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**UNIVERSAL CHANGE - INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES:
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THE MENOPAUSE AND OF
TAKING HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Philosophy
in Nursing
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and interpret the phenomenon of menopause as experienced by women taking hormone replacement therapy. The study set out to answer the question "What is the experience of taking hormone replacement therapy during the menopause?" The narratives of the ten women who participated in this study provided rich descriptions which revealed some of the ambiguity and silence that has concealed much of this experience.

The conclusions of this study are that menopause as an universal event, in human females, is comprised of individual responses which are interpreted within the context of each woman's life. The inevitable-unexpectedness of the menopause, (knowing that it will come) does not prepare the women for the experience. Ways of coping with a changing body are directed by concerns which arise from each woman's societal, family and individual experiences. The findings of this study suggest that the decision to take or not to take HRT is not a definitive one, but the source of an ongoing dilemma. A dilemma caused by the women's desire to cope naturally and their need to regain some control over their bodies and their lives through taking HRT. Underlying the women's decisions is a weighing up of the possible outcomes of taking HRT - to prevent osteoporosis and heart disease, or to increase their chances of developing cancer.

The impact of conflicting information from both medical professionals and the press added to the women's concern about their bodies. This manifested itself in the women becoming very watchful of their bodies and taking surreptitious breaks from HRT regimes. For all the freedom and self management promised by HRT, we need to alert ourselves to the possibility that in some way HRT dampens down something that wishes to express itself, but which as yet modern Western society does not accommodate.

The central over-riding theme of this study is universal change-individual responses. This is supported by three essential themes: living-with-a-changing-body, being-on-hormone-replacement-therapy and relationships-past-and-present.

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Dr Cheryl Benn then took up the difficult task of guiding me to bring the whole thing together for presentation. It is not an easy task for a new supervisor to take up where another left off so I wish to acknowledge the skill with which this was done.

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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTIONS

The abbreviations and conventions given below are used throughout this dissertation, particularly when excerpts from the interview transcriptions are used.

Int.	interview
<i>Italics</i>	the words as spoken by the participants are presented in italics
p. or pp.	page or pages
()	comments or questions made by the researcher to clarify or explain aspects of the transcription
...	indicates a pause within the original transcription
./..	indicates where material has been edited