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**A COMMUNITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:  
TALKING ABOUT LIFE IN A RETIREMENT VILLAGE**

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **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.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

People get older. Sometimes their accommodation requirements change, and although the majority of older New Zealanders live independently in their own homes in the wider community, about ten percent do not. Some are living in rest homes and nursing homes, because they require nursing care or help with daily activities. Some are living with their adult children or other family members, who may provide assistance, company or security. For some, 'home' is a retirement village, defined by the Law Commission (1999, p.1) as 'a collection of residences designed for the accommodation of the elderly'. In practice, this definition includes a diversity of retirement villages, varying in structure, services and size. The accommodation may comprise houses, units or apartments, and these may be either purchased or rented. The services offered may be limited to routine home maintenance, or may extend so far as assistance with daily living activities, on-call medical aid, and the availability of a higher level of care in the future.

In recent years in New Zealand, there has been increasing development of the retirement village 'community' that is designed for older adults in relatively good health. In this type of retirement village, residents generally purchase their home, and pay a fee for services such as gardening, rubbish disposal, and perhaps the availability of on-call medical aid. These retirement villages have features of both independent and shared lifestyles. Residents live independently of each other, maintaining responsibility for their own household routines, although there may be shared dining facilities. Generally, there will be a programme of regular social and recreational activities. There may be a community centre, providing common ground for people to meet with each other. Clubs are formed around common interests, such as arts and crafts, cards, exercise and bowls. Services such as hairdressing and podiatry are provided. This enables residents to conduct much of their daily business, as well as a social life, without ever leaving the village. A retirement village of this nature does not simply function as 'the accommodation of the elderly', but is to some degree a planned *community* of older adults.

In view of the age-segregated nature of such a community, it is appropriate to consider general theories of ageing that relate to the experience of living in a retirement village. I'll review these briefly now, to illustrate some of the context in which retirement villages have developed, as well as the context influencing the present study. The reasons why older adults might be attracted to such a way of life will then be reviewed in conjunction with the relevant literature.

### **Theories of adjustment to ageing, and relationship to retirement villages**

#### *Disengagement theory*

Disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961) suggested that the most successful adjustment to ageing was made when older adults initiated a process of withdrawing from the world, emotionally and socially as well as occupationally. It was proposed that this was a natural and inevitable preparation for eventual death. Conceptually, disengagement theory might generate the notion of the age-segregated community as a suitable place for withdrawal, although it is inconsistent with the contemporary marketing of retirement villages as places for active and vigorous older adults.

Disengagement theory was criticised because it could support ageism by, for example, justifying the segregation and exclusion of older adults from participation in society (Whitbourne & Sneed, 2002). Disengagement theory also assumed that ageing represented a natural process of decline, and failed to acknowledge that levels of engagement were influenced by cultural and historical factors, such as mandatory retirement ages (Jacobs, 1974). These criticisms generated a number of more positive theories of successful adjustment to ageing (Koopman-Boyden, 1993), which focused on change rather than decline.

#### *Socioemotional selectivity theory*

Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999) refuted the basic assumption of disengagement theory that participation in all spheres of life

diminishes automatically. Socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that older adults reduce the extent of their social networks intentionally, as a strategy to improve the quality of their relationships. It was proposed that the motivation for this is the increasing recognition by older adults that time is limited. As a result, they sacrifice both knowledge-seeking endeavours and their more superficial relationships in favour of maximising the rewards of closer emotional relationships.

Socioemotional selectivity theory may be relevant to retirement communities because of the prominence of social networks in the community lifestyle. The literature review will note that the quality of relationships between retirement village residents varies, but there are numerous accounts of close relationships developing between residents.

#### *Continuity theory*

Continuity theory (Atchley, 1989) also refuted disengagement theory's basic premise that disengagement is an inevitable and self-driven part of the ageing process. Continuity theory speculates that as older adults relinquish a life cycle role (such as being in paid employment), those who have the opportunity to develop replacement roles (such as heading a committee of volunteers) will age more successfully (as measured by their health and psychological well-being). Disengagement would occur for those adults who could not find, or successfully adapt to, new roles.

The relevance of continuity theory to the retirement village lifestyle is the opportunity for participation in the community. In a retirement village, it is residents rather than staff who run the various club and social committees. In addition, it is common for residents to appoint advocates to represent their interests to village management. Finally, a retirement village offers the role of 'neighbour'. 'Neighbouring' refers to engaging in proactive, reciprocal, helping relationships with one's neighbours (McDonald, 1996). It is not the same thing as being a friend, although the roles may co-exist. Nor is it used in the same way as it's used in the wider community, where it may mean nothing more than living next door to

someone. The reciprocal and widespread nature of neighbouring in a retirement village means that everyone has the opportunity to play a contributing role.

### *Activity theory*

Activity theory (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953) suggests that older adults can best maintain their psychological well-being by remaining physically, mentally and socially active. This is particularly so when activity promotes social interaction (Longino & Kart, 1982, cited in Jenkins et al., 2002). Just as in continuity theory, activity is recommended to counteract the loss of life cycle roles such as being in paid employment. As longevity increases, so does that period later in life when older people have the time and leisure available to participate in meaningful social, cultural and educational activities. This period, commonly referred to as the Third Age (Fahey & Holstein, 1993), draws on activity theory as a model for successful ageing. Activity theory underpins the lifestyle modelled in many retirement communities, as the literature review will show.

I'll return to this brief review of the disengagement, socio-emotional, continuity and activity theories of ageing in the analysis and discussion. Its purpose at this point was to provide a context for the literature review that follows, which is organised around the reasons why older adults might be attracted to the idea of living in a retirement village. These reasons tend to fall into the areas of sociability, independence and safety, although these areas are not always clearly separated from each other. The review ends with the notion of exclusivity that appears in the critical literature.

### **Sociability**

Expectations about sociability in a retirement village may be influenced by the salient characteristic of retirement village residents, who form a homogeneous group with respect to age. There is a minimum entry age, which is often around 55 years, and this means the average age for residents is 65 years or more. People of a similar age may be assumed to have similar social and leisure interests.

There has been a particular interest in social interaction and friendship in retirement villages, given the potential for these to increase in a community (Young, 1998). As people get older, their social networks tend to contract, as spouses, relatives and friends die or move away. Retirement villages are aggressively marketed as places that provide an abundance of social networks and activities, which may be seen as a solution to social isolation (Gardner, 1994). Although this may be particularly relevant for the recently widowed, it's also relevant to married couples who anticipate that it will be easier for the surviving spouse to cope with life on their own if they're living in a community where companionship and support is available (Gardner, 1994).

Potts (1997) summarised the literature on social interaction in retirement villages and its relationship to psychological well-being, and the findings were variable. Among the contradictions were: the finding that social interaction increased and that this was linked with increased well-being (e.g. Hong & Duff, 1994); the finding that social interaction was superficial and that this might be linked with decreased well-being (e.g. Sullivan, 1986); and, the finding that living in a retirement community didn't necessarily equate to the resident feeling a part of the community (e.g. Hunt, Feldt, Marans, Pastalan & Vakalo, 1984). Many retirement village residents formerly lived alone in the community, and therefore a retirement village may provide the opportunity for increased social contact (Young, 1998). Even though villages generally comprise independent households, social interaction is likely to increase simply as a function of proximity and community feeling (McDonald, 1996).

It seems likely that the benefit of social interaction in a retirement community will depend on the quality of the relationships, and other factors such as residents' similar life experiences and interests (McDonald, 1996). The experience of friendship in a retirement village may be influenced by factors such as gender, since there are far more single and widowed women than men. Furthermore, the developmental stage of a retirement community may influence residents' experience of social interaction, as shown in van den Hoonaard's (2002) study in which newcomers to established

communities had to be particularly proactive in initiating and establishing friendships with longtime residents who already had networks of friends.

Potts (1997) examined the relationship between social support and depression in retirement village residents and found that, despite residents experiencing higher levels of social contact with other residents than with friends outside the village, the perceived quality of social support was lower in the relationships within the village. This is consistent with McDonald's (1996) finding that three quarters of his sample said either two out of three, or all three, of their closest friends lived outside their retirement village. However, McDonald (1996) also found several examples of residents becoming inseparable companions, and other studies have reported close friendships among residents (e.g. Hong & Duff, 1994, cited in Potts, 1997).

It isn't only shrinking social networks that can cause isolation in the wider community. For some older adults, isolation results from difficulties in driving or using public transport (Stein & Morse, 1994). People who are having difficulty getting about may find it easier to socialise in a retirement village simply due to the proximity of activities held onsite. In addition, the physical environment is more manageable when modified for ease of use by older people (Streib, 2002), for example, by adding entry-chairs to the swimming pool. Such modifications make it easier for people to join in with the activities.

Retirement village advertising emphasises participation in social activities as a benefit of the lifestyle. Studies show that organised social agendas, and the proximity of neighbours, are likely to lead to increased social participation for those who desire it (e.g. Hong & Duff, 1994). A study of 245 residents of an Australian retirement village (McDonald, 1996) cited a participation rate in organised social activities of 79 percent, which McDonald claimed was representative of the rates found in other studies. However, the resultant impression of busy, active residents is questionable, because only 29 percent of residents were moderate and high participators. There was a large proportion of 'low participators', who attended an event at least once a fortnight but not necessarily any more frequently. An ethnographic study of a large

North American retirement community (Jacobs, 1974) claimed that only a small proportion of the community's club members were active participants. The same small number of people consistently attended every social function, with the majority of residents participating rarely, or not at all.

In contrast, the Sun City retirement communities in North America are described as places where there's a feverish focus on filling time, not necessarily for the pleasure of the activity but to avoid the reality of the passing of time (Kastenbaum, 1993). Similarly, an ethnographic study of residents who spent their winters in Phoenix retirement communities showed that many residents had extremely busy schedules, accounting for every part of every day (McHugh, 2000). In this context of the active ageing model, retirement villages have been described as providing 'the ultimate script of successful aging' (McHugh, 2000, p.112). One of the problems with having a script for successful ageing is the potential for the actors to forget their lines, and Slater (1995) suggests that the current emphasis on activity and engagement may dictate older adults' expectations and experience of ageing in general. This might limit how an older person can age successfully in a retirement village, and how their experience can be understood.

### **Independence**

In two Australian studies of more than 450 retirement village residents, more than half the respondents cited difficulty in managing routine household and garden maintenance as an important factor in their decision to move to a retirement village (Buys, 2000; Gardner, 1994). Services such as gardening, lawn mowing and window washing are available in retirement villages as part of the weekly service fee. The inability to manage these tasks required people either to call on family members for help, or to pay for these tasks to be done. Residents expressed the wish not to be a burden to family members by calling on them for help. Paradoxically, the move to a retirement village, which might have been seen as relinquishing their independence, allowed them a greater sense of independence than they had experienced in the wider community (Gardner, 1994).

Residents in a retirement community in the United Kingdom had an interesting perspective on independence (Biggs et al., 2000). They acknowledged that independence was important, but claimed to have a degree of control over the environment and activities in their retirement community that allowed them the same sense of independence as would be possible in the wider community. In addition, they said that the opportunity to participate in community life offered a more satisfying experience of independence than could be experienced in the wider community, where they claimed independence was achieved at a cost of isolation and loneliness.

### **Security and safety**

Retirement villages are promoted as safe environments, and it's common for people to cite safety as a reason to live in such a community (Stein & Morse, 1994). Often, a village is physically separated from the wider community by gates and walls. This provides a degree of security that is not present in the wider community, which is often perceived as an increasingly dangerous place in which older people are particularly vulnerable (Biggs et al., 2000). Older people who live alone, in particular, might feel safer living in a gated retirement village.

Neighbours contribute to the security in a retirement village, because they are likely to be both closer, and in a similar position. Not only are they unlikely to pose a threat, they contribute actively to security. Many retirement villages operate an informal safety network, checking whether other residents are all right by taking note of such things as curtains being drawn in the morning (Rowles, 1981). A community where residents take an interest in the well-being of other residents may enhance a sense of personal security in a way that isn't experienced in the wider community, where people may not take the time or trouble to check on their neighbours.

A retirement village may also provide a sense of personal security. It's common for homes to be fitted with alarm buttons, with a view to providing medical assistance

quickly. This may allay worries about medical emergencies, injuries or falls in the home. The importance of support and health care was illustrated in Buys' (2000) study of 323 older adults living independently in the units of an Australian retirement village. Health care and support were endorsed by 85% of the respondents as important factors influencing their decision to enter the retirement village. The study focused on people's beliefs about ongoing care, and the findings were particularly interesting because the village they lived in didn't offer ongoing care for residents who became too incapacitated to look after themselves. This fact was clearly stated in the promotional material for the village, but evidently people's expectations about the role of such care in a retirement village over-rode this information.

### **Exclusivity**

A final issue identified in the literature pertaining to retirement villages is that of exclusivity. Retirement villages are age-segregated communities, and have been criticised as exclusionary (Laws, 1995). Of course this is true, since there is a minimum entry age, but the criticism is directed at the nature of the exclusion, since the homogeneous nature of retirement community populations extends to more than age. Homes in a retirement village are comparatively expensive, and residents tend to be of relatively high socio-economic status. In addition, dominant cultures are over-represented, which encourages some potential residents, and discourages others.

It seems that, for some older adults, a retirement village may represent an 'inner citadel of privacy and autonomy' (Kastenbaum, 1993, p. 169) which is constantly under threat from the outside world. Kastenbaum's research showed the residents of a gated retirement community in Arizona to be very concerned about the possibility of relaxing the restrictions on who could live in their community. A discourse labelled 'fortress mentality' was identified. On the surface, this discourse was organised around resistance to the entry of younger people, with residents making comments such as: "They want to open the doors for just anybody to live here ... First it will be young families with children ..." (p.167). But it went further, manifesting as a hostile defence against the admission of anybody who was different

to the residents: "... then, anybody and everybody" (p.167). This discourse used age and social status to position everybody other than residents as 'other', and to justify admission rules as the only way to prevent the opening of the floodgates.

Although age-homogeneity may be guarded jealously by some residents, it isn't universally appreciated. Young (1998) interviewed residents living in independent apartments in a congregate housing establishment. Several hadn't anticipated the nature of an age-segregated environment, and said they missed the interaction with a range of ages that was available to them in the wider community.

In summary, the literature says that older adults are attracted to the idea of living in a retirement village because of their expectations about company, security, the lack of maintenance and the availability of health care and assistance (e.g. Buys, 2000; Gardner, 1994; Stein & Morse, 1994). The psychology of living in a retirement village features in the literature of several disciplines, including psychology, sociology and gerontology, and critical gerontologists have identified the issue of exclusivity in retirement villages. The literature available is exclusively from the Western cultures where retirement villages originated, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

The literature was reviewed in respect of the experience of retirement village residents in comparison with older adults who live in the wider community. There are in addition a number of factors that may distinguish the experience of retirement village residents from older adults in other kinds of accommodation, such as nursing homes and residential care. Usually, they own their own home. They have authority over their own domain within the community, and can choose whether or not to invite other people into their space. Retirement village residents tend to be in better health than older adults in residential care, whose decision is often driven by failing health. This facilitates mobility and social activity both within and outside the village environment. In terms of their daily needs, they make their own decisions about what to do and when to do it, thereby retaining the autonomy that may be compromised in residential care. Finally, the experience of retirement village residents is

distinguished from that of people in residential care because a retirement village is a community. Residents have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to village life as members of the community. For these reasons, I have not reviewed the literature that studied older adults in residential care. I have also excluded studies that recruited retirement village populations simply as a captive population of older adults by which to investigate aspects of ageing, since these studies do not specifically relate to the experience of living in a retirement village.

### **The present study in the New Zealand context**

Retirement communities for independent older adults originated in North America in the 1960s (Laws, 1993). The term 'village' is a misnomer for some of these communities, which are small towns and cities housing many thousands of residents. Communities of this size bear little resemblance to the retirement villages in New Zealand, which vary in size, but average out at around 60 residents (Law Commission, 1998). In addition, the residents of retirement communities both in the United States and in Australia often have migrated in search of a more temperate climate. This is not a factor in New Zealand. Generally, older New Zealanders don't move far (Heenan, 1993), and those who do may be influenced more by other factors, for example the proximity of family and friends.

Although the number of New Zealanders living in retirement villages is still relatively small (almost 3%; Law Commission, 1998), the structural ageing of the population suggests that this will increase. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over has increased relative to the general population (Heenan, 1993), and this is predicted to continue as the 'baby boom' generation reaches retirement age. The current ratio of 427,000 adults aged 65 years and over, comprising almost twelve percent of the population is predicted to increase to almost one million, comprising 19 percent of the population by 2030 (Prime Ministerial Task Force on Positive Ageing, 1996). Although many of these people will remain in the wider community, and some will require residential nursing care, retirement villages remain a possibility for the rest.

