

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.

**Constructions of loneliness in older people in the New Zealand
news and current affairs media**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

In

Psychology with Endorsement in Health Psychology

At Massey University, Manawatū,

New Zealand.

Jolinda Ruth Bidois

2017

Abstract

Loneliness is a subjective, painful, personal experience and it has negative effects on physical and mental health. The way that loneliness in older people is constructed in the mass media can reflect or influence public perceptions regarding that issue. Analysis of media reports can contribute to understanding how loneliness in older people is understood. This study is based in a social constructionist understanding and investigates the way that loneliness in older people is constructed in the New Zealand news and current affairs media. A discourse analysis was undertaken of articles regarding loneliness in older people, published in New Zealand in 2016 from selected newspapers, magazines, and a news website. Five discourses are described which are utilised in those news and current affairs articles regarding loneliness in older people. They are named the morality, economic, medical, dependence, and relational discourses. Each of these discourses has been identified in previous research. In the first four of these discourses, older people who experience loneliness are commonly offered passive subject positions of reduced power and agency, and loneliness in older people is problematised. Older people quoted in the news and current affairs articles drew on a relational discourse which, in contrast, positioned older people, including those who experienced loneliness, in interdependent relationships. A focus on the voice of older people highlights that they draw on a different discourse from others, and it is a discourse which enables more powerful and agentic subject positions for older people, especially those who experience loneliness.

Acknowledgements

Professor Christine Stephens has provided guidance and supervision, and opportunity for interesting discussions from well before this thesis began, and throughout its development. It would not have been possible without her.

I am grateful to Mrs Berys Clark and the late Mr Lovell Clark, and to Massey University for support in my studies, and for enabling this work to be undertaken.

To Curtis Bidois, Yvonne and Gorham Milbank, and the Redwoods Group, I thank you for the various shapes of support, assistance, and encouragement that you have offered week after week.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	2
OLDER PEOPLE	2
UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS	3
<i>Approaches to understanding loneliness</i>	3
<i>Temporal factors</i>	4
<i>Individual characteristics and contextual factors</i>	5
<i>Distinguishing loneliness from social isolation, solitude, and living alone</i>	7
<i>Measuring loneliness</i>	8
EFFECTS OF LONELINESS ON HEALTH	9
LONELINESS AND AGE	11
<i>Loneliness across all ages</i>	12
<i>Loneliness in older people</i>	12
<i>Attitudes linking loneliness and older people</i>	14
STEREOTYPES	15
<i>Discriminatory actions</i>	15
<i>Structural inequalities</i>	15
<i>Homogenising responses</i>	16
MASS MEDIA	17
<i>The influence of the mass media</i>	18
<i>Mass media portrayals of older people</i>	19
<i>Challenges to provide balanced portrayals</i>	23
THIS STUDY	25
METHODOLOGY	26
EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	26
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	27
METHOD	28
PUBLICATIONS	28
<i>Newspapers</i>	28
<i>Magazines</i>	28
<i>Website</i>	29
SEARCH PROCESS	30
ANALYSIS	31
REFLEXIVITY	31
ETHICAL ISSUES	32

RESULTS	34
LONELINESS AND OTHER TERMS USED IN THE NEWS ARTICLES	34
LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE: A MORALITY DISCOURSE	35
<i>Discourses and discursive constructions.</i>	35
<i>Action orientation.</i>	37
<i>Subject positions.</i>	38
<i>Practice.</i>	38
LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE: AN ECONOMIC DISCOURSE	38
Discourses and discursive constructions.....	38
<i>Action orientation.</i>	39
<i>Subject positions.</i>	40
<i>Practice.</i>	40
LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE: A MEDICAL DISCOURSE.....	40
<i>Discourses and discursive constructions.</i>	40
<i>Action orientation.</i>	41
<i>Subject positions.</i>	42
<i>Practice.</i>	42
LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE: A DEPENDENCE DISCOURSE	42
<i>Discourses and discursive construction.</i>	42
<i>Action orientation.</i>	45
<i>Subject positions.</i>	46
<i>Practice.</i>	47
LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE: A RELATIONAL DISCOURSE	47
<i>Discourses and discursive constructions.</i>	47
<i>Action orientation.</i>	49
<i>Subject positions.</i>	49
<i>Practice.</i>	49
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DISCOURSES	50
<i>Power.</i>	50
<i>Individual responsibility versus dependence.</i>	52
<i>Construction of loneliness in older people as a problem.</i>	53
SUMMARY	54
DISCUSSION	55
DEFINING LONELINESS	55
MORALITY DISCOURSE.....	56
ECONOMIC DISCOURSE.....	57
MEDICAL DISCOURSE	58
DEPENDENCE DISCOURSE.....	58
RELATIONAL DISCOURSE	61
PROBLEMATISING LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE.....	62
SUMMARY	63
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	63
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION	64
REFERENCES.....	66
APPENDIX: DATA LIST	80

