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**Old age, retirement villages and New Zealand society:
A critical narrative analysis of the experiences of retirement
village residents.**

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

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

at Massey University, Albany,

New Zealand

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2018

ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of critical research that examines the experiences of retirement village residents in New Zealand. The research objective was to critically analyse how retirement village residents in New Zealand made sense of their experience of living in a retirement village and to locate these experiences within the wider socio-political context. Multiple interviews were carried out individually with fourteen retirement village residents from one retirement village in Auckland, New Zealand. Their personal narratives, about their experience of moving to and living in a retirement village, were analysed using a critical narrative analytical approach, based on a social constructionist perspective. The way that the participants made sense of old age drew on ageist societal narratives that depict old age as a time of physical decline and loss of ability, mobility, social supports, independence and autonomy. These loss narratives devalue older adults and so undermined the participants' ability to locate themselves positively in the interview. Consequently, they drew on a young-old subject position in order to resist loss narratives. This research considers the socially constructed nature of loss narratives, by discussing the Western cultural values and assumptions that underpin them. The participants made sense of their move to the retirement village as a solution to decline and loss in old age. Analysis of the solutions that the participants sought at the village highlights that societal practices in New Zealand contribute to losses in old age. Yet, the participants indicated that the retirement village did not always provide the solutions they had hoped for and presented them with additional problems. Therefore, the retirement village represents an imperfect solution to problems in old age that are partly created by current societal practices. This study explores how retirement villages are a culturally specific solution that reflects dominant political ideologies, cultural values, and societal narratives that exist in New Zealand society. Overall, this study argues that alternative societal narratives that ascribe value to the ageing process will better promote the interests of older people. Furthermore, the problems that older adults face will be better solved by directly addressing the societal practices that create them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Professor Kerry Chamberlain, for the years of guidance, feedback, critical discussion and proof reading that has allowed me to complete this doctoral dissertation. Kerry has supervised me in several research projects to date and has been an excellent supervisor. In addition to your research expertise, I have also greatly appreciated your moral support throughout this research process.

I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr Angela McNaught, for her guidance and advice throughout this research project. Your help and support has been very much appreciated.

My thanks to Massey University for the scholarship support that made it possible for me to continue with this research under difficult circumstances.

Most especially, I would like to thank my participants for generously giving their time to take part in this study. Without your support this study would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my partner that have provided me with moral support and allowed me to endlessly discuss my ideas with them. In particular, I would like to thank Stefan, Rick, Enid, Bevan and Amber for their help and support.

This research has been approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Northern), reference: MUHECN 13/025

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