I have previously pointed out the diversity in retirement villages with respect to size, structure and services. There is diversity also in a retirement village's culture, and its residents' experience. There is no reason to assume that all retirement villages are the same. It is recognised that well-being is influenced by environment. Laws (1995, cited in McHugh, 2000) labels a retirement village rather harshly as an 'exclusionary monotonous plastic community of advantaged elderly' (p. 112), which is quite a contrast to a place for 'elders carving out lives and places rich in meaning and collective identity' (McHugh and Mings, 1996, cited in McHugh 2000, p. 112). Nor can it be assumed that all residents are the same, despite similarities such as age and possibly socio-economic status and ethnicity. Finally, there is no reason to assume commonality of experience, because a retirement village represents a particular way of living that has arisen in particular cultural conditions. Older adults who move into a retirement village bring a number of different experiences, expectations and stereotypes about ageing in this particular way and place. Expectations will influence the experience of living in a retirement village, and vice versa. In addition, expectations and experience both inform, and are informed by, the wider culture within which the community is located, and this creates new expectations and experiences.

The relative recency of commercially operated retirement villages in New Zealand (Law Commission, 1998) means that the experience of the current generation of older adults is a novel one. The people who move into them haven't had the opportunity to observe the experience of previous generations, because the current generation of older New Zealanders is the first to live in this way. Therefore, little is known about the psychology of this complex, community lifestyle. The present study will look at the experience of older people who live in a retirement village in a provincial New Zealand city, as they construct it through talk.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a context for the present study, with background information on retirement villages overseas and in New Zealand and a brief review of the relevant theories of ageing. The literature on factors motivating the move to a retirement community and the experience of living there was reviewed, along with concerns that have been raised in the critical gerontological literature. The claim was made that little is known of the psychology of the experience of living in a retirement village, particularly the subjective experience in the New Zealand context. This heralds the methodological approach of the present study that is described in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter outlines the social constructionist perspective, its methodological consequences and the reflexive issues relevant to the present study. It then specifies the style of discourse analysis, which is informed by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

### **The social constructionist perspective**

This study is informed by social constructionist theory. The social constructionist approach frequently has been justified by way of reference to the inadequacies that it proposed existed in the traditional, empirical approach. However, the approach is by now reasonably well established in the social sciences, and it no longer seems necessary to defend every social constructionist tenet with lengthy references to the inadequacies of a corresponding empiricist tenet. Briefly, therefore, the ontological assumptions of social constructionism reject the existence of an independent reality that is autonomous of language. The epistemological assumptions reject the possibility that knowledge about the nature of the world and the people in it can be acquired impartially, by observation. Instead, the nature of the world and the people in it is assumed to be flexible. It is constituted in the social processes through which people organise their lives. In particular, it's constituted in and through language (Gergen, 1985).

Language doesn't describe an independent reality, but instead is used performatively to constitute reality (Gergen, 1985). People use language to produce accounts for particular effect, and to produce particular versions of the world. Accounts and versions will differ, both across individuals and within individuals, for several reasons. They may vary according to the context, with people producing different accounts appropriate to the dynamics of different social relationships. They may differ according to speakers' intentions, and according to what they are trying to achieve. They may differ according to the availability of particular linguistic resources, which vary over culture, place and time in history (Gergen, 1999), with

things that are taken-for-granted in one culture being debatable or unknown in another. Thus, truth is both subjective and plural, and the focus of scientific enquiry is the way in which language is put to use to achieve various versions of the truth.

### **The consequences for researchers**

The position that knowledge and meaning are subjective has some implications for the approach to research. Firstly, the research environment is not neutral (Gergen, 1985). If it's accepted that meaning is flexible, the value accorded to different things will vary, according to time, place, and culture. This affects researchers and research participants by directing what, and how and why, knowledge is sought. It determines what questions are thought to be worth asking, and of whom. Therefore, research in the social sciences is embedded in cultural and historical contexts, which are value-laden (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionist research acknowledges this value-laden context, which becomes a feature of the research environment.

Secondly, researchers who accord a flexible status to knowledge and a constitutive status to language abandon the assumption that a researcher can stand apart from a discrete research topic. Researchers also are value-laden, and their values, beliefs and the conventions of their academic discipline influence their approach to research. For instance, they make choices about appropriate methodologies according to prevailing ideas about appropriate ways to acquire knowledge.

Thirdly, researchers are not interchangeable data collectors, and their interaction with participants in the research environment shapes the data that is produced (Burr, 1995). Data obtained from interviews, for example, develops idiosyncratically according to the relationship between the researcher and participants, how participants wish to present their accounts, and their reactions to the researcher's input.

Fourthly, the status of 'the outside expert' in charge of knowledge production is not appropriate, and is abandoned. The relationship between the researcher and

participant forms part of the participant's process of meaning-making (Gergen, 1985), in a collaborative enterprise which views knowledge as being co-authored between researcher and participant (Burr, 1995).

Fifthly, the principle of plurality of truth indicates that research results are an interpretation. Other readings and understandings are possible (Burr, 1995), and the partiality of a particular reading should be acknowledged. The aim of a reading is to show how language has been used to constitute particular meanings. Therefore, researchers aim to establish the merit, and not the absolute truth, of their particular reading.

### **Reflexivity applied to the present study**

It is conventional for researchers working from a social constructionist standpoint to apply the principle that the world is flexibly constituted via language to their own research. This process of reflexivity involves acknowledging that as researchers, we are actively involved in the production of our research at every point, from the choice of topic, through the collection of data, to the partiality of the analysis. Accordingly, at this point I am abandoning the academic custom of writing in the 'third person', to acknowledge my own place in my research.

I became interested in the experience of older people living in a retirement village when my mother-in-law moved into a village. The study inevitably has been shaped by my assumptions about older people, my experience of the village, and my subsequent academic enquiries into theories of ageing, and community lifestyles.

The participants in the present study took into consideration my position as a researcher and a student. It is likely their accounts of the experience of living in a retirement village would have been different if they'd been talking to, for example, other village residents, or to family members.

They might also have constructed different accounts for a different researcher. They'll have been influenced by my personal characteristics, for example my age, particularly since the research question concerns an age-related way of life. I'm a generation younger than the participants, and they may have felt it necessary to explain or defend positions that would have been taken for granted between a researcher and participant of the same age.

In the present study, I have both insider and outsider status. Although I am an outsider to the village, my mother-in-law lives there, and I visit her regularly. I have passed the time of day with other village residents frequently, as the village is an environment where, at the bare minimum, people greet each other in passing, and often stop to chat. My invitation to participants didn't identify me in this daughter-in-law role, but people talked to each other about offering to participate. My mother-in-law was a party to this, and she told residents that she knew me, and in what capacity. It seems likely that being 'spoken for' in this way influenced the processes of recruitment and data collection.

A final reflexive point relates to the performative nature of language as evidenced in the process of developing the present study. I spent some time pondering just how to refer to what I eventually came to call 'older adults' or 'older people'. Since language constitutes reality, terminology matters. Opinion differs on how to describe older adults, and while there may be little argument about whether or not a centenarian is 'old' (Bytheway, 2000), there isn't a specific birthday on which one turns 'old'. The problem remains of how to describe people who are no longer definitely young or middle-aged, but who may not be defined (by themselves or others) as old. 'Old' is not a neutral descriptive term, but comes with all sorts of associations, both positive and negative. Gibson (2000) called for the rehabilitation of a description such as 'elderly', so that it longer carried the negative connotations of ageist stereotypes. Bytheway (2000) preferred relative terms, such as 'older people' and 'older age'. I chose to use these terms in the present study because I prefer their (relative) ambiguity to specific age-related descriptors that purport, mistakenly, to neutrality.

## **Discourse analysis**

There are lots of ways to ‘do’ discourse analysis. The analysis in the present study is informed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), and refers to an interpretive analytic process that examines the ways people use language, and in what context, to account for the social world. Specifically, this is done by examining the function of accounts, how they are constructed, and the variation that exists in and across accounts.

### *Function*

Language is used performatively, and therefore accounts are purposeful. They may be organised to function as accusations, excuses, or justifications. They may work to maintain the status quo or to initiate change, or to empower or marginalise particular people or social institutions. Although accounts are purposeful, that is not to say that they will always function as speakers intend, since function may differ considerably from speakers’ stated intentions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). However, functions may be examined independently of intent.

### *Construction*

Predictably, people are interested in having their particular versions of the truth accepted. They are more likely to be successful if their accounts are made to seem natural, worthwhile, and disinterested. Versions of the world that seem natural, or normal, are likely to be taken for granted as truthful. Those that seem worthwhile are likely to be privileged over others. Versions that seem disinterested also are more likely to be accepted as truthful, since the speaker appears to be unbiased. People actively work to produce acceptable accounts. Accounts can be constructed in different ways, and discourse analysis looks at how they are put together for maximum effect (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It also attends to the context in which accounts are produced (Gill, 1996), since in any situation, there are idiosyncratic cultural and linguistic resources that can be drawn on to construct accounts.

### *Variation*

People include and emphasise different aspects of their accounts, according to the context, and this results in a great deal of variability in accounts. Variation also occurs as speakers engage in counteracting alternative, less desirable accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). It is not the task of the discourse analyst to eradicate variability from the data, in an attempt to establish the 'true' version. This is both impossible and irrelevant (Potter, 1996a). Rather, variation is of primary interest (Tuffin & Howard, 2001), since it must occur for a reason, and can be examined for its function (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

### **Social constructionism and discourse analysis applied to the present study**

In view of the interest in function, construction and variation in the discursive approach to the present study, it was important that participants were not constrained in the accounts they could produce. Surveys, questionnaires and measures limit the depth of data that can be obtained, firstly because the researcher sets the questions, and secondly because the ways it's possible for participants to respond are pre-set, in the interest of obtaining consistency of response. I chose semi-structured interviews for the present study because of the potential to generate a quantity of 'natural' research data, although I freely acknowledge the influence of the interviewer on data production.

The application of social constructionist theory to the present study invites the presumption that models of ageing, and discourses about ageing, are contestable social constructions. They are culturally and historically influenced, and in turn they determine ideas about appropriate ways to age, including appropriate places to age (McHugh, 2000). The idea of an age-segregated community for relatively wealthy older people is quite a recent concept. Retirement communities have developed in particular cultures. They reflect particular ways of thinking about older people, and according to Laws (1996, p.172), 'make statements about the cultural position of older people'. This affects the way an older person experiences living in a retirement village. The reverse also is true, with the experience influencing cultural ideas. Thus,

the meaning of a retirement community will change over time as society changes (Kastenbaum, 1993).

The experience of living in a retirement community is prescribed by the availability of discourses about what it means to age in such a place. Critical analysis of the limiting assumptions of ageing models and discourses (e.g. Gibson, 2000; Ng & McCreanor, 1999) applies also to the concept of retirement communities, where it has been demonstrated that some ways of ageing are privileged and some are marginalised (e.g. Kastenbaum, 1995; Laws, 1993, 1995, 1996; McHugh, 2000). If certain ways of living are made to seem natural for older people, this limits the ways the experience of living in a retirement community can be understood. The active ageing model that is so dominant in some retirement communities, for example, emphasises fitness, social interaction and activity, which automatically precludes frail or inactive older people from ageing 'successfully'. Clarification of how speakers and subjects are positioned by a particular discourse can lead to identifying alternative positions that subjects may take up (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). I have already said that the aim of the present study is to use discourse analysis to examine how people living independently in a retirement village construct their experience in language, irrespective of any putative 'real' experience. I will consider it a bonus if this achieves a greater range of positions within the experience for the study participants and others like them.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I located the present study within its social constructionist framework, and acknowledged the reflexive issues that were raised. I defined the style of discourse analysis, and clarified that, although the research is about the experience of living in a retirement village, the focus of enquiry is the discourse on the topic, in its own right. The method of enquiry is described in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

### Procedure

#### *Place*

The village is a gated community located in a suburb of a provincial New Zealand city. It contains 95 independent houses, built to a high standard. Although they are similar, there is no sense of regimentation. Houses are not freestanding, but most are joined to just one other house. They're built in groups, laid out around a ring road, with a community hall in the centre. The residents have formed an entertainment committee that organises regular social events. There are also exercise classes, and church services in the community hall once a month. There's a swimming pool, bowling and croquet greens, mini golf, a pool room, and a library. The grounds are landscaped, with beautifully-kept gardens.

#### *Recruitment*

I delivered an open letter and information sheet (Appendices A and B) to all village residents. My letter invited people who had lived in the village for three years or less to contact me if they wanted to participate in the study, or to ask questions. I chose this timeframe because I thought people would still have good memories of the process of moving, and of how they got used to living in the village. The village manager thought that 17 of the 95 houses were owned by residents who'd moved in within the past three years. Ten people rang to say they'd like to participate, and I completed ten interviews with twelve participants (eight singles, two couples) over the next ten days.

#### *Participants*

The participants comprised twelve village residents aged between 70 and 88 years. There were two married couples, one married man, one widowed man, one married

woman whose husband lived in an assisted living facility, one married but long-separated woman, three widowed women and one single woman. All participants identified themselves as either Pakeha or European New Zealanders.

### *Interviews*

I asked participants where they would like the interviews to be done, and all wanted me to come to their homes. I estimated, and indicated to participants, that it might take about an hour to complete the interview. In most cases, people took about an hour to discuss the various prompts, but often I was there for considerably longer, talking about other things. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had a list of sites that I wanted to cover in each interview (Appendix C), but I was flexible about the order of discussion. It was important to cover the same topic areas with each participant, since I planned to look for themes within the data. However, I didn't want to be too prescriptive about the interview content, so I also asked participants for any other information they felt was important to the topic. It's likely that participants varied in their understanding and presentation of the topics, according both to their interests and what they thought it would be useful for me to know.

### **Ethical issues**

The ethics of the study were peer reviewed and approved. No conflicts of interest were identified. All participants gave informed consent to take part in the study by signing a consent form outlining the conditions under which they agreed to take part in the study (Appendix D).

I was very conscious of the need to be respectful of the participants' contributions, and I remain grateful for their willingness to participate in my attempt to understand their experience.

The ethical issues identified as being particularly relevant to this study were:

*Voluntary participation in the study*

It seemed possible that residents might get the impression that the village management endorsed the research, and would like them to take part. I tried to avoid this possibility by making it clear in the information sheet both that participation was entirely voluntary, and that I would not tell anyone whether or not a particular individual had participated in the research.

*Anonymity and confidentiality*

I recognised the requirement for residents' anonymity to be preserved until they got in touch with me. There are 95 houses in the village, and residents do not all know each other, but it is a far less anonymous living arrangement than the wider community. I was mindful that everybody living in the village would know that a research project was being conducted among recent arrivals, and therefore might guess who was participating. In practice, none of my participants seemed concerned about remaining anonymous, and several said I was welcome to use their real names in writing up my results. However, the recruitment procedure recognised that any waiving of a participant's anonymity was their decision to make, not mine, and I have used pseudonyms for all participants.

Several participants discussed the project and their participation in it with each other, either before or after I had met with them. Some participants encouraged others to participate, and some offered to give me the names of people who met the recruitment criteria, but I didn't recruit specific individuals in this way.

My mother-in-law lives in the village, and she had talked about the research project in a general way, and her relationship to me, with several people. It is likely that this influenced some people's decision to participate. She remained unaware of who had participated in the study unless they told her, which several did.

### *Potential for harm to participants*

I talked with the managers of the village about the potential for harm to participants. They thought that residents' feelings about moving into the Village varied a lot, both at the time of the move and later, ranging from enthusiasm to reluctance. We thought it was possible that residents might find it distressing to discuss the process of moving into the village and adjusting to a new lifestyle if the move was associated with events such as the loss of a spouse or partner, or declining health. An arrangement was made that any participant who was distressed as a result of the study could be referred for psychological services if necessary. In addition, I specifically asked participants at the end of the interview whether anything we'd talked about had worried them. Nobody indicated even a mild level of distress, and most said they had enjoyed talking to me.

### **Transcription**

I audiotaped the interviews, and sent them to typing agencies for full transcripts. Discourse analysis requires full interview transcripts because variability and inconsistency within individual accounts are worthy of examining for the functions they may achieve. It is not appropriate for the researcher to summarise or paraphrase interview material, or to make decisions too soon about whether or not material is relevant (Coyle, 1995).

The typists signed confidentiality agreements in advance (Appendix E), and returned the tapes to me along with the verbatim transcripts. I listened to all the tapes again when I received the transcripts, corrected them and added notations according to simplified Jeffersonian notation (Appendix F). I listened to the tapes periodically throughout the analysis process as well, to remain conversant with intonation and expression.

I offered participants the opportunity to comment on or amend their transcripts, and to remove any material they didn't want me to use. Several participants took the opportunity to read their transcripts, but no amendments were requested.

## **Coding**

The interviews were semi-structured, and each interview produced a range of material. It's suggested that multiple readings of data are necessary to identify patterns of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and I read the interview transcripts several times before coding the material. I looked for all the material that seemed to be relevant to the research question of how participants used discourse to construct their experience of moving into and living in a retirement village, and coded it into general themes. Data that seemed to relate to more than one theme were coded into both. Not all of the data seemed to be relevant to the research question. However, my initial coding was over-inclusive rather than under-inclusive, since it's advisable to keep an open mind about emerging patterns of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

## **Validity**

I am applying the social constructionist standpoint that reality is flexibly constituted in language to my own research. I acknowledge that, just as the participants use language performatively, so do I use it performatively, both in the way I've talked about the research thus far, and in my attempt to persuade you, the reader, of the merit in the analysis that follows.

