Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
A COMMUNITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:
TALKING ABOUT LIFE IN A RETIREMENT VILLAGE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at
Massey University

Vicki Graham
2002
ABSTRACT

The recent emergence in New Zealand of commercially operated retirement villages has provided older adults with the opportunity to live independently in a community specially planned for their age group. The current generation of older New Zealanders is the first to live in this way, and little is known about the psychology of this lifestyle. It is well recognised that environment influences well-being, and the present study aimed to investigate the broad psychology of living in a retirement village.

The data was collected from twelve people living independently in a retirement village in a provincial New Zealand city. They were asked to talk about their decision to move into the village, and their experience of living in such a community. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were examined using Potter & Wetherell’s (1987) method of discourse analysis. Five themes were analysed: the decision to move, active ageing, company, privacy, and security. Overall, the analysis showed the ways in which the participants constructed their move to a retirement village as a positive and proactive part of the ageing process. Predominantly, this was achieved by highlighting the positive aspects of a retirement village community in contrast to constructions of the wider community, and by choosing contrasting features of the village lifestyle to construct different versions of the village.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Keith Tuffin, thank you for showing me how I could make sense of psychology. Thank you also for seasoning your academic guidance of this thesis with generous measures of tact and humour, and for having the wisdom to know which to use.

To my husband, Grant Christian, and our daughter, Anna, thank you both for your outstanding emotional and practical support, and for your patience. I know you will be glad to have me back.

To the rest of my family, and to my friends, thank you for all you have done to maintain and restore my equilibrium. I am looking forward to spending more time with you.

To the people who took part in the study, thank you for giving your time, and the talk that was the basis of the study. I appreciate your contribution, and it was a great pleasure to meet you all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW
Theories of adjustment to ageing.............................................................. 2
Disengagement theory ........................................................................... 2
Socioemotional selectivity theory......................................................... 2
Continuity theory .................................................................................. 3
Activity theory ....................................................................................... 4
Reasons why older adults might want to live in a retirement village .... 4
Sociability ............................................................................................... 4
Independence ......................................................................................... 7
Security and safety ................................................................................ 8
Exclusivity .............................................................................................. 9
The present study in the New Zealand context ................................... 11
Summary .............................................................................................. 13

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK
The social constructionist perspective ..................................................... 14
The consequences for researchers ......................................................... 15
Reflexivity applied to the present study ................................................ 16
Discourse analysis ................................................................................ 18
Social constructionism and discourse analysis in the present study ...... 19
Summary .............................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD
Procedure ............................................................................................. 21
Ethical issues ........................................................................................ 22
Transcription ........................................................................................ 24
Coding .................................................................................................... 25
Validity .................................................................................................. 25
Analysis .................................................................................................. 26

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DECISION TO MOVE
Timing is important ................................................................................ 28
Leaving the family home ....................................................................... 33
Sentimentality and pragmatism .............................................................. 36
Possessions and memories .................................................................... 38
Summary ............................................................................................... 41

CHAPTER FIVE: ACTIVE AGEING
It’s important to be active .................................................................... 42
The village is a busy place .................................................................... 44
It’s important to use time ...................................................................... 46
Summary .............................................................................................. 49
CHAPTER SIX: COMPANIONSHIP
Expectations about company ................................................................. 51
Getting to know people ........................................................................ 53
Not everyone participates ...................................................................... 54
The kind of people who live here .......................................................... 58
Summary ................................................................................................. 61

CHAPTER SEVEN: PRIVACY
Privacy and sociability ........................................................................... 62
Privacy and concern for others ............................................................... 69
Summary ................................................................................................. 74

CHAPTER EIGHT: SECURITY
Constructing danger in the community .................................................. 76
Contrasting the village with the wider community ................................. 79
Security in the village ............................................................................ 82
How secure is it really? .......................................................................... 84
Summary ................................................................................................. 87

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION
Summary ................................................................................................. 88
Qualifications to the study ..................................................................... 91
Suggestions for further research ............................................................ 92

REFERENCES ......................................................................................... 94

APPENDICES
Appendix A: Invitation to participants .................................................. 98
Appendix B: Information sheet ............................................................... 99
Appendix C: Interview prompts .............................................................. 101
Appendix D: Consent form ..................................................................... 102
Appendix E: Confidentiality agreement ................................................ 103
Appendix F: Transcription notation ....................................................... 104
Appendix G: Summary of results for participants ................................. 105