

'Old People' in the Talk of Helping Professionals in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional construction of old age in Hong Kong. In-depth interviews were conducted with a group of helping professionals composed of six medical practitioners and six social workers. Open-ended, unstructured questions related to professional practice were asked to each of them. Discourse analyses are carried out to examine the images of 'old age' and the identity implications for older people in the talk of different professionals. It is found that the category 'old people' in their talk refers to a special and problematic group of people which is different and separable. Two recurrent ways of talking about age are identified from the spoken material of the professionals. The theme of the medical practitioners represents 'old age' in terms of medical problems. Accordingly, sickness is the recurrent feature of the few subject positions available for older people who are expected to have poor health conditions. The theme of the social workers associates 'old age' with the experience of loss. Accordingly, passive acceptance is the recurrent feature of the few strategies advocated for older people who are expected to adjust to life's changes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: DISCOURSE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OLD	6
Introduction.....	6
Language in Structuralism and Poststructuralism.....	6
The Concept of 'Discourse'.....	16
Discourse and Power.....	23
The Productivity of Knowledge.....	26
The Ubiquity of Discursive Power.....	39
The Historical Construction of a Discourse.....	43
Conclusion.....	46
CHAPTER THREE: PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CLIENT..	47
Introduction.....	47
Professions and Power.....	47
Power in Professional Knowledge.....	50
The Client as the Construction of Professional Knowledge.....	53
The Professional Construction of the Individual and the Regulation of Social Order.....	55
An Example: the Biomedicalization of Ageing.....	58
Conclusion.....	67
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH THEME AND METHODOLOGY.....	69
Introduction.....	69
Research Theme.....	71
Conceptualization.....	73
Research Methodology.....	75
Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study.....	81

CHAPTER FIVE: 'OLD PEOPLE' IN THE TALK OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS.....	83
Introduction.....	83
The Construction of the Object: 'Old People'.....	84
The Construction of 'Old Age'.....	94
Summary.....	117
CHAPTER SIX: 'OLD PEOPLE' IN THE TALK OF MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS.....	118
Introduction.....	118
The Construction of the Object: 'Old People'.....	119
The Construction of 'Old Age'.....	130
Summary.....	140
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION.....	141
Introduction.....	141
Summary of Findings.....	141
The Identity Implications for Older People.....	143
Ageism and the Professional Discourses of Age.....	144
The Implications for Social Work.....	146
Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Future Study of Age.....	149
APPENDIX.....	152
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	155
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	170