The validity of a discursive study is assessed by different criteria to that of a quantitative study. The analysis is interpretive, and furthermore the object of study is not some suggested, independent reality but the discourse that constructs the topic in its various possible forms. Therefore, in the framework that I'm working, it isn't possible for me to 'prove' that my 'findings' are correct, or indeed for others to 'prove' that they are not (Wood & Kroger, 2000). However, there are alternative ways to assess whether or not a discursive analysis provides a reasonable reading.

I said earlier that people are adept in the use of rhetoric to present convincing accounts. Similarly, listeners are adept at interpreting the effect of rhetoric, and accepting, modifying or rebutting it with accounts of their own. I also am adept at this process, and so are you, the reader of this thesis. It is not necessary for any of us to be able to explicate rhetorical devices in order to be able to use them. However, it is my task as the analyst to explicate the rhetoric used by the participants in my study. The materials are available to readers in the form of extracts from the interviews, and if my explication of the materials explication appears reasonable, then that is a form of validity (Potter, 1996b). If it can account for the variability that occurs in the data, and why the participants constructed their accounts in the way they did in particular contexts, then that also is a form of validity (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

## **Analysis**

The transcripts were examined for construction, function and variability according to the Potter & Wetherell (1987) style of discourse analysis outlined in Chapter Two. The study aims to identify how the talk of a number of older adults constructs their experience of living in a retirement village. There were three analytic aims. The first aim was to interpret the function of the discourse, and identify what versions of living in a retirement village were achieved. The second aim was to examine how this was managed, by identifying and explicating the rhetorical devices and discursive resources that participants drew on in constructing the meaning of their social world. This involved analysing how language was used persuasively to achieve the versions that it did, as well as identifying the cultural and linguistic resources that participants had at their disposal. The third aim was to ask why the variability within and across accounts existed, and how it illustrated different aspects of the experience of living in a retirement village.

The analysis is based on the coding of interview transcripts into general themes. The distinction drawn among themes is sometimes arbitrary, as many text examples could be coded appropriately into more than one theme. The analysis is arranged around constructions of five aspects of village life. Other themes emerged during coding, but I have focused on the decision to move, active ageing, company, privacy, and security.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE DECISION TO MOVE

There's a widespread stereotype that older people dislike change, and are decreasingly able to adapt to it (Streib, 2002). This idea supports the recent emphasis on ageing 'in place', where the focus is on providing support for older people to remain in their own homes, in their familiar neighbourhoods. Certainly, it may be important to many people that they remain in a home and community of personal significance, where their memories are located. In New Zealand, the majority of older people do remain in their own homes (Thorns, 1993). This makes the choice to live in a retirement village an interesting one. Whereas many older people in residential care are motivated to move by failing health or some other incapacity that compromises the inability to live independently, this is not the case for retirement village residents, who live relatively independently.

I asked participants to talk about their decision to move into a retirement village, and this open question resulted in diverse material. I've selected three topics for analysis. The first topic is the timing of the decision, and the exercising of choice. The second topic addresses the decision in the context of leaving the family home for an unfamiliar lifestyle. This leads into the third topic of attachment to the family home, and to personal possessions which must be left behind.

### **Timing is important**

Talking about the decision to move into the village often raised the question of personal choice, and the timing of this choice. The extracts in this section evoke the notion that the decision might not be made in time, and the risk associated with leaving it too late.

Graeme: We wanted to make a decision while we could make a decision ... rather than having your bossy son telling you where you're going to go.

On the surface, this extract constructs a voluntary decision ('we wanted to make a decision') by contrasting it with a single alternative involving loss of personal choice ('rather than having your bossy son telling you where you're going to go'). In the background lies the possibility that the first option is simply anticipating the inevitability of the second, because there's a hint that making a decision may not be possible in the future ('while we could'). However, Graeme's indication that the decision was made in advance before anybody else had even the opportunity to step in constructs him as fully capable of making the choice at this time. This neatly subverts any possibility of being positioned as someone who needed a 'bossy son' to step in and make the decision. Thus, this has been a timely decision.

Graeme's alternative links the timing of the decision with the issue of place. The bossy son might choose a place they wouldn't have chosen for themselves. However, Graeme and his wife have avoided this, by deciding for themselves. This casts the village as a good choice, and a place where they did want to come. The text positions Graeme and his wife as in control, making a choice to move into the village that was well-judged in terms of both time and place.

The importance of a proactive, rather than reactive, decision to move into a retirement village is developed in greater depth by Paul. In the next extract, he contextualises the argument that appears in the subsequent extract for a proactive and timely choice.

Paul: I think one of the things that ... I tell people this quite often, is that - and we've got a lot of ... we know a lot of elderly people ... don't leave it too late to make the decision to move.

There are a number of ways to strengthen assertions by indicating that they are widespread phenomena, rather than isolated cases. People may suggest, for example, that a phenomenon forms a part of a repetitive pattern of behaviour (Potter, 1996a). Paul indicates that this is the case for leaving it 'too late to make the decision to move', by the fact that he has to 'tell people this quite often'.

A second way of strengthening an argument about behaviour is by casting it as relevant to a larger group, and not an isolated case (Potter, 1996a). Paul does this by marshalling arguments for the existence of a large group of people who don't think ahead. He does this in a rather roundabout way, by claiming to know 'a lot of elderly people'. It's a common persuasive device to warrant one's opinions about a group as true by claiming membership of the group (Potter, 1996a). In this case, the claim is virtually indisputable, since Paul is in his eighties and 'elderly people' are his peer group. The group of people who are leaving it 'too late' isn't necessarily so large as the elderly group of people who Paul knows, but it's easy to assume they're the same. If so many of the elderly people Paul knows are in this situation, it's a risk also for large numbers of the elderly people that he doesn't know. This 'factualises' the existence of a large group of older people, both known and unknown to Paul, who are at risk of making the 'mistake' of leaving it 'too late' to make the decision to move.

Paul has provided evidence of his authority to speak on the issue, and proceeds to outline the consequences of this 'mistake'.

Paul: too many people do this and they stay ... and it's ... probably, you get ... there's an association ... somebody's died and the other one lives on in the home, and they like to stay there ... and it's too big and too many bathrooms and you know, trying to get people in to do this and do that, and suddenly one day they go to the doctor and he says look you can't live on your own any more, I'm putting you into such and such a home. Now, that in my mind is where they made the mistake, they should have said earlier on, I think I'll go so and so. When the doctor says that ... they, they've lost control. They've got to go where the doctor said ... and lots of times there's a lot of these places that aren't very good. You know. And if you leave it too late, you've lost control of it.

In this extract, Paul orients to the general assumption that older people are reluctant to leave their home ('they like to stay there') but challenges the location of independence, which for older people is commonly associated with the notion of remaining in one's family home. He does this by assembling a number of difficulties that older people may experience in their own home. The difficulties are presented in the form of a three-part list. The house is 'too big', there are 'too many bathrooms', and it is difficult 'to get people in'. Potter (1996a) summarises Jefferson's description of three part lists as a linguistic device that generalises the subject of the list in order to achieve an impression of generality. A list citing three examples is enough to show that there is more than one example. Thus, the event is not unique. It's also enough to indicate that more than three examples may exist. Thus, the event may be common. The effect of this rhetorical device in Paul's extract is to indicate the existence of other examples, giving the impression that coping with a large home results in pervasive and insurmountable difficulties.

This calls up the apparent paradox that struggling to maintain independence in one's family home actually threatens one's independence, which could be maintained by acknowledging the difficulties and moving to a retirement village. Certainly, the difficulties that Paul suggests are an acknowledgement that people may cope less well as they age. However, he counteracts the value of persisting with independent living arrangements, by suggesting that this can leave a person very dependent on the help of others ('trying to get people in to do this and do that'). This works to head off any assumption that the best place to age is in one's own home, with a retirement village being only a second-best choice brought about by dependency needs. Without claiming that moving into a retirement village represents complete independence, Paul achieves a position of independence for retirement village residents that, while it may be qualified, may be greater than that of people who remain in their own home and are reliant on the help of others.

Paul draws heavily on time in constructing a disagreeable alternative that leads to loss of control. People who 'leave it too late to make the decision to move' have 'lost control of it' to someone else, in this case 'the doctor'. Rather than making a well-

considered decision in their own time, ‘suddenly’ they’ll be told ‘look you can’t live on your own any more’. Furthermore, they’ll be told where they’re going (‘I’m putting you in such and such a home’). Thus, they lose control of both time and place, becoming vulnerable to bossy sons and doctors. This could easily have been avoided (‘they should have said earlier on, I think I’ll go so and so’), and control and choice maintained.

Paul develops the undesirable nature of the alternative more fully than Graeme did. His reference to ‘putting you in such and such a home’ invokes a construction of home that varies from its usual meaning. It’s understood as moving an older person from their family home into an institution, against their wish. The assumption here, which remains unvoiced, is that the person wouldn’t undertake this move willingly, which constructs ‘such and such a home’ as undesirable. Paul openly supports this construction by declaring that ‘there’s a lot of these places that aren’t very good’. Again, these ‘places that aren’t very good’ are the result of not retaining control and choice. By implication, the village is connected with retaining control and choice. It thus becomes a good place, because it represents a pro-active choice that people can make ‘earlier on’, before ‘they’ve lost control’.

It’s notable that Graeme’s and Paul’s extracts both speak to the issue of control by placing them outside the alternative scenarios. They each constructed figures to whom people who don’t make timely choices are vulnerable (‘your bossy son’ and ‘the doctor’). Nevertheless, these figures are distanced from their own situations. Firstly, they are only hypothesised, and are not admitted as personal experience. Secondly, they’re referred to in the second and third person, which distances the speaker from that of which they speak. So in Graeme’s extract, ‘your’ bossy son could be anybody’s son, and the father could be any father. Paul distances himself even further from the group he’s talking about, when he says ‘they’ go to the doctor. Graeme and Paul have moved to the village without the input of doctors or bossy sons, and this decision can now be read as simply personal choice.

The overall effect of these extracts was to emphasise the importance of timing in making a proactive decision. The decision to move into a retirement village circumvented the spectre of becoming dependent on others, and vulnerable to someone else's less-than-desirable choice. The construction of a retirement village lifestyle as part of a proactive and progressive ageing emerged, and this becomes a recurring analytic feature.

### **Leaving the family home for a retirement village**

The next section speaks to the experience of leaving the family home after a long time. Some of the participants moved into the village after living in the same home for several decades.

Beryl: I was there for 37 years

David: 35 years ago we built our house

Melva: I'd only been living there for just on 60 years!

A position of attachment would be perfectly reasonable for people who've lived in the family home for so long. In view of the aforementioned stereotype about older people disliking change, the effect of the above statements might be to warrant a position of reluctance. However, this did not appear in the analysis. Although the decision might require careful consideration, it was constructed as pragmatic rather than sentimental.

The following participant tells of a lengthy process to her decision to move away from her family home, which proved too large for her to manage after the death of her husband.

Delia: And the family said, you know, well ... what about a ? ... the village. I didn't know whether I wanted that kind of life.

This statement stakes out Delia's position as ambivalent about living in a retirement village. When she found herself in the position of needing to make decisions about moving, she wasn't an advocate of the retirement village lifestyle already.

Delia: Everybody says don't make any decisions in a hurry, don't do this and don't do that. It took twelve months to make the decision and I thought about it and thought about it. [...] we put it in an agent's hands, that was a long, big decision to finally say [...] so eventually I said put it on the market ...

Delia works up quite a tale about the decision to move from her family home as a long, drawn-out, carefully considered process. She 'thought about it and thought about it' for twelve months, and when she 'finally' decides to 'eventually' put it on the market, it's a 'long, big decision'. This lengthy process is presented as an account of perfectly normal behaviour, rather than behaviour which is peculiar to Delia, because 'everybody' advised her not to make any decisions in a hurry.

Delia: ... so, we had a look at two or three (houses in the village) and of course went home and said well, yes, I think, I think I could, I think I could live there, it was very nice. And even right up to the day you move you don't know what it's going to be like until you've tasted it, do you? I mean you might think, oh that pie looks lovely, you don't know what it is, whether or not you're going to enjoy it until you've tasted it .. and it's exactly that. And anyhow, within a fortnight I said oh, no, I've made the right decision ... I enjoy it. So friendly, everybody's very very friendly. [...] I've been very happy.

In contrast, events happen rapidly in her ensuing story about looking at houses in the village. After all this long process of thinking about it, Delia looks at two or three houses, and this is all it takes to persuade her that 'of course' it was a 'very nice' place to live. Again, this decision is quite natural, and one that 'of course' anybody would have made. When this is considered in conjunction with her earlier statement that she didn't know whether she wanted 'that kind of life', the effect is that Delia

didn't know whether she wanted that kind of life simply because she hadn't seen that kind of life, and now that she has seen it, 'of course' she wants it.

She demonstrates a certain amount of caution ('I think' rather than 'I knew'), showing that the decision wasn't rash, but the sequence of 'I think, I think I could, I think I could live there' has an air of inevitability. And even though 'you don't know until you taste it', once she was in the village and able to 'taste' it, it took only a very short time to decide she'd made a good choice, as opposed to the long time it took her to think about the idea before she'd seen it.

Interestingly, the accounts of people who had lived in the same home for decades did not necessarily position them as reluctant to move. The following extract is from a woman who moved into the village after living in the same home for sixty years.

Melva: my friend and I came and looked at villages [...] and we looked at this one and ah then, then I heard that a friend whom I knew was moving over to the apartments (higher care section of the village) ... and ... and ... I knew that she had a nice house here, and so I asked the estate agent to ... ah, let me see it. And I liked it ... and I fell in love with it straight away [...] and so I said yes, I'd have it, and then of course it was a case of selling my house to buy this one ... which ...ahh ... took me a bit longer than I thought [...] I'd just had it painted that that year. I'd had it painted and ... ah ... ah ... some interior work done, not really thinking I was going to move

Far from being resistant to change, Melva's text constructs a proactive process of moving into the village. She takes the initiative ('I came and looked at villages', and 'I asked the estate agent to ah let me see it'). Her talk constructs a more rapid decision than we might expect from a woman who's been in the same home for sixty years, particularly since she'd been 'not really thinking [she] was going to move'. She decided she liked it 'straight away [...] and so I said yes, I'd have it'. It was only the need to sell her own home, which took 'a bit longer than I thought', that delayed her, and this is a circumstance outside her control. The absence of hesitation or

ambivalence formulates Melva's new home as something so easily recognisable as a good thing that she didn't even need to take time to think over her decision. This effect is enhanced by her talk about falling in love with her new home. Falling in love suggests being swept off one's feet with dizzying speed. Furthermore, it supports Melva's construction of her new home as highly desirable.

### **Sentimentality and pragmatism**

The previous extract demonstrates a notable absence of sentimentality. With respect to her old home, Melva is pragmatic, mentioning only difficulties in selling. The absence of any sentimental talk about Melva's old home diverts attention from what she's leaving behind. This subverts the potentially negative constructions that might arise from viewing her move as the loss of the old home, rather than a gain of a new one. This pragmatic construction was unexpected in view of the sixty years that Melva had lived in her family home. Interestingly, sentimental constructions appeared in the account of a man who had moved frequently already before moving into the village.

Paul: So many people, when they're getting to that age, have got big houses and they don't like leaving them ... you know ... but you've got to. And another problem is they've got so much furniture. And it's hard to decide which you're going to take and which you're not going to take. And, we have, being in the building line, we've moved so many times in our lifetime that we've got more or less used to going from one place to another ...

In this extract, Paul achieves a state of 'taken for granted-ness' for the idea that older people don't like leaving their big houses. He warrants the assertion that 'you've got to' by talking about 'so many people' who have large houses. Certainly it's true that many older people are living in large homes, which may now be too big for them. Possibly, only some of these people don't want to leave them, but the number of people who 'don't like leaving them' becomes large by association with the 'so many people' who own large houses. The notion that leaving these big houses is a problem

is completed with the subsequent reference to ‘another problem’, that of the furniture.

Although Paul achieves ‘facticity’ for sentimentality in most people, he does some work to deny any sentiment in himself. He uses the third person pronouns ‘them’ and ‘they’ to differentiate himself from the group. He also uses second and not first person. Although using the second person pronoun to generalise a claim about themselves to the wider population, thus bolstering its authenticity, they also may switch from first to second person to distance themselves somewhat from the statements they’re making. Paul uses first person only when he claims a position outside the category of people who don’t like to move (‘we’ve got more or less used to going from one place to another’), and at this point he is creating a category with a logical reason not to have any difficulty. Thus, he has achieved membership of a group who’ve moved so many times already that it isn’t a problem, at the same time as accomplishing the reality of the difficulties for that much larger group of people who’ve lived for many years in the same house.

The following accounts also present pragmatic versions of the family home, subverting the notion that it was a place people couldn’t bear to leave.

Sarah: the young people don’t come very often. If they did come, we used to say we’ll take a motel for them.

Paul: We always used to say, we’ve got to have a big house, the family might come home. And they might too, but they don’t all come at once.

