

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

<b>Abstract</b>	iii
<b>Preface</b>	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
<b>Section One: Civil Society</b>	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
<b>Section Two: Community Connections</b>	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



Social status of older people	98
Time as a resource for citizenship	100
Story-telling and the performance of citizenship	101
Summary	102

## **Chapter Five: The Social Policy Context**

Introduction	105
What is social policy?	105
Senior citizens and the welfare state	106
Current policies and debates	111
Income support for an ageing population	112
Health of older people	116
Health status of older New Zealanders	116
Mental health	117
The health reforms	118
Health care for older Maori	121
Current directions in health policy for older people	123
Housing policies and older New Zealanders	124
Summary	131

## **Part Two: Research Methodology and Research Groups**

### **Chapter Six: Research Methodology**

Introduction	137
The research question	138
Methodological framework	139
Telling stories	141
The promise of biography	142
Reminiscence and oral history	142
Kaupapa Maori	145
Methods	147
Biography	148
Focus groups	149
Ethical concerns	151
The research process	155
Selecting the participants	155
Recruiting and running the groups	157
Data collection	162
Data analysis	165
Summary	168

## **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

Culture and identity	353
Language	353
Mana	356
Kaumatua	358
Summary	360

## **Chapter Thirteen: Narratives of Senior Citizenship**

Introduction	363
Narrative identities	363
“Getting old’s just nothing at all really”	363
“l 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

<b>Glossary of Maori Terms</b>	399
<b>Appendix 1:</b>	
The Groups in Context	403
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
<b>Appendix 2:</b>	
Poster	417
<b>Appendix 3:</b>	
The Background	419
Information Sheet	421
Consent Form	423
Profile Sheet	424
Research Group Reflections	425
<b>References</b>	427