Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Senior Citizens?

Old Age and Citizenship
in Provincial New Zealand Communities

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for
the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Massey University

by
Alison Lassie Kerr

Massey University
2002
Abstract

This research considers the extent and quality of the citizenship of older New Zealanders in the "Third Age", a stage in the adult life cycle between the second age of careers, partnership and parenting and the fourth and final phase of (usually) increasing dependency. The study questions: whether 'senior citizens' have access to the material and cultural resources to enable them to choose between different courses of action in their daily lives; whether existing intergenerational relations enable them to appropriate substantive rights and responsibilities; and what are the relational practices and processes, the networks and affiliations, through which citizenship may be 'performed' by older people? This research was carried out with six groups of elderly people in a range of communities in the province of Hawke's Bay on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand. The purpose of running six different focus groups, each over a six week period, was to generate discussion of the issues for older people as well as individual stories about the lives of elderly people in particular local communities. The aim was to investigate the meaning of old age for elderly New Zealanders by critically analysing the term 'senior citizen'.

The study built on contemporary theories of ageing and citizenship, using a narrative collective life history approach in order to focus on older people's personal experience of policy, and the capacity for citizenship that they bring with them into old age. The study also identifies national and local government policies, national and local organisations, media representations of old age, local communities, families and the attitudes of elderly people themselves as important influences on the extent to which they are able to exercise and enjoy their rights and responsibilities as senior citizens.

My central thesis is that senior citizenship depends on a civil society which supports autonomy and connectedness for all its citizens. The balance between these two aspects of citizenship is culturally determined and sensitive to outcomes in a range of social domains over the life span. Recommendations focus on self-determination and social inclusion for older people through anti-ageist policies and practices at the national and the local level, and further research into the plans and aspirations of senior citizens.
Preface

Initially my inspiration for this research project came from my experience of counselling work with older people with visual impairment, trying to make space for the telling of their stories and the “performance of (their) knowledges” as part of the “therapeutic endeavour” described by White and Epston (1989, p. 34). I wanted to enable the older people in my study to speak for themselves, literally to “re-member” (ibid) the stories of their lives. I have struggled interminably with the problem of how to choose the parts of their stories that will best convey their spirit, their creativity and their capacity for senior citizenship. I am grateful to them all for giving so graciously and so generously of their time and energy, and their precious stories, to help me in my task.

As a Pakeha woman and a member of the ‘sandwich’ generation I have also been influenced in my thinking about ageing and citizenship by my own ageing and by the life events that have occurred in my family during the life of the research project. The increasing physical and mental frailty and eventual institutionalisation of my mother has enabled me to understand how disempowering and disheartening these experiences can be for an older person and for family members who are involved. During the time of writing the thesis, I became a mother-in-law and a grandmother. Other experiences too, such as hearing a very fit and independent acquaintance, on turning sixty-five, describe himself dejectedly as “on the scrap-heap”, even though he is still working, have contributed to my questions, and my thinking about citizenship in the “Third Age”.

An experience which helped personalise my thinking about citizenship and participation was the 2002 Wellington six kilometer Round-The-Bays walk, in which I participated with several members of my family. This event provided an opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to share public spaces in a way which was transitory but potentially community-building. The experience provided me with an impression of what a society for all ages might look and feel like, and also helped clarify for me the interactive nature of the various spheres which make up ‘civil society’. Most importantly, it was accessible to citizens of all ages. These and many other experiences have contributed to my evolving understanding of the concept of citizenship as a useful way of thinking about the relationship between older people and the society in which they live.
Central to the process and critical to my understanding and the development of my argument has been dialogue throughout with my supervisors, Professor Robyn Munford and Dr Celia Briar. Celia has been a constant source of thoughtful and challenging insights, always stimulating me to greater depth of analysis. Robyn has been unfailingly available and supportive, while still managing to encourage me just beyond where I thought I could go. My conversations with both of them have always been interesting, relevant, stimulating and fun. Frequently they have helped revive my flagging spirits and I am grateful to them both for their unfailing support and for the sense they have given me that I was engaged in something worthwhile. I am grateful to my friend Kim, with whom I walked and talked. She offered many thoughtful insights, questions, suggestions and encouragement. Thanks also to Monica Skinner for her careful and thoughtful reading and her helpful suggestions for improvements, and especially for providing the motivation I needed to produce a conceptual model of senior citizenship.

My family have been amazing. John has kept me going through it all, believing in me and encouraging me to believe in myself. I am so grateful to him for his constant practical and emotional support and love. I am also very grateful to Susannah, Chloe, Daniel and Rosalind for their suggestions, to Christopher for his loving encouragement, and to Shaun, Helena and Simon for their tolerance and willingness to engage with the issues I insisted on raising. I acknowledge with love the role of my parents and parents-in-law in teaching me how to be a grandmother to Isabella. The whole process has made me acutely aware of the importance of family in performances of citizenship throughout the life cycle.
## Contents

Abstract iii  
Preface v

### Part One: Age and Citizenship

#### Chapter One: Introduction
- The issue 3
- Background to the study 4
  - Ageing and old age 4
  - Life expectancy and health status 4
  - The ‘burden’ of dependency 5
- Perspectives on ageing 5
- Citizenship 6
- The New Zealand context 8
- The local context 10
- The people 10
- The history 12
- Research Methodology 13
- Structure of the thesis 15

#### Chapter Two: Age and Ageing
- Introduction 19
- A historical perspective 20
- Definitions of old age 21
- Dependence and independence in old age 23
- Gerontology 24
- Ageism 26
- Contemporary theories of ageing 30
  - Biological perspectives 30
  - Psychological perspectives 31
  - Sociological perspectives 32
    - Structuralist perspectives 33
    - Interactionist or social networks perspectives 36
    - Ethnomethodology and phenomenology 39
    - Critical perspectives 40
    - Postmodern perspectives 42
- Summary 45
Chapter Three: Citizenship