This extract represents the family home in a very pragmatic way. It has simply become an issue of size, specifically of having a home that is big enough for the children to come and stay. However, there's no need to keep a big house for the family to come and stay, because they can stay in motels. This casts the family home as accommodation, rather than a place full of sentimental memories.

Jack: my son, he was a bit ... um, probably more sentimental, you know, about moving out of the family home sort of thing. But when I said to him well, look, this house, the old house, you know, would deteriorate ... and I said, when I kick the bucket, you'd get all the less money. So I said ... with this one, it should be in good condition and, um, I don't think he was worried about that too much, but it was just leaving the old family home.

This extract emphasises the 'property' aspect of the family home, rather than any sentimental significance. Jack orients towards deterioration and depreciation. Sentimentality is minimised even further with the blunt use of the term 'kick the bucket'. Jack doesn't deny the issue of sentimentality about the family home, which is actually assigned 'taken-for-granted' status by his omission of any explanation about why his son should feel sentimental. However, by being attributed to his son, sentiment is acknowledged only in a way that's distanced from Jack. Thus, Jack can admit that leaving one's family home after many years might engender sentimentality. At the same time, his pragmatic construction of his own decision process obviates the risk of assigning second-best status to his choice to live in the village.

These extracts were presented to show how, without discounting sentimentality, alternative constructions of the family home can be used to cast the move to the village in a positive light, and once again, as a proactive move. The focus on sentimentality and pragmatism in this section of the analysis carries over to the next section, through the analysis of talk about possessions and memories.

### **Possessions and memories**

For most people, a move to a retirement village is a move to a smaller home, which necessitates scaling down on furniture and personal possessions. For much the same reasons as leaving the family home, this might be expected to elicit some feelings of sadness. The next few extracts are about this process of downsizing.

Paul talks about this process as being difficult emotionally.

Paul: ... all their furniture, it's a hard thing to say to the second hand man, come in, and we don't want this one or that one. A lot of it's got its history and [...] it brings back memories, I suppose, and it's hard to get rid of those sort of things. Because everything you've got is, is a memory of something. And to people who've been there for a number of years ... it's a real wrench, you know.

The text constructs memories as important and valuable, because 'it's hard to get rid of those sort of things' which bring back memories. Paul links memories with a person's possessions ('everything you've got is, is a memory of something'), so possessions are reminders of one's past life. His construction of possessions as memories, and memories as valuable, recognises and validates the difficulty people may have in relinquishing their possessions as entirely natural. Paul casts this difficulty for people who've lived in one place 'for a number of years' as so great that it's 'a real wrench'. This calls to mind a painful dislocation and an uprooting, certainly not simply a relocation that might involve a touch of sadness.

Although Paul represents possessions as precious memories that are hard to relinquish, Melva does not.

Melva: finally I, I started turning out ... there was an awful lot of stuff there that was, that would, I mean ... I'd only been living there for just on 60 years! ... and, and there were ... there were lots of things that, that my parents had brought out from England with them and they were ... there there was this table for example, this is my, this is my sister's table [...] it it must be about 300 years old, I think. [...] My sister was very fond of reading, and there were books, and books, and books ... and of course I had collected music over 60 years of music teaching and there was music, and music, and music.

This text establishes a number of reasons why Melva might justifiably attach sentimental value to her possessions. She owns furniture that is centuries old, the table that she's kept being only one example. It has family associations, having been owned by her parents and her sister. Her parents selected these particular items to bring all the way from England, and they might reasonably be expected to be associated with fond memories of her family.

Vicki: was it hard to get rid of things that you had had for such a long time or didn't you mind?

Melva: well, I didn't know what to do with them ... but the books the books went to the Red Cross, and my music teacher friends came in and priced the music.

I located my question within the emotional realm ('didn't you mind?'). Despite having established every right to be sentimental, Melva sidesteps this position completely. She constructs a practical rather than emotional problem ('well I didn't know what to do with them'), which is easily solved ('the books went to the Red Cross, and my music teacher friends came in and priced the music'). This practical construction prevents the interpretation of the scaling down of possessions as a dreadful loss.

In the following extract, the loss is presented along with the solution.

Jane: Oh yes, I miss my garden, I had a I had a lovely garden [...] anyway, I bought some seedlings the other day to put in, cabbages and [...] I've had a very good, quite a good crop of tomatoes, which was nice.

Although Jane explicitly acknowledges missing her garden, it's noteworthy that this is a loss she's been able to replace to some extent. This both mitigates the loss, and directs attention towards what is, rather than what was. Again, attention is directed towards some positive aspect of her present life, rather than back into the past.

These extracts illustrated some of the ways people dealt with pervasive notions of nostalgia and sentimentality attached to the family home and possessions. They worked to construct residents as being quite philosophical in much the same ways as about moving. Although Paul draws on a common supposition that older people are very attached to their possessions, notably he did not construct this as a problem for himself, and the other extracts focus very much on the pragmatics of the present.

### **Summary**

I introduced this chapter with the stereotype of older people who resist change, and are reluctant to leave their family homes. Notions of reluctance and nostalgia did appear in the data, but commonly appeared along with reasons why they were not issues for the speaker. People constructed their move in a positive light, by presenting the advantages of their new situation, and the disadvantages of not making a proactive choice. An example of this is the apparent paradox, which other studies have identified (e.g. Biggs et al., 2000), of conceding some independence to retain independence. In the present study, this contributed to the largely positive constructions of choosing to live in a retirement village. Participants dealt with potentially negative constructions of the move as a loss or regression by ignoring aspects that might lead in this direction, and sometimes by using their former situations to cast the new situation in a favourable light. This tactic resulted in the move to the village being constructed as a positive and proactive choice for their time of life, rather than a reaction to any incapacity to cope.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ACTIVE AGEING

There are varying constructions of retirement as a stage of life. Retirement might be an opportunity to take it easy after the demands of working life and raising a family, at least for people who are both healthy enough and wealthy enough. However, retirement may also be an ideal opportunity to undertake new interests. Most people in a retirement village are not in full-time employment, and this means that they have a lot of discretionary time. Advertising brochures usually show residents to be very busy, swimming, bowling, exercising and playing card games.

### **It's important to be active**

The active ageing model outlined in Chapter One promotes participation in social and recreational activities as the route to 'successful' ageing. This model was drawn on by a number of people in the present study, who used their participation in various activities to construct the village lifestyle as a positive and progressive move. One of the ways they achieved this was through the construction of activity as a way to avoid 'really' getting 'old'.

Paul: I've seen a few old guys that put their feet on the mantelpiece and say, I'm getting old. They've got old, you know, it's how you treat it ...

Vicki: Because of not doing things?

Paul: Oh yes ... and they go back very quickly.

Paul isn't using the term 'old' here as a neutral chronological descriptor. 'Old' is used here as a value-laden, negative descriptor, because it's linked with a state of decline. Old people who put up their feet lose ground ('they go back very quickly'). Paul warrants his statement as a personal observation, not just an opinion. He's seen it happen, more than once ('a few old guys'). Paul identifies the cause of the decline, using the metaphors of direction and momentum. They 'go back' 'very quickly' because they put up their feet, thus inactivity causes decline. However they can mediate this decline by choosing to be more active ('it's how you treat it'). This

sabotages alternative constructions, such as the reverse possibility that ageing involves a process of decline, resulting in inactivity. Paul's construction allows a measure of control, because it's possible to avoid experiencing ageing as a decline by remaining active. However, it requires an effort to remain active, as is shown in the following extract.

Paul: It would be the easiest thing to do, sit back and do nothing ... you know, it would be, but that's when people start to go back ... and there's so many people do that, getting old

Paul uses an extreme case formulation in this extract, to cast inactivity as the very easiest of all the options ('the easiest thing to do'). One of the features of talk that discourse analysis attends to is how versions are made to seem natural and normal. When events are formulated as extreme cases, they're positioned as occurring at the extreme ends of the range of possibilities, for example as something that happens 'all the time', or something that 'never' happens (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This can be used to warrant an evaluation of something as completely normal. In this case, it is sitting back and doing nothing that is cast as completely normal, and consequently a danger to many older people.

Furthermore, it is cast as a definite danger because to 'sit back and do nothing' 'would' be the easiest thing to do, rather than 'could' or 'should'. However, a choice for inactivity leads inevitably to a negative consequence ('go back'), again constructed through the metaphor of direction, and made even more negative with the word 'but'. Paul constructs this as a widespread problem ('there's so many people do that'). The negative outcome shows that it's important to make the effort to be active, despite it being easier to do nothing. There's a sense of 'use it or lose it' in Paul's extract that echoes the theme of 'we're keeping going for as long as we can' noted by McHugh (2000, p113), whereby people indicated it was important to be active and keep going, because slowing up would start them on a slippery slope that put the ability to keep going at risk.

### **The village is a busy place**

Paul links the need to remain active with the opportunities available in the village.

Paul: People say what do you do? what do you do with yourself, but there's so much to do. You know. There's a bus goes into town, not that we've ever been on it ... there's a free bus goes in twice a week now [...] Oh, well, they've got so many things in the centre up there [...] every week there's a list of things in the newsletter that comes round, there's cards every second day. We don't ... we've got too much to do to go and play cards [...] then there's the swimming pool [...] there's something going on all the time.

This extract starts with a statement about some unidentified 'people' who apparently have the idea that there's nothing to do in the village. I didn't make any such suggestion, but it is an available stereotype about age-segregated communities, and it may undermine the work Paul is doing to construct the village as a busy place. However, there's no point now in other people making this suggestion, because Paul has conceded it already. This disarms the argument, which is further disarmed by his casting of the village as a place where 'there's so much to do' that, in another extreme case formulation, there is something going on 'all' the time.

Regardless of whether or not people actually do say 'what do you do with yourself', Paul's statement provides a useful introduction to the subsequent counteracting manoeuvre of specifying quite a number of things that there are to do. He constructs the village as a place with lots of general opportunities for activity ('there's so much to do', 'so many things in the centre') as well as more specific suggestions (cards, going to town, swimming).

Interestingly, two of Paul's suggestions for activities in the village are followed by statements that he doesn't do these things himself ('not that we've ever been on it' and 'we've got too much to do to go and play cards'). These two statements allow

Paul to present himself as an active person, who's already so busy that he doesn't have the time to take up all the opportunities offered in the village.

In the following extracts, Sarah and Polly use the same technique that Paul used in the previous extract to disarm speculation that there isn't much to do in a retirement village.

Sarah: People say, what do you do with yourselves, well we don't seem to have time to do everything

Polly: It always raises a laugh when we say it outside. 'What are you going to do in there?' I don't know ... we can't find any spare time.

One effect of these statements is to show that it is common for people who have not experienced life in a retirement village to think there isn't anything to do ('it always raises a laugh', and it is the people 'outside' who make this assumption). The second effect is constructed through Sarah and Polly's statements about lack of time. In Sarah's extract, there doesn't 'seem' to be time to do everything. Polly also is puzzled about why they can't do everything ('I don't know '), before attributing it to lack of time. The effect is an impression of the village where there's actually so much to do that it's impossible for Sarah and Polly to do it all.

David: We have not been to the cinema once since we've been in the village, and yet we used to go the odd time, didn't we, Polly? But we're finding really, we haven't got time to go.

David also casts the village as so busy a place that there isn't time to do it all. This extract provides a direct comparison with the wider community, because David specifically mentions being much busier in the village. When he and Polly lived in the wider community, they had time to go to the movies 'the odd time'. Now, they 'haven't got time to go'. This supports his constructions of their lives in the village as both very busy, and as busier than they were before.

### **It's important to use time**

In the previous extracts, the 'problem' of not having enough time was used to construct a busy and fulfilling lifestyle. Time could also be problematic if it wasn't used profitably.

Elizabeth: you've got the odd nag or two

Vicki: what would they nag about?

Graeme: aw =

Elizabeth: = anything =

Graeme: = anything.

Elizabeth: they haven't got enough to worry ... they've got too, too much time to think

In this extract, Elizabeth admits to the presence of 'the odd nag or two' in the village. This is not a major criticism, in view of the large number of residents. In addition, the village is shown to be a place where there isn't anything worth complaining about, because these one or two nags would complain about 'anything'. Instead, the nagging is attributed to having too much time on their hands, with nothing to do but 'think'. This reflects a concern about retirement communities raised by critical gerontologists (e.g. Kastenbaum, 1993; McHugh, 2000) who note that the frenetic activity levels of residents in some retirement communities seem designed to ward off precisely the danger noted by Elizabeth, that of having 'too much time to think'.

An earlier extract showed Paul orienting to the possibility that outsiders might evaluate the village as a dull environment. Similarly, David draws on the metaphor of direction to introduce and then defuse the possibility that a move to a retirement village will be evaluated as part of an overall decline.

David: well, we haven't looked back! We've gone forward ... and we've ... we've taken on certain little duties in the village.

Interestingly, this claim occurs after a simple statement about the date that they moved into the village, and again, a suggestion is refuted that was never made ('we haven't looked back'). It is common for people to construct their statements according to the context in which they appear (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The context may include stereotypes and views that remain unspoken but form a sort of 'general knowledge', and speakers commonly counteract the unspoken as well as the spoken (Potter, 1996a). David's denial that they haven't looked back orients to the possibility that other people may construct a move into a retirement village as a kind of shrinkage or loss. If David was in the position of looking back, this would indicate that his current position is inferior to what was left behind, and this is why he takes the trouble to deny an unspoken suggestion.

Not only does he deny 'looking back', he uses activity and participation to construct living in the village as a move forward. He openly states that living in the village is a progressive move ('we've gone forward'), and directly links this progress with activity and participation ('and we've taken on certain little duties in the village'). This shows that one of the ways to progress is to be active and to participate.

The next excerpt is even more definite in linking the idea that old people who remain active don't really get 'old' with the idea that it's easier to remain active in old age when people live in a retirement village. The village protects against the inevitable decline of old people who live in the wider community.

David: I think we knew we were going to get mixed up with a lot more than we were, you tend to stagnate if you're outside, you know [...] here you've got all these facilities and you know that you're going to partake in them, and as I say, you know, you tend, at our age you can stagnate, and get televisionitis, and all that sort of thing ...

David assumes the listener's agreement ('you know') to his assertion that the tendency on the outside is towards stagnation. This makes his statement a taken-for-

granted truth, and gives it credibility. Furthermore, he associates the process of stagnation, which is only a possibility, with the process of ageing, which is inevitable. Moreover, he mentions this tendency twice.

Stagnation indicates decay, and 'television-itis' sounds like a disease. Age is the risk factor for these awful conditions ('at our age you can stagnate'). This might be alarming, because ageing is inevitable in the sense that we're all getting older every day. However, David lives in a retirement community. This protects against 'really' getting old, in the sense of stagnating, because there's lots to do ('here you've got all these facilities and you know that you're going to partake in them') and this allows some control over ageing. Next, David describes a busy schedule.

David: we're both on the entertainment committee and we have to ... we're a group of ten. And we have to arrange something every month, something, you know, in the way of entertainment ... which is not altogether easy, with the age bracket of the people we've got in the village. But we manage to get by, and ... um, also Polly is on the craft committee [...] and they've got a very thriving craft here, and ... they sell their craft each year on sale day and get a bit of money back for that. And, um ... help out the needy, outside the village, with what they sell, and donate, and also um we have a group of 17 houses or villas in our little area here [...] when the time becomes due they elect a member to act for them between them and management and the trust, so I've just taken over that job [...] I'm also on civil defence. I'm the chief marshal for civil defence, so ... um, I've got plenty I can do. Yes, because all the administration goes with it, you know, meetings and things like that ... so we find that time doesn't weigh heavily on us. I've also got to keep myself fit, so I go for walks each day, or a swim, and try and keep that up, and then you've got to have some time to yourself.

These activities that David talks about show he and Polly to be active, busy people. They're engaged in administrative ('entertainment committee'), charitable (selling craft work to 'help out the needy'), advocacy ('to act for them between them and

management') and safety ('chief marshall for civil defence') work. These are worthwhile activities that contribute to the good of the village or the community. They are useful, or helpful, or entertaining. This shows that David and Polly don't fill their time selfishly, on frivolous pastimes for only their own amusement. Nevertheless, 'I've got plenty I can do' sounds like an opportunity. Thus, David's activities are framed positively, and are not simply obligations.

David has constructed the image of a man who's so busy doing things for other people that it can be hard to find the time to walk and swim. David's statement about the need to 'try and keep that up' is placed among indications that time is short. The impression is that any difficulties in managing a walk, a swim, or time to himself are due to lack of time rather than motivation. As well as saying something about the kind of people he and Polly are, this says something about the kind of place that the village is. It's a place where there's a lot to be done, which provides residents with the opportunity to be active contributors in a fulfilling way. It isn't a place where people do nothing, and the lifestyle isn't in any sense the withdrawal or disengagement suggested by disengagement theory. David's final assertion that 'time doesn't weigh heavily on us' seems to be a rebuttal of an unvoiced supposition that there is little to do in the village, in much the same vein as earlier rebuttals by Paul, Sarah and Polly.

