Being Aged is not the Same as Being Old

— A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study —

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Overview of Presentation

- The demographic context
- Research question & aims
- Methodology
- Methods & design
- Agedness is not oldness
- Questions & discussion
The Demographic Context

- People aged 85 years and older make up the fastest growing sector of the population
- By 2051 there will be a six-fold increase in those aged 85 and older
- (Davey, de Joux, Nana & Arcus, 2004)
The Research Question & Aims

The Question

- How do elders experience aging in the context of their everyday community lives?

The Study Aims to:

- get closer to understanding the phenomenon of aging through elder’s stories of their everyday lives
- explore elder’s understandings of aging
Methodology

- Hermeneutic phenomenology
- Guided by the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger
Methods and Design

Recruitment of 15 participants living in private residence on Auckland’s North Shore

- 11 non-Maori men and women aged 80 and older
  - Six women: 80, 89, 90, 91, 93 & 95 years
  - Five men: 89, 91 & 3 x 97 year olds

- 4 Maori men and women aged 70 and older
  - Two women: 77 & 93 years
  - Two men: 71 & 74 years
Methods and Design

In-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes as conversations about the person’s:

- Everyday experiences, describing things in the moment; the here-and-now stories
- Understandings of aging and how it shows through everyday living
Working with the data

- The conversation is audio-taped
- For the photograph, the participant shows doing an occupation of choice
- Verbatim transcript is produced
- Read & re-read for the stories that lie within the transcript
Working with the data

- Re-craft the stories to bring the meaning to light and for readability
- 6 second interviews conducted
- Return the stories to the participant
- Interpret each story, finishing up with ‘what stays with me and a poem capturing the essence
Findings

- One compelling understanding shows through:
  - Agedness is not Oldness
- The meaning of aging is embedded in the doing of the everyday
Frank’s story
Merrill’s story

Lamp Beach,

I see a group of houses

Looking at the

And he said
Matelot’s story
The enigma of aging as ubiquitous, ever-present always there, seen yet not seen like a shadow going with. Understood by all yet not understood the same for all but different.

Measured by the chronographer aging is concrete, orderly, predictable. Experienced by the person aging is abstract, messy, uncertain. As lived, oldness is not a natural consequence of aging. Age is just a number.


The stories of Frank, Merrill & Matelot.
Questions and Discussion