Introduction 49
The language of citizenship 50
Theories of citizenship 51
The citizenship ideal 53
The ideal citizen 54
The medieval citizen 55
The beginnings of modern citizenship 56
Citizenship rights 56
Citizenship responsibilities 58
Citizenship as participation 59
Citizenship as membership of a community 60
The citizen as consumer 61
Citizenship and old age 62
Citizenship for older gay people 64
Citizenship for older ethnic minorities 64
Citizenship for older Maori 65
Citizenship and social standing 66
Citizenship and civil society 66
Summary 68

Chapter Four: Avenues of Citizenship

Introduction 69
Public attitudes to older people as citizens 69
Section One: Civil Society 71
Participation 72
Political activity 72
The citizen as voter 72
The active citizen 73
Senior citizens as service users and service providers 75
The citizen as consumer 77
Local government 78
Citizens as workers 79
Section Two: Community Connections 81
A sense of place 83
Social connectedness 85
Access and mobility 86
Voluntary work 89
Families and whanau 90
Factors which influence participation 94
Introduction 94
Money as a resource for citizenship 95
Agency 96
Cultural development 97
Attitudes of older people 98
Chapter Five: The Social Policy Context

Introduction
What is social policy?
Senior citizens and the welfare state
Current policies and debates
Income support for an ageing population
Health of older people
  Health status of older New Zealanders
  Mental health
  The health reforms
  Health care for older Maori
  Current directions in health policy for older people
Housing policies and older New Zealanders
Summary

Part Two: Research Methodology and Research Groups

Chapter Six: Research Methodology

Introduction
The research question
Methodological framework
  Telling stories
  The promise of biography
  Reminiscence and oral history
  Kaupapa Maori
Methods
  Biography
  Focus groups
Ethical concerns
The research process
  Selecting the participants
  Recruiting and running the groups
Data collection
Data analysis
Summary
Chapter Seven: Havelock North

Introduction 171
Citizenship and locality: ageing in place 171
Naming the issues 174
   Physical and mental health 174
   Safety and security 179
   Community and family ties 179
   Community connections and citizenship participation 179
   Family ties and the performance of citizenship 185
Material standards of living 189
Knowledge and skills 192
Paid work 193
Culture and identity 195
Summary 198

Chapter Eight: Flaxmere

Introduction 201
Introducing the participants 202
Naming the issues 205
   Physical and mental health 205
   Safety and security 210
   Community and family ties 212
   Community 212
   Family 216
Material standards of living 221
Knowledge and skills 223
Paid work 223
Culture and identity 226
Physical environment 227
Summary 231

Chapter Nine: Greenvale Rest Home

Introduction 233
Introducing the participants 235
Naming the issues 238
   Physical and mental health 238
   Safety and security 244
   Community and family ties 244
   Material standards of living 247
   Knowledge and skills 247
   Paid work 249
   Physical environment 252
Summary 254
Chapter Ten: Mahana Retirement Village

Introduction 257
Third Age Citizenship: ageing in a retirement village 259
Naming the issues 263
  Physical and mental health 263
  Safety and security 264
  Community and family ties 265
    Community 265
    Family 267
  Material standards of living 271
  Knowledge and skills 272
  Paid work 275
  Culture and identity 281
Summary 283

Chapter Eleven: Grey Power

Introduction 285
Exercising senior citizenship through political participation 286
Naming the issues 294
  Physical and mental health 294
  Safety and security 295
  Community and family ties 297
    Community 297
    Family 301
  Material standards of living 304
  Knowledge and skills 308
  Paid work 309
  Culture and identity 313
  Physical environment 315
Summary 316

Chapter Twelve: Maori Kuia

Introduction 319
A tangata whenua perspective on aging 321
Naming the issues 332
  Physical and mental health 332
  Safety and security 336
  Community and family ties 337
    Family 337
    Community 343
  Material standards of living 346
  Knowledge and skills 350
  Paid work 351
Chapter Thirteen: Narratives of Senior Citizenship

Introduction 363
Narrative identities 363
"Getting old's just nothing at all really" 363
"I rage against age" 365
"Grey hairs are honourable, but old age is abominable" 366
"As long as you talk to them they'll talk to you" 367
"My life as a flatter is the answer to old age" 368
"A lot of people have the impression that Grey Power people are squabblers and troublemakers" 370

Part Three: Senior Citizens?

Figure 1: The Relational Dimensions of Senior Citizenship 374

Chapter Fourteen: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction 375
Social outcome domains: arenas for the performance of senior citizenship 376
Health 377
Education 378
Safety and security 380
Environment 381
Family/whanau 382
Culture and identity 384
Income 385
Occupation 386
The Relational Dimensions of Senior Citizenship 388
Senior Citizenship in New Zealand 389
Research Methods: A Critique 391
Policy Implications and Recommendations 393
Research Directions 395
Conclusion 396
Glossary of Maori Terms

Appendix 1:
The Groups in Context
   Introduction 403
   Community Studies: A sense of place 403
   Hawke’s Bay: A regional profile 406
      The land and the physical environment 406
      History 407
      Local Government 409
   Havelock North 410
      The village 410
      The people 411
   Flaxmere 412
      A model suburb 412
      The people 413
   Hastings 413
      The people 414
   Taradale 414
   Napier 414

Appendix 2:
   Poster 417

Appendix 3:
The Background 419
   Information Sheet 421
   Consent Form 423
   Profile Sheet 424
   Research Group Reflections 425

References 427