### **Summary**

In this section of the analysis, the metaphors of direction and speed were shown to construct inactivity as going backwards, and a rapid decline. Likewise, activity was constructed as progress, and moving forward. Activity was a way to avoid 'really' getting 'old', allowing people a measure of control over the process. There were a number of extracts that disclaimed the stereotype that there isn't much to do in a retirement village. Rather, the village was constructed as a very busy place where residents were busier than they'd ever been, to the point that there wasn't enough time to do everything that was offered. The active ageing model was a readily available resource that participants drew on to warrant the need for the activity levels

claimed for the village. This worked to construct a retirement village as a place to avoid declining and really getting 'old'.

## CHAPTER SIX: COMPANIONSHIP

The opportunity for companionship features prominently in the advertising literature for retirement villages, which emphasises the community nature of a village. Residents are similar in age, and might be expected to have common interests. There are social activities available, which can encourage the formation of social relationships. New arrivals to the village are actively integrated, with the village newsletter announcing new arrivals and their location in the village, and asking people to make them feel welcome. This chapter shows how residents cast the village as a welcoming and inclusive community.

### Expectations about company

People seemed to expect that a retirement village would be more sociable than the wider community. Often, this expectation formed a part of residents' explanations for moving into the village.

Jane: there's always somebody there if you want to have a chat. Nowadays ... it's hard to say, there were people coming and going where we lived, and the younger ones of course, the wives are working and ... sort of, not there. We had neighbours there and he retired and they were both there, but then they moved away. But it's the, you know, sort of people aren't at home like they are here.

Elizabeth: Some of these cul de sacs in town, you can go in and out of those and never see a soul

Potentially, there are a lot more people home during the day in the village, simply because almost no one is in the paid workforce. Jane notes the mobility of people in the wider community ('coming and going'), which might prevent people from taking the time to develop neighbourly relationships. She talks about her neighbours moving away. Presumably someone else moved in, but we are left with the

impression that it was someone in the category of 'people who aren't at home like they are here' in the village. This supports Jane's construction of the wider community as a place where people simply aren't around. The isolated image of the wider community is echoed in Elizabeth's extract. She uses an extreme case formulation to cast the wider community as absolutely deserted (you 'never see a soul'). The notion of isolation carries through to the following extracts, in which the speakers are engaged in presenting a case for the village whereby they needn't be isolated.

Jane: when I feel lonely, I really might not see any of the neighbours for a long time, but you know you're ... sort of not alone ...

Melva: you see people, and ... and that's one of the nice things of living in the village, you ... you don't have to be quite on your own

Delia: none of us want to be on our own, and rattling around in a big house.

These extracts emphasise the normality of sociability. Delia uses an extreme case formulation ('none of us') to warrant her suggestion that a desire to be on one's own would be unnatural. Delia's formulation of a desire to be on one's own as unnatural is exacerbated by the imagery of a person rattling around in a big house, which called up the notion of somehow not fitting into one's place and space. Melva and Jane support the stance that being alone is unnatural by simply taking it for granted that it is better not to be alone ('you know you're sort of not alone', and 'you don't have to be quite alone'). What's made to seem unproblematic here is the idea that no-one wants to be alone, which renders seeking company as a natural human characteristic, and functions to support the normality of living in a retirement community.

Jane: I didn't know a soul when I came [to this town] and I thought to myself .. a village, I'd never really ... thought of a village, um ... um ... um ... but anyway I decided that a village really was for me ... [...] a chance for me to meet other people my own age, and ... I looked around at the different ones and I decided that this was the best one. It had a nice centre, and a lot of things going on

The text starts with Jane's statement that she 'didn't know a soul' when she arrived in a new town. This is a very isolated image. She builds on this by using 'I' throughout her description of the decision process ('I thought to myself', 'I looked around', 'I decided'). Elsewhere in her transcript, she talks about her daughter looking for houses that Jane might like, and helping her to move. Thus, her daughter was involved in the process of moving into the village, and Jane could as easily have used 'we' in this description. In addition, Jane has already said in the interview that she has a daughter, a son-in-law and grandchildren living in the same town. However, Jane seems to differentiate between family and friends, since she talks about the village as a chance to 'meet other people my own age'. Furthermore, her claim to know nobody at all creates a more isolated picture, and again warrants the value and normality of living in an environment where it's easy to meet people and make friends.

These extracts were presented to show the different ways in which being on one's own was constructed as being abnormal, and a problem. The effect of this was to establish the normality of sociability, and to construct a retirement village as an ideal way to achieve it.

### **Getting to know people**

Graeme: the people are very very friendly

Elizabeth: you've got the odd nag or two ... but you get that everywhere, don't you

People in the village are cast as very friendly. This is lovely, but it might seem too perfect. Elizabeth introduces a complaint ('you've got the odd nag or two'), but it's a very small complaint. Furthermore, it's normalised as something that happens everywhere ('you get that everywhere'), and as something that the listener couldn't fail to be already aware of and in agreement with ('don't you'). Therefore, nothing detracts from the 'very very friendly' quality of the people.

Graeme and Elizabeth talked about the village as a place where it was very easy to get to know other people and make friends.

Elizabeth: mosey on over and introduce yourself

Graeme: they're just so friendly

Elizabeth: if you want to sit in here and twiddle your thumbs all day, well no one will come near you [...] but ... ah, we were out in the garden, and people would talk to us and then we ... oh, I don't know ... we just knew them

Graeme uses the characteristics of the village residents to explain why it's easy to make friends (because 'they're just so friendly'). The implication is that they are friendlier than people in the wider community, otherwise it wouldn't be worth mentioning. Elizabeth's version also has meeting people and making friends as so easy as to be almost automatic ('oh, I don't know, we just knew them'). However, her assertion that you just 'mosey on over and introduce yourself' has personal agency. This casts herself and Graeme as actively initiating the process of meeting people and making friends. Furthermore, she has met people 'out in the garden'. Gardening is an active pursuit, and it's undertaken outside the home. Again, it is an action of Elizabeth and Graeme's that has contributed to the forming of friendships in the village.

### **Not everybody participates**

Not everybody is proactive, and there seems to be a somewhat critical attitude towards people who don't make friends. The implication is that it's so easy to

establish friendships that there must be something wrong with people who don't make friends. In the above extract, Elizabeth talks about a hypothetical person who chooses 'to sit in here and twiddle your thumbs all day'. It's not constructive to 'twiddle your thumbs' all day. It evaluates a person as lazy or apathetic, and is a particularly critical construction when contrasted with the people who are 'just so friendly'. The undesirable nature of this kind of behaviour is accentuated by the hypothesised outcome 'no one will come near you'. Elizabeth might have offered a more neutral alternative, perhaps describing people who simply keep to themselves, with the outcome being that people will be left in peace if that is their wish. Instead, the village is cast as a place where, at the very least, people who don't participate are not making the most of their opportunities, and will be neglected.

Elizabeth suggests an alternative to friendly behaviour ('if you want to sit in here). This alternative is hypothetical, but invested with reality by the way she talks about a definite outcome ('well no one will come near you'). The impression is that she knows, because she's seen this happen. However, Elizabeth keeps her description non-specific and second person ('if you want to sit in here'). This allows her to criticise a way of life without criticising a specific person, by keeping the criticism general rather than particular.

However, they go on to discuss the case of a neighbour in the village whom they never see.

Graeme: I've never seen (her)

Elizabeth: nor have I ... she used to live down our right of way [...] and I've never seen her [...] never seen her. She just stays in there all the time, big two storey house, one person =

Graeme: = yeh and yet ... cause everybody that in their own home is sort of living independently, so that's their choice, and people are not going to knock on her door and say hey what are you doing, you don't come out ... she doesn't want to come out, that's her choice ... and I think people respect that

Although she's not as critical as in the previous text about a hypothetical person, Elizabeth casts the woman's lifestyle somewhat negatively. She 'just' stays in her house', which in a similar fashion to thumb-twiddling implies that she doesn't do anything useful, and that's what she does 'all the time'. Furthermore, the 'big two storey house' creates an image of lots of space, and she's only 'one person'. This sounds excessive, and perhaps rather self-indulgent. Furthermore, Elizabeth establishes a point of contact with the woman they're speaking about ('she used to live down our right of way'). In a way, they know of each other already, and this perhaps indicates an unmet social obligation.

Graeme seems to see that Elizabeth's comment could seem critical, and frames his comments as a mitigation: 'yeh, and yet ...'. He offers another viewpoint, casting the village residents as people who are 'sort of living independently' with 'choice' about the level of social interaction. Graeme emphasises 'choice' and 'respect', which validates the choice to be less socially active, and casts the village as a place that allows freedom of choice. People won't interfere with others, or force them to be more sociable than they wish. This presentation moderates Elizabeth's version, in which the freedom to be private seemed to risk the criticism of being reclusive.

The following comments from Jane also construct the village as a place where people can be friendly if they want to be, but they don't have to.

Jane: It had a nice centre and a lot of things going on, whether you want to go or not, it's there to go to if you want to go to things ... the activities.

Jane talks about the village being 'the best one' because it has a community centre, and 'a lot of things going on'. Oddly, she goes on to say 'whether you want to go or not'. She makes this statement relevant to people in general, not just herself in particular, by her use of the second person ('whether you want to go or not', 'if you want to go to things'). It turns out that Jane doesn't actually attend many events.

Vicki: So, do you go to many of the activities over at the hall?

Jane: Ah ... no, no not really, no, I go to ... ah, I go to the craft group, people go to different groups, but I've been going to cards more or less since I came here [...] this year I decided I'd go to craft [...] to meet a different group.

Having claimed in an earlier extract that she decided the village was the best one because of the community centre and the activities, Jane now announces that she doesn't go to many activities. The variation in these extracts is better understood when Jane says she decided this year to go to craft 'to meet a different group'. It seems that the activities play a role in meeting people, and that this opportunity may be more important than anything about the nature of the activity. In talking about the activities available in the village, many people seemed simultaneously to be talking about the opportunity to form relationships. It may not be necessary to continue with the activities once the goal of making friends has been achieved. Paul, who was too busy already to attend many activities in the village, also used the activities for the purpose of meeting people.

Paul: but there's so much up there (at the community centre) [...] there's the swimming pool, we go there because you meet people there.

The preceding extracts constructed the village as a place where it was very easy to get to know people and participate in lots of activities. Although it was also possible to keep to oneself, participation seemed to be the preferred choice.

### **The kind of people who live here**

Elizabeth's characterisation of the people who live in the village as 'just so friendly' was repeated by other speakers who talked about village residents in glowing terms.

Beryl: the people are lovely [...] they are all ... very amiable

Melva: all my neighbours are very nice

Fran: we all get along very well

Jane: everybody was very kind, you were very welcomed

Sarah: people wave as they go by if I'm out in the garden. Half the time you don't know who they are, but everybody gives you a cheerio, oh it's nice

These extracts are notable for their global quality. In a widespread use of extreme case formulations, everybody, without a single exception, is friendly, kind and nice. This creates the impression of a group of people very like each other, and this raises the notion of sameness or diversity in the kinds of people who might live in a retirement community. Gated retirement communities originated in North America where, overwhelmingly, residents are wealthy and white. Kastenbaum (1993) identified discourse that appeared both elitist and racist among some residents in these communities, who seemed to feel anybody who was 'different' would threaten the pleasant quality of life in a retirement community. This resulted in such things as strict enforcement of age restrictions for residents, with children and young people being expressly unwelcome.

There was no talk indicating this 'fortress mentality' in the present study. However, it was acknowledged that village residents are similar with respect to ethnicity and socio-economic status as well as age. Homes in the village are expensive in

comparison with homes in the wider community. In addition, there's a weekly services fee. Hence, residents tend all to be of relatively high socio-economic status.

Jane: Really, the people who would be here, are, shall we say, are ... people who behave ... whether they live in here or whether they lived out, you know, they're not, sort of a rough crowd at all, they're sort of refined, if I can use the word, and ... um, how do I put it, it sort of ... it sounds rather rude, are sort of up a social ladder, so to speak [...] residents with a reasonable income, yes. So they're not likely to give wild parties or anything like that [...] you're all more or less the same ... social, social scale

There's some careful impression management required here if Jane is to avoid sounding elitist. She avoids giving the impression that she thinks everybody who lives in the village is refined and everybody who lives out in the community is 'a rough crowd'. She achieves this by adding the phrase 'whether they live in here or whether they lived out' when she's describing the kind of people who live in the village. Thus, there are people who behave in a refined way both inside and outside the village, and the village doesn't comprise an elite group. Nevertheless, this text includes the potential for those who live outside the village to be 'a rough crowd'. If the village residents are 'not sort of a rough crowd', somewhere there must be a rough crowd.

Jane is being careful not to sound condescending, and so her statements are tentative, to the point of asking permission for her terminology ('refined, if I can use the word'). She uses 'sort of' three times, to water down the phrases 'rough crowd', 'refined', and 'rather rude', which she has already modified with 'rather'. This makes her statements seem to come from a moderate rather than elitist point of view.

She speaks of people in the village being 'up a social ladder'. Jane is a member of this group, but she would sound snobbish if she spoke of herself as being 'up a social ladder'. She diffuses this by attributing the position on the social ladder to the group in general. Furthermore, she finds it necessary to excuse the expression three times

before she can say it: ‘how do I put it’, ‘it sort of, it sounds rather rude’, and ‘so to speak’. Again, this weakens the likelihood of seeming arrogant. Later, she avoids positioning herself and the village residents on the social scale by simply referring to being on ‘the same social, social scale’. It’s understood that she means the higher end of the social scale, without her having to repeat the statement.

The text justifies the importance of being a certain kind of person who knows how to behave, which prevents potential accusations of elitism simply for the sake of snobbery. Jane achieves this by introducing a concrete example of the potential for a negative impact on other residents’ well-being. People who don’t know how to behave might throw ‘wild parties’, and disturb other people. This justifies being ‘refined’ and ‘up a social ladder’ as having some value, which counteracts accusations of elitism for snobbery’s sake. Such people don’t annoy others, and this is important in a community.

In the previous extract, Jane constructs the village as a place where people get along because of their similarity. However, in the following extract she constructs the village as a place suitable for all types of people to live in.

Jane: But I’m one of these sort of people who sort of stick to myself, but then there’s others who ... um, I know my husband’s sister, after her husband died, she went into a into, um ... a retirement village, a beautiful one up at (placename), and she was very talkative [...] She was different ... different to me, I’m quite happy in my own home, and doing things with a bit of knitting

This segment establishes different categories of people (those who ‘stick to’ themselves, and those who are ‘very talkative’). Jane explains her earlier statement about not going to all the activities as being due to her being sort of person who sticks to herself. At the same time, she establishes that she is not unusual in this. She’s ‘one of these sort of people’, that is, she’s a member of a group. However, not everybody’s the same. Her sister-in-law, who’s ‘very talkative’, is also not unusual. Jane cites her sister-in-law as a single example, but notes that ‘there’s others’, that is,

her sister-in-law also is a member of a group. Thus, the reserved Jane and her gregarious sister-in-law are but two examples of various categories of people who might live in a retirement village.

The above extracts were included to show varying constructions of similarity or diversity in retirement community populations. Similarity was drawn on to construct residents as a uniform group of kind, friendly people. The homogeneous nature of the resident population with respect to 'class' was used to explain why residents get along well with each other. However, elitism was ameliorated by showing that refined people are not limited to retirement villages. Furthermore, diversity in retirement communities was illustrated in a construction of a retirement village as a place where both sociable and unsociable people may be found.

### **Summary**

Overall, the analysis presented in this chapter showed that people constructed the desire for company as quite natural. A retirement village was constructed as a friendly community where there was plenty of opportunity to be sociable by participating in the activities offered. Companionship was fostered by the friendly nature of the people who lived in the village, and the fact that people were present, in a way that they weren't in the wider community. Participation in village activities was constructed as the preferred way to behave, since there was little point in people living in a village if they didn't participate in the community life. However, the village was shown also to be a place where people could express the preference not to socialise, which would be respected. It was thus a suitable place for both people who wanted companionship, and those who preferred to keep to themselves. The theme of companionship is examined further in the following chapter on privacy, which is discussed in the context of sociability as well as concern for others.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: PRIVACY

This theme of this chapter is privacy, which is discussed in conjunction with the management of relationships within the village. I included the topic of privacy in the interview schedule because it seemed possible this might be threatened by a number of factors about a retirement village. Houses in the village are quite close to each other, and are not separated by fences in the way of many houses in the wider community. This proximity might affect both the availability of privacy, and expectations about privacy. The community nature of the village also may influence beliefs about whether privacy has the same importance that it often assumes in the wider community. Assumptions about the people who live in the village also seemed relevant. Older adults have a large amount of discretionary time to fill, and are sometimes represented as being over-involved in the lives of other people. Privacy is discussed in the first half of this chapter in conjunction with being sociable, and in the second half with being a concerned and caring neighbour.

### **Privacy and sociability**

Sometimes people had expectations of a less private environment than in the wider community. Privacy could be threatened by the expectations that people may have of a 'community'. It may be assumed, for example, that privacy and independence are not such valid requirements as they are outside, and that it is acceptable to intrude on the privacy of others in a way that would not be accepted or expected in the wider community. Several transcripts drew on the possibility that people living in the village might be over-involved in the lives of other residents. People denied that this was so, and often these denials were prefaced with comments about expectations held prior to moving into the village.

