those occupations in their past that were meaningful. Hence, if practitioners incorporate opportunities for story telling in their programs for older people, they can identify themes of meaning in the older peoples' past occupations and then assist the older people to weave these past themes of meaning into present occupations. Third, it is most important that older people have the opportunity to choose occupations that are personally meaningful. In some instances, practitioners may need to address economic, physical or access issues that are limiting older people's occupational opportunities. Fourth, practitioners should support older people as much as is practical and socially responsible to participate in occupations of their choice.

Conclusion

This article has discussed older women's "ways of doing" as occupational strategies to promote successful ageing. Specific strategies, developed and refined over time by two older Australian women have been presented as examples as these occupational strategies have enabled the women to participate in meaningful occupations and thereby to live satisfying and meaningful lives. The women's strategies have highlighted the significant link between occupation, meaning and health, and effectively illustrated the basic

premise of an occupational perspective of health: people need to participate in meaningful occupations for their health and well being. In addition, the importance of adopting an occupational perspective of health when developing policy and programs for older people has been emphasised.

Occupation, all the things we do in our everyday life, is ubiquitous. In fact, occupation is so much a part of our daily lives that it is often taken for granted. In accordance with an occupational perspective of health, meaningful occupation has health promoting qualities. Therefore, choices of and opportunities for meaningful occupation are important considerations when developing policies on ageing as meaningful occupation is a valuable resource in health promoting programs for older people.

References

Australian Research Council, (2005). *Priority areas for ARC funding.* Retrieved October 9, 2005 from http://www.arc.gov.au/grant_programs/priority_areas.htm

Australian Research Council/National Health & Medical Research Council. (2005). *ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well.* Retrieved October 9, 2005 from http://www.ageingwell.edu.au

Baltes. P., & Baltes, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Successful ageing: Perspectives from the*

behavioural sciences. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Bateson, M. (1990). *Composing a life*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing. The development of self, voice and mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Bowers, B. (1988). Grounded theory. In B. Sarter (Ed.), *Paths to knowledge: Innovative research methods for nursing.* Cited in Higgs, J. (1997). The context of qualitative research. In J. Higgs (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Discourse on methodologies.* Sydney: Hampden Press.

Clark, F., Azen, S., Zemke, R., Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Hay, J., Josephon, K., Cherry, B., Hessel, C., Palmer, J., & Lipson, L. (1997). Occupational therapy for independent-living older adults: A randomised controlled trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 287*, 1321-1326.

Clark, F., Carlson, M., & Polkinghorne, D. (1997). The legitimacy of life history and narrative approaches in the study of occupation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 51*(4), 313-317.

Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and power. Society, the person and sexual politics*. Stanford, Ca: Standford University Press.

Connell, R. (2002). *Gender.* Malden, MA: Polity/Blackwell.

de Beauvoir, S. (1988). *The second sex*. London: Picador.

Denzin, N. (1994). The art and politics of interpretation. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

DePoy, E., & Gitlin, L. (1994). *Introduction to research: Multiple strategies for health and human services.* St Louis: Mosby.

Dickie, V. (1997). Insights from a focused autobiography. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research, 17*(2), 99-104.

Frank, G. (1996). Life histories in occupational therapy clinical practice. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 50*(4), 251-264.

Friedan, B. (1963).*The feminine mystique*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Havighurst, R. J. (1961). Successful aging. *The Gerontologist, 1*(1), 8-13.

Hay, J., LaBree, L., Luo, R., Clark, F., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Zemke, R., Jackson, J., & Azen, S. (2002). Cost-effectiveness of preventive occupational therapy for independent-living older adults. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 50*(8), 1382-1388.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time,* trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. London:

SCM Press.

Higgs, J., & Adams, R. (1997). Seeking quality in qualitative research. In J. Higgs (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Discourse on methodologies.* Sydney: Hampden Press.

Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic concepts for qualitative research.* Oxford: Blackwell Science.

Jackson, J. (1996). Living a meaningful existence in old age. In R. Zemke & F. Clark (Eds.), *Occupational science: The evolving discipline* (pp.339-361). Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.

Jackson, S., & Scott, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Gender. A sociological reader*. London: Routledge.

King, L. (1978). Toward a science of adaptive response - 1978 Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 32,* 429-437.

Lake, M. (1999).*Getting equal - the history of Australian feminism*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Lemon, B., Bengtson, V., & Petersen, J. (1972). An exploration of the activity theory of aging: Activity types and life expectation among in-movers to a retirement community. *Journal of Gerontology*, *27*(4), 511-23.

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Qualitative research in health care: Assessing quality in qualitative research. *British Medical Journal, 320*, 50-52.

Personal Narratives Group (Ed.). (1989). *Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23.

University of the Sunshine Coast. (2005). *National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre.* Retrieved October 9, 2005, from http://www.usc.edu.au/Research/Centres/NSPAC

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Ontario: Althouse Press.

van Manen, M. (2000). *Phenomenology online.* Retrieved July 8, 2001, from www.alt.ualberta.ca/po/inquiry.cfm

Whiteford, G., & Wicks, A. (2000). Occupation: Persona, environment, engagement and outcomes. An analytical review of the Journal of Occupational Science Profiles. Part 2. *Journal of Occupational Science, 7*(2), 48-57.

Wicks, A. (2003). *Understanding occupational potential across the life course: Life stories of older women*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Charles Sturt University.

Wilcock, A. (1993). A theory of the human need for occupation. *Journal of Occupational*

Science: Australia, 1, 17-24.

Wilcock A. (1998). *An occupational perspective of health*. Thorofare, Slack.

World Health Organisation. (1986). *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*. Retrieved August 15, 2005, http://www.euro.who.int/AboutWHO/Policy/20010827_2

Zemke, R., & Clark, F. (Eds.). (1996). *Occupational science: The evolving discipline*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.