Sarah: When I first came in I thought, oh, you know, everybody will know your business ... they'll be on your doorstep ... but it's not like that at all

Elizabeth: We ... heard that, oh, the neighbours come in and they never know when to go home ... but we never had any of that.

Delia: I really did think it could be sort of a nosy parker sort of thing you know, you know, with people all round you, that you'd ... never be on your own, but it isn't so at all here.

This kind of statement is known as stake inoculation (Potter, 1996a). It results from people's awareness that their accounts may be evaluated as biased, and their subsequent attempts to avoid accusations of self-interest, or stake. People often have a vested interest in justifying their decisions, and this may render their accounts less likely to be accepted. All three extracts draw on the somewhat stereotypical view that people in retirement villages have nothing better to do than to mind their neighbours' business. The speakers use this resource to substantiate their accounts by presenting themselves as initially having subscribed to this stereotype. This works better than simply denying that it's the truth, which might be treated as a motivated statement in view of the fact that all the participants in the present study are engaged in the business of showing their lifestyle choice to be a good decision. The rhetorical effect of stake inoculation in this case is that the situation in the village is so completely different to expectations that it has overcome what they expected to find. Thus, the claims 'it's not like that at all' and 'we never had any of that' are more likely to be accepted as true.

The extracts also are notable for the extreme positioning of the potential for nosiness. The neighbours might 'never' know when to go home, you might 'never' be on your own, and 'everybody' might know your business. This would be an extreme level of intrusion, and the sense of the ridiculous in this positioning lends credence to the speakers' constructions of the village as simply not that kind of place.

One of the specific threats to privacy is the proximity of homes to each other and the lack of fences between properties. The village grounds are extensively landscaped, but this doesn't separate houses from each other, or prevent neighbours from being able to see each other. In the following two extracts, the landscaping was drawn on in different ways to construct the village as private, and sociable.

Beryl: they might be close, but [...] because of gardens and flower gardens ... hedges and shrubs and things, they've got their own privacy.

In this extract, Beryl doesn't justify the need for privacy, and in this way the need becomes a self-evident truth. Beryl acknowledges that proximity is a threat to privacy. However, in the village this is only a possibility ('they might be close'), rather than a fact. Even if privacy is threatened, there are a number of things in this extract that counteract the threat. There are ordinary gardens, and flower gardens as well, and then there are hedges and shrubs. Just in case this list is inadequate, there is any number of unspecified 'things'.

Beryl drew on these features to construct the village as offering sufficient privacy, but in the following extract, Delia draws on the same features to construct the village as a sociable and friendly place.

Delia: we've got lawn at the back which is between us and the next house, and in between ... I suppose it's about six foot wide, a strip of garden and ... the shrubs there, when they're trimmed up nicely, you can see between ... and you can wave to your neighbour, but as they grow up, and say, we all say to the gardener, well ... you'd better trim those up because I've lost sight of my neighbour.

Delia contrives a perspective on hedging and shrubs between houses in which it's best that shrubs are 'trimmed up nicely'. The word nicely indicates that trimmed is how shrubs should be, because this allows people to 'see between and you can wave

to your neighbour'. Waving to your neighbour is a friendly gesture, and this shows that seeing your neighbour is a good thing. In this way, Delia has rejected the idea that shrubs and hedges should function to afford privacy by screening neighbours from each other. This also rejects the notion that people in the village need more privacy from each other than they get. Delia generalises this stance to other residents ('we all say to the gardener'). This casts her behaviour as typical of other residents, rather than idiosyncratic, which supports the construction of the village as a sociable and supportive community.

As well as promoting sociability, well-trimmed hedges allow people to see what other residents are doing, and this relates to the sense of security that seemed to be important to residents and their families.

Delia: But when you go to bed at night, you just sort of check, and oh, all their lights are out, oh no they're still up .. it's a cosy feeling, you just don't worry.

Delia achieves a casual air in this extract by the way she modifies the importance of checking on what her neighbours are doing. This is achieved by using the qualifiers 'just' and 'sort of' to modify 'check'. In addition, it doesn't seem to matter whether or not the neighbours are up. Checking allows her to know who is up and who's gone to bed, and this is cosy but not vital. The optional nature of the checking, the fact that it really doesn't matter whether or not the neighbours are up, and the positively framed function ('it's a cosy feeling') also work to prevent Delia's actions being constructed as nosiness.

It would be difficult to talk about privacy in isolation from the topic of sociability without giving the impression that the village didn't function as a community at all. This resulted in a lot of work being done to achieve a balance between the competing constructions of privacy and sociability.

Fran: you're welcome to all the activities that are on. But people don't just come wandering in and out. No, you have your privacy, if you want it.

Fran is constructing the village as a welcoming but not intrusive place. So, 'you're welcome to all the activities'. It's a much friendlier image to be welcome at the activities than simply to have the activities available. After creating this friendly and welcoming atmosphere, she authenticates it by comparing it with an unbelievable level of intrusion. It's inconceivable in this place where each person or couple is an independent homeowner that people would come 'wandering in and out' of each other's houses. This extreme version is likely to be rejected out of hand, and Fran's version, in which people are welcoming but don't overstep the boundaries, is thus more acceptable.

Jack uses a similar exaggerated positioning to deny that the company in the village might be too much.

Jack: No, no, they don't ... live in each other's houses or anything ... no.

Jack doesn't simply refute my query about whether having the company of other people around was sometimes too much, or even agree that yes, sometimes it is. He denies a far more extreme version ('no, they don't live in each other's houses'), a version that is so ludicrous that again, it's likely to be summarily rejected.

The construction of a balance between friendship and privacy required involved people in a self-correction exercise according to what had already been said, and the adjustments that were now perceived to be necessary. In the following example, Delia, like Fran, wants to show that both friendship and privacy are possible.

Delia: I've made the right decision. I enjoy it. So friendly, everybody's very very friendly.

Vicki: Oh good =

Delia: = Yes, but they're not in your pocket. You wouldn't think there was anybody anywhere around at this stage, you don't see anybody. But get out in your garden and somebody goes walking and .. hello, what are you putting in there? and ... oh yes, that will do well there and ... would you like some other plants.

The text casts the residents as friendly, 'so friendly' in fact that they're 'very very friendly'. However, there's potential here to construe them as 'too' friendly. Delia explicitly heads off this possible judgement ('they're not in your pocket'). She next contrives an image of the village as deserted ('you wouldn't think there was anybody anywhere [...] you don't see anybody'). This, however, sounds rather lonely, and she re-adjusts ('But get out into your garden and somebody goes walking and .. hello'). The effect of this is to show that, while people are not intrusive, company and friendship are easily available simply by going outside.

The variation in the preceding extract occurred as Delia self-corrected her account according to what she'd already said, and the resulting impression. The following extract demonstrates variability that occurs according to the context of the account. Paul is talking about relationships with his neighbours.

Paul: there is a sort of an unwritten law that you don't impose on anybody, you don't go near them [...] It's a sort of unwritten law. The people next door... we were away this last time, we were back two weeks before I spoke ... [...] two weeks and I haven't spoken to them ... you go about doing your own things and they do theirs, we swap the papers, he brings the paper over every morning, says giddy and that's it [...] Other people think we're living in each other's pockets, but it's not.

Relationships with neighbours in a community might vary from relationships in the wider community, because of associated expectations about such things as company and community spirit. Paul's statement is rather at variance with earlier extracts constructing residents as, for example, very friendly, very kind, very welcoming. It sounds rather distant to say 'you don't go near them'. Obviously, this is not 'true', strictly speaking, since they exchange papers and say hello, at the very least. However, this is not the point. Paul is engaged in demonstrating that people in the village don't live 'in each other's pockets', and this is substantiated by the minimal contact he has with the neighbour, and the fact that he can go away on holiday and be back for two weeks before he speaks to the people next door. In the following extract, he does some more work in constructing the aloofness of neighbourly relationships, but this is modified by Sarah's construction of their sociability.

Paul: this is the lady from next door, she's just come round for something, but we mightn't see her for a whole week ...my office faces towards the house, I might see her as she walks past going to her rubbish, but [...] people don't impose on you at all.

Sarah: That's Deirdre from over the back, she's come over to see if we'll go over and have a drink with her tonight. We do that sort of thing with one another, it's good [...] She said I'm not coming into your house any more ... she said because I'm always here (.) and she hadn't been always here at all.

Paul: She was here when we came, but we've only been over two or three times, not very often.

The key to understanding the variation in this extract is to understand that different features of the extract are intended to emphasise different features of the village. It's constructed as a place where neighbours are friendly and have drinks together, and at the same time, it's a place where people won't impose 'at all', and you might not see your neighbour for a week. It's a place where people have no problem managing these contradictions, and knowing the rules, even the unwritten rules invoked by Paul in the previous extract. Furthermore, they can manage and correctly interpret the complexities of claims to have always been in someone else's house and

counterclaims that they haven't always been there at all. The overall effect is that, while people are sociable and friendly, they know not to overdo it.

The previous extracts were presented to show the ways in which people resolved the difficulty in presenting constructs of the village as private, but sociable. The rest of this chapter looks at how they resolved the difficulty of talking about privacy and a second competing construction, concern for other people in the village.

### **Privacy and concern for others**

A similar tension exists between constructions of privacy and concern as was earlier discussed between privacy and sociability. Residents appeared to be caught in a dilemma when talking about the caring nature of other residents in the community, as they deflected accusations of nosiness that were never made, but which seemed to be anticipated almost as a matter of course.

Graeme: they're very caring people, you know =

Elizabeth: = they're not nosy =

Graeme: = they're not nosy, and ah ... they don't live in your pocket, put it that way, but they are there if they're needed, they are ... they are very caring people

This extract moves in a circle. It could simply have been a statement about caring people who are there if (and only 'if') they're needed. However, it seems that the listener might infer nosiness, and Elizabeth pre-empts this with an outright denial, which Graeme incorporates into his original assertion. This is transformed into an account of people who are caring enough ('if they're needed'), but not too caring ('they don't live in your pocket').

Recognition of the balance necessary between concern and privacy was evident when David talked about the village being a supportive place to live after the death of a spouse.

David: People will be willing to help you, perhaps too much? I don't know [...] the help is there if you need it, but what you don't want is the ... overpowering help that's pushing you all the time.

David raises the possibility that people in a community may be too intrusive in their willingness to help others. He does this tentatively ('perhaps' they will be too willing to help) and he isn't sure about it ('I don't know'). This technique means he can raise the possibility without having to take personal responsibility for the opinion. It also helps David achieve the impression that this view may be a general one, shared by other residents rather than specific to David. This impression is created with the use of 'what you don't want', and other uses of the term 'you', which indicate that everybody feels this way. This becomes a very real possibility when David works up a solid rendition of this overly intrusive help that nobody wants. It's 'overpowering', it's 'pushing', and insistent ('all the time'). Overall, David achieves the message that people living in a village need to exercise judgement about giving help; everybody appreciates help 'if they need it', but nobody appreciates pushiness.

One of the positive features of a retirement village is the potential for residents to play a role in looking after each other. A retirement village is a community, and part of living in a community is taking an interest in other members of the community. In terms of the well-being and safety of other residents, there is a 'safety net' operating in the village, and this is similar to other villages where people are living independently. Neighbours will look for signals that other people are all right.

Delia: But everybody does look out for one another, like the neighbours [...] in the morning, you check that their blinds are up and things like that, and if they're not up by, you know, 10 or 11 o'clock, well, better see what's happening over there. That is a nosey sort of a little thing we do, but then it's good.

To 'check' on people is to risk being evaluated as nosy. Therefore, Delia ensures that some behaviours that could be construed as nosy are construed as concern for other people's well-being. For example, there's a safety purpose to checking other people's blinds in the morning. It's part of 'everybody [...] look[ing] out for one another', and so this behaviour isn't simply Delia being nosy. She's making sure the neighbours are all right, and if they don't raise the blinds, there's something specific she can do to help ('better see what's happening over there'). Being specific about checking on people's blinds also shows that there are ways to 'look out for one another' that are observational only, and not intrusive. Finally, she herself describes the behaviour as nosy. This works in a similar way to 'stake confession' (Potter, 1996a), in which speakers who can't avoid being evaluated as blatantly partial defuse this evaluation by acknowledging it themselves first. When Delia predicts a negative evaluation of nosiness, and then pre-emptively the term, she robs it of the strength it would have had if it formed part of an accusation by somebody else. It also removes any need to defend it. Negative constructions in this extract are further weakened by diluting the word 'nosey' with the qualifiers 'sort of' and 'little', and finally by the direct assertion that 'it's good'.

Sometimes it's a very complicated matter to resolve the tension between privacy and concern, as illustrated in a story told by Delia, about her neighbour Trudi. This story appears directly after the preceding extract, which showed Delia to be engaged in balancing the issues of concern with possible evaluations of nosiness. The story illustrates the variation that will appear in data when a person is trying to both achieve and avoid a number of different constructions.

Delia: I'll give you an instance, this lady across the road here, I haven't been here very long so I don't, I didn't know her but she's a very ... ah ... you know, she doesn't mix very much, she didn't go to any of the groups, she just ... did her own thing.

Delia indicates with her introduction to the extract that it's typical of any number of stories she could have told to make her point - indicating that something is just an example strengthens one's case, by indicating that the incident forms part of a pattern of activity (Potter, 1996a). The text establishes Delia's newness to the village ('I haven't been here very long'). Her neighbour is unknown to her ('I don't, I didn't know her'). This appears to be because Delia's neighbour is more reclusive than most residents. She's positioned at the extreme end of reclusiveness, by the use of the word 'very' ('she's a very ... ah'), and more private than many residents ('she doesn't mix very much, she didn't go to any of the groups, she just ... did her own thing'). This supports Delia's construction of the village as a place where people aren't nosy. The preference of a resident who wants to remain private will be respected.

Delia: She had someone call to see her one morning about 10 o'clock, a lady, she comes along on one of those little scooter bikes and ... I saw her there for five or ten minutes and I went over ... and I said, no, not any answer? and she said no. And she ... it hasn't got a garage, that house, so she parks her car down the road and I said oh ... her car's still down the road, strange. She said yes I noticed that but it was a beautiful morning, she said oh ... she could have gone for a walk, or she could be having morning tea with somebody or ... so we left it at that. I think later in the morning I said oh, well, I'll give her a ring if I see her round. I rang two or three times and didn't get an answer and I thought, oh, she's gone out for the day, you know. Um ... my neighbour and I went off into town, we came back at three o'clock and I gave her a ring, I still didn't get an answer, so I thought, oh she's still not home.

Embedded in this story is the notion that people who live in the village will take the trouble to help ('I went over and I said, no, not any answer?'). They aren't nosy, however, because Delia waited five or ten minutes before going over. We might expect somebody nosy to go over straight away, and furthermore to know already exactly where Trudi was. Delia and the visitor collaborate to produce several harmless reasons why Trudi isn't answering the door. Even though Delia notes it's 'strange' that Trudi's car is parked down the road, their reasons account for the car's presence. Because 'it was a beautiful morning [...] she could have gone for a walk', or she could be out socialising 'having morning tea with somebody'. It's possible that Delia's concerned, since she rings 'two or three times' earlier in the day, and again when she got home. Nevertheless, at this point she avoids any suggestion that something might be wrong with Trudi. The reasons suggested for Trudi's absence work to construct Trudi, and therefore by implication other village residents, as an independent person, who has a perfect right to be out and about without her neighbours knowing where she is. On this beautiful day, it's entirely unremarkable that she isn't answering her door.

Sadly, it was discovered that Trudi had suffered a stroke, and had lain on the floor of her house the whole day before anyone checked on her.

Delia: and I said, well, I really feel terribly guilty because ... we virtually ... you know ... we should have done something at 10 o'clock, but then - I'd been talking to her the afternoon before and she'd been well, just been to town and bought herself a new iron and everybody said, well, gosh, she was really well, and it was the last thing expected [...] It's just a shame that we didn't (check earlier) ... but as I said, she's a private person

Delia says 'I really feel terribly guilty', taking personal responsibility. In addition, others are also to blame ('we should have done something'), and she uses 'should', not 'could', indicating an imperative of collective responsibility. An unspoken 'if we'd known' hangs in the air, and she immediately enumerates the reasons why no action was taken, all of which support previous castings of the village residents as

respectful of each other's privacy. Firstly, there are no outward signals for alarm. Secondly, a personal conversation the day before indicated that Trudi was really well. There's some variance here from the initial construction of Trudi as a very private person who was unknown to Delia. Firstly, Delia acknowledges that she knows Trudi well enough to have had a conversation with her the previous day. Secondly, Trudi, who earlier was constructed as somebody who 'doesn't mix very much, she didn't go to any of the groups, she just ... did her own thing' is now shown to mix with sufficient numbers of village residents that 'everybody' can confidently say 'well gosh, she was really well'. The variance is required to support the preceding construction of residents as people who care enough to feel terribly guilty at not having helped another resident, even when they couldn't possibly have known that help was required.

Finally, the extract comes full circle, and reiterates the taken-for-granted need to respect people's privacy as a reason for inaction. Presumably, another resident who was less 'private' may not have been left so long, and Trudi's reticent behaviour is shown to be sufficient to influence residents' behaviour towards her, which establishes privacy as a valid option.

There were difficulties associated with competing constructions of village residents as both respectful of privacy, and concerned for others, just as there were with privacy and sociability. The previous extracts were presented to show how people negotiated the difficulties of reconciling these competing constructions.

### **Summary**

This chapter of analysis focused on the issue of privacy in a retirement village, and its relationship to sociability and concern for others. Participants' talk effected a version of the world in which people who live in a retirement village should be both sociable, and proactive in looking after each other, perhaps more so than in the wider community. It also effected a version where people who live in a retirement community should be respectful of each other's privacy, again, perhaps more so than

in the wider community. Juggling these incompatible versions resulted in considerable variation. Privacy and sociability are competing constructs, and the variability in the data showed that it was a complicated matter for people to present the village as a place where people respect each other's privacy but also are friendly. Similarly, showing respect for privacy and concern for others required the construction of different accounts of the village. People could easily establish the availability of privacy by talking openly about not intruding, but that would leave them vulnerable to accusations of being uncaring. They could easily establish care and concern by simply talking about care behaviours and safety checks. Equally, that would leave them vulnerable to accusations of being nosy and breaching privacy. The extracts in this chapter were presented to show how residents managed to construct the village as a place where residents are respectful of each other's privacy, concerned for each other's well-being, and friendly.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: SECURITY

The final section of analysis addresses security and safety issues with respect to living in a gated community. The village is enclosed by a brick wall six feet high. There are two entrances, with iron gates that close at 6pm. After this time, residents enter with a swipe card. Visitors must request admission via an intercom at the gate that is connected to the resident's telephone. During the day, personal visitors can come and go with no restrictions, but door-to-door salespeople must seek approval from village management before approaching residents.

### Constructing danger in the community

Almost all the participants commented on the security aspects of the village. It was quite common for people to talk about problems in the outside community in relation to security.

Melva: I was away on holiday, and my house was ... was ... ah, burgled [...] I was out shopping and I found that my purse had been ransacked [...] somebody had been in while I was in sorting out music [...] I lost the back door key, and the back door key fitted the front door too, and, um, I think ... somebody had been in sometime when I had been out in the garden [...] I had monitored security put in, and I did everything that I could do, I changed the, I changed the locks on the back door and the front door [...] so I was locking the back door while I was gardening, and it was an awful nuisance, it was ....a ... a pest [...] and it was just getting too much [...] and so, I decided that perhaps it would be a good idea [...] that I should move into something like this.

The first part of this excerpt establishes that the community is problematic with respect to security. Melva has a list of three separate events that happened to her personally (she was burgled, her purse was ransacked, and she was robbed by an opportunistic thief). In this text, the three part list validates the commonality in the

community of such events as Melva experienced. She uses a three part list again with respect to security measures ('I had monitored security', 'I changed the locks on the back door and the front door', 'I was locking the back door'). This works to support her claim that 'I did everything that I could do'. Overall, Melva uses a three part list of events to construct living in the community as a security problem, and a three part list of security measures to show that the problem couldn't be resolved. The effect of this is to show that she did a lot to improve her situation in the wider community, and couldn't do more. This makes sense of moving to a more secure environment.

Although Melva talks about security problems as the background reasoning for her move, she limits the impact level of the problems. There's a risk that she may be perceived as rather a victim because of her experience of crime in the community. She maintains her personal competence by talking about her experience as 'an awful nuisance' and 'a pest', rather than a disaster. The reasonable security measures she undertook weren't sufficient to solve the problem, but the experience doesn't immobilise her. There's a logical answer to the problem - a retirement village ('and so I decided that perhaps it would be a good idea [...] that I should move into something like this'). The effect of this is to present her move in a positive light, particularly since she takes responsibility ('I decided') for the choice that might otherwise have seemed rather forced.

The following extract also constructs the wider community as a dangerous place, with the village by contrast being presented as safe.

David: we were getting a little bit scared in the other place there, with the type of people that were passing, and banging your fence and ... you know, on your property and then ... um, gone to the toilet on our fence, and ...um ....graffiti and it's a bit sort of ... and you've got to fix that the next day as soon as you find it [...] Well, here, this doesn't exist

This text calls the nature of the wider community into question. David has lots of examples of problems in the community. Firstly, there is the type of people who go

past. Secondly, they bang on the fence. Thirdly, they come onto the property. Fourthly, they use the fence as a toilet. Fifthly, they write graffiti on the fence. These may be isolated incidents, occurring only rarely, but this litany is used to characterise the community in general, giving the impression that this is the kind of thing people have to put up with all the time in the community. By contrast, this sort of thing is simply dismissed as not happening in the village ('this doesn't exist').

The delineation between safety in the village and danger in the wider community also appears in the following extract.

Delia: There was one (house available) which was on the back fence but it was ... just a fence outside the back door and it was just over into a park. The family said no way, you might as well stay where you are as have a park there ... and the chap who was showing us round said well, we've only had one problem there, with glue sniffers. That was enough, the family said, you're not going there.

Vicki: With, what was the problem with it?

Delia: Glue sniffers! In the park, which is just over your back fence. [...] there's no other security. Apparently when they first built they were going to put an electric wire fence around, but these folk that have got back yards objected because their children would ... naturally, if the ball went over the fence, they're going to be climbing to get it. So ... it didn't happen [...] so, we had to be in the centre

There's an indication in this excerpt that the village is a fortress, with the outer edges of the village being less safe than the central parts due to having to join with the outside world at the fence line. The house on the perimeter fence was unacceptable because the barrier between the inner and outer community is inadequate ('just a fence' outside the backdoor, which was 'just over into a park'). Any idea of a park as a place for recreation has been neutralised by the presence of glue sniffers, which aids the construction of the outside world as dangerous. Delia doesn't explain why this isolated incident precludes living on the fence line. Through this lack of

explanation, it becomes a self-evident and unquestionable truth that there is such a danger at such close proximity to justify the statement that ‘that was enough, the family said, you’re not going there’. This danger was present also in the wider community (‘you might as well stay where you are as have a park there’). This constructs the unacceptable house too near the perimeter of the village and a house in the wider community as equally problematic. The final impression is that the village is a sanctuary from the wilderness of the outside world.

Delia doesn't openly support or refute the idea that adequate security requires the installation of an electric wire around the top of the fence. She attributes the origins of the idea to an anonymous ‘they’, possibly the village management. This works to remove responsibility for the suggestion from herself or other residents. She attributes the fact that the fence ‘didn’t happen’ to the parents who have yards backing onto the village. The safety of their children is a good and valid reason not to put in an electric fence. To offer a legitimate reason like children’s safety not to have the fence validates the notion that the electric fence was a reasonable sort of idea in the first place. Without the notion of children’s safety, it might simply be dismissed out of hand as a ridiculous and excessive idea.

### **Contrasting the village with the wider community**

Similarly, the widespread nature of security problems in the wider community is apparent in the following extracts from Elizabeth, but she follows this up with a specific claim about the security in the village.

Elizabeth: every time you go out you have to put it (burglar alarm) on ... and, you have to make sure it's not going to scream at the neighbours when you do go away ... and then you start going on about how you should be locking your doors while you are out in the garden and things like that, but ...

In this extract, Elizabeth establishes that it takes a lot of effort to maintain adequate security in the wider community. She provides a three part list of the things that have

to be done, and this indicates to the listener that this is just a representative few of the numerous examples that are available. Firstly, it's necessary to put on the burglar alarm and, using an extreme case formulation, this must be done 'every time you go out'. Secondly, 'you have to make sure it's not going to scream at the neighbours'. Thirdly, 'you start going on about how you should be locking your doors while you are out in the garden'. In addition, the sequential process to the security measures emphasises what an ongoing nuisance they are.

In considering the effect of particular constructions, it is useful to consider the effect of other constructions. A burglar alarm, for example, could be constructed as a helpful aid to security. However, this wouldn't contribute to a construction of the wider community as problematic. To achieve such a construction, it is more useful to construct the burglar alarm as problematic in some way. A burglar alarm that 'screams' at the neighbours is both a problem and a nuisance, rather than a helpful security alert. It is the burglars, and not the neighbours, that are the problem. Screaming at the neighbours therefore is an entirely unreasonable action, which constructs the burglar alarm as an unreasonable nuisance. By extension, so is the situation in the wider community that requires people to have burglar alarms.

Elizabeth presented her list of security measures in the previous extract in a general way, by using the term 'you'. The effect of this is to cast everybody in the wider community as living in this way, not just Elizabeth. However, she provides a personal story as an example of the third item on the list.

Elizabeth: we had an occasion of that at (street name), too. The lady across the way was working outside of her house and I saw this ... these couple of chaps go down the right of way at the side, and, one hopped the fence and the other one made conversation with her with her back to the one that was trying to get in the back door ? ... but luckily she had it locked ...

This story effectively constructs the outside community as dangerous through the use of details about making conversation and fence-hopping. There is a sense of drama

and conspiracy, with on the one hand, the lady minding her own business in her garden, and on the other, the two men conspiring to get into her house. There's a sense here that 'one's home is no longer one's castle' Most effectively, it's a first-hand example, which adds credibility to Elizabeth's rendition of the wider community as a dangerous place.

Elizabeth followed up the previous extracts with the following statement:

Elizabeth: you know, that's awful, isn't it? You never think about that when you're here.

This claim is interesting in a number of ways. The use of the term 'never' is another extreme case formulation, which contrasts nicely with an earlier extreme case formulation in which the burglar alarm had to be set 'every' time one went out. The effect of this is to normalise not having to think about crime in the village, and always having to think about it in the wider community. In addition, Elizabeth's assertion is generalised to other residents, by the use of 'you'. This generalises the positioning to any and all residents, thus sabotaging any supposition that Elizabeth is unique in never thinking about it. Another interesting point is that to say '[y]ou never think about that when you're here' is not at all the same thing as saying 'that would never happen here'. The latter claim is more specific, and more likely to be disputed, because while the village appears to be a safe environment, it would strain credibility to say that an event such as the one she has just described could never happen there. Finally, Elizabeth doesn't justify why there is no need to think about it in the village, and this is a similar sort of assertion as the one David made earlier when he claimed that 'this doesn't exist' in the village. Taking something for granted as a 'plain and simple fact' not requiring a justification means it's more likely to be accepted as such.

People gave some specific examples of burglaries and theft in the wider community, drawing on either personal or vicarious experience of the risks. However, the following text about personal safety is less specific.

Elizabeth: well there's not very many places ... you can walk from here to go to cards without thinking oh ... I better take a umbrella for protection or something ... it doesn't worry me walking backwards and forwards here ... but I I don't think I would walk up and down (street name) like that ? not even in the daytime now, it is awful, isn't it?

Firstly, the village is a place where you can walk over to the centre to go to cards without requiring a weapon 'for protection'. Secondly, there are 'not very many places' where this is possible. The wider community, in the form of (street name), is not one of them. (Street name) is not noted for being particularly dangerous, and this raises the question that if (street name) isn't safe, what might the rest of the city be like? Thirdly, Elizabeth doesn't describe whatever might happen in (street name), but implies that it requires a person to carry an umbrella as a weapon. When the danger isn't described, it's limited only by the listener's imagination. While detailed description is often used to establish the 'factual' nature of a description (Potter, 1996a), vagueness is also useful. It is harder, for example, to dispute Elizabeth's claim that 'it is awful' at the point where she says 'isn't it?', because there is nothing specific to dispute. Fourthly, (street name) isn't safe 'even in the daytime'. This implies that Elizabeth's earlier example was about walking to cards at night-time. The ability to go somewhere at night without worrying about safety lends a lot of support to the notion of the village being a safe place.

The extracts thus far have shown the ways that people constructed the wider community as dangerous. Security in the village, in contrast, was simply taken for granted. The next extracts work to specifically cast the village as a safe place.

### **Security in the village**

People also talked about the village in ways that constructed it as a positively safe place, rather than just a place with an absence of danger. The village was shown to

be an environment where there's not only no need for the elaborate security required in the wider community, but even ordinary security standards are redundant.

Graeme: a lot of times when we've been out, at night time, into town, and we've come home to find the, the back door's been left unlocked

This is a surprising statement, contrasting in several ways with the security requirements in the wider community. In the wider community, it's necessary for people to lock the door even during the day. In the village, by contrast, Graeme and Elizabeth haven't bothered to lock the door when going out at night. Elizabeth has already established that in the wider community, people need to lock the door even when they're only out in the garden. However, it's now established that, since living in the village, she and Graeme go 'into town' without locking the door. In the wider community, people have to put the burglar alarm on every single time they leave the house. In the village, Graeme and Elizabeth have been out 'a lot of times' without bothering to lock the door. The impression is that they haven't even made a considered decision to not lock the back door. They simply forget to lock it, and find it unlocked later. This all works to construct the village as a very safe place, where there's no need for even such ordinary security standards as locking the door, let alone the more elaborate and troublesome standards required in the wider community.

This is reflected in comments by other residents.

Beryl: if I go from here to ... go over to the apartments [...] I'd leave the door open without even a qualm

It's not usual these days to go out and leave the house unlocked, let alone open, and again, this shows a real contrast in the security standards necessary inside and outside the village. This contrast is even more surprising in the next extract.

Graeme: we went on holiday, and we've got an old chappie who does the rounds when you're... when you're away ... he gave us the message when we got back ... he says, you know you went away for, on a holiday, and you left your back door unlocked [...] I locked it up and went out the garage door [...] he just likes doing those sort of things

In the first extract, Graeme and Elizabeth construct the village environment as so safe that they didn't even check that the doors were locked before they went away on a holiday. They've already established a picture of the wider community in which an unlocked door would be an open invitation to burglars. Now, they establish a picture of the village in which there aren't any adverse repercussions for leaving the door unlocked. The only consequence was that a neighbour checked out their house, and locked it up for them. This angle to the story shows that even this wasn't necessary, because it wasn't a staff member, but simply someone who 'just likes doing those sort of things'. This creates a picture of the village as a place where one can be pleasantly casual about security matters, because residents look out for each other's interests.

### **How secure is it really?**

Although the preceding extracts showed the village to be a very safe place, people acknowledged that the walls and gates around the village didn't mean that security was foolproof. Sometimes these were the very same people who had gone to some trouble to show that security was excellent, for example David, and Elizabeth and Graeme, and Beryl.

David: I'm under no illusions that anybody who was determined to get in would get in, but by and large you go to bed and you sleep ... you know, with no worries [...] you haven't got 100 percent security, and there never ever will be. But there's as much done as can be done, I think

Graeme: there is a security gate there, but that just keeps honest people out, let's face it

Beryl: oh, they can get over the fence, if there is a fence

There is security, but it isn't impenetrable ('you haven't got 100 per cent security' and the security gate 'just keeps honest people out'). This prevents the gated community from being seen as some sort of fortress. Jokes about the walls and gates had a similar rhetorical effect.

Jane: My son always has a giggle over the gates ... lock the people in at 6 o'clock, in case somebody escapes. Oh, dear, no, it's a wonderful idea locking them, but in the summertime when it's still light it seems a bit early, you know ... but it's a very good idea.

Jane's extract contains two declarations of the value in locking the gates ('it's a wonderful idea' and 'it's a very good idea'). However, she does a lot of work to negate the absolute importance of the gates, which mitigates the possibility of the village appearing to be a fortress. Gated communities are relatively new to New Zealand. Since they are not yet taken-for-granted as 'just the place where older people live', the people who live in them might be perceived as unduly security-conscious or paranoid. The funny image of locking in the residents rather than locking out the world works against this implication, by providing an (albeit humorous) alternative. Jane keeps the tone light by referring to her son having a 'giggle'. She minimises the need for locking the gates with the comment about 'it seems a bit early', and again this circumvents the potential to seem paranoid.

By her gentle and humorous criticism, Jane dissociates herself from the decision to lock the gates so early. It can be assumed that the village management made the decision, and this works to prevent Jane and other residents from appearing excessively cautious. Other residents also minimised the need to shut the gates so early. The following mild disparagement appeared during the course of a general evaluation of the village.

Graeme: it's, it's nice for most things, really =

Elizabeth: = I can't think of anything =

Graeme: = no, I can't ...

Elizabeth: maybe the fact that in the summer the gates shut at 6 might be a bit of a disadvantage [...] if you think, oh, get so and so round for drinkies and things, but =

Graeme: = but that's all right, you can =

Elizabeth: = they can open the gates for them easily enough.

In this extract, Graeme and Elizabeth are actually struggling to find something about the village to criticise, and in the end, the only thing they can think of is the early shutting in summer, and this is hardly even a problem because it's 'easily enough' solved. Graeme also demonstrated an orientation to the possibility that the security and enclosed nature of the village environment might seem restrictive.

Graeme: living in the village does not curtail us at all, in fact it might improve things a little bit ... 'cause you don't have to put the burglar alarm on ... you just have to worry about yourselves

In the context of the talk about security and the shutting of the gates, the village might seem rather restrictive, but Graeme denies this emphatically. They aren't curtailed 'at all'. In fact, not only is the lifestyle in the village not curtailing, but by comparison with the lifestyle outside the village, it is liberating. This echoes

Graeme's earlier construction of the village as a place where concerns about security are unnecessary.

These extracts called on different constructions of security in the village to show that, while the village was a safe place, and this is good for a sense of safety and security, it wasn't a highly-defended fortress, with the associated connotations of a prison.

### **Summary**

Overall, the extracts in this chapter worked to emphasise the safety of the retirement village by constructing the wider community as a dangerous place full of gluesniffers, criminals and trespassers. This helped to make sense of the decision to live in a retirement community. The village, by contrast, was cast as a place that was so safe and secure that residents were virtually free of worries about burglar alarms and personal safety, due to factors such as the gated nature of the village, and the nature of the people living in the village.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

### Summary

This discursive study examined the talk of people who live in a retirement village. It was conducted from a social constructionist perspective, and so did not hypothesise the existence of a 'real' experience. Rather, the study examined how language was used to construct various accounts of life in the village, and how the accounts functioned. The analysis focused on five themes: the decision to move, active ageing, companionship, privacy and security.

When participants talked about the decision to move into the village, there was a potential problem for them to solve. Many participants had spent decades in their family homes, and it would be a reasonable assumption that they'd be reluctant to leave. Accordingly, there was a high potential for a move to a retirement village to be viewed negatively, as a kind of 'second-best' choice or even a calamity. An interesting feature of the talk about the decision to move was that people talked about leaving their family homes and possessions in a pragmatic way. This worked to forestall any negative positioning of the move to a retirement village.

Participants also forestalled negative evaluations by raising the issues of control and independence. This was achieved by defining the decision to move into a retirement village as a choice, and one that had been made in a timely and thoughtful way. The potential exists to construct a move into a retirement village as a concession of independence. Participants did note that such a decision might be somewhat of a 'forced choice'. However, they talked about initiating their own decision. This constructed them as in control of the timing of the move. It also evoked the position that they maintained control over where it was they moved to, and this supported having made a proactive and positive choice in moving to the village. The independence of this decision did some work towards counteracting a contemporary stereotype that remaining in one's own home represents maximum independence.

The active ageing theme was a key feature of the way village life was presented. The importance of using time and keeping busy was treated as a self-evident fact. In the wider community, ageing brought with it the inherent risk of stagnation, and decline. Residents talked about the village as a place of great activity, offering the opportunity to engage in activities to the extent that there simply wasn't sufficient time to participate in everything. Activity was cast as a way to avoid getting really old. The resulting construction of the village was a place where people could avoid 'really' getting old, because the busy environment prevented the automatic decline associated with inactivity. This presented the village as contributing in a positive way to a progressive and proactive ageing process.

As part of the activity theme, the village was presented as a place where there were lots of roles whereby people could contribute to the community. This could be through advocating for other residents, organising social events, and by being a good neighbour. One effect of this was to show that in this lifestyle, residents maintain a degree of control over what happens in their community. Another effect was to reinforce the busy quality to the village. This aspect of village life was presented as an opportunity, rather than a duty, and again, formed part of a proactive lifestyle.

The theme of companionship developed around data constructing the village as a welcoming community, with the people who already lived there being anxious to make new arrivals feel welcome and at home. This theme was developed in the context of constructing a wider community where people simply aren't around any more. In addition, people talked about not being alone in the village in ways that took for granted the normality of not wanting to be on one's own. There was some variation in the way people talked about other residents, who were cast as both similar and different according what the speakers were trying to achieve. For example, people were described as similar in that they were all very friendly and welcoming. However, there was a sense of choice about companionship, in that it was available for those who seek it, but people who wanted to remain more private would have their wishes respected. In this sense, the village was cast as the kind of place where a variety of people could fit in and be happy.

The theme of privacy was a complicated notion for participants to present. Privacy is something that may be threatened by a community lifestyle in ways that wouldn't happen in the wider community. Participants talked about privacy as something that was important, and the necessity for it was taken for granted. However, privacy competes with the constructions of friendship, and concern for others, each of which was also claimed to be an important part of village life. If participants' talk focused too heavily on privacy, this might cast the village as a place where people would be lonely, or neglected. If their talk focused too heavily on friendship, or concern for others, this might cast it as a place where people are nosy, or intrusive. Participants managed to achieve versions of the village where all three constructions were possible. They were careful to construct versions of the village where people were friendly, but not overly intrusive, and where privacy was respected, but not to the extent that people were neglected. This cast the village as the kind of place that offered the features that might be expected to attract people to a community, such as company, support and friendship. However, there was a definite sense that these wouldn't be imposed upon people whose interest in living in a community might be more to do with security and safety.

The importance of safety and security were acknowledged, and the village was cast as a place that was safer than the wider community. The wider community was cast as unsupportive, at best, because people simply weren't around in the way they used to be. At worst, the wider community was cast as crime-ridden. The village was portrayed as a place where the security problems and dangers in the community simply didn't exist. At the same time, participants minimised any impression that the gated community they live in was a fortress, by talking about the impossibility of guaranteeing complete security.

Participants' talk cast a retirement village as offering a positive and progressive way of life for older adults. The prevailing presentation was of a very busy, friendly and sociable community that encouraged residents to participate in an active lifestyle with fellow residents. However, it was taken for granted that people had a right to

live an autonomous lifestyle, and the village was presented as a place where this would be respected. It also was a place where safety and security allowed the maintenance of independence.

Some of the theories of ageing suggested to be relevant to living in a retirement community were consistent in some ways with the way residents talked about the village lifestyle. Most notably, participants talked about the opportunities for activity in the village in ways that reflected activity theory and its premise that keeping active promotes 'successful' ageing. The activity theme also drew on the premise of continuity theory that successful ageing is enhanced by the availability of new lifecycle roles to replace those that are lost. These were shown to be available in the village as part of an independent lifestyle in which residents maintained control over their own environment. The relevance of socioemotional theory was not established because, although participants talked about the friendly nature of village residents, there was very little talk about relationships outside the village. Disengagement theory's notion of withdrawal from the world did not appear to feature at all in the participants' lives as constructed in their talk. It may however have been a feature of other residents' lives, since clearly there were people living in the village who did not participate in the community.

### **Qualifications to the study**

The aim of a discursive study informed by social constructionist theory is to examine how language is put to use to construct particular versions of the world. The reading in the present study shows how a small group of people used language to construct particular accounts of their life in a retirement village. However, I acknowledge the partiality of the reading. The analysis is a product of the set of circumstances brought together in the present study. The data was a joint production between the participants and myself, and the combination of different participants with another researcher may have produced different data. The participants form quite a homogeneous group with respect to age, ethnicity and socio-economic status. They also held similar views about moving into a retirement village to the extent that all

professed to be very pleased with their move, and happy with their new life. Also, they all live in the same retirement village, and retirement village communities will differ from each other in the nature and extent of their influence on the experience of residents.

This all means that the analysis is particular to the set of circumstances brought together in this particular study, and isn't generalisable to other circumstances. However, generalisation is not an aim of a discursive study undertaken in a social constructionist framework (Gill, 1996). Generalisation would contravene the principle that meaning is flexibly constituted in language and is dependent on context. Although my analysis identified common features and rhetorical devices appearing in the various accounts, these would not necessarily construct the same things in other accounts. While similar features may be found in other circumstances, the discourse analyst's interest in looking for patterns in the data is not based on the wish to generalise, but the wish to look at how accounts are put together (Gill, 1996). The present reading shows how the participants' accounts functioned in the particular context in which they appeared, and this provided insight into the broad psychology of choosing to move into and living in a retirement village.

### **Suggestions for further research**

I believe that discursive enquiry makes a valuable contribution to knowledge simply by examining how particular versions of the world are constructed and maintained. It is useful to examine how things that are taken for granted got to be that way, and what the effect of this is. Further, discursive enquiry can prompt change, by showing how particular phenomena are made to seem more or less valuable, and how particular groups are promoted or marginalised. The active ageing model, for example, marginalises older people who can't or don't want to live in this way. If people's experience of living in a retirement village is constructed in discourse that constricts their experience, the explication of these discourses might bring about beneficial change.

The lifestyle that is offered to older adults in a retirement village is relatively recent in this country. I wanted to know about people's decisions to move to a retirement village, and their experiences of the lifestyle. I took a discursive approach in an attempt to understand how this experience was constructed in language. This provided some useful insight into the experience but, as happens commonly in the course of scientific enquiry, more questions have been raised than answered.

In the present study, for example, the participants volunteered to be in the study. The participants were generally very busy people who participated in most activities that the retirement village offered. It's possible they volunteered simply because of the high level of satisfaction they expressed with their new lifestyle. I have found myself wondering what I would have discovered in the talk of people who were not satisfied, or who felt for some reason that they had made a bad decision. I wonder also about people who have lived in a retirement village for longer than the three-year time frame of the current study. The discourses of other people who have an interest in the retirement village lifestyle, such as families, staff and policy makers, would be useful. I would like to know how their talk about village residents' lives fits or clashes with that of residents themselves, and how this affects people's experience. Finally, I am curious about older people who choose to remain in the wider community, and how the themes of the present study might appear as they talk about their lives.

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**APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS**

2 April 2002

Hello

Research project: Living in a retirement village

My name is Vicki Graham, and I am a Masterate student in the School of Psychology at Massey University. I am interested in studying how people decide to buy a home in a retirement village, and how they get used to living in a retirement village. I would like to talk with people who have bought their own home in a retirement village within the last three years.

If you have moved into the (name of village) within the last three years, I would like to invite you to take part in this study. The attached information sheet describes the study. It also outlines the rights of the people who take part, and the arrangements for protecting participants' privacy.

The (name of village) has given me permission to circulate this letter and information sheet to everyone in the village, since I do not know the names of village residents, or how long you have lived in the village. I will not know who you are unless you contact me. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you are willing your participation will be greatly valued.

Please phone me if you would like to take part in the study, or if you would like to ask any questions about the study before deciding whether or not to take part. My contact details are at the end of the information sheet, and you are welcome to contact me during the evening or over the weekend, as well as during the day.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Graham

## APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET

### Living in a retirement village: a discourse analysis

#### Information sheet (2 April 2002)

##### Who is the researcher?

My name is Vicki Graham, and I am a Masterate student in the School of Psychology at Massey University. My research supervisor is Dr Keith Tuffin, Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at Massey University.

##### What is this study about?

This study is about the experiences of people who live in a retirement village. I am interested both in how you decided to move into a village, and what your experiences have been since moving in.

##### Why have you been asked to participate?

I would like to talk to people who moved into the village within the last three years. I do not know your names and the length of time you have lived in the village, and so I have circulated this letter and information sheet to everybody living in the (name of village). I will not know your name unless you contact me either to participate or to ask questions about the study before deciding whether to participate. I will not identify to the (name of village) staff that you took part in this study.

##### What you would agree to do

You do not have to participate in this study. I hope that you will want to take part, and if you are willing to do so, all you need to do is complete an interview with me. I will come to your home for the interview if that suits you best, or we can meet at some other location if you prefer. In the interview, we will talk about your experience of moving to a retirement village. In general the interview will focus on the areas which you feel to be significant about your experience of moving into the village. In addition, I will have some questions about your reasons for moving, your expectations about your move, and how you feel about living in the village. The interview will be like a conversation, and I think it will take about an hour.

##### Protecting your privacy

I will need to tape record our interview, so that I can analyse what we talk about. If you are not willing for this to happen, you should not participate in the study. A typist from an agency will transcribe the tapes. This person will sign an agreement to keep the information on the tape confidential, and in any case will not be told who you are, although s/he will hear your name on the tape when I use it in our conversation. My supervisor, who will have a copy of the written transcripts, is bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am. Your real name will not appear on the transcripts or in my thesis or in any other publications relating to the study. You may choose another name by which your data will be identified in my written results. Tapes and transcripts will be stored securely, and when I have finished analysing the transcripts, the tape of our interview will be destroyed, or you may have it if you would like it. All participants, and the village management, will

be offered a summary of the study's main findings; your real name will not be used in this summary.

#### Your rights as a participant in the study

If you agree to take part in the study, you have these rights:

- to ask either me or my supervisor questions about the study at any time;
- to refuse to answer any specific questions;
- to withdraw from the study at any time;
- to provide all information with the understanding that your identity will be kept confidential by me, my supervisor, and my transcriber (the transcriber will not know your identity);
- to receive a copy of the transcript and make any changes if you feel it doesn't accurately reflect what you wished to say, before I analyse the data;
- to receive a summary of the findings of the study when it is finished (I am a full-time student, and expect to complete writing up the study findings by the end of 2002).

#### How to contact me

Please phone me if you would like to take part in the study, or if you would like to ask questions about it before deciding whether to participate. My home phone number is 329 2050 (local call). Please feel free to ring during either the day or evening (but I am more likely to be available during the later afternoon and evening). You are also welcome to contact me over the weekend. My supervisor, Dr Keith Tuffin, can be contacted at the School of Psychology, Massey University, tel. 350 5799 ext. 2072 during office hours.

**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROMPTS****DECISION TO MOVE**

How long ago did you move in?

How?

What were the options?

Why this vs own home?

**RELOCATION EXPERIENCE**

Big move geographically?

Where are family members and friends? including siblings.

What did they think of move? (especially family members)

**GETTING STARTED ON NEW LIFE**

Know anybody else already?

How did you start? First person you met? or first social event you went to?

Tell me about meeting your neighbours

How well do you know your neighbours? things about their lives? families? how spend their time?

**EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY**

Were there any surprises? things you didn't anticipate?

**SOCIALISING & OTHER ACTIVITIES IN VS. OUT OF VILLAGE**

Own transport?

How have you maintained former relationships?

Any integration of old and new life?

How do you participate in organised activities? How do other people?

Are there informal activities?

**NEIGHBOURING**

Supportive (e.g. checking on each other? transport assistance? company?)

Burden (dependence of one party?)

**ENVIRONMENTAL DIFFERENCES**

Physically closer to neighbours?

Pressure to conform? (behaviourally, or with respect to house, garden, decorating)

**SECURITY**

How does the increased security affect you? What were your former concerns?

**RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES**

Reduction in household/gardening responsibilities?

Taking responsibility for social events etc. in the village?

**HOMOGENEOUS COMMUNITY**

How is that?

**WHAT ELSE?**

**APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM**

**Living in a retirement village: a discourse analysis**

**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the Information Sheet dated 2 April 2002, and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher, Vicki Graham, on the understanding that my name will not be used in any publications or presentations.  
*(The information will be used only for this research and publications or presentations arising from this research project).*

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signed:** .....

**Name:** .....

**Date:** .....

**APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

## CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Living in a retirement village: A discourse analysis

I undertake to transcribe audiotapes for Vicki Graham, and to respect the privacy of the people on the tapes by keeping the tapes secure, and by not talking about the contents of the tapes with anyone else.

Name .....

Agency .....

Signature .....

Date .....

**APPENDIX F: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION**

<u>Underlining</u>	added emphasis (whole word or a part of it)
CAPITALS	louder than surrounding speech
...	pause, not timed
( )	material in parentheses is inaudible or unintelligible
[...]	material in square brackets is omitted
=	no discernible break between speakers
-	abrupt termination of speech
?	rising intonation, although not necessarily a question

**APPENDIX G: SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR PARTICIPANTS**

10 February 2003

Dear .....

In April of last year, you kindly offered to help with the research for my Master's thesis, and we met to talk about your experience of living in a retirement village. The study aimed to analyse how your experience was constructed through the way that you talked about it. I have now completed the thesis, and I am writing to give you a brief summary of the results. It's likely that you'll recognise some, but not all, of what appears in the summary. The results fell under the broad headings of the decision to move, companionship, active ageing, privacy and security.

Most participants talked about the decision to move into the village. An interesting feature of this was that for some, the decision seemed to be linked with a wish to maintain independence and control. This was achieved by, for example, talking about taking a proactive approach to the decision to move into a place such as your village, and making the decision in advance of suggestions by others. The effect of this was to show that living in a retirement village was not to be understood as a loss of independence, but rather as a way to maintain independence.

The notions of privacy and companionship and concern for others were mentioned often. The talk worked to construct versions of the village that showed people to be very friendly, and concerned about other people's wellbeing. It also constructed privacy as a right, along with the need to recognise people's privacy. These themes compete with each other, to some extent. At times it became complicated to present accounts of the village that showed people to be friendly and neighbourly, as well as careful not to become over-involved in other people's lives.

Most people talked about the village as a safe and secure environment. This effected the impression of a worry-free environment where people could simply go about

their business without experiencing the threat of crime and vandalism in the wider community that a number of people mentioned.

The village was talked about in very positive terms. Keeping busy and involved were presented as the ways to maintain well-being, with the village being talked about as a busy place that provided the opportunity to socialise and participate in a range of activities. This formed part of an overarching notion of the village as part of a progressive and proactive move forward in the lifecycle.

This is a brief summary of the research findings. You are welcome to read the full thesis if you wish, and would need to contact me on (6) 354 5843 to get a copy. Please feel free to contact me also if you would like to ask any questions about the study or the results.

Thank you for your help with my research project. It was my pleasure to meet with you, and I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Graham